**Vaishnavism**

“*Tat vishno: paramam shatha patchyanthi*

*Shooraaya: thiveve sashoorathatham*”

(Rig Veda: 1.555.5)

The above quote from *Rig Veda* explains that as the magnificent sun encompasses, spreads and lit the sky, the immortal Siddha’s(Nityasuris) are blessed to get the *darshan* (witness) of Lord Vishnu’s *Paramapatham* (Moksha) at all times.

*Yajur Veda*, on the other hand describes Shrimath Narayana as *Thrimoorthi*, celestial Devas, ultimate truth without a beginning or an ending and divinely beyond human understanding. *Sama Veda* speaks that Mahavishnu who is omnipresent is the creator of this universe. *Atharva Veda* expresses that whoever is able to dichotomize the ultimate mantra ‘Oom’ into eight letters mantra and recite it will attain moksha, which refers to reaching the lotus feet; *Paramapatham* of Lord Mahavishnu. Hence the worship of Vishnu goes back to Vedic period, viz 1500BC.

As far as South India is concerned, Vaishnavite practice had been around even prior to the ancient literature era, which would be from the *Tolkapiya* period.. The Sangam literature proclaims that Lord Vishnu is the God of the *mullai* land, the jungle and woodland (*Tol. Agathinai*, 5). Lord Vishnu is also addressed as “Maal” and “Maayon” by the Sangam literature. Besides this, Sangam literature also has various poems depicting Lord Vishnu’s ten avatars. Precisely, *Paripaadal* contains six beautiful songs that touch upon Lord Mahavishnu’s five types of features. S.N. Kanthasamy, a renowned scholar of Sangam literature, illustrates in his book entitled, *Inthiya Tattuva Kalanjiyam* with evidences that Vaishnavism had been an ancient practice to South Indians.
In a poem of oldest Tamil literature known as *Tolkapiyam*,

“*maayon meya manperunj sirappin*

*Thaava vizhuppugal poovai nilaiyum*” (*Tol*, puram, 5)

The above shows that Vaishnavism practice as an ancient ideology among South Indians. Besides this, the practice of Vaishnavism is also reflected in Sangam literatures such as *Paripaadal, Kalitthokai* and *Puranaanooru*.

**Vaishnavism**

Vaishnavism ideology regards Thirumaal as the Supreme God. Thirumaal is regarded as Lord Vishnu among the Vaishnavites. Vishnu conveys the meaning of omnipresent. This word also shows that God is everywhere and anywhere. Lord Vishnu is also known as Emperumaan, Naaraayanan, Madusoothanan, Venggadeswaran, Vasudevan, Krishnan, Raman, Paranthaaman, Ananda Sayanan, and many other unique titles. Vaishnavism also dedicates each month of a year to Lord Vishnu’s special titles as it is believed that God bestow his blessing to the devotees’ every day. The following chart represents the Tamil months and Lord Vishnu’s names.
The features of Lord Vishnu that are depicted by the twelve names mentioned above are known as ‘Viyuga Moorthigal’. An ancient poet, Nammalvar, sang on the twelve names of Lord Vishnu. Vaishnavites would mark twelve parts of their body with Vishnu marks (Thiruman - a Vaishnavite mark on the forehead) which symbolizes the twelve names of Lord Vishnu.

In Vaishnavism, a devotee who wishes to be united with God is known as ‘Chethanan.’ The meaning of this term is the knowledgeable one. The meaning behind uniting with God is attaining moksha. Those who wishes to attain ‘moksha’ are known as mumutsu. The ones known as mumuts is someone who is well versed in tatthuvam, hitham, and purusaarttam. Tatthuvam has three divisions, namely;
i) **Cittu** – souls.

ii) **Acittu** – Descriptions of body and superficial properties that surrounds the physical elements of body. This is known as *pirakiruthi*. Vaishnavites depict this as the basic part.

iii) **Eswaran** – God.

These three parts are known as *thatuva thirayam*. *Thirayam* refers to number three.

Next, is *hitham*. This refers to ways (*ubaayam*) of attaining moksha. The ways are divided into two parts known as ‘*patti*’ and ‘*pirapatti*’. Among these two, *patti* refers to the physical action of oneself to attain God’s blessing by the means of performing good deeds. On the other hand, *pirapatti* refers to attaining God through mind. This submits to the concept of ‘surrender’. Scholars regard *pirapatti* as the emphasis of *alvaars* (twelve chief devotees of Lord Vishnu).

The third is *purusarttam*. This refers to the four definite elements a soul needs to attain; namely, dharma, artha, kama and moksha that the Vaishnavites describe as righteousness, material, pleasure and liberation accordingly. Among these, a soul’s requirement is to attain moksha that is also known as attaining *paramapatham*, reaching Vaikundam or achieving complete *paakavathanupavam* by the Vaishnavites. Objective of a soul that has attained *paramapatham* would be to serve God. According to Vaishnavism, one needs to completely understand and recite *Thirumanthiram, Thuvaiyum and Saama slogan* in order to attain moksha.
Essence of *Thirumanthiram* is ‘Oom Namo Naaraayanaaya’. Vaishnavites believe that the explanation of the mantra ‘Oom’ is ‘Namo Naarayanaaya.’

*Thuvayam* is a mantra stated below:

‘*Srimat narayanaaya charaney charanam pirapathyeye*
*Srimathey narayanaaya nama.*’

The first verse means, “I surrender and embrace the holy feet of Lord Naaraayana”. The following verse conveys the meaning that one would continuously perform worldly and spiritual duty in the grace of God and his consort. This mantra is known as *thuvayam* because it is a two verse mantra. In essence, *thuvayam* elaborates the meaning of *thirumanthiram*. Next, would be *saama slogan*:

“*Sarvadharmanth parithyajya maamegham charanam vaaja*
*Ahamthvaa sharvapaapepyo motchayishyaamim maasusa*”

*Bhagavad Gita*: 66

*Saama sloka* is a verse from *Bhagavad Gita*. This verse is actually an elaboration of *thuvayam*. Based on the above verse, the first line means, embracing Lord Naaraayana’s holy feet for protection and the following line denotes fulfilling all worldly and spiritual duties by the grace of God and his consort. It is important to understand the reason behind mentioning God’s consort.
God’s consort is always present next to Lord and is a symbol of tolerance and patience as a mother. She serves as a filtration element to human. She filters the negativity and submits the positivity of human to God. This action of Goddess is known as purushakaaram among the Vaishnavites. It is a common understanding that a Vaishnavite must at least know and understands thirumanthiram.

Magnitude of Thirumanthiram

The mantra will provide goodness and immense wealth, remove obstacles and sorrow, provide goodness on earth and in celestial world, bless us with continuous victory and popularity, and protect the devotees more than a mother would for her child. The mantra is “NAARAAYANA” (Nalayirat Divyapirabantham, 956).

There is no better way of expressing the greatness of Lord Naaraayana as how it was expressed by Thirumanggai Alvaar in the above thirumanthiram. Based on Thirumanggai Alvaar, Lord Narayana is the one and only God who would bless his devotees with everlasting health and wealth, destroys negativities and brings prosperity. The mantra also provides the ultimate objective of each human, which is paramapatham.

Vaishnavism regard Lord Naaraayana as viyapthi, which refers to the meaning of universal and present in all elements. As chittu and achittu are part of God, this conveys the meaning of presence in all beings and elements. Thirumantram has the same nature as God as it is a representation of God himself. The mantra never fails the utterers just as how the Lord never fails his believers. As such, the Vaishnavites believes that the Lord’s mantra is more powerful than the Lord Himself. It goes on to say that great sages and the alvaars’ have believed and surrendered themselves to the supremacy of the mantra in order to attain moksha.

It is believed that one of Lord Naaraayana’s special names, “Goovinda” has some of thirumanthiram’s features. The story goes in Mahabaratha, that when Draupadi was
dishonoured by Tutchathanan in the court by stripping her saree, Draupadi chanted Lord Naaraayana’s name, “Goovinda” with such intense and devotion. Immediately, Lord Naaraayana bestowed his blessing and protected her honour. This action alone shows the power of *thirumantram* if a devotee truly believes in it. Based on this incident, it is awe to imagine that if the name ‘Goovinda’ is so powerful, what would be the supremacy of *thirumantram* which is the embodiment of the Lord himself. As such, we would look into a few stories that depict the supremacy of *thirumantram*.

Once upon a time, there was a man called Ajamilan. He was completely immersed in a world of *maya* and refrained from spiritual world. He named his youngest child as Naaraayanan. He loved his youngest boy unconditionally and always called out for the boy, “Naaraayana, Naaraayana”. One day, as Ajamilan was nearing death and could see Yamadharma approaching him. Being terrified and wished to see his youngest son for one last time, he called out for his son with such compassion, “Naaraayana…Naaraayana…”. The story goes that upon hearing His name being called, Lord Naaraayana himself appeared before Ajamilan to bless and offered *paramapatham* to him.

Next, is the story illustrated by Thondaradipodialvaar in *Nalayirat Thivyapirapantham* (12:96). There was wicked man who was immersed in all the sins anyone could think of. His name was Mutkalan. Once, he made an offering of a cow by uttering “Krishnaarpanam,” which means the offer is made for Lord Krishna. As time passes and he passed on, his soul was taken to Yama Loka by Yamadharma’s messengers.

Upon seeing Mutkalan’s arrival, Yamadharma rose from his throne, welcomed and praised him. Mutkalan was shocked upon this treatment from Yamadharma as he was aware of his unforgivable sins. Puzzled, he questioned the reason for Yamadharma’s unexpected action. Yamadharma explained that Mutkalan deserved the honour as he once unconsciously uttered the holy name of Lord Krishna. At that moment as Yamadharma uttered the word Krishna, the entire hell was liberated and turned into a blissful place. The
sinners in hell who heard the holy name of Lord Krishna were cleansed of their sins and overjoyed. This indicates that if Lord Krishna’s name itself is so powerful, what more of the ultimate holy mantra of Lord Krishna, “Om Namo Naaraayanaya”?

According to Vaishnavism, a true Vaishnavite is born only when he properly receives the holy mantra from a true Guru. Since the mantra is disseminated through a proper ritual, the mantra will empower those who learnt it and the mantra will never be forgotten. Let’s find out the essence behind the holy mantra that is able to provide the physical and spiritual satisfaction.

**The Holy Mantra’s Veracity**

“Oom Namo Naaraayanaya”. In Tamil, “Oom” is one letter. The accumulation of the following letters of “Namo Naaraayanaaya” would sum up to eight. “Oom” is the fundamental *pranava* mantra which is the combination of the Tamil letters “A”, “U” and “M”. In this, “A” refers to God, “U” denotes that this soul only belongs to God (*Shesattuvam* – enslave to Lord Vishnu), “M” indicates human who has the intellectual ability and freedom to think. As such, the mantra “Oom” symbolizes that the intellectual human being is slave only to God and none other. Vaishnavites praised the mantra as the essence of all mantras. In Bagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says, “I am the beginning of all letters’. As ‘A’ is the gist of ‘Naaraayana’, Vaishnavites accepts that it means protector of all worlds.

In the word ‘Namo’, ‘M’ refers to soul and ‘N’ refers to ‘don’t’, which means that the life does not belong to the body and the owner of this soul is none other than God himself. This conveys the meaning of ‘Namo’ as this life is to serve God.

‘Naaraayanaya’ is a combination of three Tamil words, “Naara”, “Ayana” and “Aaya.” In these, the first word refers to the life forms (souls) created by God, the second is solution and the third is benefit. As such, the word “Naaraayanan” means,

1. Foundation of all life forms, a place to turn to for solution and the destination of all lives.
2. Lives in all souls (lives in *chittu*).

As such, the above explains the fundamental of the name ‘Naaraayanaa’ whereby it shows that this world and souls are within Him (God) and he lives in all life forms.

‘Aaya’ reflects service towards God. This life which is given by God is to be dedicated for His service and when one contributes services in God’s name, it pleases Him. As such, when God is pleased, the blessings from God will provide strength to the person.

Based on this philosophy, the sacred mantra of “Oom Namo Naaraayanaa” reveals that all life forms are slaves to God and as such, one should detach from the worldly desires and surrender to God. Life will be blessed and liberated when one see God in everything and perform service for Him. This great truth is revealed by Vaishnavism through their philosophical teachings.

**The History of the Eight Letters Sacred Mantra**

Mankind is naturally bounded by God as He (God) empowers mankind without a reason. He is known as *Nirupathika Seshi*, (*Seshi* = leader, *Seshan* = follower, slave). People, somehow forgot this important element and faced negative consequences such as;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Consequences</th>
<th>Aathyaatmikam - physical and emotional sorrows</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aathi Bouthikam - pains due to evil spirits, devils, human and dangerous animals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aathithaivikam - sorrows caused by natural disasters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seeing this, God sends enlightened souls to earth to save mankind and teach them self and God realization through the holy mantra. In order to spread this philosophy, the Lord Himself appeared as the Guru (Naaraayanan) and disciple (Naran). The following describes the story of the holy mantra.

In *Satyayuga*, Lord Naaraayana’s avatars, namely Naarayanan and Naran were born to Dharma Devan and the daughter of Thatchaprajapathi. After growing up, Naaraayanan went to ‘Battrikasiramam’ (Battrinathar temple at the foot of Himalayas). He penanced under ‘Battri’ tree in *tavasi* (ascetic) form and sermons the holy mantra to Naran. It is in this holy place, the Lord receives the name as “Battri Naaraayanan.”

Lord Naaraayanan took the avatar of ‘Guru’ and ‘Student’ (disciple) to reveal the position and philosophy behind the distinctive role of Guru and Student before imparting the holy mantra to the world. It is believed that Lord Naaraayana took the role of Guru and student to show that people should upgrade themselves to the status of a student before they could be awarded the holy mantra.

In *Dvaaparayuga*, Lord Naaraayana appeared as Lord Krishna and Naran came as Arjuna. Even here, their role as Guru and Student is evident when Lord Krishna took the role of Guru to preach *Bhagavad Gita* to Arjuna, who humbly and obediently received the *upadesa* as a student.

**Principal Policies of Vaishnavism**

There are five principal policies that are accepted by every Vaishnavite. They are as follows:-
1. Vaishnavite senses God naturally (Lord Naaraayana’s images).

2. Sense pleasure in God’s rules of life (Image of soul).

3. Obstacles in attaining God (Illusions / Maaya).

4. Device to reach destiny.

5. Final ambition of Bhagavatha experience.

1. **Lord Naaraayana’s Images**

According to Vaishnavism, Lord Naaraayana’s holy features are divided into five parts such as parattuvam, viyukam (phalanx), vipavam, antaryami and arcchai.

*Parattuvam* - State of Thirumaal beyond one’s sense or imagination with his consort, Mahalakshmi in Vaikuntham showering his grace to the devotees’.

*Viyukam* – This image encompass four images, namely, Sangkarunan, Pratthiyumnan, Anirutthan, Vasudevan to protect and perform the three main duties.

*Vipavam* – Vipavam represents images of Thirumaal that destroys evil and protect dharma.

*Antharyami* – This represents manifestation of Lord Naaraayana in all life forms to give direction in them.
Arcchai – Images found in Lord Vishnu’s temples are known as Arcchai Moorthi. In this form, Lord Vishnu’s images are known as Yoga Moortham, Boga Moortham, and Veera Moortham.

2. Rules of Life

Rules of life are the root that separate itself from body, sensuous, heart, oxygen and mind and dedicate itself with pleasure to God.

3. Obstacles to Moksha

Among the main obstacles to attaining moksha is inability of the eternal soul to differentiate itself from the temporal body. It also does not realize the relationship between itself and God, proclaim attachment and enslave itself to another body, immersed in worldly pleasures, disinterest in the sermon of Guru and God’s grace and unconcerned in the pursuit of knowledge.

4. Devices or Ways of Attaining Moksha

Vaishnavism lays down nine possible ways that would lead to moksha. The ways are:-

i) Relationship between father and son – Regard Paramaatma (Lord Naaraayana) as father and oneself as the child and portray piety towards God.

ii) Relationship between protector and protected – Surrender to God with intense devotion and leave the responsibility of protection to Him.

iii) Relationship between the ruler and slave – Daasa devotion method of regarding God as the ruler and oneself as the servant.

iv) Relationship between husband and wife – In Vaishnavism, there’s a tradition that regards Lord Naaraayana as the husband (male figure) and all the other life forms as females. In this state, devotion is shown by considering the Lord as one’s life partner.
v) Relationship between the realized and to be realized – Understands that there’s none other than God to be realized and work towards achieving it through knowledge.

vi) Relationship between master and possession – Understands that all life are Lord Mahavishnu’s possessions and surrender to the Lord that it would be His duty to look after His possessions.

vii) Relationship between protector and protected – Realise that God alone can protect everyone and worship Him with a clear state of mind.

viii) Relationship between body and life – In Vaishnavism, this is a special route as it believes that every life forms and the world is the embodiment and body of Lord Mahavishnu.

ix) Relationship between experience and experiencing – Believe that all pleasure in this world is created by God for his beings. As such, experiencing God in every element of pleasure is the essence of this relationship.

5. Bhaagavadha Experience

*Bhaagavadha* experience is through holding firm to the following principles. Surrendering to God, doing what pleases Him and avoid what displeases Him, firm in devotion (*Bakti yoga*), take refuge in none other than God, the final destination is *paramapatham*.

**Rule Texts for Vaishnavism**

Generally, there are two ways of practicing Vaishnavism in the southern tradition. They are known as the northern way (tradition) and southern way (tradition).
• **Vada Kalai / Northern Tradition** – Led by *Vedas* in Sanskrit. This practice preaches that one should continuously be immersed in Lord Vishnu to attain *moksha*. The effort has to be unyielding as how a baby monkey clings on to his mother.

• **Then Kalai / Southern Tradition** – Accepting Tamil *Vedas* that praises Lord Mahavishnu in *Naalayirat Thivyapirapantham*. This practice preaches that surrendering and leaving the responsibility to God is the way to *moksha*. This symbolizes as how a cat carries its kitten to the destination. This way also explains that God will take the responsibility to lead the souls that surrenders to Him to *moksha*.

Vaishnavites who practices the northern way are led by *Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita*, and *Brahma Sutra*. These are known as *pirashtanatthirayam*.

**Upanishad**

The foundation and general texts for Hinduism are *Vedas*. *Vedas* appeared in the form of *sruthi*. *Sruthi* refers to various levels of revelations received by the Rishis (saints and sages). *Smirthi* refers to the teachings created through preaching and explanations conveyed by one person to the other. As such, no one has or could change the *Sruthi*.

These *Vedas* are known as *Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Saama Veda*, and *Atharvana Veda*. Each *Veda* has four divisions; *manthira / shuktha, brahmana, aranyaka*, and *upanishad* respectively.

*Upanishad* contains new explanations to philosophical teachings raised through debates and analysis. The above mentioned four divisions are known as *samhita* (collections of *Vedas*). *Vedas* are foundation to the sacrificial ceremonies, proper rituals to the ceremony, the mantras chanted during the ceremony and the principles behind the ceremonies.
**Bhagavad Gita**

*Bhagavad-Gita* is a sacred literature preached by Lord Krishna himself to Arjuna. This is the greatest deed by God to human. God appeared as Naran and Naaraayanan to impart the holy mantra to human. Next, in Gurushetra war zone, He gave *Saramasaalogakam* as *Gita* to Arjuna. *Gita* contains 18 parts, namely; Arjuna Vishathayoga, Saangkiya Yoga, Karma Yoga, Nyanakarmashanyaasa Yoga, Sanyaasa Yoga, Thiyaana Yoga, Nyaanaviknyana Yoga, Asharaprahma Yoga, Rajavithya Rajakushya Yoga, Vipoothi Yoga, Vishvaroopadharshana Yoga, Bakthi Yoga, Shetra Shetruknya Vipaaka Yoga, Kunatraya Vipaasu Yoga, Purushotthama Yoga, Deivaashoora Shampath Vipaaka Yoga, Chittatraya Vipaaka Yoga, and Mosha Shanyaasa Yoga.

**Brahma Sutra**

This literature explains Upanishad in an organized manner. *Brahma Sutra* explains the mysteries of God who is in the state of *Brahmam*. As this literature explains Upanishad which is the end of *Vedas*, it is also known as *Vedanta Sutra*.

**Then Kalai / Southern Tradition**

*Then Kalaiyinar* refers to the literature granted by the twelve chief devotees (Alvaar) known as *Naalayirath Thivyapirapantham*. Apart from this, Vaishnavism also regard literatures such as *Vedas*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavad Gita*, Vaishnavism holy religious scriptures, *Paripaadal* and *Vishnu Puranas* as special and divine literatures.

There are three main philosophies in Vaishnavism known as Vedanta, Visistadvaita, and Dvaita.
Vedanta

The foundation of Vaishnavism is *Veda*. Vedantha claims that God is the only truth and the rest are illusions *maya* (*Brahma Sutra*, 2). This principle follows Athi Sangkarar’s (788-820 AC) philosophy that speaks of none duality. As everything in this world appeared from God, only God is eternal and everything else is illusion.

There is also an opinion that claims soul is also God because Athi Sangkarar says that everything that can be seen will destroy and illusion; the one that cannot be seen is the ultimate truth and everlasting. Based on this, Atthuvaitham *Veda* that preaches “*ekam sat*” which means Truth refers to God was initiated. As such, Athi Sangkarar proves that God is the only existing truth.

Visistadvaita

Ramanujar (1017-1137 AC) a great spiritual leader in Vaishnavism is responsible to regenerate and activate strong movement of Vaishnavism’s old practice form in this world. His teachings are known as “Visistadvaita”, whereby he spreads *Vedas* through his teachings. ‘*Visista*’ carries the meaning that claims Lord Maha Vishnu is the “*cittu*” and “*acittu*”. ‘*Advaita*’ means one and only. As such, Visistadvaita conveys that *cittu* and *acittu* is within the one and only God and He is the embodiment of within and without.

Ramanujar’s philosophy is considered as central in Vaishnavism. It is the essence of three fundamentals; namely,
The philosophy illustrates that *cittu* and *Eswaran* are the same and expresses that souls are part and parcel of the *Brahmam*. The combination of the above mentioned three elements is the world. However, the philosophy also reveals that God is higher than the soul.

Ramanujar’s philosophy emphasises that illusions don’t appear and, existing truth don’t disappear. The philosophy also dictates that all beings are true; their changes are definite; cause and effects are eternal. The soul takes many life forms and in the process accumulates knowledge and finally realizes that it is part of the Supreme God. The realized soul will then attain moksha by uniting with God. The Supreme God is one. Visistadvaita explains that God is always within the soul (*cittu*) and the body (*acittu*). The soul forgets that it has the qualities of God due to the illusions that confine it. The Vaishnavism’s Visistadvaita explains these principles.

*Brammam* can be seen with naked eyes. It is everywhere and anywhere. The destiny of human is to be able to see *Brammam* everywhere. One can see, be united with *Brammam* by cleansing the heart, mind, speech and total surrender to the Supreme God. This *Brammam* took many forms (avatar) to direct and teach human the right way for world peace.
Dvaita

Matthuvar (1199 AC), another philosopher initiated the practice of “Dvaita”. He disregards Sangkarar’s Athuvaitha completely. Matthuvar’s philosophy is Dvaita, which means duality. In this, God, soul and body are seen as being in two states as follows:-

![Dvaita Diagram]

Matthuvar believes that the above mentioned five categories are different. He believes that God, soul and body are not created by anyone and is permanent. Dvaita preaches that moksha can be attained if Karma is cleansed.

Vaishnavism Temples

As far as the southerners are concerned, important Vaishnavite temples are Thiruvaranggam temple in Thirucchirappallamit Nadu and Thiruppathi temple in Andhra Pradesh. Thirumaal bestows His blessings to the devotees in two forms; yoga nittra or anantha sayana (sub-conscious sleeping) position in Thiruvaranggam and standing position in Thiruppathi. According to Vaishnavites, among these two, Thiruvaranggam is the main temple.
Thiruvaranggam

Sri Ranggam also known as Thiruvaranggam is the most important temple among the 108 Vaishnavism temples. Just as Thillai being the main temple for Saivites, Sri Ranggam is the main temple for Vaishnavites. This temple is referred as Vaikuntam (Lord Vishnu’s home) on earth. According to Bramaanda Purana, the turret over the sanctum of the temple and Lord Vishnu’s image are from the sacred milky sea of Vaikuntam. The sacred purana also insists that the earth was fortunate to get these through Lord Brahma’s penance. The deity was worshipped by Lord Brahma and as such it is an ‘arccha moorthi.’

The temple is situated in a compound of about 156 acres. Vaishnavites believe that if one offers prayers from any part of the world at the direction of Thiruvaranggam, the person will be granted the benefit of coming to Thiruvaranggam, cleansing the body in the holy river of Pushkarani and getting direct blessing of Lord Mahavishnu.

Kaveri River that flows in Thiruvaranggam has the same benefit as Viraja River in Vaikuntam. Lord Mahavishnu lies in the position facing south, right arm holding the head and left arm holding a flower that points to His lotus feet. In this temple, Lord Maha Vishnu blesses the devotees in the name of ‘Rangganathar’. As He lies on Aathi Seshan (five headed snake) in Sri Ranggam, Lord Vishnu is also known as ‘Arangganathar’.

The Avatar of Thiruvaranggan

Idol (vikraha) of Thiruvarangganathar that appeared from the milky sea of Vaikuntam was worshipped by Lord Brahma for a very long time until it was handed over to the Sun. The Sun worshipped Arangganathar before handing it over to Ishvaaku, who was from the Sun lineage to have the honour of worshipping Lord Rangganathar. According to Bramaanda Purana, the deity
of Rangganathar was passed to Vibishana by Lord Rama, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu as a gift for helping Lord Rama in the war against Vibishana’s brother, Ravana.

After obtaining the gift, Vibishana was taking it back to Ilanggai (Sri Lanka). Upon reaching Kaveri River, he placed the idol by the river bank to rest. Later, he could not remove the statue from its position. From then onwards, Arangganathar had been there bestowing blessings to the devotees. King Dharmavarman who ruled at that time, built a temple for Lord Rangganathar at that place and arranged for routine prayer to be conducted at the temple.

Later, due to erosion the temple was buried at the river bank. King Killivalavan from the Chola lineage went on hunting in the jungle and at that time, a parrot informed him that Thiruvaranggam temple was buried there. Following that, Lord Vishnu appeared in the King’s dream and gave him the exact location of the temple. The king cleared the jungle and bushes and dug to the main place of the temple. He builds a temple around it and that becomes the present temple.

Here, goddess “Rangganayagi” blesses the devotees from Thiruvaranggam. Apart from that, mother Boomathevi, Neelathevi also blesses the devotees along with Lord Rangganathar from Thiruvaranggam. Besides that, there are also other avatars of Lord Vishnu such as Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Lord Narasimma Moorthi, Lord Sri Thanvanthiri and many others in this temple to bless His devotees. In addition, there is also a huge idol of “Garudazhvaar” and “Sakkaratalvaar.” Lord Hanuman’s figure faces Lord Arangganathar in the worshipping manner.
Thiruppathi

There is no other temple in this world that provides fortune to the devotees as Thiruppathi. Lord Venggadasalapathi stands at the top of the seven hills around the temple in the names of Elumalaiyaan, Venggadasalapathi, Thirumalaivaasan, Srinivasan, and Balaji. He bequeaths His blessing to the devotees with His consort, goddess Pathmavathi.

In Thiruppathi, Lord Vishnu empowers the devotees in the standing position. A great sage Kambar sings that when mukti (moksha) is given to even the animals that live in Thiruppathi; what more to the devotees who come with such devotion to Thiruppathi. As Thiruppathi was blessed by many chief devotees (alvaar), this is a sacred place for attaining moksha.

The Greatness of Thiruppathi

According to Vaishnavism, the hills that surrounds Thiruppathi temple is Aathi Seshan (the sacred serpent). This place is also known as Sheshatri. From the foot of the hill, it would appear as a snake curled around to form the hill in the resting position. Due to this, the aazhvaar’s never set their foot on the hill as it would seem as stepping on Aathi Seshan. They had sung and blessed the temple from the foot of the hill. Among them, Kulasera Alvaar, put forth a request in his song to be blessed in becoming the steps on the hill for the devotees, celestials and all beings to walk on him to get the darshan of Lord Venggadasalapathi. At the bottom of Thiruppathi, Lord Govindaraja Perumal showers his blessings to the devotees. Two miles from here is where Goddess Alamelu Manggai’s temple is situated. Lord Varaka Moorthi is present here near Pushkarani river. According to Venggadasala Mahatmiyam, this temple was built by King Tondaimaan.
Hill That Showers Wealth

Generally, people who seek wealth would surrender to Lord Venggadasalapathi. He is full of love and blesses devotees with their requests without any hindrance. He is also in the name of Purushotaman as he grants the four boons of purusartham namely, artha, dharma, kama, and moksha. The donation box in Thiruppathi is as famous as Lord Venggadasalapathi Himself as there is a special hall for it too. According to history, Lord Sreenivasa Perumal took loan from Kubera for His wedding with Goddess Pathmawathy. The puranas also speaks that the Lord is paying the interest for his loan through the donations submitted by the devotees and would make the final settlement at the end of Kaliyuga. This is the reason to why there is a huge donation box placed in Thiruppathi. Some may even question as to why do we need to pay for the loan taken by the Supreme God.

Fundamentally, we have to understand that Vaishnavism philosophy dictates that all life forms belong to God. The fact is Lord Sreenivasan is so generous that whatever donation given by the devotees is nothing compared to what He blesses them with in terms of wealth, happiness and others. This can be realized by looking at the donations received by the temple every day. Apart from that, devotees experience with Lord Venggadasalapathi strengthens this fact, which can be clearly seen in the number of devotees gather at the temple every day which is a peculiar sight here. This is the reason why those who seek wealth keep returning to Thiruppathi.

History of Venggadasalapathi

Why did He take loan from Kubera? This can only be understood by looking at the reason for his presence on earth. Once, great Rishis’ and sages conducted a sacrificial pooja ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, there was confusion as to who among the three murthis’ deserve part of the food offerings in the sacrificial fire. At that moment, a sage called Brigu offered to find out the answer by himself.

Sage Brigu is a very devoted and determined person. He even has an eye under his feet to reflect the strength of his penance. As such, his arrogance grew and assumes that he was above
all and cannot be stopped from entering the three murthis world. The first was Lord Brahma’s Satyaloga. He entered Lord Brahma’s private room where Lord Brahma was with his consort, Goddess Saraswathi without permission. Lord Brahma reprimanded sage Brigu’s act and this raised anger in Brigu. As such, he cursed that Lord Brahma will not be worshipped in any temples on earth. Next, he went to Kailash where he entered without permission again. Lord Shiva warned Brigu for his act and being upset of this humiliation; Brigu cursed Lord Shiva that he will only be worshipped in the form of Lingga on earth.

His final destination was Sri Vaikuntam. Here, despite knowing Brigu’s entry, Lord Vishnu pretended to be in the Yoganittra. Sage Brigu tried calling Him a few times but Lord Vishnu did not open his eyes. Blinded by anger, and not realizing his action he kicked Lord Vishnu’s chest. At that moment itself the eye under his foot disappeared. Only then, Brigu realized his fault. He begged forgiveness from Lord Vishnu. As how a mother is ever forgiving on her child’s fault, Lord Vishnu, the Supreme power and mother was not angry for Brigu’s act. Moreover, He bestowed his blessings on Brigu.

On the other hand, it was Goddess Mahalakshmi who could not accept this because Brigu kicked the place where she resides in Lord Vishnu’s chest. By not punishing Brigu she assumed that she was humiliated not only by Brigu but Lord Vishnu himself. Outraged, she left Lord Naaraayana and Vaikunta to penance in a forest.

Lord Naaraayana, in search of Goddess Mahalakshmi came to earth in the name of Sreenivasan and reached Naaraayana forest. He took refuge under a Sage called Vagulamalikai. At that time, Goddess Padmawathi who was the daughter of King Aagasarajan was also residing in the same area. One day, Lord Sreenivasan who went for hunting saw Goddess Padmawathi and decided to marry her. He also obtained permission from the king to marry her. Initially, Lord Sreenivasan did not have any money to get married. Moreover, he was left with nothing since Goddess Mahalakshmi left him. However the marriage had to take place and he was thinking on how to get it done.
At this moment sage Narathar, suggested that Lord Sreenivasan borrows money from Kuberan for the purpose of this wedding. Immediately Lord Sreenivasan summoned for Kuberan and signs the loan agreement. In this agreement it was decided that the contribution by the devotees would serve as interest for the loan and the full settlement will be made at the end of Kaliyuga. The wedding then took place grandly.

This is the story on how Lord Sreenivasan took the hands of Goddess Padmawathi on earth and settles on Thirupathi. The Supreme God does not have any need or necessity to borrow money to get married. This is because everything belongs to Him and is within Him. No one else has claim on anything except for Him. The entire act that took place is to clear the sins of the devotees and offer paramapatha mukthi to the devotees. Lord Vishnu wished and crafted the entire drama to take place and used everyone including Brigu to achieve his goal.

**Navapathi’s and the Dhivya Thesam**

In Vaishnavism, there are nine holy places called as Navapathi’s and 108 holy temples in the name of Thivya Thesam. These nine holy places have the idols that depict each planet and the devotees would benefit by visiting these places as it is believed that Lord Naaraayana will remove obstacles faced by the devotees due to the planets positions.
Just as these temples, Guruvayur temple in Kerala whereby, Lord Krishna blesses the devotees in the form of Guruvayurappan is also a distinctive temple on earth. In the north, there are Badrinath temple, Sanggu (Conch) Narayanan temple, Poori Jagannathar and Dvaraga Krishna temple that are special and unique in their own ways.

The Supreme God’s Disposition

It is highly impossible to describe the generosity and the disposition of Lord Naaraayana. Despite having many dispositions, Vaishnavite scholars endorse and uphold the six nature of the Lord. They are:-
1. **Vaatsalyam**

   This is regarded as a mother’s love towards her child. ‘Vatsam’ refers to calf. As the cow would clean the dirt on the calf with love by using its tongue before feeding the calf milk; in the same manner, because of the love, God forgives and cleanses the sins from the devotees before showering His blessing on the devotees.

2. **Swamitvam**

   A manner in which, not disregarding someone who is immersed in worldly desire and forgets the Lord. The Lord empowers the person with love and leads him to the right path.

3. **Sowseelyam**

   Though The Lord is the Supreme God, He does not look down on anyone and treats everyone equally.

4. **Sowlapyam**

   This disposition shows that God would easily allow anyone who firmly believes in Him to see His appearance which no one could even get a glimpse of it. *Nyanam*
This shows God’s nature of understanding the soul’s sufferings and the reasons for it. He also provides ways and means of coming out of it. This shows the Nyana (knowledge) disposition of God.

5. Sakthi

Nurturing anyone who surrenders to Him and forgiving their sins, protect and change them into useful beings. That is sakthi.

All of the above speaks of God’s six stages of disposition. Apart from this, there are other dispositions such as palam, aishvaryam, veeriyam, thejes and many others. No one has the ability to dissect and analyse The Supreme God’s each disposition in detail.

Ten Incarnations of Lord Mahavishnu

Avatars are the forms taken by Lord Mahavishnu to protect the innocent and destroy the evil. Vaishnavism expresses this as ‘vipava’ forms. In Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna explained to Arjuna that he had been taking avatars for eons to uphold justice by protecting the innocents and destroys the evil. As such, there are ten avatars (incarnations) taken by Lord Mahavishnu to protect the world and these avatars are known as ‘Dasavatharam’. A purana called Srimad Bhagavatham describes in detail the avatars and His leela.

1. Sri Matcha Avatar

This avatar refers to fish. Puranas speak of Lord Vishnu’s avatar as a fish. One kalpam refers to four thousand eons, which is a day for Lord Brahma. At the end of a kalpam Lord Brahma went to sleep and at that moment a disaster took place on earth. On top of that, while asleep, the four Vedas were released from Lord Brahma’s four faces. At that moment, a horse faced demon (asura) called Parimukasura stole the Vedas and hid them in the ocean. Upon
seeing this, Lord Vishnu showed clemency by taking the form of fish to retrieve the Vedas and also killed the demon.

2. Sri Kurma Avatar

Lord Indra and the celestials became powerless, helpless and suffered as they were cursed by sage Brigu. As such, all of them surrendered to Lord Vishnu for solution. Lord Vishnu told them that the only way to regain their power was to churn the milky ocean and consume the nectar that will emerge at the end. As the celestials were powerless, they took along the demon (asura’s) for this job. Mantra hill was used as the churning stick and the snake Vasugi as the rope. As they were churning the ocean, the Mantra hill collapsed into the ocean and to help the celestials, Lord Vishnu took the avatar of Kurma (turtle) to shoulder the hill until the nectar emerged. In this avatar, Lord Vishnu showed mercy to the suffering celestials in the form of a turtle.

3. Sri Varaka Avatar

An asura by the name of Iranyaksha drown the earth into the ocean. Human and celestial went through great suffering due to this. In order to save the world and put an end to the devotee’s sufferings, Lord Vishnu took the form of Varaka (boar). He saves the earth by holding it between His two horns. Upon seeing this, the angered Iranyaksha attacked Lord Varaka. Lord Varakar fought and killed the demon to protect the earth.
4. Sri Narasimma Avatar

Iranya Kasibu, who was lost his brother Iranyaksha intended to avenge his brother’s death. In order not to die, he went through severe penance and received his boon from Lord Brahma. The conditions of the boon were as follows:-

- His death should be neither on land nor sky.
- His death should be neither day nor night.
- His death should be neither inside nor outside the house.
- His death should be neither in the hands of human, celestials, monsters nor animals.
- No weapons could kill him.

Upon receiving the boons, he started torturing everyone and demands that people start praying to him as god. As this may be, Iranya’s own son, Prahaladha was an ardent devotee of Lord Mahavishnu as he received the sacred mantra of Lord Vishnu when he was in the womb from Saint Narathar. Upon realizing this, Iranya tortured his own son in order to change him, but nothing shook Prahaladha. He overcomes all forms of tortures by chanting and believing strongly in the power and clemency of Lord Vishnu. Finally, when Iranya decided to kill Prahaladha, Lord Vishnu appeared to prove Prahaladha’s bakthi (faith) as Lord Narasimma from a pillar and killed Hiranya by complying to the conditions of his boon such as below:-

i) Hiranya was killed on Lord Narasimma’s lap.

ii) Hiranya was killed at dusk.

iii) Hiranya was killed at the entrance of the palace.

iv) Hiranya was killed in the hands of Lord Narasimma who was in the form of half man and half lion.
v) Hiranyan was killed by hand and nails of Lord Narasimma; no weapons used.

5. Sri Vamana Avatar

King Mahabali who was in the quest of capturing Indra Loka conducted a sacrificial ceremony known as ‘Ashvametha Yaga.’ Lord Indra who was in fear of losing his position surrendered to Lord Vishnu for help. The Lord promised to help Indra and intended to shower His clemency on King Mahabali. He appeared as Vamana (a dwarf Brahmin). At the end of the ceremony, when King Mahabali was giving away donations, Lord Vamana appeared before King Mahabali and asked three feet land and King Mahabali agreed. Lord Vamana immediately grew and placed one foot to cover entire space and one foot to cover entire land. As there was no other place to place the third foot, King Mahabali requested that his head be accepted as the third place for the third foot. Lord Vishnu who ever loves towards His devotees accepted this request and placed his feet on King Mahabali’s head and pushed him to the Paathala Loka and he was to rule there until he join the Lord’s lotus feet (paramapatham).

6. Sri Parasurama Avatar

Lord Vishnu’s father in this avatar was Sage Jamatakkani and Renuka Devi was his mother; she is also believed to be Goddess Mariamman. In this avatar, Lord Parasurama came to show that one need to honour and uphold the words of their father. In honouring his father’s words, Lord Parasurama went on a killing spree by killing Kartaveeriyarchuna and his sons who overruled dharma’ (ethics). Moreover, He also killed 21 generations of royals who went against justice and ethics. Srimad Baagavatha claims that Lord Parasurama still exist and going through penance on Mount Magendhra.
7. Sri Rama Avatar

Among all the avatars, this avatar is considered the most important one. In this avatar, Lord Rama shows the rules of life that a human should confine to and follows. Instead of preaching, Lord lived the rules and showed that it is possible to lead such an ethical and pure life. In this avatar, Lord Rama appeared as a son to King Dasaratha. He married Goddess Sita Devi by breaking the bow (Sivathanusu) and later to honour his father’s words, he went to meditate in the deep forest for 14 years with his wife and brother, Lakshmana. Here, Goddess Sita Devi was captured and kidnapped by Ravana. Lord Rama fought a battle with Ravana with help from Hanuman and Sukriva and killed Ravana. By doing so, Lord Rama had released the people and celestials who suffered in the hands of Ravana. He rescued his Sita Devi and reclaimed his throne.

8. Sri Balarama Avatar

In this avatar, it was Aathi Seshan who appeared as Lord Balarama to help Lord Krishna as this avatar is part of Sri Krishna Avatar. Lord Balarama dictates on agriculture industry and had plow as his weapon.

9. Sri Krishna Avatar

This is an equally important avatar as Sri Rama avatar. The Lord was born to Devagi-Vasudeva but grew up under the care and love of Yasodha-Nanda Gopan in Gokula and was for his mischievous acts. Lord Krishna killed the monsters sent by His uncle, Kamsa to kill Him. Finally, Lord Krishna killed Kamsa, who was ill treating the people. It was
in this avatar that The Lord helped Pandavas to fight *Mahabharatha* war against Gauravas and reduced the weight of earth. It was in this war that many ‘asuras’ (demons) and arrogant rulers were killed to protect the innocents. Lord Krishna’s *leela’s* in this avatar is myriad and it will take forever to go through it.

10. Sri Kalki Avatar

This would be Lord Naaraayana’s tenth avatar. At the end of Kali Yuka when the world is coming to its end, The Supreme Lord will appear as Sri Kalki to destroy everything and captures everything within Him. This shows that everything has to return back to where it came from. The Vaishnavites believes that The Lord will take this avatar at the end of this *Kaliyuga*.

Based on the above, it is evident that The Supreme God takes avatars to destroy the evil and protect the justice and innocent.

**Alvaars**

Alvaars (religious devotees) are devotees of Lord Naaraayana. It also means that these devotees were blessed to deeply witness, experience God’s dispositions and grace. It is strongly believed that in order to save the world, Lord Naaraayana sent ‘Boo Devi’, five weapons (*Panca ayutham*), *Sri Vatsam*, and *Kowstupam*, symbols of *Vanamalathi*, Aathi Sesha, Garudapiraan, and Vishvakshena as Alvaars. These Alvaars sang their experience of God’s grace and these compilation of songs is known as *Naalayiratth Thivya Pirapanthanggal*. There are twelve Alvaars altogether.
Poigaialvaar, Poothatthalvaar, Peyyalvaar

There were three alvaars who appeared first on earth. They are known as “moothathaazhvaar” and they are Poigaialvaar, Poothatthalvaar and Peyyalvaar respectively. Poigaialvaar appeared on Poigai river on a lotus. He was the incarnation of Lord Vishnu’s conch shell (sanggu) known as Paancha Janyam. Next, is Poothattalvaar who appeared on a flower on the sea in Mahamalipuram. He was the incarnation of Lord Mahavishnu’s weapon gadayutham known as Kaumothaki. The third one, Peyyalvaar appeared on a flower in a well in Mayilapur. He was the incarnation of Lord’s sword known as Nanthakam. These three alvaars were the first to sing praises on Lord Vishnu.

Thirumalisaialvaar

This alvaar was born to Paarkavamaharishi and Mother Kanakaanggi. He was the incarnation of Lord Vishnu’s major destroyer weapon known as Sudarsana Sakkaram. By the grace of God, he performed myriad miracles and sang various beautiful songs in dedication to the Supreme God. In addition to that, he also paved direction for human to attain moksha.

Nammalvaar and Madurakavialvaar

He is not only the leader to the alvaar but also to all the Vaishnavism religious leaders. He is the incarnation of Vishvakshena. Even now, the sadari that is placed on devotees head in Vishnu temples is the symbol Nammalvaar’s feet. His disciple was Madurakavialvaar. He was the incarnation of one of Lord Vishnu’s milliseconds, Kumuthan. He appeared in Thirukkolur. He attained Paramapatham by singing the praise of Nammalvaar.
Kulasegaraalvaar

He appeared as the son of King Chera as the incarnation of The Lord’s Kaustuba gem. He had so much of affection on Lord Naaraayana and the devotees. His songs are known as *Perumal Thirumozi*.

Periyalvaar and Sri Andal Naachiyaar

Periyalvaar was the incarnation of Sri Garudan and fortunate to be the father in-law to The Supreme Lord. He sang praises to Lord Naaraayana and with His blessings received honour from King Pandiya.

“Boo Thevi” took the form of Andal Naacchiyaar as Periyalvaar’s daughter. She appeared beneath a basil plant. She is also known as “Kothai Naachiyar” and “Soodi koduttha Sudar Kodi”. She fasted during the *Maargali* month to be united with Lord Vishnu and finally achieved her destiny. Until today, songs of *Thiruppavai* sung by Andaal Naachiyaar is sung in the praise of Lord Naaraayana during the *Maargali* month at all Vaishnavite temples.

Thondaradipodialvaar

He was the incarnation of Lord’s garland known as Vaijayanthi. Just as Periyalvaar, he serviced Thiruvarangganaathar by tying garlands for the Lord every day. Thirumal appeared as light and bestowed blessings on him.
Thirupaanalvaar

He was the incarnation of Lord Vishnu’s Srivatsham that covers His chest in Uraiyyur. He was blessed by Lord Vishnu and joined Thiruvarangganaathar by having a sage called Uloka Saaranggamuni as his vehicle.

Thirumanggaialvaar

He was the incarnation of The Lord’s bow known as Saaranggam and appeared in Thirunagar. He was the King of Thirumanggai who became a bandit to fulfill his service to Lord Naaraayana until Lord Naaraayana appeared and blessed him.

Lord Narayana’s Leela

Srimad Bhagavatha explains Lord Naaraayana’s Leela (act) in detail. In here, descriptions and his acts (leela) of each avatar are provided in detail. Kambanaatalvaar describes Lord Vishnu as the one who performs myriad tricks (alakila vilaiyaathu udaiyaan). It would be impossible to impart the entire leelas of Mahavishnu here; never the less, we would look into some of his leelas.

Gajendra Moksha

Among The Lords leela, Gajendra moksha is considered as highly important. This story depicts on how fast God would respond to his devotees.

Once, there was a strong and powerful elephant that served as a leader to a herd of elephants at the foothill of Trikuda. This Gajendra was reincarnation of a King called Indrayumnan. Though he was a strong devotee of Lord Vishnu, he failed to respond and treat sage Agasthiyar in the proper manner when the sage visited him. As such, Indrayumnan was cursed by the sage to be born as an elephant. As such, the king was reborn as the elephant,
Gajendra at the foothill of Trikuda. At one time, Gajendra and his herd went to a lake called Rithumathu and were enjoying a good bath. In the same lake, lived a crocodile called “Hu Hu”. Hu Hu was a celestial being cursed by a sage called *Thevabalair* due to his misdoings. Generally, it is said that a crocodile is strong in the water. But, Hu Hu was extremely strong in comparison to any common crocodiles.

Without realizing the approaching danger in the form of Hu Hu, Gajendra was happily enjoying his bath. Hu Hu who found that he was not going to let go such a feast in the form of Gajendra immediately bit Gajendra’s foot and tried to drag him into the pool. Not giving up, Gajendra fought back with his complete strength and the rest of the elephants came to his aid. Unfortunately, none were Hu Hu’s match. As a final solution, Gajendra, who recalled the eight letter mantra he chanted in his previous birth, decided to totally surrender to the Supreme God for his life. He chanted the mantra and called out for the Lord, “Oh, Supreme Lord, I surrender to you; Help me” (*Athimoolame Abhayam*). Upon hearing Gajendra’s plea, Lord Vishnu immediately appeared there on *Garuda* to protect Gajendra. He tore the crocodile’s mouth with his sacred wheel and protected Gajendra.

The scene where The Supreme Lord provided motcha to Gajendra is not only popular among the Vaishnavites, it attracted even the Saivites. Sage Arunagirinathar describes the speed of The Supreme God’s approach upon hearing a devotee’s plea. He says, “The God blew his conch shell and even though he was surrounded by billions of gods’, thevars, celestial beings and others for his blessing; He appeared alone without any aid on *Garuda* before the conch shells sound ends in front of Gajendra. The speed was described as faster than light and sound. By appearing before Gajendra and Hu Hu, The Lord blessed both and granted moksha to both.

This *leela* proves that anyone who approaches Him with either *bakti* or against, the Supreme Lord would still empower and protect all the lives as everything is His and everything is within and none without. This was the reason as to when the Sanakaathi sages cursed Lord Vishnu’s guards known as Jayan and Vijayan and were born as ‘asuras’ (demons) (Iranya &
Iranyaksha; Ravana & Kumbakarna; Kamsa & Sisubala), and went against Lord Vishnu, He who understands everything and ever forgiving, came to give dharisana and ‘mkshha’ to them and empowered them with his divine love and blessing. Finally upon the completion of their curse, Jayan and Vijayan regained their positions as Lord Vishnu’s guards in Vaikuntam.

Next, the above story also narrates that whoever calls out to Him with complete trust and devotion, He will appear to protect the devotee. The elders would always say that “Vaikunta is just a mouth away” which is believed that the eight letter mantra chanted in this birth would continue to protect the devotees in every birth. God does not discriminate his devotees based on the appearance (elephant = animal) and would grant his protection to whoever believes in Him.

He does not only bless and protects His devotees; he also blesses and protects those who don’t even think or chant of Him and finally empowers them. His leela in Krishna avatar is a good example of such disposition where he released the curse of a Marutha tree.

**Release of the Tree’s Curse**

Lord Krishna’s leela (mischievousness) in the avatar cannot be described in words. Among his mischievousness in Gokulam includes entering every house with his friends and steal butter, pinch other children, roll His eyes and play tricks on others, throw mud on the girls who are bathing in the river, steal the girls’ cloths and attires and hide them in the house (Na. Thivyapirapantham: 157, 213, 225, 226).

Nandakopa, who was the Head of Gokulam was Krishna’s father. As such, why would Lord Krishna steal butter from other houses when there was ample of butter unattended in His house? Was He crazy of butter? That cannot be the reason because The Lord Himself sleeps on the ocean of milk. The reason is to clear our ignorance. One is fortunate enough when the Lord
enters the house. His *leela* is to attract and empower his devotees and that’s exactly what he did in Gokulam.

Unfortunately, the ladies in Gokulam who could not decipher Krishna’s *leela* despite loving him so much faked their anger and complained to Lord Krishna’s mother, Yasodha. Yasodha tried reasoning with Him but He would never listen; how could He? He is the question itself. This time she decided to tie Him as a punishment. Could he be tied? Yes, He can be tied by the elements called love and devotion.

She took a rope and tied Krishna to a mortar. This was the moment Lord Krishna was waiting for. When Yasodha was out of the sight for a moment, Krishna quickly rolled the mortar out of the house into the garden. There stood two *Marutha* trees who were Kuberan’s sons namely; Nalakooparan and Manikkreevan who were cursed by the sage Naratha. Lord Krishna went in between the trees rolling the mortar to eliminate sage Naratha’s curse. As he pulled through with such strength, the trees fell and the curse was broken. It is not known whether the trees that stood there without any emotions ever pled to the Lord for their release; but, Lord Krishna is aware on when and where He is suppose to be offer His help to all beings and He never fails.

It is evident here that The Supreme Lord is ever loving and compassionate to all life and non life forms. He knows the sufferings and the reasons and He alone knows the solution. At the same time, when someone displays arrogance, He also conquers and empowers them through His *leela*. Sometimes, out of love for The Supreme Lord certain souls become arrogant and assumes that Krishna belongs to them (getting on the weighing scale to teach Satyabama a lesson, Jeyan and Vijayan curse and others); some souls believe that they are great and become arrogance (killing of the asuras, dance on Kalingga, story of Mahabali, and so forth). The Supreme Lord controls and conquers all these arrogance through His *leela*. Among these, Dance on Kalingga in the Krishna Avatar receives a special place in Vaishnavism.
Dance on Kalingga

Lord Krishna’s dance on Kalingga proves His ability to conquer and tame the wild. Kalingga, a poisonous snake lived in a lake in Gokulam. It poisoned the water used and caused Yadhava’s great suffering. One day, Lord Krishna jumps into the water to put a stop to Kalingga’s egotism. He dived deep into the waters to find Kalingga.

Kalingga looked in bewilderment and anger as to who was the little boy dared to enter his territory. Kalingga breathed out poison to Krishna and jumped to bite Him. The One who has Aathi Seshan as His bed would not be afraid to all these. Krishna twisted and captured Kalingga. Krishna jumped on Kalingga’s head and danced. Krishna continued dancing until Kalingga’s arrogance was totally lost and when The Supreme Lord’s lotus feet touched Kalingga’s head, he remorse and surrendered to The Lord. Lord Krishna in return blessed Kalingga.

As how Kalingga was conquered, Lord Krishna had conquered and diffused arrogance of many and blesses their souls. No one could ever understand cause and action of His leela. We are merely actors in His crafted ‘drama.’ He is capable of doing anything and everything and there’s nothing He could not do. Let’s look at one ‘drama’ in which no one could understand His motive in Mahabharatha.

Sudarshan Who Vanished the Sun

In the Mahabharatha war, Dhrona Achariya took over the lead after Beeshma died. On the 13th day of the war, the great warrior and Arjuna’s son, Abhimanyu was killed by warriors from Dhuriyothana’s side because Abhimanyu was trapped by Dhrona’s array of army. Arjuna could neither rescue nor help his son as he was away to fight single-handedly at another side of the war with warriors called as samsabtha’s. Jeyatratha who obtained boon from Lord Shiva used his power to stop other Pandavas from helping Abhimanyu. Upon hearing this, Arjuna vowed that he would kill Jeyatratha before the dusk on the following day. In the event of failure, he would jump into the fire and kill himself.
The next day was the 14th day of war. Many of Dhuriyothana’s warriors died in the arrows of Arjuna; but Jeyatratha was nowhere to be seen. As it was nearing dusk, Lord Krishna, in order to save his beloved Arjuna and to fulfill Arjuna’s vow, covered the sun by using his *sudarshana chakkara* (holy disk). Upon seeing the sunset and not being able to fulfill his vow, Arjuna decided to put up a huge fire and jump into it. At that moment, Dhuriyothana and his troops wanted to witness this event and came to the spot. Along with them, Jeyatratha also came happily to see Arjuna being eaten up by the fire. Upon seeing Jeyatratha there, Lord Krishna immediately removed His *sudarshana chakkara* and revealed the sun. He pointed to the sun and Jeyatratha to Arjuna. Jeyatratha never even had a chance to digest what was happening. He was beheaded by Arjuna at that instance and Arjuna had fulfilled his vow.

God is Master of everything. This story clearly depicts that He can perform anything that he wishes for. The ultimate tool here is total surrender. He protects those who surrender to Him unconditionally. The following illustrates another *leela* of Lord Krishna.

**The Feet that Walked as a Messenger and the Hands That Drove the Chariot**

The Pandavas who lost their belongings and properties in a gamble to Gauravas lived by concealing their identities as part of the conditions. Upon completion of their term, Pandavas returned to reclaim their rights to their thrones. In order to accomplish this, Lord Krishna went to the Gauravas as Pandavars messenger.

The Lord’s lotus feet are the feet that conquered land and sky; Gangga River came from His feet and the feet provide moksha to even the most evil ones. Those feet walked as a messenger for the people He loves. Dhuriyothana refuses to return Pandavas portion and as a result Baratha war took place. It was in this war that Lord Krishna who rides and directs the whole world rode the chariot for His beloved Arjuna. He rode the chariot for the sake of justice and dharma. It was at this place where Lord Krishna assumed the role of Guru to Arjuna when Arjuna refused to fight the war by giving him the *Satya upadesa.*
All these reflect Lord Krishna’s disposition and His qualities that capture the hearts of His devotees through His *leela*. The Lord does not discriminate those who surrender to Him unconditionally. Lord Naaraayana assumed the avatar of Narasimma in order to attest His devotee’s devotion (*bhakti*). His clemency and indiscriminate value can be seen in the way He conquers and blessed Vibishana and Kugan. Apart from that, His Thrivikrama avatar that measured the sky and world proves that Lord Naaraayana is beyond imagination and understanding. Among His other *leelas* includes holding a hill as an umbrella as Lord Kannan, being in every house at the same time in Gokula, and many more. His disposition as someone who is impartial can be seen through His *leela* as a good friend to the poor Kuselan and as someone who defies injustice in the matter of slaying Kamsan and other *asuras*.

**Conclusion**

Opinions that claim Vaishnavism practice comes from the north is not acceptable at all. Reasons being are because evidences of Thirumal can be found in Tolkappiyam and Sangga Ilakkiyam (ancient literatures). The current practice of Vaishnavism can be seen as a combination of north-south and this leads to unity of culture among all. In conclusion, the eight letter mantra is seen as the remedy to all problems and solution to all obstacles that people face in life. Evidences lead to show that even someone who don’t know anything will be able to become successful by chanting these eight letter word mantra. When we realize the essence of the mantra and chant the mantra with such devotion and dedication, nothing is impossible and Lord Naaraayana will definitely bestow His blessings on His devotees. The foundation of *bhakti* is love and when one summons the Lord with love, He is bound to respond. By singing praise of The Lord, one would enjoy His blessings in the present world and *paramapatham* in the other world. We end here with the hope that all of us attain His *paramapatham* by singing His praise and dedication towards His blessing.
“Oom Namo Naaraayanaya”