

Sri Thirumangai Azhwar(ஸ்ரீ திருமங்கை ஆழ்வார்):

Sri Thirumangai Azhwar was the youngest and the last of the Azhwars. He was born on கார்த்திகை (*Kritthikai Nakshatram*) in the month of கார்த்திகை (*Karthikai*), in *Thirukkurayalur* in திருவாலி நாடு (*Thiruvalinadu*). He was considered the *amsa* (incarnation) of the divine bow *Sarngam* of the Lord. He became a chieftain of the Chola king even when he was young. He was known by a variety of names including *Parakaalan*, *Kaliyan*, *Mangaiyarkone*, His call to spiritual journey and superior bhakti came when he married the divine and most beautiful குமதவல்லி நாச்சியார் (*Kumudavalli Naachiyaar*). She set two conditions for him before she would marry him. One was for him to embrace Sri Vaishnavism by taking proper instruction from an acharya and the second was to serve 1008 *bhagavataas* (devotees) with a grand meal daily for one year. His ardent desire to keep his promise to his wife made him spend beyond his means. He had difficulties meeting the required collections of taxes for the chola king. The latter made him a captive by force. He was vexed and upset with the Lord for not showing him the way. Due to Lord's love of the Azhwar, He revealed the location of a hidden treasure in *Kanchipuram* in his dreams, with which the Azhwar could compensate the King and continue feeding the *bhagavataas*. The Azhwar followed the lead and retrieved the treasure which made him meet his obligations for a while. Eventually however the funds ran out. He then with a few of his friends, decided to rob the rich to keep up the feeding of the *bhagavataas*. The Lord's direct grace came to the Azhwar during one of those occasions when he waited to waylay some rich couple travelling through the woods in the night. The Lord Himself along with Sri Maha Lakshmi came in the form of a newly wed rich couple. The Azhwar got the bridegroom to bundle up all the jewels and part with them by mere show of his sword. But the bundle was too heavy for The Azhwar to carry. The Azhwar felt that the bridegroom had put some kind of a “*mantric*” spell on him. He forced Him to reveal the “*mantra*”. Following this, the Lord imparted the *Ashta akshara* mantra to the Azhwar. This immediately transformed the Azhwar completely. The Azhwar refers to this in the 5th verse of the first decad in பெரிய திருமொழி (*Periya Thirumozhi*) and mentions how effortlessly he obtained the grace of the Lord (கள்வனேன் ஆனேன் சிக்கெனத் திருவருள் பெற்றேன்).

The Lord revealed Himself to the Azhwar and commanded him to visit all His திவ்ய தேசம் (*divya deshas* or holy shrines). Sri Thirumangai Azhwar in fact visited many *divya deshas*; some, difficult to reach even today, such as *Naimisharanyam, Bhadrinath and Ahobilam*. Thus the Azhwar utters his benediction (மங்கலேளாஸானம்) on these shrines. Thus all the *divya deshas* sung by the various Azhwars, came to take on a special meaning for the discerning devotees.

Sri Thirumangai Azhwar was a very talented poet and he had a large share of verses in the *Naalaayiram*, with a variety of intricate poetry. One such work is திருவெழுக்கூற்றிருக்கை (*Thiruvezhuk Kootrirukkai*). The other five works are பெரிய திருமொழி (*Periya Thirumozhi*) with 1084 verses, திருக்குறுந்தாண்டகம் (*Thirukkurun Thandakam*) திருநெடுந்தாண்டகம் (*Thiru Nedun Thandakam*), சிறிய திருமடல் (*Siriya Thirumadal*) and பெரிய திருமடல் (*Periya Thirumadal*). திருஞான ஸம்பந்தர் (*Thirujnana Sambandhar*), the *Saivite Naayanaar* saint was a contemporary of the Azhwar and the Azhwar's poetic skills were challenged by him when he visited *Sirghazhi*. The Azhwar sang ten verses on *Sirghazhi Sri Ramar* (*Periya Thirumozhi* III-4) and won the admiration of *Sambandhar* who presented him with his trident acknowledging the Azhwar to be a நாலுகவிப்பெருமாள் (*Nalu-kavipperumaal*). This is the reason why Thirumangai Azhwar in the temples has a trident (வேல்) in his hands.

The first ten *paasurams* of *Periya Thirumozhi* beginning with “வாடினேன் வாடிவருந்தினேன் மனத்தால்” are very beautiful. In these verses, the Azhwar feels elated about his own blessing of receiving *Sriman Narayana mantra*. He points out all its benefits, how it will remove all our woes and bring us “bliss divine” even in this world. He entreats all to chant the *Narayana Namam*.

துஞ்சுபோதழைமின் துயர்வரில்நினைமின்
துயரிலீர் சொல்லிலும் நன்றாம்
நஞ்சுதான் கண்டீர் நம்முடைவினைக்கு
நாராயணாவென்னும் நாமம்.

"Call Narayana's name at the time when life begins to fade. Think of Narayana's name when in distress, it is good to say even when there is none. Lo and behold! it is Medicine for all our ills".