

“THE TRAITS OF A SAINT ACCORDING TO VAISHNAVISM.”

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I Vaishnavite saints are seers (Jnanis) par excellence:-
The Lord says in Gita (7—17, 18, 19)

तेषां ज्ञानी नित्ययुक्त एकभक्तिर्विशिष्यते ।

प्रियो हि ज्ञानिनोऽत्यर्थमहं स च मम प्रियः ॥

Of these, the seer constantly united with me, desiring me alone is the best; I am supremely dear to him and he is dear to Me

उदाराः सर्व एवैते ज्ञानी त्वात्मैव मे मतम् ।

आस्थितः स हि युक्तात्मा मामेवानुत्तमां गतिम् ॥

Noble are all these; but I hold the seer as verily My soul; he is united and fixed on Me, the highest Path and goal.

ब्रह्मनां जन्मनामन्ते ज्ञानवान्मां प्रपद्यते ।

वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः ॥

At the close of many births, the man full of wisdom cometh unto Me; “Vasudeva is all,” saith he, the Mahatma, very difficult to find.

Their knowledge about their self and the God is the highest. They fully realise that their soul is an inseparable, integral part of the body of God (over-soul) and is sub-servient to that supreme being; Who is no one else than the Vedic Vishnu or Narayana. The vedas contain Sooktas (praises) of various deities. In several places they clearly and emphatically assert that Vishnu, also known as Narayana, Hari, Anantha, and Achyuta is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of all other

deities and the worlds ruled by them and consequently He alone is the sepreme being. The following texts may be noted :—“अग्निरवमो देवतानां विष्णुः परमः” (Yajurveda Samhita 5-5) [Agni is the lowest of all deities and Vishnu is the highest] “न ते विष्णो जायमानो न जातः देव महिम्नः परमन्तं आप” (Rig Veda Ashtaka 5-6-24) [O ! Lord Vishnu! Nobody in the past, present or future knows the outer boundary of your greatness] “तद्विष्णोः परमं पदं” (Rig Veda Ashtaka 1-2-7) [The abode of Vishnu is the highest world] ‘नारायण परं ब्रह्म’ (Taittireeya Upanishad Narayana Valli) [Narayana is the supreme being.] “एको हवै नारायण आसीत्, न ब्रह्मा नेशानः नेमे चावापृथिवी’ (Mahopanishad) [At the time of deluge, Narayana alone was existent; Neither Brahma nor Siva nor the worlds.] “नारायणात् ब्रह्मा जायते, नारायणात् रुद्रो जायते” (Narayanopanishad) [At the time of creation Bramha was born of Narayana and Rudra was born of Narayana.] “माता पिता भ्राता निवासः शरणं सुहृत् गतिः नारायणः— एष सर्वभूतान्तरात्मा अपहृतपाप्मा दिव्यो देव एको नारायणः” (Subalopanishad) [Narayana is the mother, father, brother, refuge, means, friend and goal of all souls. This Narayana resides inside all beings; He is free from all defects; He alone is the ruler of the highest World.] etc.

The Vaishnavite saint is fully aware that only Narayana the supreme being can redeem the souls from this Mundane World, full of misery and give them the highest bliss in the highest World. Hence, he worships the supreme being alone as a chaste woman adores her husband. But it does not follow that he hates other deities. He sees Narayana inside all the deities, all the souls and all the inanimate objects. He fully understands that the word denoting any

object in the world denotes also the supreme being Narayana who is the inner soul of every object. He is the seer (Jnani) par excellence because he sees Narayana in every object.

II Vaishnavite saints are devotees (Bhaktas) par excellence:-
The Lord says in Gita (9—13, 14, 22; 10—9)

महात्मानस्तु मां पार्थ दैवीं प्रकृतिमाश्रिताः।
भजन्त्यनन्यमनसो ज्ञात्वा भूतादिमव्ययम् ॥

Verily the Mahatmas, O Partha, partaking of divine nature, worship with unwavering mind, having known Me, the imperishable source of beings.

सततं कीर्तयन्तो मां यतन्तश्च दृढव्रताः।
नमस्यन्तश्च मां भक्त्या नित्ययुक्ता उपासते ॥

Always glorifying Me, strenuous, firm in their will, prostrating themselves before Me, they worship Me with devotion, ever desiring to attain me.

अनन्याश्रिन्तयन्तो मां ये जनाः पर्युपासते।
तेषां नित्याभियुक्तानां योगक्षेमं वहाम्यहम् ॥

To those men who worship Me alone, thinking of no other, to those who desire to attain me, I give full protection.

मच्चित्ता मद्गतप्राणा ब्रोधयन्तः परस्परम्।
कथयन्तश्च मां नित्यं तुष्यन्ति च रमन्ति च ॥

Mindful of Me, their life depending on Me, illumining each other, ever conversing about Me, they are content and joyfully speaking and hearing about Me.

The devotion of the vaishnavite saint reaches heights unknown in other spheres. The experience of these God intoxicated devotees is the highest mysticism. This mysticism is not magic, mystery-mongering or siddhi-seeking. It is entirely different from occultism and spiritualism. The true mystic rejects the values of supernatural powers and Yogic Siddhis as he seeks God and only God. He realises that they do not lead to God, rather they lead away from Him. The saint is so deeply intoxicated by divine love that he has no other thought or feeling than that of God. Krishna alone satisfies his organic cravings of hunger, thirst and pleasure. “உண்ணுஞ்சோறு பருகும் நீர் தின்னும் வெற்றிலையும் எல்லாம் கண்ணன்” says Nammalvar in his Thiruvoimozhi. The Lord exclaims such a person as a Mahatma in his Gita; of “वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः”. His devotion is the consummation of his knowledge. Bhakti is the thought of God touched by feeling and turned into devotion. Jnana deepens into Bhakti and Bhakti is exalted by Jnana and the two are fused together as Prema. Nammalvar calls this devotion as “மதிநலம்” in his Thiruvoimozhi. Ramanuja calls this as bhaktirupapanna jnana in his Sri Bhashya. Jnana and Bhakti can be distinguished but cannot be divided and the two together find their consummation in divine love, which in its highest stages bursts the bounds of artificial restraint and becomes a deluge of ecstasy. This love or prema is not one-sided. The transcendental Brahman beyond the world equally seized with soul-hunger, incarnates into the heart of humanity without abandoning His holiness and glory. This mutualness results in the game of love, a game devised by the divine Artist to transmit the karma-ridden jiva

into a mukta. The reciprocity of love leads to irresistibility by the mystic process of sams'lesa (union) alternating with vis'lesa (separation). The former is the joy of contacting the entrancing beauty of Bhuvana Sundara, and the latter the sorrow of the separation from Him. Excess of prema transforms the jnani into a spiritual bride pining for her lord. The symbolism of marriage embodies the secrets of the soul's longings and its self-giving joys. In separation each moment stretches into eternity, but in union eternity is crowded into a moment. In the former case the saintly bride pines away owing to the feeling of unrequited love and becomes pale and passive. In the latter, the soul is caught up to God and has a momentary joy of union or ecstasy. This opposition is known as the mystic paradox and its object is the transmutation of the earthly self into the godly by a process of spiritual alchemy. The like alone seeks the like; love alone calls for love. Like gold in the refiner's fire, the self is purified and deified by alternate depressions and exaltations. At one time, it is thrilled by His touches; at another, it is torn away from Him and languishes. In mystic philosophy, both are the essential elements of love/. This Sringara Bhakti or Bridel mysticism is dominant in NAMMALVAR. PERIALVAR shows motherly affection to the Lord. His love is so great that he forgets the Lord's divinity and prays for his long life in his work "திருப் பல்லாண்டு". He is so much immersed in the love of child Krishna that he forgets His divinity and tends him with the tenderness of Yasoda in his other work. These are a few instances of heights to which the devotion of the Vaishnavite saint can reach.

III Vaishnavite saints are 'Prapannas' par excellence:-

The Lord says in Gita (7—14, 15—4, 18—62, 66)

दैवी ह्येषा गुणमयी मम माया दुरत्यया ।

मामेव ये प्रपद्यन्ते मायामेतां तरन्ति ते ॥

This divine prakriti of Mine, in which the three qualities Sattva, Rajas and Tamas exist is very difficult to overcome; they who surrender to Me alone cross over this prakriti.

तमेव चाद्यं पुरुषं प्रपद्येयतः प्रवृत्तिः प्रसृता पुराणी

Ancient devotees got liberation only by surrendering to Him.

तमेव शरणं गच्छ सर्वभावेन भारत ।

तत्प्रसादात्परां शान्तिं स्थानं प्राप्स्यसि शाश्वतम् ॥

Flee unto Him for shelter with all thy being, O Bharata; by His grace thou shalt obtain supreme peace, and the everlasting dwelling-place.

सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं व्रज ।

अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥

Abandoning all other means of liberation, come unto Me alone for shelter; sorrow not, I will liberate thee from all sins.

Prapanna is one for whom the Lord is the end and the means. His surrender to God is absolute. His ultimate aim even in the highest world of liberation is the joy of the Lord. He seeks liberation or Moksha for the happiness of the Lord and not for his own. Hence, the Lord, the redeemer of all souls—is the

means for the Prapannas for attaining liberation. None else—not even their own effort is the cause for their liberation. In Sastras like Gita, Karmayoga, Jnanayoga and Bhaktiyoga which require human effort are shown in several places as means of attaining the Lord. But vaishnavite saints like Nammalvar say that they do not want to attain liberation by these yogas which presuppose selfishness in the joy in the Yonder World. As their aim is the joy of the Lord alone and not their own happiness even in Moksha, they desist from their own efforts like Karmayoga for the purpose of attaining Moksha. In the Charamasloka [Gita 18-66] quoted above, The Lord says that prapannas who do not care for their happiness even in Moksha and who care for His happiness alone need not perform any human effort like Karmayoga and that He himself is the means for them and bestow on them out of His own grace pure and simple (Nirhetuka Kripa) the highest bliss in the Yonder World. He calls such prapannas as Mahatmas and says that it is very difficult even for him to get one such Mahatma. cf. “वासुदेवः सर्वमिति स महात्मा सुदुर्लभः”. Saints like Nammalvar have shown that they are prapannas of the highest order caring for the happiness of the Lord alone and consequently having Him alone as the means for Moksha. The following texts from Thiruvoimozhi may be noted in this respect:— “தனக்கேயாக எனக்கே கொள்ளுமீதே, எனக்கே கண்ணனை யான்கொள் சிறப்பே” (2-9-4) “கண்ணனல்லால் இல்லகண்டர் சரண்” (9-1-10) “நாகணையிசை நம்பிரான் சரணே சரண் நமக்கு” (5-10-11) “நோற்ற நோன்பிலேன் நுண்ணறிவிலேன் ஆகிலும் இனி உன்னை விட்டு ஒன்றும் ஆற்றுகிற்கின்றிலேன்” (5-7-1)

Besides the above three important traits, there are many other traits of the Vaishnavite saint enumerated in Gita 10-4, 5; 13-8, 9, 10; 16-1, 2, 3; 17-14, 15&16 as follows:— “Reason, wisdom, non-illusion, forgiveness, truth, self-restraint, calmness, harmlessness, equanimity, content, austerity, humility, unpretentiousness, rectitude, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-control, dispassion towards the objects of the senses, absence of egoism, insight into the pain and evil of birth, death, old age and sickness, unattachment, absence of self-identification with son, wife or home, constant balance of mind in wished-for and unwished for events, fearlessness, cleanliness of mind, steadfastness in Atmavichara, almsgiving, self-restraint, sacrifice, study of the Scriptures, straightforwardness, absence of wrath, renunciation, peacefulness, absence of crookedness, compassion to living beings, uncovetousness, mildness, modesty, absence of fickleness, vigour, fortitude, absence of envy and pride, continence, speech causing no annoyance, truthful, pleasant and beneficial, mental happiness, equilibrium and silence etc.”

In conclusion, it can be stated that the Vaishnavite saints who have all the good qualities enunciated in all the religions of the world, are specially noteworthy by the three traits described above (ie) Highest knowledge about self and God, highest devotion to God and absolute surrender to God—enunciated in the vedas and Sastras of Bharat.

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