

The Wrong Equation-A Misconceived Parity.

(S. SATYAMURTI AYYANGAR, Gwalior.)

A deep and dispassionate study of the Vedas will reveal that Lord Narayana, also known as Vishnu, Vasudeva, Rama, Krishna etc., is the Supreme God, with none equal to or above Him. In XV-15 of Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna has said that the Vedas, in their entirety, reflect Him. (Vedaischa sarvairahameva vedyah). The position, in this regard, has been made abundantly clear, in the hymns of the Alvars, collectively known as 'Divya Prabandham' and placed beyond the shadow of a doubt. Actually, the Alvars, one and all, took utter refuge at the feet of Lord Narayana, the Consort of Mahalakshmi, their heart was the Sanctum of Narayana, their eyes saw everywhere, in all, in every event Narayana and their hands worshipped Narayana with choice flowers. As a Master, Father, Friend, Beloved and so on, they loved and adored Narayana. In short, they got dissolved in him, like milk, honey, sugar-candy and porridge. In that scintillating hymnal, Tiruvaymoli, Nammalvar dwelt on the supremacy of Lord Vishnu, in His 'Para' (transcendent) and 'Vibhava' (Incarnate) aspects, in the first decad (Tiruvoymoli) of the first centum and the second decad of the Second Centum, respectively. He then proceeded to establish His supremacy in 'Arca' (Iconic) aspect, as well, in the concluding decad of the fourth

centum, where the Alvar shakes off the stupor of the votaries of the minor deities, exhorts them to concentrate on the Supreme God, the one and only God and calls upon them to worship the Lord, in His iconic form, enshrined in Kurukur, the Alvar's birth place. This being the case, it would be grievously wrong even to suggest and much less, make a daring statement that the Alvars adored alike, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva and treated them all, on a par. Sometime back, an elderly Smartha gentleman, who reviewed a book on Nammalvar, even went to the extent of saying that the Alvar attained salvation only through his propitiation of all the three members of the Trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, for whom he had the same degree of reverence and cited, in support, the opening song of the very last decad (X-10-1) of Thiruvaymoli. This is obviously due to his utter ignorance of the subject, like many other superficial readers, without the requisite background, who tear, out of context, a few songs, here and there and misinterpret them, thereby confusing the minds of the lay public. In a recent book-review, which appeared in "Sri Ramanujan-348", the Editor has thrown adequate light on the subject, by way of clearing the possible misconception in the minds of the unfortunate readers, who might peruse the book in question, 'Tirumaladiyar' strangely enough, by a Vaishnavite author, a bundle of contradictions and a tissue of mis-statements, hardly worth the notice of one of the Editor's rank and eminence and much less, a review from his erudite pen. Besides touching upon a few salient points, in the said review, the major portion of this essay will concentrate on 'Thiruvaymoli', by way of reinforcing the Supremacy of Lord Vishnu, to the extent possible, in the brief compass.

2. An oft-repeated slogan as it were, in the aforesaid book (Tirumaladiyar) is "Ari (vishnu) and 'Aran' (siva) are one and the same or are of identical greatness and importance". The misguided author could, of course, be left severely alone, had he not sought to support this fantastic statement of his, by citing, rather misquoting, the hymns of the Alvars, betraying his colossal ignorance of their contents. Poykai Alvar, the first of the Alvars, in the chronological order of their advent, has declared his exclusive allegiance to Tirumal (Vishnu), in stanza 64 of his 'Mutal Tiruvantati' and earlier, in stanza 15, he has stated unequivocally that, of the Trinity, the cloud-hued Vishnu is the Sovereign Master of all. The author of the book in question has quoted these stanzas all right and given out their meanings also, as above. But he gets into a sudden aberration and quotes stanza 5 of the same hymnal, to support his favourite stand of parity between 'Ari' and 'Aran' and goes to the absurd length of presenting Poykai Alvar as self-contradicting and muddle-headed, demonstrating, in the said song, the perfect identity of the

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two gods and setting the pace for thinking along these lines, by the Vaishnavites. Far from establishing the identity of Vishnu and Siva, the song in question actually stresses the vast disparity between them, on various counts, viz., name, mount, texts proclaiming their respective greatness, place of residence, activity, weapon and form, establishing the overwhelming superiority of Vishnu over Siva and even stating that the latter constitutes the body of the former. Stanza 74 *ibid*, is also pitched in the same key, where it has once again been pointed out that Siva, with matted locks, the insignia of an 'upasaka' is but the ward of Vishnu, wearing the long crown, the symbol of His Sovereignty, under the latter's benevolent protection. The author cites stanza 63 of the hymnal of Peyalvar to prove that he also subscribes to the parity between Vishnu and Siva. Actually the purport of this song is that Lord Venkatesa, enshrined in Tiruvenkatam is Tirumal, who had once presented on His person, the twin aspect of Sankara and Narayana—the Sankara Narayana. The bewildered author is probably not aware that Tondaradippodi Alvar has emphatically stated, in stanza 7 of 'Tirumalai':

“Sire! He alone is the supreme Deity, whose severe
bow routed Lanka, this is the absolute truth, you see.....”

All the other Alvars have also pin-pointed Tirumal's overlordship and it is, therefore, a genuine exercise in futility to seek support from the Alvars for the author's fantastic slogan.

3. In reply to a query, supposed to have been put to him, by the people around, as to whether the Trinity standing in a row, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, are of the same stature or one of them is superior to the other two or there is yet another power, superior to all the three, Nammalvar has furnished the reply in three stanzas, in a row, Tiruvaymoli I-3-6 to 8 as follows:

“Ye folks! better study dispassionately the authoritative texts highlighting the individual traits and course of conduct of Lord Narayana (Vishnu) Brahma and Rudra and in the process, fix your mind finally on whosoever impresses you as the Supreme Lord and worship him by reciting His names and the relative mantras. Such a study will easily reveal that Narayana is the internal controller of all, including Brahma and Rudra, that He is wholly Satvik, while the other two have a blend of 'rajasik' and 'tamasik' traits, so on and so forth;

May you study dispassionately, the authoritative texts and discern that there is but one God and that is Narayana, the Super-soul, residing in all, including Brahma and Rudra. With this knowledge, you will do well to attach yourselves firmly to Narayana, during the rest of your life-time;

If we cleanse our minds of the dirt of misconceived notion of parity among the 'Tirumurtis' through that bleaching agent, called wisdom, and worship daily at the benevolent feet of our Lord, the gracious consort of Mahalakshmi, all our past sins which had been tormenting us, so far, will die out at once, and we will be free from wants of any kind. It is never too late to switch on to the Lord thus; better repose on his lap, even while dying."

4. One of Lord Vishnu's several names is 'Ananta', the endless. He is limitless and immeasurable, not being circumscribed by space and time. The unique feature about the supreme Lord is that He is not only not circumscribed by space and time but He also abides in all, without any exception, the sentient beings and the non-sentient things constituting, as it were, His bodies. It is this immense ubiquity of the Lord, in various forms, that the Alvar, refers to every now and then and there is, therefore, no meaning in His being equated with the things and beings pervaded by Him, including Brahma, Rudra and other exalted devas. Elaborating this theme in Tiruvaymoli III centum, fourth decad the Alvar says in the eighth verse-

"Could I call Kannan, my Liege-Lord of wondrous traits and deeds,
Sporting the floral garland of tulaci, which honey sheds,
Who the worlds did with delight create and is by them adored,
As the lustrous One of sapphire hue or as Siva, who sports
The cool, crescent moon on matted locks and stands revered
[By his votaries] as the god supreme or as Nanmukan, (Brahma, the
four-headed) ?

Here, the Alvar points out that Siva, mistakenly revered by some, as the Supreme and Brahma, the four-headed, also form part of Lord Vishnu's possessions. Actually, these deities derive all their powers from Lord Vishnu, vide I-1-5, Tiruvaymoli. Again, in spite of their internal bickerings, these deities join together, in the face of a common danger and propitiate Lord Vishnu, in a body. The Alvar, therefore, advises in Tiruvaymoli IV-10-7, to seek refuge at the feet of Lord Adinatha, enshrined in Kurukur, with firm faith. It is worth while reproducing here all the verses, in this decad and yet, for the sake of brevity, just one verse (IV-10-5) is mentioned here, to drive home the point. Being self-explanatory, further comment is needless.

"Ye hardened perverts, led away by stories about Ilinkam,
Jains, Buddhists, heretics, one and all ! You see, the Lord Supreme,
Internal Controller of you and your deities, Polintuninrapiran does gleam
In Tirukkurukur, with paddy fields rich; better worship Him,
There isn't any untruth at all, in what I proclaim.

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5. In Tiruvaimoli, VII-9-2, Nammalvar says that he was but the Lord's mouthpiece to repeat the words dictated by Him and still he was glorified by Him, as the great Author of the grand hymnal. Elucidating this further, the Alvar says that Lord Vishnu does precisely the same thing. in the case of the minor deities: Brahma is made to appear as the Creator of the worlds, while Siva is made to appear as the great destroyer of Tirupura (the three flying citadels) and so on, in respect of acts actually performed by the Lord, as their internal controller. The Lord, being the primate, the first and foremost, discharges the cosmic functions through Brahma, Rudra, Indra and the whole hierarchy, standing within them all as their internal controller. In dire contrast with Vishnu's magnanimity, the lesser gods, when propitiated, grant men their desires. but side by side, envy rankles in the hearts of the former over the latter's mounting stature and they seek an opportunity to pull the votaries down, to prevent their drawing level with those very gods, an unforgettable lesson from the episode of king Yayati. As regards Lord Vishnu's supreme control over all the three functions of emanation, sustenance and dissolution see also Lord Krishna's declaration in sloka 20 of chapter X of Bhagavad Gita. This can easily disabuse one of the wrong notion that Vishnu is but a co-functionary, on a par with the other two functionaries, Brahma and Rudra.

6. Reverting to the grossly misunderstood opening song of the very last decad of Tiruvaymoli (X-10-1) mentioned in passing, in para 1, the exact import of the song is given below:

The Lord is addressed in this song. as 'Muni'. the sage, who contemplates and conceives the projects pertaining to the creation of the universe, its sustenance and dissolution and gets the work of creation and dissolution, discharged by Brahma and Rudra, respectively, permeating their souls as the Internal Controller. There is absolutely no question of parity among Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra and, at any rate, the Alvar would be the last person to think in terms of such parity and muchless, throw the slightest hint or suggestion to this effect. Seeing that he has already expounded the supremacy of Lord Vishnu, in I-1, II-2, II-8 & IV-10. If the Lord has been addressed in this song as 'Oh, four-headed Brahma!', 'Oh, triple-eyed Rudra!' it only connotes the body-soul relationship of the Lord and His subjects, the entire universe and all beings therein constituting, as it were, His bodies, Himself pervading them all, as the Inner Controller, the Super-soul. c f. also VI-9-1 of Tiruvaymoli, where the Alvar has referred to the Lord, as pervading the five elements, Sun and Moon, Siva and Brahma as the Inner Controller of them all.

7. Dealing with the age of the Alvars towards the end of the book in question, the author endorses with an aura of judgement, the views of

Dr. Irasamanickkanar Swami Chidambaranar Purnalingam Pillai, M Raghava Iyengar and other research scholars, who have fixed the age of the Alvars between the 7th and 9th century, A. D. At the same time, the author seems to be quite aware of the traditional view, as set out by Manavala Mamuni in stanza 4 of his 'Upadesa Ratnamalai' as this has been referred to, in the introduction. The attention of the reader is, however, invited to the essay on the subject from the mighty pen of Sri P. B. A. Swamy, a great boon indeed to the adherents of the traditional school and Research Scholars alike. An English version of this profound dissertation, supplied by this writer, appeared in 'Sri Ramanujan—209'. A dispassionate study of the said essay will surely provide the Research Scholars the necessary perspective and thereby alert them to the dire necessity for a drastic rethinking and a thorough re-orientation of approach to this hallowed theme.