

The Glories of Archāvatāra –Thiruvénkatamudaiyān (Sri Vénkatéshwara)

I: Philosophic Tradition of our PūrvĀchārya s (Ancient / Former Teachers):

The *Brahma Sūtras* known as the *Védanta Sūtras* the work of Sage Vēda Vyāsa (known also as Sri Bādarāyana), is an important text for which all three Āchāryās namely, Sri Sankara, Sri Rāmānuja as well as Sri Madhva have written commentaries to establish their visions of philosophy (*darsanams*), namely, *Advaitam*, *Visishtādvaitam* and *Dvaitam*. Sri Rāmānuja 's commentary is the famous *Sri Bhāshyam* a title conferred upon by *Sri Saraswathi Dévi* herself. The great Āchāryā following his *pūrvĀchāryās* like Yāmuna Muni and inspired by the teachings of the *Aruliccheyal* (the four thousand divine verses) of the Āzhwārs established that the Supreme Reality or Brahman is endowed with attributes (*Savisésha Brahman*) and is organically related to both the sentient souls (*Chith*) and the non-sentient matter (*achit*), both of which are very real. The *Savisésha Brahman* is no one other than the "abode of *Sri Lakshmi*", *Sriman Nārāyaṇa* with infinite auspicious attributes (*anantha kalyāṇa gunās*) with no blemishes whatsoever. (அமலனாதி பிரான் of Sri ThiruppānĀzhwār, குறைஒன்றும் இல்லாத கோவிந்தா – Thiruppāvai of Sri Andāl). *Sriman Nārāyaṇa* is the inner controller and all the sentients and the non-sentients form His body (*Shareeree* and *Shareera bhāva*, Soul- Body relationship and *Séshi* and *Sésha bhava*, Master – Servant relationship). Sri NammĀzhwār expresses this precisely in the very first decad of his Thiruvāimozhi.

திடவிசும்பெரி வளி நீர்நிலமிவைமிசைப்
படர்பொருள் முழுவதுமாய் அவையவைதொறும்
உடல்மிசையுயிரெனக் கரந்தெங்கும் பரந்துள்ளன்
சுடர்மிகுசுருதியுள் இவையுண்ட கரனே (Thiruvāimozhi 1-1-7)

"The Supreme Lord who shines as the inner substantive meaning of the resplendent *Srutis*, remains hidden pervading inside and out through the entire cosmos and all its constituent physical entities evolved from the five basic elements of space, fire, air, water and the earth, like the *jeeva* (the individual self) inside the body, and it is the same Lord who swallows all these (at the time of dissolution)". All of the Āzhwārs refer to themselves in their verses as the "servants" of the Lord. Sri NammĀzhwār clearly indicates the nature (ஸ்வரூபம்) of the *jeeva* is that of being the servant of the Lord, who is the inner controller. To make it perfectly clear, he distinguishes the self from the body by saying "அடியேன் உள்ளான் (He is in the self) உடல் உள்ளான் (He is in the body)" in his Thiruvāimozhi (8-8-2). When the question of the true nature of the individual self (*jeeva*) arose among the disciples of Sri Rāmānuja,

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the Āchārya who was perfectly capable of dispelling their ignorance,(about the defining feature of the *jeeva* as to whether it is of knowledge "*Jnanatvam*" or being a servant of the Lord, "*Séshatvam*") instead sent his close disciple Sri Kūratthāzhwān, to his own teacher, Sri Thirukkōttiyūr Nambi to find the right answer. We learn from the commentaries that the latter pointed out to only this verse from Thiruvāimozhi 8-8-2. The *Sruti* describes the Ultimate Reality as follows:

நாராயண பரம் ப்ரஹ்ம தத்த்வம் நாராயண: பர:
நாராயண பரோ ஜ்யோதிராத்மா நாராயண: பர:

"*Nārāyaṇa* is the Supreme Brahman, *Nārāyaṇa* is the Supreme Reality, *Nārāyaṇa* is the Supreme Light and *Nārāyaṇa* is the *Paramātmā*" (*Nārāyaṇa Suktham*-Taittiriya Upanishad).

ஆபோ நாரா இதி ப்ரோக்தா ஆபோ வை நரஸுநவ:
தா யத³ஸ்யாயநம் பும்ஸஸ் தேந நாராயண ஸ்ம்ருத: (ManuSmruthi)

"Water is called 'nāra' since it arose from paramātmā who is known as 'nara'. Since it becomes His abode, that paramātmā is called Nārāyaṇa"

நாஸப்³தே³ந ஜீவாநாம்ஸமுஹபரோச்யதேபு⁴தை⁴
க³ திராலம்பந³ ம் தஸ்ய தேந நாராயண ஸ்ம்ருத: (ManuSmruthi)

"nāra" refers to the entire host of *jeevas*. For them, He is both the goal and the means. Hence He is called "Nārāyaṇa".
Sruti further declares,

"அந்தர்ப்³ஹி³ஸ்ச தத் ஸர்வம் வ்யாப்ய நாராயணஸ் ஸ்தித:" (*Nārāyaṇa Suktham*, Taittiriya Upanishad).

"*Nārāyaṇa* stands pervading everything inside and out". Sri NammĀzhwār expresses the same *védic* truth in the first decad of his Thiruvāimozhi,

"கரந்த சிலிடன்தொறும் இடம்திகழ் பொருள்தொறும்
கரந்தெங்கும் பரந்துளன் இவையுண்ட கரனே" (Thiruvāimozhi 1-1-10)

"The Lord, who swallows everything at the time of dissolution, remains hidden pervading everything without any exception even in the subatomic regions including all the sentient and the insentient"

The Creator and the creation are the same. This must be so in as much as everything emanates from the primordial source and everything ends in the same source. The same Reality pervades in and through all the sentient and the insentient entities which go to form this Universe. The manifest world is essentially made of forms and names. Even when something appears to be man - made, the ability and the knowledge involved in the effort to make it, the tools and the materials needed to make it ultimately arise from the Nature or already are pre-existent in Nature, therefore, "God" given.

யத்யத் விபு⁴திமத்ஸத்வம் ஸ்ரீமத்ஊர்ஜிதமேவ வா

தத்தத் ஏவ அவகச்ச² த்வம் மம தேஜோம்ஸஸம்பவம்

(Srimad Bhagavat Geetha - Chaper 10- verse 41).

"Whatever power or glory or energy that one sees in this world, is but a minutest fraction of the power or the glory of My power"

Nothing ever can exist without It.

சேயன் அணியன் சிறியன் மிகப்பெரியன்

ஆயன் துவரைக்கோனாய் நின்ற மாயன்- அன்

ஹோதிய வாக்கதனைக்கல்லார் உலகத்தில்

ஏதிலராம் மெய்ஞ்ஞானமில்

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi –verse 71)

Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān implies in this verse that "True Knowledge" will not be possible for those who have not heard "those words" taught by the cowherd boy who stood as, the king of Dwārakā (to Arjuna during the MahāBhāratha War). "Those words" refer to the teachings of Sri Krishna, in Srimad Bhagavat Geetha and of those in particular refer to the *Charamaslōkam*, the last concluding verse of Srimad Bhagavat Geetha namely

ஸர்வ துர்மாந் பரித்யஜ்ய மாமேகம் ஸரணம் வ்ரஜ

அஹம் த்வா ஸர்வ பாபேப்யோ மோக்ஷயிஷ்யாமி மாஸ்ச:

"Discarding all other means take me as your sole refuge and I shall liberate you from all sins and do not grieve".

The adjectives, the Āzhwār uses to describe the Lord are of interest.

சேயன் மிகப்பெரியன் - "unreachable and great" . The Struti states "யதோ வாசோ

நிவர்த்தந்தே அப்ராப்ய மநஸா ஸஹ" (*Taittireeya Upanishad – Ānandavalli*)" where mind and words cannot reach" unfathomable to even Brahmā and other *dēvas*.

அணியன் - easily accessible to those who love Him

சிறியன் - because of His compassion, He chooses to become very easily accessible to His devotees and comes in many humble and lowly forms such as taking birth in a cowherd's family.

II Five Aspects of the Supreme Reality:

Pāncharātra Āgama texts describe five aspects or modes for the Supreme Reality "*Sriman Nārāyaṇa*". They are *Para*, *Vyūha*, *Vibhava*, *Antaryāmi* and *Archāvatāra*. The "*Para*" is the Transcendental beatific non- material "*Suddha Satva*" immaculate and pure form accessible only to the *nityās* (the eternal attendants or *nitya Suris* like Sri Ananta, Garuda Vishvakṣēna and others) and the *mukhtās* (the liberated souls) in the Eternal Realm (*Nitya Vibhuthi*).

The *Vyūhas* are emanations from the same Supreme exercising control over the cosmic spheres and all their resident sentient beings as well as the insentient matter, thus involved in creation, sustenance as well as destruction. The ultimate Reality can be thought of and even realized in its huge cosmic manifestation. How often anybody pauses to contemplate on this when one looks at the stars, the moon or the sky?

The *Vibhavas* refer to the various descents of the Supreme which happen from time to time at His own Will. They are unlimited although for illustrative purposes, our Āchāryas refer to about ten of them as the main ones including the *avatārās* of the Lord as Sri Rāma and Sri Krishna. The Lord describes clearly when and why He takes his *avatārās* in Srimad Bhagavat Geetha, (Chapter 4 – verses 5-9)

யதா³ யதா³ ஹி த⁴ர்மஸ்ய க்³லாநிர்ப⁴வதி பா⁴ரத
அப்⁴யுத்தா² நம் அத⁴ர்மஸ்ய ததா³ த்மாநம் ஸ்ருஜாம்யஹம் (4- 7)

Yadā yadā hi dharmasya glānir bhavati Bhāratha
Abhuythānam adharmaṣya tadā ātmānam srjāmyaham.

"Whenever there is decline of *Dharma*, O' Arjuna, and rise of *Adharma*, then I incarnate Myself"

பரித்ராணாய ஸாதா⁴நாம் விநாஸாய ச து³ஷ்க்ருதாம்
த⁴ர்மஸம்ஸ்தா² பநார்தா² ய ஸம்ப⁴வாமி யுகே³ யுகே³ (4-8)

Paritrāṇāya Sādhūnām vināśāya ca duskrtām
Dharma samsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yugé yugé

"For the protection of the good and also for the elimination of the wicked and for the establishment of *Dharma*, I take birth from age to age".

None of us have been fortunate enough to have been born at the time when the Lord took the *avatārās* as Sri Rāma or Sri Krishna. But even among those who were around at the time of these descents, only a few fortunate ones were able to recognize the divinity behind. Sri Krishna Himself says in Srimad Bhagavat Geetha that "fools disregard Me, dwelling in a human form not knowing My Higher nature, as the Supreme Lord of all beings".

அவஜாநந்தி மாம் மூடா⁴ மாநுஷீம் தநுமாச்ரிதம்
பரம் பா⁴வம் அஜாநந்தோ மம பூ⁴தமஹேஷ்வரம் (Chapter 9 –verse 11)

The *Antaryāmi* is the resident Lord who is the inner controller of all the sentient beings (*jeevas*) as well as the insentient matter of the entire cosmos. Only great sages are able to perceive the Lord as seated in their minds through practice of the means of *Yōga* of Meditation. But how often when we look at ourselves or others we feel, think or even experience the Lord within.

The fifth aspect is the *Archāvatāra* form of the Lord, as worshipped in various temples and in our own homes wherein the icons had been properly installed by Védic rituals or invoked with love and devotion.

Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān in his Thirucchanda Viruttam verse 17 refers to these five aspects of the Lord.

ஏக மூர்த்தி மூன்றுமூர்த்தி நாலுமூர்த்தி நன்மைசேர்
 போகமூர்த்தி புண்ணியத்தின் மூர்த்தியெண்ணில் மூர்த்தியாய்
 நாகமூர்த்தி சயனமாய் நலங்கடற்கிடந்து மேல்
 ஆகமூர்த்தியாய வண்ணம்என் கொலாதிதேவனே.

"O' Lord, the ancient Cause! Thou art the form of *Vāsudéva* in the supreme Abode. Thou take the form of *Sankarshana*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruddha*, in the *Vyūha* mode. Thou art the basis of the four entities namely the primordial matter (*pradhāna*), the *jeeva*, (the *purusha*) the unmanifest primal nature (*avyakta*) and time (*Kala*). In the *Vibhava* mode, Thou take unlimited incarnations to bring Thy good grace to embodied souls and become the ultimate fruit of the righteous actions of Thy devotees. Furthermore, Thou take the reclining form reposing on the serpent *Ādhi Śeśha* in the good ocean of milk (awaiting the return of all *jeevas* to Thee). In addition to all these, Thou also become the *Archa Mūrthies* in the forms desired by the devotees.

Āzhwārs state these quite clearly.

தமர் உகந்தது எவ்வுருவம் அவ்வுருவம் தானே
 தமர் உகந்தது எப்பேர் மற்றப்பேர்
 தமர் உகந்து எவ்வண்ணம் சிந்தித்து இமையாதிருப்பரே
 அவ்வண்ணம் ஆழியான் ஆம் (Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi – 44, Sri Poikai Pirān's)

"The Lord, Who carries the discus in His hands (*Chakrapāni*) will take the forms desired by His loving devotees, takes on the names that are desired by His loving devotees as well as become one with the form and attributes meditated upon incessantly by them".

தானே தனக்கு உவமன் தன் உருவே எவ்வுருவும்
 தானே தவ உருவும் தாரகையும்
 தானே எரிசுடரும் மால்வரையும் எண் திசையும்
 அண்டத்து இருசுடரும் ஆய இறை (Mūdrām Thiruvandhādhi - 38- Sri Pei Āzhwār's)

"All things form His body only. Those who obtained the blessed forms by performing penances like *Brahmā* the creator and others, the stars, are His forms only. The Lord for whom the brilliant fire, the mountain ranges, the eight directions, the moon and the sun in the cosmic spheres are the modes, has no compeers other than Himself."

தமருள்ளம் தஞ்சை தலையரங்கம் தண்கால்
 தமருள்ளுந் தண்பொருப்பு வேலை -- தமருள்ளும்
 மாமல்லை கோவல் மதிள்குடந்தை யென்பரே
 ஏவல்ல வெந்தைக் கிடம் (Irandaṁ Thiruvandhādhi – 70 – Sri Bhūdat Āzhwār)

"The heart of the devotees, the Tanjai Māmani temple, Thiruvaram, the foremost among the divyadésams, Thirutthāṅkāl, the cool Thirumalai the favourite of the devotees, the ocean of milk, Thirukkadan mallai desired by the devotees, Thirukkōvalūr and Thirukkudanthai surrounded by tall walls, all of these are said to be the residences of the Lord Sri Rāma, known for his valour in archery"

Therefore the same Reality pervades all through these five modes. Only difference is the level and ease of accessibility. It can be compared to how water exists in nature in various forms, like in the clouds, the seas and the oceans, the lakes, the rivers and the flash floods, and subsoil underground tapped only by wells and finally at home in our own water pots, properly collected, kept cool and pure for easy access to quench not only our thirsts but also our daily needs. In our tradition, we consider the Reality to be not only Transcendental, but also "Immanent". This is so vividly brought into focus by the legend of the child devotee *Prahlāda*, (who personifies devotion and therefore known as "the king of devotees") where the Supreme Lord appears instantaneously at his behest as *Sri Nrsimha* (half lion- half human form) in the same pillar kicked by his father *Hiranya* who was an egoistic demon king. It stands to reason that the all pervasive Almighty can be invoked and even realized in all His glories in the *Archa* form also. All it requires the faith and loving devotion like that of the child *Prahlāda*.

III Āzhwārs and the *Archāvatāras*:

The philosophic and poetic works of Āzhwār saints of Tamil Nadu revered and commented upon by the Āchāryās of Sri Vaishnava tradition help to shine light on the hidden truths of the *Srutis*. All of the Āzhwārs experienced the Supreme Reality, Srīman *Nārāyaṇa* in all His glories, and poured out their divine ecstasy in flowing poetic verses (the *aruliccheyal*). They were all blessed with the true Knowledge and Vision without any clouds of doubts or confusion. Such knowledge (direct perception) of the *Paramātmā* comes only when bestowed by the grace of the Lord. Sri NammĀzhwār himself says that the Lord blessed him with that direct knowledge in the opening verse of his famous, Thiruvāimozhi. "மயர்வற மதிநலம் அருளினன்". Despite the fact the Āzhwārs were not all contemporaries and were born from different places and strata of society, amazingly their statements as revealed in their works are uniformly similar. They speak with one voice as it were. In contrast to the *Sruti* which keep repeating how hard it is to reach the Supreme, Āzhwārs ' *Aruliccheyal* uniformly point to the easy accessibility of the Lord. In the verse we referred to in the earlier section from Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān's Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi , Āzhwār points out how the unfathomable Lord is also easily accessible (சேயன் அணியன் சிறியன் மிகப்பெரியன்).

அமரர்க் கரியானை தமர்கட் கெளியானை

அமரத்தொழுவார்கட்கு அமராவினைகளே

(Thiruvāimozhi 10-5- 9)

"Unreachable even to the *dévas*. Accessible to His devotees.

Effects of *karmā* will never accrue to those who worship Him without desires"

Furthermore, all of them were particularly attracted to the *Archa* form of the Lord, enshrined in various holy places (*divya désams*). In fact, the term "*divya désam*" is given to a shrine or place only when one or more of the Āzhwārs had sung about the Lord enshrined there. Not only they experienced the Lord directly there but also were touched by His "*Saulabhya Guna*" (easy accessible nature).

Āzhwārs' experience of the *Archāvatāras* and their description in their verses are quite beautiful and fascinating. They tend to draw even our ordinary minds into the path divine. A few verses from the *aruliccheyal* of the Āzhwārs will be given here to provide a glimpse into this treasure. Two of the three Mudhal Āzhwārs, Sri PoikaiPirān and Sri BhūdatĀzhwār refer to their vision of the Lord even before birth in their unborn states in the womb. The references clearly relate to two different *divya désams* namely Sri Rangam and Thirukkōttiur, respectively.

அன்று கரு அரங்கத்துள் கிடந்து கை தொழுதேன் கண்டேன்
திருவரங்கமேயான் திசை (Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi – 6 – Sri Poikai Pirān's)

இன்றா அறிகின்றேன் அல்லேன்
இருநிலத்தைச் சென்று ஆங்களந்த திருவடியை
அன்று கருக்கொட்டியுள் கிடந்து கை தொழுதேன் கண்டேன்
திருக்கோட்டி எந்தை திறம் (Irundām Thiruvandhādhi - 87, Sri BhūdatĀzhwār's)

Sri PeiĀzhwār, the third among the three Mudhal Āzhwārs refers with same fervour to the Lord enshrined in Thiruvallikēni.

.....எந்தை
ஒருவல்லித் தாமரையாள் ஒன்றிய சீர் மார்வன்
திருவல்லிக் கேணியான் சென்று. (Mūndrām Thiruvandhādhi – 16)

Sri Poikai Pirān states how obstacles and troubles vanish when one recalls, the Lord enshrined in Vēnkatam, Vinnagar, Vekha and Thirukkōvalūr.
வேங்கடமும் விண்ணகரும் வெஃகாவும், அஃகாத
பூங்கிடங்கில் நீள் கோவல் பொன்னகரும் - நான்கிடத்தும்
நின்றான் இருந்தான் கிடந்தான் நடந்தானே
என்றால் கெடுமாம் இடர். (Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi – 77)

Sri Pei Āzhwār advises in a similar vein,
.....விருப்புடைய
வெஃகாவே சேர்ந்தானை மெய்மலர்தூய்கை தொழுதால்
அஃகாவே தீவினைகள் ஆய்ந்து. (Mūndrām Thiruvandhādhi - 76).

Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān asks the Lord to show where he can seek Him since there is no limit for His frontier.

ஓரிடத்தை யல்லை எல்லைஇல்லை என்பர் ஆதலால்
சேர்விடத்தை நாயினேன் தெரிந்திறைஞ்சுமா சொலே (Thirucchanda Viruttam – 47)

Immediately the Lord reveals to the Āzhwār, His beautiful reclining form in Srirangam.
அண்டைகொண்டு கெண்டைமேயும் அந்தணிரங்கமே (Thirucchanda Viruttam – 49)

Of course to this Āzhwār's *bhakthi*, we read that the *Archāvatāra Mūrthies* stepping outside the normal boundaries of the *Archa* form, had responded in three *divya désams*. The two famous ones of course are the Lord in Thiruvekhā and Sri Arāmudhan of Thirukkudanthai. The former got up with his serpent bed at the behest of the Āzhwār and went and stayed one night outside of Kānchi with the Āzhwār and his disciple Kanikkannan, at a place nearby called "*Orirukkai*" and returned back to Thiruvekhā again at the Āzhwār's wish and reposed in the opposite direction to memorialize this event. The Lord came to be known in this *divya désam* Thiruvekhā as "சொன்ன வண்ணம் செய்த பெருமாள்" "Sonna Vannam seytha Perumāḷ meaning" the Lord who did as told" (*Yathōktha Kāri*). In Thirukkudanthai, looking at the Lord reposing on his serpent bed and not responding to him, Āzhwār felt concerned about the Lord's well being and asked of the Lord,

நடந்தகால்கள் நொந்தவோ நடுங்குாலமேனமாய் இடந்தமெய்குலுங்கவோ
.....கிடந்தவாறெழுந்திருந்து பேச வாழி கேசனே (Thirucchanda Viruttam – 61)

"whether His feet were aching after all that walking He did as Sri Rāma all over the forests or His body became exhausted having lifted the earth out of the deluging waters as the divine boar and entreated the Lord to get up and say that He was well to allay his fear". The legend has it that the Lord in fact began to get up. Seeing this, Āzhwār, immediately expressed an auspicious benediction on the Lord thus refraining Him from getting out of His bed completely. The Lord in this *divya désam* is in a semi-reclined (*Uttāna sāyee*) position only. Sri Arāmudha Perumāḷ of Thirukkudanthai was pleased with the unparalleled devotion of the Āzhwār, exchanged His title with Āzhwār and came to be known as Sri Arāmudha Āzhwār and Sri Thirumazhisai Āzhwār became Thirumazhisai Pirān. ("The title "Pirān" meaning "benefactor" is usually given only to the Lord).

The same Āzhwār declares in his work Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi , that the Lord had taken abode in the holy shrines in the lying posture on the serpent-bed in Thirukkudanthai, Thiruvekhā, Thiruvevvul, Thiruvaram, Thiruppér, Thiruanbil, and in the ocean of milk mainly with the sole intention of getting into the minds of His beloved devotees.

நாகத்தணைகுடந்தை வெஃகா திருவெவ்வுள்

நாகத்தணை அரங்கம் பேரன்பில்-நாகத்

தணைபாற்கடல் கிடக்கும் ஆதிநெடுமால்

அணைப்பார்கருத்தனாவான் (Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi -36).

No distinction is made here between the *Archa* form and the transcendental form.

Furthermore, Āzhwār in his work Thirucchanda Viruttam declares clearly how his own final state of release from this material world happened and how he attained the eternal beatitude at the lotus feet of the Lord of Srirangam.

பொன்னி தூழ் அரங்கமேய பூவை வண்ண மாய கேள்

என்னதாவியென்னும் வல்வினையினுட்கொழுந்தெழுந்து
 உன்னபாதமென்னநின்றஒண்குடர்கொழுமலர்
 மன்னவந்துபூண்டுவாட்டமின்றியென்கும்நின்றதே (Thirucchandaviruttam-119)

"O' Wondrous Lord with the hue of the Pūvai flower! Who has taken abode in Thiruvarangam surrounded by *Kāvéri* ! Kindly listen. A tender shoot arose in my *Ātmā*, full of hosts of unrighteous *karmās*, reaching Thy divine form, described in *Védānta* as having matchless effulgence and softness like the fully blossomed flower, immersing permanently, without any defect, spread into Thee everywhere."

Sri NammĀzhwār had sung on 36 *divya désams* in his verses. It is believed that the *Archāvatāra* Mūrthies from the various *divya désams* appeared on their own before the Āzhwār. He apparently never stirred out of the shade of the famous Tamarind tree in Thirukurukūr where he actually remained in a state of meditation from the time of his birth until he was awakened by the little pebble thrown along with a question by Sri Madhurakavi Āzhwār, The latter was much older in age than Sri NammĀzhwār. He was at that time travelling in the North and saw an extraordinary light (*jyōthi*) that was emanating from the South. He then began his journey South in quest of that *jyōthi* and finally realized the source of that "jyōthi" was none other than the Āzhwār seated under the tamarind tree in Thirukkurukūr. Even today one can see this ancient tamarind tree in this *divya désam* inside the shrine.

Sri NammĀzhwār refers to the Lord enshrined in Thirukkurukūr as the "*Ādhi Pirān*" (the ancient benefactor) and points to all humans the futility of going after other deities.

குன்றம்போல் மணிமாட நீடு* திருக்குருகூர் அதனுள்
 நின்ற ஆதி பிரான் நிற்க* மற்ற தெய்வம் நாடுதிரே (Thiruvāimzohi 4-10-1)

He actually tells the Lord at Thirukkudanthai that he has no other refuge but Him.

களைவாய் துன்பம் களையா தொழிவாய் களைகண் மற்றிலேன் (Thiruvāimzohi 5-8-8).

He declares that the Lord enshrined in Thiruvinnagar, Who has no compeers, had provided the shelter of His lotus feet.

மின்னப் பொன்மதில் தூழ்* திருவிண்ணகர் சேர்ந்த அப்பன்

தன்னொப்பாரில்லப்பன்* தந்தனன் தனதாள் நிழலே (Thiruvāimzohi 6-3-9).

He entreats everyone to sing and dance and praise the Lord in Thirukkannapuram if one wants to get rid of the effects of one's own *karmās*.

பாடுசாரா வினை பற்றற வேண்டுவீர்

.....
 பாடியாடி பணிமின் அவன் தாள்களே (Thiruvāimzohi 9-10-11)

In addition, several verses in Thiruvāimzohi of the Āzhwār express the *nāyaki bhāvam*. This refers to an emotional state of a damsel in love of the Lord with a pining heart. These verses are sometimes addressed directly and other times through a friend or other suitable messenger and also in the words of a mother describing the *love-lorn* state of her daughter who has been pining for her Lord. Āzhwār's love of the Lord in Tholaiyillimangalam, illustrates the last beautifully.

துவளில் மாமணி மாட மோங்கு

தொலைவில்லி மங்கலம் தொழும்

இவளை

குவளை யொண்மலர்க் கண்கள் நீர்மல்க

நின்று நின்று குமுறுமே (Thiruvāimzohi 6-5-1)

In Perumāḷ Thirumozhi, the work of Sri Kulashkara Āzhwār, a *Chera* King by birth, we find him pining for the Lord of Srirangam.

மெய்யில் வாழ்க்கையை.....

ஐயனே* அரங்கா என்று அழைக்கின்றேன்

மையல் கொண்டொழிந்தேன் எந்தன் மாலுக்கே (Perumāḷ Thirumozhi 3-1)

This Āzhwār was also a great devotee of Lord Sri Rāma. His famous verse on the Lord of Thirukkannapuram is the most popular song of lullaby that is sung in devout Sri Vaishnava homes.

மன்னுபுகழ் கௌசலதன்

கன்னி நன் மாமதிள் புடைதூழ் கணபுரத்தென் கருமணியே

என்னுடைய இன்னமுதே இராகவனே தாலேலோ (Perumāḷ Thirumozhi 8-1)

Sri ThondarAdippodi Āzhwār served only the Lord of Srirangam by his verses as well as by his acts. He carried out the flower *kainkaryam* to the Lord by maintaining a flower garden. Both of his works (Thiruppalliyezhucchi and Thirumālai) are entirely dedicated only to the Lord of Srirangam.

Sri ThiruppānĀzhwār declares that "his eyes will not see anything else after seeing the lotus eyes of the Lord of Srirangam, who is no other than the Lord Krishna, who ate butter and also stole his heart", in his famous AmalanādhīPirān.

கொண்டல் வண்ணனைக் கோவலனாய் வெண்ணெய்

உண்ட வாயன் என்னுள்ளம் கவர்ந்தானை

அண்டர்கோன் அணி அரங்கன் என்னமுதினைக்

கண்ட கண்கள் மற்றொன்றினைக் காணாவே (AmalanādhīPirān - 10).

After saying this, the Āzhwār completely merged physically with the Lord at the sanctum.

We read in the history of the Āzhwārs , two of them, both Sri ThiruppānĀzhwār as well as Sri Andāl merged physically and totally into the *Archa* form of the Lord of Srirangam at the end of their lives in this world. That is one of the reasons why Srirangam is held as the number one among the *Archāvatāras* besides being the only *divya désam* sung by all of the Āzhwārs .

The youngest of all the Āzhwārs , Sri Thirumangai Āzhwār was one for total involvement with *Archāvatāras*. Perhaps he was inspired by the other Āzhwārs preceding him in this direction. In fact several of the 108 famous *divya désams* would not have attained that status but for Sri Thirumangai Āzhwār's *Mangalāshāsanam* (auspicious benediction). He visited and sang on 86 of the 108 *divya désams*, in the days when travelling must have been hard and most uncomfortable particularly to distant and remotely located *divya sthalams* like Salagramam, Badrikāshramam, Naimisāranayam and Ahōbilam, While in Periya Thirumozhi his earlier work he dedicates a decad to each *divya désam*, in his later works he refers to many temples together. From his Siriyā Thirumadal, a verse is presented here.

சீரார் திருவேங்கடமே திருக்கோவ

லூரே, மதிள் கச்சி ஊரகமே பேரகமே
 பேரா மருதிறுத்தான் வெள்ளறையே வெஃகாவே
 பேராலி தண்கால் நறையூர் திருப்பலியூர்
 ஆராமம் சூழ்ந்த அரங்கம் - கணமங்கை
 காரார் மணிநிறக் கண்ணனார் விண்ணகரம்
 சீரார் கணபுரம் சேறை திருவழுந்தூர்
 காரார் குடந்தை கடிகை கடன்மல்லை
 ஏரார் பொழில் சூழ் இடவெந்தை நீர்மலை
 சீராரும் மாலிருஞ்சோலை- திருமோகூர்
 பாரோர் புகழும் வதறி வடமதுரை
 ஊராய எல்லாம் ஒழியாமே- நானவனை

IV: The Glories of ThiruVénkatamudaiyān (Sri Vénkatéshwara):

This year we are paying special homage to Sri Rāmānuja in our Āzhwārs' utsavam. It is of interest to note that Sri Rāmānuja during his visit to this holy shrine, happened to address his followers summarizing the sum and substance of the Védās. This work of his is a fascinating text called Védārtha Sangraha. It is believed the Āchārya delivered the whole text extempore.

In the *Mangala Slōkam*, the first verse which is benedictory for the whole work of his commentary on the *Védanta Sūtras* Sri Rāmānuja refers directly to *Srinivāsa*, the Lord of Thirumalai.

அகி²ல பு⁴வந ஜந்மஸ்தேம ப⁴ங்கா³தி³லீலே
 விநத விவித⁴ பூ⁴தவ்ராத ரசைகூக தீ³சேஷ
 ஸ்ருதி ஸிரஸிவிதி³ப்தே ப்³ரஹ்மணி ஸ்ரீநிவாஸே
 ப⁴வது மம பரஸ்மிந் ஸேமுஷீ ப⁴க்திருபா

(*Mangala Slōkam – Sri Bhāshyam – Sri Rāmānuja 's*)

"May my intellect (ஸேமுஷீ), be engrossed in loving devotion on *Lord Srinivāsa*, (the abode of *Sri Lakshmi*) the Supreme Brahman, who is shining on the crown of the Védas (ஸ்ருதி ஸிரஸிவிதி³ப்தே), who has resolved to protect all beings (விநத விவித⁴ பூ⁴தவ்ராத ரசைகூக தீ³சேஷ), and for whom all acts of creation, sustenance and destruction are mere sport".

விண் மீதிருப்பாய் ! மலைமேல் நிற்பாய் ! கடல் சேர்ப்பாய் !
 மண் மீதுழல்வாய் ! இவற்றுள் எங்கும் மறைந்துறைவாய் ! (Thiruvāimzoh 6-9-5)

"O' Lord, Who resides in the eternal realm, who stands on the hills, who reclines on the ocean of milk, who moves around in all the worlds and who remains hidden as the inner controller pervading everything and everywhere"

Sri NammĀzhwār calls on the Lord in this verse referring to His five aspects, the *Para*, the *archa*, *vyūha*, *vibhava* and the *antaryāmi*. For the *Archāvatāra* form, Āzhwār calls on the Lord of the famous seven hills, Thirumalai, indicating that the Lord Vénkatéshwara (ThiruVénkatamudaiyān) is the example *par excellence* for the *Archāvatāra* form of the Lord.

Sri Désikan in his Srimad Rahasya Traya Sāram, glorifies the Thirumalai in the following verse,

கண்ணனடியினை எமக்குக் காட்டும் வெற்பு
கடுவினையர் இருவினையும் கடியும் வெற்பு
திண்ணமிது வீடென்னத் திகழும் வெற்பு
தெளிந்த பெருந்தீர்த்தங்கள் செறிந்த வெற்பு
புண்ணியத்தின் புகலிதென புகழும் வெற்பு
பொன்னுலகில் போகமெல்லாம் புணர்க்கும் வெற்பு
விண்ணவரும் மண்ணவரும் விரும்பும் வெற்பு
வேங்கடவெற்பென விளங்கும் வேத வெற்பே.

"The hill that shows the lotus feet of Sri Kanna Pirān (Sri Krishna) to us
The hill that eliminates the effects of both good and bad *karmās*
The hill that shines for certain as the ultimate goal
The hill that has many clear and holy waters
The hill that is praised as the refuge of merits.
The hill that can sanction all desires in this golden earth
The hill that is desired by both the immortals and the mortals alike.
That hill of the *Védās* is the glorious Thiruvénkata hill "

In his work Dayā Satakam, the same Āchārya while glorifying the Lord Vénkatéshwara's auspicious *guna* of "compassion" describes this beautifully in the following verse.

ப்ரபத்³யே தம் கி³ரிம் ப்ராய: ஸ்ரீநிவாஸாநுகம்பயா

இக்ஷாஸாரஸ்ரவந்த்யேவ யந்மூர்த்யா ஸர்கராயிதம் (Dayā satakam-1)

"I offer my obeisance to that famous hill (ThiruVénkatam) formed as it were by the crystallization of the river of sugar cane juice - the overflowing mercy of Lord Srinivāsa".

The word "*Anukampā*" means "feeling the distress of others as one's own distress".

Āzhwārs often when they refer by the general term as மலை, வெற்பு, etc, they only refer to Thirumalai.

The word "Vénkatam" itself implies "கடம் வேம்" implies "பாபம் போய்விடும்" (the effects of all unrighteous *karmās* namely all "*pāpās*" will vanish).

வேம் கடங்கள் மெய் மேல்வினை முற்றவும் (Thiruvāimzohi 3-3-6). Sri NammĀzhwār says that "our "*pāpās*" will melt away. We will not commit any more sins".

Similar expressions by Sri Poikai Pirān, "வினைச் சுடரை நந்துவிக்கும் வேங்கடமே" and by Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān, "சென்று வணங்குமினோ சேண் உயர் வேங்கடத்தை நின்று வினை கெடுக்கும் நீர்மையால்" (Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi - 42).

The Archāvatāra moorthy in this hill is believed to have manifested on its own. This *kshétram* is therefore considered as a "*Svayam vyaktha kshétram*". It is referred to in many *Purānās*. There is a reference to this hill in a *mantra* in Rigveda,

अरायि काणे विकटे गिरिं गच्छ सदान्वे ।

शिरिम्बिठस्यसत्त्वभिस्तेभिषटवा चातयामसि ॥

அராயி காணே விகடே கி³ரிம் க³ச்²ச² ஸதா³ந்வே
ஸிரிம்பி³டஸ்ய ஸத்வபி:⁴ ஸ்தேபி⁴ஷ்ட்வா சாதயாமஸி

"arāyi kāné vikaté girim gachchasadānvé sirimbithasya satvabhi:
TébhishitvA chātayāmasi" (Rigveda 10.155.1)

"The person devoid of wealth and vision, is implored to go to the hill which burns up all evil (vikata for vénkata) and drives away all obstacles to peace and prosperity. The call of the *rishi* Sirimbitha has obviously not gone in vain".

This clearly indicates its antiquity. It is said that Sri Rāmānuja cited this mantra in the royal court to provide proof that the Lord of Thirumala hills is none other than Sriman *Nārāyaṇa* . Reference to this *divya kshétram* can be found in *Silappadikāram* the famous ancient Tamil work. In the episode where *Kōvalan* and his wife *Kannagi* are on their way to the city of Madurai, they meet a person who shows them the way. After describing, various *sthalams*, on the way including Srirangam, the following description is given. The poetic description is vivid and picturesque indeed.

வீங்கு நீர் அருவி வேங்கடம் என்னும்
ஓங்குயர் மலையத்து உச்சிமீமிசை
விரிகதிர் ஞாயிரும் திங்களும் விளங்கி
இருமருங்கு ஓங்கிய இடைநிலைத்தானத்து
மின்னுக்கோடி உடுத்து விளங்குவில் பூண்டு
நல்நிறமேகம் நின்றது போல
பகையணங்காழியும் பால்வெண்சங்கமும்
தகைபெறுதாமரைக் கையின் ஏந்தி
நலம் கிளர் ஆரம் மார்பில் பூண்டு
பொலம் பூ ஆடையின் பொலிந்து தோன்றிய
செங்கண் நெடியோன் நின்ற வண்ணமும் -----

In the Sri Vaishnava tradition, Thirumalai hills themselves are considered as the incarnation of *Ādhi Sésha*, the eternal attendant of the Lord, who serves the Lord in all modes as exemplified by the verse of Sri Poikai Pirān in Mudhal Thiruvandhādhī .

"சென்றால் குடையாம் இருந்தால் சிங்காசனமாம்" "If the Lord were to walk, *Ādhi Sésha* becomes the umbrella, and if the Lord sits, he becomes the royal throne" (Mudhal Thiruvandhādhī - 53).

So Thirumalai hills remind all of us of our "*Séshatvam*" and should provide us with the true knowledge of the self "ஸ்வரூப ஞானம்" The Lord giving up Sri Vaikuntam, revels being amongst His devotees, along with the divine mother Sri Lakshmi in Thirumalai.

ஸ்ரீவைகுண்டவிரக்தாய ஸ்வாமி புஷ்கரிணீதடே I
ரமயா ரமமாணாய வேங்கடேசாய மங்களம் II

Sri NammĀzhwār has sung two decads of verses on the Lord of ThiruVēṅkatam both of which are well known among Sri Vaishnava devotees. One begins with ஒழிவில் காலமெல்லாம் (Thiruvāimzohi 3-3-1 to 11). The other one starts with உலகமுண்ட பெருவாயா. (Thiruvāimzohi 6-10-1 to 11) These two decads also indicate the substantive meaning of the famous *dwaya mantram*.

"ஸ்ரீமந் நாராயண சரணௌ ஸரணம் ப்ரபத்'யே
ஸ்ரீமதே நாராயணாய நம: "

The first half of the *dwaya mantram* indicates "the means". Surrendering to the lotus feet of *Sriman Nārāyaṇa* (who is eternally associated with Sri Mahālakshmi) is the means. The second half explains the "goal" which is to be forever engaged in the service of the divine couple without any other desires. The decad beginning with ஒழிவில் காலமெல்லாம் (Thiruvāimzohi 3-3-1 to 11) explains the second half of the *dwayam*, which is the "goal" while the decad beginning with உலகமுண்ட பெருவாயா. (Thiruvāimzohi 6-10-1 to 11) explains the meaning of the first half of the *dwayam*, which is the "means". The very first verse of the decad beginning with ஒழிவில் காலமெல்லாம் explains the meaning of the *Pranavam*. Sri NammĀzhwār in this verse reminds us that we should serve the Lord of ThiruVēṅkatam, the primal source of all, our Father forever without any interruption for that is what is suited to the true nature of ourselves, the *jeevas*.

ஒழிவில் காலமெல்லாம் உடனாய் மன்னி
வழிவிலா அடிமை செய்ய வேண்டும் நாம்
தெழிகுரல் அருவித் திருவேங்கடத்து
எழில்கொள் சோதி எந்தை தந்தை தந்தைக்கே (Thiruvāimzohi- 3-3-1)

Āzhwār further says,
வானவர் வானவர் கோனோடும்
சிந்து பூ மகிழும் திருவேங்கடத்து (Thiruvāimzohi 3-3-2)

"Even the eternal attendants (*nitya sūris*) as well all the *dēvas* pay homage to the Lord, by showering flowers at the lotus feet of ThiruVēṅkatamudaiyān, eager to witness his *kalyāṇa gunās* (auspicious attributes) especially "*Sausheelyam*" (gracious condescension) and "*Vātsalyam*" "unconditional motherly love" both of which they are not able to witness in their own realms". The 6th verse in this decad, has special meaning for all spiritual seekers.

வேங்கடங்கள் மெய்ம்மேல் வினை முற்றவும்

தாங்கள் தங்கட்கு நல்லனவே செய்வார்

வேங்கடத்துறைவார்க்கு நமவென்னல்

ஆங்கடமை அது சுமந்தார்கட்கே

(Thiruvāimzohi 3-3-6)

In this verse Āzhwār, says that the best means of making sure that one is able to do *Bhagavat kainkaryam* (service to the Lord) without any hindrances or obstacles, is to say "*Namaha*" to Lord *Srinivāsa*. This is an easy thing to do and is fitting to our real nature. When one does this, the Lord will take on this weight Himself and will not only get rid of our past *karmās* but also any future unrighteous actions of ours. This is "*Satyam*", the truth. Āzhwār further declares,

சுமந்து மாமலர் நீர்சுடர் தூபம் கொண்டு

அமர்ந்து வானவர் வானவர் கோனோடும்

நமன்றெழும் திருவேங்கடம் நங்கட்கு.

சமன்கொல் வீடு தரும் தடங் குன்றமே..... (Thiruvāimzohi 3-3-7)

"ThiruVēṅkatam is where *nityasūris* along with *Sri Vishvaksēna* perform desireless *kainkaryam* carrying articles of worship including flowers, holy water, the lamp and the incense and obtain in return the bliss of uninterrupted *Bhagavat kainkaryam*. Āzhwār declares that the same ThiruVēṅkatam will provide us the liberated state of bliss of uninterrupted *bhagavat kainkaryam* equal in measure to our service".

The *Sharanāgathi* (surrender) to the Lord here performed by Sri NammĀzhwār was the one that really materialized. The reason for this is that Āzhwār invokes the divine mother Lakshmi first who resides eternally in the heart of Lord *Srinivāsa*.

அகலகில்லேன் இறையுமென்று அலர்மேல் மங்கை உறைமார்பா

நிகரில் புகழாய் உலகமூன்று உடையானே, என்னை ஆள்வானே

நிகரில் அமரர் முனிக்கணங்கள் விரும்பும் திருவேங்கடத்தானே

புகல் ஒன்றில்லா அடியேன் உன்அடிக்கீழ்மர்ந்து புகுந்தேனே

(Thiruvāimzohi 6-10-10).

"O' Lord *Srinivāsa*, in whose heart eternally resides *Sri MahāLakshmi*, the ever youthful lady seated on the Lotus, with incomparable glory (of having limitless compassion)! The Lord of all the three worlds! Master of this humble self! O'Lord of ThiruVēṅkatam! You are forever desired by thine incomparable eternal attendants (who serve as well as enjoy the bliss of service)! This humble servant who has no other refuge has totally surrendered to Thine holy feet without any other desires".

The above verse has the same meaning as the first half of the *dwaya mantram*.

"அகலகில்லேன் இறையுமென்று" indicates the meaning of "ஸ்ரீமத்", (eternally associated with Sri Mahā Lakshmi). உலகமுன்று உடையானே indicates "paratvam" the Sovereign rulership and ownership of everything. என்னை ஆள்வானே indicates "Sausheelyam" (gracious condescension) and திருவேங்கடத்தானே indicates "Saulabhyam and Vātsalyam" (easy accessibility and motherly love). The one with all these *gunās* (attributes) is "நாராயண" (*Nārāyaṇa*). உன்அடிக்கீழ் indicates சரணை. புகுந்தேனே indicates ஸரணம். புகல் ஒன்றில்லா – indicates *Kārpanyam* ("feeling helpless without any other refuge or means". Declaration to the Lord of one's helplessness is part and parcel of seeking refuge (*Sharanāgathi*).

In the very next verse, Āzhwār refers to the Lord as "படிக்கேழில்லா பெருமான்"

அடிக்கீழ் அமர்ந்து புகுந்து அடியீர் வாழ்மின் என்று
அருள் கொடுக்கும் படிக்கேழில்லா பெருமான்.

The Lord *Srinivāsa* stands with his right hand pointing towards his holy feet indicating to everyone who comes to see Him, the message He gave as Sri Krishna, "மாம் ஏகம் ஸரணம் வ்ரஜ" ("Take Me alone as refuge"). He reminds everyone that those who understand the true nature of the *self* will serve Him without any other goal in mind. The unconditional compassion "நிர்ஹேதுக க்ருபா" that He has for all the *jeevas* makes Him the "படிக்கேழில்லா பெருமான்". ("The Lord, Who has no compeers")

Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān in his Thirucchanda viruttam of 120 verses, refers to ThiruVēṅkatam in 4 verses. In two of them (48 and 65) he refers to them by the general term like "hill" குன்று, வெற்பு. In verse #60, beginning with the word "செழும்கொழும" from among the six verses (#56 - 61) that Āzhwār does *Mangalāshāsanam* (auspicious benediction) to the Lord Sri Arāmudhan of Thirukkudanthai, he says that the Lord out of His great love for His devotees, takes abode in various holy shrines on this earth so that they can experience Him right here on this earth. Thus He stands in ThiruVēṅkatam and reclines in Thirukkudanthai so that His devotees can enjoy His beauty in whichever pose they like. In verse # 81, Āzhwār points to the Lord of ThiruVēṅkatam, Who is accessible even to the people of the present times and encourages all to seek His holy feet.

கடைந்த பாற்கடல் கிடந்து காலநேமியைக் கடிந்து
உடைந்த வாலிதந்தனுக்கு உதவவந்திராமனாய்
மிடைந்தவேழமரங்களும் அடங்கவெய்து வேங்கடம்
அடைந்த மால பாதமே அடைந்து நாளும் உய்மினோ (Thirucchanda Viruttam – 81).

In his other work, Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi , of 96 verses, Āzhwār sings on ThiruVēṅkatam in 12 verses. (34, 39-48 and 90).

Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān says that merely uttering the name of ThiruVēṅkatam, resulted in him reaching the holy feet of the Lord of Sri.

வெற்பென்று வேங்கடம் பாடினேன் வீடாக்கி

நிற்கின்றேன் நின்று நினைக்கின்றேன் .. (Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi – 40).

He declares that both Brahmā and Siva glorify the Lord in ThiruVēṅkatam by worshipping Him with lotus flowers.

கடிக்கமல நான்முகனும் கண் மூன்றத்தானும்

அடிக்கமலமிட்டேத்துமங்கு (Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi – 42)

Because of the fact that both the eternal attendants and humans seek and worship ThiruVēṅkatam, Āzhwār declares that it is a cherished treasure of immortals and the mortals alike.

வேங்கடமே வானோர்க்கும் மண்ணோர்க்கும் வைப்பு

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi -45)

Āzhwār declares emphatically that for everyone (including the *nitya sūris*, *dévas* as well as the humans) ThiruVēṅkatam is the true refuge (means or உபாயம்) as well as the goal (உபேயம், புருஷார்த்தம்).

வேங்கடமே விண்ணோர் தொழுவதும் மெய்மையால்

வேங்கடமே மெய்வினைநோய் தீர்பதுவும் - வேங்கடமே

தானவரை விழித் தன்னாழிப்படைத்தொட்டு

வானவரைக் காப்பான் மலை (Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi -48)

"Vēṅkatam alone is worshipped with true devotion by the eternal stars. Vēṅkatam alone eliminates effects of all *karmās* and disease afflicting life. Vēṅkatam alone is the hill of the Lord, who destroys the demons with a mere touch of his *Chakra* for the protection of the *dévas*."

Sri Peri Āzhwār calls the Lord of Thirumalai as "*ThiruVēṅkatamudaiyān*"

சென்னியோங்கு தண் திருவேங்கடமுடையாய்

உலகு தன்னை வாழ நின்ற நம்பீ !

The name "*ThiruVēṅkatamudaiyān*

n" implies that the Lord has three realms, one is the material world, his *Leelā Vibhuthi*. The other is the eternal realm namely the *nitya vibhuthi*. *ThiruVēṅkatam* is his special third *Vibhuthi*. It is cool and desired even by the Lord for this is where He has many seeking His shelters, including humans, *dévas*, *nityas* and even the tribal residents of the forest, the animals and even the trees and the creepers. This is where He exhibits His limitless compassion and overflowing *vātsalyam*.

In her work Nāchiyār Thirumozhi, Sri Andāl in the opening verse expressing her prayer to "*Kāma Déva*" requesting fulfillment of her wish to be united with the Lord of ThiruVēṅkatam.

வேங்கடவற்கென்னை விதிக்கிறியே. Later in the work she sings a full decad of verses beginning with விண்ணீல மேலாப்பு விரித்தார் போல் மேகங்காள் sending the clouds as a messenger of her love to the Lord of ThiruVénkatam. (Nāchiyār Thirumozhi – 8)

Sri Kulashékara Āzhwār in his Perumāḷ Thirumozhi, in the 4th decad beginning with ஊனேறு செல்வத்து உடற் பிறவி யான் வேண்டேன் begs the Lord so that he might be born as any little thing on His golden Thirumalai. எம்பெருமான் பொன்மலைமேல் ஏதேனும் ஆவேனே (Perumāḷ Thirumozhi 4-10) It illustrates the Āzhwār's devotion to be a servant of the Lord as dispensed by Him totally.

ThiruppānĀzhwār brought to the sanctum in Srirangam, at the behest of Lord Sri Ranganātha being carried on the shoulders of LōkaSāranga muni, begins to enjoy the beauty of the Lord from His lotus feet to His crown and begins to sing his famous Amalanādhīpirān. In the opening verse itself he says that the Lord who is the Supreme ruler even of the eternal attendants and who has no blemishes and who resides in ThiruVénkatam made him a servant of His devotees அடியார்க்கென்னையாட்படுத்த விமலன் விண்ணவர்கோன் விரையார் பொழில் வேங்கடவன்.

Again in the 3rd verse,

மந்திபாய்வட வேங்கடமாமலை வானவர்கள்
சந்தி செய்ய நின்றான் அரங்கத்தவின் அணையான்

The Lord who came down from his eternal abode to this earth first stood on ThiruVénkatam where he is worshipped by all the *nitya sūris* before He took the resting reclining pose in Srirangam. ThiruVénkatam stands out like the shining beacon light for all Archāvatāras.

For *Archāvatāra Anubhavam*, (experience) among all the Āzhwārs , Thirumangai Āzhwār stands out high and tall. He travelled to almost all of the *divya désams* and visited even the ones that are remotely located. Sri Parāsara Bhattar, a great Āchārya that came after Sri Rāmānuja declared all of the verses of Thiruvāimzohi of Sri NammĀzhwār were in fact only on Lord Sri Ranganātha enshrined in Srirangam. வான்திகழும் சோலை மதிளரங்கர் வண்புகழ்மேல்
ஆன்ற தமிழ்மறைகள் ஆயிரமும் - ஈன்ற
முதல்தாய் சடகோபன், மொய்ம்பால்
இதத்தாய் இராமானுசன்.

Interestingly, Sri Swami Désikan in his Prabhandha Sāram verse 16, declares all of the 1253 verses of Sri Thirumangai Āzhwār were only on ThiruVénkatamudaiyān.

..... பரகாலன் சொல்
அத்தனுயர் வேங்கடமாற்காயிரத்தத்தோடு
ஆன இருநூற்றோரைம்பத்து மூன்றும்

Besides 4 decads of verses in his work PeriyaThirumozhi (I - 8-11) exclusively on ThiruVénkatam, Sri ThirumangaiĀzhwār refers to ThiruVénkatam at least in 22 other verses of his works. Some references will be clear only when one reads Āchārya s' commentaries. We will refer to a few of them here.

.....அவன் மேய

அண்ணல்மலையும் அரங்கமும் பாடோமே (Periya Thirumozhi XI-3-7)

"Among the hills, the head is Thirumalai just as the Lord is our ruler and Master".

நீரகத்தாய் நெடுவரையினுச்சிமேலாய் (Thirunedunthāndakam – 8)

பணிவரையினுச்சியாய் (Thirunedunthāndakam – 9)

.....உலகமேந்தும்

தென்னானாய் வடவானாய் (Thirunedunthāndakam – 10).

Here Āzhwār refers to 4 *divya désams* which are like 4 elephant calves that he has been looking after, covering all four directions. In the North it is ThiruVénkatam, in the East, it is Thirukkanna puram, in the West it is Srirangam and in the South it is Thirumālrunchōlai.

V: Mudhal Āzhwārs ' *Anubhavam* of ThiruVénkatamudaiyān

It is of interest that Sri Thirumangai Āzhwār refers to ThiruVénkatamudaiyān as the Lord most favored by the Mudhal Āzhwārs (the First three Āzhwārs) whom he refers by the term "செந்தமிழ் பாடுவார்" (the ones that sing pure Tamil).

செந்தமிழ் பாடுவார் தாம் வணங்கும்

தேவர் இவர்கொல் தெரிக்கமாட்டேன் (Periya Thirumozhi II -8 – 2). We will elaborate here slightly about the experience of ThiruVénkatamudaiyān by the Mudhal Āzhwārs .

Sri Poikai Pirān refers to ThiruVénkatam in 10 pasurams of his Mudhal Thiruvdhādhī.

"எழுவார் விடைகொள்வார் ஈந்துழாயானை

வழுவாவகை நினைந்து வைகல் தொழுவார்

வினைச்சுடரை நந்துவிக்கும் வேங்கடமே, வானோர்

மனச்சுடரை தூண்டும் மலை" (Mudhal Thiruvandhādhī – 26)

Āzhwār declares in this verse that ThiruVénkatam extinguishes the fire of the effects of all bad *karmās* for all three types of seekers, those who are after material wealth (*Eiswaryārthi* – ஐஸ்வர்யார்த்தி²), those who seek only Ātmā nubhavam (experience of their own selves – *kaivalyārthi* – கைவல்யார்த்தி²) as well as those who worship daily the Lord who is adorned by the sweet garland of *Tulasi* and who do not want to be separated ever from Him (*Bhagavatcharanārthi* – ப⁴க³வச்சரணார்த்தி²) The same ThiruVénkatam itself stirs up the desires of the *nitya sūris* to come down to watch the "*Saulabhya guna*" of the Lord.

வழிநின்று நின்னைத் தொழுவார் வழுவா

மொழிநின்ற மூர்த்தியரே ஆவார் - பழுதொன்றும் வாராத
வண்ணமே விண்கொடுக்கும் மண் அளந்த
சீரான் திருவேங்கடம் (Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi - 76)

Āzhwār further points out that those who seek the Lord staying steadfast in the path of devotion will certainly realize their identity as spelled out in the *Védic* truth. Furthermore, ThiruVénkatam hills of the compassionate Lord who strode the worlds will confer the eternal bliss wiping out all obstacles.

Sri BhūdatĀzhwār in his work "Irindām Thiruvandhādhi, has 9 verses glorifying Thiruvénkatam. Sri BhūdatĀzhwār says that among all the hills, ThiruVénkatam hills is what they (speaking for all Āzhwārs or all 3 of them and Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān who was also their contemporary) desired most. Āzhwār expresses this with a beautiful imagery.

நெறியார் குழல்கற்றை முன்னின்று பின்தாழ்ந்து
அறியாது இளங்கிரியென்றெண்ணி - பிரியாது
பூங்கொடிகள் வைகும் பொருபுனல் குன்றென்னும்
வேங்கடமே யாம் விரும்பும் வெற்பு (Irindām Thiruvandhādhi - 53)

"ThiruVénkatam where rivers and streams abound and where creepers spread all over including the bodies of the devotees of the Lord mistaking them for small boulders of rock due to their still physical state being in rapturous meditation on the Lord holding on to the path to the shrine ever so permanently, is the hill desired by us".

வெற்பென் றிருஞ்சோலை வேங்கடம் என்றிவ்விரண்டும்
நிற்பென்று நீமதிக்கும் நீர்மை போல் - நிற்பென்
றுளங்கோயில் உள்ளம் வைத்துள்ளினேன்
வெள்ளத்து இளம் கோயில் கைவிடேல் என்று (Irindām Thiruvandhādhi - 54).

"O' my Lord! Just as you have considered the two *divya sthalams* ThirumārirunchOlai and ThiruVénkatam as your favorite residences, you also have taken to my heart as your favorite temple. The ocean of milk has now become a "*Bālālayam*" (வெள்ளத்து இளம் கோயில்). I pray to Thee not to let that go"

Āzhwār declares loud and clear that he is the recipient of the boundless grace of the Lord due to which he had been blessed with *kainkaryam* to the Lord. It is because of that he had been able to offer the garland of verses at the lotus feet of the Lord in beautiful Tamil. For the same reason he had become a great exponent in Tamil and also a good one due to complete absorption in the experience of the Lord.

யானே தவஞ்செய்தேன் ஏழ்பிறப்பும் எப்பொழுதும்
யானே தவமுடையேன் எம்பெருமான் - யானே
இருந்தமிழ் நன்மாலை இணையடிக்கே சொன்னேன்
பெருந்தமிழன் நல்லேன் பெரிது (Irindām Thiruvandhādhi - 74)

Hearing this big claim of the Āzhwār, apparently the Lord of ThiruVénkatam wanted Āzhwār to sing a verse which will befit such a claim. The very next verse came out in the most beautiful Tamil.

பெருகுமதவேழம் மாப்பிடிக்கு முன்னின்று
இருகணிள மூங்கில் வாங்கி - அருகிருந்த
தேன்கலந்து நீட்டும் திருவேங்கடம் கண்டீர்
வான் கலந்த வண்ணன் வரை. (Irandaṁ Thiruvandhādhī – 75)

The imagery described by the Āzhwār in this verse is exquisite. Sri Thirumangai Āzhwār elaborates the meaning of this verse in his own Periya Thirumozhi (verse I-2-5). The portrayal is that of a big male elephant in rut with intellect in disorder. Even then it wants to do only whatever will be pleasing to its female companion. It picks a tender bamboo shoot with no more than two nodes and dips it in the honey from the nearby honeycomb, and with great care wrings the honey out for its darling she companion. Where does this happen? In ThiruVénkatam. Āzhwār implies indirectly that because of the Lord who is keen on offering His shield of protection to all those who seek Him, even the animals in the divine hills engage in similar acts towards their dependants.

Sri Pei Āzhwār the third among the Mudhal Āzhwārs, in his Mūndrām Thiruvandhādhī, glorifies the Lord of Thirumalai in 19 verses. We will enjoy three verses here.

உளன்கண்டாய் நன்னெஞ்சே உத்தமனென்றும்
உளன்கண்டாய் உள்ளுவாருள்ளத் - துளன்கண்டாய்
விண்ணொடுங்க கோடுயரும் வீங்கருவி வேங்கடத்தான்
மண்ணொடுங்கத் தானளந்த மண் (Mūndrām ThiruvadhAdhi- 40)

"O' my good mind ! Know that the Lord who resides in ThiruVénkatam, the hills which reach the celestial regions above and full of free flowing streams and whose feet covered all the worlds in one stride ever exists for our protection. He is the Purushōttama and is always steadfast in His resolve. He resides eternally in the hearts of all those who think of Him ready to offer His protective fold"

பண்டெல்லாம் வேங்கடம் பாற்கடல் வைகுந்தம்
கொண்டங்குறைவார்க்குக் கோயில்போல் - வண்டு
வளங்கிளரும் நீள்சோலை வண்புங் கடிகை
இளங்குமரன் தன் விண்ணகர் (Mūndrām ThiruvadhAdhi- 61)

"For the transcendental Lord who resides in Vaikuntam eternally, the ocean of Milk, ThiruVénkatam, Thirukkadikai hills full of plush groves hovering with hosts of bees and Thiruvinnagar which the youthful Lord considers as His own, all these holy places are the temples of yore (before He took residence in my heart)".

புகுமதத்தால் வாய்பூசிக் கீழ்தாழ்ந்து அருவி

உகுமதத்தால் கால்கழுவிக் கையால் - மிகுமதத்தேன்
விண்டமலர் கொண்டு விறல் வேங்கடவனையே
கண்டு வணங்கும் களிறு (Mūndrām ThiruvadhAdhi- 70)

"The elephant in Thirumalai, having rinsed its mouth in the water flowing from its tusk and washing its own feet using the water oozing like rivers from its own body (since it is in rut), worships the great Lord of ThiruVēṅkatam with its tusks offering blossomed flowers full of intoxicating honey".

It must be noted that the lamps lit by these three Mudhal Āzhwārs are the ones that the Lord of ThiruVēṅkatam enjoys most and their three Thiruvandhādhies are specially recited on the day of the *Kāṛthigai Deepam* (the festival of lights in the month of *Kāṛthigai*) each year at the sanctum of the Lord.

We will conclude this article by referring to Sri NammĀzhwār's Thiruvāimozhi . Āzhwār in his verses glorifying the twelve famous *nāmās* (names) of the Lord, beginning with "கேசவன் தமர்" (Thiruvāimozhi 2-7- 1) says that the Lord who is the primal source with the lotus like navel from which sprang Brahma, has no compeers. He is like the sweet nectar to the Āzhwār and He gave Himself to him. Āzhwār further elaborates, by saying that He is easy of access for He is Dāmōdara who allowed Himself to be tied down to a mortar stone (by Yashoda). He is like the dark rain laden clouds and is the benefactor of the eternal attendants. He is the wish yielding tree, *Karpakam*, and He stands on the great Thirumalai Hills. Azhwar's words எனக்கேதன்னைத் தந்த கற்பகம் என்னமுதம் indicate the important difference for the wish yielding tree *Karpakam* will not give itself to anyone and is not enjoyable on its own.

பற்பநாபன் உயர்வற உயரும் பெருந்திறலோன்
ஏற்பரன் என்னை யாக்கிக்கொண்டு எனக்கேதன்னைத் தந்த
கற்பகம் என்னமுதம் கார்முகில் போலும் வேங்கடநல்
வெற்பன் விசும்போர் பிரான் எந்தை தாமோதரனே, (Thiruvāimozhi 2-7-11).

In addition, Āzhwār actually assures the loving protection of Sri MahāLakshmi to all devotees of Lord Srinivāsa of the sacred hills of Thiruvēṅkatam.

மாரி மாறாத தண்ணம்மலை வேங்கடத் தண்ணலை
வாரி மாறாத பைம்பூம் பொழில் தூழ் குருகூர் நகர்
காரி மாறன் சடகோபன் சொல்லாயிரத்திப்பத்தால்
வேரி மாறாத பூமேலிருப்பான் வினைதீர்க்குமே.

(Thiruvāimozhi 4-5-11)

"The One who has the fragrant lotus as her abode (Sri MahāLakshmi) will eliminate all the effects of unrighteous actions (which cause impediment to the enjoyment of the Lord), of the devotees who recite these ten verses which glorify the Lord of Thiruvēṅkatam, the hills ever cool due to perennial rains".

In this decad, Āzhwār elaborates on the auspicious attributes (*Saulabhyam*) of the transcendental Lord Sriman *Nārāyaṇa*. In the 8th verse of this decad, Āzhwār calls the Lord as "நமக்கும் புவின்மிசை நங்கைக்கும் இன்பனை" ("One who is the joy of His devotees and Sri MahāLakshmi"). Although only

in the last verse of this decad, Āzhwār refers explicitly to Thiruvénkatamudaiyān, the whole decad can be considered to speak only about Lord Srinivāsa for these auspicious attributes of the Lord which are so endearing to all devotees and to Sri MahāLakshmi shine here best.

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