



PEARLS FROM THE PU:RVA:CHA:RYAS

Part-1

The most celebrated *SRI:VAISHNAVA samprada:ya* (tradition) originated from the universal mother 'Lakshmi' Herself. The twelve great saints known as *A:LWA:RS*, who are lesser in rank only to Her had incarnated on this planet. They expounded the most profound philosophical truths through their Hymns, in an easily understandable language. However due to the impact of the time, the sacred knowledge passed on by them was almost forgotten and the world was on the verge of going astray. Sri-Rangana:ttha muni, the first recognized *A:CHA:RYA* (spiritual master) made his advent on this planet under those circumstances. Sri-Ranganattha muni was named after Lord Ranganattha and was fondly called as *Na:ttha. Muni* was subsequently added to his name as he used to steadily contemplate on the Supreme Lord *Vishnu. Muni* means one who constantly thinks. Hence he is popularly called as *Na:tthamuni*. *Sri:Na:tthamuni* was the son of *I:swara-Bhattara:Iwa:r*. *Sri:Na:ttha muni* appeared in a village called *Govardhan*, which is in the southern part of the country. He latter moved on to *Vi:ra Na:ra:yanapuram*, which is otherwise called as *Thiru Ko:lu:r* and *Ka:ttumanna:r Koil*. *Vi:ra-Nara:yanapuram* is situated in-between *Thundi:ra*

mandalam and *Cho:la-mandalam* (i.e. near Chidambaram).

He was an ardent devotee of Lord Raja Manna:r (also called as Raja Gopala and Kattu Mannar), the presiding deity of that place. He was very pious in his practices. He went on a pilgrimage along with his father and son *I:swara-Muni* to the northern part of the country, with the consent of his adored deity. He visited various sacred places and finally reached the banks of river *Yamuna* i.e. the sacred land in which Lord Krishna enacted His childhood pastimes. Being captivated by the sanctimony and the natural beauty of that place, he decided to spend the rest of his life in that all sanctifying place. He started to reside in a cave on the sacred *Goverdhan* hill (even today one can find that cave, it is popularly called as *Na:tth-Guha*) and used to devotedly contemplate on the Lord. After some time Lord Raja-Manna:r appeared in his dream and asked him to return to *Vi:ra -Na:ra:yanapuram*. He reverentially accepted the divine command and returned to *Vi:ra-Na:ra:yanapuram*. He also visited many sacred places like *Aho:bilam* and *Thirumala* on the way. He was received with great regard by the residents of *Vi:ra Na:ra:yanapuram* and was taken in a grand procession in all the lanes of *Vi:ra-*

Na:ra:yanapuram. He was regarded as an honored resident of the town by the order of Lord Raja-Mannar. A grandson was born to him while he was staying on the banks of river Yamuna. Hence he named his grandson as Yamanai-thuraivar (who latter on became renowned as Ya:muna:charya). He started to spend his time in the service of the Lord Raja-Mannar.

He once visited *Kumbako:nam* while he was thus happily spending his time in the service of the Supreme Lord. There he chanced to listen to eleven nectarine hymns known *A:RA:VAMUDE:* from the sacred *THIRUVA:YMOZHI*, through some strangers. He was totally captivated by those songs. The concluding lines of the last hymn said, those who know these ten songs from the thousand sung by Satago:pan will reign with the eternal beings. Being captivated by the contents of the said hymns Na:tthamuni requested those strangers to sing all the thousand hymns. However those strangers expressed their ignorance about the rest of the songs. They further told him that one or the other might know them in *Kurugu:r*, the birth place of the great saint Satago:pan. Na:tthamuni who had an intense yearning to learn those songs immediately went to *Kurugu:r*. He earnestly searched for a person who could teach him the thousand songs composed by the saint. He could not find even a single person who knew about them. However he met

one Para:nkusa da:sa, a descendent of Madhura-kavi-a:lwar, who was a disciple of the said saint. Para:nkusa dasa taught Na:tthamuni *Kanninun-siruththa:mbu* (the eleven hymns that were sung in praise of his spiritual master by Madhura-kavi-a:lwa:r) and told him that, if one devotedly and uninterruptedly chants them twelve thousand times, in front of the deity of the said saint in *Kurugu:r*, the saint will appear to such a person and teach him all the thousand hymns.

Na:tthamuni was a very fervent seeker. He sat in front of the deity of the saint and chanted *Kanninun siruththa:mbu* twelve thousand times without a break. He did not stop even to sleep or eat until he chanted it twelve thousand times. As said by Para:nkusa-da:sa the saint started to speak through his deity form and taught all the thousand hymns to Na:tthamuni. He also learnt all the hymns that were sung by the rest of the A:lwa:rs, and the life history of all the A:lwa:rs, from the A:lwa:rs themselves in person, by the mercy of the saint Satago:pan. Thus Na:tthamuni was instrumental in revivifying the most invaluable compositions of the A:lwa:rs known as *Na:la:yira Divya-prabandham*. The strong devotion, determination and faith of Sri: Na:tthamuni are highlighted by this incident of his life. This article is dedicated to our worshipful *Pu:rva:cha:ryas*.

