

Sri Andal (Goda)

The philosophic poetry of the *Azhwars* Saints from South India collectively known as the *Nalayira Divya Prabhandham* is a rich heritage in Tamil literature and culture. Azhwars were saints of *Sri Vaishnava* tradition. They were totally immersed in the devotional love of God and literally God-intoxicated. They experienced the divine in and through all of its manifestations. The transcendental Reality to them was not an abstract nameless and formless entity or mere consciousness. The Reality was very Personal and was the *Puroshottama*, the Supreme Person, *Sriman Narayana* ("the support and the abode of hosts of souls") with all auspicious and glorious attributes. The physical world is like the body of the Lord and the Lord is the life and soul of the physical world (*Sareeri Sareera Bhava*). The most important attribute of the Lord is His compassion, represented by "Sri" (*Maha Lakshmi*) who is eternally resident in His heart. Hence Narayana is known as Sriman Narayana. The icons at the temple (the *Arca* form of the Lord) were alive and vibrant to the salutations of the Azhwars. Their ecstatic divine experience flowed out in the form of beautiful poetry. The Azhwars advocated surrendering to the Lord in utter devotion or Bhakthi as the simple means of attaining the Lord superior to other systems including the Vedic injunctions or practices.

Azhwars were twelve in number and they hailed from the fertile regions of the south surrounding the rivers Cauvery, Palar and Tamirabarani. They were from different walks of life and were not all contemporaries. Yet their individual and collective experience of the divine as expressed in their poetic verses is quite similar. Sri Swami Desikan in his "Sri Guruparamparaasaaram" (ஸ்ரீ குருபரம்பராஸாரம்) states

"செய்ய தமிழ் மாலைகள் நாம் தெளிய வோதித்
தெளியாத மறைநிலங்கள் தெளிகின்றோமே".

"The garlands of verses in Tamil by the Azhwars help us understand more clearly the Vedas and Upanishads which are otherwise not easy to understand."

There is no wonder that the four thousand verses (நாலாயிர திவ்யப்பரந்தம்) of the Azhwars are considered equivalent to the four Vedas. They brought the message of the Vedas and Upanishads to the common people in the vernacular.

The most celebrated and perhaps the most popular among the Azhwars is the only woman-saint among them, *Sri Andal*. Sri Andal is worshipped along with the Lord in all Sri Vaishnava homes and temples. In most villages young and old alike go to the temples in the early morning hours during the month of Marghazhi (Dec15-Jan 15) singing her famous *Thiruppaavai* verses. Whenever, verses from *Divya Prabhandham* are recited, during the celebration of the *Thirunakshatrams* (birth stars) of any of the Azhwars or Acharyas, *Thiruppaavai* is usually recited at the beginning and during the conclusion of the worship.

The story of Andal is relatively well known. Sri Andal is considered the incarnation of *Bhoomi Devi* (Mother Earth). She was like Sri Seetha born of Mother Earth. *Divya Suri Charita* records that she appeared as a child in the 97 th year after the onset of Kali Yuga termed the Nala year, in the Tamil month of Adi in the Purva Phalguni asterism. She was found by Sri Vishnu Chittar (the other name of Sri Peri Azhwar) near a Tulasi plant in his garden, which he maintained for the purposes of growing fragrant flowers for making floral wreaths and garlands for Sri Vatapatra Sayi, the Lord at the temple in Sri Villiputur. Sri Vishnu Chittar named the child "*Goda*". The word Goda has several meanings: one who bestows the power of speech and expression, one who is bestowed by the Earth, one who has sweet curls, one who is like a flower garland and one who has control over the senses.

Swami Desikan, the famous Acharya of Sri Vaishnava tradition (1268 AD), in "*Goda Stuthi*" glorifying Sri Goda, states:

"வல்மீகத: ஸ்ரவணதோ வஸு தா4த்மநஸ் தே
ஜாதோ ப3பூ4வ ஸ முநி: கவிஸார்வபௌ4ம" (verse 7)

"*O' Goda! You are the self of Bhoomi Devi. It is because of his birth from your ears, that sage Valmiki became the emperor among poets*". (Vedas declare that anthills are the ears of *Sri Bhoomi Devi*, mother Earth)

He further goes on to say:

"தி3க் த3க்ஷிணாபி பரிபக்த்ரிம புண்ய லப்4யாத்
ஸர்வோத்தரா ப4வதி தே3வி தவாவதாராத்" (verse 11)

"*O' Goda! It is because of your auspicious birth, attainable only through maturing effects of many meritorious deeds that even the Southern direction has attained the glory of being the best among the directions*".

Goda was raised by Sri Peri Azhwar with special love and care.

"ஒரு மகள் தன்னையுடையேன் உலகம் நிறைந்த புகழால்
திருமகள் போல வளர்த்தேன்" (*Peri Azhwar Thirumozhi* 3-8-4)

Her devotion and love of the Lord grew enormously. As a young girl she used to adorn herself with the wreaths of flowers made by her father meant for offering to the Lord at the temple to see for herself whether she was a good match for her Lord. Sri Peri Azhwar on one occasion discovered her at this game. He chided her for her transgressions and withheld the offering of floral wreaths to the Lord on that day. However, that night the Lord appeared in his dreams and stated that He actually was enjoying the wreaths worn by Goda and instructed Sri Peri Azhwar that henceforth He should receive the floral wreaths only after they have been worn by Goda. Sri Peri Azhwar was wonder struck with this dream and thereafter did the bidding of the Lord. Sri Goda came to be called by him as ("*ஆண்டாள்*") "*Andal*" as the one who had come to

rule over the Lord and "சூடிக்கொடுத்த நாச்சியார் " meaning "*The Queen that wore and gave*". As she grew into her maiden years, her love of the Lord (who came as Sri Krishna in the cowherds clan) also became quite intense. (கோல் தேடியோடும் கொழுந்தே போன்றதே, மால் தேடியோடும் மனம் - *Irandaam Thiruvandhadhi* - 27). She declared openly that she would die if any mention is made of marriage to mortals ("மானிடவர்க்கென்று பேச்சுப்படில் வாழ்கில்லேன் கண்டாய்" - *Naachiyaar Thirumozhi* 1-5). She ultimately became the epitome of *Bhakti* for the Lord, giving her total self to Him. Her wishes to become His bride eventually materialized with Lord *Sri Ranganatha* Himself instructing the authorities of the temple in *Srirangam* to bring her fully decorated as a bride to His sanctum. Finally Sri Goda merged completely with the Lord in the sanctum sanctorum in *Srirangam* in front of everyone who had assembled there including her father Sri Peri Azhwar.

"ஒரு மகள் தன்னையுடையேன் உலகம் நிறைந்த புகழால்
திருமகள் போல வளர்த்தேன் செங்கண்மால் தான் கொண்டுபோனான்"
(*Peri Azhwar Thirumozhi* 3-8-4)

Sri Andal like *Sri Madhurakavi Azhwar* is sometimes not counted along with the rest of the Azhwars, because of her "பா4க3வத ஸேஷத்வம் - *Bhagavata SEshatvam* meaning being the servant of the devotee of the Lord. She considered herself "ப4ட்டர் பிரான் கோதை - *Bhattar Piran's Goda*." similar to Sri Madhurakavi Azhwar who always considered himself the devotee of *Sri Nammazhwar* ("தேவு மற்றறியேன்"- *Kanninuchiruttambu*). Their devotion excels even that of the Azhwars as indicated by *Sri Thirumazhisai Piran*,

மாறாயதானவனை வள்ளுகிரால் மார்விரண்டு
கூறாகக் கீறியகோளரியை- வேறாக
ஏத்தியிருப்பாரை வெல்லுமே மற்றவரைச்
சாத்தியிருப்பார் தவம் (*Naanmukan Thiruvandhadhi* -18)

"வேறு ஆக ஏத்தி இருப்பார்" means one who has a special understanding of the Lord's efforts as the saviour; who hails and adores the Lord; has concerns for the safety of even the Lord and pours out songs of benediction for Him. The like of such devotion is seen in Sri Peri Azhwar

("அந்தியம் போதில் அரியிருவாகி அரியை அழித்தவனைப்
பந்தனை தீர்ப்பல்லாண்டு பல்லாயிரத்தாண்டென்று பாடுதுமே" -*Thiruppallaandu*-6).

"மற்று அவரைச் சாத்தி இருப்பார்" - refers to those who serve and adore the holy feet of the Lord's devotees. Here *Sri Periyavacchaan Pillai* cites Sri Andal as example. Sri Andal says that the Lord is more likely to come to her on account of the grace of Sri Peri Azhwar. She tells her friend, " Please do not worry, there is a way for our rescue and we will see the Lord when somehow Vittuchittar would call Him".

வில்லிபுதுவை விட்டுசித்தர் தங்கள் தேவரை
வல்லபரிசு வருவிப்பரேல் அது காண்டுமே (*Nacchiyaar Thirumozhi* 10-10)

Sri Andal is also different from the other Azhwars, for she is considered the incarnation of *Sri Bhoomi Piratti*, therefore her status is that of the queen of the Lord.

The concept of "Sri" in *Visishta Advaitam* has been extensively commented upon by eminent Sri Vaishanava Acharyas. In the *Dvaya Mantra Adhikara* of *Srimad Rahasya Traya Saram*, Sri Vedanta Desika commenting on the meaning of Sriman Narayana quotes the following sloka (of Sri Arulala Perumal Emperumanar)

"ஆகாரிணஸ்து விஞ்ஞானம் ஆகார ஞான பூர்வகம்
தேநாகாரம் ஸ்ரியம் ஞாத்வா ஞாதவ்யோ ப4க3வான் ஹரி: "

"The knowledge of a qualified object is possible only through the attribute. So knowing first Sri who is an *Aakara* or *Visheshana*, the *Aakari* or *Visheshya* – the Lord is to be known".

He then gives six derivative meanings of the word "Sri", illustrating her *Purushakaaratvam*. Sri or MahaLakshmi is co-eternal with the Lord and ever resident in the chest of the Lord. She not only acts to bring the grace of the Lord to the *jeeva* but also actively helps in the redemption of the individual selves. In this role, She is considered as a compassionate mediator (*Purushakaara Bhoothai*) The Acharyas point not only to the Vedas but also to the Azhwars' works as evidence or the *Pramaana* for this.

ஹ்ரீஸ்ச தே லக்ஷ்மீஸ்ச பத்நயௌ (*Purusha Sooktam* 2-6)

" For Thee, Bhoo Devi and Sri Devi are two consorts" The second ஈ (conjunction) indicates indirectly Neela Devi.

In *Sri Suktam* we find Sri described as the Sovereign of all the souls (ஈச்வரீ ஸர்வபூ4தாநாம்). In Vishnu Purana, the most authoritative among all the Puranas, Sri is described as the divine mother who is eternal (நித்ய), inseparable from the Lord (அநபாயினி) and all pervasive (ஸர்வக3த:).

Sri is the personification of compassion or *Daya*. Bhoo represents Bhoomi Devi who stands for forgiveness (*Kshama*) and Neela Devi is of the nature of enchanting beauty and represents the Lord's *anubhava* –*sukham* and is also personification of forgiveness or *kshama*. (In *Sri Periyavacchan Pillai's* words "ஆஸ்ரிதர் குற்றத்தை பொறுப்பிக்கும் பெரிய பிராட்டி, குற்றம் காண்பானென் ,பொறுப்பானென் என்றிருக்கும் பூமிப்பிராட்டி, கூடிமை வடிவமாக இருப்பது நப்பின்னைப்பிராட்டி").

Azhwars's verses also refer to all the three consorts of the Lord indicating clearly their *Purushakaaratvam*.

திருமகளும், மண்மகளும் ஆய்மகளும் சேர்ந்தால் (*Mudal Thiruvandhadhi-42*),
சார்வு நமக்கென்றும் தேனமரும் பூமேல் திரு (*Moondraam Thiruvandhadhi -100*),
புண்டரீக பாவைசேரு மார்ப பூமிநாதனே (*Thirucchanda viruttam 22*),
அகலகில்லேன் இறையும் (*ThiruvaiMozhi 6-10-10*),
வேரி மாறாத பூமேலிருப்பாள் வினைதீர்க்குமே (*Thiruvaimozhi 4-5-11*),

இன் துணைப் பதுமத்து அலர்மகள் தனக்கும் இன்பன் நற்புவிதனக்கிறைவன் தன் துணை
ஆயர் பாவை நப்பின்னை தனக்கிறை (*Periya Thirumozhi 2-3-5*).

In the single invocatory verse glorifying *Sri Andal*,

"அல்லி நான் தாமரைமேல் ஆரணங்கின் இன் துணைவி
மல்லிநாடாண்ட மடமயில் --- மெல்லியலாள்
ஆயர் குலவேந்தனாகத்தான் தென்புதுவை
வேயர் பயந்த விளக்கு"

Sri Thirukkannamangai Andan, calls her the sweet companion of *Sri MahaLakshmi* (on account of her *gunas* of compassion and forgiveness) and declares her to be ever resident in Sri Krishna the king of the *Ayar* (the cowherd) clan and verily a lamp obtained by Sri Peri Azhwar, who is from the *Veyar* clan. This is quite an apt description of Sri Andal. The nature of the lamp is to throw light and therefore enlighten everything around it. Sri Andal and her two famous works have for ever remained a guiding light to all true seekers of spiritual emancipation. Her life and her works *நாச்சியார் திருமொழி* (*Naachiyaar Thirumozhi*) and *திருப்பாவை* (*Thiruppaavai*) are admired and commented upon extensively by many *Sri Vaishnava Acharyas*.

In *Thiruppaavai*, Sri Andal along with her companions, observes the ancient religious rite of "பாவை நோன்பு *Paavai NOmbu*" which the cowherdesses of *Vraja* observed in the bygone age to obtain Sri Krishna's hand in marriage. Each and every one of the thirty verses has been shown to contain many hidden inner meanings of high philosophical import. Several Acharyas have written commentaries on the same. Notable among these "vyakhyanam" are *Sri Periyavacchaan Pillai's* (மூவாயிரப்படி), *Sri Azhagiyanavalala Perumal Nayanar's* (ஆறாயிரப்படி) and *Sri Jananyacharyar's* (ஈறாயிரப்படி). In *Sri Jananyacharyar's* words, Sri Andal was the heiress to the collective wealth of knowledge of the ten Azhwars, being their only daughter ("பதின்மருடைய ஜ்ஞானமும் ஸ்த்ரீத4னமாக இவள் பக்கலிலேயிறேகுடிகொண்டது : பத்துபேர்க்கு ஒரு பெண்பிள்ளையிறே").

It has also been recorded that *Sri Ramanuja* had great admiration for *Thiruppaavai* of Andal. He himself was known as *Thiruppaavai jeer*. Presumably he spent a lot of his time in contemplation of this great work of Andal, inspired and enthralled by its inner meanings. He was also known to have given erudite discourses on the same. In the ஈறாயிரப்படி *vyakhyanam*, the following is recorded about *Sri Ramanuja's* comments regarding *Thiruppaavai*. When asked once to explain the meaning for one or two of the *Thiruppaavai* verses, *Sri Ramanuja* is quoted as saying " திருப்பல்லாண்டுக்கு ஆள்கிடைக்கிலும், திருப்பாவைக்கு ஆள் கிடையாது

பத்து ஆழ்வார்களுடைய ஸாரபூதையான தானே சொல்லித்தானே கேட்குமித்தனை " meaning the full import of these verses is best learnt directly from *Sri Andal* for she is the quintessence of the ten *Azhwars*.

Sri Parasara Bhattar who came after *Sri Ramanuja*, sums up the message of *Thiruppaavai*, in his single invocatory verse.

நீளா துங்கிஸ்தநகிரி தடஸுப்தமுத்போத்ய க்ருஷ்ணம்
பாரார்த்தியம் ஸ்வம் ஸ்ருதிஸுதஸிரஸித்திமத்யபயந்தீ
ஸ்வோச்சித்யாயாம் ஸ்ரஜி நிக்ளிதம் யா ப்லாத்க்ருத்ய புங்க்தே
கோத்ய தஸ்யை நம இதமிதம் பூய ஏவாஸ்து பூய :

The famous *Upanishadic* statement entreats everyone to rise, awake and learn (உத்திஷ்டத ஜாக்ரத ப்ரபோத்ய). In *Thiruppaavai*, Andal wakes everyone up including the Lord. She shows that the Lord is our "means" ("*upaya*") and assures us of His grace ("நாராயணே நமக்கே பறை தருவான்") and shows us all how to surrender to the Lord. She reminds the Lord of her "பாரதந்திரியம்" ("*Paratantriyam*" meaning "dependence on the transcendental Lord") which is expounded in the many Vedic and Vedanta texts and scriptures. ("பதிம் விஸ்வஸ்ய " – meaning the Lord of the Universe - *Sri Narayana Suktham*, "தாஸ பூதா: ஸ்வதஸ்ஸர்வே ஹ்யாத்மாநா பரமாத்மந :") meaning all individual selves are by nature subservient to *Paramatma*"). *Azhwars* also have stated this relationship in their *divya sukthies*:

"நானும் உனக்கு பழவடியேன்" (*Thiruppallaandu* -11)

"பொன்பாவை

கேள்வா கிளரொளியென் கேசவனே கேடன்றி ஆள்வாய்க்கடியேன்நான் ஆள்."(I am thy servant and thy eternal possession)(*Naanmukan Thiruvandhadhi* 59)

Andal reminds the Lord of this "*SEsha- SEshi Bhavam*" ஸேஷ ஸேஷி பா4வம்" "எற்றைக்கும் ஏழேழு பிறவிக்கும் உந்தன்னோடு உற்றோமேயாவோம் உனக்கே நாமாட்செய்வோம் மற்றை நம் காமங்கள் மாற்று" ("*O'Lord Govinda. Please change all our other desires so that we will be of Thee and serve Thee alone even if we were to be born seven and seven times over*"), at the same time indicating to us "the goals" ("*Praapya*") of service to the Lord.

In நாச்சியார் திருமொழி (*Naachiyar Thirumozhi*) containing about one hundred and forty three verses, Sri Andal pours her love out for her Lord Sri Krishna. One can feel the emotional intensity of the love-lorn state and the pining that her heart feels for the Lord. Sri Andal's verses portray clearly the various feelings of the God-intoxicated being. The *Nayaki---Nayaka Bhava* expressed in these verses is natural and profoundly beautiful. Finding herself helpless she addresses the clouds and sends them as her messenger to convey to the Lord of Thiruvencatam of her plight.

"விண்ணீல மேலாப்பு விரித்தாற்போல் மேகங்காள்
தெண்ணீர்பாய் வேங்கடத்தென் திருமாலும் போந்தானே" (*Naachiyar Thirumozhi* 8-1)

While walking around in the plush garden of her father, full of variety of fragrant flowers, she feels as if they had been sent there in full blossom by her lover Sri Krishna to torture her. Seeing a *mullai* flower creeper all in bloom reminds her of the beautiful smiling countenance of her Lord when He had promised her not to let her down- referring here to the words of Sri Rama such as ("மித்ரபா4வேந ஸம்பராப்தம் ந த்யஜேயம் கத2ஞ்சந"- Ramayanam Yuddhakaandam 18-3). She states that if those words of her loving Lord are untrue then her birth as Sri Peri Azhwar's daughter is also untrue.

"முல்லைப்பிராட்டி! நீயுன் முறுவல்கள் கொண்டெம்மை
அல்லல்விளைவியேல் ஆழிநங்காய் உன்னடைக்கலம்
கொல்லையரக்கியை முக்கரிந்திட்ட குமரனார்
சொல்லும் பொய்யானால் நானும் பிறந்தமை பொய்யன்றே" (*Naachiyar Thirumozhi* 10-4)

It is believed that the Lord delayed the fulfillment of her wishes for union, in order to demonstrate to the world her *Parama Bhakti*. At one stage, to ensure the mere physical sustenance of His dear "*Sudik-koduttha Naachiyar*", the Lord appears for her in her dreams and weds her through proper Vedic rituals. Sri Andal's description of her glorious bridal dreams to her friend, becomes the subject of the sixth decad beginning with *வாரணமாயிரம்* (*Varanamayiram*). This decad is quite famous and very popular among Sri Vaishnavas of the South. It is customary to sing or recite these verses soon after the Vedic ritual of the wedding, in order to invoke the auspicious grace of Sri Andal and Sri Krishna on the couple so that they will be blessed with good children. ("தூய தமிழ்மாலை ஈரைந்தும் வல்லவர் வாயுநன் மக்களை பெற்று மகிழ்வரே") as stated by Sri Andal herself. Sri Andal gives a detailed description of the various aspects of a wedding performed according to the Vedic practices and rituals. In these ten verses also, one can find the clear philosophic message of Sri Andal direct and unmistakable.

"இம்மைக்கும் ஏழேழ் பிறவிக்கும் பற்றாவான்
நம்மையுடையவன் நாராயணன் நம்பி" (*Naachiyar Thirumozhi* 6-8)

"*Sriman Narayana is our refuge now and for ever and He will not let us down, for we are His possessions*".

Sri Andal reminds us of this "*SEsha- SEshi Bhavam*" ரேஷ ரேஷி பா4வம்" and indicates also that the Lord is our ultimate refuge.

The philosophic import of the mystic experiences recorded in *Naachiyaar Thirumozhi*, resolve into pangs of separation, joys of temporary union, and ecstasy of the ultimate spiritual reunion of the individual self (*jeeva*) with the *Paramatma*. The state of bliss attained by total surrender of body, mind and soul (*Atma samarpanam*) is reflected in Sri Andal's wedding with the Lord (ஸ்ரீஆண்டாள் திருக்கல்யாணம்).

By Dr.N.Ranganathan