

PURAM THOZHĀ MĀNTHAR

adiyén rangathan

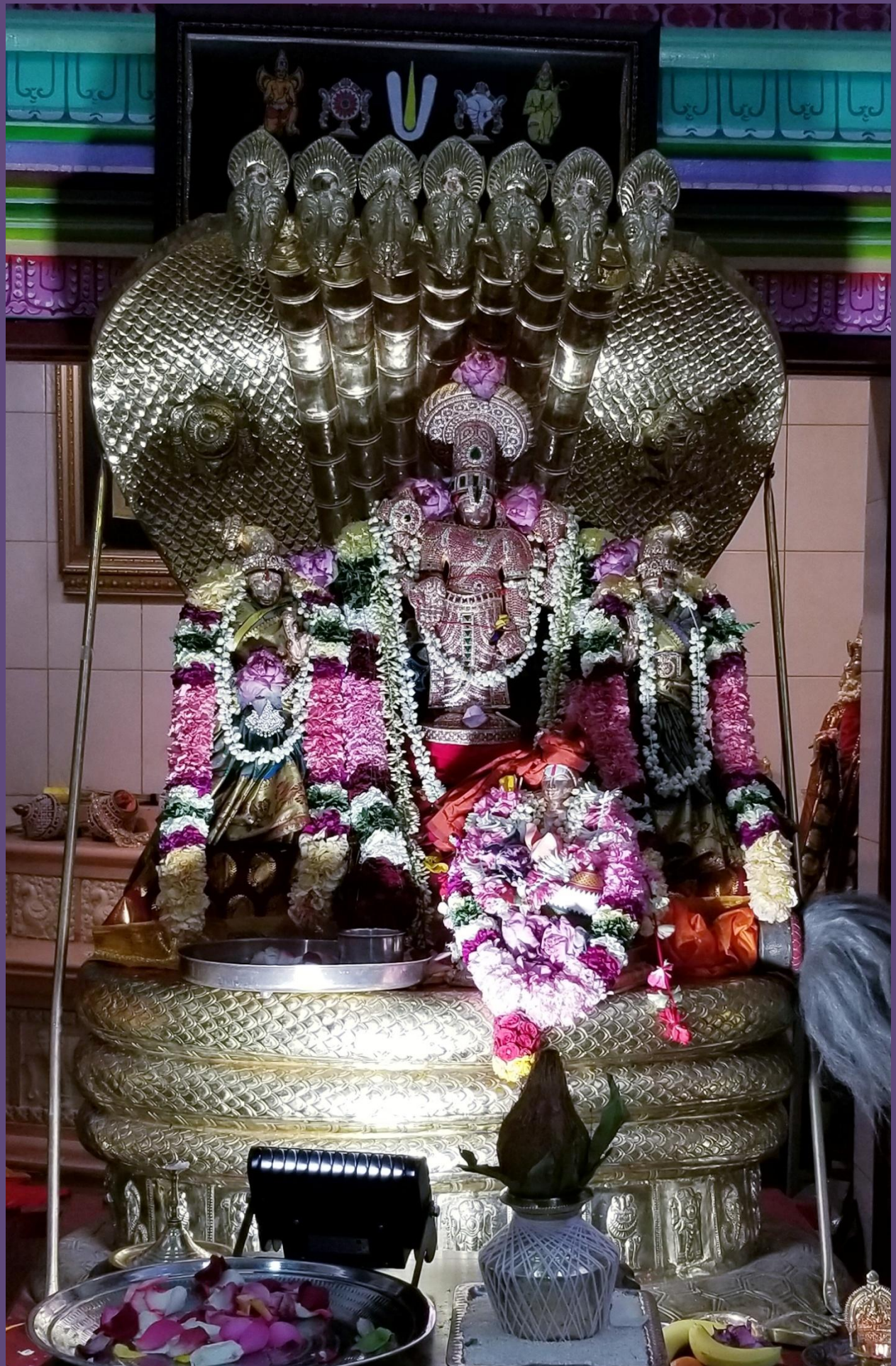
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Āzhwār Thiruvadi Thozhuthal

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Srī:

Puram Thozhā Mānthar

Puram Thozhā Mānthar (புறம் தொழா மாந்தர்)

This term is often used by Srī Vaishnava devotees from South India. We come across this phrase "புறம் தொழா மாந்தர்" (*Puram Thozhā Mānthar*) in Srī Thirumazhisai pirān's work "Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi" (verse #68) which is part of the Nālāyira Divya Prabhandham consisting of the 4000 divine verses of all the āzhwārs, the Tamil saints who hailed from the Tamil region of the Southern India.

திறம்பேன்மின் கண்டிர் திருவடிதன் நாமம்
மறந்தும் புறந்தொழாமாந்தர் - இறைஞ்சியும்
சாதுவராய் போதுமின்கள் என்றான் நமனுந்தன்
தூதுவரைக்கூவிச்செவிக்கு

"Do not ever fail to carry out this command of mine. You must salute and be gentle like *Sādhus* towards all people, who despite forgetting the Lord's name do not worship other *dēvās*" thus said *Yama* calling his close attendants and speaking into their ears".

In this verse, āzhwār actually brings home the point that only thing that offers strength is the association with the Lord. He then illustrates this by narrating an incident which is referred to in Srī Vishnu Purānam. The particular incident referred to is the conversation that *Yama déva* (the deity of justice) has with his attendants.

"ஸ்வபுருஷமபி⁴வீக்ஷ்ய பாஸஹஸ்தம் வத³தி யம கில தஸ்ய கர்ணமூலே பரிஹர மது⁴ஸுத³ந்ப்ரபந்நாந் ப்ரபு⁴ரஹமநயந்ருணாம் ந வைஷ்ணவாநாம் (3-7-14)

"Looking at his attendants, *Yama* said the following into their ears, "Leave those who have taken refuge at the feet of *Madhusūdana*. I am the Lord for everyone except *Vaishnavās*". திருவடிதன் நாமம் மறந்தும் புறந்தொழாமாந்தர் - *they are Madhusūdana prapannās*. Āzhwār stresses here the true nature of those who have taken refuge at the lotus feet of *Madhusūdana*. They will not be after other goals and therefore will not go after other *dēvās*. This will be like their second nature, meaning that they will not do it even subconsciously. This incident with the Deity of Justice (*Yama*) is referred to also by Srī Poikai pirān in Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi.

அவன் தமர் எவ்வினையராகிலும் எங்கோன்
அவன் தமரே என்றொழிவதலல்லால் - நமன் தமரால்
ஆராயப்பட்டறியார் கண்டிர் அரவணைமேல்
பேராயற்காட்டார் பேர் (Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi -55).

Before we get into the discussion of the import and the significance of this phrase (*Puram Thozhā Mānthar* - புறம் தொழா மாந்தர்), it may be relevant to review the philosophic views of the āzhwārs and how closely they reflect the evidential scriptures namely the Sruti.

Āzhwārs' Divine works and their Philosophy:

I. Védic Statements about Supreme Reality:

The following statements are considered "*pramānās*" since they are from *Sruthi* (*Védās* – *Upanishads*) which are the valid means of knowledge about the Supreme Reality.

யதோ வா இமாநி பூ⁴தாநி ஜாயந்தே | யேந ஜாதாநி ஜீவந்தி
யத்ப்ரயந்த்யபி⁴ஸம்விஸந்தி | தத்³விஜிஜ்ஞாஸஸ்வ | தத்³ப்³ரஹ்மேதி
yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante | yena jātāni jīvanti

yatprayantyabhisamviśanti | tadvijijñāsasva | tadbrahméti | (Taittirīyōpanishad – Bhrugu Valli)
"From which verily these beings are born, having been born by which they remain alive and into which on departing they enter, that be desirous of understanding, that is Brahman"

ஸதே³வ ஸோமயே த³மக்³ர ஆஸீத்
ஏகமேவ அத்³விதீயம்

sadéva sōmyé tamagra āsīt
ékaméva atdvithīyam (Chāndōgya Upanishad 6-2-1)

"O' Child, in the beginning, this (Universe with names and forms) was Existence (Being) (Sat) alone, One only without a second"

ப்³ரஹ்ம வா இதம் ஏகமேவ அக்³ர ஆஸீத் (vājasaneyam)
ஆத்மா வா இதம் ஏகமேவ அக்³ர ஆஸீத் (Aitareyam)
ātmā vā idameka evāgra āsī (Aitareya Upanishad)
"In the beginning, this was but the absolute Self alone"

ஏகோஹவை நாராயண ஆஸீத் நப்³ரஹ்மா

நேஸாநோ நேமே த்யாவா ப்ருதிவீ ந நக்ஷத்ராணி (Mahōpanishad)

There was Nārāyana alone. There were not Brahma, Shiva, Waters, Fire and Soma, Heaven and Earth, Stars.

ததை³க்ஷத ப்³ஹுஸ்யாம் ப்ரஜாயேயேதி தத்தேஜோ அஸ்ருஜத (Chāndōgya Upanishad 6-2-3)
"That Brahman thought, "I shall become many. I shall be born". That created fire".

அஜாயமானோ ப்³ஹுதா⁴ விஜாயதே

தஸ்ய தீரா: பரிஜாநந்தி யோநிம் (Purusha Sūkhtham)

"Although birthless, He takes many births. Only the enlightened ones understand His incarnations well".

பதிம் விஸ்வ'ஸ்யாத்மேஸ்வ'ரகம் ஸாஸ்வ'தகம் ஸிவ-மச்யுதம் | நாராயணம் ம'ஹாஜ்ஞேயம்
விஸ்வாத்மா'நம் பராய'ணம் (Nārāyana Sūkhtham)

"The Suzerain Lord of the Universe, the Lord of all selves, the eternal being, the all auspicious One who will not let go His devotees, the One most noteworthy, the indwelling spirit of all in the world and the highest of all means is Nārāyana"

நாராயண பரம் ப்³ரஹ்ம தத்வம் நாராயணபர:

நாராயண பரோ ஜ்யோதிராத்மா நாராயணபர: (Taittirīya- Maha Nārāyanōpanishad)

"Nārāyana alone is the supreme Brahman, Nārāyana alone is the ultimate Reality, Nārāyana alone is the supreme light. Nārāyana alone is the supreme Self (Paramātmā)"

யச்ச கிஞ்சித் ஜக³த்யஸ்மிந் த்³ருஸ்யதே ஸ்ருயதே அபிவா

அந்தர் ப³ஹிஸ்ச தத் ஸர்வம் வ்யாப்ய நாராயண: ஸ்தி²த: (Taittirīya Nārāyana Sūkhtham 11)

"Nārāyana pervades both inside and outside of everything whatever may be, whether seen or heard in this universe"

விஸ்வம் பி³ப⁴ர்த்தி பு⁴வநஸ்ய நாபி⁴ (Taittirīya- Maha Narayanopanishad)

"Remaining as the axle as it were of the wheel of the world, He supports everything"

யோப்³ரஹ்மாணாம் வித³தா⁴தி பூர்வம்

யோ வை வேதா³ம்ஸ்ச ப்ரஹிணோதி தஸ்மை

தம் ஹ தே³வம் ஆத்மபு³த்³தி⁴ ப்ரஸாத³ம்

முமுகூஷர் வை ஸரணமஹம் ப்ரபத்³யே

(Śvetāsvatara Upanishad 6-18)

"He who created Brahma in the beginning and who indeed delivered Védās to him, in the very Deity (Lord) who is the revealer of knowledge regarding the Self, I being very desirous of liberation seek refuge"

It may be useful to recollect here the **etymological derivation of the word "Nārāyana"**.

ஆபோ நாரா இதி ப்ரோக்த: ஆபோ வை நர ஸூநவ:

தா யத்³ஸ்யாயநம் பூர்வம் தேந நாராயண: ஸ்ம்ருத:

"Water is called Nāra. It originated from Nara, the Lord. That water became His first abode. Therefore He is known as Nārāyanā" (Manusmṛithi 1-10)

நாரஸப்³தே³ந ஜீவாநாம் ஸமூஹபரோச்யதே பு³தை⁴:

க³திராலம்ப³நம் தஸ்ய தேந நாராயண: ஸ்ம்ருத:

"Nāra" refers to the entire host of Jīvās. For them, He is both the goal and the means, hence He is called "Nārāyāna".

"நாராணாம் அயநம் ய: ஸ: "One who is the ultimate destiny for all Nāra samūhās (the host of jīvās)"

"நாரா: அயநம் யஸ்ய ஸ: " " One for whom the Nāra samūhās form the abode"

In *Védārtha Sangraha* (VS), Srī Rāmanuja eloquently presents his vision of the true philosophic tenets of the *Védās*. Srī Rāmānuja (also known as *Emperumānār*) is said to have delivered VS as an extemporaneous lecture to his followers in the holy *Thirumalai* hills. In it, he poses an objection as to how to reconcile text in *Sruthi* that attributes *paratvam* (ultimate Reality) to Śiva (*śvetāsvatara upanishad 4-18*) to the other texts which declare that Nārāyana is the Supreme Brahman (*Taittirīya- Maha Nārāyanōpanishad*).

Srī Rāmānuja begins the reply by saying that "**this is a trivial issue**". Then he goes on to say "*The truth may be summed up in these words. The entire body of the Védās, amplified by the words of the best of the knowers of the Védās and the canons of interpretation, declares that Hari is the cause of the origin etc. of this universe. To explain: On the authority of the text 'That from which all these creatures are born, that in which they all subsist and that into which they all enter, enquire into that and that is **Brahman** (Taittirīyōpanishad – Bhrugu Valli 3-2), we make out that cause of the creation etc. of the world is Brahman. **We have to study it only in the sections which deal with the subject-matter of creation and dissolution.** The text 'Being only, without a second (Chāndōgya Upanishad 6-2-1) declares that the ultimate cause, described therein as '**Being**' is Brahman by virtue of its being the material cause, efficient cause and the inner controller of the world. The same entity is spoken of in another section and is designated 'Brahman', as 'All this was Brahman, Brahman only, in the beginning (Brhadāranyaka upanishad.3-4-10). By this we are made to understand that the principle described as '**sat**' is Brahman. The same truth is conveyed in another branch of the text, 'All this was **ātman** only in the beginning and nothing else was there (Ai. 1)'. This brings out that ātman itself was described in the other two sections as 'sat' and 'Brahman'. Similarly in another text it is said, "Only **Nārāyana** existed, neither Brahma, nor Isana, nor the sky and earth (Mahopanishad, 1-1)". The culminating inference is that Nārāyana himself has been described in the other sections by the terms 'sat', 'Brahman' and 'ātman' all of which are applied to the ultimate cause" (paragraph 134 from the translation of *Védārtha Sangarha* by Sri S.S.Raghavaschar published by Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore, 1978). Then āchārya goes on to indicate "**the connectedness of these passages of Sruthi, to the subsequent hymn to Purusha.***

*That hymn has as its theme **the supreme Purusha**. The supreme Purusha is revealed to be Nārāyana by the text, 'The goddess Hrī and the goddess Lakshmī are the two consorts (**Purusha Sūkhtham 24**).*

II. Philosophy of Visishta-advaitam (*Emperumānār Darsanam*):

The philosophy propounded by Srī Śāṅkara and others was that the Reality was *Brahman* only, the individual self *jivā* is the same as *Brahman* in nature and the world of plurality is illusory and not real. They formed their conclusion based only on the *upanishadic* passages that supported the non-dualism (*abhéda*, non-difference) view. In truth however, the *upanishads* contain three types of texts defining the relationship of the Supreme Reality, to the individual selves and the world of matter. One set (*bhéda Sruti*) declares differences in the nature of the *jagat* (the world of non-sentient matter *acit*), which is the object of experience, the individual self *cit* which is sentient who experiences the world and the *Brahman*, the absolute ruling principle. A second set of passages declares unity (*abhéda Sruti*) between *Brahman* and the world of the sentients and the non-sentients. Also there are the third type of passages which reconcile the former two.

These reconciliatory passages are termed the *ghataka sruti*. Srī Rāmānuja takes the position that all the *upanishadic* passages have to be accepted and seemingly conflicting views resolved appropriately. His talents and mastery as a philosopher are exquisitely displayed in his philosophic works, establishing his vision (*darsanam*). The latter was known as "**Savishésha – advaitam**" to distinguish the same from "*Nirvishésha advaitam*" propounded by Śāṅkarāchārya and others. The term "*Nirvishésha*" implied that the supreme reality "*Brahman*" had no attributes like qualities, form and manifestations. Srī Rāmānuja refuted this and established that *Brahman*

is *Sa-vishésha* meaning, possesses attributes, including all auspicious qualities (*gunās*), divine form (*vigraha*) and manifestations (*vibhūti*) consisting of the phenomenal world (*līlā vibhūti*) and the eternal realm (*nitya vibhūti*). His *darsanam* actually came to be called "*Emperumānār darsanam*". It also came to be known as *visishta-advaitam* (qualified non-dualism) in later years. The term "*visishta*" means possessing "*Visésha*" or attributes. In fact this philosophy is very antiquated. Srī Rāmānuja in VS refers to ancient teachers of theistic tradition, including *Bōdhāyana*, *Tanka*, *Dramida*, *Guhadéva*, *Kapardi*, and *Bhāruci* (VS-p130).

III. The Philosophic Truths Revealed by the Divine works of the Āzhwārs:

Srī Rāmānuja was inspired by the works of the Āzhwārs in drawing his own vision. These philosophic truths were also revealed clearly in the *divya sūkties* of the *āzhwārs*, also known as the *Aruliccheyal* since these poetic verses were the result of the grace of the Lord as well as the grace of the āzhwārs. Āzhwārs actually were not all contemporaries neither they belonged to the same strata of the society. But their vision was all alike since they were the recipients of the Lord's grace. They literally spoke with "**one voice**".

Sri Thiruvarangaththu Amudanār, in *Rāmānuja nūtrandhādhi* (verse 8), says the following:

வருத்தும் புறவிருள் மாற்ற எம் பொய்கைப்பிரான் மறையின்
குருத்தின் பொருளையும் செந்தமிழ் தன்னையும் கூட்டி ஒன்றத்
திரித்தன்று எரித்த திருவிளக்கைத் தன் திருவுள்ளத்தே
இருத்தும் பரமன் இராமானுசன் எம் இறையவனே

Varutthum puravirul mātra em poikaipirān maraiyin
Kuruththin porulaiyum chenthamizh thannaiyum kūtti onṛath
Tiritthandru erittha thiruvilakkaith than thiruvullaththé
Iruththum paraman irāmānuchan em iraiyavané

(Irāmanusa nūtrndhādhi -8)

It says that *Srī Poikai Pirān* lit a lamp with two திரிis (two threads). One is (மறையின் குருத்தின் பொருளையும்) the meaning of the *Védāntam* namely *Upanishads* and beautiful chaste *Tamizh* (செந்தமிழ் தன்னையும்). So the lamp will burn better and give more intense light. This of course is applicable to all of the āzhwārs' *pāsurams*.

The words of Swāmi Védānta Déska in his "Srī Guruparamparāsāram" clearly state that the philosophic truths hidden in the *Védās* (மறைநிலங்கள் – Tamil word "*marai*" is applied to *Védās* since their meanings are hidden) are made clear by the *Aruliccheyal* verses of the āzhwārs.

என்றிவர்கள் மகிழ்ந்து பாடும்
செய்ய தமிழ்மாலைகள் நாம்தெளிய வோதித்
தெளியாத மறைநிலங்கள் தெளிகின்றோமே."

He refers to them as "God's chosen preceptors" (மாலுகந்த ஆசிரியர் – *māluganda āsiriya*). This is appropriate since *their knowledge of the divine is not a result of intellectual exercise but a clear apprehension of the Lord*. By their own words, they were graced by the Lord to have such

a clear knowledge without any clouds of doubts or confusion. மயர்வற மதிநலம் அருளினை (mayarvara madhinalam arulinan) declares Sri Nammāzhwār in the opening verse of his famous *Thiruvāimozhi*. (Thiruvāimozhi 1-1-1).

1: Knowledge in the form of Supreme love of the divine (மதிநலம்):

It may be of interest to note here that Srī Rāmānuja in his VS relates true knowledge (clear apprehension of the Supreme) to supreme love of the divine. Āchārya concludes "*parabhakthirūpānnaméva védanam tatvatō bhagavat prāpti sādhanam*". Āchārya's words from VS are as follows:

"It has already been elucidated that it is only this service of the form of *bhakti* that is spoken of as knowledge in the texts, *Brahmavidāpnoti param* - One-who knows Brahman attains the Highest" (Taittiriya Upanishad II-1). *Taméva vidvānamruta iha bhavati* - He who knows him becomes immortal here (Purusha Sūktham -20) and *tat paramam brahma véda brahmaiva bhavati* - He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman (Mundaka Upanishad III-ii-9). In the other text qualifying this knowledge, யமேவைஷ வ்ருணுதே தேந லப்யஸ்தஸ்யைஷ ஆத்மா விவ்ருணுதே தநூம் ஸ்வாம் - *yamévaisha vrunuté téna labhyastasyaisha ātmā vivrunuté tanūm svām* - This ātman is attained by one, whom he chooses - the clause, "whom he chooses" conveys the idea of the seeker becoming an object of choice to the Bhagavān. He comes to be chosen, who is the object of greatest love. He becomes the object of greatest love to the Lord, in whom, has arisen supreme love for the Lord. The Bhagavān says, **"I am ineffably dear to the man of knowledge and he is also dear to me (Gita 7-17)** Therefore in reality, only knowledge that is of the nature of supreme *bhakti* is the means for attaining the Bhagavan." (paragraph 251 page 191 from the translation of VS by Sri S.S.Raghavaschar published by Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore, 1978)

The word, "மதிநலம்" refers to this "*knowledge in the form of Supreme love of the divine*". "பக்தியின் உருவத்தை அடைந்த ஞானத்தைத் தந்தான்" as described by Srī Parāśara Bhattar. That is why the works of the Āzhwārs are also known as "*Aruliccheyal*" (அருளிச்செயல்) meaning, "the works arising out of the Divine grace". Srī Nammāzhwār states that the Lord sang His own glory making āzhwār like an instrument in his hands. "என்னைத் தன்னாக்கி என்னால் தன்னை இன் தமிழ் பாடிய ஈசனை" (Thiruvaimozhi 7-9-1) "தன்சொல்லால்தான் தன்னைக் கீர்த்தித்தமாயன்" (Thiruvaimozhi 7-9-2). Similarly Srī Thirumazhisai Pirān states "கவிக்கு நிறை பொருளாய் நின்றானை நெற்பட்டேன்" (that he found the proper and apt material for his poetry namely the Lord Himself who is full. "விதையாக நற்றமிழை வித்தியென்னுள்ளத்தை நீ விளைத்தாய் கற்றமொழியாகிக் கலந்து (Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi -81) "meaning that the Lord himself brought forth this garland of verses from his heart".

The famous Védic hymn *Purusha Sūktam* which glorifies the cosmic Person, states that He is "அஜாயமாந: ப³ஹுதா⁴விஜாயாதே" (ajāyamāno bahudhā vijāyaté) meaning "unborn, takes

many births". Sri Nammāzhwār literally states the same "பிறப்பில் பல்பிறவிப் பெருமான்" (pirappil palpiravip perumān) (Thiruvāimozhi- 2-9-5). The commentaries of the āchāryās make it clear that He does not take birth due to the effect of *karma* like all *jīvas*. Therefore He is அஜாயமாந்: - பிறப்பில் (pirappil) - birthless. But He takes birth out of His compassion (*Kārunyam*) for the welfare of all beings.

Āzhwārs experienced the all pervasive Supreme reality through all His manifestations, through the entire creation. The *jagat* containing the sentient and the non-sentients form His body and He is their inner soul and Suzerain ruler. The *śarīra śarīrī bhāva* (the body-soul relationship) is emphasized by Srī Nammāzhwār in the very first decad of his famous *Thiruvāimozhi* of one thousand verses, உடல்மிசை உயிரெனக் கரந்தெங்கும் பரந்துளன் (Thiruvāimozhi 1-1-7) ("He is hidden but all pervasive like the life in the body"). This is literal translation of the *Sruthi*,

யச்ச கிஞ்சித் ஜக³த்ஸர்வம் த்³ருஸ்யதே ஸ்ருயதே அபிவா
அந்தர் ப³ஹிஸ்ச தத் ஸர்வம் வ்யாப்ய நாராயண: ஸ்தி²த: (Taittirīya Nārāyana Sūkhtham 11)
"Nārāyana pervades both inside and outside of everything whatever may be, whether seen or heard in this universe" (Taittirīya Nārāyana Sūkhtham 11).

Srī Nammāzhwār clearly distinguishes Paramātmā from the individual *jīvas* the sentient entities as well as the insentient entities found in the cosmos.

மனன் அகம் மலம் அற * மலர் மிசை எழு தரும் *
மனன் உணர்வு அளவிலன் * பொறி உணர்வு அவை இலன் **
இனன் உணர் முழு நலம் * எதிர் நிகழ் கழிவினும் *
இனன் இலன் எனன் உயிர் * மிகு நரை இலனே

(Thiruvāimozhi 1-1-2)

"He is not of the measure of the blossoming knowledge of one's self arising in a controlled faultless pure mind focussed in meditation. He is not also of the nature of the insentient materials known through the sensory organs. At all times, future, present or past, there is none equal or superior to Him".

மனன் உணர்வு அளவிலன் - It is not possible to know the all pervading Supreme Paramātmā like knowing the atomic individual "self".

தன்னுளேதிரைத்தெழும் தரங்கவெண்தடங்கடல்
தன்னுளேதிரைத்தெழுந்து அடங்குகின்றதன்மைபோல்
நின்னுளேபிறந்திறந்து நிற்பவும்திரிபவும்
நின்னுளேயடங்குகின்றநீர்மைநின்கண்நின்றதே

(Thirucchandaviruttam -10)

"Similar to the nature of the large ocean containing within itself the whiteness and the waves which surge from and settles into itself, all the non-moving and the moving entities and their worlds which rise and die, rise from Thee and ultimately rest in Thee alone."

Srī Thirumazhisai Pirān, by giving the example of the ocean proves that the material cause of the universe is also the Lord. Just as the waves of the ocean and their rise and fall are innate to the ocean, all 'the sentient' and 'the insentient' entities which form the body of the Lord and the activities of creation and destruction are contained in the Lord's nature. The still ocean gives rise to surges of large white waves due to the sea winds. The whiteness does not move whereas the waves do. Similarly the Lord gives rise to both the non-moving insentient matter and the moving sentient jeevas by His will or sankalpa and absorbs them back to Himself at the time of dissolution.

Brahman with the insentient matter and the sentient jīvās without names and forms is the material cause and the same Brahman is the efficient cause when by His will the insentient matter and the sentient jīvās take the names and forms.

நிற்பவம்திரிபவம் - the non-moving insentient matter and the moving sentient jīvās.
ஸதே³வ ஸோமயே த³மக்³ர ஆஸீத் (Chāndōgya Upanishad 6-2-1)

"In the beginning this was One only without a second " must be interpreted to mean that the individual souls existed in a subtle state non-distinguishable from Brahman since the jīvās are eternal.

The Upanishad (Taittiriya Upanishad 2-1-1), describes Brahman as "सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म " "ஸத்யம் ஜ்ஞாநமநந்தம் ப்³ரஹ்ம" (satyaṁ jñānam anantaṁ brahma) meaning that Brahman is Eternally existent (absolute reality), Infinite Knowledge (Omniscience), is not limited by space, time or entity, being all pervading, everlasting, not limited by any entity as there is nothing but Brahman everywhere. Srī Thirumangai āzhwār addresses archā mūrthy (form) enshrined in Thirumanimāda Koil with the words that literally translate the Upanishadic statement.

நந்தா விளக்கே! அளத்தற்கு அரியாய் ! (Periya Thirumozhi 3-8-1). நந்தா விளக்கு means "everlasting lamp" meaning "form of eternally shining self luminous infinite knowledge" அளத்தற்கு அரியாய் meaning "Immeasurable and unlimited".

ஆறுசடைக்கரந்தான் அண்டர்கோன் தன்னோடும்
கூறுடையனென்பதுவும் கொள்கைத்தே - வேறொருவர்
இல்லாமை நின்றானை எம்மானை- எப்பொருட்கும்
சொல்லானைச் சொன்னேன் தொகுத்து

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhī – 4)

"To say that one who hid the river in his hair locks is equal to the transcendental Lord of all is not acceptable for He stands alone with no compeers for He is the inner meaning of all the words and things denoted by them. Thus I have described my Lord in short".

த்³ரவீ⁴தஸ்ததா³ த்⁴ர்மோ ஹரிப⁴க்தயா மஹாமுனே --- ப்³ஹுந் முமோச ததா³ ஹர:
"When Lord Nārāyaṇā measured the earth, out of devotion for the Lord, Dharma became a flowing stream. Brahma took that water and washed the Lord's feet. Śiva took that holy water and placed it in between his hair locks and he would not let it out for many thousands of years" (Brahma describes thus in Ēswara Samhita).

அஹம் க்ருத்ஸ்நஸ்ய ஜக³த்: ப்ரப⁴வ: ப்ரளயஸ் ததா²

अहं कृत्स्नस्य जगतः प्रभवः प्रलयस्तथा

aham kṛtsnasya jagataḥ prabhavaḥ pralayastathā

"I am the origin and end of all these worlds"

(Gīta 7-6)

மத்த பரதரம் நாந்யத் கிஞ்சித்³ஸ்தி த⁴நஞ்சய

मयि सर्वमिदं प्रोतं सूत्रे मणिगणा इव।

mattah parataram nānyatkiñcidasti dhanañjaya

mayi sarvamidaṁ prōtaṁ sūtrē maṇigaṇā iva

"There is nothing higher than Myself, O Arjuna. All this is strung on Me, as rows of gems on a thread"

(Gīta 7 -7)

"கரந்த சிலிடன்தொறும் இடம்திகழ் பொருள்தொறும்

கரந்தெங்கும் பரந்துள்ள 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 sentients and the insentients".

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 Gītā and of those in particular refer to the *Charamaslōkam*, the last concluding verse of Srimad Bhagavat Gītā namely

ஸர்வ த⁴ர்மாந் பரித்யஜ்ய மாமேகம் ஸரணம் வ்ரஜ

அஹம் த்வா ஸர்வ பாபேப்⁴யோ மோக்ஷயிஷ்யாமி மாஸூச:

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

(Gīta 18-66)

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" (*Taittiriya Upanishad – Ānandavalli*)" where mind and words cannot reach" unfathomable to even Brahmā and other *dēvās*.

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. Similar substance is noted in Srī Nammāzhwār's verses, reflecting the statement from Upanishad, as noted below.

நாயமாத்மா ப்ரவசநேந லப்⁴யோ
ந மேத⁴யா ந ப⁴ஹுநா ஸ்ருதேந
யமேவைஷ வ்ருணுதே தேந லப்⁴யஸ்
தஸ்யைஷ ஆத்மா விவ்ருணுதே தநாம் ஸ்வாம்

(Kathopanishad 1-2-23)

"This *Self* (Paramātmā) cannot be known through much study, nor through the intellect, nor through much hearing. It can be known through the Self (Paramātmā) alone which the aspirant prays to; To him this Self (Paramātmā) reveals His resplendent form (true nature)".

யாரும் ஓர் நிலைமையன் என அறிவு அரிய எம் பெருமான்
யாரும் ஓர் நிலைமையன் என அறிவு எளிய எம் பெருமான்
பேரும் ஓர் ஆயிரம் பிற பல உடைய எம் பெருமான்
பேரும் ஓர் உருவமும் உளது இல்லை இலது இல்லை பிணக்கே

(Thiruvāimozhi 1-3-4)

"The Lord remains unreachable and unknowable to all who try to understand Him by their own intellectual effort however smart they may be. He remains nameless and formless to them. However, for those devotees even when not intellectually advanced, who seek Him with love He becomes easily accessible and known by His thousand holy names and their defining divine forms. Thus there is no need for debate in this matter."

ந ஸந்த்⁴ருஸேதிஷ்ட²தி ரூபமஸ்ய
ந சக்ஷுஷா பஸ்யதி கஸ்சநைநம்
ஹ்ருதா³ மநீஷா மநஸாபி⁴க்ஷுப்தோ
ய ஏநம் விது³ரம்ருதாஸ்தே ப⁴வந்தி

(Taittiriya Upanishad Na – 1-10)

"This resplendent form of Paramātmā cannot be known. It cannot be seen by the eyes. It can only be contemplated by unfettered mind full of devotion. Those who know Him become free."

Srī Thirumazhisai Pirān expressing the same sentiment prays for the Lord to bestow him with supreme devotion.

பிறப்பினோடுபேரிடர்ச் சுழிக்கணின்று நீங்கும்து
இறப்பவைத்தஞானநீசரைக் கரைக்கொடேற்றுமா
பெறற்கரியநின்னபாத பத்தியான பாசனம்
பெறற்கரியமாயனெயெனக்குநல்கவேண்டுமே

(Thirucchanda virtuttam -100)

"O' Wondrous Lord, Who art difficult to attain (without Thine unconditional grace). Please grace me with the wealth of the most supreme devotion towards Thy holy feet, the means declared in the Védānta for bringing ashore the unenlightened followers of the Védās, who have concealed their true import - one that helps to liberate from the endless cycle of *samsāra* with its triple miseries. "

பெற்கரியநின்னபாத பத்தியான பாசனம்

"The wealth of the most supreme devotion (*Paramabhakti*) towards Thy holy feet which is difficult to obtain"

Srī Thirumangai āzhwār in his Thirunedunthāndakam describes beautifully the clear knowledge as revealed to him by the Lord defining the (*tattva-traya*) (three categories of reality), the inanimate insentient matter (*acit*), the living sentient beings (*cit*) and *Īśwara* (the Supreme Lord and controller). All philosophical systems must explain these three entities.

மின்னுருவாய் முன்னுருவில் வேதம் நான்காய் *
விளக்கொளியாய் முளைத்தெழுந்த திங்கள் தானாய் *
பின்னுருவாய் முன்னுருவில் பிணி மூப்பு இல்லாப் *
பிறப்பிலியாய் இறப்பதற்கே எண்ணாது ** எண்ணும்
பொன்னுருவாய் மணி உருவில் பூதம் ஐந்தாய்ப் *
புனல் உருவாய் அனல் உருவில் திகழும் சோதி *
தன்னுருவாய் என்னுருவில் நின்ற எந்தை *
தளிர் புரையும் திருவடி என் தலை மேலவே

(Thirunedunthāndakam -1)

" My Lord showed the transient nature like that of the lightning in all visible insentient forms, bestowed the four Vēdās, and the knowledge derived from them, gave me the knowledge of the *ātma* (*self*) arising in the mind shining like the moon, gave me the knowledge of the difference in the inherent nature of the *ātma* and the insentient matter (*prakruthi*), indicating the lack of faults such as distress, aging, and birth in the *ātma vastu*, withholding and not wishing to provide me with *Kaivalyam* ("aloneness- experience of one's self alone) which is like death due to lack of experience of the Lord, revealed to me His real form, unimaginable and unattainable by one's own efforts, pleasing and inviting like gold, made of five non material powers (made of pure *satva* (*suddhasatvam*), easily accessible like water to the devotees, unapproachable like fire to the enemies, being the light behind all shining things, has resided in my body. His blossoming tender divine feet became the adornment for my head"

முன்னுருவில் மின்னுருவாய் – refers to impermanent nature like the lightning in all visible inanimate things (*prakruthi*).

பின்னுருவாய் – different from *prakruthi* - முன்னுருவில் பிணி மூப்பு இல்லாப் * பிறப்பிலியாய் – refers to "ātma" with the nature of knowledge, intrinsically free of flaws such as distress, aging and birth all of which arise due to association with *prakruthi*
பொன்னுருவாய் - *Paramātmā svarūpam* (The Lord)

2: Saulabhya Guna (Easy Accessible Nature) of the Supreme:

All of the āzhwārs 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**).

In one of the verses of Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi, Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān, states that the Lord had taken abode in the holy shrines in the lying posture on the serpent-bed in Thirukkudanthai,

Thiruvekhā, Thiruvevvul, Thiruvaramam, 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).

All of the āzhwārs had Supreme Love of the Divine attracted by His many (kalyāna gunās) auspicious attributes. Srī Nāmmāzhwār falling in love with the enchating form of the Lord reclining and reposing on His serpent bed in the *divya désam* of Thirukkudanthai, addresses the Lord as "O' Insatiable Nectar" indicating to Him that his own physical body an insentient part of him has simply melted away and running like water attracted by the overwhelming beauty of His Form.

ஆரா அமுதே! அடியேன் உடலம் நிற்பால் அன்பாயே
நீராய் அலைந்து கரைய உருக்குகின்ற நெடுமாலே

(Tiruvāimozhi 5-8-1)

Āzhwār's supreme love is evident from his
"பாலாழி நீ கிடக்கும் பண்பை யாம் கேட்டேயும்
காலாமும் நெஞ்சழியும் கண்கழலும் "

(Periya Thiruvandhādhi - 34).

"Merely hearing about Your beauty, as you lie reclined on the ocean of milk, *we* become weak in our legs, begin to lose our hearts with eyes bedimmed (with tears)" The usage of the plural "*we* - யாம்" is of interest here and is probably given by the Āzhwār to indicate that this is shared by all the other *āzhwārs* also since all of them speak with one voice as well.

In another verse we see Āzhwār describing his enjoyment of the Lord in all His glorious forms.

புவையும் காயாவும் நீலமும் பூக்கின்ற
காவி மலர் என்றும் காண்தோறும் - பாவியேன்
மெல்லாவி மெய்மிகவே பூரிக்கும் அவ்வவை
எல்லாம் பிரானுருவே என்று

(Periya Thiruvandhādhi - 73).

"Whenever the *Pūvai* flower, the *Kāyām* flower, the blue water lily and the fresh blossoms of *Senkazhunīr* flowers, were sighted, at that time, the soft mind and the body of this lowly self of mine, thinking that all of them are in fact my Lord's divine form, become very elated."

Srī Nāmmāzhwār clearly points out the truly transcendental Lord whose nature is very hard to comprehend, is in fact actually easily accessible - உணரத் தனக்கெளியர் எவ்வளவர் அவ்வளவரானால் எனக்கெளியன் எம்பெருமான் இங்கு – (Periya Thiruvandhādhi - 29).

He also categorically states that in fact that there is no other that could rescue us from this terrible endless and eternal cycles of this mundane life, "*samsāra*", -தொல்லைமா வெந்நரகில் சேராமல் காப்பதற்கு இல்லை காண் மற்றோர் இறை - (Periya Thiruvandhādhi - 60). Āzhwār seeks from the Lord, not liberation, "*Mōksham*" but merely not to ever forget His divine feet - மேலால் பிறப்பின்மை பெற்றடிக்கீழ்க் குற்றேவல் அன்று மறப்பின்மை யான்வேண்டும் மாடு - (Periya Thiruvandhādhi - 58). This prayer is similar to Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān's, where the āzhwār asks the Lord to will so that his wandering mind without any distraction will always think of His divine lotus feet "பரந்தசிந்தை யொன்றிநின்று நின்னபாதபங்கயம் நிரந்தரம் நினைப்பதாக நீ நினைக்கவேண்டுமே" – (Thirucchanda Viruttam – 101).

Srī Periāzhwar touched by the saulabhyam of the Lord of Thiruvēṅkatam expresses this clearly in the last Senniyōngu pathikam (decad) of his Thirumozhi,
 பனிக் கடலில் பள்ளிகோளை* பழக விட்டு* ஓடி வந்து என்
 மனக் கடலில் வாழ வல்ல* மாய மணாள நம்பீ
 தனிக் கடலே! தனிச்சுடரே! தனியுலகே என்றென்று*
 உனக்கிடமாயிருக்க* என்னை உனக்கு உரித்தாக்கினையே.

"O' Wondrous Lord, the consort of Srī MahāLakshnmī, full of all auspicious gunās! How did you hasten to live in my mental sea as your residence forgetting to lie down and rest on the cool bed of the ocean of milk. The ocean of milk, the Sun, as well as the eternal realm are your special places of residence. Giving them all up how did you make me your servant?"

Srī Thirumangai āzhwār was the youngest and the last of all the āzhwārs. He had a very special attachment to the *archa* forms of the Lord. Several *divya dēsams* would not have been included among the 108 famous holy shrines of the Lord but for the *mangalāshāsanam* (auspicious benediction) by him in his *prabhandhams*. Here is a verse from his famous Thirunedunthāṇḍakam.

நீரகத்தாய்! நெடுவரையின் உச்சி மேலாய்! *
 நிலாத்திங்கள் துண்டத்தாய்! நிறைந்த கச்சி
 ஊரகத்தாய் * ஒண்துறை நீர் வெஃகா உள்ளாய்! *
 உள்ளுவார் உள்ளத்தாய்! ** உலகம் ஏத்தும்
 காரகத்தாய்! கார்வானத்துள்ளாய்! கள்வா! *
 காமரு பூங்காவிரியின் தென்பால் மன்னு
 பேரகத்தாய்! * பேராது என் நெஞ்சின் உள்ளாய்! *
 பெருமான்! உன் திருவடியே பேணினேனே

(Thirunedunthāṇḍakam -8)

"You are enshrined in Thirunīrakam. You stand on top of the high peak of Thirumalai. You are in divyadēsam of Thiru Nilātthingaḷ Thundam. You are in Thiru ūrakam in Thirukkacchi full of holy shrines overflowing with your *kalyana gunās*. You are lying in Thiruvekhā on the banks of a beautiful pond. You are in the hearts of those who think of you as their Lord. You stand in the divya dēsam Thiukkārakam, worshipped by the wholeworld. You live in the divya dēsam of

Thirukkārvānam hiding your divine auspicious from from your devotees like a thief ! You reside in the divya désam of Thiruppér on the southern banks of the beautiful Kāvéri river. Your form is always in my sight never leaving my heart. You are the Lord of many holy shrines. Adiyén beseech only your divine feet. "

3: Defining Feature of the *jīva* - "self":

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 *jīva* 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 (*jīva*) arose among the disciples of Srī Rāmānuja, the Āchārya who was perfectly capable of dispelling their ignorance, (about the defining feature of the *jīva* 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).

4: Supreme Reality – *Sriyapatitvam* and *Purushakāratvam* of *Srī*:

The supreme reality is no other than the cosmic Person Srīman Nārāyana, with all auspicious attributes (*kalyāna gunās*) with no flaws, ("அமலனாதிபிரான்" "*Amalanādhpirān*" – "The faultless ancient Lord" the beginning of the verse of the work of the same name by Srī Thiruppānāzhwār) who is eternally associated with *Srī Mahālakshmī*. ஹ்ரீஸ்ரீ தே லக்ஷ்மீஸ்ரீ பத்நயௌ (*hrīścha té lakshmīścha patnyau*) (*Purusha Sūktham* 2-6). "*For Thee, Bhū Dévi and Srī Dévi are two consorts*" The second ஈ (conjunction) indicates indirectly *Nīlā Dévi*. In *Sūktham* we find Srī described as the Sovereign of all the souls (ஈஸ்வரீக்ம் ஸர்வபூ⁴தாநாம் *Īśvarīgum sarvabhūtānām*). In Vishnu Purāna, the most authoritative among all the Purānās, Srī is described as the divine mother who is eternal (நித்ய), inseparable from the Lord (அநபாயினி) and all pervasive (ஸர்வக்³த:). Āzhwārs also indicate these clearly in their verses.

The first three āzhwārs express this in their verses. In Mudal Thiruvandhādhi, Srī Poikai Pirān refers to *Srīyapatitvam* many a time, and declares, that the inner consciousness is innately aware of the consort of Lakshmī.

பெயரும் கருங் கடலே நோக்கும் ஆறு ஒண் பூ
உயரும் கதிரவனே நோக்கும் உயிரும்
தருமனையே நோக்கும் ஒண் தாமரையாள் கேள்வன்
ஒருவனையே நோக்கும் உணர்வு

(Mudal Thiruvandhādhi – 67)

"The river naturally flows towards the ocean with the surging waves. The beautiful lotus blossoms upon facing the rising sun in the sky. The life force looks for the deity of death at the end of life. Similarly the inner consciousness is naturally aware of the consort of Lakshmī residing in the lotus"

Srī Bhūdat Āzhwār also refers to "Srī" in many verses in Irandām Thiruvandhādhi and declares that the grace of Srī brings the vision of the golden Form of the Lord even before the Lord's own grace.

காணக் கழிகாதல் கைமிக்குக் காட்டினால்
நாணப் படுமென்றால் நாணுமே - பேணிக்
கருமாலைப் போன்மேனி காட்டாமுன் காட்டும்
திருமாலை நங்கள் திரு

(Irandām Thiruvandhādhi –56)

Sri Pei Azhwar however begins his Mūndrām Thiruvandhādhi with a declaration at the very outset, "திருக்கண்டேன் பொன்மேனி கண்டேன்"

He first saw "Thiru" which stands for "Srī" in Tamil and then only he mentions that he saw the golden Form of the Lord. Sri Pei āzhwār confirms Sri Bhudat āzhwār's assertion stated above. Srī Pei āzhwār ends his Mūndrām Thiruvandhādhi indicating the easy accessibility of Srī Lakshmī's grace for us,

சார்வு நமக்கென்றும் சக்கரத்தான் தண்டுழாய்த்
தார் வாழ் வரைமார்பன் தான்முயங்கும்- காரார்ந்த
வானமரு மின்னிமைக்கும் வண் தாமரை நெடுங்கண்
தேனமரும் பூமேல் திரு

(Mūndrām Thiruvandhādhi ---100)

"The glorious mother Lakshmī is held close in His heart by the discus wielding Lord Who has the chest wide as the mountain adorned by the cool Tulasi garland. She is like the permanent lightning streak in the dense dark clouds in the skies. She has long beautiful lotus eyes and is seated on the honey laden lotus flower. She is our refuge now and forever".

All of the āzhwārs and the āchāryās consider that Srī representing the mercy and compassion of the Lord is actually the compassionate mediator for the individual *self* and the *paramātmā*. This is termed as the **Purushakāratvam of Srī**. The very first expression of **Sriyapatitvam** (Supreme being the Lord of Srī and *Purushakāratvam (Srī as the compassionate mediator)* is revealed in the incident when the first three āzhwārs meet taking shelter in the inner corridor of a home termed "இடைக்கழி" on a stormy night in the divya désam of Thirukkōvalūr.

Sri Poikai āzhwār himself records this event in his Mudal Thiruvandhādhi.

நீயும்திருமகளும் நின்றாயால் காமர் பூங்கோவல்
இடைக்கழியே பற்றியினி

(Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi-86).

The Lord resident in this holy shrine is known as Trivikrama (Ulagamalandha Perumāl). This refers to the incarnation of the Lord when He came in the form of a celibate dwarf "Vāmana" in order to repossess the worlds taken over from Indra, the chief of the celestials by the demon king Mahā Bali. Vamana asked for three spaces as measured by his feet and when it was granted He changed His form to cosmic proportions (Trivikrama) and took the three giant strides to measure the worlds. This legend is well known (தீர்ணிபதா³விசக்ரமே) "Trivikrama by three steps covered all the worlds" – Yajur Veda – Ashta 2-8-16). The Lord is believed to have taken His abode in this holy *kshétra* (the holy place) acceding to the prayers of the sage Mrigandu in a bygone age.

On that stormy night when these three great devotees met, Lord Trivikrama from the local shrine along with His consort Srī (desiring to mingle with them) took His abode in their midst remaining invisible. All the three however felt a strange pressure in the small space and wondered who the intruder could be. Then the first among the three sages, Sri Poikai *muni* began singing the glory of the Lord as manifested in the cosmos lighting a lamp with the shining Sun as the flame, the Earth as the vessel and the surrounding oceans as the oil and offered it as a garland of one hundred verses in the *andhādhi* style.

வையம் தகனியா வார் கடலே நெய் ஆக
வெய்ய கதிரோன் விளக்கு ஆக செய்ய
சுடர்-ஆழியான் அடிக்கே தூட்டினென் சொல்-மாலை-
இடர்-ஆழி நீங்குகவே

(Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi -1)

This helped to dispel the outer darkness. Then the second of the three sages, Sri Bhudat āzhwār lighted a lamp of knowledge with devotion as the base, love as the oil, the sweet mind as the wick and the knowing self as the shining flame offering all of them in the form of a garland of verses to the Lord again in a similar *andhādhi* style.

அன்பே தகனியா ஆர்வமே நெய்யாக
இன்புருகு சிந்தை இடுதிறியா - நன்புருகி
ஞானச்சுடர் விளக்கேற்றினேன் நாரணற்கு
ஞானத்தமிழ் புரிந்த நான்

(Irاندām Thiruvandhādhi -1)

This dispelled the inner darkness as well and the Lord could no longer remain invisible. The third in this group of the pioneer sages, Srī Pei āzhwār described the resulting Divine vision with another garland of one hundred verses beginning with the statement

திருக்கண்டேன் பொன்மேனி கண்டேன் திகழும்
அருக்கன் அணிநிறமுங்கண்டேன் - செருக்கிளரும்
பொன்னாழி கண்டேன் புரிசங்கங் கைகண்டேன்
என்னாழி வண்ணன் பாலின்று

(Mūndrām Thiruvandhādhi -1)

"I saw Srī, the divine Mother first with my ocean like Lord. Then I saw His beautiful resplendent Form effulgent like the sun, with the dazzling discus fierce in battle in one hand and the curved conch in the other"

Sri Nammāzhwār terms "Nārāyaṇā" as திருமகளார் தனிக்கேள்வன் in *Thiruvāimozhi* (1-6-9). He further points to the fact that her grace could remove the effects of the binding *karma*. வேரி மாறாத பூமேலிருப்பான் வினைதீர்க்குமே (*Thiruvāimozhi* 4-5-11). The famous verse expressing his *Śaranāgati* (absolute self surrender) to the Lord of Thiruvēṅkatam, by Sri Nammāzhwār அகலகில்லேன் இறையுமென்று அலர்மேல் மங்கை உறை மார்பா (*Thiruvāimozhi* 6-10-10), is considered by the Sri Vaishnava āchāryās as the most appropriate example to follow for spiritual aspirants since it is made to the Lord of Srī invoking first the grace of Srī who is eternally resident in the chest of the Lord. In the *Śaranāgati Gadyam* Sri Ramanuja first humbly approaches the divine Mother Srī and after gaining her grace only, makes his surrender to the Lord.

5: Bhagavat Séshatvam (Service to the Divine) - Goal Consistent with the Nature of the *jīva* - "self":

Service to the Divine becomes the natural and appropriate goal consistent with the *swarūpa* or nature of the *jīva* (*self*). Srī Poikai pirān refers to *ādhisésha*, the eternal attendant of the Lord and describes the ceaseless variety of services rendered by Him to the Lord at all times, at all places suited to the circumstances.

சென்றால் குடை ஆம் இருந்தால் சிங்காசனம் ஆம்
நின்றால் மரவடி ஆம் நீள் கடலுள் என்றும்
புணை ஆம் மணி விளக்கு ஆம் பூம் பட்டு ஆம் புல்கும்
அணை ஆம் திருமாற்கு அரவு

(Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi -53)

"To the Lord of Sri, *ādhi Sésha* serves as an umbrella when moving, as a high throne when seated, as a foot rest when standing, as a bed when resting on the wide ocean of milk, and as a lamp, a soft silken cloak and a head"

Srī Poikai pirān further elaborates this relationship of the *jīva* with *Paramātmā*.

நயவேன் பிறர் பொருளை * நள்ளேன் கீழாரோடு *
உயவேன் உயர்ந்தவரோடு அல்லால் ** - வியவேன்
திருமாலை அல்லது * தெய்வம் என்று ஏத்தேன் *
வருமாறு என்றென் னென்மேல் வினை?

(Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi -64)

"I will not take for myself that which belongs to Him, Neither will I seek the company of those who are engrossed in lowly concerns about themselves, Nor have any relationship with anyone other than the exalted devotees of the Lord. Nor will I look up to, or marvel at, any god except the Lord of Sri. How will the path of karma point to me?"

In this verse āzhwār makes it clear that the *ātma vastu* (entity the "self") is the possession of the Lord. Compared to the material things, *jīvātma* is sentient and is of the nature of knowledge and is eternal. It is therefore precious and a possession of the Lord.

கிம் தேன ந க்ருதம் பாபம் சோரேணாத்மாபஹாரிணா

"Whoever considers *ātma* (the *jīva*) as one's own possession then he will be considered a thief only since *jīva* is the possession of the *paramātma*. What unrighteous act cannot be done by such a thief of *ātma vastu*?"

Srī Nammāzhwār instructs us to serve the Lord enshrined in the divya désam of Thiruvénkatam with faultless service, all the time and in all places without interruption "ஒழிவில் காலமெல்லாம் உடனாய் மன்னி வழுவினா அடிமை செய்யவேண்டும் நாம்" (Thiruvāimozhi 3-3-1). Srī Āndāl (who is the only woman among the āzhwārs) in her famous Thiruppāvai, clearly informs the Lord that she is seeking only to serve Him alone for ever even if it meant undergoing repeated births (multiples of seven cycles) in the mundane world. "எற்றைக்கும் ஏழேழ் பிறவிக்கும் உன் தன்னோடுஉற்றோமே ஆவோம் உனக்கே நம் ஆட்செய்வோம் மற்றை நம் காமங்கள் மாற்றேலோரெம்பவை (Thiruppāvai -29).

The āchāryās realizing the importance of this have included this verse in our daily prayerful worship of the Lord both at home and at the temple.

6: Bhāgavatha Séshatvam:

Being a devoted servant of the Lord eventually achieves fulfillment only in serving His devotees. All of the Āzhwārs in fact considered, service of the devotees of the Lord (*bhāgavatha séshatvam*) to be in fact the most preferred goal (*parama purushārtham*).

Srī Bhūdat āzhwār indicates this in his Irandām Thiruvandhādhi thus,

தோளிரண் டெட்டேழும் மூன்றும் முடியனைத்தும்
தாளிரண்டும் வீழ்ச் சரந்துரந்தான் --- தாளிரண்டும்
ஆர்தொழுவார் பாதமவை தொழுவதன்றே என்
சீர்கெழுதோள் செய்யும் சிறப்பு

(Irاندām Thiruvandhādhi – 43)

"The greatest good that my blessed shoulders can do me is to bow in reverence to the feet of the devotees who worship the divine feet of the Lord, Who struck with arrows to chop down the twenty shoulders and all the ten heads and two legs of Rāvana"

Srī Kulashékara āzhwār in his Perumāl Thirumozhi indicates similar sentiments.

தில்லை நகர்த் திருச்சித்திர கூடந்தன்னுள்
இனிதமர்ந்த அம்மானை இராமன் தன்னை
ஏத்துவார் இணையடியேயேத்தினேனே.

(Perumāl Thirumozhi -10-6)

"I praise the holy feet of the devotees of Sri Rama who is enshrined in the holy Thillainagar Chitrakootam"

Srī Thondaradippodi āzhwār requests the Lord in the last verse of his work Thiruppalliyezhucchi, to consider him as someone fit to be protected and assign him to be in the service of His devotees.

தோன்றியதோள்தொண்டரடிப்பொடியென்னும்
அடியனை, அளியனென்றருளி உன்னடியார்க்கு
ஆட்படுத்தாய்! பள்ளியெழுந்தருளாயே.

(Thiruppalliyezhucchi -10)

அமலனாதிபிரான் அடியார்க்கு என்னையாட்படுத்த
விமலன், விண்ணவர்கோன் விரையார்பொழில் வேங்கடவன்
நிமலன் நின்மலன் நீதிவானவன் நீள் மதிளரங்கத்தம்மான், திருக்
கமலபாதம் வந்துஎன் கண்ணினுள்ளனவொக்கின்றதே

(Amalanādhīpīrān-1),

Srī Thiruppānāzhwār in the first verse of his work, Amalanādhīpīrān says "that the lotus feet of the ancient and immaculate Lord, who made him the servant of His devotees (who consider Him alone as their sole goal), who is the suzerain Lord of the celestials, who is resident in Thiruvēṅkatam with fragrant and plush gardens, who is pure and who does not expect anything in return, who is faultless and rules over the righteous realm of the eternal stars, who reclines in Srīrangam surrounded by tall walls, appeared to come inside his eyes of their own accord".

Āchārya Srī Védānta Désika defines "அடியார்" as follows, "இங்கு அடியார் என்கிறது பக³வத் ஸேஷத்வ ஞானவான்களான ப்ரதிபு⁴த்³த⁴ரையும், நித்யரையும் (the eternal attendants), முக்தரையும் (the liberated souls)"

"The true devotees are those who have the understanding and attitude that they are the servants of Srīman Nārāyaṇa, considering Him alone as the ultimate Reality. If a devotee even when still in this mundane life has such an attitude, he is to be included in the same category as the eternal attendants of the Lord and the ones who are already liberated"

Āchārya refers here to Srī Thirumangai āzhwār, "நின் திருவெட்டெழுத்தும் கற்று நான் உற்றதும் உன்னடியார்க்கடிமை"- (Periya Thirumozhi 8-10-3) and states "என்கையாலே இதுவே திருமந்திரத்துக்கு உயிர் நிலை". "To be servant of such devotees is in fact the central core and the sum and the substance of the eight syllable holy Thirumantram". (Sri Thirumangai āzhwār's Periya Thirumozhi 8-10-3)

Srī Thirumangai āzhwār reveals his Bhāgavata śeṣhatvam vividly in his "கண் சோர்" *pathikam* (decad) of verses on the Lord of Thirucchérai Srī Sāranātha Perumāḷ. One of the verses given here from this decad in which āzhwār says that keeping the devotees of the Lord of this *divya kshétram* in his heart, makes him feel elated like partaking nectar.

வந்திக்கும் மற்றவர்க்கும் * மாசுடம்பில் வல்லமணர் தமக்கும் அல்லேன் *
முந்திச் சென்று அரி உருவாய் இரணியனை * முரண் அழித்த முதல்வர்க்கல்லால் **
சந்தப்பூ மலர்ச் சோலைத் * தண் சேறை எம்பெருமான் தானை * நாளும்
சிந்திப்பார்க்கு என் உள்ளம் * தேனூறி எப்பொழுதும் தித்திக்குமே

(PeriyaThirumozhi 7-4-5)

"I am the servant of only the Lord who is the cause of the cosmos and who came forward in the form of Srī Nrusimha and got rid of the demon Hiranya and I am not of anyone else. I am not of those who worship some dévās like the Bhuddās or the vehemently arguing *Samanars* (jainās) with dirt covered bodies. My heart feels delighted like partaking nectar towards the devotees who daily keeps in their hearts the divine feet of the Lord of Thirucchérai, surrounded by groves full of flowering sandal trees".

Srī Thirumazhisai pirān in Nānmukan Thiruvandādhī calls "பா⁴க³வத ஸமாஸ்ரயணம்" (taking the Lord's devotee as the guide and way) as the best among the three faultless means.

பழுதாகா தொன்றறிந்தேன் பாற்கடலான் பாதம்
வழுவாவகை நினைந்து வைகல் - தொழுவாரைக்
கண்டிறைஞ்சிவாழ்வார் கலந்தவினைக்கெடுத்து
விண்டிறந்து வீற்றிருப்பார்மிக்கு

(Nānmukan Thiruvandādhī -89)

"I learnt of one faultless way. Those who choose to meet and live adoring the devotees who forever worship flawlessly the holy feet of the Lord of the ocean of milk, attain the supreme abode, rid of all effects of action and shine in excellence".

Āzhwār further states that the lot of the recipients of the grace of the Lord's devotees பா⁴க³வதாபி⁴மாநநிஷ்டை to be even better than those who have taken the Lord as the way பா⁴க³வத ஸமாஸ்ரயணம் for they become blessed with the devotional service of the divine.

வீற்றிருந்து விண்ணாள வேண்டுவார் வேங்கடத்தான்
பால்திருந்தவைத்தாரே பன்மலர்கள் - மேல்திருந்த
வாழ்வார் வருமதிப்பார்த் தன்பினராய் மற்றவர்க்கே
தாழ்வாயிருப்பார் தமர்

(NānmukanThiruvandādhī-90)

"Living well in this world with a desire to reach the supreme abode are surely those who serve the Lord of Thiruvēṅkatam offering a variety of flowers at His holy feet. Living even better are those favored by the Lord's devotees who following the Lord's will and acting with love remain in service of the Lord".

Sri Nammāzhwār declares himself to be the servant of the servant of the devotee of the wondrous Lord, even extending the lineage to several generations.

அடியார்ந்த வையமுண்டு ஆலிலை அன்னவசம் செய்யும்
படியாதுமில் குழவிப்படி எந்தை பிரான் தனக்கு
அடியார் அடியார் தம்அடியார் அடியார்தமக்கு

அடியார் அடியார் தம்அடியார் அடியோங்களே

(Thiruvāimozhi 3-7-10)

Srī Madhurakavi āzhwār not only took to the holy feet of Sri Nammāzhwār a பரம பா⁴க³வத (*parama Bhāgavata*- devotee parexcellence) and an incomparable āchārya, but lived under his holy feet being the full recipient of his and the Lord's grace."கண்ணிநுண் சிறுத்தாம்பு " (*Kanninun Chiruttāmbu*), the work of Srī Madhurakavi āzhwār is a beautiful piece of supreme *Bhāgavata* and *āchārya Bhakti* has been included by the āchāryās in the collection of 4000 verses of the āzhwārs for that reason.

7: Protective Nature of Srīman Nārāyana- the Paramātma:

Among all of the *kalyāna gunās* (auspicious attributes) of the Lord, āzhwārs are particularly fond of His ஆபத்³ஸக² (*āpadsakha*) *guna* which is to protect His devotees facing distress or calamity. The incident when Srī Krishna lifted the Gōvardhana mountain and protected the cows, the calves and the cowherds and the families (who were all dear to Him) from the onslaught of the incessant rains lashed out by Indra is often referred to. The cows and the calves were simply immersed in the adoration of the Lord mesmerized by the beauty of the Lord and the enchanting music of his flute. They did not request Him to protect them but He did. Srī Āndāl in her Thiruppāvai verse - 24 praises this *guna*. குன்று குடையாய் எடுத்தாய் !, குணம் போற்றி Srī Thirumazhisai Pirān refers to this in his Thirucchandaviruttam.

கறுத்தெதிர்ந்தகாலநேமி காலனோடுகூட அன்
றறுத்தவாழிசங்குதண்டு வில்லும்வாளுமேந்தினாய்
தொறுக்கலந்தவூனம்.து ஒழிக்கவன்றுகன்றமுன்
பொறுத்தநின்புகழ்கலாலோர்நேசமில்லைநெஞ்சமே

(Thirucchandaviruttam - 106)

"Thou bore the discus along with the other divine weapons like the conch, the mace, the bow and the sword and severed the head of the enraged demon Kālanémi who came to combat, dispatching him to join Yama, at that time (when the dévās faced the threat from him),. My heart has no love for anything other than Thine protective *guna* with which once previously Thou bore the Gāvardhana mountain in order to eliminate the danger faced by the cows, **before** any harm was caused." Similar references are seen in the works of all other āzhwārs'as well.

குன்றம் ஏந்திக் * குளிர் மழை காத்தவன் *
அன்று ஞாலம் * அளந்த பிரான் ** பரன்
சென்று சேர் * திருவேங்கட மாமலை *
ஒன்றுமே தொழ * நம் வினை ஓயுமே

(Thiruvāimozhi 3-3-8)

மழைக்கு அன்று வரை முனேந்தும் * மைந்தனே! மதுரவாறே !

(Thirumālai -36).

At the end when Srī Nammāzhwār decides to leave this material world, Emperumān also was ready to fulfill His wishes. It is of interest here to look at the experience of āzhwār and how he addresses his mind to act.

அருள் பெறுவார் அடியார் * தம் அடியனேற்கு * ஆழியான்
அருள் தருவான் அமைகின்றான் * அது நமது விதிவகையே **
இருள் தருமா ஞாலத்துள் * இனிப் பிறவி யான் வேண்டேன் *
மருளொழி நீ மடனெஞ்சே! * வாட்டாற்றான் அடி வணங்கே

(Thiruvāimozhi 10-6-1)

"The Lord who carries the discus appears to be ready to grace me who has been the servant of the exalted bhāgavathās who are rightful recipients of His grace. The way He will bestow His grace also will be as per our order. Therefore I will not seek birth in this huge world which only induces ignorance. O' ignorant mind ! You get rid of your confusion. Follow the Lord enshrined in Thiruvattāru"

அது நமது விதிவகையே – This phrase had been interpreted by āchāryās before Emperumānār " as per our *punyams* (righteous deeds). Emperumānār however interpreted to mean "that He will do as per our request or as ordered by us". This is to indicate that the Lord at the time of showering His grace to His dear devotees, He chooses to follow the wishes of His devotee. "அவன் அடியார்கட்குப் பரதந்திரனாய் இருப்பன்".

த்வதீ³ய பு⁴க்தோஜ்ஜித ஸேஷ போ⁴ஜிநா
த்வயா நிஸ்ருஷ்டாத்மா ப⁴ரேண யத் ததா
ப்ரியேண ஸேநாபதிநா ந்யவேதி³ தத்
ததா² அநுஜாநந்தம் உதா³ர வீக்ஷணை:
tvadIya bhuktojjhita sesha bhojināa
tvayaa nistrushTa aatma bhareNa yadyaTaa |
priyeNa senApatinA nyavedi tat
taTaa anu jaanantam udaara veekshaNai: ||

(Stōtra ratnam -42)

"Who approves with noble glance whatever communication is brought to You by your beloved chief of hosts (Vishvaksénar), who partakes of the remnants of Your food, and on whom has been bestowed the charge (of Your sovereignty)".(as per the translation of Swami Adidévananda)

வாட்டாற்றான் அடி வணங்கே - Here வாட்டாற்றான் refers to the Lord who had come to take āzhwār to *paramapadam*. அடி வணங்கு means here "Follow His will".

Āzhwārs refer to the purānic story of Gajéndra, the king of the elephants, a devotee of the Lord and how Srīman Nārāyana hurried from the *paramapadam* (eternal abode) hearing his total surrender and appeal for protection when its foot was caught in the poisonous jaws of the crocodile. A few of the verses are given here to illustrate this.

தொடரெடுத்த மால் யானை * சூழ்கயம் புக்கஞ்சி *
படரெடுத்த பைங்கமலம் கொண்டு ** - அன்று இடரடுக்க
ஆழியான் * பாதம் பணிந்தன்றே? * வானவர் கோன்

பாழி தான் எய்திற்றுப் பண்டு

(Irandaṁ Thiruvandādi - 13)

"Is it not because once long ago, the care-free tusker supremo entering the sprawling lake for gathering the blossomed lotus to lay at the Feet of the Lord, came to grief at the jaws of the crocodile, and in dismay thought of those Feet of the Lord, Who sports the Sudarsana', in prayerful surrender, that he attained the exalted position in the Lord's abode? "

பெண்ணுலாம் சடையினானும்* பிரமனும் உன்னைக் காண்பான்
எண்ணிலா ஊழி யூழி *தவம் செய்தார் வெள்கி நிற்ப
விண்ணுளார் வியப்ப வந்து* ஆனைக்கு அன்று அருளை ஈந்த
கண்ணறா * உன்னை யென்னோ* களைகணாக் கருது மாறே!

(Thirumālai- 44)

"While Śiva who holds the holy Ganga herself in his locks, Brahma (born of your very navel) and the great eternal divines blessed with your vision after eons of penance, stood hesitating, you rushed to show your Grace to a mere elephant. O Lord you are turning a blind eye to me. What shall I do to make you condescend to consider me for your grace? "

Srī Thirumangai āzhwār refers to the same incident in beautiful chaste *Thamizh* in his poetic verses often using different terms. The verse on the divya désam of Thiruvallikēni is as follows:

மீனமர் பொய்கை நாள் மலர் கொய்வான் * வேட்கையினோடு சென்றிழிந்த *
கானமர் வேழம் கை எடுத்தலறக் * கரா அதன் காலினைக் கதுவ **
ஆனையின் துயரம் தீரப் புள்ளூர்ந்து * சென்று நின்று ஆழி தொட்டானை *
தேனமர் சோலை மாடமா மயிலைத் * திருவல்லிக்கேணிக் கண்டேனே

(Periyathirumozhi 2-3-9)

"The elephant that normally roams freely in the forest, got into the lake to pluck the freshly blossomed flowers with the desire of offering them to the divine feet of the Lord, suddenly raised its trunk and screamed at that time since the crocodile gripped its foot with its jaws. I saw the Lord who came hurriedly to the lake on Garuda, and standing by the banks of the lake, hurled His discus to free the elephant from the distress, in Thiruvallikēni which is surrounded by honey filled flower groves" Srī Kaliyan (Thirumangai āzhwār) in his decad of verses where he surrenders to the Lord of Thiruvarangam, has the following verse about the same incident.

கடிகொள் பூம்பொழில் காமரு பொய்கை *வைகு தாமரை வாங்கிய வேழம் *
முடியும் வண்ணம் ஓர் முழுவலி முதலை பற்ற * மற்றது நின் சரண் நினைப்ப **
கொடிய வாய் விலங்கின் உயிர் மலங்கக் *கொண்ட சீற்றம் ஒன்று உண்டுளதறிந்து *
உன்அடியனேனும் வந்து அடியினை அடைந்தேன் அணிபொழில் திருவரங்கத்தம்மானே!

(Periyathirumozhi 5-8-3)

"The elephant Gajendra plucked the beautiful blossomed lotus flowers from the lake which was surrounded by fragrant flower filled groves. Aware of the nearing end of its curse, the strong crocodile gripped the elephant's feet. The elephant also thought of your divine feet and surrendered to them. At that time a special rage arose in you which put an end to the life of that crocodile with the terrible jaws. Adiyēn also sought refuge at your divine feet knowing that you will get enraged and remove all adversaries of your devotees"

In one of the *Pathikams* (decads) of verses on the divya désam of Thirunaraiyūr, āzhwār has the following verse about Srī Gajéndra's legend.

தூவாய புள் ஊர்ந்து * வந்து துறை வேழம் *
மூவாமை நல்கி * முதலை துணித்தானை **
தேவாதி தேவனைச் * செங்கமலக் கண்ணானை *
நாவாயுளானை * நறையூரில் கண்டேனே

(PeriyaThirumozhi 6-8-3)

"I saw the Lord of Thirunāvāi who is the Suzerain ruler of all the eternal stars (*nitya sūrīs*) and dévās with divine eyes like the lotus, who came mounted on the Garudāzhwān who is the form of faultless Sruti (*védātmā*) to the banks of the lake rescuing Gajéndra before it was harmed by splitting the crocodile into two halves, in Thirunaraiyur"

Āzhwārs refer to Srī Rāma's vow of protection to those who surrender to Him even once as well as that of Srī Krishna's Gīta *charama ślōkam*.

மின்னிறத்தெயிற்றரக்கன்வீழ் வெஞ்சரந்துரந்து
பின்னவர்க்கருள் புரிந்து அரசளித்தபெற்றியோய்
நன்னிறத்தொரின்கொலேழை பின்னைகேள்வமன்னுசீர்
பொன்னிறத்தவண்ணனாயுண்டரீகனல்லையே

(Thirucchandaviruttam - 33)

"Thou art of fair and just nature. Thou made the demon king Rāvana with teeth as white as the lightning to fall by discharging the fiery missiles and bestowed with compassion the kingdom to his brother Vibhīshana. Thou art the darling of Sri Nappinaipirātti who has the most beautiful complexion, incomparable sweet words and who is ever attached to Thee. Thou art Pundarikaksha, with the auspicious eternal desirable gold like attributes".

Vibhīshana, the younger brother of the demon king Rāvana sought refuge at the feet of Srī Rāma unable to get Rāvana to return Seethā Dévi back to Srī Rāma. His words beseeching the monkey chiefs to inform Srī Rāma about him were as follows:

ஸோ அஹம் பருஷிதஸ்தேந தா³ஸவச்சாவமாநித
த்யக்த்வா புத்ராம்ஸ்ச தா³ராம்ஸ்ச ராக⁴வம் ஸரணம் க³த:
so aham paruṣitas tena dāsavac ca avamānitaḥ |
tyaktvā putrāmḥ ca dārāmḥ ca rāghavam śaraṇam gataḥ ||

"Abandoning my sons and wife, when spoken to harshly and treated with disrespect like a slave by him, though wishing him well, I have sought Sri Rama (scion of Raghu) as my refuge"

(Sṛīmad Rāmāyanam YuddhaKāṇḍam – 17-16)

The monkey chiefs did not accept him since he came from the enemy's camp.

"வத்⁴யதாம் ப³த்⁴யதாமபி" –

"This Vibhīshana be beaten and bound" is what Sugrīva and other Vānara chiefs advised"

Srī Rāmā's words were:

மித்ரபா⁴வேந ஸம்ப்ராப்தம் ந த்யஜேயம் கத²ஞ்சந

தோ³ஹோ யத்³யபி தஸ்ய ஸ்யாத் ஸதாமேத த³க³ர்ஹிதம்

mitra bhāvena samprāptam na tyajeyam kathamcana |
doṣo yadi api tasya syāt satām etad agarhitam ||

(Sṛīmad Rāmāyaṇam YuddhaKāṇḍam – 18-3)

"I can not refuse to receive under any circumstances him who has come to me in a friendly spirit. Even if there is any wickedness in him, his acceptance is not reprehensible in the eyes of good people"

ஸக்ருதே³வ ப்ரபந்நாய தவாஸ்மீதி ச யாசதே
அப⁴யம் ஸர்வபு⁴தேப்⁴யோ த³தா³ம்யேதத் வ்ரதம் மம
sakṛd eva prapannāya tava asmi iti ca yācate |
abhayam sarva bhūtebhyo dadāmi etad vratam mama ||

(Sṛīmad Rāmāyaṇam YuddhaKāṇḍam – 18-33)

"I vouchsafe security against all living beings to him who comes to me only once and seeks protection (from me) saying "I am yours", such is my vow".

Also note is to be made here in this verse words used by Sṛī Thirumazhisai Pirān to address the Lord, "பொன்னிறத்தவண்ணனாயபுண்டரீகனல்லையே". It literally translates the *upanishad's* statement. Āchārya refers to *Chāndogyam* and to *Manusmrithi* here in the *vyākhyānam* (commentary)

ய ஏஹோ அந்தராதி³த்யே ஹிரண்மய: புருஹோ த்³ரு³யதே
ஹிரண்யம்மஸ்ருர்ஹிரண்யகேஸ ஆப்ரணஸ்வாத்ஸர்வ ஏவ
ஸுவர்ண:
தஸ்ய யதா²கப்யாஸம் புண்ட³ரீகமேவமக்ஷிணீ

(Chāndogyam 1-6 and 7)

"The Person seen seated in the center of the sun, who is beautiful like gold --- has two eyes that are like the lotus blossomed by the sunrays"

ப்ரஸாஸிதாரம் ஸர்வேஷாமணியாம்ஸமணோரபி |
ருக்மாப⁴ம் ஸ்வப்நதீ⁴க³ம்யம் வித்³யாத் தம் புருஷம் பரம்
(Manusmrithi 12-122)

"Parama Purusha is the controller of all things, has splendour like gold, and is to be known by wondrous and rare knowledge as in dream"

Sṛī Nammāzhwār in the famous *pathikam* "கற்பார் இராமபிரானை அல்லால் மற்றும் கற்பரோ" has the following verse referring to Kannan Empirān's assurance of protection.

வார்த்தை அறிபவர் * மாயவற்கு ஆளன்றி யாவரோ? *
போர்த்த பிறப்பொடு நோயோடு மூப்பொடு * இறப்பிவை
பேர்த்து ** பெருந்துன்பம் வேறற நீக்கித் * தன் தாளின் கீழ்ச்
சேர்த்து* அவன் செய்யும் * சேமத்தை எண்ணித் தெளிவுற்றே

"ātmā (*self*) unable to understand its own real nature, ends up with repeated births which result in aging, disease and death. The Lord with his compassion and grace removing all these and the great distress of *samsāra* (life in mundane world) takes the *jīva* back to His own divine feet. Those who realize His saving grace and mercy full of protection and understand His words clearly will become the servant of that magical Sri Krishna alone and not of anyone else".

(Thiruvāimozhi 7-5-10)

"வார்த்தை" means "word". Here āzhwār refers to Srī Krishnā's words in *Gītā charamaślōkam* ஸர்வத⁴ர்மாந்பரித்யஜ்ய மாமேகம் ஸரணம் வ்ரஜ.

அஹம் த்வாம் ஸர்வபாபேப⁴யோ மோக்ஷயிஷ்யாமி மா ஸாச:

sarvadharmānparityajya māmēkam śaraṇam vraja.

aham tvām sarvapāpēbhyō mōkṣhayiṣhyāmi mā śuchaha (Gītā 18-66)

"Relinquishing all other means, seek Me alone as sole refuge. I will release you from all sins. Grieve not"

Āzhwārs often refer to the incident of Bānāsura to indicate that the Supreme Lord Srīman Narāyana is the only one that can provide protection at all of the times. The story of Bānāsura is to be found in Srimad Bhagavatham in chapter 63 of Skandha X. Bāna was the son of Mahabali, therefore was from the lineage of Prahlāda. He was a devotee of Śiva. Since he had thousand arms he was proud of his might. When Śiva gave him a boon to ask any favor of him, Bāna chose that Śiva should become the guard of his palace. Angered by his words, the worshipful Śiva said to Bāna, "O'fool,! When you find your flag staff breaking, know that the ensuing battle that will vanquish your pride is near at hand".

வண்டுலாவுகோதைமாதர் காரணத்தினால் வெகுண்டு
இண்டவாணனீரைஞ்ஞாறு தோள்களைத்துணித்தநாள்
முண்டனீறன்மக்கள்வெப்பு மோடியங்கியோடிடக்
கண்டுநாணிவாணனுக்கிரங்கினான்எம்மாயனே

(Thirucchandaviruttam -71)

"At that time when Bānā who came to battle, being enraged on account of his daughter (Usha) adorned with flower garland hovering with bees, had his thousand arms severed, our Lord Srī Krishna, felt embarrassed seeing Rudra with shaven head and ash covered body, retreat in haste along with his people, the deity of fever, Kālī, and Agni dēvata and took pity on Bānā."

Srī Thirumangai āzhwār says the same thing

முன் திருந்தா அரக்கர் தென்னிலங்கை *

செந்தீ உண்ணச் சிவந்து ஒரு நாள் **

பெருந்தோள் வாணற்கு அருள் புரிந்து

(Periya Thirumozhi 8-6-6)

Āzhwārs state that Srī Krishna took pity on Bānāsura and allowed him to live thereby proving that the Supreme Lord is the ultimate friend who would come to one's aid at times of danger. Āzhwār also indicates that He is still the ultimate resort and succour to even those who had fought with him and called him names like Sisupāla who was an arch enemy of Srī Krishna.

வைதுநின்னைவல்லவா பழித்தவர்க்கும்மாறில்போர்

செய்துநின்னசெற்றத்தீயின் வெந்தவர்க்கும்வந்துனை

எய்தலாகுமென்பர் ஆதலாலெம்மாய நாயினேன்
செய்தகுற்றம்நற்றமாகவேகொள்ளுலநாதனே

(Thirucchanda Viruttam - 111)

"Sages declared that even those who ridiculed and called Thee (Who is all worshipful) names and those who fought incomparable combats and came to be burnt by the fire of Thine anger, could still attain Thee. Therefore, O' my Lord with wondrous attributes and the natural Master of this world! Thou should treat all misdeeds committed by this lowly self as good deeds."

The *Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Śiva* in the philosophic revelations of āzhwārs can be understood clearly by gleaning their verses.

Sri Poikai Pirān in his Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi states the following.

முதல் ஆவார் மூவரே அம் மூவருள்ளும்
முதல் ஆவான் முரி நீர் வண்ணன் முதல் ஆய
நல்லான் அருள் அல்லால் நாம நீர் வையகத்துப்
பல்லார் அருளும் பழுது

(Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi-15)

"The Trinity of Brahmā, Vishnu, and Rudhrā are the Supreme God-head. Of the Trinity, the Foremost is the Lord resembling the wide blue oceans. Without the grace of the Benevolent One Who is the First Cause, It is futile to seek the grace of others in this ocean-covered world".

Srī Nammāzhwār indicates that Srīman Nārāyanā is the Lord of them all and being their antaryāmi protects all. Āzhwār reiterates the Upanishad statement (ஏகோஹவை நாராயண ஆஸீத் நப்³ரஹமா நேஸாநோ நேமே த்யாவா ப்ருதிவீ ந நக்ஷத்ராணி. "There was Nārāyana alone. There were not Brahma, Śiva, Waters, Fire and Soma, Heaven and Earth, Stars." – Mahōpanishad) and indicates that He is enshrined in the *archa* form so easily accessible in Thirukkurukūr as *ādhipirān*. Āzhwār elaborates with an emotional appeal to the people of the world in this famous *pathikam* (decad).

ஒன்றும் தேவும் உலகும் உயிரும் மற்றும் * யாதும் இல்லா
அன்று * நான்முகன் தன்னொடு * தேவர் உலகோடு உயிர் படைத்தான் **
குன்றம் போல்மணி மாட நீடு * திருக்குருகூர் அதனுள் *
நின்ற ஆதிப் பிரான் நிற்க * மற்றைத் தெய்வம் நாடுதிரே

(Thiruvāimozhi 4-10-1).

"Before the time of creation, the Lord who brought forth the worlds, all the dévās including Brahma as well as all the beings, stands enshrined in the most accessible *archa* form in Thirukkurukūr. Leaving Him, you are searching for which god? "

இனிநின்று நின் பெருமை யானுரைப்பது என்னே
தனிநின்ற சார்விலா மூர்த்தி - பனிநீர்
அகத்துலவு செஞ்சடையான் ஆகத்தான் நான்கு
முகத்தான் நின்உந்தி முதல்

(Periya Thiruvandhādhi -71)

"O'Lord, who remained all alone as the causeless cause at the end of dissolution! *Śiva* with the matted red locks soaked with the cool waters of *Gangā* resides in the right side of your body (while), - the four faced *Brahmā* has his origin in your navel lotus. How can I even begin to describe your greatness?"

முதலாம் திருவுருவம் மூன்றென்பர் ஒன்றே
முதலாகும் மூன்றுக்கும் என்பர் - முதல்வா
நிகரிலகு கார் உருவா நின்னகத்த தன்றே
புகரிலகு தாமரையின் பூ

(Periya Thiruvandhādhī -72)

"Some will state that the trinity of *Brahmā*, *Vishnu* and *Śiva* with the three beautiful forms are the first cause of the cosmos. Yet some others will state that only one is the cause of even the trinity. O' Lord! The ancient cause, with the hue of the dark clouds! Didn't the resplendent lotus (the splendor arising from being the origin of the creator and the creation), sprout from your divine body?"

நின்னகத்தன்றே புகரிலகு தாமரையின் பூ- the lotus with the fame of being the origin of *Brahmā*, is in fact from the navel of Lord Nārāyaṇa. Here Āzhwār shows that *Brahmā* who was created by Lord Nārāyaṇa, and *Śiva* who was created in turn by *Brahmā*, are therefore not the source. He establishes clearly the *paratvam* of Lord Nārāyaṇa.

Āzhwār describes how the Lord staying as the inner controller of the *dēvās* protects all.

அவரவர் தமதமது * அறிவறி வகை வகை *
அவரவர் இறையவர் * என அடி அடைவர்கள் **
அவரவர் இறையவர் * குறைவிலர் இறையவர் *
அவரவர் விதி வழி * அடைய நின்றனரே

(Thiruvāimozhi 1-1-5)

"People of the world depending on their *gunās*, choosing *dēvās* suited to their nature, considering their respective *dēvā* as the Lord, will pay obeisance to their feet. Those *dēvās* also will not be deficient in being their chosen Lord. This is because the consort of *Srī*, the Supreme *Paramātmā* Nārāyaṇa remaining as the *antaryāmi* (inner controller) of the *dēvās*, functions to protect all making sure those *dēvās* receiving worship as specified in *āgama* texts, would yield fruits as per the desires of their devotees." This is mentioned by Bhagavān *Srī* Krishna in His *Gīta* (7-21 and 22)

Āzhwār criticizes those who attribute supreme Lordship to other deities based on their function for instance to *Brahma* for his function of creation and to *Śiva* because of his function of destruction based mainly on their own inference (not based on *pramānās* like the Upanishads).

பேச நின்ற சிவனுக்கும் பிரமன் தனக்கும் * பிறர்க்கும்
நாயகன் அவனே * கபால நன் மோக்கத்துக் கண்டு கொண்மின் **
தேச மாமதிள் சூழ்ந்தழகாய * திருக்குருகூர் அதனுள் *
ஈசன் பாலோர் அவம் பறைதல் * என்னாவது? இலிங்கியர்க்கே

(Thiruvāimozhi 4-10-4)

"Nārāyana alone is the Lord of all dévās including Brahmā, Śiva and all others. See that from the liberation of Śiva from the skull of brahmā stuck in his hand. What will be the benefit of faulty words towards the Lord of Thirukkurukūr by those who rely on their own inference from function". Āzhwār refers here to the incident when Rudra out of rage plucked one of the heads of Brahma.

ப்³ரஹ்மா யஸ்மாத்³நபராத்⁴ஸ்ய ஸிரஸ்சிந்தம் த்வயா மம
தஸ்மாச்சா²பஸமாவிஷ்ட கபாலீ த்வம் ப⁴விஷ்யஸி (Mātsya Puṛānam - 182)
"Brahma said: "Since the head of my faultless self was plucked by you, you will become
"kapālī "(the one who carries the skull) afflicted by my curse "

Due to the curse of Brahma the skull got stuck to the hand of Śiva for a long time. Eventually Śiva was released from this curse by Lord Nārāyana.

புக்கடிமையினால் தன்னைக் கண்ட * மார்க்கண்டேயன் அவனை *
நக்க பிரானும் அன்று உய்யக் கொண்டது * நாராயணன் அருளே **
கொக்கலர் தடந்தாழை வேலித் * திருக்குருகூர் அதனுள்
மிக்க ஆதிப் பிரான் நிற்க * மற்றைத் தெய்வம் விளம்புதிரே

(Thiruvāimozhi 4-10-8)

"Sage Mārkaṇḍéya served Śiva and looked to him for protection at the time of his impending death. That day Śiva protected Mārkaṇḍéya but that (act of protection) was also the grace of Nārāyana only. How you speak of other gods when the most ancient and supreme Lord stands in Thirukkurukūr with beautiful white flowers covered fields of screw pine trees (தாழம்பூ) "
Āzhwār's words clearly indicate that Srīman Nārāyana is the Lord of all and is the *antaryāmi* of all other dévās.

எங்குத் தலைப்பெய்வன் நான்? * எழில் மூவுலகும் நீயே *
அங்குயர் முக்கண் பிரான் * பிரம பெருமானவன் நீ **
வெங்கதிர் வச்சிரக்கை * இன்திரன் முதலாத் தெய்வம் நீ *
கொங்கலர் தண்ணந்துழாய் முடி * என்னுடைக் கோவலனே!

(Thiruvaimozhi 7-6-4)

"O'my Gōpāla with the head adorned by beautiful cool blossomed honey filled Tulasi flowers . The three beautiful worlds are under your control. Among those worlds, the triple eyed Śiva made famous by his knowledge and strength as well Brahma *perumān* his father are under your control. The dévās starting from Indra carrying (*vajrā āyudham*) thunderbolt emitting hot rays in his hands are also under your sway. Where would I go to reach You? "

என் திருமார்பன் தன்னை * என் மலைமகள் கூறன் தன்னை *
என்றும் என் நாமகளை * அகம்பால் கொண்ட நான்முகனை *
நின்ற சசி பதியை * நிலம் கீண்டு எயில் மூன்றெரித்த *
வென்று புலம் துரந்த * விசும்பாளியைக் காணேனோ !

(Thiruvāimozhi -7-6-7)

"The Lord has Srī MahāLakshmī (who is my ruler) in his chest. He has given residence in his physical form for Śiva who always has Pārvathi the daughter of Himavān in his body. He is the inner controller of *Brahmadévan* who always has Saraswathi with him. He is also the inner controller of Indra who is the consort of *sasi dévi*. He took *avathāra* as divine boar and brought

forth this earth out of the deluging waters and protected the same. Staying as the inner controller (of Śiva He burnt "*tripuram*"(the three cities). Being the "*antaryāmi*" of Brahmadévan he made him win over the five senses. Being the *antaryāmi* of Indra, he ruled over the heavenly worlds. Thus the Lord has been the inner controller of all the *dévās*. Will I get to see Him again? "

8: The Nature of Madhusūdana prapannās:

The reference to the term "*Puram Thozhā Mānthar* (புறம் தொழா மாந்தர்)" was mentioned earlier (Sṛī Thirumazhisai pirān - "Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi" - 68), together with the description of the incident in Sṛī Vishnu Purānam. In order to understand āzhwār's thoughts with regards to this phrase in this verse, it is relevant to look at the preceding verses so that the sequence and continuity of ideas are appreciated. In the five verses starting from #59 (அன்பாவாய்) through verse #63 (தரித்திருந்தேனாகவே), Āzhwār clearly expresses the nature of *Brahman* and what ought to be our goal and the means suited to our own inherent nature or *swarūpa* of "*self*". Āzhwār defines *Brahman* (or *parāmātmā*) as "திருவிருந்த மார்வன் சிரீதரன்" ("He is known as Sṛīdharan who bears "Sṛī" on His heart") and is no other than "அரங்கன்" (the Lord enshrined in the *divya kshétram* - the holy place - of Sṛīrangam) and His inherent nature is "Love sublime". He also indicates that those who do not understand this are actually confused and mistakenly point to others limited by birth as transcendental reality. Āzhwār describes himself as (*adiyén*) (அடியேன் நான் ஆள்). This defines the nature of our own *swarūpa*. The preferred goal (*purushārtham*) is actually being in the service of the Lord Himself and āzhwār indicates his eagerness to serve Him eternally by reminding Him of his relationship to Him (என் கேசவனே, கேடின்றி ஆள்வாய் அடியேன் நானான்) and points further that his heart never stops pining for Him (விரும்புவதே விள்ளேன் மனம்). Āzhwār points here to the *nirhétuka kripā* (unconditional love) states (எனக்கேதான் இன்றொன்றி நின்றுலகையேழ் ஆணையோட்டினான்) "the Lord who sustains the seven worlds on His own bestowed the great wealth of His grace by entering his mind". Āzhwār further goes on to declare that no sorrow will befall the one who has taken refuge at the holy feet of the Lord *Madhusūdhana*. (மனக்கேதம் சாரா மதுததன் தன்னை தனக்கே தான் தஞ்சமாக் கொள்ளில்) (verse #61). It is of interest to note that āzhwār uses the *nāma* "*Madhusūdhana*" instead of the other *nāmās* of the Lord here. That suggests indirectly that āzhwār has already planned to refer to the "*Madhusūdhana prapannās*" with reference to the *Yamā's* instructions to his attendants regarding how they should act towards them later in the text. In the intervening verses, āzhwār describes his own daily activities (verse #63), encourages us to recite the names of the all compassionate Nārāyana which will cut asunder our seven fold births (verse #64).

In verse #67, āzhwār reiterates his steadfastness of purpose and declares loud and clear that he will never give up his nature of worshipping *Nārāyana*, who governs his tongue, who is the Lord

of knowledge and who is full of auspicious qualities (நாரணனை நாபதியை ஞானப்பெருமானை சீரணனை ஏத்துந்திறம்).

All of the āzhwārs were *prapannās* of the all compassionate, the most glorious and the ancient cause of all and the causeless Lord *Srīman Nārāyaṇa* and therefore they were all *Madhusūdana prapannās*. The state of the *prapannās* (those who have taken the Lord as their sole refuge) living in the *divya désam* Srīrangam is referred to as "வாழும் சோம்பர்" by Srī Thondaradippodi āzhwār in his Thirumālai.

மேம்பொருள் போக விட்டு * மெய்ம்மையை மிக உணர்ந்து *
ஆம்பரிசு அறிந்து கொண்டு * ஐம்புலன் அகத்தடக்கி **
காம்பறத் தலை சிரைத்து * உன் கடைத்தலை இருந்து வாழும் *
சோம்பரை உகத்தி போலும் * சூழ் புனல் அரங்கத்தானே !

(Thirumālai – 38)

"O'the Lord of Srirangam, surrounded by the waters of Cauvery! You seem to be delighted by those lazy ones, who live at your doors, giving up entirely all their worldly activities, understanding the real nature of their selves, the goals consistent with them, controlling the five senses and free of all desires towards all other means and giving up also completely all their head loads."

ஆம்பரிசு – "*Bhagavat and Bhāgavata kaimkaryam*" become the goal consistent with understanding of the real nature of one's self as "*sésha*" servant of the Lord.

ஐம்புலன் அகத்தடக்கி - "Controlling the five senses". Even such *kaimkaryam* (service) can have a defect when it is done with the thought that induces happiness in us. It is repeated to emphasize that one needs to give up such self serving thought, but perform *the kaimkaryam* for the pleasure of Emperumān. Āchāryā's words here are: "தனக்கு என்னும் எண்ணமாகிற களையை அடியோடு அறுத்து அவனுக்கே இனிதாகப் பண்ணும் கைங்கர்யமே புருஷார்த்தமாகும்".

"வாழும் சோம்பர்"– means they live for the sake of the Lord and therefore do not indulge in activities for themselves (inactive or lazy in the latter sense). Āchāryā Srī Periyavācchān Pillai adds that they will not give up their ordained duties (நித்ய நைமித்திககர்மங்கள்). For them the Lord Himself is the means and therefore for these *prapannas*, "உண்ணும் சோறு பருகும் நீர் தின்னும் வெற்றிலை எல்லாம் கண்ணன்" (Thiruvāimozhi- 6-7-1) namely தா⁴ரக போஷக போ⁴க்³யங்கள் (all means of sustenance, nurture and enjoyment) are all the same Lord.

Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān also refers to the same *prapannās* allegorically

கொண்டைகொண்டகோதைமீது தேனூலாவுகூனிகூன்
உண்டைகொண்டரங்கவோட்டி உள்மகிழ்ந்தநாதனார்
நண்டையுண்டுநாரைபேர வாளைபாயநீலமே
அண்டைகொண்டுகெண்டைமேயும்அந்தணீரங்கமே

(Thirucchandaviruttam - 49)

"The place of residence of Lord Rāma, who rejoiced in throwing a soft arrow from a toy bow to straighten the hunched back of Mantara, with hairlocks adorned by flower garlands hovering with honeybees, is no doubt Thiruvarangam with beautiful cool waters, where the crane walks slowly having swallowed the crab, the Vaalhai fish scared of the crane splatters the water while the Kendai fish gently swim fearlessly under the shade of the blue lilies."

In this verse, Kūni (the hunched back Mantara) refers to all embodied *jīvās*. The hunched back refers to their defects such as "*ahamkāram*" with the false notion of one's self. The Lord rejoices in removing those defects.

நண்டை உண்டு நாரைபேர – the crane walks slowly having swallowed the crab. This refers to all embodied *jīvās* indulging in pleasures of the material world. வாளைபாய – The vālai fish scared of the crane splatters jumping up and down. This refers to those *jīvās* afraid of the mundane world actively pursue on their own various paths to seeking liberation from the *samsāra* relying on their own self effort.

நீலமே அண்டை கொண்டு கெண்டைமேயும் – Kendai fish gently swims fearlessly under the shade of the blue lilies. This reflects the state of the true *prapannās*, who enjoy the Lord's *gunās* and live fearlessly under the Lord's protective shade taking Him as the sole refuge.

Srī Nammāzhwār declares clearly that "there is no other Lord aside from our benefactor Kannapiṛān who will redeem us. He took birth in Vadamadurai mainly to get rid of the excess harmful loads on this Earth. If you happen to possess something which you consider as yours, place them under His divine feet and live. Aside from this there is no need for discussion of whether something is His or ours. Whatever you consider as your possessions, they all belong to the Lord only. There is nothing aside from Him."

கண்ணன் அல்லால் இல்லை கண்டிர் * சரண் அது நிற்க வந்து *
மண்ணின் பாரம் நீக்குதற்கே * வடமதுரைப் பிறந்தான் **
திண்ணமா நும்முடைமை உண்டேல் * அவனடி சேர்த்து உய்ம்மினோ *
எண்ண வேண்டா நும்மதாதும் * அவனன்றி மற்றில்லையே

(Thiruvāimozhi 9-1-10)

Āzhwār's love of the Lord's is very deep. One of the verses describing lovelorn state for the divine, expressed in the *bhāva* (the emotional state) of a wife missing her loving consort, as narrated by her mother is given here.

திருவுடை மன்னரைக் காணில் * திருமாலைக் கண்டேனே என்னும் *
உருவுடை வண்ணங்கள் காணில் * உலகளந்தான் என்று துள்ளும் **
கருவுடைத் தேவில்கள் எல்லாம் * கடல்வண்ணன் கோயிலே என்னும் *
வெருவிலும் வீழ்விலும் மோவாக்1 * கண்ணன் கழல்கள் விரும்புமே

(Thiruvāimozhi 4-4-8)

"If she saw royals endowed with good wealth, she claims she saw Emperumān, the Lord of Lakshmī. If she saw beautiful blue things, she would jump up and down saying that she saw the Lord Trivikrama who measured the earth. If she saw temples with icons, she would say they were temples of Kannapiṛān with hue of the ocean. She always wants the divine feet of Srī Krishna whether she is scared or afraid or falls faint and becomes semiconscious."

Āzhwār also makes it clear that while He is unreachable even to the *dēvas*, He is very easily accessible to His devotees. Furthermore, *the effects of karma will never accrue to those who worship Him free of desires and expectation* (ஒரு பிரயோசனத்தையும் கருதாதவராய்க் கொண்டுபற்றவே அவை தாமே போம்)

அமரர்க்கு அரியானை *தமர்கட்கு எளியானை **
அமரத் தொழுவார்கட்கு * அமரா வினைகளே

(Thiruvāimozhi 10-5-9)

9: Puram Thozhā Mānthar – Madhusūdana Prapannās – Āzhwārs:

Āzhwārs do not seek the other deities or *dēvatās*, but they do not disrespect them. For instance, Āzhwārs use respectful words when they refer to Śiva. The terms used include Nakkapirān, நக்கபிரான், (Thiruvāimozhi 4-10- 8) முக்கண் பிரான் (Thiruvaimozhi 7-6-4) மெய்த்தவத்தோன் – "true sage" (Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi - 18)

Srī Thirumazhisai Pirān tells the Lord that he is not after devotion as a means to liberation (*Mōksha Sāadhanam*). He has been singing His glories not as a spiritual aspirant but as one who is inspired and stimulated by the wondrous *gunās* and deeds of the Lord, like the Védās and the Védic sages.

சுருக்குவாரையின்றியே சுருங்கினாய் சுருங்கியும்
பெருக்குவாரையின்றியே பெருக்கமெய்துபெற்றியோய்
செருக்குவார்கள் தீக்குணங்கள் தீர்த்ததேவதேவனென்று
இருக்குவாய்முனிக்கணங்களேத்தயானுமேத்தினேன்

(Thirucchandaviruttam -109)

"By Thy nature, Thou became a Vāmana with no one inducing Thee to take a dwarf form and while still in that dwarf form, assumed the gigantic form of Trivikrama with no one inducing Thee to become so. Thus the Védas and the sages sang Thy glories as the Lord of all *dēvās* (Who measured all the three worlds as Trivikrama) as one Who eliminated the bad *gunās* of those with swollen head and big ego (like Mahābali and others). Seeing that, I also sang Thy glories."

தீக்குணங்கள் – the bad *gunās* are faults in the form of the feelings of "I and mine" அஹங்காரம் (*ahamkāram*) and மமகாரம் (*mamakāram*).

Srī Thirumazhisai Pirān has a verse word for word in his Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi (verse #55) similar to what Srī Bhūdat āzhwār expresses in his Irāndām Thiruvandhādhi (verse #11)

கடை நின்றமரர் கழல்தொழுது நாளும்
இடைநின்றவின்பத்தராவர் - புடைநின்ற
நீரோதமேனி நெடுமாலே நின்னடியை
யாரோதவல்லாரவர்

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi -55)

"Many stand daily at the thresholds and fall at the feet of various deities to obtain short lasting happiness as with reaching higher worlds. O' Lord, with the hue of the oceans which surround this earth, is there anyone to fall at your feet and sing your glories?"

Sri Thirumazhisai Pirān goes one step even further and tells the Lord that he worships no other deity and Rudra with the matted hair locks will bear witness to it, referring of course to the incident in āzhwār's own life, when he encounters Lord Śiva who pays a visit without āzhwār's request and ends up very impressed by āzhwār's deep *bhakthi* for *Nārāyana* and leaves him after giving him the special name of "*Srī Bhakthi Sārar*" (one who is the essence of devotion) by which name āzhwār is known till today.

மற்றுத்தொழுவார் ஒருவரையும் யானின்மை
கற்றைச்சடையான் கரிக்கண்டாய் -எற்றைக்கும்
கண்டுகொள் கண்டாய் கடல்வண்ணா யானுன்னைக்
கண்டுகொள்கிற்குமாறு

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi -26)

"There is no other deity whom I worship you will see for the one with matted hair locks will bear witness to. Please see O'Lord with the hue of the ocean, such as I shall remain your devotee forever". Āzhwār seeks the blessing of the Lord so that he will be able to experience Him always.

In the very next verse (verse #27),

மால் தான் புகுந்த மடநெஞ்சம் மற்றதுவும்

பேறாகக் கொள்வனோ -

Āzhwār rhetorically questions whether he will ever consider anything else other than the Supreme Lord as desirable.

கேடில்சீர்வரத்தனாய்க் கெடும்வரத்தயனரன்
நாடினோடுநாட்டமாயிரத்தன் நாடுநண்ணினும்
வீடதானபோகமெய்தி வீற்றிருந்தபோதிலும்
கூடுமாயைல்லதொன்றுகொள்வனோகுறிப்பிலே

(Thirucchandaviruttam – 108)

"Even if I obtained the combined wealth of Brahma with unending riches and Śiva with the wealth of the destructive power, who both are capable of favoring their devotees with boons, along with the wealth of the thousand eyed Indra and reaching the highest state of liberation, remained full, will I ever entertain any desire other than being with Thee?"

The answer of course is that he will not. This is of course true of all the āzhwārs. It is also important to consider and understand the following statements as well.

தமர் உகந்தது எவ்வுருவம் அவ்வுருவம் தானே
தமர் உகந்தது எப்பேர் மற்றப்பேர்
தமர் உகந்து எவ்வண்ணம் சிந்தித்து இமையாதிருப்பரே
அவ்வண்ணம் ஆழியான் ஆம்

(Mudhal Thiruvandhādhi – 44)

"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

(Mūndrām Thiruvandhādhi – 38)

"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"

Srī Thirumazhisai pirān clearly summarizes the relationship of the supreme Lord to all the *dévas* including the three *mūrthies* (trinity) as well as the rest of the manifest universe.

தேவராய் நிற்கும் அத்தேவும் அத்தேவரில்
மூவராய் நிற்கும் முது புணர்ப்பும் - யாவராய்
நிற்கின்றெதெல்லாம் நெடுமாலென்றோராதார்
கற்கின்றெதெல்லாம் கடை.

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi – 54)

"Among the *dévās* as one of them, among all of the them as of the three *Mūrthies*, being His first *avatāra* taken of His own will and also as all sentient beings and insentient matter stands *Nārāyanā*. **If not understood as such by one, then all one's learning is in fact futile.**"

This is an important verse to remember. The inner controller (*antaryāmi*) Brahman, the *paramātmā* Srīman Nārāyana is behind all the *dévās* as well as behind all the sentients and the insentients of the universe. Thus **the question of āzhwārs (who are all *Madhusūdana prapannās*) seeking the other deities does not arise at all. Thus the word "Puram Thozha" must therefore mean something more and specific. The answer fortunately is available in āzhwār's own verses.**

ஆணினோடுபெண்ணுமாகி அல்லவோடுநல்லவாய்
ஊனோடோசையுறுமாகி ஒன்றலாதமாயையாய்
பூணிபேணுமாயானாகிப் பொய்யினோடுமெய்யுமாய்
காணிபேணுமானியாய்க்கரந்துசென்றகள்வனே

(Thirucchandaviruttam–26)

"Thou art the inner controller of all male, female and the neuter of the sentient beings as well as the best amongst them. Thou art the inner controller of the various *gunās* such as that of taste, sound and touch. In addition, Thou control the nature of Prakruthi which gives rise to all matter and forms. ***Thou were the cowherd who tended the cows, transparent to Thy devotees and cryptic to those with pride and ego.*** Weren't Thou the Vāmana celebate who protected the earth taking on the role of a deceitful thief?"

Āchārya Sri Periyvācchān Pillai in his commentary indicates clearly the meaning of the words "பொய்யினோடு மெய்யுமாய்" in this verse.

பொய்யினோடு - remaining hidden and unrevealed to those who seek material things, like the Duryodhanās.

மெய்யுமாய் - transparent and revealed to the devotees like the Pāṇḍavās. Āchārya also refers to Sri Nammāzhwār's Thiruvāimozhi (9-10-7) which is the decad of verses on the famous *divya désam* of Thirukkannapuram.

மெய்யனாகும் * விரும்பித் தொழுவார்க்கெல்லாம் *
பொய்யனாகும் * புறமே தொழுவார்க்கெல்லாம் **
செய்யில் வாளை உகளும் * திருக்கண்ணபுரத்து
ஐயன் * ஆகத்தனைப்பார்கட்கு அணியனே

(Thiruvaimozhi 9-10-7)

"For those who consider him alone as the goal and seek him with love, he will remain true. To those who have other fruits in mind and seek him somewhat superficially, He will remain unrevealed. For those who keep in their mind the Lord enshrined in Thirukkanapuram surrounded by fields in which the Vālai fish happily live and swim he will remain near to them."

விரும்பித் தொழுவார்க்கெல்லாம் மெய்யன் – Here it refers to all those who do not seek anything other the Lord like the āzhwārs who are true *prapannās*. They have no desires for material or other benefits. They are *அநந்யப்பிரயோஜனர்* with true love and devotion.

புறமே தொழுவார்க்கெல்லாம் பொய்யன் - those who seek worldly and other benefits. The Lord will bestow them but will stay aloof from them.

க்ரு'ஷ்ணாப்ரயா: க்ரு'ஷ்ணப³லா: க்ரு'ஷ்ணனாதா²ம்ச பாண்ட³வா:।
க்ரு'ஷ்ண: பராயணம்' சைஷாம்' ஜ்யோதிஷாமிவ சந்த³ரமா:॥

(Mahābhāratham _Drōṇa parvam -183-24)

Pāṇḍavās surrendered and sought refuge at the feet of Srī Krishna. They considered Sri Krishna as their sole help and their Lord. For the Pāṇḍavās He remained மெய்யன். To Duryōdhana who sought Srī Krishna for the help of his army, he gave them what he desired but stayed away from him. But He stood for the Pāṇḍavās all along. For Duryōdhana, he was பொய்யன்.

Āchāryā further illustrates this by quoting the incident from Srīmad Rāmāyanam. Srī Rāma addresses Sage Vishvāmitra on the way to Mithiḷa thus,

इमौ स्म मुनि शार्दूल किंकरौ समुपस्थितौ ।
आज्ञापय मुनिश्रेष्ठ शासनम् करवाव किम् ॥
இமௌ ஸ்மமுநிஸார்த்தூல கிங்கரௌ ஸமுபஸ்திதௌ
ஆஜ்ஞாபய யதேஷ்டம் வை ஸாஸநம் கரவாவ கிம்

(Srīmad Rāmāyanam -Bāla kāṇḍam 31-4)

"O', tigerly-sage, here are your attendants sir, available in your attendance, what order is to be carried out further, eminent saint, that you may order us"

Srī Thirumangai āzhwār expresses the same in one of the decads on the Lord of Srīrangam in his PeriyaThirumozhi.

பொய்வண்ணம் மனத்தகற்றிப்* புலனைந்தும் செலவைத்து*
மெய்வண்ணம் நினைந்தவர்க்கு* மெய்நின்ற வித்தகனை*
மைவண்ணம் கருமுகில்போல்* திகழ்வண்ண மரதகத்தின்*
அவ்வண்ண வண்ணனை* யான் கண்டது தென்னரங்தே

(Periya Thirumozhi 5-6-9)

"To those who understand the eternal nature of the jīva and Paramāṭma, genuinely love and worship Him getting rid of the desires from their minds about impermanent worldly material things and withdrawing the five senses away from them, He truly reveals Himself fully. I saw that wondrous Lord with the dark color of the cool collyrium, the dark color of the rain bearing clouds and the bright color of the emerald in Srīrangam in the South."

மெய்வண்ணம் நினைந்தவர்க்கு* மெய்நின்ற வித்தகன் "He truly reveals Himself fully"
விவ்ருணுதே தநூம் ஸ்வாம் (Kathopanishad 1-2-23).

Āzhwār here states his direct experience of the Lord and says that he visualized Him in Srīrangam. The three things referred to by the āzhwār (namely the collyrium, dark rain bearing clouds and the resplendent green emerald) stand here for both the color and the attributes (*gunās*) of the (*divya mangala vighram*) divine auspicious form of the Lord. The color is a mixture of all the three. The collyrium has a cooling effect. The dark rain bearing clouds bring refreshing showers doing good to all. The gem emerald has bright green color and is said to remove "*dōshās*" (faults). Thus this form of the Lord is described as "*Subhāsrāyam*" meaning "very auspicious and protective support or ground (for seeking shelter)".

Srī Pei āzhwār in his Mūndram Thiruvandhādhi describes the Lord's form to be similar to the dark rain bearing clouds with the brilliance of the lightning inside.

பெரிய வரை மார்பில் * பேராரம் பூண்டு *

கரிய முகிலிடை மின் போல **

(Mūndrām Thiruvandhādhi -55).

This is a literal translation of the description from Nārāyana sūkhtham

நீலதோயத்³-மத்⁴யஸ்தா²-த்³வித்³யுல்லேகே²வ பா⁴ஸ்வரா.

It is of interest to note hear that Srī ādhi Śankara who was an advaitic āchārya who taught Brahman to be formless and attributeless in his stōtram Srī Ranganāthāshtakam, refers to the same *divya mangala vighram* of Srīranganatha in these glowing beautiful words.

आनन्दरूपे निजबोधरूपे ब्रह्मस्वरूपे श्रुतिमूर्तिरूपे ।

शशाङ्करूपे रमणीयरूपे श्रीरङ्गरूपे रमतां मनो मे ॥

ஆநந்த³ரூபே நிஜபோ³த்⁴ரூபே ப்³ரஹ்மஸ்வரூபே ஸ்ருதிமூர்த்திரூபே

ஸாஸாங்கரூபே ரமணியரூபே ஸ்ரீரங்க³ரூபே ரமதாம் மநோமே

"My mind delights in the divine form of Srī Ranganātha. He (resting on the ādhisēsha) is the form of Bliss. He is the form of true knowledge. He is the form of Brahman, the ultimate Reality. He is the form embodied in all of the védās and the upanishads, He is cool and bright like the moon and He is the form of exquisite beauty."

Srī Thirumazhisai Pirān in one of the verses in Thirucchandaviruttam clearly summarizes the points for us to remember.

முத்திறத்து வாணியத்து இரண்டிலொன்று நீசர்கள்
மத்தராய்மயங்குகின்றது இட்டதிலிறந்துபோந்து
எத்திறத்துமுய்வதோர் உபாயமில்லையுய்குறில்
தொத்திறுத்ததண்டுழாய்நன்மாலைவாழ்த்திவாழ்மினோ (Thirucchandaviruttam -68)

"The lowly ones pursue the path of one of two of the three gunas to wallow in a life of misery till death intervenes, only to return to the same path. There is no other way, if you must cut this vicious cycle, except to live your life in praise of the Supreme Lord wearing the cool densely-strung garland of Tulasi".

Āzhwār indicates that the people of this world vary in their *gunās*. Those who are predominantly "*rajasic and tamasic*" go after material happiness by propitiating the deities that suit their *gunās*. If however one wants the liberation of the "*self*" from the cycle of rebirths, then there is no other way except to seek the refuge of the Paramapurusha.

Srī Krishna in Gīta cautions and advises Arjuna thus,

த்ரைகு³ண்யவிஷயா வேதா³ நிஸ்த்ரைகு³ண்யோ ப⁴வார்ஜுந (Gīta 2- 45)

"The Védās have the three gunās for their sphere O'Arjuna, you must be free from the three gunās".

The declaration by the āzhwār in this verse "எத்திறத்துமுய்வதோர் உபாயமில்லை" rings the tone of the *mantra* from the Purusha sūkhtham,
நாந்ய: பந்தா² அயநாய வித்³யதே । (Pūrvānuvākam -17) meaning,

"There is no other way for liberation".

The words from the āchārya Srī Periyavācchān pillai interpreting this line here are worth noting.

They read as follows: "ஆகையாலே ஸ்வபௌருஷத்தாலும் இதரதே³வதைகளை
ஆஸ்ரயணியராகப்பற்றினாலும் ஈஸ்வரன் தன்னையே ஐஸ்வர்யார்த்த²மாகப்பற்றினாலும்
உஜ்ஜீவிக்கைக்கு வழியில்லை"

meaning – "*Therefore, neither self effort, nor seeking the other dévās and nor seeking the Lord Himself for material things will lead to liberation from the Samsāra*".

It is very clear from āzhwārs' verses described above what "*puram thozhuvathu*" truly means in their vision. They only encourage us to seek the Supreme Paramātmā with genuine loving devotion and not for any impermanent material benefits. For such devotees, the Lord provides all they need and more.

வேந்தராய் விண்ணவராய் விண்ணாகித்தண்ணளியாய்
மாந்தராய் மாதாய் மற்றெல்லாமாய்-சார்ந்தவர்க்குத்
தன்னாற்றான்நேமியான்மால்வண்ணன்
தான்கொடுக்கும்பின்னால்தான்செய்யும்பிதிர்.

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi -83)

"The Lord who carries the discus and who is the very form of love, Himself provides help in many ways to those who seek Him by becoming the ruling king, the dévas, the heaven, the joys of heaven, the relatives and even the mother and yet being not content with what He has done, bestows the ultimate bliss of liberation". விண்ணவராய் - refers to the dévās.

லப⁴தே ச தத: காமாந் மயைவ விஹிதாந் ஹி தாந் (Gīta 7-22)

"Obtains their desires from dévās as given by Me"

The question of worship of the other deities (*dévathāntara bhajanam*) is not directly discussed here. ***We have seen that it is not in the nature of true Madhusūdhana Prapannās.*** The subject of *dévathāntara bhajanam* is a complicated one in the practical sense although it seems straight forward as the phrase will suggest. It is one of the prohibited actions for Srī Vaishnavās taking up *prapatti mārgam* (absolute surrender as the means to attain *mōksham* from the *samsāra*). Adiyén's older brother Srī Rajagopalan has written a piece on this subject after reviewing an email discussion which I had forwarded to him for his comments. It is quite nice and will be useful to all interested Srīvaishnavās. (adiyén will post that separately). However, a few general observations must be made here on this subject. The Visishtādvaita philosophy is a lovely universal concept transcending all faiths. All of the āzhwārs infact spoke to all humanity. Srī Āndāl addresses to all people who live in this world "வையத்து வாழ்வீர்கள்" (Thiruppāvai-2). Āzhwārs had clear apprehension (*sākshātkāratvam*) of the Lord. Their words therefore not only matter in spiritual issues perhaps more importantly so for all Srī Vaishnavās. For instance, their words about the the Lord ever present everywhere "எங்குமுள்ள கண்ணன்" (Thiruvāimozhi 2-8-9) reiterating Srī Prahlādāzhwān, must always apply. The other two statements by them must also always apply. "எத்தவம் செய்தார்க்கும் *அருள் முடிவது ஆழியான் பால்" "Whatever discipline one follows, the result of the divine grace arises only from the Lord carrying the discus." (Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi -2) and finally "வைகுந்தம் புகுவது * மண்ணவர் விதியே" "Reaching the eternal abode Vaikuntam of Nārāyana being the destiny of the people of the world the liberated jīvās are welcome with great honors by all the nitya sūris (the eternal attendants). (Thiruvāimozhi 10-9-9).

Mental attitude and *dhyāna* being more subtle are more powerful than the physical act of worship with the proviso that the latter must be entirely *sātvic* (good) and cause no harm to anyone or anything. We can look at a hypothetical incident which I actually was narrating to our friends in the temple recently. "A Srīvaishnava is walking through the rural roads on a hot summer day in Tamil Nādu. Unfortunately there are no trees for him to take shelter. The heat is

unbearable. He sees at a distance a structure of a small thatched building. A tree appears to be behind the building on the right side. . When he comes near it, he realizes that it is actually the "grāma dévathai aiyanār kōvil- ஐயனார் கோவில்" and the tree is a "véppa maram"(neem tree). He has to go around in a clockwise direction to get to the tree. After reaching the shade of the tree, he sits down and decides to rest for a while. He drinks a little water which he happens to have in his bag. He actually lies down and takes a nap. When he wakes up sometime later, the heat appears to have diminished. He decides to sing Amalanādhpirān pāsuras. He usually enjoys singing āzhwārs' pāsuras. When he comes to the verse which has the following words,

கையினார் * சுரி சங்கனல் ஆழியர் * நீள் வரை போல்

மெய்யனார் * துளப விரையார் கமழ் நீள் முடி எம்

ஐயனார் ** அணி அரங்கனார் * அரவின் அணை மிசை மேய மாயனார் *

செய்ய வாய் ஐயோ! * என்னைச் சிந்தை கவர்ந்ததுவே (Amalanādhpirān -7)

"Sri Ranganātha reclines like a huge mountain. His crown is adorned with tulasi leaves and His arms bear the cool conch and fiery' sudarsana chakra. Valuable gems shine and sparkle when they are set in gold. Like wise, my Lord's beauty is enhanced when He reclines on His ādhisēsha. My heart is captivated by the bewitching smile that plays around His red lips".

the word "எம் ஐயனார்" triggers in his mind the funny coincidence of where he happens to be at that time. He is reminded of the words of Srī Nammāzhwār

"மன் பல்லுயிர்களுமாகிப் * பல பல மாய மயக்குகளால் *

இன்புரும் இவ்விளையாட்டுடையானைப் பெற்று * ஏதும் அல்லலிலனே" (Thiruvāmozhi 3-10-7) as well as by the Dāsāvathāra Stōtram of Swāmi Srī Désika. He is overjoyed by the thoughts of the Lord of Srīrangam and His līlā. He subsequently decides to resume his way. As he leaves the ground, he raises his arms in *anjali* before the sanctum believing that the *antaryāmi* of that dévata in the sanctum is in fact Lord Srīrangānātha. Now if one poses the question as to whether this act of this Srīvasiṇava in any way has violated the rules which govern his *prapatti* mārgam. Adiyén will say "not". It is possible that the vaidhikās and achāryās might disagree, although I am not sure. Given the fact that "Emperumān" has overwhelming *kārunyam* to all beings and especially to his dear devotees, it is not likely to be considered as an "*apachāram*" by Him. This story just illustrates that *dévathāntara bhajanam* (worship of other deities) is not an easy thing to decide even if one has reviewed *guru parampara charitram*. Adiyén therefore will not dwell on this further here.

10: Āzhwārs' Pāsuras – Our Perfect Prayers to the Lord.

What in fact āzhwārs choose to request the Lord in prayers is worth noting for simply reciting them becomes automatically our prayers. ***This actually has a transformative effect in ourselves which can be experienced invariably. All of the verses in all of the prabhandhams are perfect for our daily reading and recitation.*** They are all beautiful. That is why they have been recommended by our āchāryās for our daily *anusandhānam*. Adiyén here wish to refer to Srī Thirumazhisai Pirān's work since the two prabhandhams that we have from him, were actually selected by āzhwār himself since he apparently threw many of his works into river Kāvéri. The two *prabhandhams* Thirucchandaviruttam and Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi manuscripts floated against the bulging Kāvéri river stream, Azhwār apparently kept only those two for posterity.

"முழுப்பெருக்கில் பொன்னியெதிர் மிதந்த சொல்லொன் வாழியே" states his Vāzhithirunāmam

"Long live the One whose words floated upstream of the bulging river Kāvéri ". Adiyén also wish to refer to a famous *pathikam* from Thiruvāimozhi of Srī Nammāzhwār. It is said that Srī Madhurakavi āzhwār wrote simply the first line of the ***Kannan Kazhalinai pathikam*** of Thiruvāimozhi on a palm leaf which was enough to win the test and won the recognition and admiration of all the Tamil poets of the *sangham period*. In this decad of verses Srī Nammāzhwār actually simply summarizes his instructions to devotees of the Lord.

Adiyén therefore wish to end this piece with reference to three sets of verses. These are given as auspicious benediction to this piece. The first 5 verses are from Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi (verses 59-63). They are very beautiful verses of this *prabhandham* which touched adiyén's heart even before learning the full meaning. Thirucchandaviruttam which is āzhwār's second *prabhandham* has many verses at the end with beautiful prayerful submissions to the Lord. They are verses: 91,92,96,97,98, 99,100,101,103,104,111,115 and 117). Of these verses 92 and 101, 103 and 115 will be given here. The third concluding set is the decad of verses of *Kannan Kazhalinai* from Thiruvāimozhi.

Srī Thirumazhisai pirān's Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi verses 59 -63

அன்பாவாய் ஆரமுதமாவாய் அடியேனுக்
கின்பாவாய் எல்லாமும் நீயாவாய்- பொன்பாவை
கேள்வா கிளரொளியென் கேசவனே கேடின்றி
ஆள்வாய்க்கடியேன்நானாள்.

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi -59)

"You are Love sublime, the unsatiating nectar. You are my, your servant's Bliss and every kind of happiness. O' the Lord of Sri Lakshmī, whose halo adds lustre to Thee. O' my Lord Sri Késhava, I am your servant, thy eternal possession"

ஆள்பார்த் துழிதருவாய் கண்டுகொள்ளென்றும் நின்
தாள்பார்த் துழிதருவேன் தன்மையை கேட்பார்க்
கரும்பொருளாய் நின்ற அரங்கனே உன்னை
விரும்புவதேவிள்ளேன்மனம்.

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi -60)

"You are very eager to seek out your devotees. Grace so my thirst for the sight of Your sacred feet shall be everlasting. O' the Lord of Srīrangam, the Ultimate Truth, unfathomable by any seeker on his own, my heart never stops pining for You."

மனக்கேதம் சாரா மதுததன் தன்னை
தனக்கேதான் தஞ்சமாக் கொள்ளல்- எனக்கேதான்
இன்றொன்றி நின்றலகையேழ் ஆணையோட்டினான்
சென்றொன்றிநின்றதிரு.

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi- 61)

"No sorrow will befall the one that has taken refuge at the holy feet of the Lord Madhusūdhana. Today the Lord, who sustains the seven worlds, has on his own bestowed the great wealth of His Grace by entering my mind."

திருநின்றபக்கம் திறவிதென்றோரார்
கருநின்ற கல்லார்க்குரைப்பர்- திருவிருந்த
மார்வன் சிரீதரன் தன்வண்டுலவு தண்டுழாய்
தார்தன்னைச்சூடித்தரித்து.

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhī- 62)

"Those who do not realize that Nārāyana is the transcendental Reality since Srī resides in Him, teach the ignorant, pointing to others limited by birth. For He is known as Srīdhara who bears "Srī" on His heart and wears lovely, cool garland of Tulasi swarming with humming bees."

தரித்திருந்தேனாகவே தாராகணப்போர்
விரித்துரைத்த வெந்நாகத்துன்னை - தெரித்தெழுதி
வாசித்தும் கேட்டும் வணங்கி வழிபட்டும்
பூசித்தும்போக்கினேன்போது.

(Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhī- 63)

"True knowledge about You who are the soul of Srī ādhisēsha who has expounded in detail the great movements of the stars, has reached me through Your grace, spending all my time meditating, writing, reading, listening, and worshipping."

Srī Thirumazhisai pirān's Thirucchandham verses 92,101,103 and 115.

விடைக்குலங்கள் ஏழடர்த்து வென்றிவேற்கண்மாதரார்
கடிக்கலந்ததோள்புணர்ந்த காலியாயவேலைநீர்
படைத்தடைத்ததிற்கிடந்து முன்கடைந்துநின்றனக்கு
அடைக்கலம்புகுந்தவென்னைஅஞ்சலென்னவேண்டுமே

(Thirucchanda Viruttam – 92)

"O' Lord, Who came as a cowherd! In ancient times, Thou created the wavy oceans of waters, reposed on one of them and churned the same (for the sake of the *dēvās*) and (as Srī Rāma) built a bridge across another. For the sake of embracing the beautiful and fragrant arms of Nappinnai Pirātti with eyes sharp as the victorious spear, Thou vanquished the seven types of bulls. Please pray tell me who had taken refuge in Thee, "Do not fear".

இரந்துரைப்பதுண்டு வாழி ஏமநீர்நிறத்தமா
வரந்தருந்திருக்குறிப்பில் வைத்ததாகில் மன்னுசீர்
பரந்தசிந்தையொன்றின்று நின்னபாதபங்கயம்
நிரந்தரம்நினைப்பதாகநீநினைக்கவேண்டுமே

(Thirucchanda Viruttam - 101)

"O' Lord of the hue of the large ocean! My close relative! Long live Thee. This servant begs to make a plea. In Thy divine will which has the nature of bestowing goodness and blessings to the *jīva*, if Thou decide to bless me with the eternal good, then Thou should will so that my wandering mind will centre its focus without any distraction and always without any break think of Thine lotus feet."

திருக்கலந்துசேருமாற்ப தேவதேவதேவனே
இருக்கலந்தவேதநீதி ஆகிநின்றநின்மலா

கருக்கலந்தகாளமேக மேனியாயநின்பெயர்
உருக்கலந்தொழிவிலாதுஉரைக்குமாறுரைசெயே

(Thirucchanda Viruttam - 103)

"O' Lord with the holy chest where Srī Dévi (Periya pirāttiyār) eternally resides! O' Supreme ruler of the nityasūris, sought after by all the dévas! O' Immaculate Being! The revelation of the Védās with their characteristic hymns is Thy nature. O' Lord Kanna, the cowherd with the form bright as the gold and the hue of the dark clouds! Bless me so I can recite continually Thy holy names portraying Thine beauty."

அத்தனாகியன்னையாகி ஆளுமெம்பிரானுமாய்
ஒத்தொவ்வாதபல்பிறப்பொழித்து நம்மையாட்கொள்வான்
முத்தனார்முகுந்தனார் புகுந்துநம்முள்மேவினார்
எத்தினாலிடர்க்கடல்கிடத்தி யேழைநெஞ்சமே

(Thirucchanda Viruttam - 115)

"He, Who is beyond samsāra, Who bestows Māksha, destroying our many births- alike in its conscious nature but different in its forms- in order to take us under His divine service, becoming as our father, mother as well as our endearing Lord, has entered inside us and has become one with us. O' Ignorant mind! Why are you immersed in the ocean of sorrow? "

Srī Nammāzhwār's Thiruvāimozhi 10-5: Kannan Kazhalinai

கண்ணன் கழலினை நண்ணும் மனமுடையீர்
எண்ணும் திருநாமம் திண்ணம் நாரணமே.

1.

"O' all of you who desire to reach the holy feet of Krishna
You need to think of his sacred name. "Nārāyana" is the *mantra*".

நாரணன் எம்மான் பார் அணங்காளன்
வாரணம் தொலைத்த காரணன் தானே.

2.

"Nārāyana is my Lord. He is the consort of the divine mother Earth.
He is the Cause of all. He is the same Krishna who destroyed the mad elephant"

தானே யுலகெல்லாம் தானே படைத்திடந்து
தானே யுண்டுமிழ்ந்து தானே யாள்வானே.

3.

He is the life of all the world, creating it Himself, lifting it, swallowing it and bringing it forth again, He rules and protects.

ஆள்வா னாழிநீர் கோள்வாய் அரவணையான்
தாள்வாய் மலரிட்டு நாள்வாய் நாடிரே.

4.

He rules reposing on the ancient cosmic waters. At the holy feet of that Lord,
Who is reposing on the proud serpent, offer flowers and worship Him daily.

நாடீர் நாஸ்தோறும் வாடா மலர்கொண்டு
பாடீர் அவன்நாமம் வீடே பெறலாமே.

5

Worship Him daily with fresh flowers. Sing His holy Names.
You will surely attain beatitude.

மேயான் வேங்கடம் காயா மலர்வண்ணன்
 பேயார் முலை உண்ட வாயான் மாதவனே. 6.
 He has taken abode in Thiruvénkatam, He has the hue of Kāyām flower.
 His mouth sucked the life of the ogress Pūtana. He is Mādhava, the consort of Lakshmī.

மாதவ னென்றென்று ஓதவல்லீரேல்
 தீதொன்றும் அடையா ஏதம் சாராவே. 7.
 If you call Him as Mādhava, the Lord of Lakshmī, then no harm will befall you.
 Suffering will not near you.

சாரா ஏதங்கள் நீரார் முகில் வண்ணன்
 பேரா ரோதுவார்- ஆரார் அமரரே. 8.
 Suffering will never accrue. Whoever chants the name of the Lord
 With the color of the dark clouds will become the eternal stars.

அமரர்க் கரியானை தமர்கட் கெளியானை
 அமரத்தொழுவார்கட்கு அமராவினைகளே. 9.
 He is unreachable even to the *dēvās*. He is however accessible to His devotees.
 The effects of *karma* will never accrue to those who worship Him
 free of desires and expectations.

வினைவல் விருளென்னும் முனைகள் வெருவிப்போம்
 சுனைநன் மலரிட்டு நினைமின் நெடியானே. 10.
 Effects of all actions and ignorance will leave on their own.
 Think of the great Lord, offering good flowers growing near bodies of waters
 (like ponds, lakes and streams)

நெடியான் அருள்தும் படியான் சடகோபன்
 நொடியாயிரத்துப் பத்து அடியார்க் கருள்பேறே. 11.
 Sri Satakōpar enjoys the grace of the cosmic Lord.
 These ten verses of the thousand will bring Lord's grace to the devotees.

Ōm Namō Nārāyanāya
Ōm Srīmaté Rāmānujaya Namaha
Āzhwārgal āchāryārgal Thiruvadigalé śaraṇam

adiyén rangathan.

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On Dévatāntara Bhajanam

By *Srī N. Rajagopalan*

Since Védic times, a multiplicity of gods has ruled over the Sanātana dharma pantheon, with Sruti texts giving ample leeway for worship of several gods. Some clarity emerged, after Srī Krishna's pronouncements in the Bhagavad Gītā, on the God entity Who is the Ultimate Reality and the primal cause of creation and the refuge of human life. Āzhwārs through their divine poetry made extensive references to the primacy of Sriman Nārāyana among the God-trinity as sung first by Sri Poigai Pirān in his Mudhal Thiruvandhāthi pāsuram 15. Ādi Śankara queered the pitch, however, with his Advaitic siddhānta in interpreting the Vedāntic Sūtrās and Upanisads and "shanmatha" worship practice drawing a line between philosophy and religion. It was left to our Pūrvācharyās especially the triad of sages Nāthamuni, Yāmunamuni and Srī Rāmānujamuni to lay the foundations for renaissance of the Srīvaishnava religion and fostering a Sampradāya in which faith and philosophy stand in harmony on the firm platform of Vishishtādvaita Siddhānta.

Dévatāntara bhajanam is a long ingrained cultural trait in popular psyche difficult to wish away. Various Purānic legends and lore glorifying diverse god heads and Sāstraic averments are all integral to this trait. Even belief in sheer happenstance is part of this cultural more as would appear from Thirumazhisai Pirān's "Azhaippan" pāsuram in Nānmukan Thiruvandhādhi or Āndāl's "Koodal" game in decad 4 of her Nāchiār Thirumozhi. Āndāl's prayer to Manmatha for his favour in the fruition of her "nōnbu" to attain the Lord of Tiruvēnkataṁ, or Mārkaṇḍēya's prayer to Śiva for sparing his life from Yama is all part and parcel of this diverse culture. The truth that they are agents who confer boons or favours which ultimately emanate from Nārāyana as the "antaryāmi" and "niyanta", is a matter of philosophic truth but not central or even relevant to the boon seeker. In Poigai Pirān's verse cited earlier, Āzhwār's first line reads, "Mudhalāvār Moovaré", before he clarifies in the next line that of the trinity, the Ocean coloured Lord is the Principal.

Nammāzhwar in his Thruvāimozhi pāsuram 10.10.1 starts with the address to the Lord, "Muniyé, Nānmukané, Mukkannappa", which verse is considered very significant by commentators. He addresses the Lord as "Muniyé" to underline the fact how the Primordial Being Whom Sruti texts refer to as Ekō vai Nārāyana āsīd" ...etc by His dhyāna of "bhahusyām" creates the Universe and Brahma, as Svētasvara Upanishad puts it, "Yō Brahmānam vidhadhāti pūrvam"... By addressing "Nānmukhané, Mukkannappa" next, Āzhwār reminds us how the Lord by "*anupravéśa*" sets in process the "*vyashti*", and when the time comes at the end of the "*kalpa*" sets in motion the process of reabsorption of the created "*vyashti*", and at the end of it ingests the residual "*vyashti*" and "*samashti*" including Brahma and Śiva, as phrased by the Védāntic text, "Yasya brahmaca Kshatraṅga ubhe bhavata odhanam, mrtyu yasya upasécanam"... or as Srī Kaliyan would put it in his own blunt fashion "Emperumān undumizhnda ecchil dévar". It is all a

play act for the Lord induced by His "dayā", as Swāmi Désikan observes in Dayāsatakam, "Āsrushti santatānām..." to redeem the egregious universe from its persistent errant ways.

While thus Brahma and the three eyed Śiva are His instruments to carry out their assigned mandate in this play act, to popular fancy it appears as if they both are on equal footing with the Lord. So they receive adoration and worship for worldly favours, they can grant. But these gods, in their moments of overexuberance of their own self-importance overreach themselves at times coming to peril and turning to the Lord to bail them out of their predicament. Still they are dear "parādhinās" of the Lord and as such Āzhwār too wishes to experience them in inseparable togetherness with the Lord. But the cynosure of Āzhwār's eyes remains the Lord, and so he moves on to revert to his experience of Him by addressing Him in the next line as follows. "en pollākkanivāittāmaraiḱkan karumāṇiḱkamé en Kalvā"! Jivās act as "thieves" by expropriating their "selves" which belong to the Lord as independent, "Kim téna na krutam pāpam chōrēnāthmāpaharinā". But in the case of Āzhwār, it is the Lord who has stolen his mind away. So He calls Him "Kalvan". This takes my mind to a story from Harivamsam. It relates to a happening when Śiva desired the title of Īsvara or Dévadéva and performed self-sacrifice. The Lord was pleased with his penance and conferred on him the title he had coveted. Mighty pleased with the new title, Śiva was generous to suggest to the Lord that He should, in reciprocation, worship him as fitting his new title and seek a boon from him. The Lord said that he would do so at some point in a new human incarnation. He found that opportunity in Krishnāvatāra when after many years of marriage, He and Rukmini did not have yet have a baby, He thought why not undertake a trip to Kailas and meet his friend Śiva and redeem the promise He had made earlier to ask for a boon from him. It was on this "yātra" that he encountered Ghantākarna with Lord's hilarious greeting to him, "namo ghaṇṭāya karnāya ca, namah katapatāya ca". Krishna reached Kailas after passing through Ghantākarna's forest. Śankara and Pārvati were delighted to receive Krishna with all honours and inquired about Rukmini. Then Krishna explained that the purpose of his visit was to redeem the boon he had been promised by Śankara and that the boon he besought from Śankara was for a son to him and Rukmini. Śankara was nonplussed, here he was, caught in his own net, in an invidious position of having to bestow the blessing of a child to his own grandfather who was standing before him as Sṛī Krishna! What could he say. Śankara then conferred this beautiful name of Késava to Mādhava in the words,

"Kha iti Brahmano nāma Īsōham sarvadéhinām l

āvām tavāhnghe sambhūthou tasmād Késava nāmavān" ll

These words are beautifully captured by Āzhwāri in his Thiruvāimozhi pāsuram 2. 2. 10, and stated by him in Śankara's own words as, "Kalvā! Emmaiyum ézhulakam Ninnullé thottriya Iraivā! Enru Velléran, Nānmukan, Indiran vānavar pulloordhi kazhal panindhéttuvaré". As Brahma puts it, "Na dva na munayah na cāham na Śankara h jānanti Paramésasya tat Vishnoh:". I have mentioned this story only to make the point that even the good Lord is, perhaps no exception to "dévatāntara bhajanam".

Aside from this story, Śankara is looked upon as the first devotee and dependent of the Lord as he himself proudly proclaims in his Mantra Rājapada Stōtram. This closeness is underscored by the fact that Śiva temples are dotted across the countryside within close proximity of Vishnu shrines especially in South India. Among the 'divadésās themselves, one can see this closeness in many places such as Thirukkudandhai, Thiruvellikkeni etc. In Thillai Thiruchittirakkoodam and

Thirukkurungudi the shrines are contiguous to each other within the temple itself. In Thiruchittirakkodam, it is believed that the Lord was requested by Śankara to preside as the arbiter in a dance duel between him and his consort. What a consummate arbiter the Lord must have been whose mere prancing through the woods of Brindhāvan in Krishnāvatāra was a sight for the gods to envy in lost adoration, and on sight of which the celestial damsels Ūrvashi and Ménaka reportedly felt abashed and lowered their heads in admiration. In Thirukkurungudi Sṛī Kaliyan in his Peria Thirumozhi pays a rare tribute to the refined dignity of the Lord's companion in the words, "pakkam nirkka-ninra panbhar". The temple sampradāya in this divadēsam runs like this. The Lord Nambi inquires of the Bhattar after His Thiruvārādhana every day, "pakkam ninra Pirānukku kuraivillame ellām nadandhadhā", meaning if all courtesies and honours were duly extended to Śankara. In both these shrines, a Sṛīvaishnava devotee must circumambulate both shrines together and cannot do just the Lord's shrine. I am saying all this only to point to the close cultural connect between Nārāyana and Śankara . There does not seem to be much substance, therefore, in loosely characterizing the modern multi-deity temples as some kind of departmental stores, where one can go to worship the god he chooses to seek grace or favours from. "Dévatāntara bhajanam" is to a great extent historically and intrinsically underpinned in the mind of every devotee. It does not sound right to be dismissive about it as some do, merely because one happens to be a Sṛīvaishnava.

It is specifically relevant to discuss this subject in the context of the "*Prapatti mārgha*" of Sṛīvaishnava religion which is the only path of redemption open to the rank and file of us forsaken by the other paths. But the paradox of "*Prapatti mārgha*" is that it comes with rigorous canons and caveats of its own and any slippages or infractions entail consequences to the follower. The "sāstraic and other injunctions it imposes in terms of avoidance of omissions and commissions, are difficult but integral to the path which assures the ultimate reward one can aspire for, that of "*sāyujyam*" with the *Paramātmā* in eternal service at His feet. But the difficulties involved in strict adherence to the tenets often serve as a disincentive in taking to this path until very late in one's life. One has to necessarily seek one's āchārya's guidance, the life histories of our Purvāchāriars and the instructions of elders in the system and figure out what may be considered "*uchita*" or "*anuchitha*" *charita* or conduct to follow. As far as this topic is concerned, I can recount some "*aithiham*s" I have read about or heard of. It is recorded that Emperumānār used to take part on many occasions in Namperumāl's ceremonial processions. On one such occasion, it started raining when Namperumāl was somewhere in the area of Thruvānaikka near the temple of Jambukésvara and Akhilāndésvari. The processionists immediately took Namperumāl inside the shade of the temple gōpuram. Emperumānār however chose to wait outside drenching in the rain. Some devotees ran towards him beseeching him to come inside the temple. Emperumānār declined. When asked why he was not coming in, Emperumānār reportedly replied, "it is alright for the Lord to go inside the temple since the whole universe is his domain. But it would not be proper on my part to do so". In another instance relating to Sri Kūrattāzhvān (I think it was him), he was asked by someone how he would conduct himself, if he came upon a "dévatāntara". He is believed to have replied that it would be more pertinent to ask how that "anyadéva" would conduct himself if he encountered a Sṛīvaishnava like him. Another anecdotal story cited in the life of Pillai Urangāvilli Dāsar runs like this. Dāsar and his two nephews used to work for the Chōla King in Uraiyur. Dāsar was some kind of head of the King's bodyguards. Like Dāsar, this king also at some point took refuge with Emperumānār. In this connection, an incident is narrated in the Īdu Vyākhyānam on

Thiruvāimozhi line " Māyan thamaradi neeru kondu ..." (Thiruvāimozhi 4-6-6) – "apply the dust of the feet of Lord's devotees". This Thiruvāimozhi describes the fainting spell of Parānkusa Nāyaki after the Lord had left her and the ensuing futile attempt made by the mother to revive her with the 'Kattuvichi's incantations to invoke the grace of the spirits or demigods. At that point, the 'nāyaki's friend intercedes advising the mother that her daughter could be easily revived by chanting the Lord's names and applying the dust of the feet of the Lord's devotees. Reverting to the story, the King set out one evening with Dāsar's nephews on a recreational outing. These two Dāsar nephews were also like their uncle and aunt, staunch Srīvaishnavas and kept away from, and would not even as much as look at, other gods or their shrines. The Chōla King who knew this, nevertheless wished to play a trick on them. So he pointed to a temple 'vimānam' at a distance and told them that it was the 'vimānam' of Srīrangam temple. Believing the King, the two young men prostrated in the direction of the shrine following the King's words. The King then had a jestful dig at them saying that they had indeed prostrated towards a Jain shrine. The two Vishnu devotees fainted on hearing this. The King got frightened at this untoward turn of events. Since they could not be revived after first aid, the King sent an emissary to inform Dāsar about it. Dāsar rushed to where the king and his nephews were. After reaching there, he learned what had happened from the King. Saying, "marandhum puram thozhā māndharkku Māyan thamaradippodiyé marundhu", "the dust of the feet of Lord's devotees" is the medicine for men who do not worship other gods, Dāsar touched them with his feet. At that instant, the young men came out of their fainting spell and felt fresh again. The King fell at the feet of Dāsar and begged for his forgiveness.

Our Āchāryās have been the best exemplars of the "Sampradāya", and those who are following in that exalted lineage continue to uphold the traditions set by Pūrvāchāriars. The "*naichya bhāva*" they professed and practised, going to the extent of owning upto failings or foibles they did not possess and asking forgiveness of the Lord as evident from their hymns, is really daunting, viewed in the light of our own lives in modern times; 'daunting' is a mild way of putting it. We must virtually feel like storehouses of infractions in thousands, or pieces of wood floating in a vast ocean. What kind of standards anyone can set for himself is mind-boggling. How is a "prapanna" supposed to act in Thirukkurungudi temple for instance? Can he walk past Śankara's sanctum without any thought? Would it not cross his mind that Śankara is the dearest devotee of the Lord and as such eminently deserves to be venerated and greeted with an "anjali"? Can any believer, without a twinge of the heart, really follow Emperumānār's example here? I have known of instances where orthodox Srīvaishnavas would bolt their doors if Śiva's procession was going by. Can anyone say with infallible conviction what would be considered as an infraction between the two in Lord's eye, paying one's respect to the lord Śiva outside one's home or closing the doors on him and staying inside. I have certainly no settled views in the matter. Whatever it may be, one may rest in the comfort of the thought that the good Lord will eventually take us to his shore and unto his fold. We have no other recourse and He also, perhaps, has no option, since that is what Āzhwār assures us, "*Vaikundham pughuvadhu mannavar vidhiyé*".