

Difference Between Alvars and Nayanars

Alvars and Nayanars have been an important part of Indian history. These poet-saints were responsible for bringing in the bhakti movement during the 7th century to 10th century, not only in the southern parts but also in other parts of India.

Historians have always been interested in knowing about the difference between Alvars and Nayanars. They have noted the names of 12 Alvar saints and 63 Nayanar saints in the historical records. The major difference between Alvars and Nayanars is listed in the table below.

Alvars VS Nayanars

| Difference Between Alvars and Nayanars | |
|---|--|
| Alvars | Nayanars |
| Alvars existed between the 5th - 10th centuries AD. Some sources also reveal that they lived between 4200 BCE – 2700 BCE. | Nayanars are known to have been around between the 6th-8th centuries AD. |
| The Alvars were ardent devotees of Lord Vishnu and his avatars. | Nayanars were followers of Lord Shiva and his avatars. |
| Nathamuni, a leader of the Shrivaisnava sect, is believed to have gathered the hymns of the Alvars in the 10th century. He introduced the regular singing of hymns in the Vaishnava temples of South India. | Nambiyandar Nambi, in the 10th century, compiled the hymns of the Nayanars in an anthology called the Tevaram. The hymns were set to Dravidian music and became part of the services of South Indian temples. |
| The hymn collection of the Alvars is called Naalayira Prabandham, or the Collection of 4,000 Songs. | Inscriptions during the reign of the Chola king Rajaraja the Great (985–1014) record an introduction describing the singing of the Nayanar hymns in the great temple at Thanjavur (Tanjore). Manikkavachakar's hymns collected in Tiruvachakam or Sacred Utterance are also associated with the Nayanars. |

The names of 12 Alvar saints are found in historical records.

There were known to be 63 Nayanar saints.

Alvars and Nayanars

Some of the earliest bhakti movements were launched by the Nayanars and the Alvars in the sixth century. Regional languages like Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, Hindi, Marathi, and others expanded as a result of the movement, and the lower classes rose to prominence. The movement also placed equal attention on men and women while highlighting the significance of women in society.

Alvars

The Alvars was a term used for a group of mystics from South India who sang joyous songs in praise of the Hindu God Vishnu. They existed from the 7th to the 10th century and sang from temple to temple. Historical records describe the Alvars as falling unconscious while singing rapturously before the image of Lord Vishnu.

The Alvars sang songs of longing, ecstasy, and service as a way of expressing their devotion to the gods. They existed from the fifth to the tenth centuries CE. The Bhakti Movement has revived in the medieval era in part thanks to the Alvars' acts of devotion. With the help of their hymns of devotion to Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna, they brought the bhakti movement back to life.

Nayanars

The Nayanars were Tamil poets-saints-musicians from the 7th and 8th centuries who were devotees of the Hindu God Shiva and composed devotional poems or hymns in his honor, praising his great beauty. One of the characteristics of the Nayanars and the Alvars was that they wandered from place to place and sang beautifully composed poems in honor of the deities.

The Bhakti movement, which had its beginnings in South India, is also attributed to them. Sundarar is thought to have compiled the Nayanars' names initially. Between the sixth and the eighth centuries CE, they existed.

Key Difference Between Alvars and Nayanars

The key difference between Alvars and Nayanars are mentioned below.

- Alvars worshipped and were devoted to Vishnu, while Nayanars worshipped and were devoted to the all-powerful Shiva and his avatars, including Lord Krishna.

- The Alvars are thought to have existed between the 5th and 10th centuries AD, while the Nayanars are thought to have lived between 4200 and 2700 BC. Modern scholars believe the Alvars lived between the sixth and eighth centuries AD.
- Nambiyandar Nambi, Raja Raja Chola I's head priest, transformed the songs into a series of booklets known as Tirumurai, while the Alvars' hymns were collected into Divya Prabandha, a single volume that contained all of their hymns.

