Revitalization movements, past and present, have become subjects of special interest to both historians and social scientists. Nativistic, millennial, messianic, and other kind of revitalization movements have provided scholars with useful data for the study of political, social and religious change, as well as what might be called "cultural crises"\(^1\). Hinduism has experienced many such revitalization movements, in response to the internal development of Indian society or to the external challenges of invading peoples and alien faiths. We need only remind ourselves of the many syncretic Hindu cults which have developed as a result of challenges posed to the Hindu social order by Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity, in order to recognize the remarkable capacity of Hinduism for self-renewal.

Among the most interesting revitalization movements to have developed within Hinduism are the various cults of bhakti devotionalism, with their simple but impassioned messages and their implied egalitarian bias. In particular, Tamil devotionalism has long been a subject of interest to students of Indian religious history. But the recent development of scholarly interest in modern Indian regionalism and its historic roots has added new urgency to the task of studying those movements which, like Tamil devotionalism, have important implications for the cultivation and dissemination of religious and literary symbols, values, and themes which are shared by the inhabitants of a particular linguistic region. One conclusion which emerges from a series

\(^*) The author wishes to express his gratitude to Mr. N. Kumaraswami Raja, Reader in Linguistics at Annamalai University, without whose generous assistance over a period of three years, this study would not have been possible.

\(^1\) A classification scheme for such movements has been suggested by A. F. P. Wallace in "Revitalization Movements: Some Theoretical Considerations for Their Comparative Study," American Anthropologist; XVIII (June, 1956), 264-81.
of papers presented at a recent symposium on Indian regions and regionalism is that modern regional pride and self-awareness have deeper historical roots in some parts of India than in others, and that this is partly a function of the uneven literary development of India's regional languages 2). Thus, it is generally acknowledged that the early maturing of Tamil as a creative literary medium, partly under the stimulus of Tamil bhakti, facilitated the dissemination of regional symbols in Tamilnad, a process which in turn helped to lay the groundwork for the emergence of a more strident regional consciousness in recent years.

Hence it is curious that no scholar has bothered to closely examine the literary evidence in order to determine more precisely the geographical and ecological orbit within which the saint-singers of Tamil devotionalism developed their themes. The surviving devotional literature is rich in specific geographical references, most of which can be precisely identified on modern maps. It is therefore possible to abstract from the hymns a "sacred geography" of Tamil devotionalism, or what Eric Isaac calls "the landscape of myth" 3).

The following paragraphs are designed to briefly illustrate how the major collection of Śaivite devotional hymns, the Devaraṇam (Songs of God) 4) can be used in reconstructing this sacred geography and in exploring the significance of the dissemination of these regional symbols via traditional channels of social communications. Although this study is confined to Tamil Śaivism and utilizes only the most important collection of Śaivite hymns, a study of Vaishnavite sacred geography, utilizing the same techniques, is obviously feasible. Similarly, certain other texts of the Śaivite tradition, such as the Periyapuranam, readily lend themselves to this kind of treatment.


4) The edition of the Devaraṇam used in this study was published in seven volumes by the Dharmapuram Adhinam, Dharmapuram, from 1953 to 1964. Volumes I-III contain hymns of Sambandar; IV-VI, those of Appar; VII, those of Sundaramūrtti.