

LORD VENKATESWARA AND ALWARS

Dr. G. T. GOPALAKRISHNA NAIDU



Published by
TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS,
TIRUPATI.

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FOREWORD

Dr. D. JAGANATHA REDDY,
M.D., F.A.M.S., M.R.C. Path.,
Vice-Chancellor,
S.V. University.

Phone: 2737
Tirupati:517502
(Andhra Pradesh).
Dated: March 27, '75.

I had the privilege and pleasure of writing foreword earlier for his two books entitled, "Rama and Azhwars" and the "Holy Trinity". Each time my admiration and appreciation for the author's erudition and deep study of the ancient religious texts in Tamil, particularly of the contribution made by the Azhwars in the furtherance of the vaishnavite cult and presenting in a lucid manner to the reading public in simple English are on the rise. The author is an ardent devotee of Lord of the Seven Hills, known from ancient times as "Vengadam"—Lord of Unlimited Wealth and also reckoned by the Nammazhwar as offering bountiful mercy on His creatucs and rightly narrates the contributions made by the Azhwars in bringing to the reader's mind the national greatness of the great vaishnavite deity, "Srinivasa".

The author traces the origin of the existence of Lord Venkateswara from 6,000 years back, mention of which was made in Tholkappiam which to many appear as a revelation. He rightly depicts that the pilgrims who visit and make offerings shed their sins and get back with the blessings of the Lord. The genesis, devleopment and growth of the Lord's abode are beautifully described under Tiruvengadam- Tirumala Hills, and during the years the gradual transformation of the hills into a beautiful and colourful place of national pilgrimage and tourist centre linked by rail, road and air services to the bottom of the hills and pilgrims reach the hills through motor transport are vividly described. Mention is also made about the conveniences and amenities provided by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Trust Board, the details of the rituals performed to the deity

Foreword

The Alvars of the Tamil literature belong to the galaxy of mystic saints who believed in simple faith and pure devotion. At a time when people were passing through a phase of despondence and helplessness, these spiritual savants infused among the people a new awareness of fresh horizons. To them, total subjugation to the Lord is not a means but the end—the ultimate fulfilment.

The Nalayira Divya Prabandham, the anthology of the Alvars' works is befittingly known as the 'Dravida Veda'. It is, in fact, the quintessence of the teachings of the Vedas and Upanishads. The soul-stirring composition in the Divya Prabandham is also supercharged with a sense of piety and devotional ecstasy. On the whole, this great anthology is a simple and faithful account of the mystic experiences of these God-Men.

The Alvars gave themselves up heart and soul to the Lord of Seven Hills. In mellifluous poems they ecstatically glorify Him and also picturesquely describe the Seven Hills, His Abode on earth.

The Devasthanams have been devoting their wherewithal to popularising these works. For, these sacred writings are sure to instil in us a deep spiritual awareness and guide us to lead a life of purity and devotion—basic perquisites to reach the pinnacle of spiritual heights.

We have great pleasure in presenting the second edition of the book, to the public.

Tirupati
November 20, 1979

P. V. R. K. PRASAD, I.A.S.
Executive Officer,
T. T. Devasthanams

FOREWORD

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William Penn. The role of Kancheepuram and that of the Andyan Kings are well described. The interesting way Dr. Naidu has narrated the greatness and the sanctity from ancient times will be received well by the reading public, both within India and abroad.

I enjoyed reading and obtaining religious information through the booklets of Dr. Naidu and became a firm believer in that Hindu civilization and culture are ancient and would continue to influence people all over the globe, depicting the goodness of man and the excellence of human behaviour and forbearance towards different religious faiths. It looks to me that the author's main hobby, creation, attitude and values and style of life are directed in the pursuit of acquiring religious knowledge and writing in simple and understandable form for the benefit of millions of people within India and abroad, thus promoting his longevity as well as giving a tonic effect on his own physical and mental build.

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SWAMI DAYANANDA
Sandeepany Sadhanalaya,
dated 23rd April 1973.

Tara Cultural Trust,
Powai - Park - Drive
Bombay—400007

Love for the Lord is above all logic. And surrender to Him needs no proof. A logical love is as absurd as a calculated surrender.

The Alwars of South India had absolute Love for the Lord and, therefore, got themselves given up at the Altar of their Love.

In the Lord Venkateswara they discovered the Altar and stood before Him as flames of Joy, Love, Beauty and Eloquence. In His presence they found the chords of Love, unknown to the searching mortals, responding to the demands of expression, and singing out a melody, a song, of priceless cadence.

In these few articles, Dr. G.T. Gopalakrishna Nayudu, successfully attempts to portray the hearts of the Bhaktas and the unfailing grace of the Lord Venkateswara. Himself a devotee, having served for years the Lord of the Seven Hills, Sri Nayudu's articles appearing in this book entitled, "**Lord Venkateswara and Alwars**" do touch your hearts. May the Lord bless him to be His instrument to sing His glories in joy.

DAYANANDA

FOREWORD

TO

“LORD VENKATESWARA AND ALWARS”

BY

VEDANTA RATHANAKARA VEDA VACHASPATI

SRI AGNIHOTRAM RAMANUJA THATHACHARIAR.

Now, the great Bhaktha of our time Dr. G.T. Gopalakrishna Aidi, has written a Book on “**Lord Venkateswara and Azhwars.**” gives immense pleasure to introduce it to the Asthika public for their study. He writes this book after enjoying Lord Venkateswara daily, serving Him for a number of years.

Lord Venkateswara stands with unique charms for thousand years blessing His devotees in their needs. For the existence of God, Lord Venkateswara is a living proof. Common man and woman, scientists, eminent thinkers, philosophers and politicians, may bow before Him and get satisfaction fully. Lord Venkateswara stands there in spite of propaganda by atheists without giving any chance for them. The Glory of Lord Venkateswara is revealed by the Azhwars of Tamil Naidu greatly like direct perception of Lord Venkateswara, enjoying Him through their hymns which give us insights in the divinity of Lord Venkateswara.

We can enjoy Venkateswara through the Azhwars’ hymns joyfully. This enjoyment is itself a great medicine for the soul. Dr. G. T. G. Naidu gives this medicine, a mixture of wonderful combination of beautiful and deep thoughts of all Azhwars....

In this book he details divine form of Tirupati and describes Azhwar’s and Emberumanar’s spiritual thirst by quoting profusely on each and every Azhwar. He prepares this medicine for our soul. By reading this Book, we must benefit ourselves fully. Asthika public always must be grateful for Dr. Naidu for giving aid and help now and then for the spiritual elevation.

veda Niketanam,
, Iyengar Street,
Kumbakonam,
24—2—1973.

AGNIHOTRAM RAMANUJA
THATHACHARIAR.

AUTHOR'S APOLOGIA

In the sweet syllables of Swami Vivekananda, “ Religion for a long time has come to be static in India. What we want is to make it dynamic. I want it to be brought into the life of everybody.” The Tirupati-Tirumalai Devasthanam is deputing Sri C. Anna Rao, Chairman, Board of Trustees, and Sri P.S. Rajagopala Raju, Executive Officer, to Pittsburg, U.S.A., where Lord Venkateshwara's Temple is coming up. Religion is thus brought into the lives of people living in distant states.

In this booklet on “ **Lord Venkateswara and Azhwars** ” the grandeur of God as depicted by ten of the twelve Azhwars of Tamil Culture is brought out. The ecstasies of the mystic Azhwars have been delineated in brief in the pages of this booklet.

The author is grateful to Sri C. Anna Rao and Sri P.S. Rajagopala Raju for getting the approval of the Trust Board for including the Booklet in T.T.D. Publications. The author is grateful again to Dr. D. Jagannatha Reddy, Vice-Chancellor, S. V. University, to Sri Agnihotram Ramanuja Thathachariar and Swami Dayananda for their endearing Forewords.

The author believes in the dynamic words of Dante who spells out thus:

“ Follow thou thy star, thou shalt not fail of a glorious haven.”

AUTHOR'S APOLOGIA

(*Second Edition*)

The T. T. Devasthanams, rich in saintly lore, is advancing forward in its spiritual drive into society. This is evident in its resolve to print the Second Edition of

"LORD VENKATESWARA AND ALWARS".

The author lays his humble appreciation of the efforts taken by the Executive Officer and Chairman, of T. T. D. for having recognised the long-felt needs of devotees in getting five-thousand copies of the Book, printed for use of the religious public of the country.

Lord Venkateswara has been adored by ten Alwars who were saints and sages in South India. These great savants have been known for their sagely Qualities and their saintly Character. Their service was born of the conviction that world is filled with God. It is this love of God that moves the saint to spend himself in the service of man and the world. The Alwars have shown in their lives five qualities, which are epitomised in five words, *Viz.*, Faith, Fearlessness, Freedom, Fortitude and Forbearance.

The author is grateful to Sri P. V. R. K. Prasad, I.A.S., Executive Officer and Dr. N. Ramesan I.A.S., Chairman, both illustrious and intellectual, for ably guiding the destiny of the institution to which they belong.

The author is again thankful to the T. T. D. publication department, for publishing articles in "SAPTHAGIRI", which deal with Alwars and Nayanmars, who represent respectively two major religious traditions, Vaishnavism and Saivism, in Southern India. Alwars and Nayanmars were primarily saints, divers into divinity. And these great scholars show us the ever-glowing path towards Divinity, represented by LORD VENKATESWARA.

Lord Venkateswara & Alwars

CHAPTER I

Divine Deity in five States of Divinity.

Introduction

Sri Lakshmi has Her Divine habitat at the wide-welcome breast SRI VENKATESWARA. Let us enjoy Him to our hearts' content Fridays before He has His Holy Bath. What a wonderful sight! This spectacle arrests the attention of Nammazhwar, the much respected saint of the twelve Azhwars of Vaishnavite blossom. An Azhwar exclaims: "There is no equal to you! You are the owner and dweller of the three worlds; Saints, Sages and Celestials are hastening to have darshan of you; slave of slaves am I; and my illumined Self calls thy slave to your holy feet; Venkatesa, help me to merge in you." Such a rapturous verse of Nammazhwar was the source of inspiration for the writer to give a caption for the Tamil Book as hereunder:

" Alarmel Mangai Urai Marbham"

—Venkateshwar as enjoyed by Azhwars.

We shall thus enjoy this melody of Nammazhwar in the following pages.

Vengadam and Its Hoary Antiquity:

About 6,000 years ago, reference is made in Tholkappiam (Tamil) by a Great Savant known as Parambiranar, about the existence of the deity, Sri Venkateshwarar on Vengakam Hills of Vengal, of very antiquity. The word "*Vengadam*" means 'excessive un-earned wealth.' The other meaning is that one's sins are burnt away if one visits this place. A Deity of such brilliance is located at Thiruvengadam, otherwise known as Tirumalai Hills about 10 miles from Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. Tirumalai Hills is now

a Panchayat area, about 3,000 feet above sea-level and enjoy a salubrious weather. During the years 1942 to 1944, a motor road was laid by the Tirupati-Tirumala Devasthanam from Tirupati to Tirumalai Hills, and at the same period malaria was annihilated from this seat of God. Subsequently cottages were constructed, water-supply improved, epidemics controlled and in fact all amenities were provided on the Hills. The small village now looks like a miniature, self-sufficient Town of Supreme Spiritual Significance.

Five Aspects of The Divine Deity:

The all-absorbing Almighty is seen in five aspects:

- (i) Mulavar: Malaikkinia Ninra Perumal;
- (ii) Bhogar: Azhakappiran;
- (iii) Utsavar: Tirumalaiappan;
- (iv) Koluvil Amaruvar: Tiruvengadathu Urai Selven;
- (v) Uggiravad: Thiruvengadavan Meyavan.

Each one of the deities performs His peremptory function ceaselessly; and this duty on their part is an object lesson for even one of us to simulate without fear or favour.

Malaikkinia Ninra Perumal:

Friday morning is the day of rejoicing when Mulavar is given a bath with aromatics, chandan, milk and water. Now is the occasion to see Venkateshwara in full. The deity is seen in His Holy Nirvana as if He is teaching us the relevance of the occasion and impressing on us His Spiritual Significance.

Peyazhwar, one of the first set of three elderly Azhvars affirm in his ecstasy that Venkateshwara is both Hari and Haran. He confirms that the deity is seen with a long, down-flowing hair-loc from His crown to justify His Sakthi attire. Mazhuvu in one hand and with curling snakes over his body reveal Him as Haran. The Chakram on His right hand claims Him as Hari. Thus the deity appears to the Azhvar as Hari and Haran in one Supreme Self, and he declares as such to the devotees in his verse as hereunder furnished in his own words.

“ தாழ்சடையும் நீள்முடியும் ஒண்மழுவும் சக்கரமும்
 சூழ்அரவும் பொன்நாணும் தோன்றுமால் - சூழும்
 திரண்டருவி பாயும் திருமலைமேல் எந்தைக்கு
 இரண்டு(உ)ருவம் ஒன்றாய் இசைந்து.”

[மூன்றும் திருஅந்தாதி-63]

Immediately after the holy bath, a simple apparel proclaims
 s enchanting form, with His partially opened eyes, as Lord
 ishna tending His cows in the forest while young.

hakappiran:

Here is a deity of importance standing at the feet of Mulavar,
 own as Bhogar for whom all religious rites are done. Every
 y in the morning He is given a holy bath by waters brought
 m Akasa Ganga. In the night He is given due honours when
 : is fondled to rest and sleep, and the lullaby of Kulasekhar,
 : Devotee-King refers to Him as Sri Rama:

“Tiny Baby, Thou art on a leaf seen
 And ever in majestic form have you been:
 Alinagar King, Ayodhya’s Adhipathy,
 Sleep, Sleep, Sleep,!”

This deity is said to have been installed with all pomp and
 emony about nine centuries back by a north-Indian Maharani,
 devotee of Lord Venkateshwara.

umalaiappan:

Utsavar gives Dharshan to millions of pilgrims as He goes
 and the four Car streets on festive occasions in general and
 ahmotsavam in particular. Garuda vahanam is the choicest
 spectacles when the deity goes round on His Garuda. Pilgrims
 m far and near frequent Tirumalai Hills in the nights to see
 d enjoy the deity on Garuda. Also during Car procession.
 savar adorns the car in its procession round the four streets,
 nilar spectacular sights are seen during Float Festivals, when
 : deity with Ubhaya Nachiards sails round in the Swami Pushkarini.

Tiruvengadathu Urai Selvan:

He is called Koluvar and this deity settles the day-to-day accounts which are read over in front of Him. This is an occasion of celestial silence when Bhaktas congregate inside the Temple and pay reverential regards to Him.

Tiruvengadavan Meyavan:

He is known as Ugra Srinivasan; He goes round in the four streets only once a year in the early hours of a particular day, viz Kausika Ekadesi Day, and returns to the temple before sunrise. He is not taken out during the day lest, in the opinion of the religious heads, the village should be burnt.

The Ten Azhwars:

Of the twelve Azhwars ten have sung the glory of Venkateswara as hereunder.

<i>Names of Azhwars.</i>	<i>No. of Hymn</i>
Mudal Azhwars (Three)	.. 38
Tirumazhisai	.. 14
Nammazhwar	.. 54
Periazhwar	.. 7
Andal	.. 16
Kulasekhar	.. 11
Tiruppanazhwar	.. 2
Tirumangai Azhwar	.. 63
Total	.. 205

Other Savants:

Sage Tirumoolar who is said to have lived about 2,000 years ago has described Tiruvengadavan thus:

“Vengada Natha, Vedantha Gem,

வேங்கட நாதனை வேதாந்தக் கூத்தனை
வேங்கடத்துள்ளே விளையாடும் நந்தியை.’’

Again Kabila Deva Nayanar in his celestial song book ‘Sivamuman Tiruvandhadhi.’ declares:

“Vengadathu Meyan, Thou protector of mankind,
Pray, Annihilate the ills of human kind.”

வேங்கடத்து மேயானை மேவா உயிரெல்லாம்
வேங்கடத்து நோயால் விளிந்து.’’

The songs of the two illustrious Savants furnished above are ul-stirring and speak of the divine antiquity of the place.

SELF-FORGETTING DEVOTEES.

As referred to in the fore-going pages, Theertham from Akaganga was being fetched by an elderly archaka for Azhakappin as a daily routine. One day a hunter approached the elder person to ask of him some water for quenching his immediate thirst. The request was flatly turned down as that water was intended for Azhakappiran's Holy Bath and therefore it should not be defiled. The archaka avoided the troubling hunter and walked fast out of his reach till at last he found that the weight of the mudpot containing water was becoming less and less. He stopped to find out the reason and was aghast to see water flowing out of the mudpot through a hole caused by an arrow shot by the hunter who was found drinking the flowing water. The archaka was wild with rage at the turn of events when the hunter addressed the elder thus: "Thatha! I was very thirsty; kindly pardon me and so saying he vanished. And in his place stood *Srinivasa* giving benediction to the sage. Even to this day the descendants of this sage Archaka, are known as Thathacharya family. Such are the ways of Venkateswara!

Bhakta Thyagaraya:

Purandara Dasa, Thallapakkam poets and Thyagaraja are a few of the intense devotees of God Srinivasa whose fame has spread far and wide.

Once Thyagaraya's songs brought down the screen in front of the deity and helped him to have the vision of Venkateswara.

Thyagaraja sang:

"Tirupati Venkataramana, Thy Screen Thou shalt take,

And show Thy Brilliant self for my sake"

and in a trice, the screen fell down revealing God's wonderful Form. Thyagaraja now exclaims:

Venkatesa! Thousand eyes need I to gaze on you!

In a bewitching form you appear new!

Kulasekhara Azhwar:

Now is our happy prerogative to approach the Azhwars who have sung the Glory of Venkateswara in their supreme excellence.

One such is Kulasekhara, the Devotee-king of Kerala, whose poems are ennobling, rapturous and ecstatic. He approaches Venkateswara in extreme humility and desires to become a small stridge to live for ever in the Swami Pushkarini of celestial fame

Vengadam. He pines to become a beaten tract over which devotees would walk to the haven of Srinivasa. He longs to have dharshan of the deity continuously; he hungers to lie prostrate

in His presence so that he can always be seeing His enchanting face, and at the same time be affording a lovely path for devotees to tread over his body to have a glimpse of God. Kulasekhara's such scintillating songs are soul stirring; and one such is rendered as thus:

“Tirumal! you cut asunder all sin;
Your tall stature Bhaktas win;
Wish I ever to be at your side;
And increase my devotional tide;
Crave I for Devotees to walk over my little self
And enable them enjoy Thy supreme Self.”

A Bhaktha of such magnitude is rare to find. A brief history of this sage-King's life is worth mentioning.

Kulasekharas Life—An image of Devotion:

Kulasekharar was born (on the Sukla Dwadasi of the month of Kumbha) of a princely order. His father, King Dradha-Vrath, of a pious disposition, died when Kulasekhar was yet a child. However, the young prince was trained in state-craft till he took up the administration of the Chera line of Kings. He proved a good administrator and an able diplomat.

On the cultural side he became proficient both in Sanskrit and Tamil with his propelling initiative and forward zeal. He became interested in Valmiki Ramayanam and drank deep into the lore of that great Poet and author.

One day, the Ramayana Pandit who was regularly teaching

place his son deputised for the father. The son felt that he could show himself at best, as youngsters should, and explained to the King the episode of Sita being carried away by Ravana, the Rakshasa Chief. The lecturer said that Sri Rama was in extreme sorrow and was lamenting over Sita's loss. Kulasekhara's impressionable mind was, upset. He was visualising Sri Rama in this lamentable condition called out for his army chief to get prepared to invade Lanka, fight out Ravana, release Sita from captivity, and fetch Her back to Sri Rama. Soon the palace became disturbed with anxious activity; the courtiers were agitated. This commotion reached the ear of the elder teacher the father who immediately rushed to the King and cried out that Sita had been taken back triumphantly from Lanka and that she was safe with Her spouse Sri Rama. As Kulasekhar heard this, he heaved a sigh of relief. He repaired to his bed and after a spell of sleep, he became normal again.

King Kulasekharar's palace was freely accessible to all Vaishnavites, much to the annoyance of the ministers of the Court. They hatched out a plot to drive away these 'intruders,' from the palace as they imagined they were creating nuisance to the administration. A valuable Navaratnamala was reported missing from the royal treasury; and officers pointed their combined fingers to the Bhagavathas who, they said, would have stolen the property. The Devotee King would not believe this accusation against the devotees, the Lord's servants; and towards this end, he worked out a dangerous test. A black cobra was arranged to be fetched in a pitcher and the King, to the consternation of all around, put his hand in to the pitcher stating that if any or all the Bhagavathas had stolen the jewel, let the cobra bite him (the King). A dreadful immolation as this, the courtiers did never anticipate. The cobra was taken out by the King to the surprising shock to all. It slid out of the hands of the Devotee King and disappeared into the nearby bush. The officers fell prostrate before the King, admitting their guilt, described their ruse and prayed for pardon. The King excused them though he was sad to learn the vagaries of the Court. He left the Kingdom in charge of his officers and went on a pilgrimage in the country. On return he installed his son on the throne and freed himself from all Kingly responsibilities. He settled himself as a Devotee near Azhwar Tirunagari for lifelong concentration on God and His attributes. His verses of Deities in general and Lord Srinivasa in particular are of an arresting and bewitching kind.

May our culture and existence be modelled after this lovable Devotee.

CHAPTER III

BANDIT CHIEF BECOMES A SAINT.

We shall now pay our homage to Tirumangai Azhwar, who attained the supreme stage of a Saint after a successful course of life as a bandit chief and a highway robber. God's blessings came upon this vagrant Bandit and transformed him into a devotee par excellence.

His Life's raptures.

His life was full of bewildering incidents. He was the son of a chieftain, Neelan, and was christened as Neelam, the junior son. He was born in Karthigai star in the month of Karthigai, in the year 660 A.D. He acquitted himself creditably in all arts and craftsmanship of war. After his father's demise, he was appointed chieftain by the then Chola King.

Years rolled on and Neelan ruled over his subjects satisfactorily. He was apparently not satisfied with this dull hum-drum routine and began to spend his days in boisterous revelry. One such day he saw Kumudavalli, a fair damsel of a spiritual kind whom he desired to marry. But she insisted as a marriage condition that he should feed thousand poor every day without hindrance. Neelan was so much enchanted in Kumudavalli's stature, beauty and divine look, and did as he was bid. The state treasury was slowly being depleted on this account till at last Neelan thought it expedient to lay hands on the well-to-do public.

The Bandit Chief at Work:

Neelan gathered his forces and commenced to waylay people and rob them of their belongings. One of these days he saw from a perch on a tree that a fairly well-to-do marriage-party was passing through the thick of the forest. His heart leaped with joy at the prospective gain and he quickly came down the tree and was lying in wait for giving them a surprise. The party consisted of a rich beautiful bride being conducted by a fair and outstandingly strong Bride-groom. Neelan with his men jumped on the party and threatened them to part with their gold orna-

CHAPTER III

BANDIT CHIEF BECOMES A SAINT.

We shall now pay our homage to Tirumangai Azhwar, who attained the supreme stage of a Saint after a successful course of life of a bandit chief and a highway robber. God's blessings came upon this vagant Bandit and transformed him into a devotee par excellence.

His Life's raptures.

His life was full of bewildering incidents. He was the son of a chieftain, Neelan, and was christened as Neelam, the junior. He was born in Karthigai star in the month of Karthigai, in the year 660 A.D. He acquitted himself creditably in all arts and craftsmanship of war. After his father's demise, he was appointed Chieftain by the then Chola King.

Years rolloned and Neelan ruled over his subjects satisfactorily. He was apparently not satisfied with this dull hum-drum routine and began to spend his days in boisterous revelry. One such day he saw Kumudavalli, a fair damsel of a spiritual kind whom he desired to marry. But she insisted as a marriage condition that he should feed thousand poor every day without hindrance. Neelan became enchanted in Kumudavalli's stature, beauty and divine outlook, and did as he was bid. The state treasury was slowly being depleted on this account till at last Neelan thought it expedien, to lay hands on the well-to-do public.

The Bandit Chief at Work:

Neelan gathered his forces and commenced to waylay people and rob them of their belongings. One of these days he saw from his perch on a tree that a fairly well-to-do marriage-party was wending its way through the thick of the forest. His heart leaped with joy at the prospective gain and he quickly came down the tree and was lying in wait for giving them a surprise. The party consisted of a rich beautiful bride being conducted by a fair and outstandingly strong Bride-groom. Neelan with his men jumped upon the party and threatened them to part with their gold orna

ments. In seeming fright they readily complied with the thundering demands of the bandits. Thus they were dispossessed of every ornament on their bodies. Neelan then scanned them through and found that the bride-groom had a small golden ring on one of his toes. The bride-groom explained to the robber chief that it was customary for the newly wed to wear this little ornament and pleaded for sparing it. But Neelan was not convinced at the pleading of the bride-groom nor could he remove it as it stuck fast on the toe. Neelan tried to draw it out forcibly and failed. He then attempted to extract it with his teeth. As soon as his teeth touched the bride-groom's skin, Neelan swooned.

Tirumangai's vision:

When he regained consciousness, verses came rushing to his memory in ecstasy. Ten verses, commencing from

“Vadinen Vadi Varundinen” were the first hymns which he sang; and the first of the series of ten verses in Tamil is given hereunder with the relevant English rendering.

“வாடினேன் வாடி வருந்தினேன் மனத்தால்
பெருந்துயர் இடும்பையில் பிறந்து
ஓடினேன் ஓடி உய்வதோர் பொருளால்
உணர்வெனும் பெரும்பதம் தெரிந்து
நாடினேன் நாடி நான் கண்டு கொண்டேன்
நாராயண என்னும் நாமம்.”

—திருமங்கை.

“Born in stress and strain suffered I,
Ran helter-skelter with gold searching eye;
Walked at last to God's domain,
With Namo Narayana on lips do I remain;
This gospel spell I, in weal and woe,
Chantings like these, through thick and thin, banish our
foe.”

—Tirumangai Azhwar.

Out-pourings of the Bhakta:

The flood gates of his pent-up divinity were thus thrown open and Tirumangai Azhwar, for so he was called later, commenced

to sing in mellifluous verses on God and His bounty in general, and on Sri Venkateswara in particular. One such scintillating verse on Lord Srinivasa is dealt with hereunder:

“ பார்த்தற்காய் அன்று பாரதம் கைசெய்திட்டு வென்ற
 பரஞ்சுடர்
 கோத்துஅடங்கு ஆயர்தம்பாடியில் குரவை பிணந்த
 எம்கோவலன்
 ஏத்துவார் தம்மனத்துள்ளான் இடவெந்தை மேவிய
 எம்பிரான்
 தீர்த்த நீர்த் தடஞ்சோலைசூழ் திருவேங்கடம்
 அடைநெஞ்சே.”

“ Lord God! you waged a successful war as a Charioteer on behalf of the Pandavas and annihilated all evil forces. And you have finally chosen Tirumalai Hills as your permanent perennial abode.”

In another verse he delineates Venkateshwara thus:

“ பாடும் எரிகாற்றினோடு ஆகாசமும் இவையாயினான்
 பேரும் ஆயிரம் பேசினின்ற பிறப்பிலி பெருகுமிடம்
 காரும் வார்பனி நீள்விசும்பிடைச் சோருமாழுகி தோய்தரச்
 சேருவார் பொழில்சூழ் எழில் திருவேங்கடம்.”

“ You're our pancha-bhoda's ever-dweller
 You're indeed bound by the devotees' ardour;
 Nature's intrinsic thread see I in Your bow,
 With thought, word and deed to you I bow.”

Tirumangai—The spiritual man:

Tirumangai bemoans his previous lot in life and wails before Srinivasa in appealing verses to take him to His bosom. One of his pathetic verses which speak of the spiritual man in him is furnished below.

“ குலந்தா னெத்தனையும் பிறந்தேயிறந்தெய்த் தொழிந்தேன்
 நலந்தா னென்றுமிலேன் நல்லதோரறம் செய்துமிலேன்
 நிலந்தோய் நீள்முகில்சேர் நெறியார் திருவேங்கடவா!
 அலந்தேன் வந்தடைந்தேன் அடியேனை ஆட்கொண்டருளே”

“ Births and deaths have I gone through,
 No good so far have I done; but my life I threw,
 Your majesty in the cloud-laden precipice, I perceive,
 Hold I your feet tight; me thou shant’ deceive!”

His verses vindicate the storm within, the result of repentance by a Bhakta.

Tirumangai’s voice is now raised; he gets enormous strength on chanting *Namo Narayana*—the Akshaksharam—many a time; And at the entrance to Lord Venkateswara’s sanctum, he appeals to Him to cut asunder his cycle of births so that he can live in peace and plenty in Him and enjoy Him in full.

“ பேசுமின் திருநாமம் எட்டெழுத்தும் சொல்லி
 நின்று பின்னரும்
 பேசுவார் தம்மை உய்வாங்கிப் பிறப்பறுக்கும் பிரானிடம்”

The above lines mark out the supremacy of the saint, who wants us to chant un-ceasingly.

“ *Namo Narayana* ”

Again he bemoans

“ தெரியேன் பாலகனாய்ப் பலதீமைகள் செய்துவிட்டேன்
 பெரியே னாயினபின் பிறர்க்கே யுழைத்து ஏழையானேன்
 கரிசேர் பூம்பொழில்சூழ் கனமாமலை வேங்கடவா!
 அரியே! வந்தடைந்தேன் அடியேனை ஆட்கொண்டருளே!”

“ Many a sin have I committed.
 Doing good to humanity have I omitted,
 Govinda! crystal-clear waters win
 Pearls and gems are thy property
 With fervour Do I Approach you, missing no opportunity!”

Azhwar’s vision of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna:

Tirumangai looks at the Deity and gets the vision of Sri Rama. He cries out with tearful eyes:

“ Sri Rama, You had gone to the Sea-bound Lanka,
 Aimed your never-missing arrow at Ravana; and
 Annihilated his near and dear
 God! Celestials adore You on these Sacred Hills
 Father! remove my difficulties!”

Again, when he looks at the Deity of Venkateshwara with tear-laden eyes, he finds Sri Krishna standing before him and he loudly laments:

“Venkatesa, what a transformation is in Thy Form!
 You are indeed Krishna Lord Krishna of yore!
 you stole the butter balls of Gopis!
 And entranced them by your sweet dance;
 You are bewitching; Touch me
 with your benevolent Hands and make me
 Sink in Thy supreme self!”

“உண்டாய் உறிமேல் நறுநெய் அமுதாக
 கொண்டாய் குறளாய் நிலம் ஈரடியாலே
 விண்தோய் சிகரத் திருவேங்கடம் மேய
 அண்டா! அடியேனுக்கு அருள் பிரியாயே”.

Tirumangai views Him as Narasimha too and visualised that He gives benediction to Bhakta Prahlada.

Calm resignation sets in the distressed mind of Tirumangai Azhwar. He cries out again in ecstas:

“King Thou art! remove my births
 Make me thine own in your girth
 Thou standeth in snow-laden Hills
 When shall you enter my vitals and give me thrills.”

Tirumangai's visits to other Holy Shrines:

The Bhakta feels sure that God Srinivasa has entered in him and he has been placed in His Divine Exalted self. He is aware that he is firmly clinging to the Holy feet of Venkateshwara, never, never to leave Him. Tirumangai Azhwar is one with Him.

Tirumangaimannan is the Azhwar supreme who has sung the glory of 93 holy places out of 108 Vaishnavite shrines in the country. His rapturous outpourings for Lord Venkateshwara could never be obliterated from this world and beyond. Salutations to the Kalian, the great! He lived for 160 years doing intense spiritual benefits to the country.

CHAPTER IV

ETHIRAJA-THE SPIRITUAL AENIUS OF THIRUVENGADAM.

We shall now deal in this chapter with an Acharya-Purusha, though our book is mainly intended for Azhwars, who have sung the glory of Tiruvengadam. He is *Ramanuja* who wrote Sri Bashyam and hence he is known as Bashyakar. He was an ascetic of the highest order; a leader of ascetics; and hence he is called as Ethiraja. He got the name of Emberumanar from his Guru Thirumalai Nambi. Generally he is known as Udaivar in common parlance.

This great savant was the main resourceful authority for initiating religious rites, and devotional codes in the Temple of Srinivasa on the Hills. Even today, the spiritual codes ordained by him are followed up in meticulous detail in the temple functions.

Tirumalai Nambi of Tiruvengadam:

About 1,000 years ago, there was one Bhaktha, Tirumalai Nambi, who was serving Sri Venkateswara. One great religious leader Kesava-Somayaji sought the hand of Tirumalai Nambi's sister, Bhoopiratty; Tirumalai Nambi agreed and the wedding was performed with great eclat. The newly weds chose Sriperumbudur as their dwelling place, and the venue of their lives' progress.

Ramanuja and His Preceptors:

In the year 1017 A.D., a brilliant son was born to Bhoopiratty. The infant grew into an intelligent young man, having imbibed all the vedic learning taught by the parents. He was named Ramanuja and was made to learn more and more of Hindu Dharma.

As days passed by, he was placed under a great seer known as Yogi Yadava Prakasa. It so happened that the disciple, a master-mind eclipsed the Guru and the Guru became jealous and desired to do away with the sishya by hook or crock. Ramanuja, having read the dark mind of his Guru, left him for good. And as per the advice of his mother, he went to his maternal uncle, Tirumalai Nambi, and stayed at Tiruvengadam to learn more of Hinduism at his uncle's feet.

Alavandar's Deep-seated Desire:

At this time, an elderly religious teacher, Alavandar, once happened to know the greatness of Ramanuja and yearned for his company. Alavandar knew that his end was fast approaching and desired to entrust his certain unfinished works to the young man. At once messengers were sent far and wide to fetch him. Tirumalai Nambi was very happy to send his nephew to Srirangam, the abode of Alavandar. And Ramanuja in turn was intensely happy to seek the asylum of Alavandar and followed the messengers hurrying to Srirangam post-haste. As they approached Srirangam he learnt that Alavandar had breathed his last and he was drowned with sorrow. When he neared the body of the deceased he swooned and fell down wailing for the lost opportunity in not having met the Guru while alive. After he regained his consciousness he found three fingers of his Guru in semi-flexed condition and learnt that the deceased had mentioned that Ramanuja should fulfil the following three desires of his;

- (i) Brahma-sutras of Vyasara should be dealt with as per the ideals of Nalayira prabandham (Four Thousand Prabandham).
- (ii) A significant text is to be written gratefully acknowledging the world teachers, Vyasara and His father, Parasara.
- (iii) Nammazhwar's glory and greatness should be broadcast in a variety of ways to the world for the cultural and religious edification for posterity.

Ramanuja promised and took a loud vow, with flowing tears in his eyes, that he would execute all the three desires of his deceased master, when lo! the three bent fingers stretched themselves straight to the amazement of all those gathered. Wonderful is the affection of Guru-Sishya affiliation!

Ramanuja's Determined Will:

With the above mandate in mind Ramanuja went to Tirumalai, sought the help of his maternal uncle, Tirumalai Nambi, and prayed for the benediction of Sri Venkateswara. He worked with zeal, learnt a further lot of textual and spiritual knowledge from his uncle, and spent some good time in adoration of God,

at the same time plodding to get the three desires of His Guru, Alavandar, fulfilled. Time passed on in hot pursuit of Gnana and knowledge regarding Brahman.

Ramanuja—The Architect of Tirumalai Hills:

At last, light dawned on him and he became a Gnani. All the three items of the last wish of his Guru, Alavandar, were successfully wrought out much to the satisfaction and approval of his own maternal uncle. He laid little stress on property and in fact he never recognised any one who, without humility, had the pride of wealth. He became a great religious leader with 74 Sishyas working throughout the length and breadth of the country. His two main disciples were Kuresar and Mudaliyandan, whom he had set for spreading his gospel.

With this depth and magnitude of erudition and spiritual knowledge, Ramanuja left Tirumalai Hills with tears in his eyes, thanking his maternal uncle for all that he had done for him. He prostrated before God Srinivasa, his spiritual Guru, who had given him all the knowledge that was necessary, and who had made him the real vassal of Alavandar whose last desire He had made Ramanuja to fulfil.

Before Ramanuja left Tirumalai Hills, efforts were made by him to finalise Brahmotsavam on the Hills. This festival was originated by *Brahma*; and the Lord agreed to the request of Brahma for the conduct of the festival for ten days, the last day being the Sravanam, the day of the birth star of Lord Venkateswara. This festival was thus perfected by Ramanuja and his immediate assistants continued the festival successfully. Even today the Brahmotsavam on the Hills is a festival of importance of an ecstatic and devotional kind.

Vivekananda's Admiration of Ramanuja:

Let us glorify Ramanuja the spiritual perfecter of Tiruvengadam, in the words of Swami Vivekananda

“ Ramanuja.....with a most practical philosophy, a great appeal to the emotions, an active denial of birthrights before spiritual attainments and appeals through the popular

tongue, completely succeeded in bringing the masses back to Vedic Religion.”

In his “Ramanuja Nootrandadhy” Tiruvarangathu Amudhanar speaks of Ramanuja who, with his spiritual humility, has raised himself by submitting to Sadagopan-Nammazhwar. Again, Amudhanar, speaks of Ramanuja having held Tiruppanalwar in highest esteem. Amudhanar is so rapturous of Ramanuja that he spells out the following lines.

“சூழிக்கொடுத்த சுடர்க்கொடியின் அருளால்
வாழ்கின்ற வள்ளல் இராமானுசன்”.

He describes that Ramanuja lives in the world as an object lesson for posterity since he was blessed by Andal, the Lady-Saint, the foster-daughter of Periazhwar, who would first test the garlands intended for Lord Ranganatha and then only send them to be fit His Divine Personality.

Ramanuja—The preceptor of Visishtadwaitam:

Ramanuja is one of the three great savants of Hindu Vedic world. Shankara was the originator of Adwaitam, Madhwa, the founder of Dwaitam, whereas Ramanuja initiated Visishtadwaitam (qualified Monism). Ramanuja is still held as the devotional sishya of Srinivasa of the Seven Hills. He instituted 74 injunctions; and if Tirumalai Hills Temple is administered well even today, it is due to the great efforts of Ramanuja.

Amenities provided:

Of late from 1942, the Tirupati-Tirumala Devasthanam has been doing its best to provide amenities for the seat of Venkateshwara. They constructed a motor Road to Tirumala Hills, annihilated malaria which had been a scourge affecting all those who frequented the hills, provided dharmasalas and cottages for the stay of the pilgrims, improved and perfected water supply for the teeming millions who resort to the place, and started educational institutions for the erudition of the young.

The T. T. D. Board of Trustees with the administrative set up is continuing to spread the message of Ramanuja, by providing facilities for pilgrims from the length and breadth of India and beyond.

CHAPTER V

The First Three Azhwars - Their Ecstasy on Tiruvengadam

The first group of the Azhwars were those contemporaries born one after another, on three successive days, under three successive birth stars, viz., Tiruvonam, Avittam and Sadhayam, in the month of Arpisi in the year 719 A.D. They are respectively known as

POIGAI AZHWAR
BHOODHATH AZHWAR AND
PEYAZHWAR

The intrinsic meanings of the three names are worth being examined here.

Poigai Azhwar:

Poigai means lake, from which people quench their thirst. Likewise the verses of the Azhwar cleared the ever-growing doubt of the learned ones, and their thirst for knowledge was quenched by the lake of erudition of this Azhwar.

Bhoodhat Azhwar:

It is a truism that God in His Almighty wisdom sends His Angels to be born on earth to do good to humanity. Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were such angels. Likewise, the Azhwar under reference is known to have been born with a set purpose.

Peyazhwar:

This saint was imbued with saturated devotion: but he was looked upon by the then society as a devil (ඳුඹ). He was moving about with the intense yearning for God though people could not properly assess his worth. They took him as not one of their kind; they thought he was a devil. Yes; he looked a devil of devotional divinity.

We shall now observe the life-history of these there Bhaktas who have contributed to the devotional literature of the country.

Poigai Azhwar :

This saint has sung his first Nootrandadi wherein he praised five holy shrines (in the Tamil Nadu) in eleven verses, of which eight speak the glory of Venkateshwara. He perceives Venkateshwara in the hearts of one and all, and his rapturous verse given here, delineates the way in which God has permeated Himself in to everybody.

“ உள்கண்டாய், நன்னெஞ்சே! உத்தமன் என்றும்
உள்கண்டாய்; உள்ளுவார் உள்ளத்(து)—உள்கண்டாய்
வெள்ளத்தின் உள்ளானும் வேங்கடத்து மேயானும்
உள்ளத்தின் உள்ளான் என்று ஓர்”

God, Ye're present ever and everywhere
Ye're in the hearts of devotees who care;
Tidal seas you cross on Adishesha as boat!,
Ye've chosen Vengadam as your Venue's float!
The Azhwar gives another verse of arresting devotion:—

Sri Venkateshwara lits the fire of devotion in those who yearn for him and at the same time, extinguishes the fire of sins in the devotees' lives.

It is said that even Rishis, the exalted ones, frequent Tiruvengadam in search of Knowledge in cases of doubts. They stand before Him in constant prayer when He illumines their mind with Truth and they return happily rewarded. God! Thou art true knowledge Supreme! The Rishis are rapturous when they look at the sweet welcome lips of Venkateshwara who, as Lord Krishna, blows the Pancha-Janya conch to awaken mankind to their duties.

The Sound of this white conch dispelled all fears, anxiety, doubts and depression.

“ திசை திசையின்
வேதியர்கள் சென்றிறைஞ்சும் வேங்கடமே வெண்சங்கம்
ஊதியவாகி மாலுகந்த ஓர்”

Thus Poigai Azhwar gives us a vision of Mahabharata war makes us feel that our doubts and cares will be annihilated if we

Venkateshwara as we stand before Him. This is how the Azhwar visualises the Deity on the Hills as Sri Krishna.

The saint interprets the Supreme Deity of Vehgadam as Lord Rama too. He states that Sri Rama aimed an arrow at the fleeting deer, the sight of which infatuated Sri Sita. To satisfy Her endearing request, Sri Rama ran after the deer in hot pursuit and when it could not be caught he shot a decisive arrow at it. This fascinating deer was no other than the Rakshasa, Maareecha,—(the evil lieutenant of Ravana)—in his new role to elude Sri Sita.

“இடையிடையில்
மீன் மாய மாசூரும் வேங்கடம் மேலொருநாள்
மான் மாய வெய்தான் வரை”

The Azhwar gets the inspiration that Sri Rama who darted the arrow at Maareecha now lives in Tiruvengadam.

Sri Venkateshwar again impresses the saint as Tiruvikraman who blessed Bali. The Azhwar abbs that Lord Venkateshwara removes the difficulty of all those who throng in numbers to the Hills to pray for and enjoy His grace.

He states:

“ நயவேன் பிறர் பொருளை; நள்ளேன் கீழாரோடு;
உய்வேன் உயர்ந்தவரோடு அல்லால்!”

“I shall not touch others' property; never shall I befriend the bad people; the society in God's thought, word and deed only will I yearn for.” Thus saying the Azhwar pines to live in God, think of God and sing of God.

“ பழுதே பலபகலும் போயின என்(று) அஞ்சி
அழுதேன்; அரவணைமேல் கண்டு தொழுதேன்”

Similar yearnings on the part of Ramakrishna Paramahansa were noticed during his short span of life. He used to be doing his pujas to Kaali, and when the farthest Temple Bell rang daily at 8 P.M. in the night, he would exclaim:

“ God! a day gone!
And I exist without seeing you!”

Lives of great men are trails of glory, and beacon lights for posterity.

Bhoodhat Azhwar:

This saint who sang the second set of 100 verses, known as Second Nutrandady, visited several Temples, during his travels, far and wide. Of the 17 verses sung in praise of certain deities, seven have been concentrated on Sri Venkateshwara. The Azhwar is a model of hard penance, having kept Bhakti as his ideal in life. He also visualises Sri Rama in the Deity on the Hills and spells out in ecstasy:

“ சென்ற(து) இலங்கைமேல் செவ்வே; தன் சீற்றத்தால்
கொன்றது இராவணனைக் கூறுங்கால்—நின்றதுவும்
வேயோங்கு தன்சாரல் வேங்கடமே, விண்ணவர்தம்
வாயோங்கு தொல்புகழான் வந்து.”

“ Across the seas the Lord hurried to Lanka,
And with rising anger rained death blows on Ravana;
Calmed down, He went up to Vengadam,
To give darshan to human kingdom.”

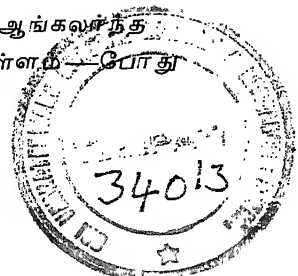
He says that celestials throng to the Temple and lie prostrate before the Deity in mute adoration of Him. They perceive Him as Lord Krishna and cry out:

“ God!, you annihilated the giant Kesi by splitting asunder his mighty jaw and earned for yourself the name of KESAVA! I am attracted by your splendour to see you here as LORD KRISHNA.”

“ மனத்துள்ளான் வேங்கடத்தான் மாகடலான் மற்றும்
நினைப்பரிய நீளரங்கத்துள்ளான்—எனப்பலரும்
தேவாதி தேவனெனப்படுவான் முன்னெருநாள்
மாவாய் பிளந்த மகன்.”

Bhoodathar's imagination again; He speaks that the monkey hordes in Tirumalai Hills consider Him as Sri Rama; and in their own language utter their prayers as 'Kuruh, Kurh,' and throw flowers at His feet.

“ போதறிந்து வானரங்கள் பூஞ்சனைபுக்கு ஆங்கலர்ந்த
போதறிந்து கொண்டேத்தும் போது உள்ளம்—போது
மணிவேங் கடவன் மலரடிக்கே செல்ல
அணிவேங் கடவன்பே ராய்ந்து”



A Bhakta always desires to share his experience, with others of his kind; and Bhoodhathar stands on ends to sing his verses to humanity for them to enjoy his experiences and get benefited. He flatters himself that as a result of hard penance he has attained God's grace and is grateful to Him for shaping him so.

“ யானே தவம் செய்தேன் ஏழ்பிறப்பும், எப்பொழுதும்;
யானே தவமுடையேன், எம்பெருமான்! —யானே
இருந்தமிழன் நன்மலை இணைஅடிக்கே சொன்னேன்,
பெருந்தமிழன் நல்லேன் பெரிது.”

Bhoodhathar finally gets lost in his fervour towards God of the seven Hills, and exclaims:

“ Having had left the domain of the Sun, thou hurried to the Hills and reigned supreme there giving your affectionate Darshan to the intense needy. Since then, your permanent place is Vengadam. Thou blesseth all! Reign supreme for millions of years! Delighted am I to see you in your spotless aroma giving peace and plenty to those who need them. You are Gnana! You are humanity's welcome resort!

“ விரைச்சந் தனக்குழம்பும் வான்கலனும் பட்டும்
பிரைப் பொலிந்த வெண்மல்லிகையும் — நிறைந்து கொண்டு
ஆதிக்கண் நின்ற அறிவ னடியினையே
ஓதிப் பணிவ துறும்”

Bhoodhat Azhwar's Bhakti is pointed love towards mankind. His devotion is just like the delightful lamp of the world giving light and lustre to everyone dwelling in it. Bhoodhathar's love stands comparison to the great author Simm's definition:

“ Love is but another name for that inscrutable presence by which the soul is connected with humanity.”

As if this one comparison is not enough, let us ponder over Sir Walter Scott's enunciation of Love in the following quotation which raises Bhoodhathar's quality of Love to supreme height:

“ Love rules the court, the camp, the grove
and men below, and saints above;
For Love is Heaven, and Heaven is Love.”

—Sir Walter Scott.

Peyazhwar:

This saint was born in Tiruvallikkeni, the present Triplicane, Madras-5. His life is a moral for all in the country. He visited many a Holy shrine in the land till at last he stepped on Vengadam and was intensely happy that he had had his innings in this visit of his. He compared the place to Paramapada (Heaven) and the ocean of Milk (Parkadal). Peyazhwar as his name indicates behaved as one possessed; and he appeared as a man of hallucination, If any one asked him to spell out a Hill, he invariably spoke of Tirumalai Hills. He described the deity as a beautiful dark adult of a supreme dazzling lustre. When the deity wore Tulasi garlands, He was enchanting. The Azhwar says that He quelled the naughty and annihilated the wicked. He was long-armed in His Yoga sleep on His Adishesha bed in the ocean of milk, wherefrom He has since repaired to Tiruvengadam, and from there gives darshan to all as Lord Venkateswara.

“ வெற்பென்று வேங்கடம் பாடும் வியந்துழாய்
கற்பென்று சூடும் கருங்குழல்மேல்—மல்போன்ற
நீண்டதோள் மால்கிடந்த நீள்கடல்தீ ராடுவான்
பூண்டதா ளெல்லாம் புகும்”

Peyazhwar's another telling verse is given hereunder:

“ உளன்கண்டாய் நல்நெஞ்சே! உத்தமனென்று
உளன்கண்டாய் உள்ளுவா ருள்ளத்து—உளன் கண்டாய்
விண்ணொடுங்கக் கோடுயரும் வீங்கருவி வேங்கடத்தான்
மண்ணொடுங்கத் தாளந்தமன்”

Vengadavan is the repository of truth. He is preceptor for mankind. He is the most perfect and endearing indweller in every-body's heart. He measured the three worlds and saved Bali from perdition. Venkateshwara is none other than Lord Vikraman.

The Azhwar urges us to approach Him and enjoy the sweet sprinkling rivulets that afford celestial waters for the Bhakthas.

Again it is interesting to know a little more of Peyazhwar. His cosmopolitan conception of the Deity is thrilling. He states

Haran; He is Sakti; He is all-combined indivisible whole. Azhwar's poem in this reference is furnished:

“Down hanging tuft from thy high crown,
 with Mazhuvu bright and Chakra brown;
 Curling snakes right around
 With Golden strings bound;
 Fast flowing streams adorn thy domain.
 With mute devotion do I remain;
 Lord! You are Hari, the Bhagavan
 And no wonder, You are indeed Haran;
 See I both of you in One,
 And Bhaktas your favour win.”

Such a unified God incarnate, Azhwar saw and experienced in Sri Venkateshwara.

Peyazhwar later become the preceptor to another devotee who got infatuated in this exceedingly erudite scholar of repute. The disciple in this case is Tirumazhisai Azhwar who had toured round the country and imbibed immensely the several systems of integral Hinduism. This saint is known later as Bhaktisaaran, a perfect model of a devoted disciple.

The Three Azhwars of Holy Trinity

All the three saints were known as *Mudal Azhwars* in Tamil. They travelled all over the country like Sri Rama, Lakshmana, and Bharatha. They did not mingle with worldly minded men, nor did they feel hungry or thirsty. They did not know they were independently making pilgrimage in the south.

It was the will of God to create a meeting ground for these three souls of self-less dedication. In Tirukkoilur in South India, on a dark rainy night Poigai Azhwar entered a small hut in the locality and found a resting place in the front verandah of that cottage. He reclined against the mud wall and looked up the leaky roof in meditation upon God. A short while after, Bhoodhatthar entered the hut and elicited if he could stay in this small place, as he wanted to take rest against the squally weather. Poigaiyar welcomed him with joined palms and entreated him to bear company with him even though the place was small, just enough for only

two people to squat. So they sat together with profound chantings on God. Just then there was another caller who asked if he could share the resting place. Poigaiyar at once welcomed this third Bhakta, viz., Peyazhwar and said that all the three can stand in that small cottage. And they were loudly chanting on Sri Hari inside the hut when rain was pouring cats and dogs outside, with rumblings and lightnings in the sky.

God's ways are inscrutable and for Bhaktas His revelation is perfect. The three saints felt the presence of a fourth personality in their midst. They were no longer shivering with cold. They now felt hot and they saw a bright individual elbowing His way towards them and they saw Narayana in His resplendent form. Each one sang his poetic effusions in praise of Sri Hari and these hymns are even to this day, soul-stirring with devotional ecstasy.

The hymns sung by the three saints in praise of God Hari are known as Antadis, in Venba metre in Tamil. Peyazhwar epitomised the hymns of the other two and sang:

“ திருக்கண்டேன் பொன் மேனி கண்டேன் திகழும்
அருக்கன் அணிநிறமும் கண்டேன்—செருக்கினரும்
பொன் ஆழி கண்டேன் புரிசங்கம் கைக்கண்டேன்
என் ஆழி வண்ணன் பால் இன்று.”

This is a description of the Divine vision vouchsafed to these sattwic souls. All the three Antadis, hundred each, are of deep devotion, with analytical introspection and felicitous expression.

We enjoy the devotional songs of the three Azhwars who have viewed Venkateshwara as Rama, Krishna, Narasimha and Tiruvikraman, with devotional love. And this love, according to William Penn, is stated thus:

“ Love is indeed Heaven upon earth,
Since Heaven above would not be
Heaven without it.”

—William Penn.

CHAPTER VI

THIRUMAZHISAI AZHWAR.

Early life:

In the previous chapter, reference has been made on Bhaktisarasar, a name enjoyed by Tirumazhisai Azhwar, a disciple of Peyazhwar, one of the Trinity to whom God gave darsan and relished their Nootrandhadis sung in His presence. This Azhwar was born in Tirumazhisai, under the star Makham in the month of Thai. Mazhisai is the Tamil form of 'Maheesara,' the essence of earth.

The early childhood of this Bhaktisarasar was spent in bamboo bushes in a village, Tirumazhisai, on the way to Madras from Tiruvellore. Pilgrims used to touch this village on their sojourn to Madras for visiting Parthasarathy Temple. This young growing mind got imbibed in the art of devotion due to environmental touch and he could not rest contented. He went out into the country in search of new, devotional pastures and visited shrines in numerous.

Visit to Tirumalai Hills: His visit to Tiruvallikkeni was unique. In the presence of God Parthasarathy, he concentrated to his hearts' content on the divinity as a totality in his life. Then his thoughts perched on Tiruvengadam to which shrine he was yearning to go. He made up his mind in this regard, went up the Hills, saw the Deity and was impressed with His majestic pose and His sweet smiling face. He made Tiruvengadam his abode, and spent days and nights in singing His glory.

“செழுங்கொழும் பெரும்பணி மொழிந்திட உயர்ந்தவேய்
விழுந்துலர்ந்தெழுந்து விண்புடைக்கும் வேங்கடத்துள்நின்றி
எழுந்திருந்து தேன்பொருந்து பூம்பொழில் தழைக்கொழுஞ்
செழுந்தடங் குழந்தையுள் கிடந்தமாலு மல்லையே.”

Every day he would experience the slowly vanishing heavy dew drops melting in the morning sun. The rays of the sun would rise higher and higher and reach the tops of the trees when the enveloped dew would fall down in continuous sprinkling on the ground. And at the same time, bees would fly higher and higher

and reach the flowers at the tree tops and settle over there. After drawing honey from the flowers at the tree tops they would fly down to the flowers at the base. Such sights created indelible impressions in the mind of Bhaktisarar; and they were constant reminders to him of Sri Venkateshwara, the Great master. He spent many a day happily on the Hills, enjoying the estases experienced by him at the sight of God.

An important landmark in his life occurred when he sung His glory thus:

“காண லுறுகின்றேன் கல்லருவி முத்துதிர
ஒணவிழவி லொலியதிரப்—பேணி
வருவேங் கடவா! என்னுள் புகுந்தாய்
திருவேங் கடமதனைச் சென்று”

“Today is Tiruvonam, your Birth-star; and I stand before you witnessing your Supreme Self. Bhaktas of immense culture are standing before you and are enjoying your bliss. God! you have chosen poor me, as your immediate servant and I am blessed. My life's ambition is reached.”

His ecstasy makes him sing again:

“சென்று வணங்குமினே சேணுயிர் வேங்கடத்தை
நின்று வினைகெடுக்கும் நீர்மையால்—என்றும்
கடிக்கமல நான்முகனும் கண்முன்றத் தானும்
அடிக்கமல மிட்டேத்தும் அங்கு”

Ye Bhaktas! Go to Tiruvengadam and pray to your hearts' content in front of Sri Venkataeshwara. All your sins will be annihilated, root and branch.'

Nature's bounty in the Seat of God:

Tirumazhisai is a poet of Nature, and his poesy is of a divine kind. He used to get into the forests and would see the wafting trees, hear the chirping birds and enjoy the breezy nights. And Tiruvengadam was a delightful spot where there were tall trees with spreading branches so mixed together that there was absolute darkness everywhere. Birds of different hues were singing their melody and monkeys were leaping from tree to tree. There was

fragrance in the air, being emitted from the sandalwood trees abounding in the forests.

Elephant and the Full Moon:

One such night when there was a bright full moon in the sky, he wandered in the thick of the forest when he came upon an elephant with uplifted trunk toward the full moon which was shining its lustre on the elephant. Tirumazhisai Azhwar was dumb-founded at this sight. His rapturous verse on the incident is given hereunder:

“ வைப்பன் மணிவிளக்கா மாமதியை மாலுக்கென்று
எம்பொழுதும் கைதீட்டும் யானையை—எப்பாடும்
வேடுவனைக் கக்குறவர் வில்லெடுக்கும் வேங்கடமே
நாடுவனைத் தாடுமேல் நன்று.”

The elephant, as an endearing Bhakta was stretching aloft its trunk to snatch at the full moon and to utilise the bright light to be shed into the Sanctum Sanctorum of Lord Veenkateshwara. He saw the elephant in its ecstasy being bent upon catching the full moon shining far high in the sky. In this futile attempt the elephant got into a state of Samadhi. When the hunters, near and far, came to know that this elephant, which had escaped their clutches for long, was in this static condition, they ran towards it to aim their deadly arrows at it. Closely galloping after these hunters came, what they suspected, their chieftain on a white horse. The chieftain ordered them not to harm the elephant but to return home leaving the animal unscathed. Accordingly they went back though unwillingly at the bidding of their chieftain without harming the animal. The chieftain touched the animal and the elephant came to its normality and understandingly bowed before the chieftain in absolute surrender knowing full well that He is no other than Lord Venkateswara.

Almost at once the chieftain disappeared leaving the animal to run after Him. The dumb-founded Azhwar was astounded at the successive turn of events.

When we read of this extreme devotion of the elephant, we are reminded of Zoroaster who says:

“ Devotion, like fire
Goeth upward.”

And we are also reminded of B. B. Browning's famous utterance:

“ God Answers sharp and sudden on some prayers,
And thrust the thing we have prayed for in our face.”

The Azhwar gets confirmed that those who spend their lives in Venkateshwara's service are worth living long to do greater and worthier service to Him.

‘ வீற்றிருந்து விண்ணுளவேண்டுவார் வேங்கடத்தான்
பால்திறந்த வைத்தாரே பல்மலர்கள்—மேல்திறந்த
வாழ்வார் வருமதிபார் த்து அன்பினராய் மற்றவர்களுக்கே
தாழ்வா யிருப்பார் தமர்.’

Azhwar's visits to a few other shrines:

Tirumazhisai's visits to a few other shrines and his experience there are telling.

Visit to Srirangam: He approached Lord Ranganatha in Srirangam and while he stood in bewildering silence before him a flash of light arose from him, went to the feet of Ranganatha and spread itself in a beautiful glow illuminating the Deity in His entire full. Sri Ranganatha created this big blaze alluring the Azhwar to look at Him in all His Glory.

“ பொன்னிகூழ் அரங்கம்மேய
பூவைவண்ணன் மாய! கேள்”

Visit to Tirukkudanthai:

The Azhwar then went to Kumbakonam and enjoyed the significant sight of Sarangapani:

“ பொங்குதன் குடந்தையுள்
கிடந்த புண்டரீகனே”

The Deity in reposeing posture is illustrative of the Lotus Flower, the petals of which are attractive, strong and endearing. The entire body structure of Ara Amudan is compared to the disposition of a healthy, spread-out, enticing Lotus flower which

adorns the lake where deep springs of unceasing continuity yielded perennial sacred waters.

While he was worshipping Sarangapani Perumal, The Azhwar was enraptured at the repose of the Deity and asked Him the reason for his restful reposing posture. He beheld Him as Sri Rama and asked Him if His legs were aching due to His end-to-end walk in the country. There was again a doubt which he desired to clear. He asked:

“ God! Is your body shaken up while you delved deep into this earth in the form of Varaha-Boar? What else is the reason for your lying down in restful peace in Kumbakonam on the bank of the Cauvery? God, please get up, and clear the doubt of Thy servant.”

“ நடந்தகால்கள் நொந்த(ன)வோ நடுங்ஞால மேனமாய்,
இடந்தமெய் குலுங்கவோ விலங்குமால் வரைச்சுரம்,
கடந்தகால் பரந்தகா விரிக்கரைக் குடந்தையுள்,
கிடந்தவாறெழுந்திருந்து பேச வாழிகேசனே”

At this request Ara-Amudan lifted up His head as if He heard the query of His Bakta and attempted to get up from His Adishesha Bed. Bhaktisara was overwhelmed at this sight and requested the Lord not to disturb Himself. He entreated Him thus:

Ye'With beautiful locks of hair! Do not get disturbed, please! I beseech you; live long, happy and strong; Do lie down here for Posterity's sake.”

The Lord with uplifted head did not then rise up, as per the request of Bhaktisara. The Deity is even now seen in this Uttana Sayee Posture - with His head slightly raised. Baktas from far and near get enraptured at this sight of Sarangapani, the Ara Amudan, giving darshan for devotees.

Visit to Perumpuliyur:

The Azhwar was then attracted to Perumpuliyur near Kumbakonam when certain learned pandits refused him entry into the temple. Bhaktisara stood outside the Temple in mute prayer. The Deity turned His head towards him; and to whichever direction

the Azhwar went round the temple, the Deity turned towards him in absolute recognition of the Bhakta's supreme love towards Him. The Vedic Brahmans were ashamed at their own behaviour, understood his greatness. Then they fell prostrate before him and craved for his pardon.

‘Sonna vannam seida Perumal’

At Kanchipuram, Kanikannan, a disciple of the Azhwar was ordered by the then ruling Raja of the place to leave Kancheepuram as he did not oblige the Raja to sing his glory. The Guru followed his disciple, and as per the Azhwar's bidding, Kanchi Varadarajar rolled up His bed and followed the party out of His Head quarters. This spectacle was impressive, but sad. The life of the capital became dull, disappointed and dreary. Trees drooped down their branches, water supply became scarce and the usual pleasant weather of the country became intolerably hot and oppressive.

The Raja understood the cause of the evil effects brought on by his own arrogance, hastened to the Azhwar, now far out of Head-quarters, fell prostrate before him and appealed for pardon and mercy. Azhwar was touched by this spontaneous climb-down of the Raja, and asked his entourage consisting of Lord Varadaraja to return to Kancheepuram and advised the Lord to occupy His original abode.

“ கணிகண்ணன் போக்கொழிந்தான்; காமருபூங் கச்சி
மணிவண்ணா! நீ கிடக்கவேண்டும்!—துணிவுடைய
செந்நாப் புலவனும் செலவொழிந்தேன்; நீயும் உன் தன்
பைந்நாகப் பாய்படுத்துக் கொள்!”

Lord Varadaraja did as he was bid by his devotee. He turned round, wended His way back with His rolled up Adishesha Bed, reached Kanchi with His Bhaktas, spread out His snake-couch and lay down to the wonder of the people in the country. Weather improved, waters swelled up in wells and the rivers, vegetation became fresh and green; and everywhere there was thorough-going happiness.

CHAPTER VII

FOSTER FATHER AND DEVOTED DAUGHTER— BANAN, THE GREAT:

Pandyan King's Supreme Spirituality:

Pandyan Kings with their capital at Madurai were the representatives of that part of the country over which they reigned. Successive rulers vied with one another in construction of temples, promotion of Bhakti and consolidation of all that was good in the country.

One such King was Narasimha Raja who was anxious to meet a preceptor and learn from him as to how best he could utilise the evening of his life in religious pursuits. He desired to meet a God-intoxicated person who would lead him to high spiritual order. He placed a golden bag in a pendant in his Durbar Hall as a present for any of the educated pandits who would satisfy his religious thoughts and queries. Many learned Shashtris and educated savants thronged to the Durbar Hall.

Vishnu Siddhar, an austere Vaishnavite of an elderly age, hurried from Sri-Villiputtur to Madurai and gave eloquent dissertations. He stressed on one aspect that God is the ultimate dispenser of all events in life. Love is the ladder for everyone to go up for enjoying Divine Bliss. When he was expatiating on this subject the pendant moved itself towards Periazhwar (for so he was called later after this dramatic incident) and dropped the golden knot at the feet of Periyazhwar to the applause of all other rival candidates. The Pandiyan King was extremely happy to acknowledge the supremacy of Periazhwar and gave him all conveniences to ride on an elephant and go round the city to inform his citizens of the efficiency of complete surrender to *Lord Narayana*.

As Periazhwar was going round in the city, there appeared in the sky a brilliant glow, as if it was the sun-rise.

God Narayana with conch and disc appeared in the brilliant brilliance and blessed him. Periazhwar was rapturous and appealed to Narayana not to expose Himself thus in the open lest black eyes should harm Him. Thus is the concern of a Bhakta toward God. He raises his voice and sings in ecstasy.

“ Let towns, cities and country sing His praise,
Chantings of Namō Narayana in the air shall rise:
Bhaktas all with love galore,
Boisterously seem happy; never seen before.”

“ நாகும் நகரமும் நன்களி யநமோ நாராயண னாயவென்று
பாகும் மணமுடைய பத்தருள் ளீர்! வந்து பல்லாண்டு
கூறுமினே!”

Periazhwar's greatness:

Since then Periazhwar's greatness became known to the world. He returned to Srivilliputtur with the blessings of the Pandya King and reverted to his usual service to Vatapatrasayee, the reigning Deity of Srivilliputtur environs.

Periazhwar's Rama

Of the many hymns he sang, those mellifluous ones in praise of Lord Srinivasa are soul-stirring, the Azhwar imagined Sri Venkateshwara was Sri Rama Himself, and extolled Him in the following verse:

Ravana had three foats all around his fortress to protect himself and his domains. The surrounding Hills formed the first impenetrable barrier, while the wooded terrain at the foot of the Hills down to the town, formed the second. The third was a high fort wall which would not allow foreign penetration.

“தென்னிலங்கை மன்னன் சிரம்தோள் துணிசெய்து
மின்னிலங்குபூண் விபீடண நம்பிக்கு என்னிலங்கு
நாமத் தளவும் அரசென்ற
மின்னிலங்காரற்கு ஓர் கோல் கொண்டுவா,
வேங்கடவாணற்கு ஓர் கோல் கொண்டு வா”

Such was Ravana's reigning capital and it was left to Sri Rama to circumvent these barriers, draw Ravana out to open warfare and annihilate him and his evil associates. Thus Sri Rama destroyed the wicked king and made Vibhishana, the king of the island, to rule over it with Dharma as his aim.

Periazhwar's Krishna:

The Azhwar saw the Deity as young Krishna too. He assessed Him as the essence of the Vedas and addressed Him thus:

“My Krishna, do not run away; You are the lifter of Govardhan Hills! Come hither, near me. You are accused of stealing butter and the Gopis are eager to catch you. They speak a language which I am reluctant to hear; Come hither, come to me, dear; Thou shall be protected; Run towards me.”

“ போதர்கண் டாய் இங்கே போதர் கண்டாய்
 போதரே நென்னுதே போதர் கண்டாய்
 ஏதேனும் சொல்லி அசல கத்தார் ஏதேனும்
 பேசநான் கேட்கமாட்டேன்
 கோது குலமுடைக் குட்டனேயா! குன்றெடுத்தாய்!
 குட மாடு கூத்தா!
 வேதப் பொருளே! என்வேங் கடவா! வித்தகனே!
 இங்கே போத ராயே”

On another occasion mother Yasoda wails over the tired and weary condition of Krishna on returning from the woods after tending His cows:

By the time she brought His chappals, umbrella and flute in the morning, Krishna had gone away. All the terrific devastations of a hot sun were seen on young Krishna. She wailed: “Krishna, your feet are hot, your eyes are red; You are exhausted beyond expression; Never, never shall thou wend anywhere without your usual foot-wear, umbrella, etc.” In this strain Periazhwar cries out in his anguish on seeing Venkateshwara whom he visualises as Lord Krishna.

“கடியூர் பொழில் அணி வேங்கடவா! கரும்போர் ஏயே!
 நீ உகக்கும்
 குடையும், செருப்பும், குழிலும், தருவிக்கக்
 கொள்ளாதே போனாய்! மாலே’
 கடியவெம் கான்றிடைக் கன்றின் பின்போன
 சிறுகுட்டச் செங்கமல
 அடியும் வெதும்பி, உன்கண்கள் சிவந்தாய்!
 அசைத்திட்டாய், நீ எம்பிரான்”

Life-History of Periazhwar:

We shall here observe Periazhwar's life-history in brief. It is this name with which he is known in the world of devotees. His original name was Vishnuchithar, belonging to the family of veyar, a family of vedic scholars.

He was born as the son of Mukunda Acharya and Padma on the Sukla Ekadasi, of the month of Mithuna. He learned the Vedas in his early years. Later he desired that he should do divine service, and took to celibacy and lived a life-long celibate.

His service was to plant and rear Tulsi Garden which yielded Tulsi to Vatapatrasayee every day. He was singing in praise of Krishna and almost all his hymns depict the infantile sports of Sri Krishna. His Tirumozhi deals with telling instances of Sri Krishna's childhood.

Childhood in general is a captivating period of life ; and in the words of Charles Dickens children are described thus:

“ They are idols of hearts and of house-holds;
They are angels in disguise”

—*Charles Dickens.*

GODA.

Periazhwar was deeply engrossed in the worship of Vatapatrasayee from time to time. As days went by, his concentration developed into one of enduring intensity. At the same time, he was interested in the upkeep of his Nandavanam with flowers of all kinds. The green leaves, the coloured flowers and the entire aroma around greeted him.

Divine Love's Language:

He came to learn the truest language from the flowers just in the same way as Park Benjamin said:

“ Flowers are love's truest language.”

As a daily routine, when he was going through this floral tribute to God, an epoch-making incident occurred. Early morning one day he went to his Nandavanam and to his admirable surprise, a certain flower-bed was emitting a gloss of light of an unparalleled kind. He was drawn to this brightness, when lo! he saw a glittering baby amidst the very flowers from which the glow emanated. He was for a moment dazed but he came round, lifted the child to his bosom, took it home and reared it up. Years rolled on; God's intentions are inscrutable. He desired that this celebrate elder should go through the rigor of domesticity, at least as far as the tending of the baby is concerned. Vishnuchitta was obliged to the mandate of God, tended the child and brought her up in loving tenderness till she grew up to a fine girl of dazzling and loving beauty.

Flower—symbol of divine ardour:

Periazhwar used to gather flowers, weave them into garlands and fetch them to adorn Vatapatrasayee, the ruling deity of the temple. As his foster-daughter grew into loving activity, she was given this creative work which she did in an excellent way. After a garland is set, Goda used to wear it herself to test if the garland would be befitting the Lord. One such day Kothai was admiring

the beauty of the garland in front of a mirror, herself imagining that Vatapatrasayee approved the delicacy and workmanship of the garlands. She was perhaps hearing the sermons from the flowers, as set down by the Poetess:

“ Flowers preach to us if we will hear ”

—*Christana G. Rossetti*

Just then her father, Periazhwar, appeared on the scene and was aghast at seeing the garland on his daughter's neck. In an irritable mood, he doubted the suitability of the garland for the Deity. Goda removed the garland from her neck in hot haste and was confused at the anger of her father who found a few streaks of hair in the garland. Periazhwar swore that he would not take it to the Deity as he thought it was defiled. He prepared another garland hastily and took it to the Deity in time before the routine function commenced in the temple. No sooner than this garland was placed around the Deity's neck, it faded away, and dried up. The usual aroma was absent. Periazhwar could not understand this unexpected phenomenon and returned home, dejected, worried and anxious. In the night during his sleep, God appeared before him and directed him to bring the garland worn by Goda which had been rejected by Periazhwar. He got up from his bed, told his daughter the details of the dream and hurried to the temple with the original garland in hand as directed by God. This time the aroma reappeared, the garland was found fresh and attractive. Goda was happy and enjoyed later the bliss of the name: “ Soodikkodutha Nachiar.”

Goda, the foster-daughter of Periazhwar was now the favourite of Vatapatrasayee. It looked as if the flowers she had been handling were dictating the following loving syllables to Godai.

“ Sweet letters of the angel tongue,

I've loved long and well,

And never have failed in your fragrance sweet

To find some secret spell ”

—*M. M. Balow*

and she found that there was a soul in every leaf.

Clouds - Messengers of Goda

Goda's devotional horizon extended to other shrines of which Tiru-Vengadam reigned supreme in her mind. She was pining for Venkateshwara whom she was expecting every day to appear before her. She appealed to Him thus:

“ God! I see the water-borne clouds around you. They are laden with rain, lightning and thunder. Through these full clouds I sent my messages to you, to interpret my feelings to you, to draw me to you. How long am I to wait for you? Kindly send your lovings through the clouds and minimise my craving for you, God!”

“குளிர் அருவி வேங்கடத்(து) என் கோவிந்தன் குணம் பாடி
அளித்த மேகங்கள்! ஆவி காத்திருப்பேனே”

We find at times that she appeals to her chosen bird, Kuyil, and asks it to be on vigilant watch for Venkateshwara's appearance and announce His arrival then and there:

“களித்து இசைபாடும் குயிலே! மெள்ள இருந்து மிழற்றி
மிழற்றாது, என் வேங்கடவன் வரக் கூவாய்!”

Andal - The endearing spouse of Ranganatha

Periazhwar was dreaming of Lord Ranganatha asking him to fetch Andal (and now she is called so) to Srirangam for Him to wed her, as per her repeatedly earnest prayers. She was therefore taken to Srirangam and as She approached the Sanctum Sanctorum, a bright light led her to the Lord in whom she got merged.

Such is the divine life-history of a saint whose appearance in the world was as endearing as her ultimate divine end was surprising. Her hymns in Nachiyar Tirumozhi are soul-stirring and love-borne to God. She is the only lady-saint of the Vaishnavite Twelve; and her Tiruppavai keeps Bhaktas spell-bound through out the years.

Andal's greatness is seen through the flowers she was bent around, through the flowers she was weaving into garlands, through the flowers which she wore before they were sent to God for His adorning. She was indeed the daughter of the earth as glorified by a Poet when he speaks of the flowers:

“ Ye pretty daughters of the earth and sun ”

—*Sir Walter Raleigh.*

and Andal knew from her divine background that

“ Flowers are like the pleasures of the world ”—*Shakespeare.*

Andal lived; Andal lives today in spite of years and she will live for Eternity.

TIRUPPANAZHWAR—(Panan-the Great)

Azhwar's Birth:

Thiruppanazhwar was born in Uraiyur (Woraiyur, now a suburb of Tiruchirapalli), once capital of Chola Kingdom. It is traditionally believed for ages that he, as an infant, was discovered in a paddy field and grew up, under the tendering care of a Panan, and became a staunch Vaishnavite in his adoration of Sri Ranganatha of Srirangam.

Panan the Great:

Panan was believed to be a low caste man in those days. A man of this community in his usual morning rounds in his rice-fields found this baby among the ripe paddy-grained stalks. He was full of joy to see this baby and took him to his wife who was also very happy to receive this baby as she had no children. The baby grew up merrily in his foster-parents' house. God's designs are preordained; and the foster son was showing increasing love for God. No day passed by without this young man learning the art of music in all its phases. Music is the language spoken by angles. It is the sacred tongue of God. And no wonder the Azhwar spoke in this tongue to God and got his ultimate bliss. Let us here admire the golden music of Tiruppanazhwar in the words of Charles W. Landon:

“ Music is God's best gift for man, the only art of Heaven given to earth, the only art of earth that we take to Heaven.”

The Panars used peculiar musical instruments known in those

himself perfect on this musical instrument. He became a full-fledged bard of eminence singing and playing on the instrument for adoration of God Sri Ranganatha.

Panan in Ecstasy:

God's ways are inscrutable again. The young man used to get up early in the morning on a particular day, walk from Uraiur towards the Cauvery, cross the river and land himself on a sand mound in the bed of the river. This sand-mound happened to be directly facing the Srirangam Temple where Sri Ranganatha is the sacred Reigning Deity. Tears swelled up in his eyes as he commenced to sing endearing hymns in adoration of Sri Ranganatha. Yazh in hand, he was pouring forth his heart's contents on Sri Ranganadha.

Sri Ranganadha's Bidding to Loka Saranga Muni:

It was early morning; and the Ranganadha Temple's doors have since been opened. Suprabhatham songs intended for waking up God Ranganadha were being chanted profusely in the temple. And far-off south on the Sand-mound the young bard with Yazh in hand, was singing in ecstasy on Sri Ranganadha. Suddenly there appeared before this young rapturous Bhakta, an aged and reverential Devotee, known as Loka Saranga Muni, a vedic scholar, and a close attendant on the Lord. Having been appraised of the situation by God Ranganatha, the Muni approached the Bard who was in deep concentrative musical state of mind, prostrated before him, told him of God's biddings and offered to carry him on his shoulders to the sanctum sanctorum of Ranga Natha. This was indeed a surprise for the young bard and here was a situation which he could not comprehend. He tried to evade the request of the Muni as he admitted he was a low caste man. He added that people would give him and the Muni untold worries if he accompanied the high-priest.

Suprabhatham in the Temple:

As the conversation between the Muni and the bard was on, the Suprabhatham in the Temple came to an abrupt stop. Everyone in the congregation was looking towards the southern door, as if by intuition, expecting some great savant to visit the Temple-

Saranga Muni brings the Young Bard on His Shoulders:

There at the river Cauvery, the pleadings of the young bard were in vain. The priest Saranga Muni had decided to take the bard to the Temple as per the command of Sri Ranganadha. He lifted the bard bodily, placed him on his shoulders, and brought him posthaste to the temple. Thiruppanazhwar (as the bard is called since then) found that he could not remonstrate. He continued to sing the praise of the Lord and was deeply God-intoxicated! In this state he was taken to the Sanctum Sanctorum. There was a reverberation in the Sanctum and Tiruppanazhwar disappeared in the Divine self of Lord Ranganadha.

Hymns in praise of Venkateswara:

Several hymns have been sung by this Great Bard of the Panar community and of these ten hymns are on record. Two of these ten are in praise of Lord Venkateswara:

‘ God! You are pure, lovable; You are the helper of mankind; and you are a great spiritual master. Nitya-suris fall prostrate before you; You are full of blossoming odour; Your sweet abode is inside the long, high, fortwalled enclosure. Lord Ranganatha, I see that You and Lord Venkateshwara are one indivisible whole. You are ever in my eyes, heart and in my soul. God! how best can I adore you? I am your slave; I am your servant.’

‘‘ அமல னாதிபிரான் அடியார்க்கு என்னை யாட்படுத்த

விமலன் விண்ணவர்கோன் விரையார்

நிமலன் நின்மலன் நீதிவானவன் நீள்மதி

ளரங்கத்தம்மாள் திருக்

கமல பாதம் வந்துஎன் கண்ணி னுள்ளன

வொக்கின்றதே’’

He then visualised that Lord Venkateswara was reclining on the divine coils of the Big Serpent forming His couch. A golden hue greeted his eyes on to the silken bed on which Lord Ranganatha was stretching Himself, being protected by the five-headed Anantazhwar. He saw a brilliant Lotus on a stalk and, emanating from the navel of the reclining Deity.

And on the Lotus was the stately Brahma squatting in calm dignity in his assigned duty of creation.

CHAPTER VIII

NAMMAZHWAR ILLUMINES TIRUVENGADAM

The star that led Madhurakavi towards Tirunagari.

A Vedic scholar, well-versed in all schools of Philosophy, adhura-Kavi by name, started on a North-Indian pilgrimage from his resident village, Thirukkolor in South India. He reached Kodhya, stood in the presence of Rama-vigraha, and prayed for spiritual peace and plenty. While doing so, he saw a brilliant star in the South, which reminded him of the effulgent form of his beloved Deity of his village. He was surprised; and he could not have peace of mind. He had desired that he should visit all the holy shrines in Uttar Pradesh in succession. But the dazzling star seemed to beckon him towards the south and he quickly obeyed the radiant call. He hurried towards the South and the star kept pace as if to lead him through thick and thin, through darkness and light, till at last he reached Tirukkurugur (Madhurakavi-zhwar-Tirunagari) in Tirunelveli District. The star led him on to the temple of Lord Adinadha, and when he followed it into the Temple, the star brightened itself and went straight into the body of a sixteen year young man sitting in Dhakshinamurthy pose. It looked as if the light had emanated from this adult of eminence and disappeared in him too.

Satagopan's Birth and adulthood:

This sixteen year luminous lad is Satagopan of our affectionate concern and consideration. Sixteen years back he was brought to the Temple as a 12-day-old baby and placed in front of Lord Adinadha, the presiding Deity of the village, in sheer desperation. His parents, Kari and Udaiya Nangai, both of a popular and devoted vellala family in Tirukkurugur. They had wanted a son and God in His bounty granted them this baby who, when born, would not cry, would not drink his mother's milk and would not move in the way of infants. The parents waited for 12 days, and in their sorrow left the baby in the Temple with an appeal

“Celestials are in constant prayerful mood on you, Ven teshwara. You are none other than Sri Ranganadha whose dr is of the colours of twilight. I see Brahma emanating from yo He is ever in the creative mood under your directions. A crea being as I am, I belong to you and none else. I merge in y for ever; and never again I am to be born.

‘மத்தி பாய்வட வேங்கடமாமலை வாகனவர்கள்

சந்தி செய்யநின் றுன்அரம் கத்தரவி னணையான்

அந்தி போல்நிறத்தாடையும் அதன்மே லயனைப்

படைத்தோரேழி

உந்தி மேலதன் னோஅடி யேனுள்ளத் தின்னுயிரே

Munivahana:

This Azhwar is even now known as Muni Vahana because he was carried by Loka Saranga Muni to the Temple of Lord Ranganadha, on Sri Ranganadha's bidding. The poet's mellifluous music in praise of God is impressive and is remembered by posterity. He visualised in Ranganadha, the Lord of the Seven Hills. He is the one saint who with the depth of devotional music in ten hymns has been raised to the exalted level of an Azhwar.

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Madhurakavi's experiment on Satagopan:

Madhura Kavi went near the squatting young man, saw him and was over-powered with his spiritual effulgence. The aged saint was anxious to rouse the squatting man in Samadhi, to speak with him and receive his blessings. He picked a small pebble and threw it just in front of the holy young man. The youth opened his eyes for a moment, when Madhura Kavi scrutinized that the eyes of this Mahatma had potential spiritual powers. He was on pins and needles to clear his doubts regarding this young man. Quietly he posed a short question to the youth:

“If a small being is born within an inanimate object, what will it absorb and where will it reside?”—suddenly came the reply from the sitting Yogi who was now seen with signs of active life: “It will absorb it and reside there.” Madhura Kavi was struck with wonder at the philosophy propounded by the Young Saint, fell prostrate before him, and pleaded to make him (Madhura Kavi) his life-long disciple.

Nammazhwar's Poesy:

At the same time Lord Adinadha appeared in a resplendant form to the youthful young man and addressed him as Nammazhwar (our Azhwar) and directed him to sing His praise in mellifluous poetry in Tamil. Almost at once, poetic effusions came pouring out of Nammazhwar's mouth and Madhura Kavi took down cogently all the expressed thoughts that came out of Nammazhwar's lips. He recorded all the poems of Nammazhwar, which were then recognised in four parts, *viz.*, Thiruvirutham, Thiruasiriyam, Peria Thiru Antadi, and Tiruvoymozhi. These four prabandham-represent the four Vedas in Tamil culture, the last one, Tiruvoymozhi, being the chief expressed thought of Nammazhwar, as transcribed by Madhura Kavi. About 36 shrines out of the 108 holy centres of Vaishnavite denomination are dealt with in these verses. It is said that Divyamurties that reside in the respective Divyadesas appeared before Nammazhwar and revealed their identities in succession. Nammazhwar sang their glory in beautiful poetry and received their blessings.

Nammazhwar's Tiruvengadam :

Tiruvengadam is the most hallowed shrine depicted and described by Nammazhwar, who has sung 36 hymns in praise of Venkatanadha in Tiruvoymozhi and eight in Tiruvirutham. In one of the latter eight hymns he approaches God as a Nayaki and appealed to Him that she should have all liberty with Him as his loving spouse, and to mingle ultimately in Him. As a love-lorn spouse of Venkatanatha, she appeals to the women of Tiruvengadam to understand her plight and requests them to lead her to Vengadavan and show her the way to reach Him. She says she could not live in the world. All the other seven hymns of Thiruvirutham exhibit the same intense divine love of Nammazhwar towards the Lord of the Seven Hills.

Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's devoted Love :

In a similar manner Ramakrishna Paramahamsa behaved just as a woman, dressed as a woman, and pined as a woman towards God.

Many a day he spent in absolute communion with God in woman's attire. This Nayaki - understanding is said to be the most perfect one as the feelings of love of a lady towards her spouse transcend the other feelings of human kind.

Nammazhwar's Hymns on Vengatanathan :

In the third centum, third set of ten verses in Thiruvoimozhi, Nammazhwar has made special mention of the glory of Venkatesa. He tells the people of the world that Venkateshwara is the father, father's father, father's grand-father, and an age-long father of Time, Space and Distance. Venkatesa is stationed in His abode which abounds with many rivulets of sweet-flowing water. Let us serve Him for our lives; and let our children and children's children continue in this great service to Him who is happily stationed on the Hills.

Serve we shall for ever
His great self—Vengadavar;
Rivers many run in Vengadam,
In the domain ancestral Father's Kingdom

“ஒழிவில் கால மெல்லாம உடனாய் மன்னி
வழுவினா அடிமை செய்யவேண்டும் நாம்
தெருகுர வருவித் திருவேங்கடத்து
எழில்கொள்ள சோதி எந்தை தந்தை”

Similar other stanzas referred to above, glorify Sriniva from many angles of the saint's perception of the Lord from domain of Lord Adinadha.

Nammazhwar visualises Venkatesa as Lord Krishna Tirukkuralappan in the following verse.

“ Lord Krishna, you saved the Gopies dear with uplift
Govardh
Paved their way safe to their cottages then;
As Thirukuralan, you first did appear,
And measured the earth as Tiruvikraman to Bali's fe
Devotees dear, go thou and pray steadfast in Vengada
All your sins would disappear fast in His Kingdom.’

The saint appeals to the people in the world and affirms that disease, birth, death and old age are annihilated in this strong strong-hold of Srinivasa if people catch hold of His feet strong and steadfastly.

The saint exclaims that people should lodge Venkateshwa in their hearts, chant His name, and merge themselves in Him. He is bound to do immense good to His Bhaktas and save them from untold misery and desperation.

In one other verse, the saint pronounces that Venkateshwara designs are inexpressible. Some times when Bhaktas feel that they are near Him, He is not really so. But when they least expect Him they feel His welcome presence. God! you are unfathomable and I shall never leave you. I do hold fast your golden feet tight and enjoy your bliss:

“வந்தாய் போல வாராதாய் வாராதாய் போல் வருவானே!
செந்தாமரைக்கண் செங்கனிவாய் நால்தோ ளமுதே

எனதுயிரே
சுந்தா மணிகள் பகரல்லைப் பகல்செய் திருவேங்கடத்தானே.
அந்தோ! அடியேன் உன்பாதம் அகலகில்லேன் இறையுமே”

The last line of the above hymn is carried to the next stanza in the first line:

“அகலகில்லேன் இறையுமென்று அலர்மேல்
மங்கை யுறைமார்பா! ”

And this line was fascinating to the author, and he hurriedly adopted it as the caption of a corresponding Tamil book thus:

“ஆழ்வார்கள் அநுபவித்த
அலர்மேல் மங்கை உறைமார்பன்”

The saint's further description of Venkateshwara is a happy delineation in a sweet syllabled verse:

“விண்மீ திருப்பாய்! மலைமேல் நிற்பாய் கடர்சேர்ப்பாம்!
மண்மீ துழல்வாய்! இவற்று ளெங்கும் மறைந்துறைவாம்”

You are in Heaven, seated majestically to the happiness of Celestials; You are steadfast in your stand on the Hills with your shining lustre; Your grace in your reclining grandeur on the silken Adishesha couch in the ocean of Bliss is appealing; your incarnations on earth as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna have glorified this universe. Your transcendental genius is of a surpassing beauty!

Madhura Kavi Transcribes as Lord Ganesa Did:

The rapturous verses as they poured forth from the impassioned lips of Nammazhwar were then and there transcribed by Madhura Kavi in the same manner as Vyasa's Mahabharata was taken down by Lord Ganesa on the golden Hill. Madhura Kavi felt and experienced Nammazhwar as a preceptor, and God-incarnate. His ten verses of a stupendous structure are laid at the feet of his Guru Nammazhwar and they are beautiful stanzas which show the Guru-Disciple ardour.

Nammazhwar - An Avatar of Vishnu:

Nammazhwar is worshipped as an Avatar of Vishnu; and his Tiruvoymozhi is a great teacher of Bhakti, Gnana, Vairagya and self-realisation. It is a scripture which contains the message of Nammazhwar to humanity conveyed through mellifluous hymns

kusa, Satagopa, Karimara and Tirukkurugur Nambi. He ne-
bowed to humanity's vanity. His only thought was on God a-
His loving benevolence, he himself living out of the human enviro-
and completely surrendering his self to Paramatma.

“என் நாவில் இன்கவியான் ஒருவர்க்கும்
கொடுக்கிலேன்”

So saying he visualised God Venkateswara from his post-
in front of Lord Adinatha:

“தென்தொ தென்தொ லென்று வண்டுமுரல்
திருவேங்கடத்து
என் ஆனை என் அப்பன்
எம்பெருமாள் உளன் ஆகவே”

Nammazhwar has bequeathed to the country a great and ev-
lasting wealth of his soul-stirring hymns composed in front of Lo-
Adinatha, transcribed by Madhura Kavi, his ardent discip-
and placed for posterity.

Pathinmar Padiya Perumal:

We have seen how the ten Azhwars have delineated the gl-
of Venkateshwara who is now called ‘Pathinmar Padiya Perum-
(God who has been sung by the Holy Ten). Within our limit-
sphere, we have gone through these chapters in meek submissi-
to His Great Self. It is His will to have kept the writer enthusias-
in dealing with the lives of the Great Ten Saints who had spok-
the greatness of Lord of the Seven Hills.

Well may we exclaim with Thomas Carlyle

“A well-written life is almost
As rare as a well-spent one.”

TIRUVENGADAM—POETS' RESORT.

The 108 Vaishnavite shrines in the Country:

We have thus seen that ten of the twelve Azhwars have glorified Sri Venkateshwara whose everlasting abode is Tiruvengadam which is one of the 108 shrines in the country. Most of these shrines located in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh were kept in good condition by the then monarchs in their respective jurisdictions. All these shrines have been sanctified by the Azhwars, each in his own ecstasy, by their sweet songs which have been collected by sage Nathamuni after years of meditation and concentration. Privation on his part brought revelation and the effect was collection of the Prabandham four thousand as it is seen today. It is stated that Nadhamuni lived for about three hundred years with a set purpose to shape the Prabandham-Four-Thousand for posterity to read, cherish, digest and enjoy.

Tiruvengadam - The curer of all Ills:

Tiruvengadam is said to be a healing centre for the sick and the disabled. It happened centuries ago that a group of four friends who stood by one another through thick and thin— in a village in the far-off south, near Kanyakumari, resolved to wend their way to Tiruvengadam as they were disgusted with their disabled condition of their physical existence. One was blind, the other was lame, the third was deaf and the fourth was a hunch-back, and all the four reached Tiruvengadam after years of travel. On alighting at the sacred place, they sought the grace of God to bless them. No sooner did they concentrate on Him than the hunch became straightened, the blind got his eye-sight, the lame got his limbs in tact and the dumb began to speak. With this transformation in their mental and physical stature, they stood before Venkateshwara with tears in their eyes and thanked Him for His bounty. This occurrence is beautifully described in the following verse from an anonymous writer of devotion and culture:

“கூன்கொண்டு வந்தவன் தான்நிமிர்ந்
தோடக், குருடன்கொம்பிள்

தேன்கண்டு காட்ட, முடவன் அத்
 தேனை எடுக்க, அயல்
 தான் நின்ற ஊமை எனக்கென்று
 கேட்கத் தருவன் வரம்
 வான் நின்ற சோலை வடமலை
 மேல்நின்ற மாயவனே''

God! Your stand is on Veda Vengadam; We are hailing from Thenkumari. You have made us—the fraternity of the disabled four—strong and able-bodied to see you, to speak your glory and to hear your manifestations to devotees. They conclude:

“Hail thou! You reach the Sky;
 You stand on the Mountain High.”

Nature's Bounty:

Such is Vedangam which is the habitat of Sri Venkateshwara. Forests, rivers, birds, animals, bespeak the devotional decorum of the Lord of the Seven Hills. Azhwars were impressed with nature's plenty: and they enjoy Nature's beauty at the same time peering into God's bounty. There, monkeys were found worshipping the Deity in their own way; an elephant was seen attempting to pluck the full moon from cosmos and to place it at the feet of God to give Him light and lustre. The Azhwars saw again how birds inhabiting the Swamy Pushkarani were serving pilgrims in keeping the area clean. They found how fishes in the tank were fortunate to serve God's pilgrims in keeping the waters clean, tidy and neat. All these various objects of nature were venerated by Azhwars as through them, individually and collectively, they visualised God Venkateshwara.

Poet's Perception to Philosophy:

In this context it may not be out of place to mention here that poets of Nature, of whom William Wordsworth was one, lead us towards perception of philosophy. Wordsworth used to walk into the forests to peer into Nature's secrets. He was conversing with Dame Nature and his emotion recollected in tranquility brought out several poems of ecstasy. He wrote a long poem, 'The Recluse,' which portrayed his divinity even in diversity. His philosophy could be understood by the then European Professor of English, who was teaching Wordsworth's 'Recluse' to his

college students. The Professor found that in spite of his attempts to make his students understand the deep devotional philosophy of Wordsworth running through the depth of poetry in 'The Recluse,' the students could not understand the poet nor his own explanatory elucidation. At once the professor advised the students to go to Dakshineswar and converse directly with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, who, he said, was the exact prototype of the one who has experienced in the daily life the philosophy adumbrated by Wordsworth in 'The Recluse'. The anxious students, of whom Narendra was one, went to Dakshineswar and saw Paramahansa. This was the beginning of Narendra's understanding Sri Ramakrishna about whom he later said: "The artistic faculty was highly developed in our Lord Shri Ramakrishna; and he used to say that without this faculty none can be truly spiritual."

Nature's secrets are delved deep by poets and philosophers; and they speak of God often enjoying His secrets which are handed down to posterity. And Thiruvengadam is indeed the resort of Poets of Nature and of divinity too.

Daya Devi:

Vedanta Desikar who lived seven centuries ago had expressed that Lakshmi who dwelt in the heart of Venkateshwara was Daya Devi of eminence. Her mercy to mankind, and Her awareness of humanity's wants are supreme. She bids Vengadavar to do good to Bhaktas. In this ocean of Daya Devi, Vedanta Desikar floated, being pushed hither and thither by the tidal waves. If such a great Bhakta, an Acharya Purusha, was being rolled up and down in the ocean of Daya Devi's Bliss, it is unworthy of one like the writer, to approach Her. And yet She knows Her Bhakta's need and she, out of Her magnitude of Mercy, encourages the writer to serve humanity to his humble best.

Services rendered:

The writer had the unique fortune to serve Him and His pilgrims by annihilating the everspreading malaria in Tirumalai Hills. He was assisted by the Tirupati-Tirumalai Devasthanam to improve the public health condition of the area and render it safe for Pilgrims' Progress.

The writer prays that he should be given the benefit of serving God, as Periazhwar said:

‘உனக்குப் பணி செய்திருக்கும் தவம் உடையேன் ’

CORRIGENDUM

wrong	page.	line	right
Vengakam	1	20	Vengadam
Uggiravad	„	15	Uggiravar
furmished	„	33	Furnished
servents	8	25	Servants
Bhagavathn	8	28	Bhagavathars
vagant	9	5	Vagrant
Neelam	9	9	Neelan
rolloned	9	14	rolled on
Expedien	9	22	expedient
ecsta	13	18	ecstasy
tnis	13	31	this
AENIUS	14	1	GENIUS
there	18	29	three
abbs	20	16	adds
thou	22	12	THOU
become	24	15	becomes
in numerous	26	16	innumeros
nad	27	30	and
foots	33	17	forts
angles	39	25	angels
—	44	9	; and
Quietly	44	10	quietly

