

## FOREWORD

The author of this work Prof. N. Subbu Reddiar is a well-known Tamil Writer. He got a Department of Tamil founded in the Sri Venkateswara University at Tirupati and has been the Head of the Department for many years. He has recently been raised to the status of a Professor in the University and he richly deserves that position. He has written a number of works in Tamil on various subjects—scientific, technological and academic. His language is easy-flowing and mellifluous, understandable both by scholars and by laymen. He has contributed greatly to Tamil writing.

The present work of his is a unique one dealing as it does with the Āḷvārs. The Āḷvārs are Sri Vaiṣṇavite saints of South India who realised Godhead in His *arcā* form in the Vaiṣṇavite temples of South India. They are mystics of a very high order and sang of God in ecstasy and their verses number about 4000 which are called the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*. The main Āḷvārs are ten in number who with the addition of two others viz. Āṇṭāḷ and Maturakavi constitute a dozen. They are drawn from all castes and they gave a great impetus to the spread of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism. Their verses mostly relate to Rāma and Kṛṣṇa – the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu – besides the absolute Para-vāsudeva in Śrī Vaikunṭha. Of all these Āḷvārs, Nammāḷvār is the foremost one though not the earliest. He is recognised as the patron-saint of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism in southern India. His thousand verses are called *Tiruvāymoḷi Āyiram* as having emanated from his holy mouth. Before the singing of any of these songs, the *taniyan* or the verse relating to the author is recited and his blessings are invoked. The *taniyan* of Nammāḷvār describes him as one who rendered the *Vedas* into Tamil and that his thousand verses have all the sanctity and the authority of the *Vedas*.

Referring to the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*, Śrī Vedantha Deśika states that they throw considerable light on a number of intricate and difficult passages in the *Vedas* and help to clarify many doubts therein; and the *Tenkalais* have given greater authority to the Tamil *Prabandhams* than even to the *Vedas* themselves. Nammāḷvār's hymns are considered to be the authority on Śrī Vaiṣṇavism by both the sects of Śrī

Vaiṣṇavism. These *Prabandhams* are recited during all the temple festivals and have even been made a part of the daily worship both in Śrī Vaiṣṇavite temples and houses of the Vaiṣṇavites. Śrī Vaiṣṇavites must feel greatly indebted to Prof. N. Subbu Reddiar for the deep study and thought he has bestowed on the *Prabandhams*; he has written on the religion and philosophy of the Āḷvārs in his fine English style, thus carrying the message of the Āḷvārs to the very doors of Vaiṣṇavites and non-Vaiṣṇavites alike. The task is stupendous and though Prof. N. Subbu Reddiar is a born saivite, he has taken a deep interest in the Śrī Vaiṣṇavite literature and written on it with great sympathy, love and admiration much better than even a born Vaiṣṇavite can do. In this his great work which can be called his *magnum opus*, he has traced the history of Vaiṣṇavite religion from time of the *Ṛg Veda*.

He has considered the subject under six sections. The first contains his introduction summarising the work. The second relates to the pre-Āḷvār period starting from the *Vedas*. The third is a prefatory study of the work of *Nālāyiram*. In section four, he discusses the main theme of the work relating to religion and philosophy of the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* with special reference to Nammāḷvār. The fifth refers to post-Āḷvār period and the sixth gives his conclusion. His summary is in sufficient detail to convey a comprehensive idea of his great work in his own language. In the second section, there is nothing controversial in the subject matter but with regard to Vaiṣṇavism during the pre-Āḷvār period, there may be a difference of opinion regarding his observations. It is true that the *Vedic* scholars of the West have described Viṣṇu as a minor deity during the *Vedic* period and to some extent he has reproduced their views. The *Ṛg Veda* is the earliest *Veda* and the one on which the other *Vedas* and later religious literatures are based. It contains a large number of hymns addressed to various natural elements whose aid and blessing the *Vedic* Aryans invoked by praise and prayer and by offering ablutions and libations to them. But Viṣṇu as He emerges in the *Ṛg Veda* is a personal God. The accepted essential feature of all theistic religions is the

existence of a personal God who created the universe. Such attributes like the creator, protector and sustainer are used in the *R̥g Veda* only with regard to Viṣṇu. It is also specifically mentioned therein that He created even the Sun and Varuṇa and that others followed Him and that He grew from a primeval germ into the cosmos. After having created the worlds, fixed his lasting abode for himself a *Paramapadam* or Heaven which ordinary mortals may not be able to see or reach easily and which place is full of sweetness and bliss. *R̥g Veda* also refers to His consort Śrī Mahālakṣmī. It states that His worship is easy and the repetition of His name is enough. It also refers to His incarnations.

Thus it appears that the essential features of Vaiṣṇavism were known to the *R̥g Vedic* Aryans and they worshipped Him as the Supreme Being. The divine qualities of Viṣṇu were enhanced late by the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Upaniṣads* and the *Purāṇas* in the North and by the Āḷvārs in the South and these laid the foundation for the systematisation of Vaiṣṇavite philosophy and religion by Śrī Rāmānuja.

Coming to the central theme of the discourse of Prof. N. Subbu Reddiar in this volume, all the essential elements of Śrī Vaiṣṇavism, as practised and preached today, have been elaborated by him with special reference to the Āḷvār saints. Briefly they are as follows : that Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the Supreme Being; that He is the creator; that His abode is the highest in the universe; that He is both transcendent in Heaven and immanent in the Universe; that for the devotees, He took the *Vibhava* form as Rāmā and Kṛṣṇa and that to make Himself easily available to all for worship, He has taken the *arcā* or permanent incarnation in temples. Their conception of the relationship of the individual soul to God is one of *Nāyaka-Nāyaki bhāva*—that is between a lover and his beloved. Nammāḷvār and Tirumaṅkaimaṇṇaṇ have emphasised this *Madhura-bhāva* and sung in ecstasy and longed to become one with the divine being. In many passages their description shows how the separation from the Lord is unbearable to them. They appeal to Śrī Mahālakṣmī to recommend them to the Lord's Grace to perform *puruṣahāra*. They have developed

*sakti* and more than that *prapatti* or *saranāgati*, the doctrine of surrender, as the means of attaining Godhead. They knew God and realized Him and became one with Him. It is said that after reciting his ten verses, Śrī Tiruppānālvār, a harijan saint lost himself in ecstasy and his soul merged into that of Śrī Raṅganātha. The thousand verses of Nammālvār called *Tiruvāymoḷi*, are treated as sacred. They contain the essence of the *Sāma-veda* and particularly, that of *Chandogya Upaniṣad* which work is largely drawn upon for describing the creation in the *Brahma-sūtras* by the Bādarāyana to establish the existence of God, His attributes and the mode of reaching Him. *Tatva-traya* which is the distinguishing feature of Śrī Vaiṣṇavite philosophy is also referred to by Nammālvār. The emphasis of all the *Prabandhams* particularly of Nammālvār is laid on true knowledge which is described as one, which finds the universe as the body of a universal consciousness or soul of which body all beings are limbs. It implies that there is only one thing in the world and that is God. In fact, he found God in everything in the universe.

Lastly *Saranāgati* or self-surrender as the means of attaining salvation and release from the cycle of births and deaths is described wonderfully by every one of the Ālvārs, and Prof. N. Subbu Reddiar has quoted chapter and verse from the original text in support of his conclusion. I admire his great talents and his inexhaustible energy and industry in gathering the material which has spread over millenia and brought the essence of all the texts in the compass of a single work.

I pray to Lord Venkateswara that He may grant him a hundred years of life to serve the cause of the Tamil language, religion and philosophy in an ever-increasing measure. The greatest tribute that can be paid to Prof. N. Subbu Reddiar for his glorious work is to keep his book in every library and in every home and to read and digest it. I most heartily congratulate him on his glorious work and wish his enterprise all success.

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