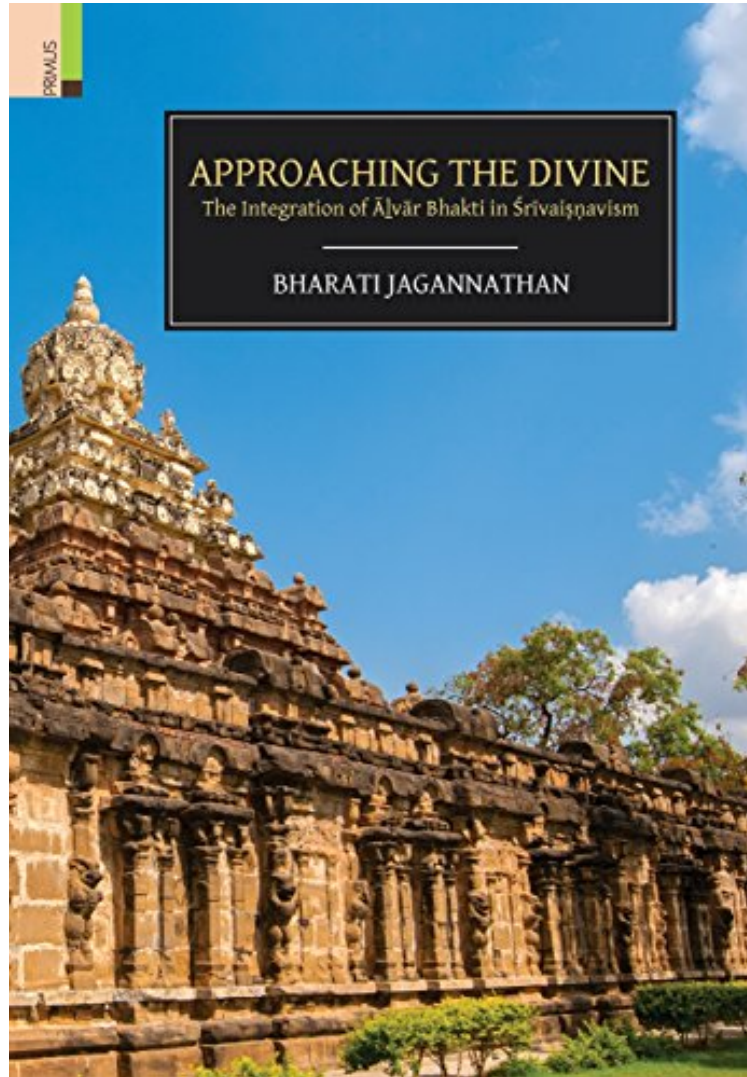


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Approaching the Divine: The Integration of Alvar Bhakti in Srivaisnavism

Bharati Jagannathan

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Approaching the Divine: The Integration of v r Bhakti in r vai avism is situated in the context of the ongoing scholarly

debate regarding the historical evolution of Tamil r vai avism. This study spans the period from the second half of the first millennium, i.e. the bhakti period to the period of consolidation of the scriptural and sectarian tradition in the first half of the second millennium. Traditionally, the lives of the bhakti saints have been used to understand their hymns. Examination of these hagiographies through the lenses of theology, caste, sectarian conflict and popular legends, however, suggests that these life stories might themselves be constructs of the latter period, and are governed by socio-economic and political impulses as much as by spiritual ones. This work attempts to trace the process whereby a Sanskrit brahmanical tradition and a devotional Tamil folk tradition were knit together, arguing that the ways in which the saint-poets hymns were interpreted and integrated contained elements of both continuity and change.

About the Author Bharati Jagannathan teaches History at Miranda House, University of Delhi. She writes fiction and poetry, and has authored several children's books.