

# REFUTATION OF CĀRVĀKA PHILOSOPHY– REFERENCES IN *TIRUVĀYMOĻI* AS EXPLAINED BY SVĀMI NAMPIĪLAI IN HIS *ĪDU*

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## Abstract

Cārvāka (also called Lokāyata), is one of the well-known heterodox philosophical system which does not believe in the authority of the Vedas and the existence of *Brahman*, the Supreme Almighty. This system has been discussed and refuted by various orthodox schools of philosophy. Viṣiṣṭādvaita is one such school of thought which advocates belief in the Vedas and in Ṣrīman Nārāyaṇa as the Supreme Being.

*Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* (“Four Thousand Divine Hymns”) in Tamil language is the core treatise that advocates Vaiṣṇavism in Tamil Nadu.

*Tiruvāymoḷi*, sung by Ṣrī Nammāḷvār (traditionally believed to have lived in 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E.), forms part of the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham*. The hymns of *Tiruvāymoḷi* have been interpreted by various authors. One among the popular commentaries is called *Īdu*, authored by Svāmi Nampiḷlai (13<sup>th</sup> century C.E.). Ṣrī Nammāḷvār has not stated anything explicitly about Cārvākas. It is through Svāmi Nampiḷlai’s commentary, one can understand the theories of Cārvāka and the refutation of the same in the Viṣiṣṭādvaita school of thought, which is discussed below.

## Introduction

Several orthodox philosophical systems (*āstika-darṣanas*) consider Vedas as the main source for expounding the fundamental principles (*tattvas*) of the creation of the world and the creator. By their way of interpretation, they have been recognised as different schools of thought. On the other hand, the systems of philosophy

that do not believe in Vedas and hence in the existence of *Brahman*, are called heterodox (*bāhyas*) schools of philosophy (*nāstika-darśanas*) or the hypothesis of the non-believers.

### Viṣiṣṭādvaita

Viṣiṣṭādvaita is one of the major schools of *āstika-darśana* that considers Śrīman Nārāyaṇa as the creator of the world. The Śrīvaiṣṇavites are the followers of Śrīvaiṣṇavism and worship Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, where *Śrī*, refers to Goddess Lakṣmī, the embodiment of divine mercy and eternally inseparable Consort of Almighty Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Being (*Paramātman*). The unconditional loving services rendered to the divine couple, is considered as the ultimate goal of every Śrīvaiṣṇavite.

### Āḷvārs and Ācāryas :

The word 'Āḷvār' (in Tamil) means, one who gets immersed in his devotion with the Supreme Lord to the extent of completely forgetting himself and the world around him. The Āḷvārs in their devotion to Śrīman Nārāyaṇa have poured out their divine experiences in the form of poems. The Āḷvārs are twelve in number. The compilation of their hymns is called the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* ("Four Thousand Divine Hymns"). Śrī Nammāḷvār, one of the Āḷvārs has contributed four *Prabandhas*. Of them, the *Prabandha*, titled *Tiruvāymoli*, comprises of one thousand one hundred and two (1102) hymns. This work is considered to be equivalent to *Sāma Veda*.

'The Ācāryas-era' started with Śrīmān Nāthamuniḷ (10th century C.E.) who compiled the *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* into one whole text and brought it to the knowledge of the world and taught it too. In this lineage of illustrious Ācāryas stands Svāmi Nampīḷlai of 13th century C.E. He has a unique way of interpreting the verses of *Tiruvāymoli* and his spell-bounding commentary, *Īḍu*

on *Tiruvāymoḷi* is fervently studied even today by numerous scholars and aspirants of Śrīvaiṣṇava society.

Svāmi Nampillai, in his introduction to his commentary, *Īḍu*<sup>1</sup>, has described six heterodox philosophies and eleven alien philosophies. The introduction is in three sections titled- '*Śrīyahpati-paḍi*'. The Cārvāka<sup>2</sup> philosophy is one of the heterodox philosophies discussed in the first '*Śrīyahpati-paḍi*' of *Īḍu*.

### ***Cārvāka Philosophy as described by Svāmi Nampillai in Īḍu :***

According to Svāmi Nampillai (*Īḍu*, Vol. I. pt.1. Śrīyahpati-paḍi-1, pp. 88-91), the main contention of Cārvāka philosophy is that: "*Lokāyatikan*<sup>3</sup>, '*prutivvyādi bhūtaṅgaḷ nālinuḍaiya kūṭṭaravilē caitanyam eṇḍṟoru dharmam piṟakkum. adukkunḍāṅa sukadukkaṅgaḷe svarga narakaṅgaḷ. avatṟṟinuḍaiya pivivilē caitanyam nasikkum. avvaruṅṟumillai eṇbadu avanuḍaiya siddhāntam.*<sup>4</sup>"

The following are the views of Cārvākas as evinced here:

- i) there are four fundamental elements, the earth (*prthvī*), water (*āpaḥ*), fire (*tejas*) and air (*vāyu*), where none of these have *caitanya* (life or consciousness).
- ii) *Caitanya* will evolve when the four said elements come together.
- iii) in disintegration of four fundamental elements, the *caitanya* also disappears.
- iv) There are no separate worlds like heaven or hell (*svarga* or *naraka*). The happiness or misery occurring in one's life in this world, is interpreted by them as *svarga* or *Naraka* – enjoying worldly pleasures is the experience of *svarga* and undergoing pain, distress, diseases or troubles in life is the experience of *naraka*.
- v) There is no separate world called *Mokṣa*.

From the above information we can infer that the Cārvākas –

- i) do not believe that there is a creator. This is seen from their first statement that the togetherness of the four elements create consciousness, which is a natural process. Hence, they do not believe in creation, sustenance and dissolution of this world by a Supreme Being viz., *Paramātman* or Almighty.
- ii) do not consider the *karma* theory and the concept of rebirth, since they do not believe in *svarga* and *naraka*, as a result of good and bad deeds, which leads to happiness and misery.
- iii) do not believe in the entity known as *atman*, as they consider the body is *caintanya* and *caintanya* is the body; '*yāvat jīvam sukham jīvet*' – to live happily for ever - seems to be their motto.
- iv) do not accept that the world is dissolved by *Brahman* as they hold the view that death is nothing but the dissolution of the four elements.
- v) do not have the concept of *Paramapada*, the abode of the Supreme Lord, since they believe that there is no *Mokṣa*.
- vi) do not accept any other *pramāṇas* like *anumāna* or *śabda*, as they want to see to believe things. Hence, they neither accept Vedas nor the Supreme Lord who can be understood only through Vedas.

### ***Cārvāka Philosophy and its Refutation by Svāmi Nampiḷḷai in Īḍu:***

In this section, the refutations given by Svāmi Nampiḷḷai in his *Īḍu* based on the verses of *Tiruvāymoli* of Śrī Nammāḷvār, are discussed:

### Śrīman-Nārāyaṇa is the cause for the universe :

Śrī Nammālvār has sung many hymns indicating that Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the cause for the creation, sustenance and the dissolution of the universe.

1. While explaining one of the *Tiruvāymoli* hymn, *munṇīr jśālam paḍaitta em mugil vaṇṇaṇē*<sup>5</sup> . . . , Svāmi Nampiḷḷai states that Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the creator of the universe; He first created the water and then the universe, which is surrounded by water on all sides (*Īḍu*, Vol. III, p. 79): *muṛpaḍa jala sruṣṭiyaip paṇṇi piṇpire aṇḍa sruṣṭidāṇ paṇṇirru. vicitramāga jagatsruṣṭiyaip paṇṇina . . .* There are many other hymns of Śrī Nammālvār to explain this<sup>6</sup>.
2. On the hymn, *maṛṇilam araṇ vān perum paḷ tani muḍalā suṛṇu nīr paḍaittu adaṇ vaḷit tholmuṇi muḍalā muṛṇum dēvarōḍu ulagu seyvān*<sup>7</sup>, Svāmi Nampiḷḷai writes in his commentary that the Lord, using the *Mūlaprakṛti*, the fundamental element for creation, brought into existence all the worlds (*lokas*) and beings in them (*Īḍu*, Vol. 10, p. 21): *advitīyamāna mūlaprakṛti thoḍakkamāga . . . ellā lokaṅgaḷaiyum uṇḍākkum avaṇ . . .*
3. Explaining the hymn, *mudal taṇi vitteyo muḷu mūvulagadikkellām*<sup>8</sup>..., Svāmi Nampiḷḷai says, Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the material cause, the efficient cause and the supporting cause while creating all the three worlds, the earth, sky and heaven (*Īḍu*, Vol. 10, p. 259): *mūvulagu thoḍakkamāṇa oṇṇoliyēāmal ellāvāṛṛirkum trivoidha kāraṇamum āṇavaṇē . . .*
4. Further commenting on the hymn *bālaṇāy eḷulaguṇḍu*<sup>9</sup>..., Svāmi Nampiḷḷai points out that that Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the performer of the dissolution of the universe too. He swallows the seven worlds and protectively keeps them within Himself; once again He starts creating the universe

as before (*Īḍu*, Vol. I, pt. 2, p. 731) : .. . *lōkaṅgaḷ ēlaiyum eḍuttu vayiṟṟile vaittāy muṇṇoru kālattilē. piṇṇai adu taṇṇai velināḍukāṇa umiḷndu . . .* There are many other<sup>10</sup> hymns that talk about the dissolution.

The following are some of the hymns describe that Śrīman Nārāyaṇa stands as all the three causes of the universe:

- ... *ivvulaḡu ellām paḍaittu iḍarndu uṇḍu umiḷntu alantēy*<sup>11</sup>
- *uṇḍum umiḷntum kaḍantum iḍarntum kiḍantum niṇṇum. . .*<sup>12</sup>
- ... *pal ulagum paḍaittu aṇṇu uḍanē viḷuṅgi karantu umiḷntu kaḍantu iḍarntatu*<sup>13</sup>
- ... *muṇṇapaḍaittu uṇḍu umiḷntu kaḍantu iḍarntumaṇanta māyaṅgaḷ...*<sup>14</sup>
- ... *tān ēḷuaḡellām tāṇē paḍaittiḍantu tāṇē uṇḍumiḷntu tāṇē āḷvāṇē*<sup>15</sup>

From the above hymns and the commentary on them, we can infer that Śrīman Nārāyaṇa is the eternal and absolute cause for the universe.

### Number of Tattvas :

Viṣiṣṭādvaita establishes *tattvas* as twenty-six – the *acit-tattva* is twenty-four; along with the *cit (jīva)* and *iṣvara-tattvas*, the total becomes twenty-six as against four *tattvas* of Cārṇvākas. The details of the twenty-four *acit-tattvas* accepted by Viṣiṣṭādvaitins is described in depth in the commentary for the hymn *poṅḡaimpulanum poriyaindum karumēndiriyam aimbhūtam iṅgu ivvuyirēy pirakirutu mānāṅḡāra manaṅgaḷē*<sup>16</sup>.

### Svarga, Naraka and Mokṣa :

Śrī Nammāḷvār has sung many hymns on these and explaining them Svāmi Nampiḷḷai indicates that there exists *svarga* and *naraka* that are destined in accordance with the *punya* or *pāpa karmas* of human beings. When the impressions of the *karmas* are fully

nullified by *jīvatma's* unshakable devotion towards Śrīman Nārāyaṇa, then by His grace, one attains *Mokṣa*.

Commenting on the hymn, *idaṅmēl vem narakam*<sup>17</sup>, Svāmi Nampillai says that the *naraka* is unbearable and a *jīvan* undergoes inexplicable pain there (*Īḍu*, Vol. IV.p.343): ... *koḍidāṇa narakam, aṅgupponāl paḍum dukkam ...*

Elaborating on the hymn *siṟappil vīḍu suvargam narakam ...*<sup>18</sup>, Svāmi Nampillai conveys that the bliss in *Mokṣa* (*Śrī Vaikunṭa*) a soul gets once liberated, is similar to the one that is experienced by the celestial bodies (*nityasūris*). But the pleasure enjoyed in *svarga* by an *ātman*, who acquired the effects of *puṇya*, is limited to a particular period. The pain caused due to the punishments undergone by a sinned soul in the hell, is highly torturous and that is also limited to a period. This is seen from his commentary (*Īḍu*, Vol .I, p. 610): *nityasūriḡaḷuḍaiya aṅubhavattaip peṟru aṅubavikkak kaḍavadāgac colluḡira mokṣam; parimita sugattai uḍaittāna svargam; niṣkruṣṭa dukkamēyāna ṅarakam.*

The same ideas are conveyed in the commentary on *Tiruvāymoḷi* for the following hymns: *vaikunṭam puḡuvatum aṅṅavar vidhiyē*<sup>19</sup>; *nāḍīr nāltōrum pāḍīr avaṅ nāmam vīḍē peṟalāmē*<sup>20</sup>; *maraṅamāṅāl vaikunṭam koḍukkum pirāṅ...*<sup>21</sup>; *mīṭci iṅṟi vaikunṭa mānagar...*<sup>22</sup>

### **Body is different from *Ātman*, a Permanent Entity :**

Svāmi Nampillai expounding Śrī Nammālvār's views considers that the body is *acit* (inanimate matter), while *ātman* is *cit* (animate entity).

Explaining the hymn, *aivar tisai tisai valittu ettukiṅṅaṅar*<sup>23</sup>, Svāmi Nampillai writes, if all the sense organs focus on one thing, it is easy to perform the entrusted task. But if each were to pull the *atman* in different directions, then all is lost (*Īḍu*, Vol. VII, p. 40): ... *ittaṅaivarum oru tikkile pōga iluttārgalēyāḡil tāṅ mellap pōḡēṅō?*

He further says that all the ten hymns in the *Tiruvāymoḷi*, 7.1 talks about the erratic oscillations of the sensory organs that do not allow the *ātman* to focus on the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord.

On commenting the hymn, *manan akam mala mara ... enan uyir...*<sup>24</sup> Svāmi Nampiḷlai describes the *atman* as the embodiment of knowledge and bliss (*Īḍu*, Vol. I. pt. 1, p. 40): *mānasa-jṣāna-gamyamāy irukkum jīvatma svarūpam ....* For the hymn, *uḍalmicai uyirenak karandu eṅgum paranduḷaṅ*<sup>25</sup>, Svāmi Nampiḷlai explains that without the existence of *atman*, the body cannot perform any action and hence *atman* is the controller of the body (*Īḍu*, Vol. I, pt.1, p. 314): ... *iccharirattukku ātma-dhārakaṇāy niyāmakaṇāy seṣiyāy irukkumāppolē ...*

From these, one can understand that Svāmi Nampiḷlai contests the Cārvākas by establishing that there exists a permanent entity, *ātman* that dwells in every being. It is bound by its *karmas*. The bodies donned by the *ātman* in various births are temporary residences of the *atman*. Once the *ātman* surrenders to the Lord, He absolving both the *punya* and *pāpa*, bestows *Mokṣa*.

### **Birth and Death cycles are based on one's own Karma :**

Ṣrī Nammāḷvār has sung many hymns<sup>26</sup> that talk about *karma*, either good or bad, depending on which the Almighty confers heaven or hell. In his commentary on one of the hymn, *karumamum palaṅum āgiya kāraṇaṅ taṅṅai*<sup>27</sup>, Svāmi Nampiḷlai explains that the Supreme Lord exists as *antaryāmin* in every *jīvan* and He determines the *punya* and *papa* as results of these *karmas* (*Īḍu*, Vol. III, p. 360): *punṅṅiya-pāpa-rūpa karmaṅgaḷukkum karma palaṅgaḷukkum niyāmakaṇāy ... karmānuṣṭāthāvāy, aṅuṣṭātru-dvārā karma nirvāhakaṅ...*

### **Vedas are the Ultimate Authority of Enlightenment:**

Ṣrī Nammāḷvār in his first *Tiruvāymoḷi* expounds all about *Brahman* and asserts that He can be understood only through the Vedas. While elucidating the hymn, *cuḍarmigu surutiyu!*<sup>28</sup>, Svāmi



Nampiḷḷai consolidates all these contentions of Śrī Nammāḷvār by showing that the flawless Vedas being eternal and *apauruṣeya* is the ultimate authority of enlightenment. Thus, says Svāmi Nampiḷḷai, all the materialistic views have been condemned (*Īḍu*, Vol. I, pt.1, p. 319): . . . *idil pramāṇam eṇṇeṇṇil apauruṣeyamāy nirdoṣamāy irukkira vēdattālē pratibhādikkap pattirukkum avaidika mariyādaiyil naḍakkīra, vēda neṟikkup purambāga nadakkīra, lokāyatikarai nirasikkirār.*

Further, explaining the hymn, *maṟaiyāya nālvēdattuḷ niṇṟa malar cuḍarē*<sup>29</sup>, Svāmi Nampiḷḷai concludes, that the two words ‘veda’ and ‘maṟai’ (Tamil equivalent for the word *veda*) are synonymous with the Vedic scriptures. He gives quite an interesting interpretation here, when he states that the word ‘maṟai’ in Tamil means that which hides the true knowledge – to wit, it hides the true knowledge from the non-believers; the term ‘veda’ means, he adds, that which enlightens the believers with the absolute truth (*Īḍu*, Vol. III. p. 60): ... *maṟai eṇṟum vēdam eṇṟum iraṇḍu paḍiyāgac collugiradu; bāhyarāy nāstikarāy iruppārkkut taṇ paḍikaḷai maṟaikaiyālum, āstikarāy iruppārkkut taṇ arthattai vēliyiṭṭuk kāṭṭukaiyālum.*

Similar such hymns where Vedas are shown by the Alvar as proof to understand the Supreme Lord are: *vēda mudalvaṇai*<sup>30</sup>; *nāraṇaṇ mūvēlulaḡam kākkum nāthaṇ vēdamayaṇ*<sup>31</sup>.

## Conclusion

Many may wonder why our Ācāryas need to refute other schools of philosophy that contradict the Vedic view. As Svāmi Nampiḷḷai himself states, this is a must to eradicate the misleading views. In fact, our ancient seers have showed us the way to overcome the dangerous effects of misrepresentations, and to ensure the welfare of the world and to guide the sincere people to follow the righteous path. Also, it is akin to plucking out the weeds from a plantation field to ensure the health of the crop under cultivation.

Vedānta Deśika, the great poet-philosopher of Tamil Nadu (13th century), in one of his works called *Paramata Bhaṅgam*<sup>32</sup>, has pointed out that the objective of refuting the other views is not just to criticize the other schools but to establish the truths revealed by the Vedas which are the foundation of our Sanātana Dharma.

### References :

- 1 All references to the text *Īḍu* and the hymns of *Tiruvāymoli* are from the book *Bhāgavat Viśayam* (in 10 volumes published from 1993 - 1999) carrying the hymns and the five manīpravāla commentaries including *Īḍu*. For easy reference, the title *Īḍu* (for commentaries) and *Tiruvāymoli* (for the hymns) are used throughout.
- 2 *Īḍu*, Vol. I. pt. 1 (*Śrīyāḥpati-paḍi-1*) p. 111: . . .lokāyatam thoḍaṅgi yogi paryantam bāhya mataṅgaḷ . . .
- 3 Svāmi Nampillai did not state that the Lokāyatas do not accept Vedas as *pramāṇas*. However, Śrī Ātān Jiyar (17th Century), commentator on *Īḍu*, in his *Aḍaiyavilainḍāṅ Arumpadam* has explained clearly, that, they are called Lokāyatas since they believe only in *pratyakṣa pramāṇa* which means accepting only those things perceivable through the sensory organs and nothing beyond that. See *Īḍu*, Vol. I. pt. 1 (*Śrīyāḥpati-paḍi-1*) p. 91: *loke āyatam – viśṛtam – sarvatra pratyakṣa-dṛṣṭameva lokayati iti vyutpatteḥ*
- 4 *Īḍu*, Vol. I. pt. 1 (*Śrīyāḥpati-paḍi-1*)p.89: Svami Manavāla Māmuniḡaḷ (15th Century) in his commentary, *Pramāṇa Tiratṭu* on *Īḍu* explains that according to Bṛhaspati who propounded the Lokāyata philosophy, “the mixing of four fundamental elements, i.e., earth, water, fire and air, in a particular proportion, promotes the feeling of consciousness; it is just like the fermentation of sugar cane juice producing a power to intoxicate its drinker”-- *ata lokāyatam, pṛtivyāpas-tejo-vāyuriti tattvāni tebhyaṣcaitanyam kiṅvādibhyo madaṣaktivat”*,iti Bārhaspatya sūtram
- 5 *Tiruvāymoli* 3.2.1

- <sup>6</sup> Similar such hymns from *Tiruvāymoḻi* are – 4.10.3: *paranda deivamum pallulagamum paḍaittu*; 5.6.1: *kaḍal jṣālam seyḍēnum yāṇē enṇum kaḍal jṣālam āvēnum yaṇē enṇum*; 7.6.1: *pāmaru mīvulagam paḍaitta parpanābāvō*; 9.3.2: *avanē agal jṣālam paḍaittiḍantān*. In his commentary on these hymns Svami Nampillai highlights that the Supreme Lord is the eternal cause of the universe.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 10.1.7
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 10.10.9
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 1.5.8
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 10.8.2: *kārēḷ kadalēḷ malaiyēḷ ulaguṇḍum*; 6.2.4: *ālin niḷḷilai ēḷulagamunḍu aṇṇu nī kiḍantāy*; 6.10.1: *ulagam unḍa peruvāyā*; 6.6.3: *niraṅkariyāṇukku nīḍulaguṇḍa*; 9.3.2: *avanē aḥḍunḍu umiḷntān*; 7.5.5: *āḷap perumpunal taṇṇuḷ aḷunḍiya jṣālattai*-- are a few of the hymns where Svami Nampillai describes the way Śrīman Nārāyaṇa swallows the universe during deluge.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 3.1.10
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 4.5.10
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 4.10.3
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 5.10.6
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 10.5.3
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 10.7.10
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 4.9.5
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 2-9-5
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 10.9.9
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 10.5.5
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 9.10.5
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 4.10.11
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 7.1.10
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 1.1.2

- 25 *Ibid.1.1.7*
- 26 These hymns that talk about the *karma* and the perennial cycle of births and deaths due to its effect. Yet the moment one surrenders unconditionally to Him, He removes all the *karmas*. Some of them are : 7.6.9: *kāṇḍuṅkōlō neṣjamē `toḷudāl vali niṅṅa valviṅai māḷvittu ; 1.4.3: valviṅaiyēn māḷādō ; 1.5.6: viṅaiyēṅ viṅaitir maruṇḍānāy*
- 27 *Ibid.3.5.10*
- 28 *Ibid.1.1.7*
- 29 *Ibid.3.1.10*
- 30 *Ibid.3.5.5*
- 31 *Ibid.2.7.2*
- 32 *Paramata Bhaṅgam – Annotated Commentary by Sri UppiliyappanVaradachar Svami.p.12: veṅiyār aṅiyār tiṅattil aruḷ purintu āraṅṅaṅ anneriyāl siriyār vaḷiḷaḷ aḷippatum tēṅgu kaḷippadarke*

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