Introduction to Srivaishnavism (Ramanuja darsanam)

PART 1
Srivaishnavism Course hosted in USA
by
Vedics Foundation
Course material designed by Srivaishnavasri, Srirangam
PARICHAYA

PART FIRST

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Sri Srirangam N.C.Srinivasan, Madras.
Welcome to

SRI VAISHNAVA SRI

“PARICHAYA”

My Dear Sir / Madam,

We appreciate your ardent desire to know of Sri Vaishnavism. “Sri Vaishnava Sri” welcomes you.

The object of the Course is to acquaint you with as many Sri-Sukthies as possible of our ancient Acharyas (Gurus). If you already know some of them, you may once again re-live in the experience of their spiritual import.

The system followed in this course is according to the Sri Vaishnava Darsana universalized by the Great Acharya Sri Ramanuja. Other Vaishnava Systems like Madhwa, Vallaba or Chaitanaya are not touched upon.

The first year Parichaya Course will contain fortnightly lessons on the following subjects:-

1. Roots of Sri Vaishnavism
2. Azwars and Acharyas – Their greatness.
4. Yamunacharya’s STOTRA RATNA.
5. Sri Krishna Vangmayam (BHAGAVAD GITA).
6. 108 Divya Deshas.
7. Atma Guna Parimala.
9. Gnana Vis-à-vis Kainkarya.
10. Mangalasasana.

At the end of Parichaya Course, there will be a simple written test, followed by a viva voce. Those qualified would be awarded certificates and Prizes / Gifts. Efforts will be made to hold the examinations at centers, which are not vary far from your place.

Response Sheets will be sent after a couple of months to assess the comprehension of the participants. Only those who sincerely follow the lessons and produce the answers in the response sheets will merit for receiving further lessons.

After Parichaya Course for one year, ‘Pravanya’ and ‘Prapanna’ Courses, each for duration of one year, will follow. Studies in greater depth and on a wider scale will mark the higher courses.

Yours,
In the Service of
Sriman-Narayana,
Ramanuja Dasa,
M.V.KRISHNASWAMY
Hyderabad
Course Director-Sri Vaishnava Sri.
LESSON ONE
ROOTS OF SRI VAISHNAVISM

1. From time immemorial Sri Vaishnavism prevails.
2. Sri-Vaishnavas are referred to as Bhagavathas or Dasa-vargas of Sriman-Narayana.
3. The Four Vedas baffle historians in arriving at a precise date of their origin. Several thousands of years ago our country possessed wisdom, the like of which the most modern scientist is yet to see. Sri Vaishnavism is co-eval with the period of the Vedas.
4. The Vedas with full-throated ease declare “Sri-man Narayana” as the Supreme Being – as He is the adhara of both sentient and insentient entities.
5. The Sangham Literature of the Tamils, which is very ancient, is unequivocal in its assertion that Sri Vishnu the primeval Purushottama – is the all-pervasive spirit within everything.
6. Azhvars, spanning two yugas (the Dwapara and the first part of Kali), have created the immortal Supramental Spiritual Poetry known as Nalayira Divya Prabandham, illumining the whole world with the knowledge of Sriman-Narayana and His oceanic Kalyana-Gunas.
7. The greatest Seers, Yogis, Intellectuals, Poets have expressed the Supreme as the All-Beautiful Krishna. Human blessedness lies in realizing the significance of Divine Service to the Joy and Ecstasy of this Supreme Being.
8. Meta-physical or philosophic enquiry is not our scope; Ours is to taste the honey gathered by our Poorvacharyas (Ancient Masters).
9. Rik-Yajus-Sama and Atharva are the four Vedas of these, the Rik Veda is the earliest.
10. Rik-Veda 1.155: 5 intuits:
    “….. the wise see the highest place of Vishnu-called Paramapada – as it were an eye fixed in the heaven.”
    Yajur Veda-siras reads as under:-

Note:Words like Sriman Narayana, Sriyap-pathi, Nara-yana, Vishnu, sri, will get explained by and by, if one follows the course carefully and reads attentively the lessons and the books that would be suggested. As the subject is vast and there are constraints of space and time, an integral reading of all the lessons is necessary.
LESSON TWO
AZHWARS AND ACHARYAS – THEIR GREATNESS

Although the Vedas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas, the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras, the Pancharatras and many revelations to the Sages of the past have imprinted the Vaishnava form of worship everywhere in our country, owing to vicissitudes of times and the colossal crumbling down of Indian culture by invasion and inter-mingling of outside influences, the payche of the Indian religious mind got shattered down in the post-Christian era. The Azhwars (divine poets) and Acharyas (Inspired Sages) have resuscitated the Sri Vaishnava culture and their role is paramount for any student of Vaishnavism to understand. Their lives, main teachings, illustrative incidents connected with them, will all be narrated briefly under this section. To begin with, a tree is given which may be kept as a key reference sheet for future lessons.

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The word “Azhwar” is unique to the Tamil tongue. It means simply “a soul immersed in divine love”. As no one word translation is possible, the same is retained in English. The divine pasurams (poetry) of these twelve Azhwars constitute the Dravida Veda (Divya Prabandam).
CHRONOLOGICAL
Tree
SRI VAISHNAVA GURUPARAMPARA

Lakshmi Natha Samarambam
Nathayamuna maadhyamam
Asmad Acharya Paryantam
Vande Guruparamparam

Ranganatha Pundarikaksha
Ranganayaki Rama Misra
Vishwaksena Yamuda charya
Nammazhwar Maha purna
Nathamuni Ramanuja

Embar Thiruk-kurugaip-piranpillan
Bhattar
Nanjeeyar Engalazhwan
Nampillai Nadadoorammal
Vedakkut-Thiru Kidambi Appullar
Veedhippillai Vedantha Desika
Pillai Lokacharya Nayanacharya
Thiruvaimozhip-pillai
Manavala Mamunigal

* * *

THE TWELVE GREAT AZHWARS (DIVYA SURIES)

Poigai-Azhwar Kulasekhara-Azhwar
Bhoodat-Azhwar Peria-Azhwar
Peyazhwar Andal
Thirumahishai-Azhwar Tondar-Adippodi-Azhwar
Nammazhwar Thirup-panazhwar
Madhurakavi-Azwar Thiru-Mangai Azhwar.
LESSON THREE
NALAYIRA DIVYA PRABHANDAM

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IV. Fourth Thousand

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<td>Ramanuja-nootrandadi</td>
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Although the exact count does not come to 4000, the Sri-Vaishnava Tradition holds that the Azhwar's Poems sum up to Nalayiram (4000). Hence it is called Nalayira Divya Prabandham.
LESSON FOUR
YAMUNACHARYA’S STOTRA RATNA

Sri Yamunacharya is forerunner to Sri Ramanuja in unfolding the truths of Sri Vaishnavism. Though the two have not met face to face, they were knit in the spiritual bond.

The Stotra is praise of the Supreme Being is considered as the most prized jewel by Sri Vaishnavas. Hence its name Stotra Ratna. This brings out the three tatwas of CHIT, ACHIT and ISHWARA as seen by Sage Parasara in VISHNU PURANA. To all Sri Vaishnava Acharyas following Shri Yamunacharya, this Stotra functions as a beacon-light.

*Invocation (Thanian)
Swathayan niha sarvesham trayyantartham sudhurgraham
Stotrayamasa Yogeendra tham vandhey Yamunahvayam (i)

Namo Namo Yamunaya, Yamunaya Namo Namaha
Namo Namo Yamunaya, Yamunaya Namo Namaha  (ii)

(Meaning: I prostrate at the lotus feet of Sri Yamunacharya again and again. The Great Acharya has taught in this Stotra the truths pregnant in Vedantha and Upanishads in a manner accessible to men of ordinary intelligence).

**STOTRA RATNA**

Namo chintyadbuta-klista-jnana vairagya rasaye |
Nadhaya munaye-agatha Bhagavat bhakthi sindhavey ||   (1)

(Meaning: Yamanucharya invokes the spiritual blessings of Nadha Muni, the great ocean of bhakthi).

*Note:* Please recite these stanzas again and again. Further stanzas will be given in this Section.

The life of Shri Yamunacharya will be narrated in the Section of Azwars and Acharyas by and by.

* Invocation: Before reciting any sloka, there will be a meditative sloka on the Acharya who sang the sloka. It is called Thanian. The word ‘I’ relates to the person who meditates on the Acharya.

Tasmai namo madhu-jidangri saroja tattwa
Jnananu-raga mahimadhishayanthan-seemney |
Nadhaya Nadha Munaye atra paratra-chapi
Nityam yadeeya charanow charanam madheeyam ||  (2)

(Meaning: Once again prostrations to the Great Nadha Muni).

Bhuyo namo aparimitha achyutha bhakthi tattwa
Jna amruthabdhi parivaha subhair vashobhibi |
Loke avatheerna paramartha samagra bhakthi
Yogaya Nadha Munaye Yaminam Varaya ||   (3)

(Meaning: Once again Salutations to the Great Yogi; the Bhaktha, par excellent; the First Acharya in the galaxy of Sri Vaishnava Acharyas)
Thus, the first three stanzas mirror the deep love and adoration which Yamanucharya (Alavandar) had for his grand-father Sri Nadha-munigal.

LESSON FIVE
BHAGAVAD GITA

Bhagavad Gita is the bed-rock of Sri Vaishnavism. Although all the slokas thereof are important, some of the most notable are given hereunder for retention in the clear lake of the mind, unsullied by other disturbing waves.

CHAPTER ONE
Text 1
Drutarastra uvacha

Dharma-ksetre kuru-ksetre samaveta yuyutsavah |
Mamakah pandavas caiva kim akurvata Sanjaya ||

(Meaning: Dritarastra said: “O Sanjaya, after assembling in the holy place of Kurukshetra, what did my sons and the sons of Pandu do—both vying with each other to flight”)

Text 15
Panchajanyam Hrisikeso devadattam dhananjayah |
Poundram dadhmau mahe-sankham bhima-karma Vrukodharaha ||

(Meaning: The Lord Krishna blew His conchshell Panchajanya; Arjuna blew his Devadatta and Bhima blew his Poundram)

Text 19
Sa ghoso dhartarastranam hrdayani vyadarayat |
Nabhas ca prthivim caive tumulo abhanunadayat ||

(Meaning: The uproar of these conchshells, vibrating both in the sky and on the earth, shattered the hearts of the sons of Dritarastra).

Text 21
Arjuna uvacha |
SENYOR UBHAYOR MADHYE RATHAM STHAPAYA MEY ACHYUTA ||

(Meaning: Arjuna said: “O unfailing One, please draw my chariot between the two contending armies”.)

Text 24
Sanjaya uvacha |
Eevam ukto hrisikeso gudakesena bharata |
Senayor ubhayor Madhya sthapayitva rathottamam
(Meaning: Sanjaya said: “O Dritarastra I being thus addressed by Arjuna, Lord Krishna drew up the fine chariot to the midst of the contending armies”)

**Text 28 & 29**

Arjuna uvacha
Drustvemam svajanam Krishna yuyutsum samupasthitam
Seedanthi mama gatrani mukham cha parisusyati
Vepathus cha sarire mey roma-harsas cha jayate
Gandeervam sramsate hastat tvak caiva paridhyate

(Meaning: Arjuna said: “My dear Krishna, seeing my friends and relatives present before my eyes poised to fight, I feel a quiver in my body and my mouth is parched. My whole body is trembling and my hair is standing on edge. My bow Gandiva is slipping from my hand and my skin is burning.”)

**Text 46**

Sanjaya uvacha
Evan uktvarjuna sankhye rathopastha upavisat
Visruja sa saramcapam soke-samvigna manasah

(Meaning: Sanjaya said to Dritarastra: “Arjuna, having thus spoken on the battlefield, cast aside his bow and arrows and sat down on the chariot, his mind overwhelmed with grief.”)
LESSON SIX

ATMA GUNAS

The Lord PURUSHOTTAMA is full of Ananta-Kalyana-Gunas. The jivatma, when it realized its nature, knows the truth of its identity with the Supren Being (Paramam Samyam Upaithi). To attain to that stage, some of the basic Atma Gunas (moral, ethical psychological, spiritual qualities) should shine forth in all resplendence. A few of the Atma Gunas prescribed for the Lovers of God by God Himself in Bhagavad Gita are mentioned below.

Advesta: With malice towards none.

Maitraha: Pouring love even on those who causelessly do harm.

Karunaha: Always being sympathetic. “Para dukha dukhitah” i.e. when one sees any living being in distress, not only should he console but also do everything in his power to relieve the distress. He must feel the other man’s sorrow as his own.

Nir-mamahā: Abdicting the sense of attachment to the feeling of proprietorship.


Sama duhkha sukhaha: Being equal both in distress and happiness.

Kshami: Forgiving, forbearing

Santustah: Ever-satisfied.

Anapectshaha: Not desiring perishing things.

Suchi: Pure in thought, speech and action; Pure in eating habits.

Tulya ninda stuthihi: Equipoised in honor and dishonour.

Abhayam: Fearlessness

Sattvam: Illumined Mental State.

Arjavam: Integral and sincere to the core: simplicity.

Anudvekakaram vakyam: Un-offensive speech.

Prasannatma: Clear, unclouded understanding.

Amanitvam: Humility,

Adambhitvam: Pridelessness.

Ahimsa: Non-violence.

Ksantih: Tolerance.
Saucham : Cleanliness.

Sthairyam : Steadfastness.
LESSON SEVEN

RAHASYAS (THIRU-MANTRAM)

The greatness of Sri Pillai Lokacharya will be portrayed in another section. The following Upadesha in his Immortal Work “MUMUKSHUP-PADI” may be first enshrined in mind. Sri Vaishnava doctrine lies hidden in the mantras and their interpretation by Acharyas. Unless one has the ardent love to know the meaning, one cannot understand.

1. A ‘Mumukshu’ (yearner after liberation) has to know three secrets (Rahasyas)
2. The first one is ‘Thiru-Ashtakshara’ Mantra
3. This mantra was adored by the Vedas, Rishis, Azhwars and Acharyas of yere
4. No matter how the mantra is uttered, (derisively, even) it produces good and confers its protection.
5. All the meanings sought after are found in it.
6. Five are the meanings sought after (Artha-panchaka Jnana):
   i) True Nature of God (Paramatma)
   ii) True Nature of individual (Jivatma)
   iii) Path of realizing God
   iv) Obstacles in the path.
   v) Nature of realized jivatmas.
7. .... The Lord is the means to attain Him; the End is also ‘Attaining Him’. He is both UPAYA & UPEYA.
8. This mantra comprises of eight letters and three words.
9. The three words reveal three meanings.
10. Namely: SESHTAVA, PARATANTARYA & KAINKARYA.
11. The first of these three words is: “OM” (Pranava).
12. “OM” (the Pranava) consists of three letters: A, U & M letters.
13. This mantra is the quintessence of all the Vedas.
14. The letter ‘A’ denotes the root of all sound-vibration; hence it refers to the Supreme Being ‘NARAYANA’ intuited by the Vedas as the All-Protector.
15. Protection means: “destruction of enemies” and “fulfillment of desires”.

Notes: As the above is self-explanatory, further explanatory note is not added. Only when some difficult words come, notes will be given.

7. UPAYA = means; UPEYE = end;
10. SESHTAVA = Servitude
    PARATANTARYA = Dependence.
    KAINKARYA = Divine Service to the extreme joy of the Supreme Being.
LESSON EIGHT

108 DIVYA-DESHAS (PLACES OF WORSHIP FOR SRI-VAISHNAVAS)

The Supreme Being’s eternal Nitya Vibhuti is Sri Vaikunta. His Vyuha Abode is Thirup-parkkadal (Ksheera-Sagara).

The other 106 Divya Deshas are spread over the length and breadth of our country.

The most important shrine on earth is “Thiru-Arangam” – Srirangam – situated near Tiruchirappalli (Tamil Nadu).

DESCRIPTION OF SRI-RANGAM

Moola-Virat Moorthy : Sri Ranganadha, resting on Adi-sesha, facing South.
Utsava-moorthy : Nam-perumal.
Divine Mother : Sri Ranganayaki.
Punya thirthas : Chandra Pushkarani, Kaveri, Kolladam, Vedashrunga.
Sthala Vruksha : Punnai
Vimana : Pranavakruthi.
Pratyaksha to : Dharma-Varma, Ravi-dharman, Chandra & Vibhishana.

Specialities: Sung by all Azhwars and Andal (except Madhura-Kavi). All Poorva-charyas moved in flesh and blood in this place, with tears of love for Sri Ranganadha, trickling on the sands of the temple prakeras.

Birth-place of Parasara Bhattar, Vadakkut-thiruveedhip-pillai, Pillai Lokacharya, Peria Nambi.

Kainkarya: Nandana Vana Kainkarya by Tondaradip-podi Azhwar, Prakaras, Mantapas, and Gopuras by Thiru-mangai Azhwar.

Arayar Seva established by Nadha-munigal continues to be followed even to this day.

Sri Ramanuja regulated all the practices of worship, etc. (For details Koil-Ozhugu may be consulted)

Swami Desikan was conferred the title of “Kavi-tarkika-Simham” and “Sarva-tantra-swatantrr’ by Sri Ranganadha and Sri Ranganayaki respectively.

Sri Ranganadha deems Sri Manavala Mamunigal as His Acharya and the thanian ‘Sri-sailesa Dayapatra’ was composed by Him assuming the form of a disciple-pupil, after hearing Thiru-voi-mozhi discourses for one full year from the Great Master.

The divya desha is called ‘Bhooloka Vaikuntam’.

The deity is the Kula-Dhana of the Ikshvaku Dynasty-handed over by Sri Rama to Sri Vibhishana, when the latter returned to Lanka after participating in the Pattabhisheka Mahotsava of Sri Rama. After vanquishing Ravana, Sri Rama took Vibhishana, his retinue, Sugreeva and the hordes of monkeys in the Pushpaka Vimana to Ayodhya (for details, refer Ramayana.)
There is a shrine for Sri Dhanwantri in this temple—the like of which can be found nowhere else.

It is impossible to describe in full the Vaibhava of Sri Rangam. The above is only a very tiny introductory note.

“WHO IS A VAISHNAVA?”

The qualities of a Vaishnava are narrated soulfully by Saint Narsing Mehta, in a famous Gujarathi Song “Vaishnava Janatho”. This song always enraptured Mahatma Gandhi and he drew constant inspiration from this song for his ‘Non-violence Movement’.

VAISHNAVA JANATHO

1. “Vaishnava janatho they-ney kahiyeh
Jeh peeda paravo janarey -
Para duke upkar karey thoyeh
Mana abhimana na aaneynrey”.

2. “Sakala Loka-mam sahiney vandhey
Ninda na karey keyneerey -
Vacha-kacha maha nichchalarageh
Tantan jananeey theyneerey”

3. Sama-drishti-ney trushna tyagi
Para-stree kee jeyney matharey-
Jihvah thakee asatya na bholey
Para-dhana nava janey heatharey.

   Nitya Vibuti means the Eternal Vaikunta.
   Leela Vibhuti means the playing-ground of the Lord. (Viz. the Universes)

4. “Moha-maya vyayeh nasi jeyney
Dhruda-vairagya jeyna mana mamrey-
Rama nasaram thali-lakhi
Sakala theertha theyna thana mamrey”.

5. “Vana-lopee ney kapata rasithachey
Kama-krodhah nivaar yaarey -
Paney nara-samyo theynum thara-sana-karatham
Kula Eko theyra dharyamrey”

Meaning:

1. A Vaishnava is one who feels deeply the sorrows and miseries of others and without any boasting, helps them.

2. Blessed is the Mother who gave birth to a son full of love to all creatures on earth, finding fault with none and who is pure in thought, word and deed.
3. He only is a true Vaishnava who is equipoised, transcended all attachment to desires, who looks upon other ladies as his mother, who is truthful and who does not touch others property.

4. He is a Vaishnava who becomes the embodiment of service to God and his Devotees. His darsana is enough to save one from entering into the detestable naraka (hell).

(What better explanation can one find to express Vaishnava Lakshana?)

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VASUDEVA SUTHAM DEVAM
   KAMSA CHANURA MARTHANAM
DEVAKI PARAMANANDHAM
   KRISHNAM VANDHE JAGATGURUM.
Maintaining an ancient temple is better than building a hundred new ones. That is the reason why Yashoda who brought up Sri Krishna, attained greater eminence compared to Devaki who gave birth to Him. When the temple is a Divyadesam, the service is all the more significant.

“Serve our Temples” is an initiative to help our temples by restoring basic services, food, shelter, education, financial independence

**Dream a little. Do a little**

"What we can do, we must“ - As He allows us to use His resources for Him via devotees like us.

Back home in India, there are so many temples deprived of their basic needs and services, primarily due to lack of funds. With galloping prices, temple assets stripped, no government support, the temples have never found it as difficult to sustain as they have now. Most of the temples are deprived of basic necessities for the unhindered performance of minimum daily prayers.

1. One priest to offer prayers and keep the premises clean and open for devotees (Rs: 2500 per month)
2. Food (Prasadam), Oil, Flowers (Rs 2500 per month)

With just $100 per month (Rs 5000 per month) we have a divine opportunity to preserve a temple. It is the solemn duty to preserve the temple not only for current day devotees to have a divine Darshan but also for our future generations.

From the U.S, far away from India, yet you can still make a difference. Allow His Grace to flow, and spend His money for His causes.

Vedics Foundation volunteers to serve as a bridge between those willing devotees who have resources and the temples in need. Vedics has already reached out to a few temples.

Please visit [www.vedics.net/projects](http://www.vedics.net/projects) for helping an ancient temple. For further details, send mail to: [vedics@yahoogroups.com](mailto:vedics@yahoogroups.com)
Details: www.vedics.net/activities/

Basic Tenets of VEDICS: www.vedics.net

FALL IN LOVE WITH GOD
Pray with sincerity, humility and gratitude for at least 15 minutes a day.

RESTRICT FOOD CONSUMPTION
Eat anything only after offering it to God.

MEDITATION
Meditate on the LORD, at least thrice a day, at least a minimum of 3 minutes each time. Chant Sri Vishnu Sahasranamam (the 1000 Holy Names of Lord Vishnu) once a day.

RESPECT FOR ALL THAT IS HIS
Strive to lead a life in which you will never hurt a fellow living being for any reason.

MONEY
Earn to live, educate, support and serve and not for the sake of pursuing materialistic desires.

CHARITY
Donate however little it may be to noble causes. Feeding the needy is the highest form of charity.

CONTENTMENT
Be happy and content that you are His. Thank your preceptors at least once a day for blessing you with this awareness.

ABSOLUTE FAITH
Place complete trust in the supreme LORD. Do not go against His way.

SELF - CONTROL
Strive to live a life free from selfish desire and anger.
Always adorn a peaceful smile; it will work on others and on you too

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