

**EVANGELISATION
THROUGH VAISHNAVISM**

PROF. DR. J. D. BASKARADOSS

M. A., M. Ed., M. A. M. Phil., Ph. D., Cert. in Sanskrit
Vice-President, Curriculum Director, NILT
Former Vice Principal, Annai Violet Arts & Science College, Chennai – 53

EVANGELISATION THROUGH VAISHNAVISM

PROF. DR. J. D. BASKARADOSS

Apostle Thomas in India

The mission of Apostle Thomas in India is a historical fact well recorded in the “Acts of Judas Thomas” an apocryphal book discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 which narrates his evangelical work in India. The Takht-i-Bahi inscription of 46 AD makes king Gondophares a contemporary of St. Thomas. The Book of Thomas and Apocalypse of Thomas are a few of the documents attributed to St. Thomas. These writings are believed to have come from an ascetic, pre-Manichean Christianity of Osthoe (Eastern Syria between Edessa and Messene)¹. The first visit of the apostle to Taxila, North India was in 49 AD according to the scholars and his fully fledged mission commenced in 52 AD from Chera Nadu (Kerala) which lasted till 72 AD in Mylapore where his martyrdom commensurated with a well laid foundation for the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ assimilating the Indian culture as its base. But neither the church nor the Christians were keen to show much interest to explore and dig out the hoary past to find out what had happened to the mission of Thomas, the Apostle in India.

Indian Religions

The agnostic and atheistic religions of Buddhism and Jainism were the two major religions founded and propagated in India in the pre Christ era and no theistic religion was either founded or practiced in the Indian soil at the time of the arrival of Apostle Thomas.

“Hinduism” is a territorial name and is not a religious term. Though this name is widely and loosely used to refer to the Indian religion (Hindu religion), we confine this terminology to refer to Saivism and Vaishnavism. It may be out of the scope of this paper to delve deep into the various aspects of Hinduism/Hindu religion.

Old Testament gave rise to Vishnu as Supreme God

The basic and fundamental source materials of Vishnu and Vaishnavism are not available in the Indian scriptures or other Indian writings. Hemachandra Raychaudhuri in his “Materials for the Study of Early History of the Vaishnava sect”, affirms,

“We have no evidence of the existence of Vaishnava sect in these early times... We should also note another important fact, namely, that there is very little inner connection between Vedic and Brahmanic Vishnu worship and Bhakti religion we call Vaishnavism”²

He therefore shoots a question:

If the Vedic or Brahmanic accounts of Vishnu worship do not furnish any clue to the origin of Vaishnavism as we know it, what is its source”³

Neither do we have any evidence nor reference in the early Tamil writings. The ancient Tamil Sangam Literature gives no evidence for the occurrence of the names Siva or Vishnu.

Prior to assigning any proper name to Lord Siva, the common epithet attributed to him was “Thee Vannan” (தீ வண்ணன்), “Alal Vannan” (அழல் வண்ணன்), “Senthalalon” (செந்தழலோன்) etc., and to Lord Vishnu, it was “Mehan” (மேகன்), “Meha Vannan” (மேக வண்ணன்), “Muhil Vannan” (முகில் வண்ணன்), etc. Lord Siva and Vishnu were identified with fire and cloud and were venerated and worshipped.

This is how the Old Testament testifies how God appeared to Moses and to the people of Israelites when they were in the wilderness who proceeded towards the promised land.

In Horeb, the mountain of God, the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire.⁴

The Lord went before the people of Israel in the pillar of fire by night in the pillar of cloud by day and they never depart from before the people.⁵

Like fire, evidence about God in the form of cloud is plentiful in the Old Testament.

The presence of the Lord in the cloud was with the people of Israel when the Egyptians marched after them. The Bible records:

“Then the angel of God who went before the host of Israel moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness; and the night passed”⁶

In Exodus 19:10, The Lord appeared in the cloud. In the subsequent passages, “And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever.”⁷

The glory of the LORD abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days.⁸

The Lord used to speak with Moses face to face from the pillar of cloud in the tent.⁹

The Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there.¹⁰

The cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.¹¹ and

For the cloud of the Lord *was* upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.¹²

The presence of God continued when Solomon consecrated the Jerusalem temple; when the priest came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord!¹³

The biblical accounts of God in the form of cloud have much relevance to the development of Vaishnavism in India because the etymological derivation of the word “Vishnu” corroborates the conception of God in the form of cloud.

Etymology of the word Vishnu

The word Vishnu is derived from the Tamil root “Vin” (விண்). The letter “U” is suffixed with “Vin” and in spoken Tamil it is pronounced as “Vinnu” (விண்ணு). Philologist Devaneyan (Paavaanar) has explained this phenomenon in the following line:

The Sankrit word Vishnu is a corrupt form of the Tamil word “Vin”. This refers to the cloud as well as the sky and the word “Vindu” which is derived from the above also refers to Thirumal.¹⁴

Scholars have opined that Vishnu is a Dravidian God and Vaishnavism is a product of the Tamil soil. J. Przyluski’s view in this respect is worth mentioning here; he contends that the word is ‘pre-Aryan’ and that it should be connected with non-Aryan ‘Vin’ (Sky). The Puranas hold that the word means ‘who enters or pervaded’ (Viz. Universe.)¹⁵

‘Vann Sirappu’ in Thiruk Kural

The Old Testament tradition is carried forward by the Tamil seers and an important land-mark is preserved in Thiruk Kural which is highly regarded as ‘Tamil Marai’ (the scripture of the Tamils). Thiruvalluvar invokes the Triune God in the first three chapters viz. ‘Kadvul Vaazthu’, ‘Vann Sirappu’ and ‘Neethaar Perumai’ and the second chapter deals with ‘Vann’ – the scholars have substantiated with reliable evidences and have established this aspect as God the Holy Spirit and He is being invoked in Vann Sirappu.¹⁶

In this background we shall now go on further to see how best the various components of Vaishnavism can be used for evangelisation.

Doctrine of Avatar

Fundamentlly Vaishnavism is a religion of avatar which focuses the discussion of the Lord in this mundane world so as to establish his relations with earth and his close association with our planet and its occupants. The essence of the Vaishnava philosophy evolved later is based on this, as evidenced by the hymns of Azhwars.

The transcending almighty God who cannot be comprehended by the human brain lost all his glory and was born on this earth as a human baby. This historic incident is

rendered in Vaishnavite Puranas in different ways but the theology of Vaishnavism terms the birth of the Lord as 'Divyam Janma'.¹⁷

When we analyse the birth of every avatarin enumerated in the puranas who will fall into category of divyam Janma? They were all born of the earthly parents and fall short of 'divine birth' but it is Jesus who alone has fulfilled this aspect. Mary the mother of Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit¹⁸ unlike the other puranic personalities. The 'virgin birth' is the immaculate and divine birth conceived by the Vaishnavite doctrine because the Sanskrit term avatar means the process of coming down¹⁹, in other words, it is the opposite of rising above.

Every religious doctrine clearly asserts that every human being is born with sin or 'sahaja malam' (sin at birth) or 'vinai' (karma) and therefore no human birth is without the original sin. But Jesus was born of the virgin conceived by the Holy Spirit-it is a holy relationship of God and the human being- and hence divyam janma, without any blemish. Therefor the birth of Jesus is unique and the other puranic avatarins fail the litmus test of divyam janma of Vaishnavism.

The avatarins described in Vaishnavite mythologies finally died and disappeared. This is not the case with Jesus, he was crucified and died but he rose again from the dead. Death had no power over him. So Jesus descended in this earth planet and he ascended into heaven and every believer is faithfully waiting for his second coming. He is alive today. This is the gospel truth which has to be propagated.

Thirumazhisai Azhwar sings in the following verses:

Ulagu thannai neepadaththi, ul odukki vaiththi meendu
Ulaguthannu leapiraththi, oridaththai allaiyaal
Ulagu nino donriark veru nirri aathalaal
Ulagil ninnai ulla soolal yavarulla vallarea?

உலகுதன்னை நீபடைத்தி, உள்ளொடுக்கி வைத்தி மீண்டு
உலகுதன்னு ளேபிறத்தி, ஓரிடத்தை யல்லையால்
உலகுநின்னொ டொன்றி நிற்க வேறுநிற்றி; யாதலால்
உலகில்நின்னை யுள்ள சூழல் யாவருள்ள வல்லரே? ²⁰

Lord! You had created this world! You have preserved it within yourself! You were born in this world. You are not in a single place. The world is one with you but you stand aloof. Who can discern what thou art in this world?

Thirumazhisai Azhwar was wonder struck as to how that the creator of the whole world could be born as a human baby.

The Vaishnavite theology emphasizes the avatar as God-man i.e., God descending as man; and not man-God-man ascending to the position of God, ie., deification. Deification is different from incarnation or avatar. Yet, this is what is described in the

puranas. The learned scholars had skillfully described a component in Vaishnavite theology known as 'Vyuha' which is included in the 'Murthi bhadas'.

The Purpose of the Avatar

Redemption is the central motive of divine incarnation. While commenting on Visistadvaita, P.N. Srinivasachari observes that,

“Greater is the intensity of God’s love to redeem the soul than the soul’s desire to see God. For this purpose the transcending Brahman puts on the human form to get united with his devotee.”²¹

He further elaborates on this point that,

“Isvara descends into this world and redeems the mankind and He restores the lost soul”²²

Visistadvaita gives no explanation of the history of how and when the soul has lost its glory. Saivism also makes an impressive note on ‘Sahaja Malam’ and Muthi muthar Kodikke mohak kodi padarnthu aththi pazhuth thathu’²³ that is, the heavenly creeper was entangled by the evil creeper and began to yield the fruit of death. Neither the Saiva Siddhanta commentators nor the expositors had justifiably explained the above metaphor.

The Bible gives an authentic answer for this. It is because of the dis-obedience of Adam, he was estranged from God and had fallen into sin and his sinful act had enslaved the entire humanity to ever remain in bondage and for this reason Jesus was born in this world to redeem the sinners. This redemptive act of Jesus is the central theme explained in Vaishnavism.

Nammazhwar invokes the incarnate God in the following verse in which the purpose of avatar is vividly explained.

Poinninra gnanamum polla ozhukkum azhukkudambum
Inninra neermai iniyaam uraamai uyir alippaan
Enninra yoniyumaaip piranthaai imaiyor thalaiiva
Meininru ketharulaai adiyean sei vinnappamea²⁴

பொய்நின்ற ஞானமும் பொல்லா ஒழுக்கும் அழுக்குடம்பும்
இந்நின்ற நீர்மை இனியாம் உறாமை உயிரளிப்பான்
எந்நின்ற யோனியு மாய்ப்பிறந் தாய்இமை யோர்தலைவா
மெய்நின்று கேட்டரு ளாய்அடி யேன்செய்யும் விண்ணப்பமே!

It is because of the disobedience of Adam, the wisdom, the conduct and the body, and they all there were corrupted by sin and the end result was that the man became unrighteous. The expression ‘*uyir alippaan*’ in the above poem signifies ‘to give a lease of life’ that the transcending God had to incarnate not only to redeem mankind but also to

out an end to the recurrence of this state (*inni yaam uraamai*). Another important aspect of '*uyir alippaan*' in the above verse refers to is the 'eternal life'. The first man's fall had led the mankind to eternal hell (death) but God's avatar had redeemed mankind. This is the salvific act of Jesus.

Bhagavad Gita expounds two main purposes of avatar.

1. Whenever there is a decline of 'dharma' and uprising of 'adharma' God incarnato.²⁵
2. For the protection of good and also for the destruction of the wicked so that dharma may be established, God comes as an avatar.²⁶

Adam's sin was the root cause for the decline of 'dharma' and uprising of 'adharma' and it was imperative for God to send his only Son to save the world. Secondly, His abounding love and grace continue to persist on humanity so that it can equip itself to be worthy of inheriting the eternal life or else the unrighteous people have to face the wrath of God. This is what is 'annihilation' explained in the above sloka.

Jesus had explained this in his parable in Mathew gospel-

"The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth"²⁷

This is the end of the wicked. The next verse of the Gospel talks about the protection of the righteous.

"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father"²⁸

The name Isvara/Esan

In the religious circle, the Saivites make use of the name 'Esan' to call Lord Siva. The Tamil name Esan is widely used by the Vaishnavites also to refer to Godhead. Isvara is a common terminology of use in Indian philosophy.

Nammaazhwaar sings in praise of God as,

"Thaal parappi man thaaviya Esanai"²⁹

(தாள் பரப்பிமண் தாவி ய ஈசனை)

References to 'Esan' in Naalaayira Thivyap Prabhandam are numerous. Gita call Him as 'Bhuteswara' (9:11), Prameswara (11:3), Yogeswara (11:4) and so on.

“The basic three ‘tattvas’ of vaishnavism are cit, acit and Iswara. Acit (the non-sentient) constitutes the body of cit, and Iswara has his body cit (sentient) and acit together these three never perish and depend on each other for their relevance and existence”³⁰

According to Ramanuja Iswara is Saguna Brahman, the embodied supreme God. Gita terms Iswara as ‘Akshara Purusha’ (15:16). ‘Akshara’ is imperishable ‘Om’ or ‘Nadha Brahman’. In fact, Om is a Tamil word (ஓம்). The mystical syllable. Om refers to the ‘word’ which is responsible for the creation of the universe and hence it is the name of God.

Word = Om – Creator – it is analogous with John’s gospel truth- “the Word became flesh”³¹

Likewise the etymology of the word Isvar may be traced from the Hebrew root.

Jehosua – Joshua – Jesus
Aramaic – Yeshua
Greek – Yeshu (Jesus)
Arabic – Isa
Sanskrit – Isvara
Hindi – Iswar
Tamil – Esan

The meaning of Joshua is Yaweh saves, and Jesus is Saviour. In Vedanta Brahman itself becomes (appears) as Iswara and the concept of Iswara is the centrality of Vedanta. It is explained in Vedanta that Iswara is the personal aspect of Brahman. Raimundo Panikkar further explains about the concept of Iswara that:

“The Iswara of our interpretation does not belong only to the world of Godhead. He is not just a mere aspect of the Divine. He is really ‘human, or worldly without ceasing to be divine’”³²

Thus it is seen that Vaishnavism is not the only religion which glorifies the doctrine of avatar but Saivism and Indian philosophy also revolve around the incarnation of God. The doctrine of incarnation is the contribution of Christianity to the world and Indian thought is not too far to have it as the basic aspect. Now we shall move on to the doctrine of Trinity.

Trinity in Vaishnavism

The worship in Indian religions revolves around the Triune God. Saivism and Vaishnavism are the major Indian religions and these major religions are known by the common name of Hindu religion. At the same time Saivism and Vaishnavism have independently developed the Trinitarian Doctrine.

The Azhwars refer Thrumaal as:

“Moovarkia orvanai” 33

“Muthlaavaar Moovarea” 34

“Moovaraakia Moorthi” 35

The Vaishnavite theology for formulates five forms of God known as ‘Murthi bhehas’. The five forms are Paratva, Vibhava, Vyuha, Arca and Antaryamin. ‘Para’ is the transcending state in which Para Brahman dwells in the domain of nitya-vibhuti. In ‘Vibhava’ the supreme manifests Himself as avatara. ‘Vyuha’ is the emanated form. ‘Arca’ is the adorable form, ie., He manifests in the form of idol and ‘Antaryamitva’ is the state in which He dwells in the hearts of all embodied beings.

Though five forms are mentioned they refer to only the Triune God. ‘Vyuha’ is said to be the form of manifestation and it was developed by the Pancharatra system mainly to deify the Vrishni heroes and to include them into the pantheon of avatars. Naturally ‘arca’ is the idol form represent the avatara in the human image. So, Vyuha and Arca are complementing Vibhava. These three forms are nothing but the expression of Para, Aparam and Paraparam of Saivism and God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. The following table exemplifies this.

Trinity	Saivism	Vaishnavism	Christianity
Formless	Param	Para Swarupam	God the Father
With Form	Aparam	Vibhava Swarupam Vyuha Swarupam Arcavatara Swarupam	God the Son
Semi Form	Para param	Antaryami Swarupam	God the Holy Spirit

The scholars have pointed out that the outstanding contribution of Christianity to this world is the doctrine of Trinity.

Ishanand Writes:

“Trinitarian revelation seems to indicate that reality is fundamentally neither one nor many but one in many nor many in one”³⁶

We have seen that Vaishnavism is religion which magnifies the avatar aspect of God and it is because of this reason, unlike Saivite sanctum, the Vishnu temple sanctum is adorned with the idol (arca). The salvific mission in Vaishnavism is associated with

another important doctrine, the doctrine of the fulfilment of sacrifice. We shall now deal with it briefly in the following passages.

Sacrifice fulfilled

The mode of Old Testament worship is to offer sacrifice. The Aryan way of worship as described in the Vedas also is based on sacrifices. But Christianity has put an end to the sacrificial worship as the God incarnate had offered Himself as the Supreme sacrifice. Vaishnavism also falls in this line and no sacrifice is offered in any of the Vishnu temples. Every temple has a sacrificial altar (Pali peedam) but no bloody sacrifices is offered and it is an evidence of the fulfilment of sacrifice.

Thirumangai Aazhwaar praises Thirumal as:

“Vedamum Velvium Vinnu iru sudarum Athiyum aanaan”³⁷
(வேதமும் வேள்வியும் விண்ணும் இருசுடரும் ஆதியும் ஆனான்)

Thirumazhisai sings:

“Vedamaaki veliviyaaki vinninodu mannumai
Athiaaki aayanaya mayam”³⁸
(வேதமாகி வேள்வியாகி விண்ணோடு மண்ணுமாய் ஆதியாகி ஆயனான மாயம்)

Nammaazhwaar sings:

“Thirunthu vedmum velvium”³⁹
(திருந்து வேதமும் வேள்வியும்)

The above lines indicate that Vishnu himself is the sacrifice and the equivalent term for sacrifice in Tamil is ‘*veli*’ (வேள்வி). The thematic expression of sacrifice is found in Gita.

“Cha atra tehe aham eva ati yajna”⁴⁰

“Aham yajna”⁴¹

“Aham hi sarva yajnanam bokta”⁴²

Bhagavata Purana enumerates various avatar of Vishnu and one among them is ‘Yajna avatara’.

According to Gita it is very clear that God is the supreme sacrifice and therefore there is no meaning in offering yet another sacrifice. So the sacrifice of God had set aside the bloody sacrificial worship. Therefore Gita suggests ‘alternative yajna’

“Other yogins resort to sacrifice to Gods; in the fire of Brahman others offer by the self by the self”⁴³

“Others offer as oblation hearing and other senses in the fires of restraint. Some others offer as oblations the objects of the senses such as sound and the rest into fires of their senses.”⁴⁴

In this chapter the Gita emphasises that a devotee has to renounce his action in knowledge.

The above ideology is the echo of the New Testament. The author of the Hebrews deals with the Supreme Sacrifice of Jesus in the 13th chapter.

“Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his our blood.”⁴⁵

“... Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledges his name.

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifice are pleasing to God.”⁴⁶

The alternative to the age old practice of bloody sacrifice is to offer God ourselves as living sacrifice because God died for our iniquities so that we may be made sinless and this state of sinless nessqualifies a person to go near his sanctuary so as to praise him and inturn he can share the joy of salvation with the fellow men in kind words and deeds. Vaishnavism terms this virtuous act as ‘Kaingkaryam’.

The Old Testament mode of sacrificial worship was for the atonement of sins. When the atonement of sin is sanctioned the forgiveness of sin also is assured, Thus the reconciliation of God and man was brought about by Christ.

Forgiveness of sin

‘Sin’ in vaishnavism is termed as ‘vinai’. Two types of sins are mentioned in Vaishnavism. They are quoted by Aazhwaars as ‘Pazha vinai’, ‘Sarntha iru val vinai’, ‘Iru vinai’, ‘Irumai vinai’, etc.

“Paaramaaya pazha vinai parraruththu ennaiththan
Vaaramaakki vaiththaan; vaiththanri ennul pukunthaan
Kora mathavam seithanankol ariyeam”

“பாரமாய பழவினை பற்றறுத்து என்னைத்தன்
வாரமாக்கி வைத்தான் வைத்தன்றி என்னுள் புகுந்தான்
கோர மாதவம்செய் தனன்கொல் அறியேன்”⁴⁷

It is God who forgives our sins – both the ‘original sin’ and the ‘individual sin’ as is described in the above lines. ‘Kora maa thavam’ (கோர மாதவம்) is the expression of

crucifixion through which only the ‘Old sin’ (paara பார – maaya மாய pazhavinai பழவினை) was blotted out. Many other references are available in the Paasurams of Aazhwaars. We shall quote one reference from Gita. In the 18th chapter it says,

“Completely relinquishing all Dharmas, seek Me alone for refuge.
I will release you from all sins.”⁴⁸

A person cannot completely rely upon his own good deeds for the remission of his sins, because good deeds cannot remove all his sins. The devotee has to take refuge of the Lord who alone can forgive his sins. The above sloka also indicates one more aspect of ‘saranagati’ ie., salvation by faith. The following paragraphs shall elucidate this.

Sarangati

Bhagavad Gita 18:66 is the echo of the words of Jesus in the gospel of Mathew.

“Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”⁴⁹

Saranagati in Vaishnavism is explicitly termed as ‘prapathi’. Indira Parthasarathi writes:

“The only requisite for ‘prapatti’ is the change of heart on the part of the devotee and his absolute confidence in the saving grace of God.”⁵⁰

Sarnagati according to St. Paul is to surrender our sensory organs to God. His writings are worth mentioning here:

“Do not yield your members to sin as instruments to wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life and your members to God as instruments of righteousness.”⁵¹

Again to quote St. Paul’s Epistle to Galatians,

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”⁵²

Vaishnavism teaches us to have control over the sensory organs like a turtle which withdraws its organs. In another context, Gita tells:

“Who, controlling all the doors (senses), holding the mind within the heart, fixing his life – breath within the head, maintains himself instead concentration.”⁵³

Thenkalai school of thought proposes ‘Marjara’ type of surrender unto God – ie., like the kitten fully submits itself to its mother cat so that it can be taken away to any place the mother wishes. Vadakalai school suggests ‘Markata’ type of surrender unto the

Lord – ie., to cling on to the mother like the young one of the monkey. Both are required of a disciple of Jesus.

Sensory organs are the doors through them only the worldly desires enters into the mind and defiles the soul. The Lord always wishes to live in the hearts of every one because heart is the temple of God, thus explains Vaishnavism.

Kshetram and Kshetrajan

In ‘Periya Thiruvanthaathi’, Nammaazhwar sings that, ‘the dark- complexed Lord has made my heart His dwelling place and he would never leave me. And ‘vaikundam’ and Thiruppaarkadal have no relevance for me now’.⁵⁴ In another poem he refers to ‘Thirumaal’ as ‘the Lord living in the heart’ – என் நெஞ்சமே கோயில் கொள் தெய்வம் (En nenjamea koil kol theivam).

Bhagavad Gita discusses about ‘Kshetra’ and ‘Kshetrajan’ in the 13th chapter, There, the body of a person is termed as Kshetram (temple) and the one who dwells in it is the Kshetrajan (The Lord). In the Epistle, St. Paul mentions,

“Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” “For God’s temple is holy and that temple you are”⁵⁷

The same doctrine is further written in I Corinthians 6:19 and 2 Corinthian 6:16. Vedanta also has visualised that the heart is the ‘Brahma puram’ – the dwelling place of Brahma and therefore Vaishnavism emphasises to have universal brotherhood.

Universal brotherhood

This doctrine gives rises to universal brotherhood and humane love because when the Lord chooses the heart as his dwelling place, every person is considered as the temple of God and there can be no stratification or division in the name of caste or creed.

Thondaradippodi aazhwaar’s poem is a typical example to show the way for eradicating caste animosities. He sings:

Pazhuthilaa ozhuka laarrup palasathup pethi maarkal
Izhikulath thavar kale lellum emmadi yaarka laakil
Thozhumin neer kodumin kolmin enrum ninnodu okka
Vazhipada aruli naiponm mathilthiru arangath thaanea.

“பழுதிலா வொழுக லாற்றுப் பலசதுப் பேதி மார்கள்
இழிகுலத் தவர்க னேலும் எம்மடி யார்க ளாகில்
தொழுமின்நீர் கொடுமின் கொள்மின்! என்றும்நின் னோடு ஒக்க
வழிபட அருளி னாய்போன்ம்! மதிள்திரு அரங்கத் தானே”⁵⁸

Every one should follow the foot steps of Ramanuja, the revered seer of vaishnavism, to weed out caste discrimination as he did to the outcastes embracing them as Thiruk Kulaththaar. The humane love is the key-word gospel message of Jesus – ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’. 59

Vaishnavism propounds the negation of cycle of birth and instead it teaches ‘rebirth’, in Christian terminology, it is ‘born again Christian’; it distinguishes between the children of God and children of evil. Christian ideologies are thoroughly embedded in Vaishnavite theology and philosophy. However we must be cautious while handling the puranic renderings and other misinterpretations, distortions, interpolations etc. because there are religious fundamentalists and fanatics. An evangelist in India shall devote much of his time in equipping himself for the warfare as is described in the Epistles. Puranas are not historic and they are parables and the Vaishnavite theology has a different perspective. An evangelist in India shall be cautious that he shall not disturb the culture of the soil but shall find the proper way to present the gospel as a typical Indian.

- o 0 o -

-

References

1. James Kurikilankatt, First Voyage of Apostle Thomas to India, p. 10 f.n.
2. Hemachandra Roychaudhuri, Materils for the study of Early History of Vaishnava sect, p.80.
3. Ibid., p. 11
4. Exodus, 3:1-2
5. Exodus, 13:21-22
6. Exodus, 14:10-20
7. Exodus, 19:9
8. Exodus, 24:16
9. Exodus, 33:9-10
10. Exodus, 34:5
11. Exodus, 40:34
12. Exodus, 40:38
13. I Kings, 8:10
14. Devaneyan, G., Thamilar Matham, p.49.
15. Przulski, J., (i) Acts dn xviii e Congre’s internation des Orientalistes, 1931, p.154.
16. Deivanayagam, M., Viviliyam Thirukkural Saiva Siddhantam Oppaaivu, p. 127.
17. Bhagavad Gita, 4:9
18. Matthew, 1:23-25, Luke, 1:35
19. Vempeny, Ishanand, Krishna and Christ, p. 233, Pandey, P.K., The Concept of Avatars with special reference to Gita, P. 1
20. Naalaayira Thivyap Prabhandam, 763.
21. Srinivasachari, P.N., Visistadvaitam, Keezhai meali Nadukalin Meipporul Iyal Varalaru (Tamil Tr.), pp. 574-75.

22. Ibid., p. 561
23. Thiruk Kalirrup padiyar, 93
24. Naalaayira Thivyap Prabhandam, Thiruviruththam ,1
25. Bhagavad Gita, 4:7
26. Ibid., 4:8
27. Matthew, 13:41-42
28. Ibid., 13:43
29. Naalaayiram, 2336
30. Indira Parthasarathy, Vaishnavism in Tamil Literature between 7th and 9th Centuries, pp. 24-25.
31. John 1:14
32. Rainundo Panikkar, The unknown Christ of Hindusim, p. 159.
33. Naalaayiram, 1157
34. Ibid., p. 3198
35. Ibid., p. 2360
36. Ishanand Vempeny, Op. cit., p. 94
37. Naalaayiram, 1786
38. Ibid., p. 785
39. Ibid., p. 2685
40. Bhagava Gita, 8:4
41. Ibid., p. 9:16
42. Ibid., p. 9:24
43. Ibid., p. 4:25 (Sankara)
44. Ibid., p. 4:26 (Ramanuja)
45. Hebrews, 13:12
46. Ibid., 13:15-16
47. நானாயிரம் 931
48. Bhagava Gita, 18:66
49. Matthew, 11:28
50. Indira Parthasarathy, Op.cit., p.81
51. Romans 6:13
52. Galatians, 2:20
53. Bhagava Gita, 8:12
54. Naalaayiram, 3754
55. Ibid., p. 2913
56. Bhagava Gita, 13:1,2
57. I Corinthians, 3:16,17
58. Naalaayiram, 913
59. Matthew, 22:39

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aerthayil, J., : Spiritual Heritage of Thomas Christians, Bangalore, 1982.
- Manachery, George (Ed) : The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia of India, Vol. II, Trichur, 1973, Vol. I, Trichur, 1982.
- Arulappa, R., : Thirukkural and Its Central Thought, Meipporul Achagam, Madras - 23, 1990
- Baskara Doss. J. D., : Trinity in Indian Thought, NILT, Korattur, Chennai - 80, 2005.
- Baskara Doss. J. D., : Vaishnavism and Christianity, NILT, Korattur, Chennai - 80, 2009
- : The Holy Bible
- : Bhagavad Gita
- Deivanayagam, M, : Viviliyam Thirukkural Saiva Siddhantam Oppaivu, Meipporul Achagam, Madras - 23, 1997.
- : Naalaayira Thivyap Prabhandam, Thiruvengatathan Thirumanram (Ed.), Chennai, 1987.
- Indira Parthasarathy, : Vaishnavism in Tamil Literature between the 7th and 9th centuries, International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai - 113, 2002.
- Hemachandra Raychaudhuri, : Materials for the Study of Early History of Vaishnava sect, Oriental books Reprint Corp., New Delhi, 1975.
- Raimundo Panikkar, : The Unknown Christ of Hinduism, Asian Trading Corp., Bangalore, 1982.
- Ishanand Vempeny, : Krishna and Christ, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 1988.
- Varadachari, K.C., : Visistadvaita and Its development, Chakravarthy Pub., Tirupathi, 1969.