

VAIṢṆAVISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Author: Dr.J.D.Baskara Doss

PAPER FOR PRESENTATION AT THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
THE HISTORY OF EARLY
CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

Date : 13th to 16th August, 2005.

Venue : CONCORDIA COLLEGE
BRONXVILLE
NEW YORK

VAIṢṆAVISM AND CHRISTIANITY

DR.J.D. BASKARA DOSS

Introduction

The advent of Christianity into India dates back to the middle of 1st c.A.D. which coincides with the arrival of St.Thomas, the apostle of Jesus Christ. It has been recorded in the history that Tamil Nadu carried out trade with the neighbouring countries both by land and sea. This helped the interaction with the people and the dissemination of the gospel of Jesus proclaimed by the ‘early’ missionaries in India. The origin and development of Tamil Bhakti Movement dates back not prior to the fifth century A.D. It may appear to be hypothetical that Christianity may have given rise to the origin of Vaiṣṇavism and other Indian religions. This proposition is taken up for a brief analysis in the following pages.

Origin of Vaiṣṇavism

As Dr.Keith observes in Journal of Royal Asiatic Society states that

“The first great theistic movement of India is that of Ramanuja. However precisely, at this point we are met with the fact that Christian religious influences are possible and even probable”.¹

Ramanuja lived in the 12th c.AD in Sriperumpudur in Tamil Nadu and he was the exponent of Visistādvaita. Eminent scholars like Weber, Seal, Macnicol, Kennedy have also pointed out the possibilities of the influence of Christianity on Vaiṣṇavism.

Hemchandra Raychaudhuri observes the account of Lassen in his book:

“Lassen concurs in the belief that some Brāhmanas became acquainted with Christianity in some country lying to the north of India and brought home some Christian doctrines. This he considers to be supported by:-

- a. The name of the White Island and the color of its inhabitants, so different from that of the Indians;
- b. The ascription to these people of the worship of Unseen God, while the Indians of the same period had images of their deities;
- c. The attribution to them of faith, the efficiency of which is not an ancient Indian tenet;
- d. The value attributed to prayer, which is a less important element in Indian than in Christian rites; and
- e. The fact that the doctrine which they learnt is described as one only made known to Indians at a late period.”²

‘Brahmanas’ in their opinion should refer to the Indians since the very name itself is of late origin in the sociological background. Lassen opines that Parthia was the country where the Indians met with Christian missionaries. Weber prefers Alexandria. According to Macnicol it probably refers to some Christian settlement to the north of India.

The above suppositions can be supported by the historical evidences of trade links that the Tamil country had with other parts of the world. In the time of the Roman Emperor Augustus there was a great development of India’s trade with Rome. The Roman Empire imported pearls, the costliest animal product and thousands of other materials from the gulf of Mannar. Madurai and Uraiyūr had the chief pearl marts from whence the Roman merchants got it.

P.T. Srinivas Iyengar writes that

“This trade grew to enormous proportion in the time of Claudius and Nero (54-68 A.D.) so that Pliny complained in 70 A.D. that India drained gold to the value of nearly a million pounds a year, “giving back her own wares, which are sold among us fully a hundred times their first cost.”³

Romans, Greeks, Arabians, and people from Palestine were commonly known as ‘Yavanas’ in the Sangam poetry. Mullaippāṭṭu, Cilappatikāram, Maṇimēkalai etc. record about the Romans who were employed by the Tamil emperors as their bodyguards and soldiers. Mullaippāṭṭu, describes them that the Yavanas were strong and terrible looking and they wore beside a coat, a long piece of cloth hanging low and with many folds in which they concealed the whip with which horses were whipped.

Mattikai Vaḷaiyia marinṭuviṅgu cerivuṭai
Meippai pukka veruvarun tōṛṛattu
Valipuṇar yākkai vaṅkaṇ yavanar.⁴

Therefore they acted as the gate-keepers of palaces and they were with dreadful swords, excellent guardians of the gates of the fort-walls.⁵

Millions of Roman coins were found in various parts of Tamil Nadu as well as in the north from Constantius upwards, increasing in the fourth and fifth centuries, and Constantine received an Indian Ambassador in the last year of his life, while Julian (aggressive in the East like Trajan before him) received Ambassadors from various oriental peoples, including Indian tribes.⁶

According to historians there was a Roman colony in Madurai. The author of Periplus says

“that from the southern part of the East coast, large vessels called Colandia, sailed to the Ganges and to Chryse

(probably Burma, then called Suvaṇṇabhūmi). There are imported into these places everything made into Damirike⁷, and the greatest part of what is imported at any time from Egypt comes here, together with all kinds of things that are brought from Damirike and of those that are carried through Paralia (Travancore Coast)”.⁸

In addition to the historical accounts there are numerous literary evidences in Tamil to show the migration of religious, philosophic ideologies etc. from either side, i.e., Tamil Nadu and adjacent countries with the help of foreign trade. In the recent past many scholars have evinced keen interest in the comparative study of Indian religion and philosophy who have dug out the hoary past of the advent of Christianity in India before the arrival of the Europeans.

St. Thomas in India

We infer a great deal of accounts about the activities of the apostles of Jesus Christ from the apocryphal writings. According to them it was decided by the disciples to go to different countries to preach the gospel and St. Thomas was commissioned to go to India. John Samuel enumerates historical documentations that are associated with St. Thomas in India. “They are:

- i) North Indian Tradition
- ii) Malabar Tradition and
- iii) Cholamandala (Coromandal) Tradition”.⁹

St. Thomas is connected with Gondapharus, a king of Taxila. Millions of coins issued by Gondapharus have been excavated and these historical findings have disproved the earlier notion that Gondapharus was a mythical personality. ‘Gospel of St. Thomas’ and ‘Acts of St. Thomas’ are the important books that tell about the apostolic mission of St. Thomas.’ The Acts of Judas Thomas’ a book written in Syriac language in 3c. AD. is held as the first

book which elaborates about the advent of Thomas in India and his mission. ‘Didascalia’ is another book in Syriac which tells that India had welcomed St. Thomas. Syrian poet St. Ephrem had composed many poems on St. Thomas. He had accounted for the martyrdom and burial of St. Thomas in India. The historical evidences assert the traditions linked with St. Thomas that he lived in Mylapore (Chennai) and used to preach the gospel in Little Mount and was skewered to death at St. Thomas Mount and was buried in Mylapore where the San Thome Basilica stands today.

Tamil traditions also hold that Mylapore was the birth place of Thiruvalluvar who composed ‘Thirukkural’. Some eminent scholars are of the opinion that Thiruvalluvar would have encountered St. Thomas and as a result Thirukkural reflects the Christian doctrines. Though there is no historical evidence to prove that Thiruvalluvar had met St. Thomas, scholars have unearthed ample internal evidences from Thirukkural to show that it is a Christian ethical literature. Thirukkural was instrumental for the development of the Bhakti Movement which in turn had given rise to Saivism and Vaiṣṇavism.

Etymology of the word Viṣṇu

The name Viṣṇu is a derivative of the Tamil word ‘Viṇ’ which means the sky. The letter ‘u’ is suffixed with the root word ‘Viṇ’ and is pronounced as ‘Viṇṇu’ in the spoken language like maṇ > maṇṇu. Devaneyan explains:

“that the Sanskrit word Viṣṇu is a corrupt form of the Tamil word Viṇ. This refers to the cloud as well as the sky and the word ‘Viṇṇu’ which is derived from the above also refers to Thirumāl”.¹⁰

Viṇ > Viṇṇu > Viṇṇu > Viṣṇu

Kambar employs the name Viṇṇu for Viṣṇu in his *magnum opus* Ramayana.

“Viṇṭu Kālināl aḷanta Vāṇa mukaṭṭaiyum”¹¹

J. Przyluski contends that the word is ‘pre-Aryan’ and that it should be connected with the non-Aryan ‘Viṇ’-(Sky). The puranas hold that the word means ‘who enters or pervades (viz. the Universe).’¹²

Vaiṣṇavism, a Dravidian Religion

Vaiṣṇavism is a religion of the Dravidians basically which originated from the background of the Tamils. Viṣṇu of Vaiṣṇavite religion is not a Vedic deity as is claimed by some scholars. Vedic Viṣṇu is the name of the Sun – the long strides which he takes, and the three steps by which he measures the universe, are always described with enthusiasm.¹³

The three strides of Viṣṇu are the rise, the zenith point and fall of sun. In Ṛg Vēda Viṣṇu appears as the comrade and helper of Indra and he was only “in the subordinate position”.¹⁴ Viṣṇu was a minor deity in the Vēdic pantheon and the Ṛg Vēda has referred to him merely as a ‘protector of cows’.¹⁵

Indira Parthasarathy observes that,

“Viṣṇu was, perhaps, one such god, who was ‘faintly heard’, during the Ṛg Vēdic period, but gained supremacy over the Aryan gods, because of His basic syncretistic character.”¹⁶

He further quotes a few foreign scholars to show that Viṣṇu is of a pre-Aryan origin.

“Scholars like Przyluski, Ruben and Kuiper have given linguistic evidences to prove the pre-Aryan origin of word Viṣṇu; and armed with this view, the present study approaches the subject in the background of Tamil literature, which substantiates the stand taken by the western scholars”.¹⁷

He holds pre-Aryan natives as Dravidians and he emphasizes that

“Vaiṣṇavism is a product of the Tamil soil”.¹⁸

It should be noted at this juncture that Nālayira Tivyap Prabantam is named as ‘Dravida Vēdam’ and Nammālvār’s pāsūrams are known as ‘Dravida Mābhāṣya’. The Tamil hymns of āḷwars were very significant for Ramanuja which, infact, helped him in developing Viṣiṣṭādvaitam and in spreading Vaiṣṇavism. The Vaiṣṇava bhakti movement consists of twelve āḷwars, all of them hailed from Tamil Nadu; They composed the Nālayiram pāsūrams in the Tamil language; Out of 108 ‘Divya dēsams’ (Temples) 96 are in Tamil Nadu; Viṣiṣṭādvaita the Vaiṣṇavite theology originated from Tamil Nadu and Dvaita another Vaiṣṇavite theology from Karnataka, a part of Dravidian state. All these are suffice to say that Vaiṣṇavism is a Dravidian religion.

Old Testament and Vaiṣṇavism

Hemchandra Raychaudhuri says:

“We have no evidence of the existence of a Vaiṣṇava sect in these early times. We should also note another important fact, namely, that there is very little inner connection between Vedic and Brāhmanic Viṣṇu worship and the Bhakti religion we call Vaiṣṇavism”.¹⁹

He therefore puts a question:

“If the Vedic or Brahmanic accounts of Viṣṇu worship do not furnish any clue to the origin of Vaiṣṇavism as we know it, what is its source?”²⁰

The scholars who undertake Indological studies normally tend to trace those aspects in the Aryan Vedas and they feel much comfortable to say that they are Vedic or Brāhmanical. But only a handful of scholars surge ahead to surpass these types of inclination and compare it with ‘other’ religious tenets and their origins.

Siva is the Supreme God according to Saivism. The other nomenclatures for Siva are ‘Tīvaṇnan’, ‘ceṇṭaḷalōn’, ‘cēyon’ etc. are associated with fire. In the Old Testament God appeared to Moses in the form of fire only, when he came to Horeb from the wilderness.²¹ Later on when Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain and

“Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire”.²²

In the same way the source of Viṣṇu may be traced in the Old Testament. The Old Testament tells that God exhibited His valour, might, power and grace in the forms of ‘pillar of fire’ and ‘pillar of cloud’. When the people of Isreal were led out of captivity from Egypt, God led their way in the pillar of fire during night and by the pillar of cloud during day.²³ It is mentioned in the Bible that God descended in the cloud.

“And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord”.²⁴

God used to speak to Moses in the tabernacle from the pillar of cloud.

“as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses”.²⁵

It is evident from the Biblical passages that God encountered Moses and Israelites in the form of ‘pillar of fire’ and ‘pillar of cloud’.

This is how the perception of God is depicted in the religious literature in Tamil.

As Lord Siva is mentioned with the epithet ‘Aḷalvaṇṇan’ and ‘Tīvaṇṇan’, so Lord Viṣṇu has the epithet as ‘Mēgavaṇṇan’, ‘Mēgan’ etc. Māṇikkavacagar hails the Lord as

“Karu mā muhilil tōṇri”²⁶

“Aṇṭat taṇṭumperaṇ mēgan vāḷka”²⁷

‘Māyōn’ is mentioned as the pastoral deity in Tolkāppiyam and in his commentary Nacciṇārkkīṇiyar interprets the word ‘māyōn’ as ‘one who has the complexion of sea’.²⁸ His complexion is indicated as ‘māya vaṇṇan’ in Patirruppattu,²⁹ while Siva is conceived as having the complexion of red, Viṣṇu is conceived as having the complexion of blue, sky-colour; dark etc. This conception of Dravidian thought has given rise to the prominent avatars of Viṣṇu like Rama and Kṛṣṇa who are invariably picturised in blue or with dark complexion.

A close survey of the Caṅkam literature clearly shows that the names Sivan, Sivam and Viṣṇu do not occur and they are a later conception founded in the era of Christ. The origin and development of the Tamil Bhakti Movement is traced only during the 5th c. A.D. and the major religions like Saivism and Vaiṣṇavism are the outcome of the Bhakti movement. Since the later part of the 20th Century many contemporary scholars have come out with a new finding that the gospel of Jesus Christ only had propelled the origin of the Bhakti Movement to gain momentum with the cultural background of the Dravidians. Their findings are not superfluous but are based on indepth analysis with historical and comparative approach. The ensuing analysis with special reference to Vaiṣṇavism shall throw much light to reveal the fact that Christianity and Vaiṣṇavism are not different entities but are founded on the same dogmatic tenets.

Viṣṇu and Holy Spirit

Western theologians normally accept the fact that it is a Himalayan task to explain the doctrine of Trinity. The church history reveals that it had constituted many councils to formulate the Trinitarian theology.

In 325 A.D. the council of Nicea promulgated an official formula known as Nicean Creed and this council took place in the context of Arian controversy. To cite another formula promulgated by the First Council of Constantinople in 381 A.D. where the nature of the Holy Spirit is explained rather elaborately.³⁰

The Indian conception of Trimurti or the Triune God is explained with mythological stories. Brahma, Viṣṇu and Siva are the Trimūrtis among whom Viṣṇu, the ‘god of preservation’, is interpreted as a male god and a female god by two different denominations viz. Vaiṣṇavism and Saivism. The concept of ‘Arthanāri’ is the combination of Siva and Sakti, i.e., half male and half female. The Tamil word ‘Sakti’ is translated in English as spirit. For the Saivites, Sakti is the female form and for the Vaiṣṇavites it is the male form and hence they call it by the name Viṣṇu.

Maraimalai Adikal emphatically writes:

“There were not much differences between Saivism and Viṣṇavism till 8th.C. AD. during the period of the Saivite saints and first two āḷwars and people of both the religions were worshipping both Siva and Viṣṇu”.³¹

The Tamil proverb

“Ariyum Civamum oṇṇu
Aṛiyār vāyil maṇṇu”

was very popular among the common people of Tamil Nadu in these days. The masculine name ‘Aran’ for Siva was employed as ‘Ari’ to refer to Viṣṇu in the feminine gender and further was corrupted as ‘Hari’ with Sanskrit sabdam. The poem of Peiāḷwar in Mūṇṇāṁ Tiruvaṅtāti is worth its mention here:

Tāḷsaṭaiyum nēḷmuṭiyum oṇmaḷuvum cakkaramum
 Cūḷaravum poṇṇāṇum tōṇṭumāl – cuḷum
 Tiraṇṭaruvi pāyumu tirumalaimēḷ entaikku
 Iraṇṭuruvum oṇṇrai icaiṇṭu.³²

Poikai, one among the three early aḷwars, also sang in the same manner.

Pontikaḷum mēṇip puricaṭaiem puṇṇiyaṇum
 Niṇṭulakat tāya netu mālum – eṇṭum
 Iruvarankaṭṭal tirivarēnum oruvaṇ
 Oruvaraṅkat teṇṇrum uḷan.³³

Kāraikkāl Ammaiṅār in her Arṇputattiruvantāti sings:

“Orupāl ulakaḷanta Mālavaṇṇām marṇrai
 Orupāl umaiyavaḷām eṇṇrāl – irupālum
 Niṇṇuru vamāka niraṇṭeriyā māṭṭēmāl”

Sambantar also mentions in the following manner,

“Ariyālāl tēvi illai ayyanaiṅāra nārṅkē”

in Tēvāram.

Maraimalai Adikal observes that we never come across any poem composed by Poikaiāḷwar and Peiāḷwar discrediting Siva. The later aḷwars like Tirumaṅkai, Tirumaḷicai and

Nammāḷvar only had attempted to degrade Siva in their poems. He observes further that this trend had been set in motion after 8th C.A.D. after the Purāṇās were fabricated by the Brahmins with an ulterior motive of disintegrating the Tamils and to estrange the Saivites and the Vaiṣṇavites.³⁴ Lord Siva is considered as the ‘God of Sūdras’ even to this date.

‘The mythological suppositions about Siva, Sakti, Viṣṇu, Murukan, Pillaiyār, Brahman and Ayyappan have been rationalized with theological propositions – Siva as God the Father, Sakti and Viṣṇu as the Holy Spirit, Murukan Pillaiyar, Brahman and Ayyappan as God the Son. According to Christianity, Mary was conceived by the Holy Spirit which had given room to treat the Holy Spirit as male. The rationalization as how to engender the Holy Ghost in the Dravidian conception was the result of treating ‘Sakti’ as a female by the Saivites and a male (Viṣṇu) by the Vaiṣṇavites in the six-fold religion.³⁵ The Trinitarian dogma in the Indian background was proliferated into the sixfold religion and the different names of God gave an impression to the minds of the common people as a pantheon of gods. A close analysis of the above study has shed more light on the understanding of the Trinitarian dogmatic theology in the Indian context.

Trinity in Vaiṣṇavism

It has been outlined in the previous paragraphs how Viṣṇu was mythicized as a person of Trinity. A deeper analysis of Vaiṣṇavite dogmatics reveal much more about the Triune God and His nature. The divine Godhead is an infinite personality for all perfections are in Him. He is the embodiment of love and perfection and in Him there is neither imperfection nor cruelty. Because of His supreme love He was born in this world as a human being and had imparted the perfect ways to the human beings and he himself had set an example.

The basic three tattvas of Vaiṣṇavism are cit, acit and Īswara. Acit (non-sentient) constitutes the body of cit, and Īswara has as His body cit (sentient) and acit together. These three never perish and depend on each other for their relevance and existence.

Trinity in the poems of āḷvars are lucidly expounded. A few of them are given below:

“Mūvaril Yeñkaḷ mūrti”³⁶

“Mūvarākiya Oruvaṇai”³⁷

“Mutalāvār mūvarē”³⁸

“Mūvarakiya mūrti”³⁹

Ōruruvam poṇṇuruvam; Oṇṇu ceṇṭē

Oṇṇumā kaṭṭal uruvam ottuniṇṇa

Mūvuruvuum kaṇṭapō tonṇām cōti

Mukiluruvam emmaṭṭikal uruvaṇṭānē”⁴⁰

These are comprehended in the Vaiṣṇavite theology as ‘Mūrti Bhedās’ or the forms of the Supreme God. It emphasizes that these forms of God are to be known and realized for the purpose of an integral knowledge.

K.C. Varadachari writes:

“God is not only Transcendent (Para). He is also the God who is the creator, sustainer and destroyer – redeemer, the Lord of all processes and ruler of all the categories (Vyuhas). He is the indwelling self (antaryāmi) of all souls and Nature. He is in addition to these triunity or trinity (of Absolute, God and Self) the Historically descending Godhead for the redemption and rescue of saints and good men and for the establishment of righteous (dharma) and annihilation of adharmā and evil (Avatār). These four poises of the Absolute, who is God and self and Avatār, are true and perfect and make God what He is. And in addition Sri Ramanuja intimated a fifth poise known to the Mystics to whom the Divine in His infinite compassion reveals Himself in an effulgent form for worship and adoration (arca).”⁴¹

The following five forms of God are explained in the above analysis.

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|------------------------------|
| 1. Para Swarupa | - | Transcending Form |
| 2. Vibhava Swarupa | - | Incarnated Form |
| 3. Vyūha Swarupa | - | Emanated Form (Grouped Form) |
| 4. Arcāvatāra Swarupa | - | Adorable Form |
| 5. Antaryāmi Swarupa | - | Immanent Form |

Though five forms have been enumerated here basically they are the explanation of the triune nature of God. It is explained:

“Para Swarupa signifies the Almighty of Omnipotence and Omnipresence – the form of Creator that surpasses everything. Vibhava is the incarnated form of God and Arca is the Adorable form, the iconic representation which signifies the Lord who came into this world embodied Himself as a human being for the salvation of the world. Vyūha concept was introduced during the Puranic Age for the purpose of deifying the mythical heroes. The members of the Vrishni family were thus deified in the North India. So, Vyūha, Vibhava and Arca are to be clubbed as one which invariably expounds the doctrine of incarnation only”.⁴²

The formulation of the Vyūha concept basically the worship of the heroes and kings which were prevalent after 1st c.A.D.had paved the way for apotheosizing them, as a consequence these personalities were adorned with godliness and the ingredients of divinity. Suvira Jaiswal says that it has been accepted, after analyzing certain inscriptions which are associated with Vyūha concept, are later than 1st c.A.D.⁴³

The analytical condensation of the five forms of the One Supreme God in Vaiṣṇavism is analogous with Saivism and Christianity. The following table illustrates this.⁴⁴

Trinity

| | | | |
|-----------|-----------|--|------------------------|
| Trinity | Saivism | Vaiṣṇavism | Christianity |
| Formless | Param | Para Swarupam | God the Father |
| With Form | Aparam | Vibhava Swarupam Vyuha Swarupam Arcāvatāra Swarupam | God the Son |
| Semi Form | Paraparam | Antaryāmi | God the Holy Spirit |

In the course of its development Vaiṣṇavism had assimilated the worship of the Sātvatas, Bhagavatās, Pāncarātra, Kṛṣṇa cult, sectarian worships etc. into its stream. To cite an example, the Varaha – worship was prevalent and was popular in the Gupta period. This type of sectarian worship was blended with the doctrine of trinity. D.A.G. Rao points out that Varaha Avatara of Viṣṇu consists of three forms viz. Bhuvanāhā or Āti Varāhā, Yajña Varāhā and Pralaya Varāhā.⁴⁵ Āti Varāhā connotes the beginning – Ātimūlam (Creator), Yajña Varāhā is the sacrificial form – Jesus was the historical sacrifice and Pralaya Varāhā signifies the spirit of God.⁴⁶

Scholars have pointed out that the doctrine of Trinity in Indian religions was the outcome of the Christian doctrine. An eminent scholar points out:

“The outstanding contribution of Christianity to this world is the doctrine of Triune God. The invisible God in the ‘Arūpa’ state was born in this world as a man with five sensory organs and showed the path of righteousness to the human beings. It was due to the spirit of God, who was the embodiment of grace, God came into this world as an earthly

babe and it was due to this spirit the humanity could be united with God who descended into this world as a Guru.”⁴⁷

Naturally the Triune God of Vaiṣṇavism is based on the Triune God of New Testament and this “Trinitarian revelation seems to indicate that reality is fundamentally neither one nor many but one in many and many in one”.⁴⁸

Avatar and Incarnation

The Sanskrit term ‘avatar’ is a compound word with the prefix ‘ava’ and the verb ‘tar’

“Ava+tar = Avatar

‘Ava’ is the prefix which means down; and

‘tar’ coming down, the process of coming down”.⁴⁹

Ishanand Vempeny writes:

“Avatāra is a compound word consisting of the prefix ‘ava’ which means down, away etc. and the verbal root ‘ṭr’ which means to save, to carry across or beyond. ‘Avatara’ is then rightly translated by ‘descent’ and the one who descends is called Avatāri, Avatārin and often in worth simply by the term Avatār”.⁵⁰

‘Incarnation’ is derived from the Latin verb ‘incarnari’ and is formed by the terms ‘in’ which means in, into and ‘caro’ which means flesh. English dictionary gives the meaning for incarnation as enfleshment.

“Incarnation – to be made flesh.

In – in and caro

carnis – flesh.

Incarnation is a Latin derivative; the verb ‘incarnari’ means enfleshment.”⁵¹

In the early days, the term incarnation was used to refer to the birth of Jesus Christ. The Oxford Universal Dictionary explains:

“The Incarnation – the earliest sense – In early use often in reference to the date of birth of Christ”.⁵²

The Webster’s dictionary’s explanation with regard to incarnation is noteworthy – (i) “the endowment with human body; appearance in human form; (ii) taking on of human form and nature of Jesus conceived of as ‘Son of God’.”⁵³

Scholars have enumerated many terms which have been used to refer to the concept of ‘avatār’ – ‘pradhurbava’, ‘vibhava’, ‘Divyamjanma’ (Gita) etc. A few authors like Rudolf Otto, H.H. Farmer, Aldous Huxley have dealt with avatārs and incarnation and have commented about their similarities and dissimilarities. Many scholars believed that the Aryan Vedas were the most ancient religious writings and they only had given birth to the ideologies of Hindu religion: In fact Vedas do not belong to the Indian soil and the pantheon of gods of the Aryan Vedas are alien to the people of India. In this context Sesha Iyengar observes that it would be appropriate to call the Indian religion as Dravidian religion and the gods of Hinduism namely Siva, Kṛṣṇa, Rāmā and Durgā are unknown to the Vedas; and the Vedas are not adumbrated with the concept of avatar.⁵⁴

In fact the concept of avatar is the centrality of Vaiṣṇavism. There is no consistency as far as the number of avatars of Viṣṇu is concerned. A few later texts, many of them of the Pāñcarātra school have been at pains to fix the number of avatārs which gradually came to be stereotyped as ‘ten’ (Dasavataras). Jitendra Nath Banerjea says:

“The Nārāyaṇīya section of the Mahābhārata refers in one list (XII, 349, 37) to the Varaha, the Vāmana, the Narasiṃha and the ‘Man’ incarnations. The human incarnations refer, no doubt, to Vāsudēva – Kṛṣṇa, Bhārgava Rāma and Dāsarathi Rama, for in Chapter 389 (Verses 77-90) of the same section not only the stories about the first three in the list given above are briefly narrated, but also those about his incarnations as Bhārgava Rāma (Parasurāma), Dāsarathi Rama and Vāsudeva - Kṛṣṇa are recounted. But the fullest list of incarnations in Verse 104 of the same Chapter.”⁵⁵

He observes further that the,

“Bhāgavata Puraṇā enumerates the Avatars thrice; in the first recounting (I.3, 6-22), the number is 22, in the second (II.7, 1 ff), 23, and in the third (IX.4, 3 ff.), 16.”⁵⁶

“The Matsyapurāṇa (Ch. 47 v, 46) lays down that Viṣṇu was born seven times among men because he was cursed by Bhṛgu for killing his wife, the mother of Sukra”.⁵⁷

The account given by Matsyapurāṇa is interesting because the concept of avātar suffers by its doctrinal construction. The rebirth theories of Buddhism and Jainism probably had given birth to such mythologizing which had not even spared the ‘so-called’ Supreme God Viṣṇu to bear the brunt of the curse. Perhaps Viṣṇu was not elevated to the Supreme state at this point of time. Schrader had attempted to identify many of these avatars on the basis of Purāṇic and other enumerations.

It has also been pointed out,

“some of the later saṃhitās like Ahirbudhanya and Visvaksena distinguish between primary (mukhya) and secondary (gauṇa, āveśa) Avatars. The latter says that the primary ones are like flame issuing from a flame (Viṣṇu himself with aprākṛta body), while the secondary ones are souls in bondage with a prākṛta body which is possessed (āviṣṭa) for some particular mission or function by Sakti of Viṣṇu”.⁵⁸

The process of permutation and combination in the avatar theory had given room for bewilderment in the religious scenario of India. In Vaiṣṇavism the creation of the universe is related with ‘Yugāvatārs’. Krēta, Trēta, Tvāpara and Kali are the four Yugās. Bhagavad Gita says:

“Restoring to my Prakriti, I again and again send forth the whole multitude of beings, powerless under the control of Prakriti”.⁵⁹

Another constituent of avatar concept is Kalāvatāra. ‘Kala’ in Sanskrit means a part of the whole. ‘Kala’ may vary from avatar to avatār and according to the increase in the number of ‘Kala’ that avatār is construed as superior to the other avatārs. These types of variance at the hands of the myth-makers ended up in corruption to the core.

Purpose of Avatar and Incarnation

Redemption is the central motive of divine incarnation. While commenting on Visiṣṭāitva, 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 unite with His devotee’.⁶⁰ He further writes that ‘Īsvara descends into this world and redeems the mankind and He restores the lost soul’.⁶¹

Vaiṣṇavism expounds that it is out of love and abundant grace of God, He wants to descend among the mundane world as a man to live amongst the human beings and to restore the lost glory.

Gita says:

“Yata Yata hi dharmasya glanir pavati Bharata
Abhyuttānam adharmasya tadhāmānam sṛjamyahaṃ”⁶²

(Whenever there is a decline of Dharma, O Arjuna, and uprising of Adharma, then I incarnate myself).⁶³

In the next verse the Gita says:

“Paritrāṇāya sāthunāṃ vinachaya dhuśkṛtam
Dharmasamstāpa nartāya sambavami yuge yuge”⁶⁴

(For the protection of the good and also for the destruction of the wicked, for the establishment of Dharma, am I born from age to age).⁶⁵

The uprising of Adharma is the cause for God’s incarnation (Gita IV.7); the annihilation of the wicked is the next motive and also the purpose of the incarnation is to protect the good and the last element of avatara is to establish dharma.

It is clearly earmarked in the avatar doctrine that ‘the goal becomes the guide so as to liberate the mankind.

Ishanand Vempeny writes:

“He is not only the way but also the ‘Vehicle’ and this is the central purpose of avatara. Otherwise it is difficult to

understand the intimate connection the Lord points out between his ‘janma-karma’ and man’s salvation”.⁶⁶

Aurobindo has built up his theory of man’s ascent through the divine descent. It is through the expression ‘madbhavamagatah’ of the Gita, Aurobindo has mainly relied on the verses 4:9-11 of the Gita. The human ascent does not refer to the rising of human to the supreme state of God but it conveys a vital position of the humanity, which hitherto was suffering in a state of captivity, was liberated from its sinful nature and the Divine descent has endowed the humanity with a new nature to live in bliss with God Himself. Indeed this is the real ascension of man unlike Sankara’s advaitic philosophy of ‘Aham Brahmasmi’.

According to Christians, Jesus Christ in his very being and mission is ‘Saviour’. This is what the name Jesus precisely means. God conveyed the name Jesus to Mary through Gabriel even before Jesus was conceived.⁶⁷ The fundamental idea behind Christian salvation is that every man is born in bondage to sin so he cannot liberate himself without divine intervention. It is because of the disobedience of Adam, the whole of his descendants (generations) were cursed-

“I will put enmity between you and the women,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel”.⁶⁸

The above verse indicates that ‘her seed’-the mankind as a whole shall be cursed but the second part of the verse promises about the redemption-‘he shall bruise your head’.

St. John calls Jesus Christ as the ‘saviour of the the world’.⁶⁹ Both God the Father and Son Jesus Christ are designated by St. Paul as ‘saviour’.⁷⁰ It is obvious that salvation according to the New Testament is achieved by God’s own initiative through Christ.

The prayer of Nammālvār lucidly elucidates why God had incarnated in this mundane world thus:

Poinniṅṅa ṅānamuṅ pollā oḷukkum aḷukkuṭambum
 Inniṅṅa nirmai iniyām uṟāmai uyir aḷippān
 Enniṅṅa Yōniyu maippiṟan tāi,imai yortalaivā
 Meinniṅṅu Kēṭṭaru lāiadi yēnceyyum viṅṅappamē.”⁷¹

The phrase ‘uyir aḷippān’ signifies ‘to give a lease of life’-and Nammālvār praises the incarnated God had taken birth not only to redeem the mankind but to put an end to the recurrence of this state (Ini yām uṟāmai).

It may be out of context here to deal with the stories of Dasāvātara. However all these mythologies are interwoven with the main theme of salvation – to redeem earth (Matsya, Kūrma, varaha etc.) and to give salvation to mankind (Vāmana, Narasimha, Kṛṣṇa etc.). The celestial avatar Kalki is regarded as the future avatar like the second coming of Jesus in Christianity. The apocalyptic writings in the Book of Revelation visualizes about the ‘Word of God’ (Jesus) was seated upon an white horse⁷² and “the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God, the Almighty.”⁷³ The inclusion of the historical personality, the Buddha in Dasāvātāra was done with an ulterior motive of eradicating it from the Indian soil. S. Radhakrishnan writes:

“When the Brahminical inculcated universal love and devotion to God and proclaimed Buddha to be the avatar of Viṣṇu the death knell of Buddhism was sounded.”⁷⁴

In the same way there was a futile attempt to include Jesus Christ as an avatar of Viṣṇu. Salvation being the central aspect of avatar doctrine, it is related to sin or bondage and

release or Mukti. In the ensuing lines we shall try to analyse these points in the line of Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity.

Bondage (sin)

According to Bagavad Gita, a constituent of Vaiṣṇavite scriptures, the ‘jīvātman’ is the ‘amsa’ of the Lord. But it is different from saying that this ‘amsa’ is the total reality that the ‘Paramātman’ is. Bagavad Gita affirms real distinction between ‘jīvātman’ and ‘Paramātman’. The Bible tells that man was created in the image of God.

“God created man in the image of himself, in the image of
God he created him male and female he created them.”⁷⁵

It is this ‘image’ (in the Bible) and ‘amsa’ (in the Gita makes the relationship of man with God. Gita also affirms that man is constitutionally in bondage, born in bondage. This in Saiva Siddhānta is termed as ‘sakaja malam’-the sin that clings on to a person from his birth. The theologians of the New Testament call it as ‘original sin’ or ‘Adam’s sin’. But neither Saivism nor Vaiṣṇavism elaborates how and when this bondage came into being.

The Āḷvars make references to this aspect of bondage in their hymns.

“Pāramāya paḷavinai paṛṛaruttu ennaittan
Vāramākki Vaittān vaittaṅṅi ennuḷ pukuntān
Kōra mātavam ceitanankol lariyēn Arankattammān tiru
Āramāvatu aṅṅō āṅkoṅṅātē”⁷⁶

“Piṛavittuyaraṅa ṅānattuḷ niṅṅu”⁷⁷

“Cārṅṅa iruval vinaikaḷum
carittu māyap paṛṛaruttu”⁷⁸

“Tol vinai tīralārum”⁷⁹

“Perumaiyuṭaiya pirānār – irumai vinai kaḷivarē”⁸⁰

It is significant for our study about ‘Iru valvinai’, ‘irumai vinai’ that we come across in the above poems. It is usual for the commentators to give the meaning for the above terminology as ‘Nal vinai’ and ‘Tīvinai’. If it is accepted as ‘nalvinai’ and ‘tīvinai’ we will be confronted with the flow of ideologies of Tiruvaḷḷuvar.

Tiruvaḷḷuvar writes in his kuṛal:

“Iruḷcēr iruvinaiyum cērā lṛaivan
Poruḷcēr pukaḷpuriṅtār māḷtu.”⁸¹

‘Iruḷ’ in Tamil is conceived as hell. It is acceptable to hold that ‘tīvinai’ shall propel a person into the hades but how would it be correct if we hold that ‘nalvinai’-the good deeds also shall lead him into hell? Now the scholars have given a new interpretation for ‘iruvina’ which means the ‘original sin’ and the ‘individual sin’.

The original sin is pointed out by the terms ‘paḷa vinai’, ‘piṛavittuyar’, ‘tol vinai’ etc. Philosophy uses the words ‘avidya’, ‘ajñāna’, neiscience etc. to refer to the above sin. Bhagavad Gita says:

“Ajñānēna jñanam āvṛtam”⁸²

(Knowledge is covered with ignorance).

Gita uses the word ‘jamma bhandam’⁸³ for the original sin. This ‘janma bhandam’ is usually misinterpreted as ‘rebirth’. As has been pointed out earlier the concept of ‘rebirth’ is a belief propounded by the atheistic philosophies of Buddhism and Jainism. The other bondage according to Gita is ‘karma bhandam’⁸⁴ or ‘karma bhandanam’.⁸⁵

Since Adam rebelled against God by the act of his disobedience he was cursed and in him the whole creation was also cursed and man was disinherited by Him. God did not abandon man to his own fate but promises him victory. It is pointed out:

“According to the New Testament, if Adam disfigured God’s image by his sin, Christ the “second Adam” would reconstitute the image through a new creation (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:45-49). According to the NT Christ is the image par excellence of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:2) and by union with him man’s image, distorted by sin, is made whole.”⁸⁶

The saving grace of God is expounded, we can say, in the mythology of Lord Siva consuming poison, Lord Viṣṇu taking ‘kūrmāvatāra’ while the ocean of milk was churned in order to get elixir and the suffering Bhodisatvā. The doctrine of ‘Vēhi’ and ‘kāmāri rūpa’ in Saivism reveal the ‘suffering God’ mainly to liberate the mankind.

The complex process of other type of bondage is explained in Gita II. 62-63.

“To a man thinking about sense-objects there arises attachment to them; from attachment arises desire, from desire arises anger; from anger there comes delusion; from delusion, the loss of memory, the destruction of discrimination; and with the destruction of discrimination, he is lost.”⁸⁷

The fruits of sinful behaviour of the individuals are obvious and they have to be abandoned with the help of God because according to the āḷvār God Himself is the medicine with which the ‘vinai’ (bondage) will be cured- ‘Vinaiyēn vinai tīr maruṅtānāi’⁸⁸

‘Vinaitīr maruṇtu’ is a metaphorical expression in the religious background and it has a thematic proximity with ‘Tavam’. According to Thiruvalluvar ‘tavam’ means,

“Tannuyir tāṇṇarap peruta!”⁸⁹

‘Tavam’ in Tamil religious literature connotes ‘sacrifice’. It cannot be equated with the penance of the sages who undertake it for personal gains. The divine penance excels the human efforts and it surpasses self-centredness-the Lord of Creation of this universe empties Himself of the heavenly glories and chooses the path of suffering so as to redeem the mankind. This suffering aspect of salvific function and the sacrifice of the incarnate God is known as ‘tavam’. To quote from Saiva Siddhānta,

‘Aimpula vēṭarin ayarṇṇai vaḷarṇṇat
Tammatal Guruvu māi tavattinil uṇartta!”⁹⁰

The first line of the above aphorism conveys that God incarnated as a human being and He came as a guru and the next line emphasizes that He taught the mankind through the act of His ‘tavam’ which means His sacrifice. This aspect is conveyed through the lines of āḷṅkar quoted above elsewhere,

“Pāramāya paḷavinai paṭṭaruttu ennaittaṇ
.....
Kōra mātavam ceitaṇṇa!”⁹¹

This ‘mātavam’ has an epithet of ‘Kōra’ which means great suffering and it refers to the sacrifice of God so as to redeem the people from the fetters of ‘pāramāya paḷavinai’-the original sin.

Bhakti

Bhakti implies the conception of the deity as a person with whom man can have relationship; it is infact a personal relationship with God. The nature of bhakti is love which culminates in direct communion with the divine. Friedhelm Hardy puts bhakti this way:

“This bhakti, a completely unintellectual devotion, a continuous flow of emotional religiosity ... animated the religious life of the Vaiṣṇavas, eversince it had founded its superb expression in the poetry of Gita.”⁹²

The Supreme God loses His transcendence and formlessness and descends as a human being with a view to have relationship with man. Now bhakti comes into its own as love within a personal relationship between man and God. This love of God for man is portrayed by St. John in his gospel as,

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life”.⁹³

In bhakti it is the love of God which plays the primary role that makes the man to reciprocate with love, humility and reverence. In the doctrine of avatar the dual phenomenon of divinity blended with humanity is exhibited. Therefore it is required of everybody to love God as well as to love the fellow men. When the Pharisees came to Jesus and a lawyer put a question about the great commandment; Jesus said to him,

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

“This is the great and first commandment.”

“And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”⁹⁴

Bhakti is not the devotion or love that is shown to God alone but to translate that love into action. We shall cite here the observation of Vempeny:

“the bhakti advocated in the Bhagavad Gita is essentially surrender to God with the totality of one’s person, with one’s body, mind and heart.”⁹⁵

In addition to bhakti the āḷvars have introduced a new path known as ‘prapatti’.

Prapatti

In the observation of Indira Parthasarathy,

“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.”⁹⁶

F. Hardy points out that ‘prapatti’ is an alternative to bhakti.

“In fact Srivaiṣṇavism makes it quite clear that bhakti is the strenuous affair of Yoga exercises, and introduces an ‘easier’ alternative prapatti, ‘surrender in love’.”⁹⁷

Bhakti and Prapatti are not the basic doctrines of Vedic worship. Hemchandra Raychandhuri observes:

“The idea of a God of Grace, the doctrine of Bhakti-these are the fundamental tenets of the religion termed Vaiṣṇavism. But

they are not very conspicuous in Vedic-Brāhmaṇic Viṣṇu worship. Viṣṇu in Brāhmaṇic texts is more intimately connected with ‘yajña’ than with Bhakti or Prasāda.”⁹⁸

The ideology of ‘prapatti’ or complete surrender to God is exemplified with the help of two similies. According to Vaṭakalai Vaisnavites, just as the young one of the monkey, how it catches hold of its mother the devotee should catch hold of God through his own efforts. This ‘monkey theology’ is ‘markaṭa nyāya’. The other one is to surrender oneself unto the Lord like a kitten how it commits itself to its mother to be carried away where ever the cat wishes to carry its offspring. This ‘cat theology’ is advocated by the Teṅkalai Vaiṣṇavites.

According to Visiṣṭādvaita, the sum total of Vaiṣṇavism is prapatti. In Gita we read,

“mām ekam saraṇam vraja ... mā sucaḥ!”⁹⁹

(Come to me alone for refuge. Do not worry!)

Tirumaḷicai āḷvar in Tiruccantaviruttam sings,

“ninraṇakku aṭaikkalam pukuntav enṇai añcal enṇa
vēṇṭumē”¹⁰⁰

F. Hardy writes,

“Aṭaikkalam and śaranāgati will be synonyms of
‘prapatti’.”¹⁰¹

The verse of Matthew is echoed in the Gita quoted above. Jesus said,

“come to me, all who labour and are heavy-ladden, and I will
give you rest.”¹⁰²

Saraṇāgati according to Pauline writings is to surrender our sensory organs to God. He writes:

“Do not yield your members to sin as instruments to wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from 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.”¹⁰³

In the epistle to Galatians St. Paul writes:

“it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”.¹⁰⁴

A typical example of ‘saraṇāgati’ is exemplified in the above verse. Complete surrender to God is otherwise known as ‘salvation by faith’ in Christian terminology.

Fulfilment of Sacrifice

The chief mode of Vedic worship was sacrifice or Yajña. The main trend of worship as practiced by the Vedic Aryans was polytheistic and kenothistic or kathenotheistic in which sacrifice played the most important role, in fact, it was full of ritualistic acts which had for its objective the attainment of wealth and enjoyment in the world. There was little scope for deep meditation in his early rituals, his deities being hardly ever the objects of ‘dhyana yoga’. These points of observation have to be borne in our mind and Jitendra Nath Banerjea remarks:

“the early authoritative Brāhmanas, which lay down with meticulous details the mode of performing the various sacrifices, there is practically no reference to the idols of the gods, which would certainly have been explicitly mentioned if they were found necessary.”¹⁰⁵

and in the ensuing lines he quotes Keith saying,

“Though it would be wrong to ignore the anthropomorphic character of the gods, the Vedic pantheon has none of the clearest figures of the Greek.”¹⁰⁶

Scholars like P.T. Srinivas Iyengar have pointed out that the worship and religious practices of Siva and Viṣṇu are primarily Agamic which are basically built up on the edifice of Bhakti Mārga and Jñāna Marga. Both the Bhakti Mārga and Jñāna Marga are opposed to the Vedic sacrifices and fire rites.

Indira Parthasarathy quotes U. Rangacharya:

“The word ‘Āgama’ means ‘mantra’. It denotes ‘a popular cult, wherein practical religious rites and offerings in the form of fruits, flowers, food and drinks etc. are done with great devotion, substituting for incantations and sacrifices in fire’. This, in fact, establishes the triumph of the Dravidian thinking over the Aryan practice of sacrifice.”¹⁰⁷

Suffice is to claim that Vaiṣṇavism is a non-Vedic, non-sacrificial religion. The Vaiṣṇavite scriptures describe its Godhead as the real sacrifice. The age-old practice of bloody sacrifice is fulfilled by Viṣṇu Himself. Therefore he is called as ‘Yajña’.

Tirumaṅkai āḷvar sings:

“vētamum vēḷiyum viṅṅum iru cuṭarum
Ātiyum ānān”.¹⁰⁸

‘Vēḷvi’ means sacrifice or yajña. The above lines explain that the He (Viṣṇu) is the very origin, the universe, the scripture and the sacrifice. In Bhagavad Gita, He is acclaimed as ‘yajña’.

“cha atra thēhē aham ēva ati yajña:”¹⁰⁹

‘aham yajña’¹¹⁰

“Aham hi sarva yajñānām boktā”¹¹¹

Bhāgavatapurāṇa enumerates various avatars of Viṣṇu and one among them is ‘Yajña’.

The sacrificial worship is meant for God. The Aryan Vedic sacrifice, though it falls in line with this, the vedic worship is not monotheistic. Sacrifice was part of the worship and it was an act of expiation for man’s sin or thanks giving-in the Old Testament days. But according to the New Testament God came into this world enfleshed as a human being so that he himself has become the sacrifice, i.e., the very purpose of incarnation was to liberate the mankind, through his act of self-sacrifice, from the clutches of Satan. Therefore God becomes the embodiment of sacrifice- ‘Aham ‘yajña’.

Bridal mysticism

God is love and He loves all mankind with a divine love. The mystic realizes expression of beauty of the Lord. Out of their mystic experiences the aḷvārs realized God as ‘Bhuvana Sundara’. The human love of Caṅkan corpus of Akattiṇai had its influence on the Ālvār hymns, sublimated in the direction of divine love or nor is a subject to be re-examined. The passionately emotional songs of Āṇṭāḷ are ‘girl songs’ and her personal emotionalism is erotic. Scholars have pointed out that the ‘gopi eroticism’ in the Bhagavata Purana are unworthy of a bhakti interpretation. F. Hardy quotes Hooper as under:

“The Bhagavata Purana however appears to have gone further in the less worthy directions that are associated with the later bhakti movement than do the Āḷvār hymns ... From the standpoint of religion it would appear to mark a

perversion, which is by no means so definite in the Tamil works”,¹¹²

The passionate hymns of Nammālvār, Aṇṭāl etc. are mostly the mystic hymns of Kṛṣṇāism than of Viṣṇuism. It is observed:

“When the sexual love is not humanised, it is bestial and when it is spiritualized into devine love, it loses all traces of selfishness. Love is a relation between the ‘atman’ and ‘God’ and longing for the communion”.¹¹³

So Kṛṣṇa the lover of the ‘gopis’ do not have its counterpart in the spiritual foundation of Christianity. F. Hardy points out:

“there does exist the Canticle. But the fundamental problem of this beautiful work (quite apart from the fact that scholars have not succeeded in explaining its original sitz im Leben) is that the Christ of New Testament cannot possibly be envisaged, according to common Christian sentiment, as acting out the content of the Canticle literally (as Kṛṣṇa did with the gopis).¹¹⁴

In Pauline’s writings Christ is described as the bridegroom and the church as the bride. The allegorical expressions – Christ loving the church or the soul in love with God may be worth mentioning here, ‘Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her’.¹¹⁵ The book of Revelation also gives references to this sort of allegory – Rev. 19:7, 21:9.

Development of Kṛṣṇaism

It was already pointed out that Vaiṣṇavism is a religious product of the Davidians. Scholars like Zvelebil affirm that ‘the early poetry of Tamil is founded on a secular, oral bardic tradition.’¹¹⁶

The Caṅkam poetry reflects mostly the rites and ceremonies connected with the daily life of the people and also we come across the reflections of tribal cults and their ceremonies. The presence of Vedic worship, or Brāhmanism, in early Tamil poetry may not be traceable or the traces may be feeble. ‘The greater bulk of extant Caṅkam poetry belongs to akam category, but also because it was akam, not puram, which was of importance in the formation of southern Kṛṣṇa bhakti.’¹¹⁷

A good amount of accounts relating to the Kṛṣṇa cult is available for our analysis. Endless arguments continue about the person Kṛṣṇa whether he is the same mentioned in the Ṛg Vēda, Upaniṣads, Mahabharata’s Kshatriya prince, etc. In tracing the origin of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva cult the historians point out the Garuda column erected in honour of Vasudeva by Heliiodorus, a Greek ambassador to King Kasiputra Bhagapatra of Besnagar in 200 BC. Which testifies Vasudeva as ‘deva deva’. Bandarkar writes that Vasudeva was the supreme deity of Bhāgavata religion. The gurudadhvaja inscription refers to ‘the Yavana devotee Heliiodorus as the worshipper of Bhagavat’ (Vāsudēva).¹¹⁸ Bhagavata cult was in vogue during that period and the Vṛṣṇi heroes Sankarshana, Anirudha and Pradyumna were included in the pantheon of deities of the Bhagavata religion around 2nd c. A.D.

For apotheosizing the Vṛṣṇi heroes the Bhagavatas had devised the Vyuha concept. This was in continuation with the age old tradition of hero worship. According to this concept the Vṛṣṇi heroes were regarded as emanations of the Lord and phases of the manifestation of the spirit. This ‘Vyuha doctrine was an effort to integrate the doctrines of incarnation and hero worship.’¹¹⁹ The names of the above heroes were written on the inscription of first century A.D. at Mora seven miles west of Mathura.¹²⁰ According to this epigraphic evidence, the Vyuha concept was developed after 1st c. A.D. This date has been attested by other

authors also. Varadaraja Ayyar brings out the fact that ‘Vyuha concept could not be traced in Bhagavad Gita’.¹²¹

It is observed that Narayana was integrated with Vāsudēva Kṛṣṇa during the period of Mahabharata (5th c. A.D. or later). It was due to the ceaseless efforts of the Bṛhaita Brahmins, Narayana was recognized with Viṣṇu and Narayana Viṣṇu was infused with Vāsudēva Kṛṣṇa.¹²² The Nārāyaṇīya portion of Mahabharata is considered to be the first work which speaks about the concept of Vyuha.¹²³

Bhagavad Gita refers God as ‘Purusha’ and Viṣṇu. ‘The inscriptions which identifies the supreme God as ‘Purusha’ and Viṣṇu are dated as belonging to 5th or 6th c. A.D.’¹²⁴ ‘It was during the period of Gupta many literary works related to Pāncarātra started flourishing. According to Winternitz the Pāncarātra samhitas would have been compiled between 5th and 9th c. A.D. Schrader opines that they could have been compiled before the end of 8th c. A.D.’.¹²⁵ It is also pointed out that ‘the inscriptions related to Vaiṣṇavism are not very much available’.¹²⁶ In the religion which is commonly known as Vaiṣṇavism, it was only in a very later period the element Viṣṇu was regarded as the supreme one’.¹²⁷

The devotees who worship Narayaṇa-Viṣṇu Vāsudeva were named as Sātvatas, Bhāgavatas, Pāncarātras or Ekantins. According to Kūrmapurāṇa and Sāmbapurāṇa, the Bhagavatas and the Pāncarātras are regarded as anti-vedic. The Pāncarātras never accepted the Varṇāśrama but in course of time the Vedic recensions infiltrated into the Pāncarātra scriptures.

Tadpatrikan has indicated that the stories of Kṛṣṇa are first portrayed in Brahmapurāṇā. Kṛṣṇa in Sanskrit means black. In Tamil he is known as Kannan. Āṅṭal sings in praise of him as:

“Kaṅṅaṅ enṅum karunteivam”¹²⁸

‘Though we are uncertain about Kṛṣṇa of the Ṛg Vēda it is certain that the origin of the name is non-Āryan’.¹²⁹

Different views have been expressed by various authors about Kṛṣṇa. They are of the opinion that ‘Kṛṣṇa of Gita must be a different person from Kṛṣṇa of Mahābhārata. Kṛṣṇa of Mahābhārata doesn’t seem to be the upholder of ‘dharma’. The way in which Kṛṣṇa has killed Bhisma, Dhrōna, Karṇa and Dhriyodhana was unlawful’.¹³⁰

Kṛṣṇa is described as a descendant of Vṛṣṇi family, a kṣatriya warrior, a pastoral hero, a leader of the Yādavās, a teacher of ethics, the author of Gita, and an enemy of Indra while he was living in Gokula and Vrindāvana. He is also portrayed as the son of Vāsudēva and Dēvaki who had assimilated various sectarian worships which were prevalent during his period. S Radhakrishnan writes that ‘kṛṣṇa was incorporated with Vāsudēva and Viṣṇu of Vaiṣṇavism and thus was elevated to a strong position’.¹³¹

The Bālagōpāla worship is yet another important development in the history of Vaiṣṇavism. Historians point out that the worship of Kṛṣṇa-Govinda was practiced among the aborigines called Ābhiras of Malwa and Deccan. It is suggested by R.G. Bhandarkar that “Ābhiras might have migrated to the northern part of India at the later part of 2nd c. A.D. and in the earlier period of 3rd c. A.D. They might have brought with them the worship of ‘boy-god’, the story of the birth of this ‘boy-god’, the noble foster-father who was aware that the ‘boy-god’ was not his own son and stories connected with the murder of the innocent children. The last two aspects have correlation with Nanda, the foster-father of kṛṣṇa and kamsa who had murdered the small children. He further writes that ‘they might have brought with them the name Christ. Their worship of the ‘boy-god’ might have been incorporated with Vāsudēva Kṛṣṇa. The Goanese and the Bengalis often pronounce the name Kṛṣṇa as ‘Kristo’ and ‘Kusto’ and so the Christ of Ābhiras was recognized as the Sanskrit Kṛṣṇa’.¹³²

A.L. Bhasham also holds:

‘The third aspect with which Kṛṣṇa was incorporated was the boy Kṛṣṇa. It is evidently clear that it was a later adaptation to the Kṛṣṇa cult. It could have been an adaptation of the stories brought by the Christian traders or Nestorians who came to the Western Coast of India in the medieval period. Some scholars may refute this point but it cannot be ignored as though it was not possible to happen’.¹³³

The stories connected with the childhood and youthful days of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma which are found on the fragmentary relief of the second or third century A.D. in the collection of Mathura Museum (No. 1344) are considered to be the oldest.¹³⁴

J.N. Banerjea further writes:

“Pl. XXVI. Fig. I illustrates a Deogarh relief in which Nanda and Yasoda, the adoptive cowherd parents of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, are standing side by side and caressing the infants in their rural surroundings; the cows in the background (not very clear in the reproduction) emphasise the pastoral character of the scene. The dress of the cowherd chief and his wife is to be noted; Yasoda wears a long skirt with a flowing veil covering her and shoulders. The garment is characteristically foreign with a slight touch of late Gandhara element in it, and tradition records that these cowherds of Mathura and its environs belonged to Ābhira stock.”¹³⁵

Suffice is to infer that the worship of God in the form of a child had entered India from the alien soil which was later on incorporated with the Kṛṣṇa cult and thus Kṛṣṇa was deified as an avatar.

Varadaraja Ayyar affirms that ‘there is no evidence to show that there are references about Kṛṣṇa’s playful activities and he writes that Ramanuja and Madhva never accepted this’.¹³⁶ ‘So is the case with Harivamsa also’.¹³⁷ Pattuppāṭṭu also do not mention about Kaṇṇan’s lilas with the cowherd girls.¹³⁸

The ‘Rasa Lilas’ of Gopi-Kṛṣṇa at Brindhavan tantamount to vulgarity and the amorous acts of Kṛṣṇa taking away the clothes of the cow-girls and Kṛṣṇa asking them to appear before him naked were given philosophic and allegorical explanations. Kṛṣṇa’s adulterous love with Radha is not an exception to this. In Bengal Vaiṣṇavism this had given rise to a new doctrine called ‘Parakia’.

Asha Goswamy writes:

“The above would amply prove that the concept of the Hindus about the Avatār is symbolic and Krishna himself was just a human being and not the avatar of God, though of course the greatest among men.”¹³⁹

Asha Goswamy enumerates three stages in the development of Kṛṣṇnaism viz. ‘(1) incorporating Vāsudēva with Nārayaṇa (2) incorporating Vāsudēva-Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Samkarshaṇa, Pradhymna and Anirudha as the emanated forms of Viṣṇu by devising a doctrine called Vyūha and (3) incorporating the worship of Bālagōpala with Kṛṣṇa’.¹⁴⁰

King-worship and hero-worship had also contributed to the development of Vaiṣṇavism and Kṛṣṇnaism. Tolkāppiyar in his aphorism text defines:

“Māyōn mēya manperuñ cirappiṇ
Tāvā viḷuppukaḷp pūvai nilaiyum”¹⁴¹

‘Pūvai nilai’ gives room for the deification of a king. F. Hardy writes:

“The literary genre (denoted by the name of the flower) pūvai (= kāyāmpū) (consists in) the undecaying excellent praise of the great heroism of a king who is comparable (or compared?) to Māyōṇ.

In the later texts, the pūvai or kāyā flower is frequently compared to Kṛṣṇa’s dark-blue complexion; thus the association of a King’s heroism (via Māyōṇ) with this flower does not seem altogether arbitrary.”¹⁴²

In this line Nammālvār also mentions in his hymn as:

“Tiruvuṭai maṇṇaraik kāṇiṇ Tirumālaik Kaṇṭēnē”¹⁴³

The inclusion of Rama as an avatar of Viṣṇu was done in the same fashion as was done with Kṛṣṇa. In ātikavi Vālmiki’s Ramayana, Rama was an ordinary man, a high-souled hero but later on only he was deified as an incarnation. Kambar Christens his *magnum opus* as ‘Ramāvatāra’ (Kamba Rāmayaṇam).

It is evident that an avatar or incarnation is the descension of God in human form and not an ascension of man into God. The avatars depicted in the Indian epics, itikāsas etc. amply prove that they are only the ascension of human beings to the level of God. Vempeni writes:

“In the context of various grades of avatara existing in popular beliefs and in the context of the prevalent theories about Vyuhās, Vibhūtis, amsavatars etc., it is quite tempting to say that every avatar is an ascent, utthanam.”¹⁴⁴

Radhakrishnan, S. defines: ‘An avatar is a descent of God into man, and not an ascent of man into God’.¹⁴⁵

The above facts convey that Kṛṣṇaism cannot be considered to point to a pre-Christ period for the identification of Vāsudēva-Kṛṣṇa with Gopāla-Kṛṣṇa. According to F. Hardy the Southern Kṛṣṇaism emerged by 6th c. A.D. He says:

“These many and separate analysis will ultimately suggest that popular segments of Tamil society had evolved a typically Southern Kṛṣṇaism by the sixth century or so, with peculiar myths and religious attitudes, and that this form of Kṛṣṇaism stood in contrast not only to the spirit of the Tirumāl hymns in the Paripāṭal, but also to the treatment of Māyōn in the formulated akattiṇai conventions (and projected on folk Kṛṣṇaism by the renaissance literati)”.¹⁴⁶

R.G. Bandarkar states that ‘the cult of Rama must have come into existence about the eleventh century.’¹⁴⁷ The sectarian cults, minor gods, hero-worship, king-workship etc. were amalgamated into Vaiṣṇavism and the doctrine of incarnation which was introduced to India after the 1st century A.D. had given rise to the present religion of Vaiṣṇavism.

Conclusion

As was pointed out Vaiṣṇavism is a product of Tamil land, and integral religion of the Dravidians, which is very much the outcome of the Tamil Bhakti Movement. The land of the Dravidians is the birth place of Bhakti Movement.

“Utpaṇṇā drāvida bhakti”¹⁴⁸

Vedicism is not the source of Hindu religion and the various aspects of Vedas that are made available to us are based on sacrificial worship of the minor gods the benevolent forces and other objects of creations personified as gods and these are worships associated with animism, henotheism, spiritism etc. Temple-worship, avatar doctrine etc. were unknown to the four Vedas of the Āryans. The pragmatic evidences are to be gleaned out from the four

Vedas regarding the development of Vaiṣṇavism would be, thus, a futile attempt to proceed with.

Yāmuna was the first exponent of Viśiṣṭādvaita and he was the grandson of Nāthamuni. Yāmuna's disciples were the teachers of Ramanuja. 'Nāthamuni received from Nammālvār the Tiruvoimōḷi, which according to Madhurakavi is the Tamil Veda, Viṣṇu's revelation in Tamil of Himself – so the sampradāya had its legitimate origin in Viṣṇu the parabrahman'.¹⁴⁹

The contributory factors of the Old Testament background of God's visionary guidance in the form of 'cloud' to the Israelites may not be of less importance.

The hymns dedicated to Tirumāl in Paripāṭal constitute a veritable storehouse of information about Vaiṣṇavism in the south. The scholars assign 5th or 6th c. A.D. as the most probable date for Paripāṭal.

Māyōṇ is considered as the ancient pre-Aryan Tamil deity and he was identified with Kṛṣṇa according to Zvelebil and others. According to Thani Nayagam, Māyōṇ is nothing but the adaptation of the Tamil Murukaṇ to a pastoral environment and form of life. But F. Hardy holds that 'there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that Māyōṇ is anything but Kṛṣṇa Viṣṇu'.¹⁵⁰ The Caṅkam corpus is secular and in the initial period the Ālvārs sing in praise of Siva and Viṣṇu as unified God with two forms.

The various names of Gods of the sixfold religion, viz. Siva, Sakti, Viṣṇu, Pillaiyār, Murukaṇ, Brahmaṇ and Ayyappan constitute the members of Siva family, and subsequently they were developed into six different religions/denominations.

The early avatārs of Viṣṇu were theriomorphous and later, anthromorphous. The lists of avatar invariably differ from one source to another. The stories of different avatārs amplify one important aspect of the ascendancy of Viṣṇu as a Supreme Lord. The essence of Vaiṣṇava philosophy evolved later is based on the avatār doctrine.

The doctrine of avatār, as evidenced by our study, was developed in the Indian religions only in the Christ era. It is a historical fact that Christianity had contributed to the avatār doctrine. The Bhāgavata cult adopted the Vṛṇi heroes (the non-Aryan tribe to which Vasudeva-Kṛṣṇa belonged) as their divinities as an outcome of deification. A separate concept of ‘Vyūha’ was developed and with which the family members of Yadu or Vṛṣni were pronounced as avatārs of Viṣṇu.

The fundamental aspects of Sri Vaiṣṇavism (Viśiṣṭādvaita) formulated by Ramanuja show that Vaiṣṇavism is basically founded on the Trinitarian dogmatics which are again the basics of Christianity. The ‘five modes’ or Mūrti Bhēdas are nothing but the expressions of ‘Para’ (God the Father) ‘Apara’ (God the son) and ‘Para para’ (Holy Spirit) or Antaryāmitva which is a state in which He dwells in the heart of all embodied human beings. This doctrine is a New Testament doctrine (1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19, 2 Cor. 6:16). The virgin birth of Jesus gets reflected in Vaiṣṇavism as ‘divyam janma’¹⁵¹ (holy birth) as evidenced in the Gita.

The animal sacrifice which played a predominant role in the Vedic worship was discontinued in the Indian religions and in these religions the rituals were performed with flowers, fruits etc. The palipiṭam (sacrificial altar) near the entrance of the Hindu temples are no more adorned with animal blood. This stands as an evidence that the Hindu religion, whether Saivism or Vaiṣṇavism, is a religion of the fulfillment of sacrifice. The Old Testament sacrificing of animals are no more practiced in the New Testament doctrines because Jesus had offered himself as the ‘Supreme Sacrifice’ for the remission of the sins of the mankind and thus the whole humanity was redeemed. This being the reason, Vaiṣṇavism also falls in line with the religions of the fulfillment of sacrifice.

The constitutional bondage of man is yet another basic tenet of Vaiṣṇavism. Man is born in bondage (janmabhandam-Gita) and Vaiṣṇavism doesn’t elaborate how and when this bondage occurred. This is evidenced only in the Bible as a dogma. Scholars have brought out the identical tenets of salvation according to Vaiṣṇavism and Christianity.

The Christian salvation by faith is documented as ‘saraṇāgati’ in Vaiṣṇavism. Saraṇāgati is the *summum bonum* of Christianity and Vaiṣṇavism. By affirming faith in Him the deeds also are sanctified because by submission of oneself unto God the whole sensory organs are tamed towards perfection, holiness. This finally will lead him to ‘Mōksha’, a place of eschatological in nature, attaining ‘ācāryaṇu tiruvaṭ!’-the feet of the Lord so as to live in eternal bliss with Him.

Pāncarātra and Bhāgavata religions professed human equality and humane love. The evil of corruption and distortions had gained their venomous entry into Vaiṣṇavism and gradually this universal religion of love was captured by the brāhmanical forces and Vaiṣṇavism was subjugated. Caste discrimination has been condemned by āḷvārs. Toṇṭaraṭipotiāḷvār says:

“Paḷutilā voḷuka laṅṅrup
 Palacatup pētimārkaḷ
 Iḷikulat tavarka lēlum
 Emmati yārka ḷākil
 Toḷuminir koṭumiṇ koḷmin”¹⁵²

The revolutionary acts of Rāmānuja, what he did for the outcastes-‘Tirukkulattār’-may be quoted here as the Vaiṣṇavite proclamation of universal humane love. Christ’s teaching of ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’¹⁵³ is the fore-most philosophy of humane love.

A careful scrutiny of Vaiṣṇavism in the background of historical perspective clearly reveals that the cults prevalent among the people were amalgamated with Vaiṣṇavism at different stages identifying Vāsudēva with Viṣṇu, identifying Nārāyaṇa with Vasudeva, identifying Kṛṣṇa with Vāsudeva and incorporating the boy-god Bālagōpala with the above streams projected as a monotheistic religion.

R.G. Bandarkar also observes:

“The Hindu habit of thought of identifying one god with others by regarding the latter either as forms or incarnations of the former, and thus evolving monotheism out of polytheism, led to the identification of this Vāsudeva with other gods and with the boy Kṛṣṇa of Gokula”.¹⁵⁴

The transmigration of ideologies along with Indian foreign trade was not an unreality. Apostle Thomas’ mission in North India (Taxila), Malabar coast and Mylapore and his martyrdom at St. Thomas Mount are historically supported by very many evidences and the influence of his ministry might have brought about a sea change in the religious history of India.

The significance of Sanskrit has to be taken into account for our study. The earliest epigraphic evidence on languages employed in India comes from the inscriptions of Ashoka inscribed in 3rd c. B.C. Ashoka took care that his messages were intelligible to all and he used a particular kind of Prakrit. He even translated his messages to Greek, Aramaic, Pali, Dravidi and Arthamagati but there are no inscriptions in Sanskrit. The first evidence of Sanskrit is seen around 150 A.D. and only from 5th c. A.D. Classical Sanskrit is seen to be the dominant language in the inscriptions.

The first Sanskrit inscription mentioned above records the repair of a dam originally built by Chandra Gupta Maurya.¹⁵⁵ Therefore the Sanskrit works cannot be dated before 2nd c. A.D.

In this background of evaluation, if the alleged process of interpolations, mutilations, corruptions and misinterpretations done to the original works of Vaiṣṇavism are carefully analysed, then the analysis leads to the conclusion that Vaiṣṇavism owes its origin to Christianity.

References:

1. Keith, Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, 1915, pp. 836-37.
2. Hemchandara Raychandhuri, Materials for the study of the Early History of the Vaishnava Sect, Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, New Delhi-110055, II Ed., 1975, p. 80.

3. Srinivas Iyengar, P.T., History of Tamils (from the earliest times to 600 A.D.), Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 304-5.
4. “k;j;jpif tis,a kwpe;JtPq;F nrwpTil
nka;g;ig Gf;f ntUtUe; Njhw;wj;J
typGzh; ahf;if td;fz; atdh;”
(Ky;iyg; ghl;L 11.59-61)
Mullaippāṭṭu, 11.59-61
5. fbkjpg; thapy; fhypw; rpwe;j
tly;ths; atdh;
rpyg;gjpgfhuk; 14:11.66-67
Cilappatikāram, 14:11.66-67.
6. Warmington, Commerce between the Roman Empire and India, p. 140. Quoted by Srinivas Iyengar, P.T., Op. cit., p. 321.
7. The name Dymirike, belonging to the Tamils was apparently taken, by foreign merchants, to apply to the Tamil province immediately south of Ariake, i.e., the Sera country. Ibid. p. 318.
8. Srinivas Iyengar, P.T., op. cit., p. 311.
9. John Samuel. G., Chrithava Tamil Ilakkiyam-sila Parvaikal, Institute of Asian studies, Chennai-119, 2005, p. 4.
10. Devaneyan. G., Tamilar Madam, Nesamani Pathippakam, Kattuppadi Extn., 1972, p. 49.
11. KambaRamayaṅm, Sundara Kāṅṅam, Kaṅṅal Tāvu Paṅṅalam, 32.
12. Przulski, J. (i) Actes dn xviii e Congre’s internation des Orientalistes, 1931, p. 154, (ii) Quarterly Journal of the mythic society of Bangalore, 1934, p. 35.
13. Ṛg Veda I. 155. 5.
14. Bhandarkar. R.G., Vaiṣṅavism, Saivism and Minor Religious Systems, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1983, p. 47.
15. Ṛg Veda 1.22 18 x 19.4.
16. Indira Partharasathy, Vaiṣṅavism in Tamil Literature between the 7th and 9th centuries, International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai – 600113, 2002, p. 2.
17. Ibid., p. 3.
18. Ibid., p. 6.
19. Hemchandra Raychandhuri, Op.cit., p.10.
20. Ibid., p. 11.
21. Exodus 3:1-2.
22. Exodus 19:18.

23. Exodus 40:38, 13:21-22.
24. Exodus 34:5.
25. Exodus 33:9.
26. Tiruvācagam, Tiruvaṅṅappahuti, 67.
27. Ibid., 95.
28. Tolkāppiyam, Porul, Akattiṅṅai Iyal, 5, Nacciṅṅārkkkiṅṅiyar Urai.
29. Patirruppattu, Patikam, 7-8.
30. Vempeny, Ishanand, Kṛṣṇa and Christ, Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand, 1988, p. 95.
31. Maraimalai Adikal, Tamiḷar Matam, Manivacakar Patippakam, Chennai-108, 1999, p. 161.
32. jho;rilAk; ePz;KbAk; xz;kOTk; rf;fuKk;
 #ouTk; nghd;dhZk; Njhd;Wkhy; - #Ok;
 jpuz;lUtp ghAk; jpUkiyNky; ve;ijf;F
 ,uz;LUTk; xd;wha; ,ire;J.
 Iyaṅṅppā, Mūṅṅrām Tiruvaṅṅtati, 63.
33. nghd;jpfOk; NkdpG; GhprilAk; Gz;zpaDk;
 epd;Wyfj; jha neLkhYk; - vd;Wk;
 ,Utuq;fj;jhw; wpuptNuDk; xUtd;
 xUtdq;fj; njd;Dk; csd;.
 Iyaṅṅppā, Mutal Tiruvaṅṅtāti, 98.
34. Maraimalai Adikal, Op, cit., pp. 181-82.
35. Deivanayagam, M., Tīrukkural Viviliyam Saivasittantam, International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai-113, 1986, pp. 130-33.
36. Nālayiram, 1296.
37. Ibid., 1157.
38. Ibid., 3198.
39. Ibid., 2360.
40. “XUUtK; nghd;DUtK;; xd;W nre;jP
 xd;Wkh fiYUtK;; xj;Jepd;w
 %d;WUtK; fz;INgh njhd;whk; Nrhjp
 KfpYUtK; vk;kbfs; cUte; jhNd”
 Nālayiraym, 2053.
41. Varadachari, K.C., Viṣiṣṅādvaṅṅa and Its Development, Chakravarthy Publications, Tirupati, 1969, pp. 22-23.

42. Baskara Doss, J.D., Trinity in Indian Thought, National Institute of Leadership Training, Chennai-600 080, 2004, p. 25.
43. Suvira Jaiswal, Vainavattin Tōṭṭramum Valarcciyum, (Tr.) Anumanthan K. & Parthasarathi. R., Indian Council of Historical Research & New Century Book House (P) Ltd., Chennai-600 098, 1991, p. 33.
44. Baskara Doss. J.D., Op. cit., p. 26.
45. Quoted: Suvira Jaiswal, Op. cit., p. 195.
46. Baskara Doss. J.D., Aruvakai Taricananṅkalum Tamiḷar Camayamum (Viviliya Oḷiyil) ōr Āivu, Ph.D. Dissertation, Madras University, 1998, p. 106.
47. Deivanayagam, M., op. cit., p. 127.
48. Vempenny, Ishanand, op. cit. p. 94.
49. Paney, P.K., The Concept of Avatars with special reference to Gita, B.R. Publications, Delhi, 1978, p.1.
50. Vempenny, Ishanand, op. cit. p. 233.
51. Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of English Language.
52. Oxford Universal Dictionary – Illustrated on Historical Principles.
53. Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary.
54. Sessa Iyengar, T.R., Dravidian India, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1982, p. 98.
55. Jitendra Nath Banerjea, The Development of Hindu Iconography, Munshiram Manoharlal Pub. Pvt. Ltd., 1974, p. 390.
56. Ibid., pp. 390-91.
57. Ibid., p. 391.
58. Ibid., pp. 392-3.
59. Bhagavad Gita, IX. 8., Commentary of Sri Sankaracharya, Alladi Mahadeva Sastri, Samata Books, Madras, 1985.
60. Srinivasachari, P.N., Ramanujar (Visistadvaitam), Keeḷai Mēlai Nādukaḷin Meipporul, iyal varalāru (T), Annamalai University, 1970, pp. 574-75.
61. Ibid., p. 561.
62. Gita, IV. 7.
63. Ādidevānanda, Swāmi (Tr.), Sri Rāmanuja, GitāBhāsyā, Sri Ramakrishna Mutt, Madras-600 004, 2001, p. 161.
64. Gita, iv. 8.
65. Ādidevānanda, Swāmi (Tr), Op. cit., p. 162.
66. Vempenny, Ishanand, op. cit., p. 331.

67. Luke, 1:32, cf. 2:21.

68. Genesis, 3:15.

69. John, 4:42, John 4:14.

70. Titus, 3, 2:10; 3:4; 1:4; 2:13, 3:6.

71. **ng**ha;e;epd;w QhdKk; nghy;yh xOf;Fk; mOf;Flk;Gk;
 ,e;epd;w ePu;ik ,dpahk; cwhik capuspg;ghd;
 ve;epd;w NahdpA kha;g;gpwe; jha; ,ik Nahu;jiyth
 nka;e;epd;W Nfl;IU sha;mb Nad;nra;Ak; tpz;zg;gNk.
 (ek;kho;thh;> jpUtpUj;jk;> 1).

Nammālvār, Tiruviruttam, 1.

72. Revelation, 19:11.

73. Revelation, 19:14-15.

74. Radhakrishnan, S., Indian Philosophy Vol. I, Blackie & Son Pub. Pvt. Ltd., Madras, 1977, p. 607.

75. Genesis, 1:27.

76. “**gh**ukha gotpid gw;wWj;J vd;idj;jd;
 thukhf;fp itj;jhd; itj;jd;wp vd;Ds; GFe;jhd;
 Nfhu khjtk; nra;jdd;nfh ywpNad; muq;fj;jk;khd;jpU
 Mu khu;tJ md;Nwh mbNaid MI;nfhz;INj.”

Nāyāyiram, 931.

77. “**gp**wtpj; Jauw Qhdj;Js; epd;W”

Nāyāyiram, 2148.

78. “**rh**h;e;j ,Uty; tpidfSk;

rupj;J khag; gw;wWj;J”

Nāyāyiram, 2135.

79. “**nj**hy;tpid jPuyhUk;”

Nāyāyiram, 2457.

80. “**ng**UikAila gpudhu;- ,Uik tpid fbtNu”

Nāyāyiram, 2145.

81. “,**Us**;Nru; ,UtpidAk; Nruh ,iwtd;

ng^hUs;Nru; Gfo;Gupe;jhu; khl;L”

Tirukkuraḷ, 7.

82. Bhagavad Gita, XV:5.

83. Ibid., ll. 51.

84. Ibid., II. 39.
85. Ibid., III. 9.
86. Vempeny, Ishanand, Op. cit., p. 157.
87. Bhagavad Gita, II.62-63.
88. “**tpidNad; tpidjPh; kUe;jhdha;**”
Nāyāyiram, 2131.
89. Tirukkuṛal, 268.
90. Sivajñāna Bhōtam, 8.
91. Nāyāyiram, 931.
92. Friedhelm Hardy, Viraha-Bhakti, Oxford University Press, Oxford Indian Paperbacks, 2001, p. 37.
93. John, 3:16.
94. Matthew, 22:37-39.
95. Vempeny, Ishanand, Op. cit., p. 217.
96. Indira Parthasarathy, Op. cit., p. 81.
97. Friedhelm Hardy, Op. cit., p. 37.
98. Hemchandra Raychandhuri, Op. cit., p. 10.
99. Bhagavad Gita, XVIII:66.
100. Nāyāyiram, 843.
101. Friedhelm Hardy, Op. cit., p. 441.
102. Matthew, 11:28.
103. Romans, 6:13.
104. Galatians, 2:20.
105. Jitendra Nath Banerjea, Op. cit., p. 48.
106. Ibid.
107. Indira Parthasarathy, Op. cit., p. 27.
108. Nālayiram, 1786.
109. Bhagavad Gita, VIII. 4.
110. Ibid., IX.16.
111. Ibid., IX:24.
112. Friedhelm Hardy, Op. cit., p. 47.
113. Indira Parthasarathy, Op. cit., p. 102.
114. Friedhelm Hardy, Op. cit., p. 569.
115. Ephesians, 5:25

116. Zvelebil, K.V., *The Smile of Murugan. On Tamil Literature of South India*, Leiden, 1973, p. 20.
117. Friedhelm Hardy, *Op. cit.*, p. 142.
118. Sircar, “Besnagar Garuda Pillar Inscription of the time of Bhagabhadra”, *select Inscriptions*, Vol. I, pp. 88-89. Quoted: Susmita Pande, *Op. cit.*, p. 97.
119. Susmita Pande, *Op. cit.*, p. 97.
120. *Ibid.*
121. Varadaraja Ayyar, *A History of Tamil Literature*, Annamalai University, p. 217.
122. Suvira Jaiswal, *Op. cit.* pp. 14-16.
123. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
124. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
125. *Ibid.*
126. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
127. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
128. Nālāyiram, 627.
129. Suvira Jaiswal, *Op. cit.*, p. 86.
130. Vempenny, Ishanand, *Op. cit.*, p. 243.
131. Radhakrishnan, S., *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, p. 87.
132. Bhandarkar, R.G., *Op. cit.*, p. 53.
133. Bhasham, A.L., *Viyattaku India (Tamil)*, Tr. Govt. Pub. of the Department of Language, Ceylon, 1956, pp. 421-22.
134. Jitendra Nath Banerjea, *Op. cit.*, p. 421.
135. *Ibid.*, p. 422.
136. Varadaraja, Ayyar, *Op. cit.*, p. 237.
137. *Ibid.*
138. *Ibid.*, pp. 224 & 238.
139. Asha Goswamy, *Krishna Katha and Allied Matters*, Y.R. Pub., Delhi, 1984, p. 186.
140. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
141. “மாயோன் மேய மன்பெருஞ் சிறப்பின்
தாவா விழுப்புதழ்ப் ளவை நிலையும;”
Tolkāppiyam, Puram, 60.
142. Friedhelm Hardy, *Op. cit.*, p. 155.
143. Nālāyiram, 2454.
144. Vempenny, Ishanand, *Op. cit.*, pp. 265-66.
145. Radhakrishnan, S., *Op. cit.*, p. 545.

146. Friedhelm Hardy, *Op. cit.*, pp. 169-70.
147. Bhandarkar, R.G., *Op. cit.*, p. 66.
148. Quoted by Majumdar, A.K., *Bhakti Renaissance*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay-7, p. 56.
149. Friedhelm Hardy, *Op. cit.*, pp. 483-84.
150. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
151. *Bhagavad Gita*, IV:9.
152. “பழுதிலா ஒழுகா லாற்றுப் பலசதுப் பேதி மார்கள்
இழிகுலத் தவர்க ளேலும் எம்மடி யார்க ளாகில்
தொழுமின்றீர் கொடுமின் கொண்மின;”
Nāḷāyiram, 913.
153. *Matthew*, 22:39.
154. Bhandarkar, R.G., *Op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.
155. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Hinduism*, Oxford University Press, Madras-1979, p. 39.