

Vaishnavism

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The first and foremost thing which is common to all religions is this. In all Books on religion, the first chapter will be the sources of the religion, that is, which is the Book of Authority on which the religion is based. We call this thus: **Pramanam or Manam** (प्रमाणं or मानं) meaning Authority. The second thing is **Prameyam or Meyam** (प्रमेयं or मेयं) meaning that which the Authority denotes, that is God. The third is **Pramatha** (प्रमाता) meaning he who finds out the Prameyam or God by reading and Understanding the Book of Authority. These three things are common and essential to all religions.[for example; Bible for Christians and Koran for Muslims].

For Hindus **Pramanam** is the 4 Vedas, namely Rik Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharvana Veda. These are the invaluable Books of Authority for us. Beyond this , there is no other authority. **Prameyam** is that which the **Pramanam** denotes. It is God; To Vaishnavas it is Narayana, Mahavishnu, Krishna, Rama and that which the Sahasranama says. The Vedas point out the God mainly, among over so many things, for our benefit.

Pramathas are men who can read the Vedas and find out the **Prameya or God**. Almost all men are ignorant and are incapable of reading the Vedas, much less understanding them. So God had created great Sages, Seers, Saints and Acharyas who were all endowed with superhuman knowledge (ज्ञान - Gnana). They help us with their Books and treatises and teachings to find out the **Prameya or God** from the **Pramana**, that is Vedas. The details of Pramana, Prameya and Pramatha are as follows.

Pramana-(Authority):

The Original Authority or Pramana is the 4 Vedas, named above. They are the storehouse of all knowledge , which is derived only from them. The Vedas are eternal like God Himself, having no beginning or end but existing throughout. The Vedas have 6 Angas or Branches with the help of which only we can understand the Vedas. They are as follows.

1. **Siksha** (सिक्शा): The first Anga of the Vedas is Siksha, which is rhetoric which help us to pronounce and utter the Vedic words properly and correctly. We should learn them only from a Competent teacher or preceptor (Acharya).

2. **Vyakarnam (व्याकरण)**: It is the second Anga. It means grammar which help us to learn the Vedic language. It is a monumental thing and its study will take a number of years for anybody, that even through an Acharya.
3. **Chandas (धन्द्)**: The third Anga is Chanda meaning metre and prosody . Vedic passages should be cited with proper Swara or intonation. This also should be learnt from an Acharya for a long number of years.
4. **Niruktham (निरुक्तं)**: This is a science which gives the meaning of every letter in the words of the Vedas. This helps to learn the proper meaning and interpretation of the Vedic words. This is a greatly trying Sastra (Science) involving great study from great Acharya or teacher.
5. **Jyothisham (ज्योतिषं) or Astronomy**: This is essential to find out time and all the things connected with time - auspicious, inauspicious, good, bad, fruitful time etc. It contains Mathematics which is necessary for all calculations affecting mankind.
6. **Kalpam (कल्पं)**: Several sages have written sutras or treatises - containing the summary of the Vedas and helping us to know all about the Vedas. They are together called Kalpa.

Besides the six Angas of the Vedas there are also four other minor Angas and they are called as **Upangas (उपाङ्गः)** subsidiary branches. They are

1. **Tarka or Nyaya (तर्क or न्याय)**: Meaning Logic which is a science of reasoning and inference, which is quite necessary to human thought and which goes a long way in sharpening human intellect. One of the Nasthika sub religions is based on this science and it is dealt with, in the later parts.
2. **Mimamsa (मीमांसा)**: It is a science which deals with the interpretation of the Vedas and is essential for that purpose. Sage Jaimini has written the Mimamsa (मीमांसा) sutras which completely deal with this science with its numerous commentaries and treatises. There is also a sub-religion called the Mimamsaka (मीमांसका) religion, a Nasthika religion which is also dealt in the later pages.
3. **Dharma Shasthra (धर्म शास्त्र)**: It is a summary of the Vedas and Smrithis, which comprises some sublime smirithis and sutras which has been dealt with above Dharma Shasthra.
4. **Puranas (पुराणः)**: The epics, Ramayanam and Mahabharatha and the 18 puranas written by Sage Veda Vyasa gives instances and stories which dearly explain and elucidate several of the Vedic concepts and teachings and which, in short, is quite necessary to have a clear understanding of the sublime Vedas. This also has been dealt with, above. The Upangas along with the Angas of the Vedas help us to understand the Vedas clearly. The Angas as also the Smrithis and Dharma Shastras profoundly help us to understand and evaluate the sublime principles of the Vedas.

All the Angas and Upangas are the branches of the Vedas and are essential to understand the Vedas. Various Rishis and saints have written very learned, monumental and useful books on all these Angas. By reading them only, we can

have a full understanding of the Vedas. Common man are not expected to read them and understand the Vedas. Only a few highly knowledgeable religious and scholarly persons can read and use them.

The Vedas are together called **Prabhu Samhita** (work of the Master). A master will only give orders to his servants. So the Vedas order the people to do certain things and not to do certain things. So they are together called Prabhu Samhita (order of the Prabhu or Master), Vedas are called Sruti. These are about Vedas in Short.

The next thing is Smrithis (**स्मृति**) seeing that the Vedas are not easily understandable, many sages have written simple slokas containing the meanings of the Vedas which can easily be read and even memorised by people who have got limited knowledge. They are simple slokas and can be easily understood. Dozens and scores of Rishis or Sages have written innumerable Smrithis. Manu also was one among them. He was a king of Ayodhya in the very early years and God had given him the knowledge to write his famous Manu Smrithi. It is Law from beginning to end. In short, there are hundreds of smrithis, big and small, written by several sages. Some sages have written their smrithis in slokas or verses. Some other have written sutras - short prose passages having a lot of meaning and ideas. Even the sutras come under the head smrithis. The smrithis all reflect the true meaning of the Vedas in a simplified form. The smrithis are as a whole called **Suhrit Samhita**(**सुहित संहिता**). Suhrit means a friend. A true friend will advise his friend to obey the orders of the master, as otherwise the latter will undergo great trouble. So the Suhrit Samhita is intended to carry out the orders of the Vedas (Prabhu Samhita).

The third and last thing is the Puranas or Epics. The Ramayana, the Mahabharatha and the 18 puranas written by sage Veda Vyasa contain the stories of several hundreds of person who by following the orders of the Vedas as interpreted by the Smrithis attained happiness and others who disobeyed them undergoing misery and punishment. The Puranas are intended to give examples of persons who obeyed or disobeyed the Vedic orders and attained misery or happiness. They are together called Kantha Samhita(**कान्ता संहिता**). Kantha means a wife. The wife of every man will give her husband examples in the form of stories about virtuous and vicious persons and refer to their fate good or bad. So like a wife, the Puranas give stories to emphasize the Vedic orders and hence they are together called Kantha Samhita(**कान्ता संहिता**). A study of the smrithis and Puranas are essential to understand and appreciate the Vedas.

The Ramayanam and the Mahabharatha are called Itihasas and the 18 puranas are known as Puranas. The difference between the two are minor but their function and utility are one and the same.

By the foregoing passages, you might have got a detailed account of the sources of our great Hindu religion. The Vedas along with the following smrithis and Puranas

form the sole Authority for our Hindu Religion. Before dealing with our Vaishnavism, it is better to understand some religions.

By religions, we mean our native religions and not foreign religions as Islam or Christianity. We call them religions for want of a better word. We can't call them sects, which are small divisions in a big religion. The Sanskrit word is **Matham**(मतं). In English we can call them sub-religion, for the sake of convenience. Our Indian religions or sub-religions are of two kinds. Those which do not believe the Vedas and condemn them and those which believe the Vedas but interpret them wrongly except one that is ours. The former are three in number namely **Charvaka or Lokayathika religion, Buddhism and Jainism**. We call them Nasthika Mathams(नास्तिकमतम्) which do not believe God or the Vedas. In English we call them **Atheism**. The 1st Charvaka Matham is totally atheistic. They do not believe in anything which they do not see or hear. Their only objective in life is that man must enjoy the pleasures of life and nothing more. This religion is condemned by all the people of other sub religions. The 2nd is Buddhism. It also does not believe the Vedas and God. They respect Buddha but do not consider him as God. Buddha had only prescribed good conduct and behaviour for people and condemns the yagas and yagnas prescribed in the Vedas. There are many divisions among the Buddhists each different from the others. The 3rd is Jainism which also does not believe the Vedas and God. They believe in their 24 saints called Theerthankaras. The last was **Mahavira**. In Jainism also there are differing divisions opposed to one another. They call the super power **Arhath** but not as God.

We call the above three sub-religions as Nasthikas or atheists and Veda Bahyas(वेदबाह्या) who are out of the pale of the Vedas. We condemn them severely. Many writers in each had written Books on their respective sub-religions.

Then comes the Vedic religions which believe the Vedas but interpret them wrongly. The 1st is Vaiseshikas (वैशेषिक) or Logicians. Their system is also called Naiyaayikas (नैयायिका). Logic is called Tharka (तर्क or न्याय) or Nyaya. They are also called Thaarkikas(तार्किक). They say that from reasoning and inference as per the rules of Logic, we can believe that there is a Supreme Power that conditions and controls the world. They do not believe the God as described in the Vedas. So we condemn their religion. The original founder of this system was **Sage Gautama**. Logic is a growing science and it grows in proportion to the growth of man's intelligence. So later on, one **Sage Kannaada**(कणाद) had renewed the old Logic and this alone is now prevalent and popular. Many brilliant authors have written great Books on this system. The Logicians or Thaarkikas call the Supreme Power as Kartha(कर्ता). Then comes the Sankhyas(संख्य) who brilliantly analyse things, but even they do not believe the Vedic God, though they believe the Vedas. They have great respect for Prakriti or Matter (प्रकृति). It is lifeless. It is composed of the 5 elements called Bhutas(पञ्च भूता) namely Prithvi (पृथिवी) or earth, Ap(अप्) meaning water, Thejas(तेजस्) meaning Fire, Vayu(वायु) meaning Air and Akasa(आकाश) meaning ether or vacuum. Each of the five Bhutas is possessed of a separate quality or

Guna(गुण). Earth-fragrance(गन्धः), Water taste(रसः), Fire-sight(रूपः), Air-touch(स्पर्शः) and ether or vacuum-noise(शब्दः). Our 5 perceptive organs called Gnanendriyas(ज्ञानेन्द्रियः) experience the said five qualities of the elements Prithivino; Ap-tongue; Fire-eyes; Air-Skin; ether or Vacuum-ears. The said five elements possess the atoms of the said qualities called Tanmaathras(तन्मात्र). Earth-Gandha Tanmaathra(गन्ध तन्मात्र); water-Rasa Tanmaathra(रस तन्मात्र); Fire-Roopa Tanmaathra(रूपतन्मात्र); Air-Sparsa Tanmaathra(स्पर्शतन्मात्र); and ether or vacuum-sabda Tanmaathra(शब्दतन्मात्र). So much about our perceptive organs or Gnanendriyas.

There are functional organs called Karmendriyas(कर्मन्द्रिय). They are also five and they sustain the human body. They are the hands, the legs, mouth, buttocks and penis(male or female organ). They are essential for the body to live and function.

Thus the said 5 elements or Bhutas, their 5 Tanmaathras, the 5 Karmendriyas and the 5 Gnanendriyas constitute Prakriti or Matter, which is lifeless. Along with these we Vaishnavas add Mind(मनस्), intelligence(बुद्धि or महत्), egoism or selfishness(अहंकार) and Prakriti(the combination of all these) constitute Matter or Prakriti. They are together called Achit(अचित्) or inanimate substance. All these are 24 in number and we call them Thathvas(24 तत्त्व). The sankhyas are correct so far. But they leave out God. We accept them so far but condemn their godless perception. We call the Sankhyas also Nastikas or atheists.

Then comes the Yogins. One great Sage Patanjali has written the Yoga Sutras(a treasure on the Yoga sastra) which helps us to control our senses. It is a famous book and greatly helps man to advance spiritually by controlling his senses. Even this religion does not accept the Vedic God and so we condemn this also as Nastika Matham or Atheism.

Then comes the Mimamsaka religion. The Mimamsa(मीमांस) is a science which is engaged in interpreting the Vedas. The mimamsakas believe the Vedas fully but not God. They say that we have committed many karmas(कर्म) good and bad in our previous births, but should pay for them, as per the Vedas. If we do the yagas or yagnas prescribed in the Vedas, the yagnas confer on us punya or papa and we enjoy or suffer according to them. So no God is necessary. We condemn this religion also as Nastikas or atheists. They call Karma(कर्म) for God.

Then come the Saivas, some of whom do not believe the Vedas and say that Siva is the God of all Gods . We dismiss them also.

Finally come the Vedantins of whom we are one. Vedantam means the last portions of the 4 Vedas which are called Upanishads. They deal with God fully, which serve as the final authority. Sage VedaVyasa churned the Upanishads, so to say and had given the cream of them in his work called the BrahmaSutram, which are 545

Sutras in number. It is a treatise on God Almighty. Lord Krishna also in His Bhagavad-Gita deals with the concepts contained in the Upanishads and Brahma Sutram. These three 1. **The Upanishads**, 2. **Brahma Sutram**, 3. **Bhagavad Gita** are known as the **Prasthanam Trayam** (the three books of Authority) for vedantins. Sankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and Madhvacharya have written commentaries called Bhasyas for all the three Prasthanam Thryas. They differ in the interpretation of the said three. We follow the interpretation of Sri.Ramanujacharya for all the three. Sankara formulated the Advaita system holding God(paramathma) and Soul(Jeevathma) are one and the same. Madhvacharya formulated the Dvaita System and held that Paramathma and Jeevathma are two distinct entities and never the two come together. Our Ramanujacharya founded the Visishtadvaita System according to which Paramathma and Jeevatma are two distinct entities but in the end the two come together and become one.

Now we will deal with our system known as **Vaishnavism or Visishtadvaitam or Ramanuja Darsanam**. The Pramanas or Authority stated in the beginning are all common to our system also. Added to them, we have two more Pramanas which none of the foregoing religions or system accept. The first is the **Nalayira Divya Prabandam** also called Arulicheyal (**அருளிச்செயல்**) or Tamil Vedam, which are Tamil verses, in all 4000 in number, written by the Azhwars. They are all about Lord Narayana or Mahavishnu and are the clear summary of the Prasthanam Trayam, which stated above. With this we have a 4th Prasthanam unlike the Advaitis or Dvaitis. The Azhwars are 12 in number including a lady Andal and Mathurakavi Azhwar, who had sung only 11 Tamil verses, all about not Lord Naryana, but about his own Guru Nammazhwar. The Azhwars had seen God and got His grace. They were great Yogis or Saints and had sound knowledge of all the Pramanas. That is why their works, through in Tamil, is considered as valid Pramana like the Vedas.

The second additional Pramana is the Pancharathra Samhitas(**पञ्चरात्र संहिता**), which we, the Vaishnavites hold in great esteem as a valid Pramana. In the beginning, the Asura Madhukaitaba seized the Vedas from Lord Brahma and hid himself into the sea. Lord Vishnu took the Matsyavathara (**मत्स्यवतार**) or the form of a giant fish, fought with the Asura within the sea, killed him and got back the Vedas and restored them to Brahma. It took 5 days for the Lord for this purpose. Without the Vedas, the world became dark, not knowing how to worship the Lord. So Lord Vishnu divided Himself into two, one as Guru or teacher and the other as Sishya or disciple. The guru taught the disciple the methods of worshipping God for five nights. Hence the teaching was called Pancharatra or work of the five nights. They are all about the methods of worship. They are 108 books called Pancharathra Samhithas, which are followed in the various Vishnu temples in the country. The Dvaitas and Advaitis do not accept this Pramana but we alone respect and accept it as a Pramana.

Incidentally, we want to mention another thing. Like the Pancharathra Samhitas, there is another kind of Samhitas called the Vaikhanasa Samhithas(**वैकानस संहिता**).

They also are about the methods of worship in temples. They were taught to Sage Vikanas by Vishnu and through him to the Sage's descendants. They are also 108 Books existing side by side with the Pancharathra Samhitas. There is no much difference between the two, except some different manthras during Puja in the two. All the temples in the country even in villages fall under one or other of the said varieties, but all the temples under both are valuable, holy and deserve to be worshipped with same devotion by the Vaishnavas. The Samhitas under both are together known as Agamas(आगमः). Pancharathra Agamas and Vaikhanasa Agamas.

For example, the Srirangam Ranganatha Temple is a Pancharathra temple, while the Tirupati Srinivasa Temple is a Vaikhanasa temple, So on and so forth. We should worship in both kinds of the temples with the same fervour and devotion, without any distinction.

We have dealt with the Pramanas of the Vaishnavites in the above pages, which are the same as those for all Hindus but in addition the Pancharathra and also Vaikhanasa samhitas and the Arulicheyal or Nalayira Divya Prabandam of the Azhwars. Now we shall deal with the Prameya or God of our religion or system.

Our **Prameya** or God is Lord **Mahavishnu or Narayana or Sriyahpathi** (the Lord of Sri Mahalakshmi), who is the Sarveswara or the God of all gods. Ramanuja, our preceptor or Prime Acharya, not content with the appellation Sarveswara calls him Sarveswareswara (सर्वेस्वरेस्वरः). he has created all other Gods and sub-Gods and in short, the entire universe and all their contents and inhabitants. He is possessed of innumerable noble and excellent qualities called Kalyanagunas. The advaitis say He is not possessed of any qualities. They call God Nirguna Brahman (निर्गुणब्रह्मं)-one without qualities or attributes. We condemn the advaitis for this. The Lord has five forms. they are,

1. **Parasvaroop** (परस्वरूप): This refers to his remaining in the Vaikuntha Loka with His Consorts Sridevi, Bhudevi and NeelaDevi accompanied by AthiSesha (serpent Bed), Garuda (His Vahana or vehicle) and Viswakshena (विश्वकशेनः) His commander-in-chief called Senai Mudaliar and crowded with His Bhakthas, devotees and those who had reached there by Moksha. Reaching Vaikuntha and serving God Vishnu is Moksha according to our Azhwars.
2. **Vyuha** (व्यूहः): The second is Vyuha. He reclines on the AdiSesha in the Milky ocean (शीरसमुद्रः) and stays there to help humanity. He takes four forms there via., Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Sankarshana and Vasudeva. In these He creates the Universe by one, Protects it by one and destroys it by one and by another helps and affords protection to the Devas who come there and seek the protection of the Lord against Asuras and Rakshasas like Hiranya, Ravana, Kumbhakarna, Kamasa, etc., etc., No Devas, why, nobody

can go to Vaikunta and see the Lord in His Para Swarooma except by going there by Moksha. So they troop to the Milky Ocean.

3. **Vibhav Avatara** (विभवावतार): The third form of the Lord is Known as Vibhav Avatara (विभवावतार) as Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Nrisimha, Rama, Krishna etc., etc.,. The Lord's Kalyana gunas were manifested in His various Avatars in this world. There were opportunities for Him to show His innumerable qualities on this earth to a greater extent than in Vaikunta or Milky Ocean.
4. **Antharyami** (अन्तर्यामि): The fourth form of the Lord is known as Antharyami (अन्तर्यामि) that is He indwells or inheres in all the things and men in all the worlds in the vast universe. There is not even a single **ATOM** in which the Lord does not inhere or dwells. This aspect of the Lord is known as **IMMANENCE**. Great Sages, Saints, yogis and seers enjoy the Lord within themselves in his Antharyami Form. That is why our conscience tells us good things at times. We can meditate on the Lord in this Form. As you do meditation daily, you think of the Lord in His Antharyami Form within your own self, think of Him and Worship Him.
5. **Archa Form** (अर्चावतार): The fifth and the last Form of the Lord is in his residing in temples as idols, in hermitages, houses, cottages etc.,. This is known as the Archa Form (अर्चावतार). For common people, this is the most valuable, comfortable, easily available form of worship. The Azhwars have sung on the Lord in this Archa Form in the various temples in their Prabandas. Even our Saligramam in our house will come under this Form.

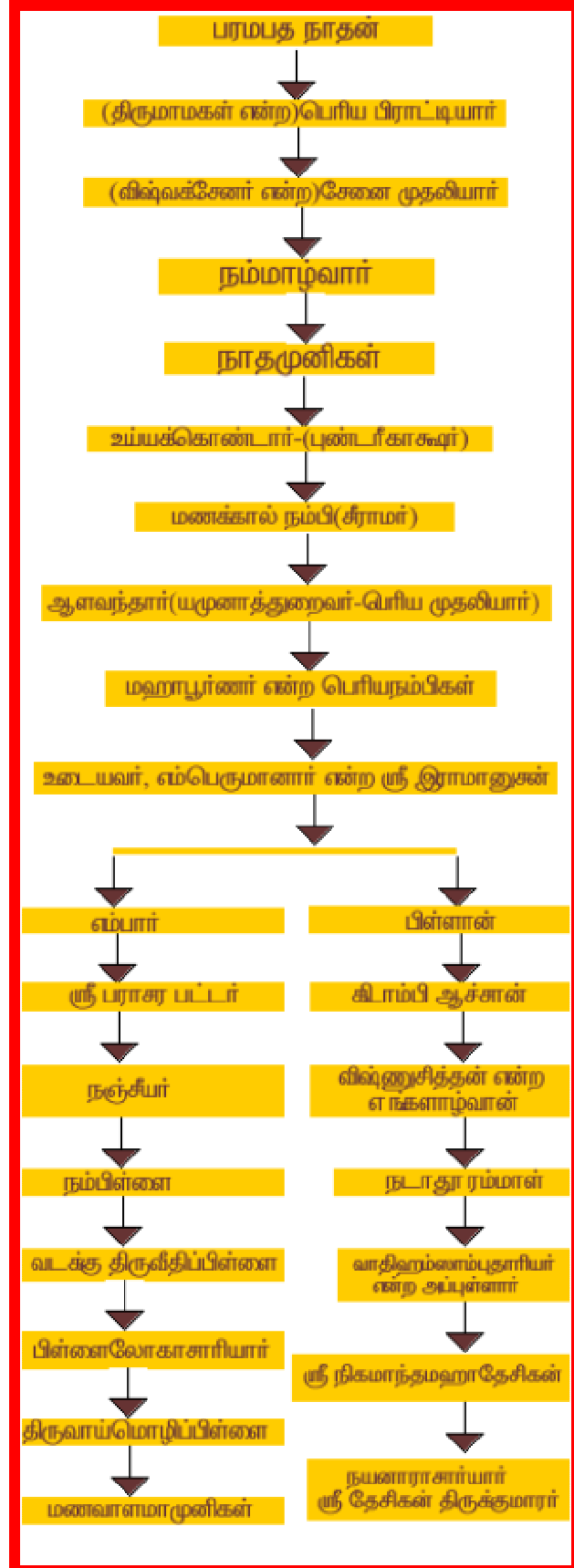
Having dealt with the Five Forms of the Lord, we shall now move on to the various Pramanas which describes Lord and lay emphasis on each of them.

1. The Vedas describe the Para Swarooma of the Lord.
2. The Pancharathra and Vaikhanasa Agamas serve as the sole Pramanas of the Vyuha Form of the Lord.
3. The epics and the Puranas extensively describe the Lord's Gunas and activities in His Vibhava Avatars.
4. The Dharmasastras i.e Smritis and Sutras deal with His Antharyami Form in extensor.
5. All the Azhwars Prabandams (அருளிச்செயல்) extol the Archavatara.

These specially deal with one or the other of the Lord's Form. But all are equally good, sacred and important to us without any distinction.

Now we will deal with Pramathas. As said in the beginning of this article the ancient sages, seers and saints are the Pramathas. Added to them, our Azhwars and Acharyars are our more important Pramathas. The azhwars had written the summary of the Vedas in their Tamil Prabandams. After them come the Acharyas. The institution of the Acharyas is very important and unique for the Vaishnavas. It goes by the name Guruparampara or Line of Gurus (their galaxy), which every Vaishnava should recite and worship daily. The Adi guru is Lord Vishnu and His

disciple is His Consort Lakshmi. Her disciple is Vishvaksena or Senai Mudaliar. His disciple is Nammazhwar. These four in the line are in the world beyond. Nammazhwar appeared specially before his disciple Nathamuni, who is the first Acharya from whom the line continues up to our present preceptor. After the azhwars, the line of Acharya start from him up to our present Acharya Swami. The old acharyars called Purva Acharyas were all learned up to the 15th to 16 centuries. Later the Acharyas deteriorated and many of the present Acharya Swamis are ignorant. How can we call them Pramatas ? Any how as they come in the line of Acharyas of the Guruparampara, we have to respect and worship them. The Guruparampara begins from Lord Vishnu and Through Lakshmi, Senai Mudaliar, Nammazhwar and Nathamuni it passes on uninterruptedly and ends with the present Acharya of every Vaishnava. The Guruparampara is given here in the form of flow chart for reference.



(After ManavalaMamunigal and Nayanaracharyar it passes on uninterruptedly and ends with the present Acharya of every Vaishnava).

In this context we want to tell you that some of the old Competent Acharyas had written brilliant and useful commentaries on the works of the Azhwars and others had written Tamil Sutras which are easy to memorise and which contain the important tenets of the Vaishnava Philosophy and Sampradayam. They are also Pramanas for us. All of them are summaries of the Azhwars Prabandhams in easy language. Many women used to learn them by heart and recite them daily a few generations ago.

Now let us pass on to the doctrines and tenets of Vaishnavism in brief.

The greatest, super most and God of all gods is Lord Vishnu or Narayana for the Vaishnavas. He had created all the worlds and their contents in the vast universe. He had created the minor and sub- gods like Siva, Brahma, Indra, Agni, Vayu, Kubera and a host of others and had endowed them with limited powers and allotted specific works for each of them. Lord Narayana is the storehouse of all good, noble and auspicious qualities called Kalyana Gunas. The Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras called Him Brahman and Parabrahman. They also hold that all words refer to only the Brahman which, to us, is Narayana. They declare that the stotras to the deities referred to above, contained in the Vedas frequently, apply to Lord Narayana alone, as He is the Antharyami and inheres in each one of them. If we say " I bow to Indra it means" I bow to Narayana who inheres as Antharyami within Indra, so on and so forth. So the entire universe has within itself Narayana as Antharyami. He is associated with his principal consort Sri or Lakshmi and hence He is also called Sriyahpathi (श्रियः पति). We call them DivyaDampathi (दिव्यदम्पती) meaning the Divine couple Lakshmi appeals to the Lord Vishnu to show sympathy or compassion to men, notwithstanding that they are guilty having committed many sins. This act of Lakshmi is known as Purushakara (पुरुषकार) meaning recommendation to the Lord to show sympathy to the erring men and excuse them considerably.

In English, we call the supreme god as Almighty or Ultimate Reality. He is omnipotent (All-powerful), omniscient (All-knowing) and omnipresent (All-pervading). In western philosophy they attribute only two forms to God, namely Immanence (Antharyami) and Transcendence (Outward manifestation).

The whole creation of God is composed of the three Thathvas (known as Thatvathraya- तत्त्वत्रय). Thathva means truth simple. When applied to religious concepts it is called verity. Eternal verity means the Thathva which we mean in our system. For example, the 24 thathvas as stated above under the Sankhya system can be translated as 24 verities, more clearly 24 eternal verities.

The Three Thathvas or external verities are :

1. **Chith**(चित्): meaning animate, sentient or living things. Our soul is chith and is called Jivatma(जीवात्मा)
2. **Achith**(अचित्): meaning inanimate, non-sentient or lifeless objects called Prakrity or matter(प्रकृति). All the bodies of all living beings including men is Achith(अचित्).
3. **Iswara**(ईश्वर) or God

All the above three Thathvas are eternal verities. They exist throughout and never die. God inheres as Antharyami both within the chith and achith. In other words, the chith and Achith form the body of the Iswara or God and God is the soul of the two. More clearly, God or Iswara is the soul or Jivatma and has for His body the Chith and Achith as His Sarira(शरीर). Take for instance the human species. The body or (शरीर) is Achith. By itself it has no life. It is inanimate. When the soul or Jivatma enters it, it gains life and does things. The soul or Jivatma is Chith or animate. Within the Jivathma or Soul, God or Iswara inheres and dwells as Antharyami. The three together form the Thathvathraya(three eternal verities). thus the body(Achith) and the soul (Jivatma) constitute the body of Iswara or God who is the Antharathma forms the soul of the twofold body of the chith and Achith(body and soul). This grand and sublime concept is known as **Sarirasariribhava** (शरीरशरीरिभाव), which is uniquely the Vaishnava concept. The other systems do not believe in this concept. Sarira(शरीर) means body and sariri(शरीरि) means soul which rests within the body. The two together (body and soul) is the body of God or Iswara who is the soul of the twofold body as Antharyami.

According to our Acharyas, all the Pramanas right from the Vedas down to the later Acharyas' works or treatises should contain three specific matters or things. They are Thathva(तत्त्व), Hitha(हित), and Purushartha(पुरुषार्थ). They are as follows.

- **Thathva**(तत्त्व) here means God, the eternal verity. Any religious work of value, should deal with God, describe His nature, powers, qualities and indispensability to man.
- **Hitha**(हित) means that which is essential for men's benefit and good and that which will make him eternally happy. This is the method of reaching God, which alone is Moksha and which alone will make men eternally happy. This is Saranagathi(शरणागति) which means realising man's helplessness and ignorance of attaining moksha and surrendering himself before God and begging God for his Moksha or salvation.
- **Purushartha**(पुरुषार्थ) means the fruit or effect of man's endeavour. According to our Acharyas and Acharyars, by Saranagathi, man must reach God in the Vaikunta Loka and render God service. That is real Moksha. Man must attain moksha with the help of his good Acharya, who will initiate the Sishya or disciple in the system.

The acharya will do five rituals to the Sishya, known as Pancha Samskara(पञ्चसंस्कार) or five purifying and anointing ceremonies as a result of which the disciple will become a true Vaishnava.

The samskaras are

1.Putting 12 Namams(thiruman) on the disciple this is called **Pundra**.

2.Branding him with the image of Chakra, rendered red hot in fire in the chakra image(in silver) on his right shoulder (top of his right hand). Branding him with the image of Conch (Sankha) on the left shoulder as said before. This is called **Thapa(ताप)** or Branding.

3.Teaching the disciple the Three Manthras via

Ashtakshari(अष्टाक्षरी)- the eight lettered Manthra also called Moola Manthra-
(ओम् नमो नारायणाय_ஓம் நமோ நாராயணாய)

Dwayam(द्वयं)- the two sentences of prayer to the Lord and Lakshmi.

श्रीमन्नारायणचरणो शरणं प्रपद्ये
श्रीमतेनारायणाय नमः

ஸ்ரீமந்நாராயணசரணெள சரணம் ப்ரபத்யே
ஸ்ரீமதே நாராயணாய நமः||

Charamaslokam(चरमश्लोकं) The verse dealing with the last method of reaching Moksha. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Krishna explains to Arjuna the karma yoga, Gnana yoga and Bhakthi yoga.

If these are not possible to practise, Krishna tells Arjuna to last(**चरम**) method which is easy

सर्व धर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज
अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि माशुचः

[Leaving all other methods stated above, Prostrate and surrender before me(perform Saranagathi before me) owning your helplessness. I shall make you attain moksha grieve not]

The teaching of the three manthras known as Rahasyathraya(**रहस्यत्रय**) by the Acharya is called Manthropadesa(**मन्त्रोपदेश**).

4. The Acharya will give a spiritual name known as **Dasya Nama(दास्यनाम)** to the Sishya. That will be to mean servant of God, any Azhwar or Acharya. It is optional.

5. The last is the Acharya will teach Ijya (इज्या) or **Bhagavad Aradhanam**(திருவாராதனம்) which every Vaishnava is expected to perform daily in his house before the Saligrama, which every house will have.

The Acharya-Sishya relationship is unique among the vaishnavas. No other system has it to this extent.

Lastly we want to tell you one more important thing. All the Pramanas including the works of Azhwars and Acharyas and also short Stotras by later Acharyas should contain five important matters which are in the form of guidance to the devotees. They are

1. God(परमात्मा)
2. Soul(जीवात्मा)
3. Method of reaching God(उपाय)
4. Fruit (फल) i.e. Moksha
5. Impediments of enemies for reaching Moksha (शत्रवः) as they are called Virodhi(विरोधी).

These five are called Arthapanchakam(अर्थपञ्चकम्) Five Arthas or matters.

We end with this for the present. Let us recount the unique aspects of Vaishnavism.

1. The institution of the Azhwars and their Arulicheyal.
2. New Pramanas-Arulicheyal and Agamas
3. Guruparampara
4. Relationship of Acharya and Sishya.
5. Sarirasariribhava concept(Thathvathrayam)
6. The panchasamskara of the Acharya to the Sishya which only the Vaishnavas have- males after Upanayanam and Females after Marriage. The whole process is known as Samasrayanam(समाश्रयणं)
7. The Division of Thathva, Hitha and Purushartha.
8. The Arthapanchakam
9. The Rahasyathrayam.
10. The concept of Vaikunta Lokam and its inmates etc., No other system, not even the other vedantic systems as Dwaitam and Advaitam hold such views of the Vaikuntam as we do. (Note :Swargaloka:- It is the abode of the Devas. If a man perform good deeds and earns Punya, he is sent to the SwargaLoka, where he will enjoy happiness as a reward of his Punya. It is a loka for enjoyment. If the quantity of his punya is over, the man is pushed back to the earth. Even the Gita says it. Swarga is not Vaikuntam)