The *Divya Desam* Temples: A Premise for Analyzing the Śrīvaisnava Dispute in South India

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By

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DEDICATION

To my family.
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This thesis aims to analyze a semi-latent conflict in the Śrīvaiṣṇava sect of Hinduism practiced primarily in South India. Specifically, the thesis will first look at the historical background of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, from its early history in the Vedas, Upanishads and the Bhakti movement to its philosophically formative stages under the reign of its strongest proponent, Rāmānuja, to the metamorphic era in the twelfth century that led to its theological split into two separate streams of practice. The early historical context will touch upon the socio-religious context in India that led to the birth of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. The thesis will study the causal factors that led up to the split of Śrīvaiṣṇavism into two contending branches of Śrīvaiṣṇava practice.

This thesis will analyze, using the Divya Desam temples as its premise, the current dimensions of the Śrīvaiṣṇava conflict. These temples are the single biggest topic of contention between the two Śrīvaiṣṇava groups, thus, being the primary focus of
conciliatory approaches that will be discussed in this paper. The paper will then look at the factors contributing to the very manifestation of the conflict and will compare the Śrīvaishnava conflict situation with other glaring examples of conflicts, and their resultant outcomes, in an attempt to further reiterate the importance of addressing this situation in the near future.

In order to address a comprehensive intervention approach, this thesis will suggest a two-pronged intervention strategy. Starting with the judicial approach, this study will discuss the necessity for the involvement of legal research teams in analyzing the claims made by the two groups and the various religious institutions in order to better evaluate the current conflict scenario. The second approach suggested by this paper will involve both the religious leaders and the grassroots members of the Śrīvaishnava community alike. In this mediatory approach, the focus will primarily be on the Lederachian model of relationship building between the two groups and within the community. This approach will involve changes in deep-rooted narrative changes to influence the community members against discriminating against each other; development of common rituals, symbols and festivals for the two groups; progressive paradigm shifts to change the existent biases and prejudices. Although this approach may seem less pragmatic in the beginning, the paper will provide practical solutions aimed at driving the two groups towards the solutions devised in this mediatory approach.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A. Contextual Sources of Conflict

In spite of the superlative economic growth and rapid modernization in its post-colonial era, India is still reeling under religious, ethnic, and caste-based conflicts. Such conflicts perpetually modify India’s social fabric – tearing and sewing it with the same amount of intensity and conviction. Conflicts have, in fact, consistently shaped the size, form and existence of modern-day secular India. The country was repeatedly invaded by Persians, Arabs, Turko-Mongols and several other colonial empires in the recent past in order to gain access to its vast resources and wealth. In their attempts to weaken the existing social structure, the invaders would often use tactics of ‘divide and rule’ to create rifts between the various sects and tribes there. Heavily influenced by such persistent attacks, India has developed into a society full of clashing religions, cultures, sects, and sub sects.

While conflicts can be damaging to society, one can also argue that such indifferences and incompatibilities provide the society an opportunity to learn and evolve into an open and tolerant civil structure. For instance, in my opinion, India’s deep-rooted history of conflict between regions, cultures and religions has rather greatly contributed towards the seismic adjustments in its societal makeup – allowing it to accommodate
such disparities and contribute towards the eventual coexistence of these very conflicting parties. Observing and studying such a large mixing bowl of cultures and traditions, where several microcosmic societies that seem to be at loggerheads are in fact part of a grander scheme of a symbiotic cultural relationship, does provide social scientists with a rare sense of both delight and amusement. Critics might say that societies under a constant cultural flux with mutually competing groups can be highly volatile and experience hindered overall growth but as is evident from India’s recent surge as a global economic superpower, the constant evolution of society (through several lifecycles of conflicts) greatly contributes towards the development of a secular, tolerant and free country.

That being said, it is imperative that social incompatibilities and clashes be addressed appropriately using mechanisms relevant to the conflict in hand. Failure to do so can greatly damage the society’s strong foundations and principles, throwing it deep into turmoil and chaos. Though these conflicts are representative of the evolutionary cycle of an upcoming multicultural society, they can be detrimental to the upholding of long term cultural, historical and traditional values of the people. In the case of Indian society, it is constantly hounded by several seemingly irresolvable disputes and conflicts that call for immediate attention. With such an immensely diverse culture, where language, food, thought and expression seem to change with every state border, it is hard not to find a conflict of interests and opinions. Added to this are the growth elements of marketization, liberalization and globalization, and the fact that this young nation’s population (in reference to its recent independence) faces an increased intensity in
competition for resources – be it natural or man-made. The resource competition adds a new dimension to the already-existing complex, multi-layered conflicts in Indian society. Such conflicts of interest exacerbate the situation by highlighting the incompatibilities and differences of opinions between the competing groups. It is in this context that this thesis has been conceptualized. This study aims to explore one such arena of conflicting interests between people and attempts to propose an objective solution to the problem. This thesis is but only a humble attempt at analyzing a conflict in the context of its ethno-social history and suggesting a solution designed to help promote the overall growth and prosperity of the involved people.

Conflicts can arise due to competing interests and disagreements about materialistic or non-materialistic resources. Historically, many conflicts have arisen over the control or possession of materialistic resources such as water, land, etc. The primary cause of resource conflicts can be attributed to a set of factors that directly contribute to the intensity and severity of the conflict itself. In the twenty-first century, the most prominent causal factors for resource conflicts are population growth, globalization, urbanization, and increased economic competition. Land resources have especially been contentious as land’s value and marketability has increased. With the rapid appreciation of property value, the possession and ownership of land has increasingly become a topic of core contention between people. As with any other conflict situation, the resolution of land resource conflicts involves the redistribution, re-evaluation and/or repossession of the land itself. In such conflicts, the ownership and accessibility to the land resource often transcend other underlying factors of identity, religion, and ethnicity of the conflict.
actors. Of course, it does not necessarily trivialize the significance of these factors in a given conflict – it only helps us understand the most prominent objectives of the conflicting parties involved. All major conflicts of the twentieth century, be they inter- or intra-state, have oft converged around the issue of resource sharing, particularly land. Post-colonial partitions, internal displacements, interstate wars, and other fabled attempts by dictators at ‘taking over the world’ have the common causation issues of land control. The availability of a resource and the demand for it has a direct correlation to the probability of manifestation of a conflict surrounding the possession of the resource. This becomes particularly true as we enter a new century of global competition over a disproportionate availability and distribution of land resource.

Besides material resources, there are several cognitive, psychological, spiritual and conscientious sources of conflict in human history. These types of conflict are more layered and complex than an objective resource based conflict – they are often harder to express, communicate and resolve. Religion, for one, has become a common source of contention between groups for various reasons. This is because religion often spans the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual psyche of the believer (and at some levels, the non-believer too). Religion also involves the sacred and the eternal. The topic of salvation in religion also connotes a sense of uncompromised and righteous existence of the belief. To even think about the possibility of misrepresentation of beliefs or misconstrued values in one’s religion is often considered to be sacrilegious. So the possibility of a compromise or perspective change in religion is almost always met with resistance. Religion often forms the core part of an individual’s identity and so any perceived threat to one’s
religion is looked upon as a direct threat to oneself. Every religion carries a set of unique beliefs and practices that are methodically and consistently followed by its believers. People who waver in their practices risk being labeled as non-believers or, in some cases, even heretics. The rigidity of religion (or the perceived rigidity of it) sometimes leads to the questioning and intolerance of other religious beliefs. Conflicts can possibly arise in situations where two (or more) sets of religious thoughts and opinions intersect. This does not necessarily mean that religion on its own is a potent source of conflict. Religion is used as a vehicle often by people who are at the lower end of a power dynamic or are a minority or have a historical trauma associated with their religion to protect and preserve their self and group identity. Religion is only a platform that such people choose to promote their cause – be it social justice or economic freedom.

The chances of conflicts arising due to religious differences in heterogeneous societies increase exponentially. A simple explanation for this would be that an increased interaction area between the different groups provides for a wider range of trigger events for religious conflicts. Prayers, rituals, habits and even simple day-to-day activities tend to be viewed with suspicion among the groups. Religious symbols, possessions and resources soon turn into objects of extreme high value. Shared land, culture and practices soon become subjects of debate between the conflicting groups. This also increases a group’s desire to protect, preserve and establish their presence in every form possible. Temples and religious institutions become display boards of religious identity and every bit of land added in possession is perceived to strengthen their domination. Protection and preservation of the land then becomes a primary source of contention in these conflicts.
In the past century, every major religious conflict around the world has had the occupation or possession of land as a focal point of the conflict. Be it Babri Masjid or Jerusalem or Northern Ireland, there was a strong underlying theme of land resource occupation or possession that heavily lent to the manifestation of the conflict itself. The deadly combination of historical latent conflict, religion and the need for land resources is what seems to be a perfect recipe for religious conflict escalation. In this paper, we will be exploring the issues and factors leading to the potential escalation of one such conflict.

**B. The Śrīvaisnava Conflict**

Śrīvaisnnavism is one of the Vaisnava sects of Hinduism originating from South India. Its origin dates back to the 10th century and it was propagated through devotional hymns and songs written by a group of saints known as the Alvaṅś. By the end of the twelfth century, there were two doctrinal schools of Śrīvaisnnavism emerging as a result of some soteriological differences. One group based in the northern region of Kanchipuram revered Vedānta Desikan (A.D. 1269-1370) as their foremost teacher and continued teaching the principles of Śrīvaisnnavism in Sanskrit. This group was hence known as Vatakalai – meaning ‘northern school’ referring to their choice of a northern language. The other group based in the southern region of Srirangam considered Pillai Lokācharya (A.D. 1213-1327)¹ to be their leader (ācārya) and taught Śrīvaisnnavism using commentaries adapted in Manipravālam – a mix of the southern Dravidian Tamil language and Sanskrit. This group was known as Tenkalai or ‘southern school’ of

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¹ Some Tenkalai followers consider Manavālamāmuni (A.D. 1370-1443) to be the main active proponent of their philosophy and thus their main ācārya.
teaching. The doctrinal differences between these two sub-sects were further highlighted by the various theological interpretations put forth by their respective leaders. Although the two leaders themselves acknowledged that the differences in their teachings were simply different ways of achieving the same goal, the subsequent generations of followers delved on these differences that further widened the rift between the two communities.

This conflict becomes evident when one starts analyzing the underlying attitudes and behavior of the two groups, especially on issues concerning their individual sect-based identity. People from the two groups are often not ready to compromise with each other on matters of religious resource sharing and symbol display. In fact, a core issue that has been gaining momentum lately in this Śrīvaisnava conflict involves the 106 Divya Desam temples\(^1\) - one of the most prestigious symbols of identity for the two sub-sects. These temples are considered the ‘sanctum sanctorum’ of all Śrīvaisnava places of worship. There are several reasons for their religious significance – the Divya Desams have been the focus of all the Divya Prabandhams (poetic works) composed by the Alvārs; the temples have been often referred to as ‘Bhūloka Vaikuntam’ in Hindu mythology, which in Sanskrit quite literally means ‘heaven on earth;’ and certain Śrīvaisnava festivals have historically been celebrated only in these Divya Desam temples. These temples hold the same religious significance to Śrīvaisnavas as Mecca holds for Muslims – in that a Śrīvaisnava hopes to visit all the 106 temples at least once

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\(^1\) The Alvārs sung about important Śrīvaisnava shrines known as the Divya Desams. There are 108 Divya Desams in total – only 106 of them are considered to be in this material world. Out of the 106, one is located in Nepal and the remaining 105 are located in India, primarily in the south.
during his or her lifetime just like the Hajj pilgrimage in Islam. These temples are also epicenters of theological study and practice. So, it is not difficult to see why the two subsects are so powerfully attached to these temples. Temple ownership and the rights to perform the daily rituals there have been heavily contested by the Tenkalai and Vatakai communities for the past century or so.

Being a Śrīvaisnava, I have personally witnessed a lot of ‘passive’ hostility between the members of the two sub-sects in India and have even been a victim of sect-based bias there. A very interesting complexity arises, however, when the conflict set-up or environment changes. The group dynamics between these two sub-sects outside India varies significantly from their behavior in India. I am an active member of a large Śrīvaisnava diaspora here in the U.S. and it is quite surprising to observe that the Tenkalai and Vatakai Śrīvaisnavas here do not seem to have carried the conflict over from India. The members from the two sub-sects are strongly committed to promoting Śrīvaisnavism on the whole and often work in unified teams towards this common goal. It is very interesting to note the sudden changes in the attitudes of the diasporic people considering that they come from a conflictual background where emotions are still running high and the conflict is fresh in the minds of the people. It seems as if the people in the diaspora have given up their differences - equally respecting the traditions, rituals and ācāryas of both the groups.

It is also interesting to see how people from the two sub-sects here in the U.S. seem to have pushed away (or masked, as I suggest), their sect-based group identity. It is rather surprising that the Tenkalai and Vatakai community members do not
acknowledge the presence of any sect-based kinship at all. The Śrīvaiśnava diaspora members claim to have recognized the basic issues daunting this conflict and appear to have found ways to spiritually bond with the other group. There is no discrimination based on sub-sectual affiliation, and the practices and rituals of both the groups are given equal preference here. Does this mean that the groups have successfully found ways to counter their biases towards the ‘in-group,’ as they seem to portray? Has their ‘native’ group identity suddenly evolved to form a new collective identity that is inclusive of the other group? Are they ready to share an unbiased platform for true Śrīvaiśnava practice, leaving behind any self-interests or prejudice? Most importantly, are they simply giving lip service to these ideas or are they actually willing to compromise - in our case, on the most contentious issue of the Divya Desam temples - in order to address the core issues of this conflict? I am afraid not.

C. Research Methodology

The main premise of this paper is to analyze the manifestation of a conflict between two sub sects from the southern region of India, specifically Tamil Nadu. There are many reasons why this thesis is a study of the manifestation of the conflict rather than a direct analysis of the conflict itself. Given its long history, the conflict is only strongly evident in certain modern contexts – the presence of a resource competition between the

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1 Scholars Lawrence J. McCaffrey and Oscar Handlin, through their study of Irish Catholic, German and Sikh diaspora, argue that the diaspora in America seem to carry very little ethnic consciousness. The ethnic identities of the immigrants are often minimized as a consequence of assimilation into the new culture of the host society they are in. see Lawrence J. McCaffrey, “The Irish Diaspora in America.” (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976). See also Oscar Handlin, “The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People.” (Little, Brown and Company: Boston, 1973).
two subsects strongly highlights the history and significance of the conflict itself. This paper, thus, analyzes both current and historical evidence of seeming incompatibilities between the groups and suggests a context-based solution to the situation. Using an ethno-historical methodology to study the origins of the ethnic divide between the two subsects, this research parses through empirical social and cultural markers that provide valuable insights into the circumstances contributing towards the conflict. Also, by carefully analyzing the cultural symbols that are associated with and contended by the subsects, this paper hopes to present a potential scope for improvement of relationship between them. The reasons for the choice of this methodological approach and the accompanying set of assumptions that were made through that approach will be discussed in the following sections of this paper.

The theoretical context for the methods of analysis and opinions expressed in this paper is presented through the ideas and theories of prominent social scientists, specifically anthropologists, of the last century. It is the premise-based holistic approach taken by these scientists while dealing with social subjects and cultures that inspired me to follow in their footsteps. Defining the subject matter in purely cultural perspective and providing ethnologically historic evidence allows for the proper understanding of the relevant concepts, traditions and narratives. Ethnohistory as defined by William N. Fenton is “the critical use of ethnological concepts and materials in the examination and
use of historical source material.”¹ Axtell describes ethnohistory as "the use of historical and ethnological methods to gain knowledge of the nature and causes of change in a culture defined by ethnological concepts and categories."² My study of the South Indian ethnic subject can be considered to be an ethnohistorical endeavor that in Simmons’ words can be described as both a holistic and diachronic approach based on the narratives and memories of living documents and people.³

Clifford Geertz defines culture as “an ordered system of meanings and symbols, in terms of which social interaction takes place.”⁴ The integration of culture and social structure, according to Geertz, is essential for the proper functioning of a social system.⁵ To study and understand the functional aspects of a social system then we need to thoroughly analyze both the cultural and the structural premises of that system without separating or decoupling the two. Geertz recognizes that such a distinction is only heuristically:⁶

Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations. Culture and social structure are then but different abstractions from the same phenomena.

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⁵ Ibid., 144.
The persistent form of interaction between individuals and groups in society comprise the social structure itself. The organized form of expression of values, beliefs and traditions then forms the complex web of culture. Geertz says:\(^1\)

On the one level there is the framework of beliefs, expressive symbols, and values in terms of which individuals define their world, express their feelings, and make their judgments; on the other level there is the ongoing process of interactive behaviour, whose persistent form we call social structure.

So to explore and interact with social systems, it is important to inspect the underlying causal and functional social structures and culture. In this study of the particular South Indian sub sects and its relevant conflicts, the entire premise is analyzed through elements of cultural symbolism and social structural aspects. It is in this conceptual form that this paper discusses the conflict – the ethnohistoric backdrop, the sources of contention and the possible solutions to the problem-in-hand are all examined through the lens of socio-cultural symbols and values. The primary social context of this conflict is religion and its pertinent symbols. What constitutes this study as an ethnohistoric outlook of the conflict subject is the analysis it necessitates through its traces in time. By doing so, we can aggregate the current situation of this conflict through historical contexts and dynamic social perspectives.

**D. Assumptions**

This study is a subset of my attempt to largely understand and analyze models of ethnic and religious conflicts in South India, and contextualize the significance of such

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\(^1\) Ibid., 144-45.
conflicts in India’s attempt to emerge as a global economic power. The study heavily emphasizes on the socio-historical context of conflicts, especially the Śrīvaiṣṇava conflict, and brings in the perspectives of other researchers and scholars who have done significant work in the field in the past half century or so. The ultimate aim of the study is to understand and correlate the bigger problems and potential hindrances that India faces in its bid to compete with other world powers.

The larger aims of this research, however, are not the primary focus of the current paper. This paper takes a very microcosmic and specific approach to a particular conflict in the largely heterogeneous South Indian society. The potential valence and disruptiveness of such a mix of micro-cultures can only be truly comprehended by people who have a direct connection, either ethnographically or socially, with that culture. It is extremely difficult to contextualize and compress the situational background of the society to outsiders. This paper only humbly attempts to present, where appropriate, the premise and the recent historical backdrop of the Śrīvaiṣṇava conflict situation with a tacit assumption that the reader has some relevant knowledge in the social infrastructure in place in the region. That being said, there are several ethnographic works on India and South Asia that can be used to gain further understanding of the social situation there. Major analysis of the socio-cultural context of India was presented by Max Weber\(^1\) and Dumont\(^2\) with great tenacity and detail. The scholars present the pre- and post-colonial understanding and development of the ethnic society in the region. For a deep level

understanding of the historical context of the origins of Tamil Nadu, please refer to the work of Srinivasa Iyengar\(^1\), which provides an early depiction of the nascent stages of the Tamil region in India. There are plenty of ethnohistoric and ethnographic works available to explore the roots of the deep history of the South Indian society. This paper limits itself to the furthering and understanding of the conflict in question and does not attempt to go off scope in explaining some of the implicit details in relevance.

The primary foci of this study are the Śrāvaisnava sects of South India. These sects belong to the Brahmin class of the caste structure. The orthodoxy and social restrictions of people belonging to this class are not explicitly mentioned in the paper. It is assumed that the reader has some prior understanding of the caste structure largely in place in India. It is beyond the scope of this study to summarize the reasons and implications attributed to the practice of caste segregation in India. Marriott and Inden’s\(^2\) work gives a very broad perspective on this topic and Dharma Kumar\(^3\) presents a modern outtake on this issue as well. The paper at no point attempts to support or admonish the caste system in place in South India, but only presents it in the social situation of the Śrāvaisnava conflict. The rituals and practices of each caste or varna\(^4\) are unique to their

\(^4\) *Varnashrama Dharma* or *Varna* is a Sanskrit term referring to the ancient Hindu system of social classification based on color and duties. It is largely believed that the post-Vedic period of *varnashrama dharma* was largely considered to be the source of the current caste system in place, although originally it was not meant to be so. Scriptures and ancient texts in Hinduism refer to the *varna* system as the categorization of society into four distinct classes and prescribes specific duties to each class. The society was divided into *Brahmins* or the priest class, *Kshatriyas* or the warrior class, *Vaishyas* or the merchant.
individual beliefs. This paper will only assert an explanation of rituals when it is deemed necessary and relevant to the discussion topic. It is otherwise assumed that the reader has a rudimentary knowledge of the Hindu class structure and practices.

E. Biases

The Śrīvaisnava conflict has a strong bearing on my personal assumptions and opinions. The choice of this particular topic of study was a result of my personal exposure and interest in the issues of the Śrīvaisnava community. Given this background, it is important to clarify the issue of bias in this study. It is also important to acknowledge the fact that as part of my research, some of the opinions expressed might be subjective. This study is not only a research study but a reflection paper meant to invoke rationality and objectivity in my formed outlook of the conflict situation. There is considerable emotional and time investment involved in this research for me to involve absolute neutrality in value and tradition. I see bias in this type of research as a way of self-learning and discipline – it allows me to correct and quell my unneeded subjectivity on issues that I was not even aware of to begin with. This research is an inner journey of exploration through the sensitive and rather personal mental axioms on the subject matter. So, I believe, it is to my advantage that I acknowledge and formalize the possibility of bias in the study instead of targeting neutrality and objectivity.

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class and Shudras or the servant class. The Brahmīns enjoyed the highest status in society and were often looked upon as the intellectual elites in society. The Kṣhatriyas commanded the highest political power in society whereas the Vaishyas were the most economically prosperous. Shudras provided services to the other members of society and were historically subject to oppression and servitude.
Researcher bias is commonly understood as inevitable and important by most qualitative researchers. Researchers are not comfortable with the notion that knowledge can be disseminated in a constructive way even after accommodating for personal bias and subjectivity on the topic. According to Beloo Mehra, this is because researchers “are more familiar with the positivist traditions of knowledge construction where objectivity and value-neutrality are considered important criteria for evaluating research.”¹ Experts in the field of qualitative research see subjectivity as an essential aspect of the research itself.

People and their interactions are more than a collection of objective, measurable facts; they are seen and interpreted through the researcher's frame- that is, how she or he organizes the details of an interaction, attributes meaning to them, and decides (consciously or unconsciously) what is important and what is of secondary importance or irrelevant.²

As with other qualitative social researchers, I struggled to “formulate ideas, collect and interpret data, and build theory”³ but have tried, to my knowledge, to maintain an objective approach in providing solutions to the Śrīvaisnava community. It is with this limitation that I proceed with my research in the following sections.

F. Hagiography

One of the direct consequences of my subjective outlook on the Śrīvaisnava community is the hagiographical representations of the leaders or ācāryas and the

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¹ Beloo Mehra, “Bias in Qualitative Research: Voices from an Online Classroom,” The Qualitative Report, Volume 7, Number 1 (March 2002), http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR7-1/mehra.html (accessed on April 12, 2009).
relevant traditionality of the community on the whole. Belonging to the community, I have internalized the mandatory respect and devout reference to the ācāryas and community elders. I have tried my best to limit the scope of the hagiographical representations to the narration of the historical background of the ācāryas. The concept of hagiography is rooted in our awe of inspiring humans who have shown extraordinary vision and ability to transcend generations of followers with their moral outlook. Hagiographical representations are not intellectual works of logical narratives but works of wonder and delight. They do not pertain to the logic of reason but are bound by the emotional sensibilities of the representing personalities. Indira Parthasarathy states the meaning of hagiography as follows:

*The Concise Longman Dictionary*, which traces the work ‘hagiography’ to the Greek root of hagios meaning (1) holy and (2) saints, defines the term as (a) biography of saints or venerated people and (b) idealizing or idolizing biography. The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* also gives similar definitions. However, there seems to be a more critical view of the mode in its second definition which says “biographical writing that is too full of praise for its subject.” Such recent dictionary definitions reflect a suspicion of any mega claim about any person that militates against our sense of credibility.¹

He further explains the method of hagiography as follows:

The genre has developed its own grammar and methodology. It is predicated on a mode of storytelling which may be linear but its significance cannot be grasped at the temporal level. It takes recourse to non-rational modes of representation of events and actions. One should say it finds the rational mode of apprehension inadequate for grasping the full import of the actions of a personality who is larger than life. It has a natural proclivity towards miracles. Often action is governed by a *dues ex

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machine or divine intervention, which resolves insurmountable problems. Hence, the structure of such narratives is embedded in a specific cultural milieu in which a transvaluation renders the temporal, existential situation non-essential. Hagiography can also be used to refer to the modern discipline of studying such writings. Thus hagiographies operate in dual spheres: the religious and the social. Because of its embeddedness in the religio-cultural matrix, the genre has had its provenance both in the East and in the West and can boast of an impressive genealogy across cultures – Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Christian and Islamic.¹

The hagiographical representation of the ācāryas is only meant to further the social context of the leaders’ life and the religious and social significance of their works. Hagiographies can also sometimes lead to misinformation about historical narration. This paper gives due consideration to the limitations of hagiography and confines it to only essential contexts where its usage is deemed necessary.

¹ Ibid., xii.
CHAPTER TWO: THE ORIGINS

A. History of Śrīvaiśṇavism

To truly understand and appreciate the modern basis of the Śrīvaiśṇava conflict, it is imperative to trace back to the origins of Śrīvaiśṇavism itself. By looking at the metamorphosis of this branch of Hinduism, we can fathom the conditionalities and the intricacies that the foundation of Śrīvaiśṇavism was built on. Śrīvaiśṇavism took its course into the two modern day sects partly because of its formative history and tradition. The basis of Śrīvaiśṇava devotionalism, the socio-political impact it had on its followers and the evolution of Śrīvaiśṇava ācāryas as the institutional mastheads are all very significant factors in shaping the history of Śrīvaiśṇavism and the conflict itself. So this section primarily focuses on the history of Śrīvaiśṇavism in sufficient detail to enable the reader to contextualize the basis of this research study.

Śrīvaiśṇavism is evidence of the evolutionary nature of Hinduism. Hinduism, as commonly thought, was not formed as a rigid set of religious philosophies. It formed as a convergence of various traditions, philosophies and cultures from the region. Hindu religion places particular emphasis on individual spirituality but does not prescribe any means to salvation. This has encouraged Hindus to adhere to their own set of traditions and methods of practicing spirituality. The evolution of Hinduism is also closely
associated with the social and political developments of the region.¹ Over the years, there
have been significant departures from the traditional Hindu axiom in the wake of
changing socio-political landscapes in India. Several religious branches and sub-types
have formed across the nation, so much so that the practices and rituals vary drastically
when traveling from the north of the country to the south. Śrīvaiṣṇavism is one such
unique tradition native to South India that was founded on the core principles of
Hinduism but at the same time carved out a separate set of theological principles and
practices quite different from the rest. The reason for the path that the founders of
Śrīvaiṣṇavism took lies in the social and political history of the times.

The Vedas and the Upanishads (scriptures) are supposed to be the earliest
theological scripts in Hinduism and are supposed to have been originated some five
thousand years ago.² The early ages of Vedic practice involved sacrifice and sharing the
sacrificial offerings with the gods and the community. Sacrifice did not only include
animals but other offerings such as milk, honey and butter. The Vedic rituals and
practices were and still are very elaborate. The Vedas prescribe specific rituals for certain
types of events and its adherents were required to follow strict codes of conduct and
attire. In fact, the practice of the Vedas was strictly restricted to the orthodox, priestly
Brahmin class of Hindus. No one knows for certain why the recitation and practice of
Vedas became the virtuous birth right of one particular class of the Hindu social structure.

¹ BBC, Religion & Ethics: Hinduism (2008),
² Ibid., http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/history/history_3.shtml (accessed on January 29,
2009).
The scriptures and hymns were verbally passed through generations of Brahmins and this class of society soon became the sole proponents and practitioners of the Vedas. The Hindu class structure was deeply hierarchical with the Brahmins being right at the top. Their expertise in the Vedic rituals and perceived intellectual capability allowed them to enjoy the highest status in society. And since admission to the Brahmin class was purely lineal, the privileges and statuses were closely bound within one section of the society. Brahmins often held highly influential positions as the main priests and ministers in kingdoms, and had a significant say in the building of societal norms. Besides being a lineal, the learning and practice of Vedas was strictly restricted to the male members of society. This legal sanction against women was based on some of the governing principles, supposedly denoted in the Vedas, which deem women to be unfit to perform and participate in the rituals as an outcome of their biological make up. As a result of this, the “purity” of women had a centrality in Brahminical patriarchy and resulted in the social and religious exclusion of women.¹

It was in the shadows of this apparent social stratification of Hindus that the Bhakti movement started during the later half of the medieval period in India (800 to 1700 A.D.). As discontent spread in society, a great movement swept through the north

¹ The mechanisms and the reasons stated in history for the social exclusion of women, though important to understand, are beyond the scope of this paper. There are several scholarly articles that bring to light the social oppression of women and lower castes in Hindu society, and explore the relationship of caste and gender. These scholarly works focus on the factors for the subordination of women in society and the general Brahminical requirements for patrilineal succession that jeopardized the status of women. Uma Chakravarthi (Uma Chakravarthi, “Conceptualising Brahminical Patriarchy in Early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State,” Economic and Political Weekly, 1993, in JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/pss/4399556 (accessed on February 2, 2009)) and Himani Bannerji (Himani Bannerji, Inventing Subjects: Studies in Hegemony, Patriarchy and Colonialism, Anthem Press, 2002) look into great detail the history of gender hierarchy and caste hierarchy in Indian society both in the pre- and post-colonial era.
and central parts of India where devotion to God through mysticism and pure love took over. The *Bhakti* movement transcended caste and gender, and was revolutionary for its time and age. *Bhakti* comes from the word *Bhaj*, meaning devotion in Sanskrit. The *Bhakti* movement was also unique because it introduced monotheism to the evolving Hindu tradition of devotion. The focus of the movement was the pure spiritual practice through devotion using expressions of mysticism. Many of the mystics in the *Bhakti* movement did not reject *Vedic* practices but aimed to incorporate the larger masses in the spiritual faith. Also, recurring invasions by Turkish and Persian forces left Hinduism vulnerable to the growing influence of Islam and the *Bhakti* movement is also considered to be a method of countering this.\(^1\) It allowed for an easy, accessible and established platform of Hinduism that could be spread amongst the masses. The *Bhakti* movement started elaborate rituals in places of worship. Singing of devotional hymns in temples, *Gurbani* in *gurudwaras* and *Qawwalis* in mosques are all considered to have their roots in the *Bhakti* movement.\(^2\)

Between the sixth and ninth centuries, twelve Tamil poet saints or *Alvārs* propagated the practice of *Bhakti* in South India. These *Vaisnava* saints introduced emotional mysticism and devotion in their songs praising God. ‘Alvār’ literally means one who is immersed in divine love. The twelve *Alvārs* namely *Poigai*, *BhoothathAlvār*, *PeyAlvār*, *Thiumolisai*, *NammAlvār*, *Kulasekhara*, *PeriyAlvār*, *Tondaradippodi*, *ThiruppanAlvār*, *Thirumangai*, *Madhurakavi* and *Andal* are considered to be the founders

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\(^1\) M. Sivaramkrishna and Sumita Roy, *Poet Saints of India*, (Sterling Paperbacks: New Delhi, 1996).

\(^2\) *Gurbani* and *Qawwalis* are poetic, devotional hymns sung by mystics in the Sikh and Islamic religion respectively.
of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. The devotional songs of the Áḷvārs were hymns of worship to Vishnu and his other incarnations or avatars. This collection is what is referred to as the Nalariya Divya Prabandham (four thousand devotional verses) and is considered the Tamil equivalent of the Vedas. It details the relationship between humans, spirituality and God, and prescribes Bhakti as being the only way to salvation. The Áḷvārs came from all aspects of life and belonged to different castes. The Áḷvārs and their literature greatly contributed to the propagation and sustenance of the Bhakti tradition as it made religion much more accessible to the common man. It broke away from the ritual-based Vedic tradition in a sense and did not place any pre-conditions for devotion and salvation. In addition, since the Divya Prabandhams were written in native Tamil, it was far more accessible to the vernacular population as opposed to the Vedas and the Upanishads, which were primarily in Sanskrit.

The Áḷvārs sung about one hundred and six Divya Desam temples in their songs as being important places of worship. These temples were built in the pre- to early-medieval period across South India by various rulers and were centers of religious and political power. All of these temples have a deity of Vishnu in his different avatars installed. The Áḷvārs describe the presiding deities in form at these temples in the Divya Prabandham and narrate their blissful experience of worshiping at the temples. So the temples are important places of worship for Śrīvaiṣṇavas. The Divya Desams established the legitimacy of Śrīvaiṣṇavism by providing a solid practicing platform and a launch pad for the fervent growth of the Śrīvaiṣṇava movement across the region, highly influencing the masses with its simplicity and ease of worship.
B. Śri Rāmānuja

Śri Rāmānuja (ācārya) was an eleventh century philosopher and the foremost proponent of Śrīvaisnavism. He was a prime philosopher of the Vishishtādvaita school of Vedānta and is considered to be one of the most influential scholars in Indian philosophy. The contribution of Rāmānuja to the Indian philosophical school of thought is best summarized as follows:

He was the first Indian philosopher to provide a systematic theistic interpretation of the philosophy of the Vedas, and is famous for arguing for the epistemic and soteriological significance of bhakti, or devotion to a personal God. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Rāmānuja defended the reality of a plurality of individual persons, qualities, values and objects while affirming the substantial unity of all. On some accounts, Rāmānuja’s influence on popular Hindu practice is so vast that his system forms the basis for popular Hindu philosophy. His two main philosophical writings (the Shri Bhāṣya and Vedārthasāngraha) are amongst the best examples of rigorous and energetic argumentation in any philosophical tradition, and they are masterpieces of Indian scholastic philosophy.²

Rāmānuja was born in the small village of Sriperumbudur on the outskirts of modern day Chennai into a family of Brahmins, well accomplished in the learning of the Vedas and the kramas (rituals). Rāmānuja is believed to have lived for one hundred and

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1 Vishishtādvaita Vedānta is a sub-school of philosophical thought of Hindu philosophy. “Vedānta means the ‘end of the Vedas’ and refers to the philosophy expressed in the end portion of the Vedas, also known as the Upanishads, and encoded in the cryptic summary by Badharayana called the Vedanta Sutra or Brahma Sutra. The perennial questions of Vedanta are: what is the nature of Brahman, or the Ultimate, and what is the relationship between the multiplicity of individuals to this Ultimate. Vedanta comprises one of the six orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy” (directly cited from Shyam Ranganthan, “Rāmānuja (c. 1017 – c. 1137 CE),” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, May 1, 2005). The two major schools of philosophical thought are Advaitam (non-dualism) and Dvaitam. Vishishtādvaita literally stands for specialized form of Advaitam and establishes the non-dualism of the qualified whole or Brahman. It is also referred to as qualified monism. This non-dualistic philosophy believes in the unified holistic approach to all diversity. Rāmānuja was the main proponent of the Vishishtādvaita Vedānta and believed that all Hindu scriptures including the Upanishads, the Bhagawad Gita and the Brahma Sūtras must be interpreted in a way that purports the message of Vishishtādvaita.

twenty years from 1017 to 1137 A.D. He was believed to have been deeply impacted by the surrounding caste-based social stratification from a very young age and took a liberal attitude towards members of the lower castes. In fact, he first approached Kanchipurna (a local temple volunteer who belonged to a lower caste) to accept him as a disciple after seeing his piety and worship towards the temple deity. In Kanchipuram, Rāmānuja started learning Vedānta from Yadavaprakasha. From early on, Rāmānuja established his presence in the intellectual world with his ability to understand deep philosophical principles and scriptures. His popularity soon surged amongst his contemporaries and was noticed by popular spiritual leaders such as Yamuna and Alavandar. Upon renunciation, Rāmānuja embarked on a spiritual journey of philosophical exploration and wrote numerous scholarly works articulating his philosophy to the community. To summarize his contributions to Śrīvaishnavism:

Rāmānuja’s first work was likely the Vedarthasangraha (‘Summary of the Meaning of the Vedas’). It sets out Rāmānuja’s philosophy, which is theistic (it affirms a morally perfect, omniscient and omnipotent God) and realistic (it affirms the existence and reality of a plurality of qualities, persons and objects). This work is referred to several times in Rāmānuja’s magnum opus, his commentary on the Brahma Sutra, the Shri Bhashya (also known as his Brahma Sutra Bhashya). This is the work that Rāmānuja is best known by outside of the Shri Vaishnava tradition. In addition to this large commentary on the Brahma Sutra, Rāmānuja apparently wrote two more shorter commentaries: Vedantapida, and Vedantasara. Aside from the Vedarthasangraha and Shri Bhashya, Rāmānuja’s most important philosophic work is a commentary on the Bhagavad Gita (Bhagavad Gita Bhashya). In addition to these philosophic works, Rāmānuja is held by tradition to have written three prose hymns called collectively the Gadya Traya, which include the Sharanagati Gadya, Shriranga Gadya and the Vaikuntha Gadya. The Sharanagati Gadya is a dialogue between Rāmānuja and the Hindu deities Shri (Lakshmi) and Narayana (Vishnu) (which jointly comprise God, or Brahman, for Rāmānuja) in which Rāmānuja surrenders himself before
God and petitions Vishnu, through Lakshmi, for his Grace. Vishnu and Lakshmi, for their part, respond favorably to Rāmānuja’s act of surrender. The Shrīrāngā Gāḍya is a prayer of surrender to the feet of Ranganatha. (This is Vishnu in his repose on the many headed serpent Adīśesa – ‘ancient servant,’ ‘ancient residue,’ or ‘primeval matter’- on the milk ocean.) The Vaikuntha Gāḍya describes in great detail the eternal realm of Vishnu, called Vaikuntha, on which one should meditate in order to gain liberation. Finally Rāmānuja is held to have authored a manual of daily worship called the Nityagrantha. ¹

Rāmānuja established the Vishishtādvaita philosophy as a counter argument to Adi Sankara’s Advaita school of thought. Adi Sankara established the philosophy of unattributed dualism where all qualities of the Brahman are unreal and temporary. Rāmānuja believed them to be both permanent and real, and under the control of the Brahman. ² Rāmānuja’s detailed analysis of the scriptures and his command on the subject matter made him one of leading philosophical contemporaries of his times and helped gather a strong suit of followers. He detailed several commentaries charting out the flaws in the Advaitin philosophy of Adi Sankara and laid down a solid foundation for Śrīvaiṣṇavism. ³ Also, Rāmānuja was critical of the caste system in place that promoted

³ The book titled “Sri Ramanuja: His Life, Religion and Philosophy” (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, 2001) details the seven fundamental flaws that Rāmānuja pointed to in the Advaita philosophy. The following is a citation from the book referencing this:
1. The nature of Avidya (non-knowledge or positive nescience). Avidya must be either real or unreal; there is no other possibility. But neither of these is possible. If Avidya is real, non-dualism collapses into dualism. If it is unreal, we are driven to self-contradiction or infinite regress.
2. The incomprehensibility of Avidya. Advaitins claim that Avidya is neither real nor unreal but incomprehensible, anirvachaniya. All cognition is either of the real or the unreal: the Advaitin claim flies in the face of experience, and accepting it would call into question all cognition and render it unsafe.
3. The grounds of knowledge of Avidya. No pramana can establish Avidya in the sense the Advaitin requires. Advaita philosophy presents Avidya not as a mere lack of knowledge, as something purely negative, but as an obscuring layer which covers Brahman and is removed by true Brahma-vidya. Avidya is positive nescience not mere ignorance. Ramanuja argues that positive nescience is established neither by
the categorization of people in society by virtue of birth. He believed that one can only become a *Brahmin* by virtue of his or her devotion and not because of lineage. One can only become a *Brahmin*, he said, only based on one’s endless devotion to Lord *Nārāyanā*¹. This made *Rāmānuja* very popular amongst the masses as he opened doors of worship and temple participation, previously restricted to orthodox *Brahmin* caste members, to everyone. In this sense, *Rāmānuja* successfully synchronized elements of the popular devotionalism of the *Divya Prabandham* poems with the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

After spending his initial days at Kanchipuram, *Rāmānuja* moved to Srirangam to expand the ever growing *Śrivaisnava* base in the region. There he laid some ground rules

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1 *Nārāyanā* is a Sanskrit name for *Vishnu* and means “one who provides direction to man.” *Nārāyanā* was a very commonly used vernacular reference to Vishnu.
for the establishment of a common Śrīvaiśnava praxis. Rāmānuja vigorously promoted the views of his predecessor Yamunācārya, who had established the orthodoxy of ritualistic practice (āgamas) in South Indian temples in one of his works called āgamaprāmānya that placed emphasis on worship through arcāvatara (presence of god in images and idols) – this system of practice was referred to as Pancarātra āgama school. This type of devotion through temple rituals was introduced by Rāmānuja at the Srirangam temple, which set the tone for temple practices throughout South India. By establishing the traditions of Pancarātra āgama in temples, Rāmānuja radically changed the role of temples in worship and expanded the participation of broader social groups by elaborating the temple festival calendar and introducing indulgent standards of recruitment for temple activities. Appadurai specifies the important role of Rāmānuja in establishing the Pancarātra āgama tradition in South India:

Rāmānuja not only extended the concerns of his predecessors in reconciling temple worship with unorthodox Vedic praxis, which is domestic and aniconic, but specifically displayed his orientation toward the elaboration and popularization of temple worship. For the priests of the Vaikānasa school [the alternate school of worship to the Pancarātra system], certainly up to the medieval period, appeared to have practiced a rather spare, severe, and simple form of temple worship, not responsive to the increased medieval wish to deify alvār poet-saints and the ācāriyas (sectarian leaders/apostolic heads). Nor were Vaikānasa priests enthusiastic about the elaboration of the temple calendar with costly and pompous celebration. In short, their preferences were inimical to the expansion of temple activity to include broader social groups and interests.

2 Ibid., 74.
The priests of the Pancarātra Agamic school, by contrast, seem to have been more open to the elaboration of the festival calendar, less rigorous in their recruitment patterns than the strictly endogamous Vaikānasas, and in general more open to popular, multi-caste participation in temple affairs.¹

The growing influence of Rāmānuja and the ousting of Vaikānasa priests ruffled a few feathers in the Srirangam Brahmin community as a few members opposed the changes to the traditional ritualistic practices that had been passed down through generations to them. Also, the beaming popularity of a non-native leader (Rāmānuja received his initial formal training in Kanchipuram) was not received favorably by all at Srirangam. This was one of the first events that contributed to the growing averseness amongst locals in the shift of source and power in apostolic leadership from Srirangam to Kanchipuram.²

One of Rāmānuja’s long lasting legacies was the establishment of a strong Śrivaishnava structural framework through the appointment of seventy four simhāsinādipatis (leading ācārya preceptors) carefully selected from leading Śrivaishnava families from throughout South India with the sole responsibility of upholding the principles of the Śrivaishnava faith.³ This helped extend the formation of an “Acarya Cult” phenomenon in the Śrivaishnava community.⁴ The descendants of these seventy four leaders formed the major structural framework of the Śrivaishnava leadership community. Modern day Śrivaishnava institutions and leaders still incorporate the lineal heritage of the

simhāsinādipati tradition. Leaders are often anointed based on their lineage and allocation of certain ritualistic rights is based on familial associations as well. Rāmānuja’s primary contribution to temple administration was through his detailed codification of processes and activities (udaiyavar tittam) for the Srirangam temple in a document titled Koil Olugu. He described a “complex web of duties and honors, attached to a highly specialized division of labor and involving the most intricate possible interdependence between various groups of functionaries, both Brahmin and non-Brahmin.”

The temple community in Srirangam and other neighboring temple towns along with the orthodox Brahmin community had started resenting Rāmānuja soon after his ascension as the resident scholar of the region. Rāmānuja openly patronized the non-Brahmin community and encouraged women to actively participate in temple activities. He moved freely amongst his followers without minding caste taboos and would even openly perform initiation (pancasamskāra) on both men and women from all castes. The extent of Rāmānuja’s influence spread across other South Indian states like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. He established strict codes for participation and legalization of rights of outcastes to perform temple functions in all the temples there as

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2 Ibid., 2:76.
3 Ibid., 1:xxiii.
4 It is the process of initiation of a young adult by an ācārya through a set of five sacraments; see also V. Rangachari, “Historical Evolution,” in Worship and conflict under colonial rule, ed. Arjun Apadurai (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 77.
5 Ibid., 1:xxiv.
6 Ibid, 1:xxvi.
well. Rāmānuja aimed to build an egalitarian, caste-discrimination-less society based on a tolerant and progressive set of principles – both solidly founded on ancient Hindu scriptures and improvised for the elimination of indiscriminate social exclusion. It is, thus, not hard to see why Rāmānuja is often considered to be one of the most influential thinkers of South India and had a profound impact on the future evolutionary path of Śrīvaisnāvism. By establishing a community-based system of temple worship and devotionalism, Rāmānuja was able to launch a new brand of vernacular worship that was both accessible and easy to follow. This allowed for the proliferation of Śrīvaisnāvism throughout the region and is one of the main reasons for its survival through the ages.

C. Theological Split of Śrīvaisnāvism

Some distinct features of Śrīvaisnāvism surfaced as a direct outcome of Rāmānuja’s organizational reform. The most striking impact was the permanent emphasis of the ācārya as a sectarian group leader with complete authority over temple administration. Rāmānuja was the most popular pioneer leader with complete control of the Srirangam temple. In the following decades, the role of a Śrīvaisnava ācārya grew to encompass functions of sectarian leadership, preceptor, facilitator between disciples and god, and the final authority on Śrīvaisnava principles. The ācārya now was the central figure of leadership and the main characteristic of Śrīvaisnava. The main role of the ācārya was the initiation of a disciple into manifold Śrīvaisnava practice through

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pancasamskāra. The five-fold pancakesmāra practice (five sacraments) involved the following:\(^1\):

1. **Tapas**: branding of the individual by the ācārya as a Śrīvaisnava initiate by embossing Vishnu’s symbols of conch and discus on the shoulders (using a heated metal cast)

2. **Puntaram\(^2\)**: initiating the individual into wearing a sect mark known as Thiruman, a representation of Vishnu’s feet on the forehead

3. Giving a divine name to the initiate, commonly, Nārāyanadāsa

4. Giving the right of uttering certain verses passed on by the ācārya known as the rahasyatriyam

5. Handing over of sālikkirāmam (black stone considered auspicious for worship by Śrīvaisnava) for daily worship

According to Appadurai, the formal pancakesmāra ritual for initiation into the community became the monopoly for recognized ācāryas to vest their authority in recruiting new members who in turn accepted the absolute authority of the ācāryas in sectarian matters.\(^3\)

*Rāmānuja* was successful in putting together a complex organization of popular devotionalism and sect-centered basis of worship with ritualistic Vedic tradition and caste-based/lineal-based orthodox practices. Even though the two interlinked complex

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\(^2\) Also sometimes referred to as Urdhva puNdra

\(^3\) Ibid., 1:77.
systems of traditions held good during his lifetime, the centuries following his death in A.D. 1137 saw the development of visible fractures in his Śrīvaisnnavism schema. Two distinct schools of thoughts emerged as a result of these divisions. Appadurai explains:

The overall issue that divided Rāmānuja’s followers was the question of whether the Sanskrit tradition, represented at its peak in Rāmānuja’s Sri Bhāsyā, or the Tamil Prabandham devotional poetry of the Alvār poet-saints was to be the focus of religious study, exposition, and the sectarian missionary activity. This issue, in part, had tremendous significance as a linguistic question, because the choice of Tamil over Sanskrit as a religious language automatically ensured a wider audience in South India, greater popularity for its proponent ācāriyas, and most important, the accessibility of the greatest religious truths to all four varnas of society. Emphasis on Sanskrit, on the contrary, implied a socially and historically conservative position, retaining a relatively Brahmin-exclusive mode of religious discourse, which was certainly closed to Sudra participation and closely linked to the varna scheme as a system of mutually exclusive roles and duties. The question of which language (and therefore which set of texts) was to be preferred center of dogmatic attention, Sanskrit or Tamil, was, in fact, the linguistic expression of a considerably wider set of issues that divided the followers of Rāmānuja.1

The formal division of Śrīvaisnnavism into two schools of thoughts, namely Tenkalai (southern school) and Vatakalai (northern school), is attributed to the works of two prominent leaders – Vedānta Desikan and Pillai Lokācharya, who are largely considered to be the founders of Vatakalai and Tenkalai sects respectively. The basis of doctrinal differences amongst Rāmānuja’s followers is based on a minor divergence in perspective on the issues of salvation or self-surrender or prapatti.2 The Alvārs had extended on the idea of prapatti by prescribing salvation through the mode of pure

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devotion or bhakti rather than the Vedic way of bhakti involving strict adherence to rituals (karmas) and knowledge (jnānas).¹ The Alvars’ Prabandham poetry places an emphasis on the concept of self-surrender through emotions of helplessness and unbound love for the Lord through pure devotion. In fact, it considers the Vedic route to prapatti through karma and jnānas as almost non-humanistic and unachievable by many. By highlighting the path to self-surrender through minimal actions on the part of the prapannan (individual seeking prapatti), the method of surrender becomes more accessible to the common man and does not require specific knowledge and training in Vedic rites or Sanskrit. Though Sanskrit followers do believe in salvation through the route of prapatti, they believe in the practical responsibility of the prapannan to adhere to some basic functions and duties that qualify him or her to seek self-surrender from god. This seems more derived from the Vedic school of learning as compared to the Tamil-based Prabandham followers. The Tamil or Southern school insisted on the need for no prerequisite conditions for surrender and completely relied on the divine grace for salvation.

The basic difference in the theological interpretation of the two Śrivasnava schools was later represented using the analogy of a “cat” and a “monkey.” Patricia Y. Mumme, a leading researcher on the works of the Alvars, notes:

Nearly every student of comparative religion has heard of the Śrivasnava sectarian schism as the dispute between the “cat” and “monkey” schools over the understanding of salvation by grace. The Tenkalai school affirms that God saves the soul in a way a mother cat carries her kitten – the soul

¹ Ibid., 1:79.
is completely passive, and no effort or action on its part can help the process. The Vatakala school, on the other hand, believes that God saves the soul in the way a mother monkey carrier her young. The baby monkey must make some effort to hang on, even though the mother does work.\(^1\)

Besides the major interpretative differences in the topic of salvation, the Tenkalai and the Vatakala groups had the same philosophical backbone – other differences in social and ritualistic practices only grew with time in the later centuries.

After the death of Rāmānuja, the first two centuries were critical in the formation and expansion of doctrinal differences between the two groups. Srirangam is considered to be the place of high debate and discussion for the sectarian and theological separation of Śrиваism.\(^2\) Eminent Sanskrit scholars of the Northern school in the thirteenth century were natives of Kanchipuram, which acted as a factor in the formation of Kanchipuram as a base for the Vatakala or Northern school. Srirangam, in the meantime, forged ahead as a strong base for Prabhandam or Tamil based teachings and became the epicenter for the Southern school or Tenkalai community. It was during the time of Nampillai and Nadāthur Ammāl in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that Kanchipuram and Srirangam came to be recognized as the respective venues for the Northern and Southern schools.\(^3\) The doctrinal differences between the two groups only became evident to the larger population through the scholastic works of Vedānta Desikan and Pillai Lokācharya.\(^4\) However, some sectarian accounts largely attribute the works of

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4 Ibid., 2:80.
Manavālamāmuni (A.D. 1370-1443) to be the seminal Tenkalai doctrine, providing rich
details of the theological perspective of the Southern school and furthering the efforts and
works of Nampillai and Pillai Lokācharya.

D. Vedānta Desika

After the death of Nadāthur Ammāl (c. 1275), the scholastic period of post-
Rāmānuja teachings at Kanchipuram lost a great contributor and was sustained by his
disciple Kitāmbi Appilār (also known as Atreya Rāmānuja). Kitāmbi Appilār’s nephew
was born as Venkatanātha in A.D. 1270. Venkatanātha, who later came to be known as
Vedānta Desika, got his formal education through his uncle Kitāmbi Appilār until his
death in A.D. 1290. After the death of his teacher, Vedānta Desika left for
Thiruvahindrapuram and then travelled to other parts of South India often writing
discourses and commentaries in Sankrit, Tamil and Prakrit. Vedānta Desika was known
for his polemic skills and command over the Vedānta and śāstras, and had won several
debates with Advaitin and Buddhist scholars in South India. Taking up on one such
challenge by an Advaitin, Vedānta Desika moved to Srirangam at the end of the thirteenth
century.¹

Vedānta Desika’s arrival at Srirangam was a turning point in Śrīvaisnava history
as it brought a “star pupil of the Kanchi school”² in direct dialogue with the ācāryas of
the Srirangam. He was at Srirangam for the next ten to fifteen years and produced some

¹ Patricia Yvonne Mumme, “The Theology of Manavalamamuni: Toward an understanding of the
Tenkalai-Vatakalai Dispute in Post-Ramanuja Srivaisnavism (India),” (PhD diss., University of
² Ibid., 21.
of his most important literary works there. Many of his works were critiques of earlier works of Srirangam ācāryas such as Pillai Lokācārya and Peria Vāccān Pillai.¹ Many of the works of Pillai Lokācārya and his younger brother AlakiyamanaVāla Perumāl Nāyanār (A.D. 1207-1309) were criticized by Vedānta Desika in his work Rahasyatrayasāra. Many points of practice and doctrinal details expounded by Pillai Lokācārya and Peria Vāccān Pillai were studied and disqualified by Vedānta Desika in his works – more significantly, the views of the Srirangam ācāryas on the nature of the goddess Śrī drew sharp criticisms.² While at Srirangam, Vedānta Desika grew very familiar with the views of the ācāryas there and started writing several works in Manipravālam³ and Sanskrit exposing his views on the vulnerable works of the ācāryas. Some of his works from early-fourteenth century include Pāncarātraraksā, Tattvamuktākalāpa and Amrutaranjani Rahasyas.⁴

The first quarter of the fourteenth century saw Muslim invasions in Srirangam that resulted in religious persecution and eventually led to the closure of the Srirangam temple. Many Śrivaisnava ācāryas like Pillai Lokācārya and his younger brother died while trying to escape the invaders.⁵ Vedānta Desika would have also suffered the same fate but for his daring escape by hiding among the dead bodies. He rescued some important manuscripts like the Śrībhāṣya and Śruthaprakāsikā while fleeing to the

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² Ibid., 1:22.
³ It is a literary style used, especially amongst the Śrivaisnava community in South India, in medieval texts mixing a local language (commonly Tamil or Malayalam) with Sanskrit.
⁴ Ibid., 1:22.
⁵ Ibid., 1:23.
Melkote region in the Vijayanagara kingdom (situated in what is now Karnataka state). His exile in Satyamangalam and Melkote, according to estimates by historiographers, lasted merely twenty years but his works became popular in that region and he was considered by many there as a prominent scholar. He was very active in his debates against the Advaitins and wrote many philosophical works reinforcing the Śrīvaiśnava principles. Desika is believed to have spent his last years at Srirangam and wrote some of his best works there including his magnum opus, Rahasyatrayasāra. He was adorned the title of Sarvatantra Svatāntara (“master of all disciplines”) and Kavitārkika Simham (“lion among poets”) for his prolific writing ability in all literary forms and his image amongst his contemporaries as being an excellent polemicist. He was a master of both Sanskrit Vedānta as well as Tamil Prabandhams. Even though his works are critical of the philosophical and theistic interpretations of the Southern school, he does not “banish their Śrīvaiśnava doctrines as outright heresies. He tries to reinterpret the statements they make, restrict their exaggerations and refine their doctrines so as to reconcile their views with the body of Śrīvaiśnava doctrine and tradition as he saw it.”¹ None of his works portray any sort of interest in him to found a separate sect based on his prescribed doctrinal interpretation. In fact, in his Sampradāya Parisuddhi, he clearly states that there is no room in the Rāmānuja tradition for contradiction of meaning but only for interpretative differences and opinions.² He also adds that interpretative differences can

² Ibid.
only been seen as subjective methods of determining the qualifications of an individual towards salvation and depend on the context – the existence of alternate methods (as a result of the two schools of thought) only allow for the choice of method specific to one’s situation. His successors, Nāyanār Ācāryā (his son) and Brahmatantra Svatantra Jeeyar, popularized his works and philosophy, and promoted Vedānta Desika’s “separate but equal” philosophy on the two schools of Śrivaśnava thought.

E. Pillai Lokācārya and Manavālamāmuni

After the death of Nampillai’s important disciple Vatakku Tiruviti Pillai (c. 1264), his two sons Pillai Lokācārya and Alakiyamanavāla Perumāl Nāyanār forged ahead to prominence in Srirangam with their literary contributions to the Śrivaśnava philosophy including treatises such as Śrivaścana Bhusanā, Arulicceyal Mantra and Ācārya Hridayā. They were severely critical of the Vedic varna (caste/class) system and reaffirmed the absolute lack of qualifications required to receive Lord’s saving grace. During the Muslim invasion, Pillai Lokācārya along with some priests rescued the processionary idol of Śri Ranganātha from Srirangam and is said to have died en-route while escaping. He is, thus, highly celebrated in Srirangam for having defended and saved the destruction of Namperumal1 at the hands of the invaders with his own life. Born in A.D. 1205, Pillai Lokācārya was named after Nampillai (who was referred to Lokācārya) by his father out of respect for the ācārya. Pillai Lokācārya lived for a hundred and six years, and authored several works including the eighteen rahasya granthās known together as

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1 Namperumal is a term of endearment used by Srirangam residents in reference to the processionary idol of Śri Ranganātha. The term literally means “Our Lord.”
Ashtadasa Rahasyā and Gadyatraya Vyākhyānam. His magnum opus, Śrivacana Bhusanā, contains four hundred and sixty six curt axiomatic phrases. Manavālamāmuni provided extensive commentary to decrypt the layered meaning evident in its curt writing. The central aphorism of this work expounds the “cat-style” philosophy of the Southern school and can be illustrated as follows: “the soul does not need anything but knowledge about its essential nature. It is always subservient to and dependent upon the Lord. It has to do eternal service through the mediation of the preceptors. It is the grace of preceptors that ultimately helps the soul to attain liberation.”

He was considered to be a “Ubhaya Vedānta,” or expounder of traditions belonging to both the Sanskrit Upanishads and Tamil Prabandhams. His treatises were written in a manner that facilitated the deeper meaning of Vedānta to the masses through usage of vernacular references and language. Many Śrivaishnava scholars opposed his views on the status of caste and his acceptance of followers irrespective of their varna but Pillai Lokācārya was unavering in his opinion that Śrivaishnavism learning transcends caste.

Manavālamāmuni was born a year after the death of Vedānta Desika at Alvār Tirunagari as Alagiyanavāla Perumāl in A.D. 1370 and gained basic education in Prabandham and Śrivaishnava doctrine from his father Annār. He received formal training in the Nalayira Divya Prabandham and the treatises from Tirumalai Ālvān who was a direct disciple of Pillai Lokācārya. Some records, though unconfirmed, indicate that

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Tirumalai Álvān instructed Manavālamāmuni to focus on the hymns of the Alvārs and only give perfunctory importance to Sanskrit sources and Śribhāsyas and to only reside in Srirangam.¹ After the death of his ācārya, Manavālamāmuni moved to Srirangam. There he established temple practices along the lines of Rāmānuja’s mandate and gained popularity therewith. He later proceeded to Kanchipuram to study the Śribhāsyas, which is testimony to the fact that Kanchipuram was considered the Sanskrit stronghold during the ages.²

Manavālamāmuni’s ability to gloriously illustrate the works of ācāryas helped him gain a large following in Srirangam and neighboring regions. He also spent a significant amount of his time in his native Alvār Tirunagari and was successful in establishing a big base of followers there. Through his prominent and wealthy disciples, Manavālamāmuni helped restore several temples in the region. He published several commentaries on the works of earlier ācāryas and composed treatises such as Upadesa Ratnamālai and Ārti Prabandham. Several accounts of Manavālamāmuni’s last days at Srirangam recount his urge to his followers to always be at the service of Lord Ranganāthā and to try diligently to live in harmony with all Śrivaisnavas.³ While Manavālamāmuni is often considered in many circles as the true founder of the Tenkalai sect, historic accounts documented during his lifetime do not provide any evidence to support that. In fact, he repeatedly commented on the importance of a unitary Śrivaisnava

² Ibid.
³ Ibid., 2:34.
community for the prosperity of the theology. His involvement with the temple restoration and renovation throughout South India is well documented. The political context of that period called for a close association of religion, ācāryas, local rulers and landlords, and his popularity helped him gain leverage in generating support for temple restorations. Later Tenkalai and Vatakalai guruparamparai prabhavams (ācārya lineage history) show followers of Manavālāmāmuni and Vedānta Desika vying for temple controls throughout the south. This dispute for temple controls does not seem to have started until several generations after Manavālāmāmuni. The schism only widened with time as subsequent followers wrested for temple control. The birth of sectarianism attributed to the ācāryas, mentioned in the works of the seventeenth and eighteenth century scholars, seem to be misinterpreted commentaries on the social context of the life and times of the Manavālāmāmuni and Vedānta Desika. The ācāryas themselves were cordial towards each others’ interpretation of theistic philosophy and only administered their followers to respect one another.
CHAPTER THREE: CURRENT STATE OF ŚRIVAISNAVISM

A. Social Effects of the Conflict

In the subsequent centuries after Manavālamāmuni and Vedānta Desika, minor differences in theology were translated and amplified through varied linguistic adaptations in the two Śrīvaisnava sects. The Tenkalai group contended that since the Divya Prabandham\(^1\) was written in Tamil, it only made sense to propagate Śrīvaisnavism in the same language for greater outreach amongst the people. Within the context of the evident caste-based social segregation in the region, the Tenkalai group felt that use of Sanskrit (which carries a strong connotation of being the language of the brahmins) would alienate the majority of non-brahmin people. The Vatakalai group, on the other hand, believed in teaching the true essence of Śrīvaisnavism in the language of the Vedas and in promoting an authentic approach to its adherents. Besides linguistic adaptations, the two groups developed several unique identity characteristics as well.

Despite carrying divergent views in core philosophy and tradition, members of the two Śrīvaisnava sub-sects can be seen practicing and learning the Divya Prabandham together in modern day-India. Temple space is also commonly shared by the two groups.

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\(^1\) The four thousand Tamil devotional verses of Divya Prabandham is sometimes called the Tamil Vedas, considering them to be equal in sanctity and a derivative of the Sanskrit Hindu scriptures, the Vedas (Carman, 1989). The Divya Prabandham forms the essence of Śrīvaisnava philosophy.
for praying. Inter-sect marriage between these communities is common and accepted except in a few orthodox circles. Individuals from the two groups seem communal in social settings and the dispute between the two sub-sects is not very evident outside the community. One can seemingly notice the conflict only after analyzing the underlying attitudes and behavior of the two groups on topics concerning their individual sect-based identities.

1. Shared Culture but…

One of the most important aspects of Śrīvaisnavism is its strict adherence to the tradition of lineage. The notion of lineage has a special importance to Śrīvaiśnavas as it clearly defines a link from their current ācārya to the various Alvārs and ultimately to Lord Vishnu himself. Both Tenkalai and Vatakalai members share much of their lineage as the division of Śrīvaiśnavism occurred only towards the later stages of this historical timeline. They recite the names of these ācāryas in order of their spiritual lineage as part of their daily rituals.¹ This reference to their lineage forms a major part of their collective existence and narrative. As a result, the two sub-sects often develop descending anachronisms² by constantly using metaphorical, symbolic and ritualistic reference to their lineage and history surrounding the ācāryas from the pre-split era. Such a shared narrative enables the two group members to relate to their common history and recognize the fact that the sub-sects were formed only during the later stages of Śrīvaiśnava evolution.

The essence of Śrivaishnava philosophy can be found extensively in the poetic verses of the Divya Prabandham. The two sub-sects also share their core Śrivaishnava traditions and practices at the micro-level despite their macro-level interpretative differences. Both the groups equally revere the Vedas and acknowledge it as the foremost sacred text in Hinduism. Daily rituals, in both the sub-sects, incorporate verses from the Divya Prabandham and hymns from the Vedas, and carry a similar code of conduct. So, barring a few minor details, the two groups follow the same format for daily prayers.

Both groups are native speakers of Tamil – a significant commonality that they share. Language is an important social marker. It is tied to a group’s history, culture, identity and religion. Language is also a means of storing shared meanings within a group from one generation to another.\(^1\) Shared language between two groups can serve to indicate the deep commonalities in their culture and history. Although the Śrivaishnava dispute was a derivative of the linguistic incompatibilities in religious teaching, Tenkalai and Vatakalai members speak the same dialect outside of theology. This presents a reasonable scenario for the creation of close ethnic ties between the two groups who can use a common communication medium for relaying their respective narrative constructs.

Although there have been some adaptive changes made to the groups’ ritualistic traditions, they share most festivals, religious holidays, and food, among other cultural aspects. Important festival events are still celebrated together and both groups seemingly respect the practices of the other. Inter-sect marriage is also very common – barring the

orthodox few, Śrīvaisnavas seldom have any reservations towards marrying from the other sub-sect. In fact, one can say that the two sects do not have any clear sociological markers to distinguish them with each other. No significant differences exist in class, occupation, demography or ethnicity. The two groups seem to readily acknowledge the fact that they share much in common, yet there is at the same time some persistent reluctance to dismiss their perceived differences as trivialities.

2. …distinct Identities

Despite the tremendous similarities between the two sub-sects, there are several differences, perceived or real, that contribute to each group’s distinction of its ethnic identity from the other. There are both philosophical and practical factors that constitute each group’s uniqueness and give form to its character. As much as the similarities seem to homogenize their ethnic characters, Tenkalai and Vatakalai members are proud of their distinctions and never fail to display them when the issue of kinship arises.

As noted earlier, the differing interpretations of theology by the respective ācāryas of the two groups culminated into the formation of dual schools of Śrīvaisnava philosophy. The marjarakisora-nyaya, or ‘cat’ school, and markata-kisora-nyaya, ‘monkey’ school,1 disciplines led to the popular ‘Monkey-Cat’ debate that details two ways of interpreting God’s grace towards devotees and the attainment of salvation. The Tenkalai members’ belief that one can achieve salvation by being ‘passive’ and without having to make a conscious effort to seek God pervades into their customs and traditions.

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Individuals, primarily male,\(^1\) of this group do not strictly follow the routines as prescribed in the scriptures for living the “Vedic” way of *brahmin* life.\(^2\) This is viewed by the *Vatakalai* members as sacrilegious and as displaying an utter lack of discipline. The *Vatakalai* sub-sect believes that individuals need to take initiative to earn God’s grace and achieve salvation. They believe in following a daily set routine of prayer practices and rituals to inculcate self-discipline and also to qualify for salvation.

The two groups have also created mutually exclusive religious institutions known as *Matams* that are led by the leading proponents or current ācāryas of their respective philosophies. There are several different institutions within each sub-sect – formed to represent various groups on the basis of their lineage. These institutions are religious seminaries that are involved in training their disciples in theology, *Divya Prabandham* and other works of their ācāryas. Their teaching curriculum is seldom inclusive; it is meant to cultivate, promote and celebrate individual group contributions and history. Affiliation to these institutions is fiercely loyal and invokes a deep sense of ethnic kinship amongst their followers. Institutional affiliation is a way of exhibiting one’s lineage and history, and all Śrиваśnavas take great pride in this association.

\(^{1}\) Even though Śrivaśnavism is considered as being one of the least patriarchal sects, the right to perform *Vedic* rituals is often only entitled to men. For this reason, we will focus our discussion on the basis of the ritualistic practices of *Tenkalai* and *Vatakalai* men. The paper will specifically note the role of women where applicable.

\(^{2}\) The *Vedas* prescribe that a *brahmin* follow strict discipline and adhere to a set of daily prayer rituals and practices. This strict regimen includes practicing self-cleansing rituals performed three times a day, known as *Sandhyavandhanam*, accompanied with the regular recitation of hymns and adherence to strict dietary restrictions.
In addition to the religious institutions, the two Śrīvaiṣṇava groups have clear and distinct symbolic markers to denote group affiliation. Using symbols to distinguish each from the other and explicitly display affiliation is the most commonly used indicator of group identity. Such symbols are cognitive components of meaning. All social life is portrayed through symbols since they connect human beings and their groups to the external world. A symbolic representation of a group’s identity allows it to create and maintain solidarity amongst its members.¹ These shared symbols stand to represent their in-group shared commonness while at the same time allowing them to distinguish from the other out-group. Language is one such set of symbols – although currently the two groups share the same dialect, it is important to keep in mind that the rift between them was initially formed on the basis of the usage of language.

The first visual distinction between the two group members is the display of sect marks on the forehead. Both Tenkalai and Vatakalai males wear distinct vertical, white sect marks known as the Thiruman². These marks differ in shape between the two sub-sects – Tenkalai members wear a ‘Y’ shaped mark with a red middle line whereas the Vatakalai mark consists of a ‘U’ shaped mark with a red or yellow line. These symbols of identity are of utmost importance to the believer. These sect marks are also prominently displayed on personal property, temples and other religious institutions.

² Śrīvaiṣṇavas consider themselves to be inseparable from Lord Vishnu and they portray this by wearing forehead marks known as Thiruman. The white ‘U’ or ‘Y’ shaped mark depicts the feet of Vishnu and the line in the middle represents His divine consort Lakṣmī.
The groups utilize language, culture, symbols, rituals and other cultural and ethnic pointers to identify with each other and form a cohesive unit. This creates a metaphoric 'ethnic tent'\(^1\) that covers the group and is used by them to come together and stay together – it also allows for a clear demarcation of ‘us’ from ‘them.’

**B. Characterization of the Other**

The ‘ethnic tent’ of group identity encompasses *Tenkalai* and *Vatakai* members irrespective of their gender, class or status in society. However, the intensity of the ‘us vs. them’ attitude in the Śrīvaisnava group members seems to be proportional to their level of orthodoxy and religious familiarity and involvement. Also, practicing Śrīvaisnavas in rural areas and in temple towns seem to be more prone to ethnic bias and groupism. These are obviously highly generalized but useful observations allowing us to further understand the dynamics of the two groups. There are members in rural, but more so in urban, society leading a life of piety, largely oblivious to the entire dispute. These individuals are capable of ignoring the conflict, and the theological digressions, to focus on the gains from the overarching Śrīvaisnava philosophy. There are also some educated and wealthy Śrīvaisnava urban families that seem more militant in defending their group’s identity, often organizing and funding activities for that cause – this is especially the case amongst Śrīvaisnava members who are closely affiliated with their respective Matams. Religious involvement is thus one of the underlying factors of determining the

level of ethnocentric behavior. There are also other factors of familial ties and social environment that can largely influence this behavior.

A key feature of group behavior is the formation of perceptions about the other. Each group assigns a set of characteristics to the out-group based on their own outlook, which either comes out of its ethnic inferences or is passed on from its ancestors, and are typically negative sketches of the other used to strengthen the in-group character. The members draw a character map based on their perceived notions of the other’s habits and characteristics. This map highlights the perceived negative attributes of the other and denotes a sub-human character to them. This sort of demonization of the other is typical group behavior in conflict dynamics – the Tenkalai and Vatakalai communities too have formed similar perceptions of each other.

The Tenkalai community’s outlook of the Vatakalai community portrays them as being ultra-orthodox followers of stubborn ritualistic practices that are impractical. They accuse Vatakalais of caste-ism and of being patronizing towards others. By insisting on Vedic practices in Śrivaisnavism, Vatakalais are seen as being antithetical to the Śrivaisnava philosophy of inclusiveness of all members irrespective of caste or creed. The Vatakalai community’s deep involvement in studying Sanskrit scriptures is also seen as being unfaithful to their South Indian heritage and as being negligent of the Divya Prabandham.

On the contrary, Vatakalais characterize Tenkalais as being undisciplined and lazy for their inability to adhere to the ‘true’ brahmin principles of life. Their lack of Sanskrit knowledge and reluctance to learn Vedic scriptures are considered to disqualify
the Tenkalai community from Śrīvaiṣṇavism. Vatakalai members point out that the foremost Śrīvaiṣṇava ācārya Rāmānuja himself established the *Udbhaya Vedānta* synthesis that wed the *Vedāntic* philosophy (Sanskrit based) with the Tamil devotional scriptures of the *Divya Prabandham* and pointed to it as the supreme way of Śrīvaiṣṇava worship.¹ Vatakalais consider Tenkalais as being disrespectful of an important Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition and as not following Rāmānuja’s legacy.

The formation of such character maps of the other becomes evident in social practices as well. These characterizations are commonly used as references in social groups and often become hot topics in settings of important social functions such as marriage alliance discussions. As an example, it is not uncommon to observe Vatakalai elders of the family giving descriptive details of the character of Tenkalai brides and grooms. They portray banal negative characteristics upon them and have several ready examples in defense. These exercises are common occurrences in both groups and are features of collective decision-making settings (such as marital arrangements) that call upon the ‘wisdom’ and experience of the elderly. Baseless attribution of negative characteristics helps the groups to simplify their outlook of society – viewing it in black or white contexts of the righteous us versus the wicked them. This contextualizing enables them to comprehend their existence as true Śrīvaiṣṇavas and strengthens the notion of the group. It serves the purpose of reinforcing one’s own history and narrative, and also allows the group to bond together.

The proliferation of media and the internet in India over the past two decades has not only been a boon to Śrīvaiṣṇavism but has also shed light on the centuries old dispute between the Tenkalai and Vatakalai groups. There seems to be a sudden resurgence of interest in religion and arts in South India, especially Śrīvaiṣṇavism. The Alvār poetry of Divya Prabandham that was traditionally recited at Śrīvaiṣṇava temples and homes has become immensely popular in the mainstream arts scene in the south. Vasudha Narayanan explains this phenomenon as follows:

Alvār poetry has traditionally been performed at Sri Vaisnava homes, temples, and temple processions. Two waves of dissemination have made the Alvār songs enormously popular in the last fifty years in many parts of India and in diaspora temples and homes. The first wave in the mid twentieth century, led by musicians and dancers connected with Carnatic music and Bharata Natyam, made these songs prominent in public concert spaces. The second wave, in the late twentieth century, came about through the creation of Sri Vaisnava cyber-communities in the 1990-s. Ariyakudi Ramanuja Ayyangar (1890-1967), the musician who was responsible for both establishing the format for Carnatic music recitals and for setting the Tiruppavai to Carnatic ragas, is significant in the discussion of the first wave because the format he popularized created the space for the inclusion of Alvār verses in radio and stage concerts. In the 1950-s with the choreographing of Andal's works for Bharata Natyam dance, Kamala Laxman and Vyjayanthimala (later Bali) starting a new trend of including Alvār poetry in dance performances. The second wave began with the creation of the "bhakti" listserv [sic] in California in 1994 and has been instrumental in creating new awareness of the Alvār poetry outside India. The local communities catalyzed by listserves [sic] have initiated festivals of recitation in domestic and temple spaces in the diaspora and the entire Divyaprabandham of the Alvārs is now available through the web.1

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Also, the emergence of several dedicated media outlets for spirituality and religion has opened up avenues for scholars and philosophers. Scholars from both the Northern and Southern schools have patronized such outlets to spread their respective ācāryas’ interpretation of the Śrīvaisnava theology. Matams and other Śrīvaisnava institutions are seeing a surge in interest; the Divya Desam temple events are celebrated with great fanfare and the number of people getting involved in the re-establishment of a strong Śrīvaisnava community is steadily increasing.

While these are flourishing times for Śrīvaisnnavism, as a whole, it adds an increased amount of stress to the relationship between the Tenkalai and the Vatakalai community. Small temple disputes and theistic disagreements are amplified and highlighted on account of the number of memberships to each group. Philosophical popularity is now being measured in terms of the number of followers. Given the situation, it becomes very important to pay heed to the issues underlying the Śrīvaisnava community. Sectarian rivalry and animosity that have been brewing for centuries can easily spew into a full-blown destructive conflict.
CHAPTER FOUR: CONFLICT CONDITIONS

A. Temple Control, Rituals and Pride

Looking beyond the soteriological differences between the Tenkalais and Vatakalais, the areas of contention between the two groups revolve around issues that stretch well beyond the realm of core religious beliefs. Instead the two groups have been at loggerheads over issues ranging from resource allocation to property rights and membership. The seemingly latent conflict between the two sects comes to the forefront while analyzing issues related to the promotion and prominence of sect-based identity. People from the two groups seldom compromise when it comes to issues of sharing temple space, revenue, symbols or even knowledge.

The most contested issue amongst the two communities, as mentioned earlier, is the topic of property ownership and maintenance – mainly the Divya Desam temples. These temples are one of the most prestigious symbols of identity for the two subsects and are an integral part of their group identities. The splendid architecture and antiquity of these temples seem to condense multiple, large meanings into a single structure, and they are a proud representation of Śrivaisnava culture. These temples are also epicenters of theological study and practice. The temples “galvanize the deepest emotions and attachments, material and symbolic control over the most central sacred spaces and are
sources of enormous social power”.¹ So it is not difficult to see why the two sub-sects attach such powerful symbolic significance to these sacred temples. Temple ownership and the rights to perform the daily rituals there have been heavily contested by the Tenkalai and Vatakalai communities for the past few centuries.

To completely understand the social and historical perspective of the complex relationship structure between the two Śrīvaiṣṇava groups, it is important to appreciate the evolvement of the Divya Desam temples as a symbol of cultural importance and a significant marker of group identity. In South India, temples are important institutions that provide the framework for analyzing the evidence of varna-based socio-economic-social relationships present in society. The extensive construction of temples in India dates back to the fifth and the sixth centuries during the Pallava period.² Early census data show that there are as many as eleven thousand-odd important temple structures in Southern India.³ They were built in every size and place – from familial shrines to village centers to regional and pan-regional pilgrimage centers. Temple construction details, layouts, endowments and the administrative records for many of the bigger medieval temples have been preserved through stone inscriptions and other historical documents. All the temples, whether big or small, rich or poor, are based on a common cultural and institutional model.⁴ The temples only vary iconographically, doctrinally and ritually.

³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., 2:20.
The main iconic and central figure of a South Indian temple is the deity. The deity is not a mere image but at some levels considered to be a moral authority and an intelligible person. Appadurai mentions that the cultural interpretation of an iconic deity as a resident person or individual has been scholarly debated for many years.\(^1\) “But high-level philosophical treatments and popular behavior provide evidence that the deity is considered fully corporeal, sentient and intelligent,” says Appadurai.\(^2\) Every temple has ritualistic procedures in place to vivify and consecrate an idol as the presiding temple deity, perform daily cyclical worship cycles involving waking up, cleansing, dressing, periodically feeding and putting to sleep the deity. The rituals are performed with the perception of serving the literal personality of the deity.

Devotees visiting the temples make offerings and donate gifts to the deity as a personal benefit to the deity (and the temple). Gifts include jewelry, cash and real estate, and are made as an offering, sometimes expecting in return a favor from the deity. Appadurai makes the observation that South Indian ethnographic evidence, particularly linguistic and ritualistic signs, indicate that the deity is often considered to be a “paradigmatic sovereign.”\(^3\) He adds that Kōil, in fact, means both temple and royal palace. Temple workers are referred to as courtiers or servants of the king; the paraphernalia used for the procession of the deity around the local neighborhoods is the same as that fit for a king such as palanquins, conches, umbrellas and musical...

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\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid., 1:21.
accompaniments. The deity is addressed by the priests using idiomatic references used for kings reflecting servitude to the sovereignty.

The core temple ritual consists of pūjā or worship, which is made up of a set of individual ritualistic tasks corresponding to the worship cycles mentioned above. In Śrīvaisnava temples, the worship rituals involve the deification of several figures including the main deity, the deity’s divine consort, the twelve Alvārs of medieval Śrīvaisnadvism and the relevant ācāryas of the corresponding tradition. The pūjā rituals are accompanied by the recitation of the Vedas and the Divya Prabandham. Honors from the preponderant deity are then distributed in hierarchical order from the oldest to the youngest Alvārs and ācāryas. Treatises and hymns honoring the contributions of the various Śrīvaisnava teachers and leaders are then sung by the devotees participating in the ritual to establish a lineal trace route of the current Śrīvaisnava ritualistic standing and authenticity of the temple. Monthly and annual temple festivals are celebrated with great fanfare and are typically important social phenomena.

An important concept of the Hindu tradition of worship and the South Indian temple tradition is “redistribution” of gifts received by the temple deity. Typically, the gifts bestowed upon the deity are redistributed amongst people participating in the rituals including the donor, the priests and other worshippers. Staff and other volunteers of the temple also receive a partial share of the offerings during temple festivities. The order of the redistribution of gifts is based on the seniority and importance of the participants.

1 Ibid., 34.
Sectarian leaders and important scholars are typically honored first. Such honors denote the cultural privileges and the status of individuals in society, and are a matter of great contention in debate during major temple festivals.¹ This becomes particularly heated and controversial during annual festivals and other special religious occasions when the gifts and endowments coming into the temple increase ten-fold. There is a lot at stake both in terms of the actual quantity of the gifts redistributed and the honor associated with it.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a new trend in the redistributive activities of sovereign kings appeared. The kings of the late Chola and Vijayanagara Empires initiated prolific building of temples and used the temple endowment as a method of economic redistribution.² They also used it as a technique to gain control of new areas and include newer constituencies by using religion and worship as a mode of expanding their kingdom. The relationship of kings to temples was defined through the sectarian leaders and local constituent scholars who were responsible for temple management. The kings performed a dual role of providing endowments to the temple and also protecting these religious structures. The relationship between the sectarian leaders and kings is one of sociopolitical prominence in which the rulers were introduced and publicly legitimized by the leaders in their constituencies in return for endowments and protection. The sectarian leaders did this by bestowing temple honors upon the kings as a sign of their approval and acceptance of the rulers. The sectarian leaders saw their interests in wresting control of the temples and the protection of their constituencies

¹ Ibid.
² Ibid., 64.
being met with the backing of the kings. Temple control, in turn, provided sectarian leaders the authenticity and power to gather new recruits for the sect. Rāmānuja had established a link between recruitment and rewards in the form of temple honors activities. New recruits were allowed to participate in temple activities, which legitimized the power and influence of the sectarian leaders. On the other hand, recruitment for the sect allowed the leaders to gain further access to religious resources like the temples.

This political involvement of the leaders and recruitment process were important factors in the spreading of Śrivaishnavism throughout South India. In fact, the southern parts of India saw the enormous growth of Tenkalai or Prabhandham-based Śrivaishnavism and this was largely due to the contributions of Manavālamāmuni. It was during his lifetime, it is believed, that the concept of royal patronage for specific temple honors and the strong subsectarian affiliation to temples became part of the main strategic objectives of Śrivaishnava membership. Manavālamāmuni established eight individuals with the aim of propagating Tenkalai Sampradāyan to the deep clutches of South India. These eight scholars called asta-tikkajas or eight pillars of faith proved to be the institutional framework for Tenkalai Śrivaishnavism after Manavālamāmuni’s death. The northern school of Śrivaishnavism started late in its efforts to institutionalize and establish

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2 Ibid., 77.
3 Ibid., 90.
4 Sanksrit word commonly used to refer tradition or philosophy.
relationships with rulers. It was only in the late sixteenth century that it started expanding in South India. By then, the Tenkalai sect had a significant control of all major temples in Tamil territory so the northern school was forced to expand into Telugu and Kannada areas.\(^1\) It was not until the eighteenth century that the two sects started to consciously wrest for temple control. In the consequent generations, the two sects constantly contended for temple control and expansion.

The secatarian dispute for temple control in the Śrīvaiśnava community has been particularly evident in the past century or so. There are a multitude of reasons for the escalation of the situation between the two sects, which will be further discussed in later sections. The conflict situation in the community was evident across all major temples but was the most pronounced in four major Śrīvaiśnava temples: Tirupati, Srirangam, Kanchipuram and Triplicane. Each temple complex has evolved to include one’s own but more importantly exclude the other sect’s unique tradition in its practices as a way of stamping authority. The temple tradition and honor system also evolved around the segregation of sectarian activities at these temples. The context and organization of the sectarian control of these temples provides perspective to the current situation of the Śrīvaisnava conflict there.

B. Śrī Venkateswara Temple, Tirupati

The temple at Tirupati expanded and progressed during the Vijayanagara period.\(^2\)

\(^{1}\) Ibid., 1:100.
\(^{2}\) T.K.T. Viraraghavacharya, History of Tirupati, published by C. Anna Rao, on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams (Tirupati), (1953).
introduction of numerous temple festivals throughout the year. Also, the nature of endowments at this temple changed the level and status of its interaction with the devotees. The popularity of this temple in becoming a major pilgrimage center can be credited to the large endowments received from rulers and merchants. The sectarian leaders of the southern school are said to have played an instrumental role in mediating the involvement and contribution of both royals and merchants in temple affairs. By introducing the Prabandham poetry during worship, the Tenkalai sectarian leaders opened worship to both Brahmin and non-Brahmin worshipers. This style of worship soon became very popular, attracting several donors’ interest in temple events. Due to the increasing popularity of the Prabhandic style of worship, there was increased rivalry amongst the sectarian leaders of the two Śrīvaisnava schools. By mid-sixteenth century, the differences between the two sectarian groups had hardened into traditional rivalry for temple control and receiving honors.

Today, the Tirupati temple complex as managed by the Tirupati Temple Devasthanam is a sprawling complex with as many as fifty thousand visitors on a daily basis. It is the most visited place of worship and also the second richest temple in the world. The social and cultural implications of gaining control over temple administration and the privilege of receiving temple honors has also increased exponentially. The

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2 Ibid., 96. See also Ibid.: 1.
independent temple management at Tirupati\(^1\) has made efforts since its establishment in 1932 to stay fairly neutral in its ritualistic and honorific system towards the two sects. But despite attempts of the temple management to maintain a nonaligned status, there is a significant residue of the Prabhandic school’s influence on the temple ritual practice. This has often been perceived by the other sectarian leaders as an open exclusion of their ritualistic rights. In private conversations, members of the northern school often seem umbrageous at the exclusion of invocatory verses during temple rituals and festivals honoring their ācāryas.\(^2\) There were also other significant points of contention like the explicit display of one sect’s marks or thiruman on temple property and the priority for bestowment of temple honors on sectarian leaders of the two sects that invoked a sense of hostility between them.

**C. Śri Ranganāthaswāmi Temple, Srirangam**

By establishing the Pancarātra ēgama system of worship at the Srirangam temple, Rāmānuja ruffled a few feathers amongst the native set of scholars who had been exercising their lineal right for temple control and worship at the temple for generations. But this change brought in a substantial transformation in the socio-cultural environment of this temple town as it allowed, for the first time, for the active participation of

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\(^1\) In 1932, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) was formed as a result of the TTD Act of 1932 passed by the Government of Madras. The administration of the temple was vested to a committee of independently appointed members under the Government of Madras. See T.K.T. Viraraghavacharya, *History of Tirupati*, published by C. Anna Rao, on behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams (Tirupati), (1953).

\(^2\) The author cites from personal conversations and subscribed email discussion groups with members of the Śrīvaiṣṇava community in the United States. See “Fwd: Desikar and Thenkalai,” *Ramanuja and Desika*, in Yahoo Groups, 2 January 2009, archived at: [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/RamanujaandDesika/message/1221](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/RamanujaandDesika/message/1221)
unorthodox non-Brahmins in temple activities. By the sixteenth century, Srirangam had become an important base for the Prabhandic school of Śrīvaiṣṇavism and an important base for Tenkalai philosophy and membership. Vedānta Desikan’s influence in popularizing the northern school’s philosophical thought at Srirangam only had a very measured success. Under the tutelage of Manavālamāmuni, followers of the southern school further reigned control of the Srirangam temple and honors.

Temple activities and roles in the Srirangam temple are distributed amongst recruited Śrīvaiṣṇava members, irrespective of caste or status, in accordance with Rāmānuja’s mandate and have been documented in the Kōil Olugu.¹ These activities and the associated honors have stayed with those appointed member-families for all these generations until now. The presence of a strong Prabhandic movement in this region greatly influenced all the appointee families as well, hence, rendering the Srirangam temple in the complete control of the Tenkalai sectarian leaders. Today, the Srirangam temple remains the main religious center for the Southern school. Several attempts by other sectarian leaders to gain access to temple control and honors over the years have been futile.² Invocatory verses and recitation of treatises of non-Tenkalai ācāryas has been strictly restricted. There have been numerous cited instances of open conflicts between members of the two sects on temple premises during temple festivals as a result

² Ibid.
of group marginalization and refusal to share temple honors. The animosity between the resident sect members and members belonging to the other sect has surged in the past several decades due to the increased prominence of the Srirangam temple as a major tourist attraction and pilgrimage center.

D. Śri Varadarājaswāmi Temple, Kanchipuram

The Kanchipuram temple was the northern epicenter of Śrīvaiśnava religious learning and has been home to several of the seventy-four ācāryas that Rāmānuja had appointed during his time. Initially, when the doctrinal differences between the two schools were purely restricted to academic interpretation, the two communities were far more cordial. As the differences pervaded into social observances, daily rituals, and quasi-religious practices, the two sects became far more divided and the social interaction between them was also greatly affected. The Kanchipuram region is evidence of this widening schism as there is a large presence of members of the two sects and rights to temple honors are heavily contested between them. The level of sect-consciousness in the Śrīvaiśnava community in Kanchipuram is only paralleled at Srirangam. A common religious learning center for centuries has now become a severe battleground for sectarian conflicts stemming from the Varadarājaswāmi temple and its control. The annual festivals are marred by clashes between the two sects, often calling for strict police

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1 Reports of conflict and heated arguments between the two sect members were reported to the author in informal discussions with members of the Śrīvaiśnava community at Srirangam. Several of these members have specific roles in temple management and have a first-hand account of all the temple activities and incidents.
Several civil and criminal cases have been filed as a result of this conflict. Recent civil case settlements, though, have mostly been made in favor of the Tenkalai sect leading to a reduction in sectarian duels during festivals.

E. Śri Pārthasārathi Temple, Triplicane

The temple complex at Triplicane had its endowment and ritual model based on the contemporary model at the Tirupati temple. The inscriptions found in the temple premises record endowments made directly to the temple deity by the various rulers and merchants in the region over the years and the relevant honors that were bestowed upon them as a result. Temple management and honors were amenably administered by the sect leaders and administration. Appadurai notes that it was not until the mid-nineteenth century, after the temple had been under British jurisdiction for a century, that the sub-sectarian conflict between the Tenkalai and the Vatakalai groups gained judicial prominence.

The first petition filed by the two groups in 1754 pertains to the recitation of invocatory verses of the respective sects in temple rituals and festivals. Each sect contended that its form of the invocatory verse should be given priority for its authenticity and precedence in Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. This civil case was temporarily resolved by assigning specific shrines for worship in the temple complex to each sect.

2 Ibid., 131.
4 Ibid., 104.
5 Ibid., 3: 108.
Records show that in 1795 the Vatakalai group filed another petition complaining that the Tenkalai group had taken control of all the shrines in the temple. It was believed that the Tenkalais had greater sympathies amongst the native contributing merchants, allowing them to gain control of the temple as part of perquisite benefits.¹ The temple has since been in the control of the Tenkalai sect but the conflict between the two sects has not ceased. Important temple festivals and other occasions often turn into volatile situations marred with incidents of insult and exclusion. In as late as 2007, there were reported incidents of heated arguments and minor physical confrontations between members of the two sects during the traditional procession of the deity as part of the annual temple festival.² Such incidents seem to have risen in the past few years, calling for the immediate attention of the sectarian leaders and authorities to the issues underlying the enmity between the two groups.

F. Prevalence of Conflict

A closer look at the incidents reported at the temples mentioned above reveals a pattern of common conditions and issues. Some of these issues have been in contention for the past few centuries. The issues concern both the material and cultural objectives of the two sects. Interestingly, all the issues are interrelated at some levels and are tied to sectarian attempts at gaining complete of temples.

1. Invocatory Verses

¹ Ibid., 3:109.
² The author spoke to friends and relatives who partake in the temple festivals at Triplicane annually and were present during the celebrations in 2007.
In every case of temple conflicts discussed above, the introduction of the “Rāmānuja Dayāpātram” introductory verse seemed to be the first stage in the sectarian battles for temple control.¹ One of the first things done in a Śrīvaisnava goshti (community) prayer is the recitation of invocatory verses of all the Alvārs and relevant acāryās. This tradition has been meticulously followed by both the groups and has been in practice since the times of Rāmānuja. The Tenkalai tradition’s invocation, starting with “Śrisailesa Dayāpātram,” pays homage to the greatness and contribution of their foremost sectarian leader, Manavālamāmuni. Vatakalai sect members use the “Rāmānuja Dayāpātram” verse in reference to their revered leader, Vedānta Desikan. Even in neutral venues like Tirupati, where both verses are supposedly recited at all important events, the two groups fight for the priority of the order of chanting one verse over the other.

2. Temple Honors

Honors are an important aspect of the recognition and redistribution of offerings in the Śrīvaisnava worship system. The honor bestowed upon the goshti typically consists of theertam (holy water), satagopan (silver or golden crown denoting the feet of the Lord that is placed on the devotee’s head), parivattam (cloth tied around the head) and prasadham (holy leavings of the Lord). An important part of any temple festival or ritual includes an elaborate ceremony of honor bestowment on important sectarian leaders and scholars in the participating goshti or audience. This ceremony is significant because it connotes the authority of the leader in temple control and implicitly verifies the leader’s

standing in the social circle. The conferment of temple honors is a much sought-after affair by leaders of both the sects and every temple management goes to great lengths to highlight the event. Given the social and sectarian importance of this event, it is easy to see why each group heavily contends for its leader’s priority in receiving the honor.

3. Temple Endowments

Some of the underlying factors contributing to the situation of the two fiercely embattled groups are often materialistic in nature. Such issues are not openly admitted as causes of conflict by the two groups for fear of appearing shallow and unspiritual-like. By gaining access to temple endowments, or rather the sources of temple endowments, a group enjoys direct influence in temple control and management. This is not to suggest that sectarian leaders seek to amass temple resources for materialistic benefits of their groups. Rather, control of temple management allows them to further their sectarian beliefs and principles to the broad temple audience; it is a stamp of authority and authenticity. By becoming an important element of the donor-endowment-deity-redistribution chain, the groups have a direct voice in the ritualistic and sociopolitical aspects of the temple.

4. Temple Property

In the rising economic condition of society, ownership of movable temple property, specifically the acreage, jewels and temple accounts, is the single most important indicator of temple control. Similar to endowments, control and ownership of temple property reinforces the authenticity and authority of the group. But the difference in control of temple property over endowments lies in the ability of the groups to solely
control the ritualistic discourse of the temple proceedings. Temple festivals and other annual events are often celebrated with much fanfare and highlight the unique traditions of the sects in rituals and practice. Control of temple property allows for the direct control of temple management, temple festival calendar\(^1\) and the associated rituals. Besides, ownership of some of the richest temples in India provides instant recognition and prominence to the group.

5. Membership

Historically, leaders of Śrīvaisn navism have devoted their lives to proselytizing to the masses in order to increase the popularity of their beliefs and increase membership in their sects. The main role of any Śrīvaisnava acāryā is to spread the word of the Upanishads and the divine works of the Alvārs, and open avenues for even supposedly-“unqualified” individuals in society to gain access to the Hindu philosophy of worship. Popularizing their sectarian beliefs and increasing the size of their following is an unstated agenda that underlies the motives in all of the above mentioned issues. Temple control, authenticity of beliefs and prominence are all means of expanding this social agenda of increasing membership. This is not unique to the holy duties of the Śrīvaisnava acāryās but is an important aspect that often does not get factored in the analysis of the Śrīvaisnava conflict.

G. Factors Affecting the Conflict

\(^1\) Temple festival dates are based on the agamic calendars prescribed by the respective groups’ acāryās and so they vary between the two groups.
All the conditions and issues that have been mentioned above cannot be isolated from each other in the analysis of the conflict. They are deeply interrelated and carry a diachronic relationship with one another. The control of temple management and material belongings has a direct impact on membership through the control of participation, which then relates to the nature and source of endowments. Temple control and management in turn leads to control of the redistribution of temple gifts and honors.

The dispute between the two groups for temple control manifests in numerous ways. Temple ownership is often coupled with identity pride resulting in the public display of sectarian symbols and markers on temple property. Festivals, rituals and temple processions soon become events for the pompous projection of group identity. The presiding deity and the temple walls adorn the native sub-sect’s Thiruman mark. This outward display is viewed as a stamp of hegemonic control of the temple and the two communities strongly compete to indicate this control. Thus, the dispute over temple property rights has a multi-dimensional adversarial effect.

Besides temple ownership, contention over the rights to perform daily temple rituals is a frequent topic of debate in the community. These rituals are a matter of great honor to the two communities. Rituals are made up of a belief system or theology and can produce powerful bonds of solidarity. It is in the performance or action of these simple, repetitive rituals and not in the belief itself that the solidarity exists. Religion is made up of such rituals, which can even predominate theology. Rituals, however, get their power from being done ‘properly.’ The effectiveness of rituals stems from adherence to traditional, prescribed methods of performance and it loses power if done incorrectly. The
method for the daily rituals in the Divya Desam temples has been recorded for centuries in a document known as the Kōil Olugu\(^1\), which has been made available through manuscripts, palm leaves, temple inscriptions and inscriptions on copper plates. It is a matter of high prestige for the groups to undertake temple operations in strict adherence to these instructions. By gaining control over temple management, the groups can exhibit great ‘social power’ in their ability to correctly perform traditional rituals and temple festivals, and thereby validate their authenticity.

The annual temple festivals have also become avenues of high contention between the two groups. These festivals are cultural extravaganzas that attract thousands of people and provide the perfect platform for a display of control and power. One such festival is the annual twenty-one day Adhyayana Utsavam held at all Divya Desam temples. In this grand festival, Śrīvaisnavas recite all four thousand verses of the Divya Prabandham in a certain style of rendition. This event has conjured up many controversies and debates between the two groups in the past. There have been several instances cited by members from both sides of having witnessed insider partiality, exclusion and biased treatment at these festivals. During this festival at Tenkalai temples such as the ones at Srirangam and Triplicane, Vatakalais have claimed to have been prevented from participating in the chanting and singing rituals. Similarly, Tenkalais have accused the authorities at the Kanchipuram temple of restricting them from

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\(^{1}\) Kōil Olugu is an ancient traditional work available only in Tamil. Kōil Olugu simply means temple practices. It refers to the methods and administrative practices involved in administering a Hindu Temple, specifically the Srirangam Temple. This has been the norm for the operational practices of all the Divya Desam temples across India; see also V.N. Hari Rao, ed., “Koil Olugu,” in Worship and conflict under colonial rule, ed. Arjun Apadurai (Cambridge University Press, 1981).
partaking in the temple rituals and of having been denied traditional honors associated with participation.

These are some of the prominent issues of contention between the two groups, although there are several other areas of dispute between them as well. This conflict permeates into the everyday lives of the two peoples. Mutual exclusion, exertion of control and power display are attributes of groups competing for common significant resources. When these resources also form an integral part of the groups’ identities, the levels of contention increase by several notches, thereby raising the stake for the two groups. And when emotions are running high, these duels can easily spiral into a dangerous, violent conflict.

There have been several instances of court involvement in disputes concerning the Divya Desam temples before and after the presence of the British judiciary system in India. At present, a majority of the temples come under the auspices of the Tenkalai community and Matams. Vatakalai members feel that this is an unfair distribution of temple rights considering that the Tenkalai community makes up only thirty five to forty percent of the entire Śrīvaisnava population. Although the exclusivity of temple ownership by Tenkalais is an outcome of the historical rigors of sectarian leaders like Manavālamāmuni, Vatakalai sect members tend to blame it on the current overzealousness of the southern school in gaining temple control and establishing philosophical monopoly. The inevitable consequences of this dispute often surface in the social attitudes of the two sects towards each other. The implications of the conflict become evident in the day-to-day aspects of coexistence and interdependence between
the two groups. There are increasing amounts of mistrust between the two sects, especially in the regions surrounding temple centers, and this affects traditional lifestyle practices such as inter-sect marriage, shared festival celebrations, etc. There is also an increased vigilance against groups exerting temple ownership wherein members of the opposite sect blame temple authorities, and hence the relevant sect, of misappropriation of funds, mismanagement and fraud. Not only is this detrimental to Śrīvaisnavism itself, but it also contributes to the escalation of the conflict situation, putting at risk the social health of the Divya Desam temples.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONFLICT MANIFESTATION

Given the historical and social background of the Śrivaisnava dispute, it is important to clarify and understand the gravity of the situation. From an outside perspective, the conflict situation may not seem imminent in comparison to some of the more violent and detrimental ethnic and religious conflicts in the same social scope. The Śrivaisnava conflict seems latent and unmanifested, at best, compared to some of the more “active” conflicts in the region and elsewhere. Southern India has over the years witnessed several protracted conflict scenarios with adverse outcomes, but not many conflict situations present themselves with such poise and indication of brewing into a full-blown clash of highly motivated groups. It, thus, becomes not only important to qualify the significance of the Śrivaisnava conflict but also to remind us of the serious consequences of ignoring a dormant, but protracted, conflict.

The theological dispute between the two sects only began as a difference in soteriological interpretation of the main philosophical theme presented by Rāmānuja. The pervasive nature of the differences as linguistic, traditional and structural incompatibilities in social settings led to the transformation of a seemingly lucid disparity of beliefs into a complex and profound clash of ideologies. What started as a theological exercise of amassing support for membership of the local masses in temple worship
through public discourses and alliances with the local rulers soon came to be seen as competing interests for temple control and management. Through centuries of dispute, the focus of the conflict has shifted from the theistic difference of opinions to the possession of temple and intellectual property rights (strictly in the theistic sense). There is also a visible shift in the attitudes of the beacon leaders of the two sects – the so-called drivers of the sectarian split, Manavālamāmuni and Vedānta Desikan, explicitly state the importance of accepting the divergence of interpretation without considering it to be a Śrīvaisnava theological difference. But recent sectarian leaders, scholars and acāryās do not expound this message clearly through their discourses. Some have even been openly cited inciting hatred and animosity against the other group. This, of course, does not come as a surprise as we begin to look closer at what is at stake. As mentioned in the previous sections, the most recent phase of the Śrīvaisnava conflict reflects the material and resource contention amongst the groups. Incidents of physical confrontation, police involvement and the list of criminal and court cases filed in recent years are some of the few indicators of a simmering conflict in hand.

One can argue that all the listed incidents that have been cited earlier are attributes of any property or resource dispute. This may be true in a purely objective perspective without acknowledging the plethora of factors that contribute to the escalation of this conflict from a resource dispute to a latent, potentially dangerous sectarian conflict. The presence of a wide variety of factors acts as a catalyst for the manifestation of the conflict. These are conditions that are neither sufficient nor necessary for the formation and exegesis of conflicts but are key factors that catapult certain situations beyond
control. It is these factors that can help determine the potential destructiveness of a conflict.

A. Religion

Much has been written and said about the conciliatory tools available in all modern religions. This is in fact beyond doubt. It is not religions or theistic values that directly contribute to the formation of negative concepts and hatred against the “non-believer” or “conformer.” Juergensmeyer writes:

[Religious violence] has much to do with the nature of the religious imagination, which has always had the propensity to absolutize [sic] and to project images of cosmic war. It also has much to do with the social tensions of this moment of history that cry out for absolute solutions, and the sense of personal humiliation experienced by men who long to restore an integrity that they perceive as lost in the wake of virtually global social and political shifts.¹

The misinterpretation and exaggeration of theological expectations is often the main contributor of spreading intolerance and revulsion. But it is beyond reasonable doubt that the sanctity and sacredness associated with religion and theology gives its followers an element of disillusionment and righteousness over other beliefs. Much to the chagrin of new age global philosophers, religious sentiment and emotion are triggered by the relentless and uncompromising attitudes of religious fanatics. But it is not only the fanaticism of beliefs that leads to stubborn outlooks in religion – even the average believer seldom garners courage to question the theistic interpretations of religious leaders and texts. The aura of sanctity surrounding religion makes it intimidating and out-

of-reach for the follower. Also, the possible social repercussions and retaliation borne out of questioning one’s faith or belief is a big deterrent.

Śrīvaisnnavism is abound with orthodoxy and traditionalism. There are strict moral, social and ritualistic norms to be adhered to by a practicing Śrīvaisnava. In such an environment, it is not difficult to see why followers rely with great piety and respect on the sect leader or acāryā for spiritual guidance. It is considered sacrilegious to question the moral authority and virtue of the acāryā. Also, the collective social culture in place adds to the pressure of normative expectations of an individual in society. Considering this context, it can be safely stated that the attitudes and behaviors of the Śrīvaisnava members reflect the tone of enactment displayed by their respective leaders with regards to the Śrīvaisnava conflict. With the deep-level involvement of sectarian leaders and scholars in the conflict, it is hardly surprising to witness the level of zealous participation of the sect members in matters concerning their group identity. The Divya Desam temples are an integral part of Śrīvaisnava worship. Contention for temple control then becomes a matter of religious mandate with sect leaders actively seeking to wrest ownership from the other group. Herein lies the problem: the very element of religion and the vigorous involvement of leaders elevates the intensity level of the Śrīvaisnava conflict by several notches. Members of the two groups are unapologetically competitive in issues concerning temple control, honors and rituals.

B. Property Resources

There are numerous causes for the occurrence of religious conflicts in ethnically diverse environments but an increasing number of economic studies suggest that conflict
over resources may be an important indicator of conflict escalation and violence.\(^1\) Struggle for control of resources, especially resources relating to ownership of land or territory and/or directly affecting income, are among the key instrumental factors that help explain the eruption of historic tensions between communities into acts of violence.\(^2\) The intensity of the conflict is often correlated with the value of the resource itself – when the resource is scarce or invaluable, it often deeper passions and emotions amongst contenders. This is particularly true for resources that hold significant cultural and historical value. When combined with religious value, such resources become a topic of high contention and debate.

The *Divya Desam* temples are cultural icons of the Śrīvaisnava philosophy. The basis of the *bhakti* movement in Southern India was based on the collective participation of all members of society, irrespective of their social position, in the worship of the deities at these temples. By allowing access to non-*Brahmins* in temple activities, Śrīvaisnava philosophers vernacularized and popularized the Hindu religion to the masses. Considering the pivotal role of the temples in changing the face of religion in the region, the historical significance of these cultural symbols is undeniable. With so much legacy and history attached to them, the temples form the main structural and ideological framework of modern day Śrīvaisnavism. In these circumstances, it is not surprising to


see the two sects vigorously compete to stake claims on the material and cultural resourcefulness of the Divya Desam temples.

C. Proximity

The intensity of a conflict is often proportional to the amount of interaction between the parties to the conflict. Interaction is typically defined in terms of social and cultural exchanges that occur between the groups. Constant contact between groups allows the group members to visualize and objectivize the enemy other. This can amount to increased comparison of distinguishing qualities between the members and leads to the clear demarcation of group boundaries. Higher levels of interaction increase the exposure of the groups to each other and are often used by the group leaders to project negative traits on the other group and to dehumanize them. Also, the scope of the conflict is amplified in scenarios of daily societal interaction between conflicting parties, mainly because of the large number of contention points it presents. The circumstances under which two conflicting parties that share a common heritage, ethnicity and religion interact on a daily basis typically extends the issues that arise from proximity between the groups. Not only are the two groups exposed to each other, they are also contending for the same set of cultural and religious resources. Such groups often try harder to distinguish their group identity from the other in order to highlight their group’s dominance and authenticity over the other. In such cases, there is a certain level of ambiguity and overlap present in the group-level identity of the conflicting parties but the groups tend to devise tools for clear differentiation.
The two sectarian groups in Śrīvaisnavism are both unique and similar at almost every level. The members of both sects have been historically in close proximity to each other given their common ethnicity. The groups over the course of time developed linguistic, cultural and social markers to identify, and more importantly, distinguish themselves from the other. Group members from both sects have occupied the same villages, have had familial relations amongst themselves and were even sharing the same acāryā heritage until the end of the medieval period. But as with the evolution of any religion, subtle perceptive and analytical differences in theistic outlook split them into separate groups with distinct lineal, traditional and philosophical identities. Over the years, the very element of shared cultural resources became an area of dispute. Religious texts, temples, honors and culture soon became issues of contention. And the juxtaposition of the two cultures in social contexts increased exposure and, hence, the chances of unfavorable comparisons made amongst each other. Common places of worship soon became playgrounds for heated debate and exchange, and as time progressed, the intention of mutual exclusivity crept in. Exclusion translated to claim of ownership and control of the shared resources by one group or the other. Unfortunately for the two Śrīvaisnava groups, they have been caught in this vicious cycle of referring to shared heritage and culture for religious identity but having to strive, at the same time, to establish a unique group identity. Being in close proximity to each other has provided the two groups with a large number of social instruments to compare, project and rationalize their ill-emotions about the other.

D. Materialization of Religion
One of the severe effects of globalization is that it has virtually eliminated geographic proximity as a necessary condition for the development of religious conflict.\(^1\) Some argue that it has also led to the massive materialization and commercialization of religion. In fact, Radhakrishnan argues that globalization often incites the outburst of banal religious extremism and fundamentalism:

(a) The interface between religion and globalisation (sic) is contrary to conventional sociological wisdom that as societies progress the traditional significance of religions declines.
(b) For the success of globalisation, especially in the third world, its dramatis personae have been using the major religions of the world as purveyors of their globalisation agenda, with unprecedented flow of funds for the purpose from the master world to the third world.
(c) The major consequences of globalisation have been (1) the transmogrification of traditional religions and belief systems; (2) the beginning of the disintegration of the traditional social fabrics and shared norms by the invasion of consumerism, cybertulture (sic), newfangled religions, social fads, and changing work ethics and work rhythms; (3) the fast spreading anomie (in the Durkhemian sense) forcing an ever increasing number of individuals to fall back upon – for moral and social support – the easily accessible pretentious religious banalities; and (4) attributing to religion the creation and acceleration of extremist, fundamentalist, and terrorist tendencies in the third world countries, which are intended to destabilise (sic) them, and strike at the root of their civilisation (sic), and multicultural and pluralist nature.\(^2\)

The sudden increase in the value of cultural resources in conjunction with the resurgence of interest in religious beliefs has made Indian society vulnerable to religious conflicts

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centering on resource sharing. The consequences of globalization are not in the form of direct incitement of religious sentiments but in the materialization of religious values.

The true materialization of Śrīvaisnavism started during the time of the post-Rāmānuja ācāryas when they started courting merchants and rulers for endowments and protection in return for temple honor and privileges. This trend has continued into modern existence with sectarian leaders openly soliciting material gifts for their respective institutions and temples. With the globalization of the region, the advantages of material control of temples reigned over benefits of cooperation and coexistence. To be in control of temple activities and management put one in direct control of donors and their endowments through the dissemination scheme for temple honors. This places the sect and its leader in a strong social position, especially in cases of high volume temples such as Tirupati and Srirangam. So, as time progressed the Śrīvaisnava conflict shifted from being a subjective theological argument between two groups to a more objective resource-based conflict. With the increasing valuation of temple property with time, this conflict is only bound to get more intense and contentious.
CHAPTER SIX: CONFLICT REFERENCES AS CONTEXT

The presence of factors such as religion, resource competition, proximity of groups and religious commercialization in a conflict environment can easily potentiate the virility of a tense situation and escalate it into a conflict spiral. The evidence of all the issues mentioned above in the Śrīvaiṣṇava dispute is a clear early warning indicator of the potential it holds to escalate into a long-drawn destructive conflict. The radicalization of this conflict is already apparent at temple festivals and in the general discourses of Śrīvaiṣṇava scholars and leaders who seem to be making sharpened criticisms against the philosophy and practices of the opposite group. Also, given the resurgence of religion in the region and an increased membership in the groups over the past decade or so, it has now become far easier to polarize the general population through standard channels of communication. It can be said that the current situation in South India is ripe for the manifestation of the Śrīvaiṣṇava conflict from a latent religious dispute to an escalatory conflict spiral.

There are several references available in both recent and historical conflicts where the factors that contribute to the prevalence of conflict have, indeed, given rise to escalating conflict scenarios. Many of these conflicts situations have religion as their premise but the main area of contention tends to be related to resource availability and
sharing. To better illustrate the urgency of the Śrīvaishnava conflict situation, it might be useful to compare and analyze other conflict situations that bear resemblance in some form to the current Śrīvaishnava situation and have escalated to a more intense level. The context of the dispute in-hand, and the purpose of this study really, can be better understood by comparing the formative conditions of these protracted conflicts to the current conditions of the Śrīvaishnava conflict dynamic.

A. Episcopal Church Property Battle

The years-long property battle between the national branch of the Episcopal Church and its congregations in the state of Virginia has garnered a lot of interest, both nationally and internationally. The dispute started in late 2006 when nine conservative Virginia congregations voted to leave the Episcopal Church and join a more like-minded Anglican branch.¹ The attempt to separate from the parent church became more controversial and contentious when the congregations also voted to take the millions of dollars worth of real estate with them from the parent entity. The conservative members were peeved at the church’s position with liberal ideas such as biblical liberalism, gay clergy and same sex marriage.² The congregation members decided to split from the liberal-thinking national church to align with the African branch of the Anglican branch. In February 2007, the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia filed lawsuits against the eleven


congregations asking the court to disallow the congregations from taking away the property and assets, and to declare the diocese as the rightful owner of all the property.¹

In 2008, the Fairfax district courts ruled in favor of the congregations citing a centuries-old state statute called statute 57.9 “that governs how church land is divided when there is a split in the congregation. It essentially says a majority vote of members is decisive.”²

The Episcopal denomination filed an appeal in response saying that the statute was unconstitutional as it tells the religious organization how to govern its affairs and is currently awaiting judgment from the Supreme Court of Virginia.

The dispute in the Episcopal Church has similar bearings to the Śrivaisnava conflict in many aspects. Much like the theological split amongst Śrivaisnavas, the conservative members of the Episcopal Church were unhappy with the biblical interpretations of their denomination and wanted to separate from this union. In a modern twist to the phenomenon of theistic separation, the congregation members democratically voted to separate from the parent church and wanted to take the local congregation property along with them to their new group membership. It can be argued that the dispute took an adverse turn with the claim of material possession and separation by the departing members. This materialistic endeavor triggered a competitive reaction for property control and possession similar to the way the two Śrivaisnava sects have been


retorting against each other in the matter of temple control. In essence, the disputes in the Episcopal Church and the Śrīvaisnava conflict have the same thematic issues and factors affecting their outcomes. Proximity between the rival churches or sects has a big impact on the reactionary process and the method of retaliation. For instance, there have been some reports of incidents and felony vandalism at the congregational churches in Virginia after the lawsuits were filed and the groups have been openly hostile towards each other in other interactional settings\(^1\) – a similar reaction was also seen in the Śrīvaisnava community during temple festivals and other occasions. The Episcopal Diocese dispute is a primary example of a conflict situation that qualifies in terms of the contributory factors mentioned in the previous section and presented all the early warning indicators for the predictive analysis of conflicts that are on a possible escalatory path. Unless this conflict is settled in a satisfactory manner mutually agreeable to the parties involved, it has the potential to disrupt the interactions and relationships of the two communities. The Śrīvaisnava conflict can be considered a superlative example of the diocese conflict in that it has a longer history and can be more disruptive because of the sheer number of people and money involved. But the two conflicts have taken similar paths in their manifestation and there are plenty of lessons to be learnt in their analyses for the benefit of the other.

B. Sectarian Disputes in Samarra, Iraq

\(^1\) Ibid.1.
Sectarian disputes in Iraq spring from age-old ethnic tensions in the region between different sectarian identities. The formation of these modular ethnic identities dates back several centuries and has been a major source of tension in the region. Despite having common origins in the past, these ethnicities have evolved over time to give rise to largely differing cultures and traditions. The formation of unique ethnic identities and strong group characteristics has also permeated into issues pertaining to social stress. Over the years, the ethnicities have disputed various matters including property (both religious and personal), traditions and practices. Besides the Shi’i Arabs, Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurd ethnic population, there are several additional groups like the Armenians, Chaldo-Assyrians, Yazidi, Turcomans, etc.¹ Sectarian tension has been an element of Iraqi society but violence has never been a social constant. Incidents during special occasions incited violence amongst the various ethnic members. Sunnis and Shi’ites have a traditionally similar religious and historic background as compared to the Śrīvaiśṇavas. The two sets of groups share the importance given to traditionalism, lineal heritage, rituals and culture at many levels of social existence. Some of the Iraqi Sunnis and Shi’i groups have even shared traditions and places of worship.

Given the background, the two ethnic Muslim communities witnessed a lot of passive hostility over ownership of religiously significant property in common neighborhoods. One of the most popular sites in dispute was the Al-Aksari mosque or the Golden mosque in Samarra (sixty five miles from Baghdad) – it was a shrine commonly used for worship by both the

communities in spite of being considered one of the holiest Islamic shrines by the Shi’ite community.¹ The ethnic tension between the two groups only manifested on certain occasions during worship at the mosque. The situation has an uncanny resemblance to the Śrīvaiṣṇava conflict situation – two historically rival religious sects clashing for ownership of religious property and rituals. Amidst such tense existence for years, a trigger event can easily escalate the conflict and embattle the rival groups in a deadly, bitter fight. That is exactly what happened as a result of the 2006 bombings of the Golden mosque. The event set off the two groups in a conflict spiral of revenge and retaliation. Sectarian fighting between the two sects from other parts of country led to the bombing of the mosque by miscreants (some Sunni factions claimed responsibility), which eventually led to gross mistrust and bitterness between the local sects in the region. The subsequent fighting and backlash between the two groups in the Samarra area and elsewhere has been extensively covered by global media. Tens of thousands of people were killed in the aftermath and the ethnic rivalry between the groups reached an irresolvable peak. The Śrīvaiṣṇava conflict has not yet ripened to the level of tension where minor differences could lead to rash reactions of violence and retaliation but as with the case of the Iraqi conflict, any adverse trigger can very easily degenerate group relationships, especially in cases where historic tension already exists. Considering the contextual similarities between the sectarian disputes in Samarra and South India, the Iraqi conflict presents the grim realities and outcomes of conflict escalation and spiral. The Sunni-Shi’i conflict illustrates the

importance of identifying and addressing the early indicators of escalation. It is, thus, important to address the similar factors existing in the Śrivaisnava conflict situation and take necessary measures to prevent future conflict escalation.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE SOCIAL IDENTITY OF ŚRIVAISNAVAS

A. Formation of Group Identity

John Locke said “man is a social animal.”¹ It can indeed be modified this to read, “man is a social animal – not an ordinary animal, but a chameleon.” Not only do humans adapt adeptly to different social situations but they also change their identities (and color perhaps!) to fit into their environments. On occasions, though, this identity forms a rigid outer layer, defining and guiding their moral and social actions. Changes to this identity suddenly come to be seen as threatening to one’s social existence. People begin to associate their social status and security with this identity – it provides meaning to their existence. Identity shapes the perceptions and outlook of humans. Any threat to their identity is considered to be a direct threat to their survival. It is under such circumstances that we find many of the modern day conflicts emerging around the world. Conflicts over land, religion, culture or region always have a strong undercurrent of identity. As much as the causes of such conflicts seem to be related to competition over resources or incompatibility of goals, there is always an underlying struggle for identity protection and survival involved in people’s actions.

¹ John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, (1690).
It is thus very important to identify, recognize and address these factors of identity in any conflict situation. Conflicting identity needs have to be tackled and dealt with such that the people involved feel secure. The Śrīvaiśnava conflict is, at some levels, an identity pursuit of two ethnically similar groups, both striving to establish the prominence of its own social identity and status. The formation of two groups with different value systems based on their respective interpretations of theological text led to two separate discourses – causing the formation of two distinct sect identities out of a single ethnically similar group. When the differences between groups are small, there is a greater importance placed on those minor distinguishing features. Disliking other ethnic group members, according to Dr. Volkan, results from a vested interest in valuing one's own ethnic identity, leading to the phenomenon of minor differences.¹

The two groups utilize language, culture, symbols, rituals and other cultural and ethnic pointers to identify with each other and form a cohesive unit. The group’s identity converges into a single large ethnic identity that shelters the entire group, which can be metaphorically seen as a tent. Volkan calls this all-encompassing identity an ‘ethnic tent’², which is often used by the group to stay together and feel secure – it also allows for a clear demarcation of ‘us’ from ‘them.’ Building on Volkan’s metaphor, one can consider the leaders of the two ethnic groups as the tent poles that protect the group by upholding this tent.³ Over the centuries, religious leaders have been instrumental in the

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² Ibid., 27-28.
³ Ibid., 2:28.
mobilization of the two groups and have contributed to the formation of distinct identities. Language engineering, for instance, has been a commonly used theme by the leaders in defining group boundaries.\(^1\) The use of Tamil versus Sanskrit became the single most influential factor used by sectarian leaders in driving public opinion.

Religious identity, as can often be seen, is more powerful than other identities in its scope of influence and rigidity because it provides basis for the idea of one’s origin, creation and way of life.\(^2\) Religious identity can be classified at two distinct levels of influence – personal and structural. At the personal level, religious identity defines the individual level aspects of religious association and perspective. This identity defines an individual’s personal moral standards, practices and adherence to the religion’s philosophy or scriptural principles. On a structural level, religious identity is connected to several other identities such as ethnic or regional identities. At this level of social association, religious identity is defined in terms of requisites and obligations that need to be fulfilled for membership into a group. The Śrīvaiśnava conflict is multi-dimensional as it involves structural elements of religion, ethnicity and most importantly identity; all are intertwined with personal goals for social status and security.

The conflict at hand is centered on the issue of religious resource sharing. One of the obvious reasons for such strong contention over issues related to the temples is that they are symbolic and cultural reservoirs\(^3\) for both communities. According to Volkan, by

\[^1\text{Charles Tilly, }\text{Identities, Boundaries and Social Ties, (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2005).}\]
\[^2\text{Karyna Korostelina, }\text{Social Identity and Conflict, (Palgrave, 2007).}\]
\[^3\text{Vamik Volkan, }\text{Bloodlines: From Ethnic Pride to Ethnic Terrorism, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 90.}\]
externalizing and investing positive aspects of themselves in these reservoirs, group members form an invisible network of ‘we-ness’ that connects them to this reservoir.\(^1\)

These temples are not only the most sacred symbols for the two groups but are also considered to be the greatest representation of their culture. These symbolic structures thus form a core part of their group identity, making them difficult objects to compromise on.

The two groups also run their own exclusive religious institutions known as *Matams*. Their leaders not only lead these religious seminaries but are also proponents of the respective philosophies – they propagate their institution’s mission and provide form and meaning to the group’s ethnic identity through their teachings. Affiliation to these institutions is fiercely loyal and invokes a deep sense of ethnic kinship amongst followers. Institutional affiliation is a way of exhibiting one’s lineage and history. Lineage-based association further contributes to a stronger ethnic identity because ethnicity is familistic.\(^2\)

Those in ethnic groups recognize each other as kin for many reasons. “Ethnicity and kinship thus overlap in a quite direct, operational way: the former builds on the latter, the one is often confused with the other, and behavior in one sphere is extended into the other.”\(^3\) Forming such a kinship network, Horowitz says, helps the groups to be more effective, including forming effective ethnic organizations.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid., 61.
\(^4\) Ibid.
The Tenkalai and Vatakalanai members of the Śrīvaisnava community belong to the same ethnic group and have coexisted until the twelfth century. The theological split in the community that led to the formation of the two distinct group identities has resulted in factors influencing the unfavorable perception of the other. This comparison results in a “positive We-negative They” perception. Identity of both the in-group and the out-group was formed on the basis of allegiance. Identities of the group members were defined by a set of value commitments offering moral guidance to the relationship within and between the group members – this is referred to by Rothbart and Korostelina as collective axiology. The Tenkalai and Vatakalanai religious leaders developed mythic narratives to promote their group’s primacy and authenticity using stories of discrimination and false claims of kinship by the other.

In this strictly lineage-based Śrīvaisnava community, the formation of two groups led to an immense competition between them to establish the ‘rightful’ or ‘true’ descendants of the foremost Śrīvaisnava philosophers. The polarization of the two groups increased further with the growing tension over religious resource ownership such as the Divya Desam temples. The two groups took a very confrontational attitude towards each other in issues concerning the temples. The rift between two groups over minor theological differences transformed into a conflict over material resources. As this confrontation manifested into an identity-based conflict, the two groups engaged in tactics aimed at securing the group’s interests, beliefs and values. This form of

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1 Karyna Korostelina, Social Identity and Conflict, (Palgrave, 2007), 149.
counteraction led to the formation of negative stereotypes of the other and the general
dehumanization of the out-group members.

B. Identity Intervention through Contact Theory

Despite the protracted nature of the Śrīvaisnava conflict, there are several distinct
features of the conflict and the groups that make intervention viable. Ethnically, the
Tenkalai and the Vatakalai groups are formed out of the same Śrīvaisnava sect of
Hinduism. The two group members share the same food, culture and traditions. Even the
religious texts of the two groups are the same – it is only the interpretation that varies.
Tenkalai and Vatakalai group members can also be seen learning religious scriptures
from common teachers. These commonalities present us with approaches to limit the
social classification and distinction of group identities. Given these circumstances, one
can see how the Śrīvaisnava community provides an ideal set-up for implementing the
contact theory hypothesis. According to intergroup contact theory, increased contacts
between an in-group member and representatives of an out-group will increase the
positive attitudes of the individual towards the out-group. Mere contact is not sufficient
for improving relations, as we see in the Śrīvaisnava community; certain conditions are
essential for contact theory to work. The conditions that need to be met include
cooperative intergroup interactions and supportive norms by religious leaders in the two
communities.

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1 G.W. Allport, *The nature of prejudice*, (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley: 1954); see also T.F.
The main approach to promoting the hypothesis of contact theory amongst the *Tenkalai* and *Vatakali* members is through the transformation of their respective needs for distinct identities into the formation of a superordinate identity that can have mitigating effects on the conflict itself. Managing the identities of the groups can be a consuming task but with tactical planning and implementation of strategies prescribed by Pettigrew\(^1\), it can be achieved. These strategies can be applied in several ways. Much of the *Śrivaishnava* conflict (as with other conflicts) is primarily considered by the people to be based on differences in core religious discourses. The two groups claim their respective interpretation and way of practice to be the only right way. So as a first step it is necessary to make the two groups focus away from religion as the primary source of the rift between them and instead create awareness of the role of their group identities in the conflict. The next step involves reducing the salience of the sub-sect based categories of the two groups. The *Tenkalai* and *Vatakali* members have been part of the same lineal heritage, sharing the same set of ancestors before the groups were formed, and this needs to be further highlighted. Taking this further, the historic similarities of traditions and customs, shared moral and familial values and the analogous outlook towards life of the two groups need to be made the focal point of the process of identity transformation. The identities of the groups that are focused on the differences need to be transformed into a new common identity based out of the similarities between them. This requires

Śrīvaiṣṇavas to re-evaluate and negotiate their identity needs in order to form a superordinate identity encompassing all categorizations that currently exist.

Accomplishing the goal of successfully managing the identities of the two groups to be mutually inclusive is a seemingly difficult task but the Śrīvaiṣṇava community provides all the instruments needed for the process. The process of de-categorization (and transformation of the identities) of the Tenkalai and Vatakalai groups can be achieved in multiple ways and by employing several different aspects of the community. One of the most effective ways of improving interpersonal relations between the two groups is through marital association. Inter-sect marriage in the two communities is not uncommon but is restricted only to the unorthodox sections of the two groups. There is a certain stigma attached in the orthodox community to inter-sect marriage – this was not the case until the early twentieth century. With such similar cultural and traditional similarities, it is not difficult for the two communities to re-engage in matrimonial relationships across group boundaries.

Śrīvaiṣṇava communities tend to be patriarchal and so, participation in temple rituals and other religious events is dominated by men. This severely restricts the wealth of resources available through the involvement of Śrīvaiṣṇava women in conflict intervention. Women from the two groups can get involved in joint community projects such as the daily maintenance of the temples, joint learning of the scriptures, etc. Such groups called Andaal goshtis already exist in the respective groups and it would be valuable to form a cross-cutting group that would assist in improving inter-personal relationships amongst them.
Religious leaders and philosophers have a very important role to play in diverting the focus of their groups towards the common underlying Śrīvaisnava identity by being inclusive of the other group’s narratives – both historical and theological. Leaders in such hierarchical communities have the impetus to make such an impact on their followers and are, hence, valuable resources in any process of de-categorization. By including the mythological stories and interpretations of the other group in their discourses and discussions, religious leaders can help develop a common narrative for the two groups. This can also be achieved through other supplemental avenues such as community-wide magazines\(^1\), which are circulated by the Matams and have a large subscription base amongst Śrīvaisnavas. These magazines contain doctrinal articles and other community related stories and are generally considered to be the mouthpiece of the religious leaders.

As seen with the Śrīvaisnava community, the identity needs of an individual or a group evolve and change over time. Identity is not solely attached to ethnicity, kinship, lineage, religion or culture. Multiple identities can and do exist in ethnically similar communities. Social identity is based on an individual’s need for membership in her group and need to fulfill a sense of security as a result of this affiliation. Any threat to the group’s identity is seen as a direct threat to the individual herself. So, any conflicts involving identity needs and security must be addressed at the core level of identity for successful intervention – this needs to be the mantra of any identity-based conflict resolution. The Tenkalai and Vatakalai groups have been at loggerheads for the past

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\(^1\) Popular subscription based magazines circulated by the Matams include Sri Nrisimha Priya, Sri Ranganatha Paduka and Panchajanyam.
century or so with seemingly incompatible identity goals. But what on the surface seems to be a conflict of clashing identity interests is merely a race for uniqueness and distinction. The Śrīvaisnava conflict fortunately presents multiple opportunities to address the identity aspect of the two communities. Through processes of identity transformation and de-categorization, it is possible for the two groups to form a common, superordinate Śrīvaisnava identity that transcends individual group differences and instead focuses on their shared common history and culture.

C. Śrīvaisnava Diaspora

There is a large Śrīvaisnava diaspora in North America. Members of both the sects are strongly committed to promoting Śrīvaisnavism here and often work in unified teams towards this common goal. It is very interesting to note the sudden changes in the attitudes of the diaspora members considering that they come from a conflict background where emotions are still running high and the conflict is fresh in the minds of the people. It seems as if the people in this diaspora have given up their differences, equally respecting the traditions, rituals and the ācāryas of both groups. This is very significant because their brethren back home, at the same time, are actively involved in discrediting and defaming the contributions of these ācāryas. In fact, Tenkalai and Vatakalai community members here in the U.S. meet every other weekend to participate in discussions involving the works of their respective ācāryas and also work together on fund-raising events to send back money to their religious institutions back home. There is active participation amongst members in the web community to discuss the Śrīvaisnava theological stances and interpretations. The members of the Śrīvaisnava community are
often seen expressing their regrets over the current state of the conflict in community listservs and blogs, and some even offer to bring up this issue with their respective ācāryas.

Diaspora is a term often used to study the social world resulting from displacement, flight, exile and forced migration. It has lately been expanded to include situations of migration that are not forced and involve groups of people who have the ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations.¹ The cultural identities of the diasporic community are formed by the past and the present. The past and the present are nothing but social constructs created by those differing identities, histories, and experiences.² The diasporic community tends to form a new self-identity, often masking its internal cultural identity. This new level of identity is formed as a result of cultural, social, and psychological adjustments to new social contexts. This often leads such peoples to live in a state of ‘double consciousness,’ where they put forth separate identities to different groups of people – a ‘native’ identity with people within the diaspora and a separate ‘global’ identity outside of it.³ There is a constant struggle of choice between these two consciousnesses in the minds of the diasporic people.

¹ Vijay Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home*, (University of Toronto Press, December 31, 2005).
The Śrivaisnava diaspora comes from backgrounds that were more conducive to a collective form of identity. Groups in such an environment thrive on the collective differences that they share with other out-groups. This forms the core of their self-identity and is a hard shell to break. This carries through in the group’s attitudes and behaviors. When groups perceive a threat to their identities, they immediately form a stronger alliance to protect their interests, mimicking the basic survival instinct in humans. When this threat is perceived in the form of mutually incompatible goals or philosophies, it leads to the formation of a manifest conflict process. In order to defend their in-group’s identity, members will associate deep value with symbols that relate to this identity in any way. In the context of this research, Tenkalai and Vatakailai members attach great value to their Divya Desam temples and want their identities to be represented through those places of worship. So, members from the two communities will thoroughly savor this attachment and it is hard to overcome such feelings.

Śrivaisnavas members in the diaspora do not admit to a bias towards their sub-sectarian identity, although it is evidently displayed in their traditional attire and sect marks. When confronted, they tend to blame the traditional requirements and the teachings of their ācāryas that mandate them to comply. They also wear a communal identity as a supplement to their Tenkalai/Vatakailai identity. Their religious activities do not exclude the other sect, and the prayers include the mention of all the ācāryas. This superficial identity may be required to sustain the cultural practices in the diaspora, but

does not necessarily translate into authentic communal intentions. In the wake of ethnic disputes and conflicts, especially those involving valuable cultural symbols, these superficial identities seem to disappear and the original ‘native’ identity drives the thinking and behavior of these people. These symbols form the basis of their identity’s existence and survival and thus, tend to trigger a protective reaction. The Śrīvaisnava diaspora members, who seem communal and cordial towards the other group, tend to reveal their biased opinions on issues of temple ownership, management and honors in order to either gain or retain control of those religious symbols (temples). For the successful creation of a superordinate identity, it is important for the two communities to evolve their relationship to a level beyond sheer tolerance for each other. The sectarian leaders, scholars and members need to transform the dynamics in their associations to a shared platform of culture, coexistence and practice. It is after all a tangible goal, given the common origins of the communities.

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A. Divya Desam Temples: A Premise for Conflict Intervention

Temples are an essential part of worship in Hinduism. They are meant to be places conducive to religious learning and exploration. Temples are also viewed as cultural and religious icons of authenticity, traditionalism and local heritage. For a Śrīvaiṣṇava, temples manifest the concepts and virtues of the ācāryas, and stand as testament to the works of the Alvārs. The Divya Desam temples were repeatedly referenced by the twelve Alvārs in the Divya Prabandham and were expounded as both authentic and central places of worship for Śrīvaiṣṇavism. Each temple, out of the one hundred and six total temples referenced by Alvārs, has a minimum of one verse dedicated to in the Divya Prabandham which extols the significance of the presiding deity, praises the physical and spiritual beauty of the deity, and ascribes the spiritual rewards of worship at those temples. The Alvārs describe in great detail the corporal, metaphysical and spiritual attributes of the deities at the Divya Desams. The seminal works of the twelve poets also sometimes describe the mythical origins of the temple and detail the stories of incarnations of the deities at these altars of worship. Expanding on the four thousand verses of the Divya Prabandham, later day ācāryas furthered the mythical narratives associated with the temples and created an insuperable aura of religious
importance around the *Divya Desams*. As an outcome, not only did these temples become the holiest places of worship, they were also permanently fortified as premier cultural symbols for the entire Śrīvaisnava community.

Given the exposition received by the *Divya Desams* and the significance of temple worship highlighted in the most important works of the ācāryas, the members of the Śrīvaisnava community hold these temples in utmost regard. The temples are considered to be the ‘earthly abode of God’ and are seen as eternal sources of *Vedantic* wisdom. Elaborate carvings, frescos and illustrations surround the temples, depicting the ancient mythology and culture of Śrīvaisnavism. Temple festivals are celebrated with much fanfare in accordance with the calendar cycle prescribed in the scriptures. The temples have also played an integral role in the recent resurgence of Śrīvaisnavism. In South Indian society, temples are not only religious symbols but are also centers of socio-political and cultural activities. The temples form the economic center-points of the towns they are located in, teeming with enough activity to sustain the economy of the local population. The local community’s business and social activities are centered around temple proceedings. Thus, the temples play a crucial role in both the religious and social contexts of Śrīvaisnavas, and the local populace in general.

**B. Lederachian Model for Conflict Intervention**

The *Divya Desam* temples present a unique opportunity for Śrīvaisnavas to focus their combined synergies in developing interdependence and mutual relationships. These temples have the capacity to bring the two groups to the table for an informed and mature discussion on the topic of temple sharing, management and control. The temples are after
all the main social arena of interaction for the two sects. They provide the groups with a common ground for a philosophical, cultural and societal understanding of one another. The process of relationship building between the groups using cultural and religious tools at their disposal can be rationalized using the Lederachian model for defining the framework of peace building and conflict transformation. Lederach suggests the development of a comprehensive conflict framework for the purpose and practice of mediation and intervention.¹ As part of the intervention strategy, Lederach suggests that it is essential to pursue the cognitive exploration of the conflict variables. The longitude or protractedness of the conflict is an essential, and at times necessary, element of the conflict process and occurs in the context of the dynamic relationships between the conflicting parties.² He lists two variables that elicit the nature of the conflict: balance of power and awareness of conflicting interests and needs amongst the parties. Both the process of conflict and the resulting efforts at conflict resolution must and will occur within the paradigms presented by the two variables. The process of conflict resolution, thus, must factor in the position of the conflicting parties in terms of these variables and engage them accordingly. According to Lederach, when there is power imbalance, the process of conflict intervention must create awareness amongst the parties and ultimately address it.³ Finally, a conflict is ripe for intervention when the awareness of the situation is high and the power between the conflicting parties is sufficiently balanced. In

¹ John Paul Lederach, Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995).
² Ibid.
Lederach’s opinion, the absolute goal of conflict intervention and transformation is the mending and reformation of relationships between the actors to produce long lasting results.¹ In a true Lederachian sense, the process of Śrivaisnava conflict transformation will need to begin with the measure of bringing to prominence and confrontment the seemingly latent conflict in its current form.

Another important distinction brought forward by Lederach lies in the approach to conflict intervention and mediation. Lederach defines the process of peacemaking in terms of conflict transformation as opposed to conflict resolution.² Conflict transformation seems to capture the essence of relationship building and the very nature of this process itself. First, transformation implies the dialectical nature of conflict, and reflects a holistic approach to understanding conflict processes. Second, a conflict transformation approach recognizes the positive elements, outcomes and potential of conflict. The term transformation captures a conflict’s potential to change the perceptions and behavior of the self and the other.³ The implication of using this term is also that the transformative effects of conflict should be focused on producing positive systemic change. Lederach mentions that “transformation as a concept is both descriptive of the conflict dynamics and prescriptive of the overall purpose that building peace pursues.”⁴

So the intervention approaches suggested in the following sections for the Śrivaisnava

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² Ibid., 1:15.
³ Ibid., 1:17.
conflict will heavily borrow from the Lederachian model of transformative philosophy in order to render a sustainable and legitimate solution for the two groups. The process of transforming the Śrīvaisnava conflict is not only about the resolution of the temple dispute but also needs to involve the cementing of long standing relationships between parties that have common origins but have ventured astray in their pursuit of distinct goals. The ultimate aim of the intervention process is to make the parties realize the complementary nature of their shared but conflicting interests and unite them in the exploration of Śrīvaisnava philosophy instead of countering each others’ efforts. And to utilize the Divya Desam temples to ultimately serve the purpose of transforming the relationship between the Tenkalais and the Vatakalais conjures up the true Śrīvaisnava spirit of these magnificent temple structures.

C. Intervention Strategies

There are several approaches that can be taken in the process of Śrīvaisnava conflict intervention. The approaches need to ultimately lead to the satisfactory closure of the rivalry and animosity that exists between the two groups. Intervention strategies can range from objective and rule-based approaches that present a factual outlook on the process of intervention to subjective processes of dialectical interactions and responses. There are merits to both the approaches that present compelling reasons to adapt them. But, in the end, there is no single tailor-made approach to conflict intervention for any kind of conflict situation. Adaptability and scope are the crucial objectives of an intervention approach, and ultimately drive the process of conflict transformation. In the current context, the following sections will present intervention strategies that can or
have been used in the Śrivaśnava conflict, and hold the potential of being an effective objective approach towards peace.

**D. Judicial Approach**

The judicial approach to conflict intervention has been explored in the past by certain sections of the two Śrivaśnava groups. This was the case starting with the ācāryas and sectarian leaders who used arbitration methods involving the local kings in issues of temple management and control disputes. Of course, the ultimate capacity of the local courts and kingdoms to render a fair judgment was restricted by their reverence and respect for these spiritual leaders. The rulers often offered protection and support to the leaders in return for temple honors and spiritual advice. This obviously led to irregularities and power imbalances amongst conflicting groups for temple control, rendering some of the groups powerless and incapacitated. With the advent of British rule in India, the number of civil cases entered under the British penal code involving temples like the Śri Pārthasārathi and Śri Varadārājaswāmi temples in South India increased dramatically. These cases were met with stiff resistance from British counsels as they deemed them matters of internal dispute amongst the local peoples and did not want to get involved in matters of ethnic concern. The civil cases involving Śrivaśnava temples soon dwindled out mainly due to the ineffectiveness of the British courts in arbitrating the issue.

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid., 1.
The failure of the British courts to address the issues of temple dispute should not be seen as a failure of the judicial process itself. The judicial approach to helping resolve the dispute ultimately presents an element of fairness to the process, albeit based on an individual group’s perception. In that measure, the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment Board was established in 1925 by the Madras Government as a statutory body to oversee “management and control of the temples and the administration of their endowments.”¹ Under this British mandate, all levels of temple control and management were made independent of the lineal heritage and control of the presiding sects and leaders. A board of officers oversaw temple management committee elections and supervised temple endowments and honor distributions. In essence, the board was a legal and executive entity that constitutionally advised the temple committee on its normal proceedings.² The committee, however, was still formed by members that traditionally held control of temple activities. Sectarian affiliation and lineal traditions still were the decisive factors in matters of temple festivals, rituals and honor redistribution. Temple management was governed by two sets of principles: the British judicial system and the traditional dharmasāstra or Hindu law. These two were purposefully formed to be mutually exclusive and independent of the other. The board was established to only oversee the proceedings of the temple committee and present an alternate process for disputed elements of temple administration. All disputes concerning temple control and administration were directed to the board for a judicial approach. In 1951, the Hindu

¹ The Hindu Religious & Charitable Endowment Department, accessed on June 12, 2009 at http://www.hrce.tn.nic.in/
² Ibid., I: 216.
Religious and Charitable Endowment Department (HR & CE) was established to extend the functionalities of the board and increase control of temple administration and endowments by the State.¹ The new department was established to acquire further control of temple administration and reduce the influence of Hindu religious law in temple control. As the department introduced regulations and control of the temple administration and endowment process, the sectarian authorities had to concede their traditional control of temple activities to a certain extent. The HR & CE directly controls the proceedings of the temple committees and applies laws in accordance with the Indian penal code to adjudicate disputed issues. The department was formed with the aim of presenting a secular and unbiased approach in matters of religious structures and endowments, a topic that started to become highly contended in the wake of the rise of religious sectarianism in the region.

While the intervention of the State in religious issues of temple control and endowments can be beneficial in areas of historical religious disputes, the discerning rulings on matters of traditional and historic significance by a legal entity weakens the ultimate result of the intervention. By minimizing participation of religious and sectarian members, the ultimate beneficiaries of the legal proceeding, the State is reducing the credibility of the very process of the intercession. The State treats a temple body and the related endowments as public property and wrests control away from groups that claim ownership of the process. But given the cultural and traditional symbolism, and

¹ Ibid. 2.
importance of those temple structures in Hindu worship, the very separation of the process of worship from the means of worship delegitimizes the embedded values in those religious symbols. So by devaluing the traditionalism involved in temple control, honor system and ritualistic cycles through mandating legal processes for their management, the State body deprives its people of the cultural potential of temples in their religious traditions. State involvement in religion must be restricted to the level of providing tools for legal proceedings and security much like the medieval rulers of South India who endorsed religious entities by providing external support and security to the temples – by getting involved in the temple proceedings and activities, the State infringes upon the rights and religious freedom of its peoples.

The involvement of religious leaders and restoration of traditional practices of honor redistribution and temple control are important in restoring the cultural value of the Śrīvaiśnava temples. It is also extremely important to accommodate religious and sectarian members’ views on matters involving temple management in order to implement a successful intervention model based on the judicial approach. In a true sense of the meaning of the intervention model, State participation is restricted to providing the judicial tools and privileges to disputing members to amicably and impartially resolve matters of religious conflicts. In the judiciary intervention approach model suggested here, members of the conflicting parties will participate and get involved in evaluating the legal standing of the parties involved. A team of counsels will guide and educate the participating members on the legalities of the issues based on current religious property law in India. The legal aspects will only be used to present and validate historical facts,
and to facilitate the mutual agreement or resolution of the dispute situation. So in effect, this judicial intervention approach is a hybrid that mixes legal techniques with alternate dispute resolution mechanisms to problem solve the issues. In fact, in 1991 the Government of Tamil Nadu introduced a few amendments to the HR & CE to include religious and spiritual leaders in the proper administration and maintenance of temples and charitable endowments.¹ This certainly takes the HR & CE closer to the judicial intervention model but is still not an optimal approach for the resolution of historic religious disputes.

The 1991 amendment to HR & CE introduced the all important elements of religious community involvement in the process of overseeing temple management and control. It also allowed for religious members to contribute towards the settlement of problems involving temple property and revenue.² The major impediment in the complete involvement of religious and sectarian leaders in a judicial-level intervention approach through the HR & CE was the restricted access given to them in using executive powers of decision making and limiting their capacity to be fully involved in the process of defining the procedural and administrative rules for the temple. The HR & CE still heavily involves the penal code in its intervention and undermines the religious leaders’ ability to settle their disputes using alternate methods of settlement through Hindu law.

¹ The Hindu Religious & Charitable Endowment Department, accessed on June 12, 2009 at http://www.hrce.tn.nic.in/
when needed. The flexibility of using either dharmasāstra or secular law or both to arrive at a ‘legal’ settlement of temple disputes will incentivize the religious leaders to promote it to their respective group members. It not only legitimates the solution but also provides a strong structural foundation on which to base further resolution approaches as needed. In the case of the Śrīvaisnava conflict situation, the judicial approach will allow Tenkalai and Vatakalai leaders to participate in a dialectical conversation to understand their respective group’s legal standing and also understand options available to settle the long standing issues. This approach plays itself as the first step in a Lederachian approach at conflict transformation by impartially (and legally) settling down the dispute and clearing the way for the process of relationship building between the groups. By resolving any pending issues between them, the two groups can start focusing on matters of common understanding and importance to further make inroads into their process of relationship transformation.

1. Shortcomings

The judicial intervention strategy takes a very objective approach to finding solutions. While objectivity is crucial to successful conflict resolution, the judicial approach lacks the element of leveled compromise. Judicial approaches almost always will result in the compromise or relinquishing of ‘power’ by one party for the benefit of the other. While it is fair and civil, this approach can often leave a sour after taste for the affected parties, especially the one that has had to concede. The judicial approach also tends to be conservative in the sense of coming up with creative ideas and solutions to problems. This approach involves the literal interpretation of laws, both traditional and
constitutional, and their implementation based on that interpretation. There is very little scope for religious leaders and interveners to involve traditional methods of intervention or even suggest novel ways of compromise. So in certain ways, the judicial approach constricts the building of a working or collaborative relationship between leaders and members of conflicting groups. Also, the involvement of the Indian judiciary system can reduce the efficiency of the process given the bureaucracy and latency involved in the handling of cases. The HR & CE additionally do not have the complete vote of confidence from the Śrivaisnava members as many of the cases filed through the HR & CE Board during British rule were unresolved or unsatisfactorily cleared. The presence of religious and sectarian leaders will certainly add legitimacy to the process but the perception of State involvement in religious affairs still needs to be addressed.

Finally, one of the most pressing elements of conflict resolution that does not necessarily get addressed in this judicial approach is the permanence of the solution. As with all legal solutions to a conflict, there still remains the possibility of re-emergence of this dispute at a future time due to a new or existing overlooked factor. Future claims and discontent can very easily trigger the unsettlement of the dispute. This approach does not really present an opportunity for relationship building, as prescribed by Lederach, during the process of initial conflict settlement.

E. Mediatory Approach

A second approach to conflict intervention that can be applied to the Śrivaisnava conflict is through mediatory techniques. In this approach, the emphasis is on the leveled compromise of the two groups involved such that no one group feels like it had to
relinquish its pursuit of interest for the sake of the dispute settlement. Ideally, mediatory techniques will help both parties achieve their interests without having to sacrifice any of their interests. But given the limited availability of resources and their conflicting interests, there needs to be some level of compromise involved for the parties to reach a level of combined satisfaction. The emphasis in the mediatory intervention approach is purely on the aspect of relationship building and creation of mutual interdependence amongst the parties. This incentivizes the groups to focus their energies, attitudes and behaviors on the basis of an inclusive model of societal coexistence with the others. The main emphasis of this approach is on the creation of a long term and permanent solution for the conflict situation. The first step in this approach would then be to level any power imbalances that may exist between the conflicting groups in order to start the mediation on a firm and leveled ground. The second and important advantage in this approach is the sheer level of involvement of the sectarian leaders, members and the community as a whole in the process of conflict intervention and transformation. This holistic approach allows for the bringing together of separate ideas and presenting them in a common platform. Hence the legitimacy and authenticity of the process itself is reinforced merely by the equal contribution of all involved parties and the transparency of the process. Finally, this intervention approach is geared towards permanently resolving the issues underlying the conflict and so it undermines the issue of re-emergence of conflict in the short term – the re-emergence of a conflict will only indicate the failure of the process itself and not the outcome.
Mending relations and building trust between people is considered the primary challenge of any process designed to prevent a conflict from escalating. In order to rebuild the broken relationships of people from opposite sides, memories from the past, present and future need to be addressed – failure to do so will result in past memories poisoning visions of a common future between them. A new common order of values needs to be created, keeping in mind the historical hurts and grievances of the two sides. Relationship building requires the ability to visualize and invent a new and different future. Restoring past dignity, faith and trust amongst people is a required step to help people cope with the past and work towards building a new tomorrow. Using the Divya Desam temples to mend relations between the two Śrīvaiśnava groups both allows for the centrality of the issue to be the main theme of intervention and also implores participation from the groups for the sake of a common resolution. The temples can greatly help the sects to build a common narrative based on their common heritage and history.

The dispute surrounding the ownership and operation of Divya Desam temples forms the crux of this conflict and so, it is crucial to make them the central issue of any designed intervention. Temples hold equal sanctity for both the sub-sects and therefore, claims of ownership by a single institution or sect is seen as a moot stance. Śrīvaiśnava institutions or matams along with the sectarian leaders and ācāryas have to play the leading role in designing techniques to allow for the successful sharing of temple rights, resources and revenue by the two communities. The temples are important signifiers of group identity and the representation of these symbols, genial to the sentiments of all Śrīvaiśnavas, has to be carefully evaluated and addressed. Issues regarding the traditional
rituals in these temples, display of *Thiruman*, and temple festival norms are bound to invoke deep emotional responses, and need to be addressed properly in order to sustain intercommunity relationships.

The first issue that needs to be addressed is the individualized claims of ownership perpetrated by the two sects. Temple management and control is an issue that will sensitize the issue of lineal traditions and sectarian ownership. For this very reason, the sectarian leaders need to take a stance and provide solid leadership on this issue. Perhaps the formation of a religious committee by the various Śrīvaiṃavāna matams and other religious institutions will allow for the administrative framework for temple management. This committee can be formed purely based on the lineal, hierarchical and traditional facts presented in historical records (such as temple inscriptions and other manuscripts), as opposed to current legal mandates, and can be comprised of members in accordance to their respective sect’s historical participation in the temple’s history. This avoids depriving any one party of their historical and traditional ‘ownership’ of temple control but at the same time allows for the involvement of marginalized sect members. Of course, the process of committee representation and co-ownership calls for great debate and discussion amongst members. It is important to have an open forum discussion format to also involve sect members. This is just one of the many possible ways of addressing the issue of temple control – the main gist of the process is to completely involve all affected parties in the direct resolution of the conflict and empower the sectarian leaders to fully represent their groups’ interests.
Shared ownership will then allow for the successful sharing of temple resources and revenue. Endowments and gifts to the temple will also be shared and distributed in accordance with the ownership agreement. Joint ownership and management of temples will call for a compromise between the two groups on issues of temple rituals and practices. The traditional rituals in these temples will need to be modified to include practices of both the sects. The first steps in tackling issues related to shared practices and rituals involve addressing the heavy connotation of cultural symbolism associated with the sectarian split between the groups. Temples and deities alike are decorated in colors and *thirumans* associated with each group to stamp authority and claim ownership. These symbols are identity markers used by the groups and it is of utmost importance to promote a notion of shared symbols in order to overcome this identity distinction and to create a common superordinate identity. There are several ways of tackling issues of distinctive symbolism but some possible solutions are listed below:

- The groups take turn to display symbols in high visibility areas on temple premises. The schedule can be based on the temple calendar and festival cycles. By doing so, each group gets to both display and celebrate their cultural pride without having to fully compromise on symbolic display. This might not be an ideal solution in terms of creating a shared symbolic identity amongst the groups but is a plausible option given the reverence and penchant they hold for symbols like the *thiruman*, especially when adorned on deities and temple property. By allowing both groups to decorate deities with their traditional symbols on assigned occasions, they are given an equal opportunity to celebrate their unique
sectarian tradition. Also, the two symbols can be alternately switched between the main deity and the processional deity for this purpose as well.

- A different approach to tackling symbolism issues would be to measure up remedies for blurring the identity and symbol distinction between the two groups. For instance, as mentioned in previous sections, the thirumans or sectarian marks of the two groups vary in shape and color. The southern school traditionally uses a Y-shaped white symbol denoting the feet of the Lord with a red center line representing the Lord’s consort. Vatakalais, on the other hand, use a U-shaped white outer symbol with a yellow center line. These marks are adorned by deities, idols of ācāryas, temple walls/property, and even animals dedicated to temple service like elephants. By attempting to merge the symbols and create a unique representative symbol for Śrīvaisnavism, the group boundaries between the sects can be made indistinctive and a common perspective on identity can be formulated. This allows for the two groups to feel equal ownership of temple proceedings. It will be difficult to transition from a traditional approach to sectarian identity to a combined model of Śrīvaisnava worship but this can be and has been done at some level. The Tirupati temple presents a classic example of symbolic unity. The presiding deity at this temple adorns a unique symbol which in some ways is a hybrid of the two symbols – it is neither a U nor a Y but a simple flat-based V. The center line is a black line unique to this temple. While this symbol is created out of mythological and traditional lore, it displays the possibility of combining the traditionalism of the two groups. Besides, unifying
the symbols is only the first step in changing the course in narrative discourse of
the two sects. Distinct rituals and practices still need to be addressed in temple
traditions in order to blur group identity lines.

In way of sharing temple control, the intervention approach needs to address issues of
invocatory verses, chanting of hymns in praise of respective ācāryas and sectarian
leaders, and linguistic preferences in reciting the Vedas versus the Prabhandhams. Such
issues involve hierarchical preferences, lineal traditions and linguistic aversions that have
been core features of the Śrīvaisnava dispute. Changing such central values will require a
major departure for the two sects from their historic narratives that have been formed
over the years based on ancient angst and frustration. This is not something that can be
changed in a few years but will take a process of forced learning and discipline over time
amongst the members of the two communities. Leaders and scholars need to make the
most effort in aligning their discourses to include values and traditions from both
cultures. They need to equally promote the principles and perspectives of both theistic
schools, incorporate the usage of the two linguistic philosophies, focus on the creation of
common group characteristics in terms of traditions and finally invoke unity amongst
their members for the sharing of the rich values offered by the Śrīvaisnava tradition.
Although this sounds like a monumental task, there have been examples of several past
and present sectarian leaders in the community who have explored and achieved relative
success in shifting narrative discourse to be more inclusive of the other group. But to
make a more systemic change, there needs to be a combined effort by all ācāryas and
scholars to purposefully promote unity and support for the other tradition.
Temples, being important centers of traditional learning, can be used as vehicles for the promotion of understanding theological interpretations and works of different ācāryas. Such common avenues of learning help emphasize the contributions of both traditions towards the healthy promotion of the Śrivaishnava philosophy. These temples will also make excellent venues for conducting religious debates and conferences to discuss the works of previous ācāryas from both traditions. By establishing common schools of learning, the Śrivaishnava institutions (matams) can evolve into strongholds of Rāmānuja’s bhakti tradition and great centers of Śrivaishnava learning instead of being individualized sectarian schools. These schools will be dedicated to the development and dispersion of common wisdom, traditions, rituals and practices amongst the Tenkalai and the Vatakalai community, and will be the most important transitionary vehicles for identity transformation in the community. These Divya Desam temples can, thus, also serve the role of being essential educational platforms to bring together the Tenkalai and the Vatakalai Śrivaishnava traditions and to allow them to celebrate each other’s traditional differences and commonalities.

The Śrivaishnava community in India can find many templates of reconciliation in the practices of its counterparts in the U.S. Through its religious ceremonies and learning exercises, the diaspora has displayed the strength and the ability of rituals to form a deep sense of ‘communitas’ amongst members originally belonging to different groups. This model can be, and in rare occasions has been, implemented amongst the Śrivaishnava community in India. The way the two community members currently interact and the
resulting interdependencies provide for ample opportunities to devise a ‘diaspora-style’ relationship building mechanism.

The first step in mending relationships between Tenkalai and Vatakakai communities would involve implementation of ritualistic exercises that both communities can participate in. This will provide a neutral ground for both the groups to associate, cooperate and understand each other’s perspective. Staging grand religious events, such as the ones held in the diaspora community in the U.S., can help the two groups explore and develop a hermeneutic vision of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. The participation of prominent Śrīvaiṣṇava scholars along with other influential Śrīvaiṣṇava citizens such as politicians, industrialists and philanthropists will add tremendous value and lend credibility to the process. Media outlets such as publications, newsletters, and magazines are capable of reaching far and wide amongst the two communities, and can serve as instruments for promotion of cordial relationships between them. Currently, magazines such as Nrisimha Priya, Panchajanyam and Ranganatha Paduka are published by various Śrīvaiṣṇava institutions and have a large subscription base in the community. By including unbiased, educational references to works of philosophers and teachers from both sects in them, these circulations can reach across barriers and yield rich results in the process of cross community outreach. Having such powerful change agents at their disposal, the Śrīvaiṣṇava community can take effective reformative action towards reconciliation.

There is an urgent need for the involvement of the Tenkalai and Vatakakai institutions in the process of conflict transformation. The institutions are led by distinct ācāryas and scholars who have a very significant role in the reconciliation process. Such
ācāryas, also known as Jeeyars, are institutional leaders who are highly revered by the community. Being influential religious figureheads, they have one of the most important roles in the intervention process. Such religious authorities carry a deep “understanding of the religious images and meaning surrounding the sites and the rules governing them” and they “could be in a position to find ways to redefine the present intransigent situation in constructive and more inclusive directions.”¹ Hence, the success of an intervention process will highly depend on the Jeeyars’ approval and acceptance of it. In an effort in this direction, the various institutional leaders have met in the past to discuss the future of the Śrīvaisnava community and of possible ways of addressing the current situation with partial success.² By organizing, attending and participating in such conferences, Jeeyars will set a positive precedent for the Śrīvaisnava community.

The diaspora has a deep influence on the proceedings in the small Śrīvaisnava community. There are several reasons for the prominence and influence of the diaspora on local activities in India but the main one is the high amount of remittances contributed by the diaspora towards politics, religion and culture.³ As part of the intervention design, the contribution and influence of diaspora members cannot be ignored and needs to be factored in with significant exercises for relationship building between the communities.

¹ Marc Howard Ross, The Culture of Conflict: Interpretations and Interests in Comparative Perspective, (Yale University Press, 1993), 190.
² Śrīvaisnava Yathi Sammelan or the Jeeyar Unification Meet was held on February, 11, 2001 at Chennai, India. (Source: http://www.ramanuja.org/sv/bhakti/archives/feb2001/0105.html)
Some of the ideas and exercises that are either currently being used or have the potential to make a significant impact on the relationship are listed below:

- Organizing a North American regional conference for the Śrīvaisnava diaspora members to discuss their thoughts and opinions on the outcomes of this research; conclude the conference by setting a long-term agenda to address all the issues and concerns raised there. The reason for choosing North America as a use-case is that it is the largest Śrīvaisnava diaspora.

- Expansion of this conference to include other international Śrīvaisnava diaspora members – their input and feedback is as important for a successful intervention design.

- Organizing annual religious events to celebrate the contributions of all Śrīvaisnava ācāryas; engaging in narrative exercises such as pravachanams (storytelling) and discourses to discuss the lives and works of various Śrīvaisnava scholars and leaders.

- Organizing religious debates to discuss the soteriological differences between the two sects.

- Publishing monthly journals with stories and articles about various traditional practices of the two groups as a means of cultural exposition and exploration.

After implementing it in the diaspora, the intervention design will then need to be expanded to the conflict zone itself in India. Śrīvaisnava from all walks of life need to be included in the intervention process for its successful implementation. Discussions about the intervention strategy held by the citizens themselves can yield some important
results for this community. The outcomes of such discussions can then be presented to the various institutional Jeeyars and respected scholars. The next step in the intervention design would be to bring together all these institutional leaders to discuss possible solutions to this conflict and the future of the Śrivaisnava community. This can be done by organizing a conference in which the leaders can explore different avenues of peaceful resolution on issues of resource sharing, traditions and philosophy. Favorable outcomes of such conferences and open discussions can include the creation of new standards for combined worship and rituals, and the introduction of novel ideas for traditional unity amongst the two groups. By promoting a healthy competitive spirit amongst the various sectarian scholars and philosophers, the community can expect to metamorphose the existing structures of traditional individualism to collective elements of Śrivaisnava worship and culture. Besides promoting a common narrative discourse for the community, the leaders have an even more crucial role in vehemently opposing negative discourses that promote separationism and sectarian distinction. The relationships between the two groups can only be promoted by slowly dissolving the pseudo-ethnic distinctions that exist between them.

1. Shortcomings

The most obvious shortcoming of this approach is the incentivization and justification of this method to the two communities. Leaders and community members seldom want to give up power positions and identity distinctiveness unless they see the immediate repercussions of not doing so. Convincing the members of the two groups to promote shared influences and culture will lead to initial fear and apprehension of the
other. Hence, leaders will play an important role in shaping the expectations of their members. The initial task of the mediatory intervention approach must, thus, heavily involve the leading scholars and philosophers from the two groups. Additionally, the intervention process does not render immediate results. The intervention design is meant to soothe current tensions in the two communities before allowing for the formation of relationships between the two groups. The cooling period for any conflict is both unpredictable and vulnerable to incitation. Often during times of conflict stalemate, small incidents of mistrust can lead the conflict back towards the path to escalation and so the interveners have to be careful and prepared for such situations. Also, with the heavy reliance on institutional leaders for this mediatory intervention process, the process depends at some levels on individual personalities. Existing relationships and animosity between leaders can very easily reflect upon the intervention process. And since such leadership posts are tenured, the process of healing of wounds and improvement of relationships can last multiple lifetimes.

Despite being a long and arduous process, the mediatory intervention approach lays solid ground for long lasting bonds between people. But the unconventional approach can also lead to a sense of hostility in orthodox environments. Such “western” methods of conciliation are often seen as non-traditional, foreign and anti-cultural by the core adherents. It then becomes very important to include localized and organic methods of intervention amongst the communities. The mediatory approach can only be used to jump start the process and present ideas to the two communities. By invoking a sense of responsibility and urging action, the intervention can allow members of the two groups to
see alternate perspectives on their future possibilities. The intervention is only meant to provide a stable platform for mediation between the sects. In that sense, the diaspora members are in an ideal position to formulate this intervention process – they are both connected to and removed from the conflict with a high level of influence on the proceedings. The diaspora community can present a perceived fair and unbiased approach to the sectarian leaders, many of whom are in close contact with the diaspora already, for the advancement of a conciliatory process in the community. The diaspora members in some ways control many of the institutional plans and processes. Being the major source of remittance income for the institutions, the Śrivaīnava community abroad is shouldering a large responsibility towards the promotion and improvement of relationships between the communities. Through means of organized lobbying and informed analysis, the diaspora can easily convince the leaders to participate in the process of mediation and reconciliation. There is a lot at stake for the Śrivaīnava diaspora given the strong influence of sectarian leaders in their spiritual lives outside of India – the natal cultural connection for expats living abroad draws high emotion and energy – and calls for unanimous action from the community to address the issues back home that threaten their religious, spiritual and cultural status.

In the current scenario, there have been several individualized efforts taken by members from both the communities at organizing and resolving their internal disputes. These efforts range from judicial intervention approaches in temple towns of Kanchipuram and Srirangam to permanently resolve the temple disputes on the basis of a fair and unbiased legal approach. By presenting temple manuscripts and inscriptions, the
members of the two sects have sought out judicial action to allow for equal participation in and ownership of temple rituals and management. Similarly, there have been organized approaches by a minor portion of the community to bring together leaders in a process of reconciliation and organize joint temple events between the two groups. So efforts to alleviate the situation can be seen along a horizontal timeline over the past few decades.

But the absence of a single, unified approach to address the concerns of both the communities across all regions has resulted in the actions being unable to take substantial form – the kind of form that can be noticed by all members and can motivate them to participate. This kind of a movement takes concerted effort on the part of the leaders, the sponsors and the community itself. By uniting together, all the Śrīvaisnava institutions can come forward and make a joint statement on these efforts; leaders can share a platform and jointly dispose an elaborate process of community organization; temple committees and HR & CE departments can assist in discussions on issues of temple ownership and management; and members from local neighborhoods can participate together to discuss and learn about the two cultures. So the responsibility ultimately rests on the community as a whole and not on individual groups or members. This is truly a process that requires a bottom-up approach to meet half way with a top-down approach in affecting change. Top leaders and scholars have a motivational role while the members have a participatory role in the process of intervention. The diaspora plays the important mediatory role in this process by providing platforms for dialogue and discussion. The union of these three membership roles in the Śrīvaisnava community is the only way to promote reconciliation amongst the two groups.

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CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

The *Divya Desam* temples are economic microcosms that form an important support structure for the areas surrounding them in terms of being the main source of income. Some of the temples have even become popular tourist destinations in the region, attracting both national and international visitors. The true potential of these temples can be seen in the example of the Tirupati temple, which is not only one of the richest temples in the world but also the largest employer in the region. This temple management is involved in several community projects in the fields of education, training, and rehabilitation. Several of the other *Divya Desam* temples possess the same amount of potential as the Tirupati temple in contributing to the socio-economic development of their corresponding regions. So, resolving the *Śrivaishnava* temple dispute can be seen as a large incentive for the two groups and the general community as a whole, in view of the temples’ religious, cultural and social importance. And with one hundred and six such temples at their disposal, the *Śrivaishnava* community can influence massive socio-economic change by uniting to keep aside their differences and focusing on reinstating the past glory of these temples.

In the context of the social and cultural significance of the *Divya Desam* temples, the tackling and resolution of the *Śrivaishnava* dispute over temple control and rights
becomes imperative for the social betterment of the entire community as a whole – the temples do not “belong” solely to either of the two groups but are indeed the religious property of the entire community. Rituals, festivals and honors are the social paraphernalia of the temples that allow for the involvement and participation of all interested devotees. The Śrīvaiṣṇava communities, for all the contributions made to the history and culture of South India, have to cease being socially irresponsible and disrupting normal temple activities. The current social situation in India, more than ever, demands for the restoration of a congenial relationship between the two groups given the ability of such protracted conflicts to hurt the economic progress of the nation.

The Tenkalai and Vatakalai groups have been at loggerheads with seemingly incompatible identity goals. The Śrīvaiṣṇava conflict fortunately presents multiple opportunities for addressing the identity aspects of the two communities. Through processes of identity transformation and de-categorization, it is possible for the two groups to form a common, superordinate Śrīvaiṣṇava identity that transcends individual group differences and instead focuses on their shared common history and culture. The diaspora stands to be a positive example in this transformative process of common identity development whereby both groups can overcome and, in fact, have thrived in this form of co-existence. Drawing on this example, the intervention design for the Śrīvaiṣṇava conflict in India must involve the entire range of the community. But the execution of the intervention process itself largely depends on the involvement of the Jeeyars. If the institutional leaders fail to agree upon a common agenda towards unity, it becomes difficult to convince the general Śrīvaiṣṇava population to give up their
differences. The ultimate responsibility, though, rests on the Śrīvaisnava community as a whole from the religious leaders to the scholars and the women in both groups, who will all play a vital role in improving inter-group relationships and ultimately follow in the footsteps of their common ācārya, Sri Rāmanuja.

Tenkalais and Vatakalaïs have several inspirational sources for harmonious existence within their own tradition and culture – sharing this must surely make it less difficult for them to visualize a common tomorrow. Paradoxically, the Divya Prabandham that has often been considered as the first object of contention between the two groups also presents a clear theme for communality in several of its verses – the most popular verse being “…Koodi irundhu kulirndhu-el or empaavaai” from Thiruppavai\(^1\) which literally means that we will always stay united and be happy to worship you together, O Lord!

\(^{1}\) Thiruppavai is a set of thirty Tamil verses from the Divya Prabandham. Aandaal is a 10\(^{th}\) century female Alvār who composed the Thiruppavai, which is widely considered one of the most important contributions to Tamil literature.
APPENDIX A: FIGURES

Figure 1: Prominent Śrivaishnava Temples.
The original map was modified to include temple locations. Source Note: http://printable-maps.blogspot.com/2009/07/blank-map-of-india.html
Figure 2: Major Śrīvaiśnava Ācāryas from Rāmānuja to Manavālāmānu.  
Source Note: Mumme, p. 393 (1983).
Figure 3: Tenkalai and Vatakalai Thiruman (Sectarian Symbols)
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Curriculum Vitae

Ramaseshan Iyengar is a graduate student at the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University and expects to graduate in Fall 2009. Originally from Mumbai, India, he earned his Bachelors in Telecommunications Engineering from the University of Bombay. He spent a year working as a Technical Services Engineer before coming to the United States, where he completed his Master of Science in Electrical Engineering from George Mason University, Fairfax, VA. Growing up in India, Ramaseshan was aware of both the fruitfulness and perils resulting as a direct consequence of the evolution of a multicultural and pluralist society back home. Having personally witnessed the aftermath of sectarian violence and riots in India, Ramaseshan became interested in studying and understanding the sources and dynamics of conflict escalation lifecycle. Ramasesh is currently working on a research project titled ‘An Analysis of Women’s Involvement in Terrorism through a study of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam in Sri Lanka and the Maoist Rebels in Nepal’ with the Regional Center for Security Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka.