

DIVYA PRABANDHAM

(Part-1)

The ideology of *Sri: Vaishnavism* is authoritatively based on the *Ve:das* and *Na:la:yira Divya prabandham*. Most of the theistic schools of Indian philosophy have their roots in the *Ve:das*. However only *Sri Vaishnavism* the oldest theistic religion can claim to have its basis in both i.e. the *Ve:das* and *Na:la:yira Divya prabandham*. The four thousand hymns that were sung by the twelve God-intoxicated saints known as *A:lwa:rs* are collectively called *Na:la:yira Divya-prabandham*. ‘*Na:la:yira*’ means four thousand, ‘*Divya*’ means divine and *Prabandham* is defined as “*prakarshe:na badhna:thi ithi prabandhaha,*” which means that which captures Him (the Supreme Lord) is *prabandham*. *Prabandham* is also used to denote any good theistic literature composed by a great saint. According to the tradition the Supreme Lord Himself was captivated by these hymns, hence these hymns are called as *Divya prabandham*.

The Upanishads are paradoxical in nature. One cannot understand them easily. One has to exert with the guidance of a well-acquainted

spiritual preceptor to understand them in the right sense. However the *A:lwa:rs* have articulately revealed the quintessence of the Upanishads in their hymns. The Sanskrit-Vedas can be learnt only by a permitted few whereas the *Divya prabandhams* can be learnt by everyone. These hymns are in the regional language, hence they are easy to understand. The *Divya prabandhams* also evoke interest in a person who studies them. Hence the Upanishads are often equated to the sugarcane, which has to be relished with labor and the *Divya-prabandhams* are equated to the cane juice that can be relished without any exertion.

The *Divya prabandhams* might seem like devotional songs of any other saints like Jayadeva, Purandara da:sa, Mi:ra bai etc. However on the closer examination they expound the complex teachings of the Upanishads in a simple and easily understandable language i.e. Tamil. Hence they are also called as *Dra:vida Ve:da*. *Thiruva:y mozhi* the third portion of the *Divya prabandhams* has been equated to *Sa:ma Ve:da* by the *Vaishnava-A:cha:ryas*. *Thiruva:y mozhi* is also called as *Dra:vido: panishad*.

Brunda:van was initially a forest which was filled with thorny bushes. When Lord Krishna wanted to settle along with His tribe in *Brunda:van*, He transformed it into a prosperous province with lots of agricultural land and green pastures. Similarly the Lord transformed the *A:Iwa:rs* who were like any other materialistic human beings (as revealed by the *A:Iwa:rs* themselves) into great devotees. *A:Iwa:r* is the term used to imply those who dived deep into the ocean of love of the Supreme Lord. *A:Iwa:r* also means a savior. The *A:Iwa:rs* saved the mankind by propounding the most confidential spiritual knowledge in their hymns. By that they also saved the glory of the Lord from being decried by the heretics. They were the great mystics who had reached the zeniths of the ladder of devotion. *A:Iwa:rs* were great saints who were devoted to the Supreme Lord Vishnu. They spent their lives in the service of Lord Vishnu.

As said in the 10th verse of the 10th chapter of Bhagavad Gi:tha, the Lord blessed them with the required spiritual knowledge. They were blessed with intrinsic spiritual insight and utmost devotion to Lord Vishnu. The hymns of *Divya prabandham* are the spontaneous outpourings of the *A:Iwa:rs*. They are in a simple language yet filled with marvelous esoteric meanings. The *A:Iwa:rs* have expressed their mind through these hymns. They have glorified the

Supreme Lord and have expressed the various mellows in which they were with the Lord in these hymns. They have also established the supremacy of Lord Vishnu and have asserted the inadequacy of the other minor deities in their hymns. As the Supreme Lord bestowed the *A:Iwa:rs* the knowledge to sing about Him, these hymns are considered to be authoritative as the Vedic scriptures.

According to the tradition, the *A:Iwa:rs* are said to be the manifestations of various aspects of Lord Vishnu. However according to the *A:Iwa:rs* themselves, they were ordinary mortals and were like any other materialistic people. The Lord, out of His causeless mercy transformed them into great devotees. Even the *Pu:rva:cha:rya:s* are of the same opinion. The *Pu:rva:cha:rya:s* also say that, if, the Lord were to make His paraphernalia to incarnate and sing about Himself, He would not be considered as merciful. He would rather be termed as One who is fond of eulogy. In-fact He transformed the *A:Iwa:rs* who were ordinary mortals into great devotees out of His causeless mercy. Hence, the Lord's mercy is termed as causeless. Let us try to know more about the *A:Iwars* and their works in the coming issues of BHAKTHINIVEDANA.

