

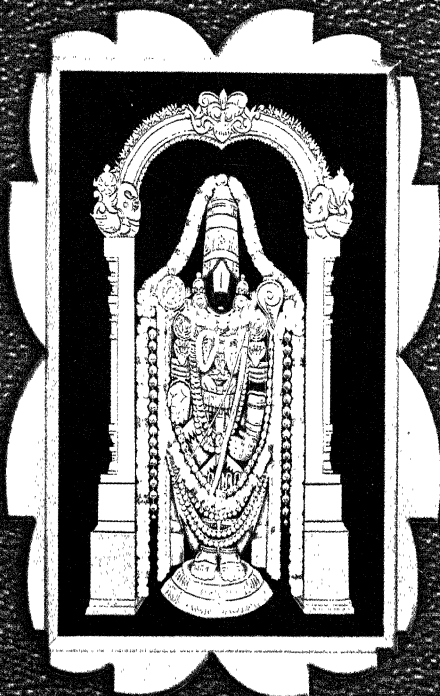
108

VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS

VOLUME SEVEN

DIVYA DESAMS IN MALAI NADU AND VADA NADU

Miss. Dr. M.S. Ramesh, (A.S. (Retd.))



Published by
Executive Officer,

T.T. DEVASTHANAMS, TIRUPATI.

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Tirupati
2000

**108 VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS
VOLUME - VII**

By

Miss Dr. M.S. Ramesh, I.A.S. (Retd.)

T.T.D. Religious Publications Series No : 586

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T.T.D. First Edition: 2000

Copies: 5000

Published by

Dr. I.V. SUBBA RAO, I.A.S.,
Executive Officer,
Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams,
Tirupati - 517 507.

Printed at

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Press,
Tirupati - 517 507.



Dedicated
To my Parents
Smt. Padmavathy Srirama Iyengar
and
Prof. Srirama Iyengar

FOREWORD

The Divya Prabhandham contains the most sublime lyrical outpourings of piety. The twelve Alvars who indited these exquisite hymns took the devotional poetry to the dizzy heights of mystic experience and filled the devotee's heart with love of the highest order. Besides, these minstrels of God par excellence have exultantly praised the grandeur and glory of 108 divya desas dedicated to the auspicious arca forms of Sriman Narayana.

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams has already brought out six volumes on the celebrated divya desams located in the ancient Chola Nade, Pandya Nadu, Nadu Nadu and Tondai Nadu. In the present Volume, the author graphically describes the holy shrines of Lord Vishnu in Malai Nadu (mostly in Kerala) and Vada Nadu (northern India). The salient features of the temples, location, sthala purana, Alvar's hymns on each divya desa with translation and mode of worship are given in great detail. The author's essay on the Lord's sacred Feet enables the readers to realise that salvation can be attained by surrendering oneself to His Holy Feet.

We have utmost pleasure to present the seventh volume of 108 Divya Desams to the readers. We hope that the present book like the preceding volumes, will help the devotees unfold their spiritual aspirations.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

PREFACE

This is the Seventh and last in the series on the 108 Vaishnavite Divya desas. The readers who have gone thro' the earlier volumes are aware that in these series I have attempted to present a holistic picture of each Divya desa covering the mythological stories of each desa, the epigraphical evidences available in those temple walls which stand a mute testimony to the historical events connected with each of those places. I have also presented what I call a hymnological picture by translating into English some of the pasurams, the literary outpourings of great Alvars and saints and musicians on the presiding deity of each divya desa. The earlier four volumes have covered the divya desas in Tondai Nadu, Chola Nadu, Nadu Nadu and Pandiya Nadu. In view of the wealth of material available as also in view of the special attachment this author has towards Lord Srinivasa, I thought it appropriate to devote one whole volume to just four divya desas viz. Tirupathli, Ahobalam, Thirupparkadal and Paramapada (Vaikuntha). In that volume I had translated into English all the pasurams composed by the eleven Alvars on Lord Srinivasa.

In this the last volume I have covered 22 divya desas located in the geographical area known as Vada nadu and Malai nadu i.e. present North India and Kerala State. One general phenomenon noticed while collecting the material for these divya desas was the near total absence of epigraphical material in the temples in this area. While there is some material available in the stones in the temples in Kerala, there is virtually no such material in the temples in the North - obviously the impact of successive invasions by muslims and others who consistently desecrated the temples, plundered and pillaged the wealth of those temples. Even pictorial material like the photos of main deities, or utsava vigrahas or of any special festivals etc. is not available. The temples in these areas do not have the majestic tall gopuras or temple cars etc. So I have not been able to present any pictorial visual representation of these temples.

The readers may recall that in each of these volumes I have been dwelling upon one general topic of relevance to vaishnavites.

Thus, in the earlier volumes I have dealt with subjects like Temples and their significance, Maha Vishnu and His traits, Mahalakshmi and Her role, Ayudhams (weapons) of Lord Narayana, the vehicle of the Lord Viz. Garuda, Prapatti i.e. way to salvation. In this last volume I am winding up the series by dwelling on the Divine lotus Feet of the Lord which are our saviour and succour in crossing the turbulent ocean of samsara. I have given extracts from the utterances of great sages, saints and savants on the Divine Feet, their description and their role in the past and future.

Before I conclude it is my pleasant duty to publicly express and record my thanks to all those who have helped me in completing this work.

First and foremost my special thanks are to the members of my family but for whose encouragement and loving support I would not have been able to complete this work. My special thanks are next due to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams for having come forward to publish these seven volumes. All the reviewers and critics have uniformly praised the printing standards, the get up, the reproduction of the photos and the neat flawless production. For this, my special thanks are due to the successive Executive Officers of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams starting with Shri M.V.S.Prasad, I.A.S., Sri D.V.L.N.Murthy, I.A.S., Shri Ramesh Kumar, I.A.S., and Dr. I.V. Subba Rao, I.A.S., who took a keen personal interest in expediting the printing work. My thanks are also due to the senior staff in the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Press whose personal attention contributed a great deal to the printing excellence in these volumes. My thanks are therefore due to Shri Vijayakumar Reddy, Shri Mohan Rao, Shri Govindarajulu of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams press. My thanks are also due to Shri Ubhaya Vedantha Sthala Sayana Thuraivar Sri Pillai Lokam Swami who took me thro' the pasurams and their commentaries so that I could get a feel of those divine outpourings before attempting its translation into English. My thanks are also due to Professor Ananthan, Head of Department of English, Vivekananda College, Madras and Shri M.Narasimhacharya, Professor and Head of the Department of Vaishnavism and to Shri

Ramaswamy of T.T.D. for all the help extended to me. My special thanks are also due to Shri K.Ramji who provided excellent secretarial support to me for all the six volumes. His unstinted, participative and perfect co-operation, cheerfully willingly taking down dictation at all odd hours even after his heavy office routine was of great assistance to me. My thanks are also due to Shri Chandrasekhar who also provided secretariat assistance for this volume.

In conclusion, I once again reiterate and wish to place on record my deep sense of gratitude and special thanks to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams for having brought out all these seven volumes. In conclusion, I wish to say that it is nothing but the bountiful grace of Lord Srinivasa which saw me thro' 1989 to 1996 to successfully and satisfactorily complete this work. The fruits of these seven years of toil is nothing but the grace of Lord of Seven Hills.

OM NAMO VENKATESAYA

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THE DIVINE LOTUS FEET

The 108 divya desams have been dealt with in seven volumes. In each volume, I have been dealing with a general subject of significance to vaishnavite philosophy. The first volume had a general feature on “temples and its significance and on Lord Vishnu and His Traits”. In the second volume, I dealt with the divine consort Mahalakshmi and the significant role that She plays in Sri vaishnavism. In the third volume, I took up the general topic “Ayudhams of Mahavishnu” and related some stories connected with each of those weapons. The fourth volume dwelt on Peria Thiruvadi i.e. Garuda, the Lord’s vahana. In the 5th volume I took up the subject “Prapatti” and broadly covered the salient features of prapatti. In this, the last volume, it is proposed to conclude with the significance of the Divine lotus feet as those feet are the sure saviour and succour for all Sri vaishnavites.

An attempt is made here to briefly quote what great sages and saints have to say on the lotus feet. I propose to briefly outline the description of those feet by giants of poesy like Alavandar, (i.e., Yamunacharya), Ramanuja, Desika, etc. quoting their Sanskrit verses. Later I propose to selectively quote one each of the pasurams by all the Alvars which glorify the achievements of the Divine lotus feet. While on this, the magnificent feats achieved by the lotus feet will be enumerated. To illustrate, the Thirvikrama episode, the Ahalya sapa vimochana episode, the dundubhi episode, etc.

In the Lord’s body the feet are the most important part for any devotee. It is said that even while the Lord assumed Visvaroop, the devas and others occupied different parts of His body. But the feet alone were left free for the devotees. In many of the archa vigrahas, the Lord Himself is seen pointing with one of His hands towards His feet giving us a very broad hint that it is those feet which will ensure our salvation. Whenever the God is described in literature, people follow the padadi keshanthe varnana technique i.e. the divine figure is described feet upwards up to the crown. In Tamil, this is known as “Thiruvadi to Thirumudi darsanam”. The Dvaya mantra which says “**Sriman Narayana**

Charanam saranam Prapadye” very clearly asserts that our salvation lies in resorting to the feet of Lord Sriman Narayana. The word “padham” i.e. feet has got three meanings. “Pad” means “to go to” i.e. so “padam” is that which is reached. That is why the feet of the Lord is “padam” as we all have to aim to go to those feet. The word “padam” also means His abode i.e. Vaikuntha, which again is the place which all devotees would like to go after shedding the mortal coils. The third meaning for the word “padam” refers to the Lord Himself as He is the goal. Ramanuja in his Vedantha Sangraha gives these three meanings to the word “padam”. In brief it means that His feet is the upaya as well as the upeya.

The Rig veda in the Vishnu suktha says **“Tad Vishno pade parame madhva utsah”** (I 22.20). It means that in the highest abode of Vishnu there is a spring of honey or immortality. It could also mean that in the most exalted feet of the Lord Vishnu there is a spring of honey. The Rig veda further says **“Tad Vishnoh paramam padham sadaa pasyanthi surayah”** (I 22.23). It means the wise ones always behold the exalted abode of the Lord.

Sankara Bhagavatpada in his Vishnu Padaadi Kesanta Varnana Stotram devotes eight stanzas to describing the greatness of the divine lotus feet. In one stanza he says that the particles of dust on the lotus feet of the lotus-eyed Lord are able to eliminate the accumulated mire of sins of all His devotees. He also says that the extremely jealous group of demons do not even go near those feet for fear of touching them while the entire celestial group always desires them to adorn their heads. He says that on the sole of the feet of the God one can see lines in the form of a wheel, fish etc. and those emblems confer auspiciousness on us and are adored by the Gods themselves. He says that one of the two feet of the lotus-eyed Lord during Trivikrama avatara spread as an emerald flag star in the sky and from that emerged the spotless celestial Ganges river. The other foot which was resting on the earth, he says had the beauty of a big pillar for the house, viz. the Universe. The two feet of the Lord, he says, are delicately graceful and red and confer abundant prosperity on the seekers. The same foot was the cause for the destruction of

Vairocani (Bali) and the prosperity of Indra, the Lord of the celestials. He says that the toes on His feet are shining with resplendant brilliance and that the nails on those toes look like spotless shining gems. Together the shining toes on the feet with their spotless shining nails look like a row of blue lotus petals with their edges adorned by dewdrops. He goes further to say that the celestials along with Indra who bow down before the feet of the Lord, for a moment become jealous on seeing their own reflections in the spotless row of nails, as they think that their reflections are yet another set of celestials closer to the Lord than themselves! He says that when hosts of celestials bend down their heads to worship the Lotus feet, the multitude of the rays from the glittering gems adorning their crowns fall on His feet and add to the lustre and dazzle.

Sri Venkatesa Prapatti has similar stanzas which give a soul-stirring description of the divine feet. One stanza says - "I seek refuge at Lord Venkatesa's feet which add fragrance to the sweet-smelling flowers offered to the deity and those feet are enjoyable for ever and ever and look newer and newer on every occasion when we behold it". The "Prapatti" also says that to say that Lord Venkatesa's feet are like a lotus is a mistake as the feet of the Lord are superior to the lotus and comparing them with the lotus is a rash mistake! Yet another stanza in the Prapatti describes the soles of His feet and says they bear marks of a banner, a pot of ambrosia, an umbrella, the thunderbolt, lotus, kalpavriksha, conch and disc. The other great Vaishnavā sages like Perialvar and Yamunacharya also give similar description of the soles of Lord's feet saying that he sports on His sole the above mentioned 'Samrajya lakshanas' which are to be seen only on the feet of an emperor. The mark of the conch on the sole of His confers jnana (knowledge) on the devotees. The emblem of disc on the Thiruvadi of the Lord reminds us that He will destroy the enemies and rid us of all our sins. (Dushta nigrāha sishta paripālana role). The kalpavriksha shows that He will fulfill the wishes of the devotees. The insignia of the banner seen on the sole is for capturing the attention of His devotees, even as any colourful banner attracts the attention of people. The lotus on the sole of His foot lends

fragrance to those who seek succour at His feet. The 'Ankusa' seen on the sole and which is usually used to control the elephant, they say serves as an advocate on behalf of the devotees and makes the Lord act as per the wishes of His sincere devotees. It is because these samudrika lakshanas were seen during Trivikrama avatara by many devotees, Yamunacharya offers a special prayer to Trivikrama and wants to know when those feet are going to adorn his head (verse no. 31 Stotraratna). As stated earlier, Periyalvar expresses similar thoughts when he describes the scenes that occurred in Ayarpadi. (hamlet of the cowherds). He says that when Krishna walked about in Ayarpadi, wherever He left His impression of His feet on the ground, one could see all those samrajya lakshanas (vide pasuram 91).

Yet another stanza in Sri Venkatesa Prapatti says that the reddish soles of the Lord have surpassed the lustre of the rubies and their brilliance excels the dazzle of sapphire and the nails on the toes of the feet outbeat the beautiful cool moonlight. The feet are said to be so tender that even when Sri Lakshmi, the Divine consort massages with love and tenderness those feet become redder. In short, the tenderness of the feet is beyond the scope of speech or imagination. Those are the feet, the Prapatti says, which were shown to Arjuna on the battlefield while propounding the 'Charama sloka' and exhorting him to seek refuge at those feet. Today during Kaliyuga, the Lord standing on Venkatadri Hill points to those very feet as the refuge for all devotees. Another verse in Prapatti refer to those feet as the ones placed on the head of serpent Kaliya and in the hearts of the sages who meditate on Him on Venkatadri.

Let us now turn to Sri Yamunacharya and see what he has to say about the twin lotus feet. In verse 6 of his "Stotraratna" Yamunacharya says that he is going to praise his patrimony and family deity (kula dhanam and kula daivatam), which is the lotus feet of the lotus-eyed Lord! (Padaara vindam aravinda vilochanasya). In verses 28 and 30 of the same Stotraratna, while referring to the "paada pankajas", the great poet says: "Even if one at any time, and in whatever fashion, folds his hands towards the feet of the Lord, he will have all his sins absolved and acquire

enormous punya". In short, he says that anjali offered to the lotus feet is never lost. Sri Desika has written an entire commentary on this single verse of Yamunacharya which is known as "Anjali vaibhavam".

Koorattalvan (Kooreswarar) in his Sri Vaikuntastava (verses 70 and 71) also expresses the same desire to receive the Lord's feet on his head. In his Sundara Bahusthava (verses 62, 65, 67 and 111) which is a set of verses praising the Lord at Thirumaliruncholai and in his Varadarajasthavam praising the Lord Varadaraja at Kanchi (verses 59 to 62) he gives beautiful description of the Lord's feet praising their grandeur, softness and sweetness.

In verse 62 of Sundarabahusthava, Kooreswarar says that the feet of Lord Sundarabaahu resting on a lotus must be more delicate and tender than the lotus itself, as only then the lotus flower can hold aloft and support another pair of lotuses!

In verse 63 Koorathalvan says that the lotus feet of Lord Sundarabaahu are better than the ordinary lotus flower because of their beauty, tenderness, fragrance and is for ever brimming with makaranda pravaha (flow of honey). In short, he says that the lotus which serves as the Lord's pedestal, is carrying these superior lotus like feet on its head, even as the feet of the victor are carried on the head of the vanquished person.

In verse 64, the poet says that those two feet of the Lord Sundarabaahu are the ones which were washed by Brahma (during Trivikrama manifestation) and the water that flowed from the foot that covered Brahmaloaka took a three-fold course. One stream is called the Ganga, the second stream is known as Dhruva and the third stream is known as Alakananda which is the one carried by Shiva on His head (Alaka means locks of hair and as this river adorns the locks of Shiva, it is called Alakananda). In verse 65 of Sundarabahusthavam, the poet says: I bow down to the lotus feet of Sundarabaahu which is the fragrant flower that has blossomed on the creeper called the Veda; The foot is like the royal swan sporting in the lotus flower, viz. the hearts of the sages. It is also the mango fruit which is attained due to performance of Dharma

(i.e. to say if one performs one's Dharma sincerely and steadfastly, it will bear fruit). Koorathalvar in verse 67 compares the toes on the feet of the Lord to the various waves in the Ocean of nectar (Amrith) which is the charming Lord Himself (i.e. the poet says the beauty of the Lord is like the ocean of Amrith; the tiny toes are the waves in that ocean. He continues the comparison and says that the nails are many reflections of the moon on these waves.

In verse 111 the poet says:- "Oh Lord Sundarabahu, my head yearns to be the hoods of Kaliya (Kaliya Nanthana episode) or the topmost branch of Kadamba tree (Vastrapaharana episode) on the banks of Yamuna as You kept Your beautiful lotus like feet on those two objects. The author says that in his present form he does not have Bhagavat sambandha and hence wants to become the Kaliya or the kadamba tree.

In his Varadarajastavam, Koorathalvan poses the question to Lord Varadaraja (verse 59): He says:- "Oh Lord, which is more comfortable for your lotus feet? Is it the lotus like hearts of Your devotees or is it the lotus which is described as the seat of the Lord in Vaikuntha, His highest abode? Or is it the crown of the Vedas i.e. the Upanishads? Or is it the head of Sathakopa (i.e. Nammalvar)? Or is it the Hastigiri where You have manifested in archa form?"

Parasara Bhattar, son of Koorathalvan, in his Sri Rangarajastavam (I-124) relates the beautiful different roles played by the lotus feet of the Lord. He says: these are the Feet which wandered in Brindavan; these are the Feet which learnt the art of Thandava dance from the Gopikas who churned curds in Gokulam; these are the Feet which enjoyed the rare privilege of being pressed gently by the sprout-like delicate hands of Lakshmidēvi. These are the Feet, which excel the lotus flower itself in beauty, charm, brilliance, fragrance, softness and tenderness. It is those very Feet that ignored the distinction between the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the birds and brutes, the mighty and meek and gave asylum to one and all (During Trivikrama avatar). It is those Feet that were eager to go on errands for the Pandavas" (Pandavadoota episode).

This enumeration as it were of the roles played by the divine lotus feet, are beautifully epitomised in the “Kattiyam” rendered before Sri Parthasarathy at Sri Parthasarathy temple at Triplicane, Madras. This ‘Kattiyam’ found in the Triplicane sthalapurana describes the beauty of the Lord Parthasarathy and then describes the greatness of His Thiruvadi and runs as follows:

“Kalla sakatathai kala kazhia sachi”

(The feet which broke and destroyed the demon Sakatasura who came in a disguise to kill Lord)

“Kandu mariththodi”

(The feet which ran and controlled the calves which were running hither and thither)

“Kaliyan meethaadhi”

(The feet which dances on the hood of Kaliya, the venomous serpent)

“Kaalindhi neeraadi”

(The feet which were washed by the river Yamuna)

“Kuraivai pinainthu paadi”

(The feet which danced to the beat of Kuravai koothu where Lord Krishna danced with each gopika, having manifested Himself in myriad forms)

“Kudameri aadi”

(The feet which performed the kuda koothu - a peculiar type of dance among the cowherds where the pots are balanced on the shoulders as well as the head while dancing)

“Karunaiyaal thoothu oodi”

(The feet out of their magnanimous character traversed as the emissary on behalf of the Pandavas to Kauravas)

“Kanniyarodu oodi”

(The feet which danced enjoyed the company of gopikas)

“Kazhaga mithithu aeri”

The feet which ascended and sat majestically on the throne kept with evil designs over a deep pit by Duryodhana in his court)

“Sitrill azhithu aadi avai”

(The feet which playfully destroyed the house built out of sand on the banks of river Yamuna by the cowherd children)

“Saranam thanthu ozhyinda thiruvadigal”

(These are the feet which are for ever and ever are our certain saviours)

Kulasekhara Alvar in his Mukundamala (verse 7) has a beautiful thought to express on the lotus feet. He says that the mind which is a Rajahamsa desires to enter and be seated permanently in the bird cage which is Lord's feet. The poet says, he is afraid that when his life is ebbing out, his mind may not have that ability to think about the Lord. It is said that the swan usually sits on a lotus flower. Here the poet says by way of comparison, that his mind is like a swan and wants it to be seated on the lotus feet of the Lord, even long before his time to leave this world arrives i.e. he does not want to lose the chance by default, lest his mind may go out of the purview of his intelligent control due to old age! He says **“Krishna thvadeeya pada pankaja panjarantam adyaiva me visatu maanasa raaja hamsaha”**.

Yet another great quality of these divine lotus feet is that they are used by the Lord to display four different styles of walking! Vishnu Sahasranaama also refers to God as “Chaturgatih”. The very same feet the Lord uses once to display the gait of a lion i.e. Simhagathi (the majestic gait of a lion); at another time with the same feet He charms the devotees with His Vyaaghra gathi (the majestic stance of a tiger which will pounce upon its enemy with the speed of lightning; similarly, the Lord in His unfailing zeal rushes to rescue the devotees). At another time, He uses them to enthrall the devotees with “Gaja gati” (the majestic gait of an elephant); at other times the same feet exhibit the “Vrishabha gati” (the gait of a bull which is confident and proud of its strength). It is the beauty of these gaits which captivated Andal who in her Thiruppavai (pasurams 496 and 497) refers to a lion king sleeping in a cave along with the lioness during the rainy season. As soon as the rainy season ended it opened its eyes and with anger looked around, hither and thither and shook its head in such a manner that

the hair in its mane stood erect, it stood on its four legs stretching them to the maximum, so as to get rid of its lethargy and then gave a majestic mighty roar and walked out of the cave. Andal in that pasuram requests Lord Krishna Who was sleeping with Nappinnai to come out like the majestic lion in response to the invocation song sung by her and her friends early in the morning in the month of Margazhi. She then continues, oh Lord! with the colour of blue lotus, come out of Your bed chamber, display the beauty of Your gait (nadai azhagu). Then sit on the throne (simhasana), so that we may enjoy that beautiful sight also. Only then you should listen to our plea and grant our wish. That is the prayer of the gopikas, led by Andal. In brief, she describes the beauty of the gait of the Lord. Having requested Him to come out of His bed chamber, in the next pasuram Andal refers to the incident when these feet measured the three worlds and does the 'Mangalaasasana' to those feet and says: "Anru ivvulagu alandayi adi pottri" (Hail! Praise be to those feet which once measured the three worlds). It is said that the gopikas of Brindavan were very fortunate, as during Krishnaāvātara, they had the privilege of seeing all these different types of gaits of the Lord with "Saulabhya guna". It is said that once when Lord Krishna was playing on the flute and mesmerising the audience with different types of gait, Urvasi, Menaka and Thilottama, who are themselves known for their beautiful gait, and who had come to listen to His divine music, were captivated by the Lord. So says Periyalvar in his pasuram 278. He says that those ladies felt so ashamed when they saw the far superior gait of the Lord and its beauty and bent down their heads, decided to give up their song and dance and worship the great Lord. Alvar says:

"Menakaiyodu, Thilothama, Rambai, Urvasi yaravar velgi, mayangi, vaanagam padiyill vaai thirappinri aadal, paadal avai marinar thaamae" (i.e. on seeing the beauty of the Lord's gait, they felt ashamed and could not say anything and decided to give up their song and dance).

Let us now see what Kulasekhara Alvar has to say on the greatness of these divine feet. Kulasekhara Alvar in pasuram (pasuram 688) refers to the Perumal in Thiruvithvakodu divya desa

in Kerala. He refers to Thiruvithvakodu full of scented flower groves and asks the Lord, why is He delaying in ridding him of problems and why is He behaving as if he does not exist and why His benign glance does not fall on him. He says, Oh God, even if You kick me out, I have no other support and certain relief except Your Thiruvadi, i.e. the Divine feet. He then goes on to say that he is like a child who even when the mother gets angry and pushes the child aside and does not allow it to come close to her, still that child continues to weep and thinks only of the mother as its goal and help and keeps on looking at her face and continues to weep with the firm belief that it must reach and cling to the mother's feet as she only could comfort it. Thus, Kulasekara alvar refers to the relationship between the God and the devotee to that of the mother and the child and says that the Divine feet are the rakshakas i.e. saviour for the devotees.

Thirumazhisai Alvar (vide pasuram 812) addresses the Perumal Who has manifested Himself at Thirukkudandai in sayana-pose and asks him whether He is lying down due to exhaustion and fatigue. He wonders whether these feet which had to traverse thick difficult forest terrain during Ramavatara and the Feet which had to cover all the worlds during Trivikrama avatara and the feet which had to perform mighty feats during Varaha avatara, were tired and so were resting on the cool beautiful banks of the river Kaveri. The alvar says that the delicate, flower-like charming divine feet must have borne a lot of pain and strain and commiserates with those feet! Kulasekhara Alvar also similarly feels for the Lord who had to travel a lot during Ramavatara and asks a rhetorical question "Evvaru nadandanai emmi Raama?" i.e. Oh Rama how on earth did You walk all that long distance? Kulasekara alvar always had a very personal one to one relationship with God as Rama.

Thondaradippodi Alvar in his pasuram 880 says: Oh Ye devotees! Worship the feet of the Lord Who grazed the calves (Katttrinam meitha endhai kazhalinai pani minn neerae). This Alvar sang the praise of only Lord Ranganatha. It may therefore appear strange that he should have advised us to worship the feet of that Lord Who grazed the calves, viz. Lord Krishna. It only means

that in the eyes of Tondaradippodi Alvar, Lord Ranganatha is none other than Lord Krishna. The Alvar thus makes it clear that the feet of Lord Krishna had the quality to rid one of all the sins and thus perhaps he only reiterates what Krishna Himself said to Arjuna on the battlefield viz. "**Maam ekam Saranam vraja**".

Thiruppan Alvar's pasuram 927 is famous for having given a description of Lord Ranganatha, from foot to the crown of the head and finally merged with the Lord Himself. He says that the Thiruvadi of the Lord are always present in his mind's eyes and that even as he goes searching for them, they appear before his minds eye and have enslaved him.

Thirumangai Alvar in his pasuram 1424 also addresses the lotus feet of Lord Ranganatha and says, Oh Lord, what is it that You have not done to those who seek succour at Your feet? You have even performed impossible tasks to help those who sought refuge at Your feet. This he illustrates by referring to Sandeepani Maharishi's guru dakshina story. Krishna was a student of Sandeepani rishi. When Krishna asked the rishi as to what he should give as guru dakshina, Sandeepani rishi asked Krishna to bring back to life his son who was washed away by the ocean sometime back. He wanted to see his son again. Krishna, the Alvar says, fulfilled the wish of his teacher by bringing back the son of the rishi from Yamaloka and restoring him to the fond hands of the father. The Alvar says, "because You have performed such impossible tasks, I am also seeking refuge only at Your feet."

Poygai Alvar (pasuram 2082) and Bhoothat Alvar both worshipped the divine feet of the Lord. Poygai Alvar fancies the Earth as the receptacle, the ocean as ghee and the Sun as the lamp and places them at the feet of the Lord Who is holding the disc in His hand.

Bhoothat Alvar (in his pasuram 2182) had slightly varied the metaphor. He says that he used love as the receptacle, his desire as the ghee and the mind which is hankering after the Lord as the wick and merged his soul and placed it at the feet of the Lord Narayana as the eternal flame of enlightenment. Thus, while

Bhoothat alvar lighted the lamp of enlightenment (jnana), Poygai Alvar lighted the lamp to rid the darkness of ignorance.

Bhoothat Alvar in yet another pasuram (2186) speaks about the glory of Thiruvadi of the Lord which during the Trivikrama avatara measured the worlds. In that pasuram the alvar says that when Vamana requested Mahabali for three feet of land, he wanted to measure only three worlds; but at the time when the thought was translated into deed, He measured all the fourteen worlds in just two steps, i.e. seven worlds above and seven below, and finally kept one on the head of Bali and he says, "how am I to measure and speak about the greatness of such feet?" The Alvar therefore says that as Vamana His intention was only to measure three worlds, but as Trivikrama, He measured all the fourteen worlds and wonders that there is none who is capable of understanding and praising such a glorious divine feet. That is why the alvar says:

"Nemi adiyai yaar otha vallaar arindhu"

Peyalvar in his pasuram 2358 has a very interesting and unusual anecdote to relate about the divine lotus Feet. He is doing mangalasaana to Lord Srinivasa of Tirupati and exclaims, "Oh Lord, Aren't You the one Who wanted to lie down as a child on the lap of Brahma and counted one by one Your ten toes in order to give a broad hint to Brahma that he should not be in a hurry to give a boon on to the person who was standing before him and he was none other than the demon Ravana?" The alvar says that once Ravana concealed his true form and did tapas before Brahma, standing before him with just one head, Brahma was pleased with the depth of devotion of the demon and without knowing that he was a demon who was standing before him, was about to grant his boon. Just then Lord Narayana realised the danger and so hurriedly manifested Himself as a small child, came and laid down on the lap of Brahma and started counting one by one the ten toes of His feet. Thus the God used His feet to give a timely warning to Brahma, not to confer the boon on the dreaded demon and create more problems for the world, and thus save both Brahma and the world. The Alvar says that such Feet are our sure saviour.

This story is related by Thirumazhisai alvar in his Naanmugan Thiruvandaadi (pasuram 2425) wherein he says

“Kondu kudan kaal male vaitha kizhaviyaa

Thanda varakkan thalai kaal pandu enni oru Kumaran” -

Oh Lord Who counted the ten heads of demon Ravana on the ten toes of Your feet). Pey alvar says that the Feet of the Lord Who showed to Brahma the true colours of Ravana are our refuge (nangalku aran).

Nammalvar in his Thiruvaimozhi, pasuram 2675 starting with the famous words “Uyarvara uyar nalam udayavan evan?” exhorts his mind to bow down at the feet of the Lord Who has all the kalyana gunas, Who is capable of releasing us from our ignorance (ajnana) and confer on us ‘jnana’, and Who is the Master of the Devas. The Divine Feet of such a Master are the sure remedy for ridding ourselves of our problems. The Alvar refers to these divine feet and says “Thuyararu sudar adi thozhudezhu en manane” i.e. “Oh mind, surrender to those brilliant feet which rid your ills.”

In the other equally famous pasuram (vide 3326) starting with the words “Ulagam unda peruvaya”, Nammalvar devotes the next ten pasurams seeking Saranagathi at the feet of the Lord Srinivasa of Thirumala. He says that the Lord Who possesses a mouth big enough to swallow the entire world during Pralaya time should bless him and make him attain His divine lotus feet, as he and his family were serving Him for generations. In the tenth pasuram (pasuram 3335), he makes it clear that through the intervention of Mahalakshmi he has attained his heart’s desire viz. merge with the feet of the Lord. In pasuram 3327 he pleads with the Perumal and asks him to bless him with the necessary wisdom to attain His divine feet. In pasuram 3328 he asks God to have pity on him and see that he attains the divine lotus feet. In pasuram 3329 he says that his only prayer is that the Lord of Thirumala must confer on the sinner “Anugraha” for attaining the flower bedecked Thiruvadi of the Lord. In pasuram 3330 the alvar asks the God which is the day when he will reach the divine lotus feet. In pasuram 3331 the alvar pleads for an early date of deliverance from this samsara and says that the divine feet which measured

the three worlds is his sure succour and saviour. In pasuram 3332 he says that he has not performed any special vratas for attaining the lotus divine feet, but yet like the people who have performed the vratas, he is impatient and cannot wait even for a minute more for attaining the lotus feet of the Lord. Thus, he brings out the impatience born of sincere devotion in seeking merger with the divine lotus feet. In pasuram 3334, he says that he is His devoted servant and as such will not be able to stay away from the feet of the Lord of Thiruvengadam, even for a moment. Thus, the alvar beautifully expresses the agony experienced by him at the separation from the Lord's feet and finally also conveys to us beautifully the pleasure that he experiences when finally he attained the feet of Lord Srinivasa thus extolling the great qualities of Lord's Divine Feet.

Bhattar in his Sri Rangarajastavam, Uttara Satakam in verse 54 while enjoying the sight of the Lord as Vatapatrasayi, says, Oh Lord Ranganatha when I saw You lying down on a banyan leaf like a small child, I felt You are the young one of the Ocean. At that time I saw You savouring the sweetness of Your own Padakamala (lotus feet) as You were keeping them in Your beautiful mouth. Why did You do that? Were You trying to check with those toes of Yours whether all the worlds measured by You during the Trivikrama avatara have gone fully inside Your stomach during the Pralayakala? Was it Your intention to count the worlds that were inside Your stomach? Or were You trying to prove what is stated in the Vedas that Your feet are eternally oozing the sweet honey by tasting them Yourself? Please let me know why You kept those feet of Yours in Your mouth?" That is how Bhattar describes the beauty of the Thiruvadi of the Lord Ranganatha.

Ramanuja in his Vaikuntha Gadhyam describes the Thiruvadi as resembling the freshly blossomed lotus (thatkshana unmilitha pundareeka sadrisa charana yugalam).

Pillai Lokacharya in his Archiradhighadhi says that the Divine Lotus Feet are so gentle and soft (mridu) that even the consorts hesitate to touch it lest they hurt him. These Divine Feet he says are the repositories of boundless joy to the devotees and are

the sure succour for the devotees to ward off the ills of "Samsara". The feet, he says, have an effulgent beauty as they provide solace and pleasure to the devotee and act as a proven sheet anchor while being tossed about in this samsara. The toes in the feet, the Acharya says, are shining white and beautiful like a string of foamy waves in an ocean. The nails on the toes shine like many moons that had arisen on the sky.

Having thus seen what all the sages have had to say about the Lotus feet it is now proposed to briefly recall some of the achievements of those feet. As Trivikrama those were the feet which measured the three worlds. As Sri Rama the Lord's feet wrought miracles, as for example, when He delivered Ahalya the wife of sage Gautama, from her curse. Later those were the feet which heaved with the big toe Dundubhi's body and flung them to a distance of ten yojanas, so as to win the confidence of Sugriva. Those were the feet which were served by Lakshmana with single-minded devotion. These were also the feet whose sandals were taken by Bharata and made to rule the kingdom so as to provide for the welfare of all the worlds. Bharata sought inspiration from Rama's sandals in the conduct of the affairs of the kingdom. He ordered all his ministers to regard the sandals as revered elder brother's feet and said that those sandals will lay down the law for the State. Thus, Bharata anointed his brother's sandals and the coronation as it were, was done for the sandals of the Lord. Commenting on this Desika in his Paduka Sahasram says: Dasaratha wanted Rama to be king and Kaikeyi had other plans to execute. She wanted Bharata to be the king and Dasaratha had to agree. The final coronation took place only for the Padukas of Sri Rama in a most unexpected manner. Desika therefore concludes that fate is more powerful and nobody knows God's intentions. In His avatara as Krishna, again these feet performed many miracles. Even as a child Krishna killed Sakatasura by kicking him with His delicate tiny feet. Again it was the feet of Krishna which performed the wonderful Navaneeta natya (butter dance) in Nandagopa's house. The gopikas used to tempt the child Krishna to dance for the sake of butter. The child would slightly raise one foot and bend the other foot while the anklets would jingle. The

child would then stamp his feet in rhythm with the churning of the curds by the cowherdess, hoping that they would be paying for his performances with quantities of fresh butter. Again it is those very feet which ran restlessly on the banks of Yamuna playing with friends and gopikas. Those were the feet that were engaged in the celebrated 'Rasaleela' dance with gopikas on the sand banks of Yamuna on moon-lit nights. Again it was those feet that went to the Court of Kauravas to make a fervent appeal on behalf of the Pandavas (Pandavadoota). Thus many are the achievements of those feet.

To conclude we cannot do better than the alvar who said "Thaai naadu kanrae pole than thizhyayar adikke oye naadi kollen" that is to say "Oh you mortals! Seek the feet of the Lord even as a calf goes seeking its mother". If we do that we cannot but recall what Tulasidas said "**Bhaja mana Ramapada sukha daayi**".

* * *

MALAI NADU DIVYA DESAS

THIRUKKODITHANAM

This divya desa is about two miles to the east of Chengannacherry which lies on the Thiruvallar-Kottayam road. This temple is believed to have been constructed during the days of Bhaskara Ravi varma. It is a small place with no facilities worth mentioning. The Perumal here is known as Athputha Narayanan as also Amrutha Narayanan. He is seen in a standing pose facing east. Thayar is known as Karpagavalli. The theertha is known as Bhoomi theertha. The vimana is Punyakodi vimana. God appeared to Rukmangatha, a king belonging to the Solar dynasty.

This temple is associated with Sahadeva, one of the brothers of Pancha Pandavas. It is believed that he did a lot of renovation work to this temple and hence people here generously say that the idol itself was installed by Saha deva.

As stated earlier, the sthalapurana associates this place with Rukmangatha, a king belonging to the Solar dynasty. He was a very noble king who ruled his subjects in a very just manner. He used to honour the learned persons and great sages. Once Vasishta Maharishi told Devendra about the noble, great qualities of this king. Lord Indra decided to test the king. He sent Narada to the court of Rukmangatha. Rukmangatha welcomed Narada with his usual reverence. He plucked the rare flowers in his garden, made a garland out of it and adorned it round the neck of Narada. When Narada went back with the garland round his neck to the court of Indra, Indra was taken in by the beauty of these flowers. He therefore sent his men to stealthily visit the garden of Rukmangatha and pluck those flowers and bring it for him also. The Indra's men used to visit the garden everyday. It became a mystery to Rukmangatha as to how the beautiful flowers in his garden were disappearing. The king decided to look into this mystery. He put round the clock vigil in his garden. But it was of no use as the men sent by Indra would pluck the flowers without the knowledge of the watchmen and mysteriously disappeared in the sky and get back to the court of Indra. However, the watchmen continued their vigil. One night as it was very cold the watchmen

burnt some dried twigs of brinjal tree. By sheer accident, some of the tubers in the roots of that brinjal tree also got burnt. It is said that the smell which emanates out of such burning tubers would neutralise the divine powers of any spirits as well as demons. Thus, the accidental action of the watchmen in burning the brinjal roots spread its smell in the entire sky over the garden. This lingering smell made it impossible for Indra's men to fly back to their court. The watchmen thus caught them red-handed trying to steal the rare flowers from the garden. The watchmen took them to the king. The king found out from them the truth. Instead of scolding them and taking them to task for stealing these flowers, the king lovingly treated them as guests and told them that if Indra was so fond of his flowers, he was welcome to have them everyday. Yet because of the smoke of the burnt brinjal plants, these envoys of Lord Indra lost their divine power to fly in the sky. It was an Ekadasi day. They told Rukmangatha that the only way they could regain their divine powers to fly was if someone who observes the fast on that Ekadasi day (Ekadasi fast) was willing to give them the benefit of such a fast. Rukmangatha started searching his entire kingdom to locate anyone person who had observed the Ekadasi vratha. He found that in his entire kingdom there was only one lady who had fasted on that day. She happened to be the wife of a dhobi. It was not as if knowingly she observed the Ekadasi vratha, but due to the misunderstandings between the couple, she had refused to partake the food of that evening. But even the accidental observance of the fast on that day is said to have conferred on her all the benefits of having observed the Ekadasi vratha. The king therefore asked her to give the benefit of having observed the fast to the men of Indra. Rukmangatha later decided that if observance of Ekadasi vratha was so effective, he should inculcate that habit amongst the great number of his subjects. He started observing the vratha himself and set an example to his subjects to also follow his precept. It is said that on one Ekadasi day after he had finished observing his fast, Durvasa rishi came to his court and asked the king to feed him and his disciples. Durvasa went to have his bath in the tank. Before he could return, the king realised that the timings for Ekadasi would be over and Dwadasi i.e. the next day would begin. The fast

observed on Ekadasi is to be broken when Dwadasi commences in order that effect of having observed the fast of Ekadasi is not lost. It is said that Rukmangatha partook of some water. But when Durvasa returned and saw that Rukmangatha had drunk some water even before his guests had partaken the food, he cursed him for not having observed the strict principles of honouring the guests and allowing them to eat first before partaking of the food. Any amount of explanation by Rukmangatha that he only partook of water and not food failed to impress Durvasa. Durvasa cursed Rukmangatha. At that time, Lord Vishnu sent His discus (Chakra) to punish Durvasa. A similar story is related connecting Ambarisha Maharaja and Durvasa rishi. But the contents of both the stories are same viz. that Lord Vishnu sent His Chakra to punish Durvasa and to impress upon the people the greatness of observing Ekadasi vratha.

It is said that once to test the belief of Rukmangatha in the efficacy of observing this Ekadasi vratha, Brahma sent a beautiful damsel to disturb the vow. As expected, Rukmangatha fell for the charms of the beautiful damsel. He forgot about his vows. But after some time, once he suddenly remembered his duty and he wanted to leave the beautiful damsel and re-start his religious activities. The damsel then asked Rukmangatha to behead his son and handover the head to her in return for releasing the king. Rukmangatha agreed and severed his son's head and handed it over to the damsel. The damsel then disappeared. Impressed by the devotion of Rukmangatha, God appeared before him and asked him to choose a boon. Rukmangatha asked for life to be given back to his son. It is said that by this example, Rukmangatha was able to impress upon the people the efficacy of observing the Ekadasi vratha. It is said that it was at Thirugadithanam that Perumal appeared before Rukmangatha to prove the efficacy of Ekadasi vratha. This place is known as the place where Rukmangatha gave a part of the benefit that flows by observing the Ekadasi vratha to help the devas to return to Devaloka.

Thus, the legend connected with the temple is rather very slender. However, the temple has various other unique features. The first and foremost unique feature is that there are three idols

in the same garbagriha. The idol of Lord Vishnu can be viewed through a door in front of the Sree Kovil. To the right of the idol of Lord Vishnu is the idol of Dakshinamurthy. There is no separate door for viewing Dakshinamurthy. It has to be seen only through a small eye-like opening in the artistically sculpted wall of the Sree kovil in front of this vigraha. The third idol in the garbagriha is that of Lord Narasimha. It is situated right behind the idol of Lord Vishnu. This can also be seen through a similar small hole or opening through the front wall. The processional deity which is taken round the prakara, however, is only that of Lord Vishnu along with His consort Lakshmi Devi seated on the Garuda.

It is believed that this place was once upon a time a capital of art and culture. It is referred to in Tamil records as "Nunruzhai Nadu". Some say that the word Thiru Kadi thanam was originally known as Thiru Ghati sthanam; "Ghati" usually stands for seat of learning. It is therefore claimed that this Thiru Gati sthanam which was known as the seat of learning in course of time got corrupted as Thiru Kadi thanam.

Yet another legend connected with this place relates to an incident in the life of Pandu and Madiri, the famous Pandu couple. It is said that Pandu died in this place and Madri, the devoted wife, committed sati here. This incident is sought to be established by the observance of certain peculiar rights and rituals in this temple. For example during the festival celebrated in the month of November and December in this temple on the 9th day, there is a unique ceremony called "Deepam." The plantain leaves are arranged in the form of a funeral fire and small torches are inserted into them. They are then soaked in oil and lighted. This is a unique form of Deepa Kazha which is not observed anywhere else. This is said to be a reminder of the event of Madri committing Sati. The percussion instruments played on this occasion bring out a melancholy note which is called Chadikkottu. It is said to be a rare form of drumming. Similarly, the performance of what is known as Asukottuka which is also a peculiar event performed during that festival the drummers get paid by the devotees and it is linked with Madri having committed sati.

Yet another legend connected with this temple relates to a stone pillar found in front of the temple. On the top of that pillar, there is a figure of a man about three feet long. The figure holds a conch in his right hand. It is said that once the Raja of Chempakasseri came to offer worship at this temple. But by the time he reached the temple, the Sree kovil was already closed after the mid day pooja. The chief priest had also returned to his home. But on seeing the Ruler, some of the servants of the temple, under the leadership of one Marar, the conch blower wanted the temple doors to be opened to enable the king to worship. Usually, the Marar is given the job of blowing conch before the opening of the temple. The Marar therefore decided that if he blows the conch, the priest was obliged to open the door. In spite of the opposition by the priest, the Marar blew on the conch. The legend has it that when the Marar attempted to blow the conch, no sound emanated from the conch. What is more, he fell down on the floor dead. This was interpreted to mean that even the God did not want any distinction to be made between the ruler and the ruled and that the rituals and timings observed in the temple cannot be relaxed to suit any individual however powerful he might be. It is believed that the three feet long figure seen on the top of the stone pillar was designed to commemorate this incident and as a perpetual reminder of the loyal act of the Marar.

The temple is located in a fairly extensive area. The Sree kovil or the inner sanctuary is imposing edifice in vesara shape. To look at it appears as if it is a two storeyed edifice. It houses on its walls interesting wood carvings and mural paintings. These are said to relate to the period from 16th to 18th century. One very interesting mural picture is that of Vishnu represented and depicted as a serpent. The wood carvings on the mukha mandapa and Balikkalpurā are also highly artistic in appearance. The lythic records relating to the age of the second Cheras preserved in the temple are of great historical value. It is also believed that the exquisite image of Narasimha installed in this temple was done by a Vijaya nagara king.

There is a peculiar custom followed by the devotees who visit this divya desa. While circumambulating the prakaras in the

other divya desas, the devotees merely walk round in reverence. But in this temple, the devotees sprinkle rose water round the prakara as they do the pradakshina.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

On the western and southern base of the central shrine of the temple, there is a record relating to the 14th year of Bhaskararavi Varman Govardhana Marthanda, Governor of Venadu. The record says that he made certain gifts to the temple¹.

On the northern and western walls of the central shrine, there is another inscription relating to the 15th year of Bhaskara Ravivarman (992 AD). It says that the zenison (Ooralar), member of the Parishat should not be corrupt in the management of the shrine and collection of rents. It says that the temple priests should be appointed only for three years and that the expenditure of feeding the brahmins who recide the Mahabharatha etc. should not be diverted to other purposes and that violation of any one of these orders would merit a fine of 12 kalanju and 5 kanam².

On the southern wall of the central shrine, there is another inscription relating to the 26th year of Bhaskara Ravivarman (1010 AD) which mentions that Govardhana Marthanda of Venadu was ruling over Nanrulai Nadu³.

On the western base of the central shrine, there is a badly damaged inscription in vatteluttu. It relates to the period of Bhaskara Ravivarman who is said to have gifted a lamp⁴.

On the northern base of the central shrine of the temple there is an inscription in Tamil which records that one Kandan Kumaran of Kilumalai gifted some lands for the maintenance of a lamp which was entrusted to some private persons in the presence of 300 of Nanrula Nadu. It relates to the period of the king Bhaskara Ravivarman⁵.

1. *Inscriptions of Madras Presidency by V. Rangacharya Volume II P. 1714*

2. *Ibid p. 1714*

3. *Inscriptions of Madras Presidency by V. Rangacharya Volume II P. 1714*

4. *Ibid page 1714*

5. *Ibid page 1714*

On the northern and western bases of the central shrine, there is an inscription relating to the king Kopakkaran Iravi Varma Tiruvadi. It records an order that the Ooralars and Parutaiyar shall not interfere with the arrangements made for the Tiruvamirtu, Nanda vilakku, Tiruvakkiram and Mabarathan. It also lays down certain rules regarding the management and appointment of temple servants ⁶.

On the southern base of the central shrine, there is an inscription relating to the period of the Chera king Bhaskara Ravivarman. It says that the people of the two quarters of the town of Naranamangalam should, before the specified time, render to the temple the quantity of oil they have earlier agreed to supply ⁷.

On the southern base of the central shrine, there is another inscription belonging to the Chera king which records a gift of land as offering to the temple ⁸.

On the northern and western bases of the central shrine, there is an inscription relating to the Chera king Bhaskara Ravivarman. It records a gift for feeding twelve brahmins ⁹.

On the western and southern base of the central shrine of this temple, there is an inscription relating to the period of Bhaskara Ravivarman which records gift of paddy by the chief of Nanrulai Nadu for the sacred offerings to the Perumal ¹⁰.

On the southern base of the central shrine of this temple, there is an inscription which mentions certain restrictions relating to the mortgage of the lands belonging to the temple ¹¹.

On the same southern base, another inscription registers certain lands by Devam Iraman of Mutturu for meeting the expenses of providing daily offerings to the God ¹².

6. *Inscriptions of Madras Presidency by V. Rangacharya Volume II P. 1714*

7. *Ibid P. 1714*

8. *Ibid P. 1714*

9. *Ibid P. 1714*

10. *Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency V. Rangacharya P. 1714*

11. *Ibid Page 1714*

12. *Ibid page 1714*

On the base of the central shrine in this temple, there is an incomplete inscription which registers the arrangements made for the Uthiram festival instituted by Venadu ruler Sri Vallaban Kottai when Marthanda Varman was ruling Nanrulai Nadu ¹³.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalwar has composed eleven pasurams in praise of Lord of Thirukadithanam.

The commentator in Eedu explains the backdrop to these eleven pasurams. Nampillai says Nammalwar was torn by the pangs of separation from Lord. In order to relieve him from that pain, God had come to Thirukadithanam. But God wanted to break the happy news of His presence at Thirukadithanam in a slow manner to Nammalwar so that the alvar would be able to bear with equanimity the excessive joy resulting thro' anticipation of an immediate meeting with God. The alvar therefore speaks about the kindness and affection the Lord has towards him in these ten pasurams.

The theory that excessive joy also needs to be released in a phased manner is illustrated thro' two incidents in our epics. For example victorious Rama returning to Ayodhya after destroying Ravana and his demons, did not proceed direct to Ayodhya. He felt that if He went straight to Ayodhya, Bharata may collapse due to excessive happiness. So He camped at Bharadwaja ashrama and sent word to Bharata that He was coming. He felt that Bharata would then have had time to take in his stride the joyful tidings. Similarly, when Krishna had to go to Hastinapura as an envoy on behalf of Pandavas, He knew that His arrival would cause excessive joy to Vidura and others. So He stayed in the outskirts of Hastinapura and sent word to Duryodhana's court that He will be arriving the next day at the court. He sent word as "**Kushashthala nivasathi sacha praatha riha yeshyathi**" i.e. Krishna is staying at Kushasthala and will reach Hastinapura in the morning. Thus, both Rama and Krishna announced their arrivals in advance so that their devotees could calm down a bit after the initial reaction of extreme happiness at the thought of

meeting their loved ones. Similarly here God Who has come to Thirukadithanam reminds alvar about the earlier happy days and then slowly makes the alvar realise that He has come to Thirukadithanam only to fulfill alvar's wish and release him from the pain of seperation.

One of these eleven pasurams with its meaning is given below:-

PASURAM 3504

ஒருவர் இருவர் ஓர் மூவ ரென நின்று
உதவு கரந்து உள்ளூந் தோறும் தித் திப்பான்
திருவமர் மார்வன் திருக்கடித் தானத்தை
மருவி யுறைகின்ற மாயப் பிரானே

Meaning:

Freely translated this pasuram runs as follows:

The Lord Who manifested Himself first as one, then as two, later as three and later as many and was seen here, there and everywhere on the battlefield and fought with the army of demons and Who has Mahalakshmi residing on His chest, that enchanter, Rama is residing in Thirukadithanam of His own happy volition. He is ever sweet to contemplate.

Here the alvar says that when Sri Rama fought with demons, He let loose the Gandharva astra. The demons were virtually stunned and mesmerised by that astra. While describing this Valmiki says that:

Nathae dadru sirae Ramam
Dahantam arivaahineem
Mohithaahaa Paramaastrena
Gandharvena Mahaatmanaa

It means that the great astra known as Gandharvastra let loose by Lord Rama made the enemy forces of demons faint with fear and as a result the hordes of demons could not even see Rama. Immediately Rama let loose a shower of arrows on those hapless demons. While describing the situation of the demons in that position, Valmiki says **Tethu Rama sahasraani Ranae pashyanti rakshasaaha** i.e. those demons in the arena saw thou-

sand Ramas, though in the arena there was only one Rama. This was because the speed with which Rama moved in the arena His agility, and consequential speed of movement was so great, that the army of demons were seeing Rama as double, triple, multiple and a multitude of forms; He was seen here, there and everywhere moving with such speed that the enemies could not even pinpoint Him!

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI :

காண விரும்பும், என் கண்: கையுத் தொழ விரும்பும்
ண விரும்பும், எந்தன் புன் தலைதான்-வாணன்
திருக்கு அடித்தான், நத்தான், திகிரியான், தண்டான்
திருக்கடித்தானத் தானைச் சென்று.

Meaning:

I wish to attain the feet of the Lord at Thirukadidaanam Who destroyed Banasura and Who is seen holding the conch and disc and mace in His hands. My eyes wish to see none else but Him. My hands wish to pay obeisance to none else but Him. My head desires to be adorned only with His divine twin lotus feet.

Similar thoughts are expressed by Pei alvar (vide pasuram 2316). He says:-

“Kaan kaanana virumbum kangal kadhira ilagu poon
thaar agalathan pon meni;

Paan kan thozhil paadi vandaraayum thongalaan.
Sempon kazhal paadi yaam thozhudum kai”

காண்கா ணென விரும்பும் கண்கள் கதிரிலகு
பூணதா ரகலத்தான் பொன்மேனி-பாண்கண்
தொழில் பாடி வண்டறையும் தொங்கலான் செம்பொன்
கழல் பாடி யாம் தொழுதும் கை.

It means:

My eyes wish to see again and again the beauty of the majestic enchanting body of the Lord Whose chest is adorned with bright shining ornaments. My hands desire to do pranams (salutations) only and sing the praise of the twin lotus feet of the Lord Who is adorned with the basil garlands.

THIRUKAT KARAI

This is yet another of the thirteen divya desas in Malai Nadi (Kerala). To reach it, one has to get down at Irunalakodi station on the Alwaye-Trichur rail line. It is about nine miles away from that station. The moolavar is known Katkarai Appan. He is seen in a standing pose, facing south. The Thayar is known as Perunselva nayaki as also Vatsalyavalli. The theertha is known as Kapila theertha. The vimanam is known as Pushkala vimanam. The Perumal is believed to have appeared in response to the prayers of Kapila maharishi.

As is common with the divya desas of Kerala, there is not much of sthala purana relating to this place. This place is known as Mahabalikarai as also Vamana Kshetra. This place is also known as Katkarai i.e. the holy place where the foot was placed by Lord. The very name thus signifies the connection of the place with the story of Mahabali. This place was once an important city, almost equal in importance to the capital of the kingdom of the Cheras.

To now turn to the sthala purana. It is said that once Kapila maharishi was searching for a suitable place for doing his tapas. He reached Thirukkatkarai and was taken in by the scenic splendour of the place. Yet he noticed that there was no water resource anywhere near the place. He therefore dug a tank and grew lotuses and sengaalineer flower in the tank. These are the two types of flowers which are used for worshipping Lord Vishnu. The rishi settled down in the place and used these flowers for worshipping the Lord. In due course pleased with his prayers the Lord appeared before him. Kapila maharishi then requested the Perumal to stay in this place so that other devotees may also have similar darshan. This explains the presence of Perumal at this place. The temple is located in a spacious area of over eleven acres. Apart from the presiding deity, there are twenty-seven other shrines dedicated to different god and goddesses. Once upon a time each shrine had its own poojas and priests. Each had imposing gopurams (temple towers), Dwajasthambas made of gold. Besides a wide ampitheatre as well as an auditorium for present-

ing art events were in existence. But with the passage of time, this great cultural centre has lost all its glory. But even today as soon as one enters the temple a broad square mandapa in front of the garbagriha of Mahavishnu attracts our attention and makes us ponder over the glory that once must have existed in this place. The moolasthanam presents the magnificent huge presiding deity of Mahavishnu, as he must have appeared to Mahabali when the Lord kept his foot on the head of Mahabali to cover the third foot of land that was gifted to Him by Mahabali. The image of the God at Thirukkkaaakkara is believed to be that of Vishnu in the form of Vamana avatar. The hey day of this temple was during the Chera days. The most important of the Chera kings was Kulasekhara Varma (800 - 820 A.D.) more popularly known as Kulasekhara Perumal. The Cheras held the temple in great esteem and did a lot of work in the temple, gifted lands to meet the expenses of the pooja in the shrines etc.

Onam festival which is almost a State festival in Kerala had its origin at Thirukkatkarai. It is said that in those days, when Onam was celebrated the heads of 64 revenue divisions, the local chieftains, the regional representatives etc. would come to this place. Each of the local chieftains had a palace of their own in this place when they camped at Thirukkatkarai. Each of the chieftains had a duty assigned to him. The spot where the zamorin of Kozhikode used to take his station is still pointed out. The Raja of Edapally officiated as the priest and the memory of this custom lingered for a long time as the Raja of Edapally would nominate the person who is to perform the pooja. In those days as a routine custom every household in Kerala would send atleast one member from the family to Thirukkatkarai for the Onam festival. This festival was a month-long event which ended on Thiru Onam day in the month of 'Chingam'. The last ten days were specially grand. Floral decorations, art events, pageantry of 64 caparisoned elephants, grand feasts and fire works would form part of the celebrations of Onam. But with the decline of Chera empire, this unified territory broke up into small principalities and each local chieftain started pulling in different directions. The custom of celebrating the Onam festival at Thirukkatkarai was given the go

by. Instead each one of them started celebrating Onam in their own place. But even then, they had the hang-over of the earlier practice of worshipping the deity of Thirukkatkarai. So in each of places, an improvised idol of Thirukkatkarai-appan made of clay is placed, pooja is offered to it during those ten days when Onam festival is at its zenith. Atha chamayam of Thripunithura which is well known today during the Onam celebrations is nothing but a reminder of the ancient practice of the ruler of Cochin proceeding with all his entourage to Thirukkatkarai for celebrating Onam. Even today the mandapa in the front of the deity at Thirukkatkarai is tastefully decorated during Onam; the floor is covered with beautiful floral display. This practice is widely prevalent in Kerala and it is known as Poovidal.

The story of Mahabali and his gift of three feet of land to Lord Vishnu Who appeared as Vamana is too well known to bear repetition. Suffice it to say that the Vamana after receiving the promise of the gift, manifested Himself into the viswaroopa and covered with His two feet all the worlds and asked Mahabali as to where He should keep His foot for the promised third feet of land. The generous king offered his own head in absolute surrender. When Lord Vishnu placed His foot on his head, it is said that the king had only one request to make to the Lord. He asked the Perumal for permission to make an annual visit to the kingdom over which he ruled so well and meet the people whom he ruled so benevolently. His wish was granted. It is believed that Onam is the day on which Mahabali makes this annual visit from the nether world where he was sent by Mahavishnu to this world to see his erstwhile kingdom. The grateful people who had a just and peaceful time under Mahabali give him a real red-carpet welcome even today. They remember with gratitude the paradise on earth that was established by Mahabali with his equitable and just regime.

There is a small legend connected with this divya desa. It is said that a sincere devotee a farmer who heard of the God appearing to Kapila maharishi, decided to visit Thirukkatkarai and pray to the same Lord to resolve his small problem. He had good

plantain trees but to his dismay none of them yielded fruits. He did not know why the trees were barren. He promised a golden bunch of plantains to the Perumal and prayed for a luscious yield in his field. His wish was granted. The kataksha of the Lord fell on his field and it yielded plentifully. It is said that is why the particular type of plantain fruit found in Kerala is known as Nendran Kaai, "Nendram" being corrupted word for the term "Netra", i.e. eye or kataksha of the Lord. In brief when the Divine Grace of the Lord's eyes fell on the farmer's fields, he had a bountiful copious yield of sweet fruits. In return for this blessing that farmer kept up his vow and made a bunch of golden plantain fruits and offered it to the temple. It is said that when the golden fruits were brought to the temple precincts the priest asked the devotee to place it near the mukhadwara as he had to go for his ritualistic bath before offering pooja. At that time one other person was present. He was an yogi doing japa in the mandapa. As directed, the farmer placed the golden bunch of plantains in the mukhadwara near the garbagriha and left. Thus, there were only three people in the temple at the time when the golden bunch of plantains were offered viz. the rich farmer, the namboodri priest who received it on behalf of the temple and the yogi who was doing his meditation at the spot. The namboodri priest returned after the bath and found that the golden bunch was missing. The matter was reported to the king. Suspicion centered around the old yogi who was doing the japa. The king also delivered his judgment and said that the culprit was the yogi. The people abused the yogi and ill treated him. They called him a thief though he said he knew nothing. He was also punished. But the next day while performing abhisheka for the deity the priest found that the water in the garbagriha was stagnating and not flowing out freely. The priest looked into the new factor of stagnation. To his dismay he saw that the outlet was blocked by the missing golden bunch of plantain fruits! He felt very ashamed in having accused the holy man of thieving. He informed the king about it and the king himself came and apologised to the yogi. But damage was already done. The yogi felt humiliated. He felt that the king had rushed to a rash conclusion and had behaved in a manner not worthy of a great ruler. He felt

he could not stand the humiliation any longer and he committed suicide. Before he committed suicide, however, he cursed the king as well as the citizens and said that these people who had no foresight or sense of justice should suffer with abject poverty, be denied clothes and food. His curse was couched in words which spelt eternal misery with no time frame for the curse. The people begged the yogi to forgive them. The yogi relented and said that the curse will cease to have effect only on the day the people in the village reach abject penury as to have only a thatched roof (koochai vedu) over their head and a burning stack of weeds (kolli kattai) for light. In effect it meant that the prosperous town would lose all its wealth and glory and only then the anger of the innocent yogi would be cooled. The yogi who committed suicide became a brahma rakshasa due to his unnatural and untimely death. He roamed about the town in the night and the people were frightened to move about. They decided to propitiate the yogi, as they felt that unless they do good to the brahma rakshasa, he would not in turn do good to them. The people of the town therefore unanimously decided to build a small shrine in the outer prakara of the temple for the brahma rakshasa. They used to offer as neivedya the offering given to Thirukatkarai appan Himself earlier. Even today this practice of offering the neivedya from Thirukatkarai temple to this shrine of brahma rakshasa continues. It is said that once this practice was introduced the brahma rakshasa was appeased. He stopped troubling people in that town. Later the town itself was conquered by Jains. The people became paupers. People could build only a bamboo thatched roofs over their heads and used to burn kora grass for having light. Thus, the duration of the curse ended. The Chera Rajas invaded this town and reclaimed it from Jains. They renovated the temple and the town became once more prosperous.

But after the break up of Chera empire this temple again sank into oblivion and it became difficult to manage even the daily neivedya. Later the Raja of Edapalli took charge of this temple and in due course this principality of Edapalli was merged with Travancore State during the reign of Sri Moolam Thirunal. The Travancore Raja heard about the state of affairs in the temple.

He undertook a complete reconstruction of the temple along with making other arrangements for performing the daily poojas.

As stated earlier, this is perhaps the only temple in the whole of India which depicts the Perumal as Vamana. The presiding deity is seen as a majestic figure, perhaps a replica of viswaroopa which He assumed in order to claim the balance of land promised by Mahabali chakravarthi. It is believed that the consecration of the presiding deity viz. Thirukkatkarai Appan was done by Parasurama himself. A Sivalinga which is seen within the precincts of the temple is believed to be the one worshipped by Mahabali chakravarthi himself as his Ishtadevata i.e. personal-chosen God. People believe that when all the other shrines were ravaged by age, the shrine of Shiva was the only one which would withstand the ravage of time as that linga was a “swayambhu” i.e. self-incarnated and not sculpted. There is a pond to the right of the main temple. People say that when Mahabali granted the wish of Vamana for gifting three feet of land, he had drawn water from this pond and used it for washing the feet of Lord and for pouring the water through his kamandala into the outstretched palm of Perumal as a token of sealing the fateful promise that he had made to the Lord!

One other interesting feature of this divya desa is that at a place five kilometers east of Thirukkatkarai temple there is an underground passage locally known as Mudikuzhi. According to local tradition, the Pandavas made good their escape through that underground tunnel when their palace made of lac (arakkillem) was set on fire by Kauravas.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

The Vishnu temple in this place has a number of early inscriptions engraved in the Vattaeluttu characters. Five of these belong to the reign of the Chera king Baskara Ravivarman, three belong to the reign of a king by name Indu Koodaivarma and one to the reign of Baskara Ravivarman and two others mention Kannan Puraiyan, the chief of Kalkkarai Nadu. A few others mention some other early chiefs. A brief will now be given of some of the important and interesting inscriptions.

One inscription belonging to the Indu Koodaivarman Tiruvadi refers to the following transaction. It says having received gold the chief of Kalkkarai Nadu Kannan Puraiyan gave with libation of water certain lands to the Bhattaraakar Tiruvadi of Thirukkatkarai. It was agreed that from the owner's share of the produce of that land, they should supply twelve dishes of sacred meal, the gold required for performing the worship of the deities in the enclosure veranda on a particular day in the month of Masi and gruel to be supplied during the month of Karkataka. From the other half i.e. the cultivator's share, the expenses for meeting three dishes of meals and the cost of lighting one perpetual lamp was to be met ¹.

Another inscription on a slab of stone lying in the courtyard of the temple relates to the tenth year of the reign of the king Indesvaran Koodai. It registers an assignment of the revenues of certain lands yielding an annual income of 12 kalams of paddy for burning two perpetual lamps and for feeding two brahmins in the temple. One of the lamp, it says, was made of silver and it was to be burnt with camphor inserted in the wick. The If this worship is allowed to be failed even for one day, a fine of 2 ½ kanam of gold was to be levied ².

Yet another inscription relating to the reign of king Indu Koodaivarman Tiruvadi engraved on the outside of the south and east bases of the suttru mandapa of the Vishnu temple registers a gift of land made by a chief for meeting offerings to the temple. That land was exempt from taxes by the chieftain. In return, certain quantity of ghee was to be given to the temple to light a lamp. If there was default even for a day in supply of ghee, double the quantity was to be paid the next day. If default is there for one whole year, the beneficiary was to give up the right and also the land ³.

1. *Travancore Archaeological Series Volume III pp 168-169*

2. *Travancore Archaeological Series Volume III p.171*

3. *Travancore Archaeological Series Volume III pp 172-173*

Another inscription on south and east bases of the surru mandapa of the Vishnu temple registers gifts of lamps to the temple ⁴.

Another inscription on the eastern base of the central shrine refers to regulate the conduct of temple servants. It fixes penalties also in case of violation of that code of conduct. One of the rules was that temple servants shall not borrow money. If they borrowed both the debtor and the creditors were to pay a fine of 100 kalanju of gold to the temple ⁵.

Yet another inscription on the outside base of the surru mandapa, south and eastern base and also right in the entrance relating to the reign of Koindu Koodai Tiruvadi registers that money was gifted by Kannan Kumaran in favour of the temple to enable the temple officers to purchase lands. They nominated two other persons as cultivators with condition they supply annually 600 nali of paddy to the temple. Failure to carry out the condition of the grant resulted in the loss of the cultivating right ⁶.

Another inscription on the eastern base of the surru mandapa registers certain regulations preventing the district officials from lending money to temples and temple servants. In spite of this they did lend money, they were prohibited from proceeding against the debtor for the recovery of the loans. It goes further and says that if a worshipping priest had received loans, he should not be permitted to render duty in the temple. Thus, the arrangement for the management of the temple routine is detailed ⁷.

Another inscription engraved on the outside of the south base of the first prakara relating to the sixth year of the reign of Chera king Baskara Ravivarman registers a gift of money by Koodai Keralan of Serumarrappulai to the temple for feeding brahmins. The money was received by the temple officials and entrusted to Divan Narayanan and his three brothers on condition that they supplied 12 kalams of paddy annually. In case of failure

4. *Ibid* Page 173

5. *Ibid* Page 174

6. *Travancore Archaeological Series Volume III P. 176*

7. *Ibid* page 178

to observe the condition, they were obliged to leave to the temple alternate land yielding 15 kalams of paddy⁸.

On the outside base of the surru mandapa of the temple, there is an inscription relating to Baskara Ravivarman's reign which registers a gift of 16 kalanjus of gold by Koodai Narayanan of Serumarrappulai to the temple Bhattar for lighting lamps⁹.

An inscription engraved on the southern base of the mandapa at the proper right of the entrance into the central shrine of the Vishnu temple says that when that inscription was engraved already 3706 years had elapsed since the consecration of the God. This inscription is believed to belong to the 13th century AD. So some epigraphists believe that the facts engraved here are too absurd to be accepted¹⁰.

Another inscription relating to the 23rd year of Baskara Ravivarman i.e. 1000 AD is seen on the right of the entrance into the Ambalam. It records gifts of lands for lamps and feeding Sri Vaishnava pilgrims¹¹.

Yet another damaged record on the base of the platform in front of the ambalam relating to the 31st year of the reign of Baskara Ravivarman records arrangements regarding collection of rents from the tenants of the temple lands¹².

Yet another inscription on the base of the front mandapa relating to the 42nd year of Baskara Ravivarman records gifts of 40 kalanjus of gold for purchasing land by Govinda Kunrappolan of Kuralayani for purchasing land to provide for the mid day offering to the God from the day of Pooradam to Tiruvonam. The offerings were to be distributed equally half to the brahmins and Sri Vaishnavas and the other half to the temple servants¹³.

8. *Travancore Archaeological Series Volume III* p.179-180

9. *Ibid* p 182

10. *Ibid* pages 184-185

11. *Travancore Archaleological Series Volume 2* P.38 & 40

12. *Ibid* page 42-44

13. *Ibid* P.46-48 and *Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy 1965-66 Appendix B*

Another inscription on the base of the front mandapa relating to the 58th year of Baskara Ravivarman records that a person took up the Kaaraanmai of certain lands and in return he bound himself to burn a perpetual lamp in the temple ¹⁴.

On the eastern base of the central shrine there is an inscription relating to the reign of the chera dynasty king Koparkaran Ravivarman and refers to gift of gold ¹⁵.

Another inscription on the proper left of the entrance into the first prakara of this temple which records the gift of land to the temple for meeting the expenses for various items. The scale of expenses falls items and the particular temple services are indicated in detail¹⁶.

Yet another inscription on the outside east base of the surru mandapa in the proper left of the entrance into the first prakara of the temple, there is an inscription relating to the king Poolan Iravi which refers to a gift of ornament by Koodai Puraiyan of Koodai Srikandan¹⁷.

Yet another inscription on the outside south base of the same proper right of the entrance to the first prakara of the temple refers to gift of land by a dancing girl ¹⁸.

There are a number of minor inscriptions recording to offerings for lighting perpetual lamps in the temple. These are referred to in the book Travancore Inscriptions - A topographical list by R. Vasudeva Poduval.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalvar is the only alvar who has composed ten pasurams on the Perumal at Tirukatkarai. These pasurams, the

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14. *Travancore Archaeological Series Vol. 2 p.49-50*
 15. *Travancore Inscriptions - a Topographical list by R.Vasudeva Poduval P.232-233*
 16. *Travancore Archaeological Series Volume 3 P.186*
 17. *Ibid P. 185 as also Travancore Inscriptions - A. Topographical list by R.Vasudeva Poduval P.233*
 18. *Travancore Archaeological Series Volume 3 P.188 and Travancore inscriptions - a topographical list by R.Vasudeva Poduval.*

commentators say, convey the impression that the Lord at Thirukatkarai reminded the alvar of the happy times he had with Him on earlier occasions and with that as strength asked him to bear the burden cast by the pangs of separation now. In short God apparently advised the alvar to get lost in recalling the sweet memories of the past and thereby bear with equanimity the current pangs due to separation. But alvar in every pasuram weeps uncontrollably and tells the Perumal that to contemplate on and recollect the past memories of enjoyment of the company of the Lord only heightened the present pain.

The advice given by Perumal is reminiscent of what Sitadevi told Hanuman when he located her in Ashoka vana. The Divine Mother said that She was able to withstand to some extent the pain caused by Rama's absence and the pain caused by the mental cruelties inflicted on Her by the demonesses and Ravana only by living in the past and recalling all the happy moments She shared with Rama in Ayodhya during the twelve years preceding the banishment to the forests. She then said "**Samaa dwaadasa tatraaham Raghavasya Nivasaanae Bhunjaanaa amaanushaan Bhogaan sarva kaama samudruni**". Literally translated she said that when she stayed for twelve years in Rama's house she enjoyed pleasures which were beyond the reach of humans. She then had all her dreams fulfilled. On similar lines Thirukatkaraiappan tried to console and comfort the alvar by recalling the good old days of alvar's close association with God.

One of these pasurams with its meaning is given below:

PASURAM 3621:

வாரிக் கொண்டு உன்னை விழுங்குவன் காணிலென்று
ஆர்வுற்ற என்னை யொழியஎன் னின்முன்னம்
பாரித்துத் தான் என்னை முற்றப் பருகினான்
காரொக்கும் காட்கரை யப்பன் கடியனே

Meaning:

Here the alvar says:

The Lord at Thirukatkarai with the appearance of a dark rain bearing cloud is very quick in safeguarding his interests. That

is why even before I could think of fulfilling my desire to grab Him and make Him mine the moment I set eyes on Him, He has been more alert and enslaved me and made me His!

Amongst all the 1000 pasurams in Thiruvaimozhi this is regarded as the most important one conveying a very important message. On the face of it the words in the pasuram present a pen picture as if there was a competition between God and Alvar and God won even before Alvar could draw the sword of thought out of the scabbard of action. But the fundamental truth expounded thro' this pasuram is something very different. The issue is whether attainment of God is to be considered as the fortune of the devotee or attainment and conferment of salvation to the devotee is to be regarded as God's fortune? In Tamil this debatable issue is couched as follows:

**“Eeswaranai adaivadhu chetananukku Purushaarthamaa
Illai chetananai adaivadhu Perumalukku bhagyama?**

**எஸ்வரனை அடைவது சேதனனுக்கு புருஷார்த்தமா
இல்லை சேதனனை அடைவது பெருமானுக்கு பாக்யமா?**

i.e. which is the more fortunate thing viz. devotee attaining God or God finding a devotee fit to be accepted? Should we seek God or should God seek us and make us His? When God takes us it is Paragatha sweetaaram. When man attains God it is swagatha sweetaaram. The Lord manifests Himself in various avatars so as to fulfill His desire to locate devotees who believe that Vasudeva, Narayana is everything in life here and in life hereafter i.e. He is the sole sustainer and great redeemer. God likes those devotees who like Nammalvar's parankusa nayaki say that the food that she eats, the water she drinks, the betel she chews are all Krishna. That sort of all consuming, all encompassing love for God along with an absence of attachment to the worldly objects is the sine qua non of a true devotee. God goes in search of such true devotees and the moment He spots them He makes them His property.

The alvar thro' this pasuram says that Paragatha sweetaaram is the most fortunate, best event that could happen to anyone. The attainment of an individual's soul is the Lord's greatest gain!

**DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108
TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:**

மாற்குமும், தாம் தாம் வழிபடும் தெய்வமும்,
ஏற்க உரைப்பார் சொல் எண்ணாதே, தேரல் குரம்பை
நான் கரையா முன்னமே-நல்நெஞ்சே! நாரணன் ஆம்
காட்கரையாற்கு ஆள் ஆஹகாய் காண்.

Meaning:

Oh mind! Realise that there are many in this world who will putforth a lot of arguments, produce religious tomes to convince you that the religion they follow and their religious books only are gospel truth. Do not get carried away by such glib talk. Do not mistake that to be the truth. Instead before life ebbs out from this body which is like a hut enclosed by skin, become the devoted slave of Sriman Narayana residing at Thirukatkarai. Only that will augur well for you.

* * *

THIRUCHENGANNOOR

This divya desa lies on the Travandrum-Ernakulam via Kollam railway line. It is also connected by bus. This is one of the five places where the Pandavas are believed to have installed the idols worshipped by them. There is a popular belief that when the Pandavas were travelling incognito, they toured extensively in the South mostly in the region now known as Kerala. Many of the places in Kerala, particularly Trivandrum area, still bear the imprint of the association of the Pandavas as is evident from the names of several places in Kerala. For example, very near Chengannoor there is a place known as Pandavapara. As stated earlier, when the Pandavas left Kerala they installed the idols which they were worshipping in five different places. These five places are in and around Chengannoor. They are the temples at Thiruchittat i.e. Chengannoor itself; Thiruppuliyur (to the west four miles), Thiruvanmandoor (to the northwest five miles), Thiru Aranmula (to the north ten miles), Thirukodithanam (to the north east from Thiruvalla four miles).

The moolavar here is known as Imaya Varappar. He is seen in a standing posture facing west. The Thayar is known as Sengamalavalli. The theertha is known as Sanga theertha as also Thiruchittrar. The vimanam i.e. temple tower above garbagriha is known as Jagajyothi vimanam. The Perumal appeared to Shiva.

The moment Chengannoor is mentioned people immediately think of only Bhagavathi Amman temple at Chengannoor as that is the more famous one. It is one of the powerful temples for Sakthi. However, the temple for Vishnu, one of the divya desa is also located at Thiruchittar, about one kilometer from Chengannoor on the Chengannoor Mannar route. It is widely believed that the idol at this temple was consecrated and worshipped by Dharmaputra, the eldest of the Pandavas. The tributary of river Pampa flows very close to the temple and it may be one of the reasons why the place is known as Thiruchittrar i.e. holy tributary river. In course of time, that name got corrupted as Thiruchittar, later Thiruchengannoor and much later as merely Chengannoor. The temple stands in a sprawling compound of about three to four

acres and it presents a very sorry picture of heart rending dilapidated ruins. One can only think of its bygone past glory when the Alvars visited the place and sang the praise of the Lord. For a long time, the management of the temple was vested with the Vanchi Puzhachiefs. At that time, there were a number of priests in charge of daily pooja, with regular neivedyam and feeding of many brahmmins. It is said that nearly 23 measures of rice used to be cooked for offering as neivedyam to the Lord. The temple also reportedly had 200 paras of paddy fields attached to it. Festivals were conducted with pomp and pageantry. Temple arts such as Chakkiyar koothu, Nangayar koothu, Koodiattam, Koothukoli and Pancha vadyam were all performed, during the main annual festival held in the month of Meenam. But today all these are things of the past.

To relate the sthala purana of the temple. As stated earlier, the idol here is believed to have been installed and consecrated by Dharmaputra. During the great Mahabharat war, Dharmaraja was given the unenviable task of having to utter a part lie a suppressio veri in order to weaken Dronacharya. The story is well known, yet bears repetition. To briefly recapitulate, during the Mahabharat war Dronacharya, the great Acharya could not be defeated easily. The Pandavas were reluctant to fight with their guru. They asked the Lord for advice. He prevailed upon Dharmaraja to announce within the hearing of Dronacharya the death of Aswathama, the elephant. The Lord further advised that the words "death of Aswathama" may be uttered at a little higher pitch and the word "elephant" at a lower pitch. The Lord anticipated that the acharya would only hear the words "**Aswathama hathaha**" and believe it was his son who was killed in the war and thereby lose interest in the war. It was against the conscience of Dharmaputra to utter such part truths. However, he had to say those fateful words. When the guru Drona heard the two words "**Aswathama hathaha**", as anticipated by the Lord, the acharya thought it was his son who died and had therefore no further interest in the war and allowed himself to be defeated by Pandavas and gave up his life in the battle field. Dharmaputra however felt unhappy as he had uttered a partial truth. He realised that it was

his reputation as a person who always spoke the truth which made Dronacharya have no second thoughts on the statement made by him. Dharmaraja felt that he had committed a sin in uttering a statement not in keeping with his sterling reputation as an honest soul. To atone for that sin and regain his peace of mind, Dharmaraja left on pilgrimage. In due course, he reached Chengannoor, where he heard the local story as to how Imaya Varappa Perumal of Thiruchengannoor had given darshan to Lord Shiva and resolved his problem of getting the allegedly invincible asura Sura Padman killed. Dharmaraja felt convinced that the same Lord may have some remedy for his problem also and bless him with peace of mind. He therefore prayed to the Lord Imaya Varappa Perumal of Chengannoor. He was blessed by the Lord with peace of mind. As a thanks-giving gesture he renovated the temple to a great extent. He installed the idol worshipped by him at that place.

Another legend connected with this place deals with the prayer offered by Shiva to the Perumal and the manner in which Perumal resolved Shiva's problem. It is said that Kasyapa manasa putra of Brahma had two sons by name Suran and Padman. One day they offered obsequence to their father Kasyapa and requested him to advise them on how they could become all powerful, immortal and become one body instead of the two persons. They wanted the boon of invincibility at the hands of Trimurthis. Kasyapa rishi advised them to do japa to Lord Shiva and seek boons from him. They acted accordingly and worshipped Lord Shiva. In course of time, Shiva appeared and granted the boons requested by them. Sura and Padman thus became one person by name Surapadman. Armed with the boon of invincibility at the hands of Trimurthis, Surapadman started disturbing and yagnas performed by the rishis. They had their palace in the middle of the ocean; their body was made of vajra i.e. indestructible diamond; their chariot was known as Indiraghalam; their capital was known as Veera Mayendiram. Among their subjects were ferocious Bhanugopa, Agnimukha, Hiranya, Vajra Bahu etc. They gave a lot of trouble to the Devas also. Unable to bear all this the devas

and rishis went to Shiva and asked him to withdraw the boon granted so unknowingly and unwittingly by him. Shiva had no answer. Shiva sat on the banks of Thiruchittrar and did dhyana on Lord Narayana. In course of time, Sriyahpathi appeared before Shiva Who requested Narayana to take the asura. Narayana smiled and reminded Siva of how He always caused problems by His unfailing generosity in granting boons. He reminded Him of the Banasura episode. However, He assured Shiva that He would take care of the situation. He reminded Shiva that He had only assured Suran and Padman that Trimurthis could not defeat them. It meant that some one other than Trimurthis could vanquish the asura. Therefore, Perumal advised Shiva to ask His son Subrahmanya to fight with Surapadman and kill him (Surapadman). Shiva was happy. He sent for Subrahmanya and requested Him to put an end to the evil deeds. Subrahmanya set out to engage the asuras in a fight. The fight was severe. Sura and Padman used all their maya powers. They converted themselves into clouds, later as lightning and thunder and mountain; they assumed different forms to catch Subrahmanya by surprise. Towards the end of the fight, Suran and Padman created a gigantic form of a mango tree. Subrahmanya then threw His spear and split the tree into two and as advised by Vishnu, Muruga threw the two bits in different directions far apart. Suran and Padman thus lost their united personality. The two who got united into one person earlier thanks to the boon given by Shiva got split again. They fell at the feet of Lord Subrahmanya and sought forgiveness. They also sought clarification as to how the boon of invincibility and freedom from death granted by the father (Lord Shiva) could be deprived by the son (Subrahmanya). Subrahmanya explained to them that His father had only granted their own wish viz. of invincibility against Trimurthis and not others. Moreover, they were only split into their original dual personality and had not technically been killed! Thus, they were still immortal! The asuras realised they were outwitted. They fell at the feet of Lord Muruga and asked Him to grant them a boon, even as Garuda defeated by Perumal sought a gift and got

the boon from Narayana. They requested that similarly they also should be blessed by Lord Subrahmanya. Muruga agreed and even as Vishnu permitted Garuda to become His vahana as well as a symbol of His flag-mast, so also Suran and Padman became a cock on the flag held by Muruga and the peacock which is the vahana of Lord Subrahmanya. This is the story of Surapadma samhara which was made possible by Perumal of Thiruchittrar Who appeared in response to Lord Shiva's prayers and resolved His problem.

One should not miss a peculiar feature in the idol of Vishnu worshipped in this place. The usual idol of Vishnu has four arms. It is the left hand that holds the Sankha (conch) and the right hand the Srichakra. But the idol installed by Dharmaputra at Chengannoor is different. It is the right hand that holds the sankha (conch) and the Srichakra is held in the left hand. The reason for this peculiar feature is not known.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalvar is the only alvar who has written eleven pasurams on the Perumal of Thiruchengannoor. The commentators explain an interesting background for these pasurams. It is said that Nammalvar felt all human beings in this world were selfish and so asked for and obtained favours only for themselves from the Lord and never seemed to even think that the Lord should live happily without any danger to Himself. The alvar got worried and frightened regarding the safety of the Perumal. Realising this state of mind of the alvar, God decided to relieve him of his fears. He started enumerating and enunciating his strong points. The Lord told the alvar that He is staying in Thiruchengannoor which is a very safe place where the enemies could not even mentally think of any harm for the Lord. Further the Lord said that in Thiruchengannoor Thiruchitraru, 3000 learned men were residing along with Him. He then reminded the alvar about His valour, His heroic deeds, His noble qualities, etc. Hearing all these, the alvar felt comforted. He was no longer afraid. Only then he was able to concentrate on enjoying the beautiful form of the enchanting Perumal. These ten pasurams are reflecting that sense of enjoyment experienced by Nammalvar after his fears were allayed.

The commentators say that the fears of the alvar and the comforting reaction of the Lord are reminiscent of two other situations that occurred in the Ramayana and Bhagavata. In the Ramayana when Vibhishana sought saranagathi at Rama's feet, Rama promptly gave him abhaya. But seeing this Sugreeva was a bit disturbed and worried. He wondered whether Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana would pose some problems for Rama later. Sugreeva felt that no good can come out of a demon.; Rama read the mind of Sugreeva. He replied

**“Pisaacha aan daanavaan yakshaan prithivyaam
cheiyva raakshaasaam
angulya grena thaan hanyaam ichchan hari ganeswara”**

Literally translated this means, Oh Monkey king! If I so wish, I can completely destroy with the tip of my little finger the spirits, the demons, the yakshas, the kings living in this world and all the rakshasas”. Thus Rama spoke about His prowess to allay the fears of the monkey king Sugreeva. After hearing Rama, Sugreeva replied **“Kimatra chitram dharmagna lokanatha sukhavaha”**

This means “Oh embodiment of Dharma! Oh Creator of the worlds (Lokanatha)! Oh Lord conferring happiness on all living in this world! I am not surprised at Your prowess.”

Yet another incident where God had to convince His well wishers about His prowess in order to rid them of the needless worries regarding His welfare occurs in Bhagavata. This is related in Eedu by Nampillai. Kamsa wanted to destroy Krishna by some method fair or foul. Once he sent word to Krishna to come to his palace to participate in a “vil vizha”, a contest in archery. Krishna and Balarama accepted this invitation and came to the palace of Kamsa. Earlier Kamsa had arranged for expert wrestlers (mallars) to engage the young boys Krishna and Balarama in a fight. The people who witnessed the sight felt it was an unequal fight with two children on one side and the experienced wrestlers on the other. They were all saying **“Nasaman yudham ithyaa huhu”**. All the people in unison felt that the fight is not between the equals. But Krishna defeated with ease the wrestlers and removed the fear from the minds of His well wishers.

The commentators say that similarly the Perumal at Thiruchenganoor Thiruchitraru is reminding the alvar of His prowess and thereby removing his fears for His safety. Perialvar sang Pallandu to prevent any evil eye being cast on His enchanting Lord. It is in a similar fashion that Nammalvar here recalls the qualities of the great enchanter to say that all his fears for His safety were needless. One of these pasurams with its meaning is given below:-

PASURAM 3480:

வார்கடா வருவீ யானைமா மலையின் மருப்பினைக்
 குவடிநுத் துருட்டி
 ஊர் கொள் திண் பாக துயிர்செகுத்து அரங்கின்
 மல்லரைக் கொன்றுதழ் பரண்மேல்
 போர்கடா வரசர் புறக்கிட மாடமீயிசைக் கஞ்சனைத்
 கர்த்த
 சீரிகொள் சிற்றாயன் திருச் செங்குன் றூரில் திருச்சிறா
 மாமலையான்றெங்கள் செல் சார்வே

Meaning:

The place which we wish to reach is Thiruchengannoor Thiruchitraru divya desa where the Perumal known as Balakrishna resides. He is the one Who broke the two huge tusks of the huge mountain like elephant Kuvalayapeetam and killed it. He also killed the Mahout of that elephant. He is the one Who killed after a fierce fight the mallars (wrestlers) with whom Kamsa arranged a fight. Seeing His heroic acts the kings seated on the thrones in the palace of Kamsa took to their heels and ran away from the scene. He is the one Who destroyed Kamsa who had hid himself in the top floor of the palace. He is the one Who has Veerasree (the Goddess of victory) with Him.

In this pasuram, the alvar enumerates some of the heroic acts of the Perumal and thus convinces himself that he has nothing to worry regarding the safety of the Perumal. He refers to the wrestlers who were destroyed by the child Krishna. These wrestlers were Chanooran, Mishtikan. Kamsa had arranged for a contest in archery i.e. vil vizha. He had sent the friend of Krishna,

Akroora to invite Krishna for the contest. He felt that Krishna would not reject any request from Akroora. As expected, Krishna accepted the invitation from Akroora. He left Gokulam and reached Mathura. Kamsa had kept the mighty elephant Kuvalayapeetam ready at the entrance to the palace. The story of Krishna's fight with the mighty elephant in musth is well known. He broke its tusk and used its very tusk to stab the elephant to death. The alvar says that Kuvalayapeetam was like a mountain. The words he uses are "Yaanai maamalaiyin" (யானை மாமலையின்) because he has compared the elephant to a mountain. The words he uses are "varrkada aruvi" (வார்கடா அருவி). Thus, he completes the description of the elephant to a mountain and the oozing musth liquid to the rivulets in a mountain. He further says the tusks were like the twin peaks of the mountain. The words used are "Maruppu inai kuvadu" (மருப்பினைக்குவடு). Thus, the comparison with the mountain is complete. The alvar thus presents a graphic picture of the valorous acts of the Perumal who is residing at Thiruchengannoor Thiruchitrar.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGA'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

வரவேண்கும் கண்டாய் மதிகலங்கி வீக்குள்
பெரெவே உயிர் மாயும் பேழெதூ பரமேட்டி!
செங்குன்றூர்மாலே! சிறைப் பநவை மேல் கனகப்
பைங்குன்று ஊர் காரர் பேசெல் பநந்து.

Meaning:

Oh Paramapadanadha!

Oh Lord of Thiruchengannoor!

In my last moments, when life is ebbing out, my mind has lost its clarity and I am suffering from hiccups, you must come flying and give me darshan seated on the divine Garuda looking as if a dark rain bearing cloud is seated on a golden mountain. Only then will I be blessed with salvation.

The thoughts expressed by Divyakavi are similar to what Periyalvar says (vide pasuram 423). Periyalvar says "Appodhaikku Ippodhae sollivaithen arangathu aravanai palliyaanae" i.e. he says, Oh Lord Ranganatha lying down on Adesasha, when I become

old, decrepit with my limbs not under my control I may not be in a fit mental condition to think of you and sing your praises. So, as I sing your praises today and offer my prayers to you today, when I am mentally fit and alert, I am only asking for advance credit. You please treat what I am doing today as what I wish to do even when I am old but when it becomes a case of spirit is willing, but flesh is weak. It is almost like asking for overdraft facility later while depositing the green chips today.

* * *

THIRUNAVAI

This Malainadu divya desa is located on the Madras-Kozhikode rail line. One can get down at Thirunavai station itself and the temple is about one mile away from the station. One can also reach the place by bus from Shoranur. The moolavar here is known as Naavai Mukundan as also Narayanan. He is seen in a standing pose facing east. This is the only divya desa in Kerala where Thayar has got a separate shrine. She is known as Malar Mangai Nachiyar as also Siru Devi. The theertha is known as Sengamala saras. The vimanam is known as Veda vimanam. The Lord appeared to Gajendra and the nine yogis (nava yogis). The divya desa is located on the banks of Bharatpuzha river.

This is one of the few famous temples in the erstwhile Malabar district. This is one of the temples which had a glorious past. But unfortunately today the entire temple precincts speak volumes on the relentless ravages of time and man's neglect of his holy heritage. The temple towers are dilapidated. There are gaping holes on the sidewalls. It is heart rending to see the dilapidated condition in which the temple is found. Yet there is a certain aura of holiness pervading in the area. The feeling is very succinctly, eloquently and effectively reflected in the following words found in the book "Pilgrim's Guide to Guruvayoor and few other Vaishnavite temples"¹ when the editor says "one can feel there there is a ring of timelessness about it and that something dignified still presides over the entire setting in spite of its abjectness. Even in this sad state there is something still mystic about it and its solidified silence is a strident rhetoric of its own departed glory before which time seems to stand in a stupor of amazement". The temple is situated in sylvan surroundings on the right bank of the Bharatpuzha river. This river is to Kerala what Ganga is to the whole country. It is said that Mahakavi Kunhiraman Nair the great poet of Kerala, paid a glowing tribute to this river when he said that the river Ganga fascinated poet Kalidasa, the voluptuous Godavari cast her spell on poet Bhavabhooti, river Padma lent its sweetness to the songs of poet Rabindranath Tagore and the heart

1. *Pilgrim's Guide to Guruvayoor temple and few other Vaishnava temples of Kerala* by S.P.Nair - Page 111

of Mahakavi Kunhiraman Nair was lost to the rustic and bewitching beauty of Bharatpuzha river. The river is at its broadest at Thirunavai.

There are temples for Siva and Brahma in this place and as Mummurthis are located in one town on either side of Bharatpuzha river, the place is considered as a holy place and is regarded as equal to Kasi and Rameswaram. As in Kasi shraddha ceremonies (obsequies and funeral) performed for our forefathers on the banks of Bharatpuzha river are considered as equal to similar ceremonies performed at Kasi. As at Beneras, cremations take place on the banks of Bharatpuzha river at Thirunaavai. It is of interest to note that ashes of late Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru were also immersed in this river at Thirunavai. Such is the holiness attached to this place even now.

The chuttambalam is very ordinary-looking and has only a tiled gopuram. There is no golden flagmast or any impressive steeples (thazhikankkudam). The srikovil is also nothing outstanding. There are no outstanding sculptures or paintings either.

Let us now turn to a few legends connected with this divya desa. The Perumal here is known as Nava Mukundan as also Narayanan. It is believed that once upon a time, the Moolavar of this place was known as Narayanan only and he was seen in a sitting posture. The divine consort known as Malar Mangai Nachiyar was facing south. There are old records mentioning this position; but today the lord of the place is mainly known as Navai Mukundan and He is seen in a standing posture facing east.

One of the legends connected with this place illustrates the quality of bhakta vyaamoham (great attachment to a devotee) found in abundance with Perumal. It is said that once upon a time the ponds and the tanks in and around Bharatpuzha river were full of lotus flowers. Mahalakshmi used to pluck those lotus flowers for worshipping the Lord. At one point of time Gajendra, the famous elephant also came to this place and he wanted to pluck the lotus flowers and offer worship to Lord Narayana. To his chagrin he found that Mahalakshmi always beat him to it by successfully plucking the flowers earlier than him. He therefore went

to the Lord and complained that he could not fulfill his desire to worship Him with the lotus flowers and so he may have to go elsewhere where lotuses could be had. The Lord did not want His true devotee to be disappointed. He therefore appeared to Gajendra and Mahalakshmi and told Thayar that She could stay with Him and receive the flowers offered by Gajendra, instead of competing with Gajendra for plucking flowers. This story is said to illustrate the great quality of God that He does not like to let down even one of His devotees. Mahalakshmi agreed and hence it is that only in Thirunavai in Kerala nadu there is a separate shrine for Mahalakshmi. The Lord is said to have been pleased with the worship of Gajendra and permitted him to ask for any boon. Gajendra is said to have requested Perumal to continue to stay in that place and bless the other devotees also. It is believed that as Mahalakshmi plucked all the flowers in the tank for worshipping the God, the tank got the name as Sengamala saras (i.e. lotus pond in Tamil) and the Thayar Who offered the flowers to the Lord came to be known as Malar Mangai Nachiyar (flower Goddess).

There is yet another legend connected with this place. It is believed that the Lord appeared to the nine sages (nava yogis); the nava yogis were sathwanathar, Saalokanathar, Adinathar, Arulithanathar, Mathanganathar, Machendranathar, Kadayanthiranathar, Gorakanathar and Kukutanathar. These were nine siddhapurusahas. They were staying in this place and performing yagas and offering worship to the Perumal. Hence this place came to be known as Thirunavayogi town i.e. town of the nine sages. With passage of time the word Thirunava yogi got corrupted into Thirunavai. It is believed that these nava yogis stayed in this place for a very long time. In due course eight of them attained siddhi and disappeared from the mortal eyes and along with them the aaradhana vigrahas which were being used by them during worship also disappeared. The ninth yogi who was left behind felt very sad and he gave up all worship. The Lord appeared and wanted to know why he had given up the practice of performing poojas and why he was sad. The yogi then told the Perumal that all the nine yogis had been roaming the world as a group for a very long time; they had been camping in many places

and offering worship to the Lord; finally they had reached Thirunavai where they were struck by the sylvan beauty of the place and had stayed on continuing to worship the lord. But unfortunately eight yogis attained moksha and their idols have also disappeared; as only he and his archa murthy were left he said he felt lonely and very sad. The perumal took pity on him and with His powers asked the yogi whether he would resume his prayers if he had a vision of his long last eight companions. The yogi agreed and the lord with His powers of maya was able to make the yogi have a vision of his erstwhile companions. The yogi then requested his eight companions to continue to stay in that place. They agreed to stay but said they will not be seen by the naked eyes of mere mortals, but they would provide the companionship and mental comfort to their friend by continuing to stay there in cognito. The ninth yogi then requested the Perumal that he may also be made invisible so that he could join his companions and attain moksha. He also desired that his archa murthi should also disappear along with him. The lord did not agree. He said that if the archa murthi were also to disappear from that place, the place would become a wasteland. He advised the ninth yogi to install the archa murthi in the temple. He will become invisible but that he should continue to collect the flowers from the neighbouring forest and worship Him in the temple. The yogi agreed. It is believed that to date the nine yogis continue to live in this place but remain invisible to the naked eyes of the residents of this town. It is said that the Lord Who appeared before the naga yogis was known as Mukundan and hence it was that the presiding deity of this divya desa came to be referred to as Nava Mukunda, i.e. the Mukunda Who appeared to the nava yogis. It is also believed that as the Nava yogis performed a lot of poojas and yagnas in this place and as they used to recite the vedas for a long time, the vimanam of this place came to be identified with Nava yogis and was popularly known as Veda vimanam.

An unique feature to be noticed in this place is the peculiar sculpting of the eyes of the Thayar (Goddess). The eyes of the Thayar appear to be closed i.e. they are not open. It is said that one day the sculptor had almost completed the image and had

reserved the final act of opening the eyes to the morrow. But that night in his sleep he had a vision of the Goddess Who told him that there was no need to open her eyes. Normally, the opening of the eyes is believed to breathe life into an idol. As the idol (Goddess in this case) had spoken to him the previous night, the sculptor felt that life was there already in the idol and hence there was no need to open the eyes to breathe life into the image! This is said to account for the present position when we see the image of the Thayar with closed eyes.

One other interesting festival which is reported to have been celebrated in the historic past in this place is the Maha makam festival. This festival was celebrated once in twelve years on the banks of Bharatpuzha river. Readers may be reminded that the same festival is celebrated in Kumbakonam once in twelve years even to this day. While the festival in Kumbakonam continues to this day, the festival in Thirunavai stopped a long time ago. Long back when this festival was being celebrated it used to be celebrated in the month of Masi when the planet Guru was situated in Simha rasi. At that time the river Ganga and other holy rivers are believed to have traversed to underground and mixed with waters of Bharatpuzha so as to wash away their sins and in turn make the waters of this river holier due to the confluence of all the holy rivers like Ganga etc. At that time the festival (thiruvizha) was celebrated in the temple for thirty days. It would begin on Thai poosam day (full moon day in the Tamil month of Thai) and it will conclude in the month of Masi when Makha star was in the ascendent. But when the Perumal dynasty ended the king who succeeded was known as Valluva Konaadri Raja. He had Angadipuram as his capital and he used to continue to organise the Maha makam festival. But the Raja of Kozhikode Saamudri raja did not like this. He waged a war with Konaadri Raja. In order that he may be blessed with success in that war he is said to have offered prayers to Bhagavathi Amman at Thirumannaach kunru who was the 'kuladevata' of the enemy king! Apparently he sought the divine help of the God who was favouring his enemy and he was successful in receiving her blessings. He won and from that year he usurped the title of Makha makha Raksha

Purusha which earlier was held by Konaadri Raja. He was able to safeguard this position till the year 1776. That was the last year when this makha makham festival was celebrated. In April of that year Hyder Ali invaded Kozhikode and occupied it. Thus, Samudri Raja lost his position as Makha makha Raksha Purusha and it is said that from that year onwards the Maha makha festival was never celebrated.

Kerala history however records the drama the thrill, grandeur and action associated with the celebration of Maha makha festival on the sandy banks of Bharatpuzha river at Thirunavai. At that time all the kings, chieftains, warriors, scholars, artists and acrobats would all assemble at Thirunavai. They would be single as well as group competitions. It was an occasion for displaying honour, courage, gallantry etc. Perum para (drums) would be beaten; metallic cymbals would also ring. Caparisoned elephants, countless horses, royal entourage would all camp at Thirunavai. Sword events (duels) would take place. The hapless royal victims who were defeated in the battle would be killed and the heads that rolled would be dumped into a huge well right in the middle of that town. People believe that the ghosts of those killed during the Maha makham celebration still haunt the place. An old well where the remains of the dead were believed to be thrown is still shown to the curious inquisitive visitors. But today that receives the industrial waste of a tile factory nearby!

Another curious incident reported in connection with the history of this temple relates to the consecration of the idol in this temple. It is widely believed that the idol in this temple was installed by the nava yogis. Normally a temple would remain closed for seven days after the consecration of the idol during which time the daily poojas are believed to be performed by the devas. When similar procedure was followed at the time of the installation of the idol on the 8th day when the temple doors were opened to the wonder and consternation of the authorities, the idol was missing! No one could explain this mysterious occurrence. Another idol was duly consecrated and after the due ceremonies and rituals were followed for seven days the doors were opened. But again on the eighth day history repeated itself when the second idol also

disappeared; This was said to have been repeated eight times and on the ninth occasion, when the authorities installed the idol, they were all a bit curious. They therefore opened the temple on the third day itself instead of waiting for eight days and to their surprise they found that this idol had descended into the earth upto the knee. Immediately they prevented further descent of the idol by repeating various mantras; Even today the idol in the garbagriha of this temple can be seen only above the knees.

There are others who say that when this idol which is now seen upto the knees disappears into the earth completely it will herald the end of Kaliyuga! However, the fact that the idol is seen today only upto the knees led to the practice when some devotees offer prayers at this temple standing on bended knees as they do not want to offer prayers standing higher than the idol. It is said that when Adi Sankara came to Thirunavai, he also offered prayers on bended knees. But some people who were witnessing this were so amused that they loudly uttered some derogatory remarks saying that a little elephant had come to the temple to offer worship. Adi Sankara who heard this comment wanted to teach a lesson to these people as he felt it was their affluence which made them talk with such haughtiness and arrogance. He felt that the Goddess of this place was very munificent standing in the temple with both palms open and stretched upwards i.e. in a posture where it appeared She was generously ladling out riches. He felt the position of the hands with both their palms turned upwards granting abhaya to all the devotees there was the cause for the limitless wealth of the residents. He changed the position of the idol's hands instead of both hands being kept with their palms turned upwards he made one palm turn downward. It is believed that from that day this town started declining and deteriorating. This explains the present state neglect of this town.

Yet another legend connected with this temple relates to the story of Markandeya and God of death. It is believed that when the Lord of death, Yama came on his buffalo with the usual lasso and lance to tie up and kill young Markandeya, Markandeya ran towards Srikovil at Thirunavai to seek God's help to escape. The lord gave him a handful of sand and asked the boy to escape

through the door at the back of the idol. Markandeya accordingly ran through that door, crossed the river and reached the Siva temple on the other side of Bharatpuzha river. The lord had also advised Markandeya to make a Sivalinga and to worship that Linga for protection from the hands of Yama and He assured that Lord Siva would take care of the rest. As soon as Markandeya ran thro' the door at the back of the idol, God closed that door. It remained shut making it impossible for Yama to pursue Markandeya. Even today a slab in the temple depicts the picture of Markandeya prostrating before Lord Vishnu; there is a door behind the idol of Mukunda which is never opened. There is also a figure of an ox carved in hard granite at the back of the temple. These are some of the stray facts which are cited as evidences to corroborate the mythological story.

There is yet another interesting legend connected with this divyadesa. Just behind the idol there is a big hole. Many claim that it is a big hole which goes into an abyas, a bottomless pit. One day a priest tied his ring to a long thread and sent it down to verify the depth of the pit. The bottom was never touched. Finally when the priest pulled out the string, the ring had disappeared; neither was there any water on the string. This phenomena of the bottomless pit is beyond any explanation. Some say that is the route thro' which the eight idols installed prior to the existing one in the garbagriha disappeared! There is a small shrine dedicated to the Lord Vigneswarato the south of Srikovil. By the side of the shrine there is a concrete slab two feet wide which is so placed as to cover a hollow; the slab is not cemented; yet it remains in the same position without any change during all the centuries that have lapsed. It is believed that the slab covers yet another tunnel. Many are the stories repeated about going on in the colourful underworld to which this tunnel is supposed to lead.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalvar and Thirumangai Alvar have composed 11 and 2 pasurams each on the Lord of the divya desa at Thirunavai.

Nammalvar had sent winged messengers to Gods in four Thiruvaimozhis. In pasurams 2708 to 2718 starting with the

words"Angirayamadanaarai" (அங்காயிர மடநாரை) he had sent message (dhoodhu) to Perumal in His vyuha manifestation. In pasurams 3227 to 3237 starting with the words "vaigal poonkazhivai" he sent message to Perumal in vibhava avatar. In pasurams 3204 to 3214 starting with the words "Ponnulagaaleero" (பொன்னுலகளீரோ) he sent word to Perumal in His antharyaamithwa form. In pasurams 2623 to 2633 starting with the words "En kaanal agankazhi vaai" (என கன்னல் அகங் கழிவாய்) he sends word to the Perumal in His archa avatar. It is said that while waiting for reply to his appeal to the archa avatar Perumal the alvar tried to sustain himself by singing the praise of the Lord at Thirunavai. One of the pasurams with its meaning is given below:

PASURAM 3634:

அறுக்கும் வினையாயின ஆ கத்து அவனை
நிறுத்தும் மனத்துடன் நியகிந் தையினார்க்கு-
வெறித்தண் மலர்ச்சோ லைகள் தூழ் திருநாவாய்
குறுக்கும் வகைண் டுகொலோ? கொடியேற்கே

Freely translated in this pasuram the alvar says:

Is there any way by which this great sinner (i.e. the alvar himself!) can attain Thirunavai divya desa surrounded by cool scented flower groves. That divya desa has the virtue of destroying all the enemies of all those devotees who wish to permanently enshrine in their hearts the Supreme being (i.e. Perumal).

In this pasuram the alvar vests even the divya desa with power to wipe out ones sins. He uses the words (வினையாயின அறுக்கும்). "Vinai" means sins, "arukkum" means destroys. The word aayina refers to all other ills which are like sins. So this divya desa will not only redeem us of our sins but also all other ills which are as harmful as sins. These ills are categorised in as Swaroopa virodhi, upaaya virodhi and upeya virodhi i.e. swaroopa virodhi ills are those which obstruct the path of knowledge of the soul. The upaaya virodhi ills are those which stand in the way of adopting the means for attaining salvation. The upeya virodhi ills are those which prevent rendering service to the Lord with the object of the service being for God's pleasure and not devotee's

happiness. In this pasuram, the alvar uses the words “Thirunavai kurukkum vagai undo” (திருநாவாய் குருக்கும் வகைஉண்டோ?) i.e. is it possible to make some attain that divya desa Thirunavai? The word “Kurugum vagai” (குருகும் வகை) has got corrupted as “kurukkum vagai” (குருக்கும் வகை) and the words “Kurukkam vagai undo” (குருக்கும் வகை உண்டோ) is a typical manner of conversation heard in Malayala nadu. It is amazing that Nammalvar seated in meditation at Thirukurugoor in Tirunelveli district ever since he was born, should so fluently use the mode of speech found in Malainadu while uttering pasurams relating to Malai nadu divya desas. There is also a story which says that once when Ramanuja was on a pilgrimage to this place, as he neared the place he asked some locals as to how much further is the Navai divya desa. They replied “kurukkum kurukkum” meaning “not far not far”. Hearing those very words used by the Alvar in his pasuram being uttered by the people, Ramanuja was struck with pleasant reverential awe at the ability of the alvar who used the local lingo while describing the Malainadu divya desa all the while staying in the hollow of the tamarind tree in Kurugoor.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

பறந்து திரிதரினும் பாவியேன் உள்ளம்
மறந்தும் பிறிது அறிய மாட்டா சிறந்த
திருநாவாய் வாழ்கின்ற தேவனை அல்லால், என்
ஒருநா வாய் வாழ்த்தாது உகந்து.

Meaning:

This sinner's mind may wander hither, thither, everywhere. But it will not ever even for a day, out of forgetfulness, accept any one other than Sriman Narayana as its Lord. My tongue and my mouth will never sing the praises of any Lord other than that of the one residing at Thirunavai.

THIRUPPULIYUR (KUTTANADU)

This is yet another of divya desas in Malainadu which is associated with the life of the Pandavas. This divya desa lies about three and a half miles west of Chengannoor.

The moolavar is known as Mayappiran. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The Thayar is Porkodi Nachiyar. The theerthas are Pragnasaras and Poonshunai theertha. The vimanam is known as Purushothama vimanam. God appeared to the saptha rishis.

The temple is located in the midst of idyllic surroundings and on a small hillock. It lies on the Chengannoor-Mannar route. Nammalwar described the temple as “Karimanickkathu malai mel manithadam chadukal pol” (கருமாணிக்கத்து மலை மேல் மனிதாடும் சாதுக்கள் போல்).

The beautiful lotus tank and the emerald like hill described by Nammalwar so many centuries ago can be seen even today thus enabling us to have a tryst with the glorious past when we visit this Tirupathi.

During the great Mahabharata war, Krishna was on the side of Dharmaputra and his brothers. When it came to fighting with their Paramacharya, i.e. Dronacharya the Pandavas had an understandable hesitation and were reluctant to fight the Guru as they knew his excellence in archery only too well. Yet as advised by Lord Krishna, they decided to utter a part of falsehood, as perhaps even in those days as of now, all is fair in love and war. Dharmaraja who was known for his principled existence and his strict adherence to Dharma and honesty was asked to utter the words “**Aswathama Hathaha**” within the hearing of Dronacharya and to follow up those two words at a lower pitch with the word “**Kunjaraha**”. It was anticipated that Dronacharya would hear the first two words and presume that his son Aswathama was killed in the battle-field and therefore would have no interest in the war and could be easily conquered.

It is said that even after hearing the words “**Aswathama Hathaha**” Dronacharya was continuing to engage the Pandavas

in the encounter. It is believed that Bhima uttered loudly the words "**Aswathama Hathaha**" and further said that what was said by Dharmaraja was true. Only on hearing Bhima reiterating what was said by Dharmaraja earlier, Dronacharya downed his weapons and swooned. At that time Drishtadumnya let loose his arrows which killed the great Acharya. Bhima therefore felt that it was not Dharmaraja who was wholly responsible for the gurudroha, and that if any, he had a greater responsibility in that act of foul play. His conscience was tearing him to pieces. He had no peace of mind. He decided to go on a pilgrimage and in course of time, he reached Thiruchenganoor and proceeded further down. He reached Thiruppuliur. He saw the beautiful temple there set in idyllic surroundings. On making local enquiries he learnt that the Perumal there had given darshan to saptha rishis and helped them a lot. He felt the same Lord will bless him also. So he stayed on in Thiruppuliur and continued to worship Mayappiran.

The story of the saptha rishis is related to Bhimasena by the locals is the main sthala purana of this temple. Once upon a time, the son of Sibi chakravarthi by name Drishtadumnya was ruling the kingdom. There was a severe drought at that time; the saptha rishis passed by that way; they did not have sufficient food to eat. They were begging for alms. During one of their perambulations, Drishtadumnya the king met them. He enquired from them the purpose of their travel. He offered food and also entire villages to the saptha rishis and asked them to accept it and thereby honour him. But the rishis declined and said that as per dharmic principles they should not receive any 'dhana' from the king whose land was passing through severe drought and famine. They said if they did accept it, it would amount to a great sin, as drought and consequent untimely deaths meant there was some blemish or drawback in that ruler. So they continued their journey. The king was simply taken aback. He had a long discussion with his ministers and he decided to have some fruits sent to the rishis through other messengers; he hid some gold inside the fruits and hoped that if the rishis accepted it, they would have enough money for meeting their future requirements. When the messengers went with the fruits to the rishis, with their gnana drushti they saw through the

ruse. They therefore declined even the offer of the fruits and hearing this the king got very angry. He decided to punish the rishis. He performed a homa out of which a lady emerged; she was named Krithyai, a demoness. She was to be the instrument of death. She asked the king as to whether he had any tasks for her. The king asked her to go to the place where the saptha rishis were residing and kill them. He also said that if she failed in her mission the rishis would destroy her. After having completed the task assigned to her, he told her she was free to go wherever she liked. Krithyai accordingly set out and settled on the bund of a tank full of lotus flowers. Earlier, the saptha rishis also had seen the same tank full of lotus flowers and decided to halt there and pull out the lotus flowers with the stalks and eat the stalks to satisfy their hunger. When the rishis saw the lady sitting on the tank bund, they asked her as to who she was and why she was sitting alone in that place. The lady replied that she was guarding the tank, her name was Yadudaani and told them that she was not in a position to disclose further details about herself and asked them whether she could be of any service to them. The saptha rishis replied that they were suffering due to the pangs of hunger. They requested her to permit them to pluck the lotus stalks in the tank. The lady then asked them for their names. By that time, the rishis with their gnana drushti knew the purpose and task for which this lady was sent. When asked to mention their names, they failed to disclose their real names and mentioned it in a jumbled fashion. Thus, Atri maharishi is said to have given his name as Aratri thwathri. Vasishta muni is said to have given his name as Vasishta Vasad Vasistaha. The lady therefore could not make head or tail of those names. She asked them to explain the meaning of their names. One thridandi sanyasi Soonasakha who had accompanied the saptha rishis came forward saying that he was willing to utter his name in a manner whereby she could understand the meaning and added that if she could not get the meaning, he would hit her with the thridanda and she would immediately die on the spot and be turned into ashes. The lady agreed. Thridandi mentioned his name as Soonasakha. She again said that she was not able to understand the meaning of that word. He immediately hit her

with the thridandi and she was turned into ashes. The saptha rishis then entered the tank, plucked the lotus stalks and lotus tubers, placed them on the bund and went to offer prayers before partaking of their meals. Meantime, Soonasakhan hid the lotus stalks and when the rishis came their food had disappeared. They started blaming each other for the loss. Atri maharishi then said that whoever had stolen their food would be subjected to the sin of having kicked a cow with his foot; Vasishta said that whoever had stolen the food would have to incur the same punishment which would be inflicted on a person who killed the individual who sought saranagathi at his very feet. Gowthamar said that whoever was guilty of that sin of having hid their food would receive the same punishment which would be meted out to the person who forgot the Vedas. Viswamitra said that the sinner would be subjected to abject misery and poverty. Kashyapa alone said that whoever was guilty of this heinous act would be exposed to the same crime as a person who claimed that a God other than Sriman Narayana was the Supreme deity. At that time, Soonasakhan said that whoever stole the lotus stalk will be blessed as if he has done kanyadanam. Immediately the rishis cursed the thief, he was the only one who blessed the thief! He accepted his guilt. He said he was Indra who had come in his maya form had accompanied the saptha rishis as he had heard of the evil intentions of the king Vrisha darbi. He said that he had been instructed by Perumal to kill Yadadaani who emerged out of the homa performed by Vrisha darbi. It is said that God then appeared before them as Mayappiran and blessed the saptha rishis. He said he was touched by the depth of single-minded devotion exhibited by Kasyapa rishi and he said they could choose any boon of their choice. Rishis then requested Narayana to continue to stay in that place in the form in which He appeared and bless the other devotees as well. This is the legend that explains the presence of Mayappiran Perumal in Thiruppuliyur. As Perumal appeared to the saptha rishis and solved their problems, Bhimasena felt doubly assured that if he worships the same Perumal he would also have peace of mind. He renovated the temple and worshipped the Perumal. As in the case of other temples with which the Pandavas are associated here also

the fact of Bhimasena having worshipped the idol himself, is equated with his installing it in the place! Many say that Thiruppuliyur idol is Bhima *pratishta* idol. The other Vishnu temples where the Pandavas worshipped the Perumal and did renovation work are the temples at Thiruchengannoor, Thiruppuliyur, Thiruvarammala, Thiruvannamdoor, Thirukodithanam.

In ancient days this temple was administered by a committee of senior people residing in the place known as Oorazhaamakkars. This was a small administrative council for looking after the affairs of the temple. This temple had one such council consisting 28 members. Majority of the members of the Committee were Namboodri brahmins with the exception of one who was a Nair by caste. His name was Varayan Pillai and he was a man held in high esteem by local people. Once it is said that there was a difference of opinion between this Nair and the other Namboodris. He was very arrogant and had hurt the sensitive Namboodri brahmins. The custom was that whenever he came to that place, the Namboodri brahmins had to receive this Nair with a great deal of respect and extend all courtesies to him as if he was a member of the royalty. In the feudalistic Kerala atmosphere, the habit was that the person who is received is given a seat on a pedestal which is covered with a white cloth and a woolen blanket. The Namboodri brahmins decided to get rid of the Nair by playing a deep game. They dug a deep pit in the temple precincts where the meeting of the Oorazhaamakkars (administrative council) was to be held. They filled the pit with a number of spikes and covered the mouth of the pit with the pedestal covered with white cloth. The Nair was received right royally and conducted to the pedestal as usual. Unaware of the plot that was hatched, the Nair sat on the pedestal; as expected he fell down into the pit. The spikes injured him. He bled to death. It is said that the Namboodri brahmins covered the pit and thought it was good riddance of the Nair who could no longer create problems in administering the temple. Perhaps in those feudalistic days, none of the relatives of the Nair could raise an issue on the disappearance of the Nair. The relatives however were cut up and they were waiting for an opportunity to wreak vengeance on the

Namboodri brahmins. That opportunity occurred at the end of the year when a grand function was arranged in the temple and a number of Namboodri brahmins from outside Puliur also were invited to participate in the festivities. A big feast had been arranged and the guests, as is the normal custom among the Hindus, were to be fed first. After these guests left, the Oorazhaamakkars and their family members sat down to partake of the feast. At that time, the relatives of the Nair rushed from inside the temple and ruthlessly murdered the Namboodri brahmins and their relatives inside the temple precincts. Most of the Namboodri brahmins and their relatives died on the spot; only one amongst them is said to have run for dear life. He entered the sanctum sanctorum and hugged the idol of Perumal and prayed to be spared. However, his prayers were not heard. The Nairs chased him into the sanctum sanctorum as well and when the sword cut off the head of Namboodri and as the Namboodri was hugging the idol, the sword had cut his neck also, as a result of which the idol was slightly damaged. It is said that even today one can see the idol bearing the cut mark of a sword. However, after this mass murder, the people had no inclination to offer pooja in the temple. It is said that for nearly two hundred years, the doors of the temple remained closed. It was believed that the ghosts of the Namboodri brahmins freely roamed in the temple precincts. Later one day the local devotees decided to put an end to the sorry state of neglect; they invited a sidha purusha from nearby and asked him to perform expiatory sacrifices and prayers so as to exorcise the evil spirits of the brahma rakshas hiding in the temple. The Sidha purusha performed pushpanjali for several days. He is said to have offered to build a shrine for the appeasement of the departed souls in the temple precincts itself; it was only later that the worship was restored in this temple.

As stated earlier, the idol in this temple was consecrated and worshipped by Bhimasena. The association of Bhimasena with this temple is noticed through a few of the rituals followed in this temple. To illustrate, there is a temple at Malanad in Quilon district where the presiding deity is Duryodhana and nowhere else is this phenomenon in existence, viz. the character of Duryodhana

honoured with a temple. However, at the temple of Duryodhana, the local community called kuravas offer worship and it is here that the legend and superstition merge. Even today there is a taboo which prohibits the kuravas settling down in Puliur. The kuravas dare not spend a night in Puliur as they felt that the people of Puliur belong to the side of Bhimasena will kill them!

Yet another minor incident which is interesting is the fact that any offering made at Puliur temple is made in big size, befitting the stature of Bhimasena's requirements. Once a chief of the principality known as Illambal, lying between Kottarakkara and Pulanur had an unbearable stomach pain. All the efforts of physicians to cure the stomach pain was in vain. They had come to the conclusion that it was incurable and at that time they had turned to the Perumal at Puliur and promised him a generous offering if he was cured of his ailment. As is to be expected the miracle occurred and the grateful chieftain is said to have offered huge number of appams and adas so as to satisfy the hunger of Bhimasena, the mighty Pandava.

A special offering made in this temple is known as Chathushatham. It is a special payasam. As Bhimasena is associated with the presiding deity, the minimum quantity of rice to be used for preparing this payasam is said to be four hundred measures! There is a long list of people waiting to express their gratitude to this Perumal here and it is said that every day one devotee takes on the task of offering this neivedyam to the God.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalwar has composed 10 pasurams on this divya desa Perumal. These ten pasurams are in the nature of words uttered by the companion and describes the mental state of anguish of her mistress. In the 1000 pasurams of Nammalvar's "Thiruvai Mozhi" there are 3 decads (batch of ten pasurams each) which are called "Thozhi pasurams" (Lady companion's pasurams). The first decad of such thozhi pasurams are pasurams 3062 to 3072. The second set of ten pasurams are from 3271 to 3281. The third set is pasuram 3535 to 3545 i.e. the set of ten pasurams on the

Thiru Puliur divya desa. In all these three sets of pasurams, the alvar expatiates on the philosophy of ananyarhatwam which is enshrined in the word “U” (ukaaram) in the pranava letter OM (A + Ma + u). The philosophy of ananyarhatwam says that I belong to Him (God) and to none else.

In the first set of pasurams (3062 to 3072) starting with the words “Theerpaarai yaam eni” (நீர்ப்பாறையாம் இனி) the (thozhi) lady companion notices that the elderly ladies in the village look at the love lorn mistress (Parankusa nayaki) and mistake her behaviour as that of a woman who is in danger of loosing her senses. So they arrange for a “veriaattam” (a dance to exorcise the demons and spirits which they believe are having hold over the mistress). However the lady’s companion knows that her mistress is yearning for the Lord and that she is not mad in the mundane sense of the term. She therefore tells the elderly ladies that her mistresses disease and the medicine they are prescribing do not match! The solution adopted by them will not resolve her mistresse’s troubles. The companion suggests that what her mistress needs to cure her is the basil garland of the Perumal and not any demoniac dance of exorcism! Thus, the companion (thozhi) politely makes known to the ladies about the ananyarhathwa state of her mistress.

In the second set of pasurams (3271 to 3281) starting with the line “Thuvalil maamani maadam” (துவளில் மாமணி மாடம்) Parankusanayaki the mistress has lost her heart to Aravindalochana Perumal of Tholaivillimangalam. She is lost to the rest of the world as all the time she is thinking of only the Lord of Tholaivilli mangalam. The companion (thozhi) thro’ ten pasurams gently tells the ladies that their mistress has given her heart to Aravindalochanan and so they need not waste their love and centre their affection on her. The thozhi so says “Ini umakku aasai illai vidumino?” (இனி உமக்கு ஆசை இல்லை விடுமினோ). Thus, the thozhi again establishes and explains her mistresses anmanyarhatwatham state to the ladies. The companion says “my mistress belongs to Aravindalochanan” and not to herself or you or me so forget about her.

In this set of ten pasurams starting with “Karu manicka malai” (கரு மாணிக்க மலை) the position is slightly different. These pasurams paint a picture that Parankusanayaki has attained marriageable age. The parents therefore fix a date for Swayamvara and send invitations to select eligible bachelors. The companion of Parankusanayaki comes to know of this. She is in a quandry. Because she has heard her mistress say that she would not marry a mere mortal and that if such a situation were to arise she would prefer to even give up her life. She had also said that she would accept none else other than the Perumal of Thirumalirunsolai as her life’s companion. The companion therefore felt that if her mistress were to come to know of these marriage preparations being arranged by her parents she would be extremely sad and upset. The companion was in a fix. She felt that if she informed the parents that she knew that Parankusanayaki loved the Perumal residing at Kuttanadu Tirupathi (i.e. Puliyoor) they would get angry with her for not telling them earlier about it. But if she kept quiet and the parents went ahead with swayamvara preparations, her mistress will be considerably embarrassed. She therefore decided that she will meet the parents and pretend as if only very recently she came to know about the close association of her mistress with the Perumal by noticing her strange behaviour. She therefore went and told the parents that their daughter is of late talking all the time about the Thirupuliyoor Perumal, His great qualities, His great achievements etc. and she had therefore reason to believe that she was close to that Perumal and so they should stop all the arrangements for her swayamvara. The parents then wanted to know whether the Thirupuliyoor Perumal was a fit person for their daughter. Would His beauty match their daughter’s beauty? Does His wealth, fame, qualities of generosity, affection etc. compliment that of their daughter? They said that a person who wishes to marry their daughter should be proficient and well versed in vedic knowledge. They asked does the Perumal at Puliyoor fit this bill? The companion replied that the Perumal of Kuttanad Puliyoor fulfills all these criteria. However, she added that even if he does not meet with their approval, their daughter has set her heart only on that Lord. She advised them to give up the swayamvara prepara-

tions. This reads like a love story but it illustrates and conveys in simple language a fundamental truth of the Thirumantiram philosophy. Thirumanthiram explains in simple language the philosophy of ananyaarha seshatwam i.e. we do not belong to ourselves nor to others. We belong only to Him, the Lord. The alvar therefore thro' the lovelorn behaviour of Parankusanayaki towards Puliyoor Perumal teaches us the truth of swaroopa gnana i.e. an awareness that we belong to Him and none else only then can we attain salvation.

One of these pasurams with its meaning is given below:

PASURAM 3540:

திருவருள் முழ்கி வைக லும்செழு நீர்நிறக் கண்ணிரான்
திருவ ருள்களும் சேர்ந்த எமக்கு அடை யாளம் திருந்தவுள்
திருவ ருளரு ளால்அவன் சென்று சேர்தன் திருப்புலியூர்
திருவ ருள்குழ கொண்டு முத்தது மெல்லியல் செவ்விறை

Meaning:

In this pasuram, the companion says my mistress is steeped in the bliss resulting from being with the ocean-hued Lord Krishna. No one can make a mistake as it is evident that she is the recipient of full anugraha (blessing) from the Lord. She says my mistress's lips are glowing red like the arecanut fruit which by God's grace is growing in plenty in Thirupuliyur. The alvar uses the word "tiruvarul kamugu" (திருவருள் கமுகு) to refer to the arecanut trees found in Kuttanatu Thirupuliyoor. In the Eedu the commentator Nampillai says that there are some trees known as Tiruvarut Kamuku. They are the trees which survive not through water, but because of the kataksha (divine glance) of the Lord and His consort.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

முதல் வண்ணம் ஆமே முலை வண்ணம் முன்னை
விதி வண்ணம் நீங்கி விடுமே - சதுரத்
திருப்புலியூர் தின்றான் திருத்தண் துழாயின்
மருப்புவி ஊர் தென்றல் நின்.

Meaning:

Only when the soft breeze laden with the basil scent from the basil garlands worn by Lord Maayapiraan of Thirupuliyoor wafts on to me I will be able to survive and live. Only then will my body acquire a healthy rosy colour as against its pale colour caused by seperation from the Lord. Only then will this sense of loss due to seperation from the Lord resulting from my past sins of earlier births, be removed.

Here Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar says that as there has been delay in attaining the Lord, he is not able to put up with the pain resulting from seperation from his Lord. He then looks at his friends and tells them that he will survive and live only if he receives the blessing of the Lord. Only if Lord blesses him, he feels, will the accumulated sins of all previous births be redeemed.

Similar thoughts were expressed by Andal when she says (vide pasuram 478) “Poya pizhaiyum pugudharuvan ninranavum theeinil doosaagum” (போய பிழையும் புகுதருவன் நின்றளவும் தீயினில் தூசாகும்) thro’ those words Andal says the sins committed in the past and the sins likely to be committed in the future, will all get destroyed like cotton put into fire when we pray to the Lord.

* * *

THIRUMOOZHICALAM

This divya desa is located very near Bharatapuzha river. One can get down at Alwaye railway station and reach by bus this place which is about twelve kilometers away. One can also get down at Kaladi road station and reach this place as it is about seven miles from Kaladi Road.

The moolavar here is known as Thirumoozhi Kalathan, Appan, Sri Sookthinathar. The Perumal is seen in a standing pose, facing east. The Thayar is known as Madhuraveni Thayar. The theertha is known as Perunkulam, Sanga theertha, Chitraru. The vimanam is known as Soundarya vimanam. The Perumal appeared in response to the prayers of Hareetha maharishi.

This temple has a hoary past as it finds a mention in the Naalaayira Divya prabandha. The word "kulam" in Malayalam means a tank. One will therefore expect that a big tank is perhaps situated near the temple; but it is surprising that there is no tank worth mentioning anywhere near the temple! Some others say that the place derived its name from the word "mozhi" which meant irrigation channel and "kalam" which meant fields. As the origin of the temple is traced back to the glorious days of Kulasekhara, it is believed that this temple must once have been situated in very fertile land with criss-crossing of irrigation channels and luscious fields. There is a popular belief that the idol at Thirumoozhikalam was consecrated by Parasurama himself. Some others believe that this idol is that of Lakshmana. In Kerala, in very many places, Lord Vishnu is worshipped as Krishna, Narasimha as also Rama. Many temples originally regarded as Vishnu temples later came to be accepted as temples for Sri Rama. It is in keeping with that tradition and concept that the identity of the presiding deity in this temple is linked with the brother of Sri Rama, viz. Sri Lakshmana. The temples of Vilwadrinatha at Thiruvilwamala and the Sri Rama temple at Trprayar were both regarded as Vishnu temples. The idols in both places are having four hands. But yet in course of time, these temples have come to be accepted as temples for Sri Rama. Normally, the idols of Sri Rama are never depicted with four arms. He is never seen without His ensemble of bow and

quiver of arrows. Yet the idols in these places, in spite of having four arms, are popularly referred to as temples of Sri Rama! In the famous Irinjalakuda temple, the idol is identified as that of Bharata. At Payammal, a few kilometers away from Irinjalakuda, the idol is identified as that of Satrugna. All these deities are also Chaturbahus and yet Vishnu idols generally get identified popularly with Rama or Krishna in Kerala.

Tradition has it that the idol in this temple was one among the four discovered by some fisherfolk in their fishing net. They handed over the idols to their master, one Vakaiyil Kaimal, who in turn subsequently entrusted the idols to Namboodri priests for installation in nearby places. The Namboodris did astrological readings and are reported to have consecrated and housed these idols at or near river banks. The idol at Thirumoozhikalam is believed to be one of those four idols.

As stated earlier, there are many who believe that the idol in the temple is that of Lakshmana, brother of Sri Rama. There is a legend connected with this line of thinking. The legend is that after killing Ravana, the victorious Rama Who had His coronation and started ruling His kingdom sent Lakshmana and Bharata to go round the kingdom and learn from the subjects their problems and views on men and matters. Lakshmana reached Thirumoozhikalam, saw Harithi maharishi, prostrated before him and enquired whether there was any shortcomings as voiced by the people. The rishi replied that Lakshmana should at the outset sort out his shortcoming and find a solution for that! Lakshmana asked the rishi to enlighten him on his shortcomings. The rishi then recalled how when Bharata, the great Rama bhakta came to Chitrakoot to plead with Rama to come back to Ayodhya to rule, he had mistaken the intentions of Bharata and had threatened to kill him and in the alternative advised Rama Himself to kill Bharata. The rishi said that therefore Lakshmana had committed a sin though it be in thought and not in action. The rishi therefore advised Lakshmana then to atone for that sin. Lakshmana then recalled the incidents that occurred in Chitrakut. Rama, Sita Devi and Lakshmana had, at that time, decided to stay on the banks of

Mandakini river at Chitrakut. One day Rama noticed dust and din being raised as if an army was marching. He saw the animals fleeing in terror hither and thither in virtual stampede with fear writ large on their faces. Rama asked Lakshmana to verify what was the cause for that tremendous din bordering on thunder. He felt it may be herd of elephants or wild buffaloes or deer scattering at the approach of a lion or it may be a king out for a hunt. He asked Lakshmana to find out the case. Dutifully, Lakshmana climbed up a pine tree. He saw a mighty army with elephants, horses, chariots and soldiers coming in the direction of their hut. He asked Rama to send Sita inside a cave and ready Himself with a bow for a fight. Rama asked him to verify the flags and see whether he could identify the marchers. Lakshmana then replied in anger that it was Kaikeyi's son Bharata who was coming and that perhaps the newly crowned king wanted to remove the last possible obstacle in his path and had come to kill them. Lakshmana then poured out all his wrath on the alleged usurper and pleaded with Rama to permit him to kill Bharata, because of whom Rama and Sita had to undergo all these hardships in the forest. He told Rama and Sita that it could not be any violation of Dharma to kill Bharata, who had wronged Rama by usurping the kingdom. Lakshmana then said "Today I shall let loose on the enemy forces like fire on bone dry thickets, the wrath that I have suppressed so long and avenge the slight put upon us. I shall pierce the bodies of the foe with sharp arrows, I shall drench with their blood this Chitrakut forest today. Let beasts of prey drag about here and there the carcasses of elephants and horses whose hearts I shall have cleft with my arrows and the corpses of men whom I have slain. I have in many a great battle repaid my debt to my bow and arrows, and I shall do the same now by slaying Bharata with his army"¹. Lakshmana recalled how during all this fiery outburst Raghava maintained a serene calm. He then asked Lakshmana to calm down and recalled how Bharata was a great bowman and so it was of no use to take up the bow. He added that Bharata was a man of immense wisdom. He said that He was not eager to break

1. *Srimad Valmiki Ramayanam* - translated by N.Raghunathan Vol. I pp. 384-385

His father's pledge and kill Bharata to regain His kingdom. Moreover, the blood of Bharata would bring him only infamy. Rama said, "the sea-clad earth is not beyond my grasp but I would not take the position of a Sakra himself by sacrificing righteousness.....". Having thus advised Lakshmana on what is right and what is wrong Rama said that Bharata, who loves his brothers, was dearer to Him than His own life and He was sure that he was coming to see them here as he would have been upset at the turn of events. He said Bharata would have come to offer Him the kingdom and would never even think of doing any harm to them. He severely admonished Lakshmana to have even thought of killing Bharata, Kaikeyi or his father. Lakshmana recalled how ashamed he felt at that moment. All these events and conversation flashed before the mind of Lakshmana. He requested Harithi maharishi to tell him what he should do to absolve himself of the sin of having harboured evil thoughts against his brother. The rishi advised him to seek pardon and forgiveness at the feet of Bharata. The rishi with his gnana drushti knew that Bharata was also coming to Thirumoozhikalam. He advised Lakshmana to stay on and atone for his sin at that place itself.

As expected Bharata came to Thirumoozhikalam and was happy to meet Lakshmana there. Lakshmana then fell at the feet of Bharata and asked to be forgiven. Bharata learnt from Lakshmana the whole sequence of events. Bharata heard everything. He then told Lakshmana that he had committed no sin. He said that the words of Lakshmana only spoke of his boundless love for Rama. Lakshmana repeated to Bharata all that Rama had said about Bharata's love for his brothers and his absolute loyalty to Rama Himself. On hearing the words of Rama repeated by Lakshmana, Bharata became mad with joy. He hugged Lakshmana and reprimanded him for not having told him earlier about Rama's words of praise! Thus, the two brothers hugged each other and all was forgiven and forgotten. The story goes that as these pleasantries and sweet words of reconciliation were uttered in this place it got the name Thiru Mozhi kalam i.e. holy place where sweet words of reconciliation and better understanding were uttered. It is said that Lakshmana had the temple tower,

mandapa and prakaras built for the temple. Many people believe that the abovementioned legend is only a parable to impress upon the minds of human beings the necessity and the need not to rush to wrong conclusions. What is more even if unwittingly one were to commit a sin, one should be bold enough to accept it even if the sin was committed in thought and not in action. Mere repentance is not sufficient. The person sinned against should also accept the apology. All these principles are enunciated through this parable pregnant with dharmic principles.

As stated earlier, it is believed that Hareetha maharishi did tapas at this place. Hareetha maharishi was the son of Viswamitra. In response to his deep and long penance, Lord Narayana appeared and asked him to choose his boon. It is believed that Hareetha maharishi during his stay at this place had laid down the varnashrama dharma and the basic tenets of yoga, Srisookthi, Thiru mantra and also the prayers that should be uttered during the different parts of the day daily anushtanam etc. God is said to have accepted the correctness of these religious rites, precepts and practices. As this was the place where the "Thiru mozhi" were written down, i.e. the holy precepts came to be laid down, the place got the name Thiru Moozhikalam and the God Who put His seal and approval on those precepts was referred to by Hareetha maharishi as Thirumozhi Kalathan. Further, as Thirumozhi Kalathan as Perumal played the role of a father in explaining and helping in initiating people in knowing about dharmic principles and religious practices the deity got the name of Appan, i.e. father in Tamil.

Though the sthala purana is somewhat rather sketchy, there are certain interesting features which relate to the history of this temple. As stated earlier, the idol of the Moolavar is in a damaged condition with its two arms broken. This vandalism was caused by Tipu Sultan. One of the legs of the idol is also fractured beyond repair. While two arms are broken, in one arm the Perumal is seen holding the mace (Gada). Usually damaged idols are not worshipped as it is contrary to religious injunctions. However, Kerala which is the land where astrology has a strong base, it is said that astrological readings were made. They stated that in

spite of the damaged condition of this idol, it is holy and fit to be worshipped. Efforts were made to cover the damaged parts with silver metallic fittings i.e. angi. About a decade ago the temple administration authorities made a silver angi for the idol. Angi is a sort of flat body-fitting cover for the idol. Within a day or two of putting the silver cover (angi) on the idol, there was a theft and the robber removed the angi. But was not able to carry it outside the precincts of the temple and it was found abandoned at the entrance. Again, astrological readings were held and it is said that the Lord desired no such covering. Hence the silver angi which was made at a considerable cost has never been used for the idol.

An intriguing feature at this temple is that to the left of the main deity there is a grilled door with no idols inside. But the local people believe that in the shrine Hanuman, Rama and Sita are there. Regular poojas are conducted for all the three. Similarly, in the middle of the temple yard, there is a shrine for Ganapathi. The ottaiyappam offering made to Vigneswara there is very very popular.

There is another shrine in the middle of the temple yard dedicated to Gosala Krishna. Here also there is no idol, but only a pedestal. But still people are very firm in their belief that the shrine has the presence of Gosala Krishna.

It is said that some time back the authorities decided to enshrine an idol of "Vettakkoru magan" in addition to the existing shrines in the temple. The shrine was built and even the pedestal constituted. The idol was planned to be brought from another ancient temple in Padamuttam. But the astrological reading that preceded the consecration ceremony is said to have given the message that the idol at Padamuttam was not prepared to leave that place! The empty pedestal is still there as mute witness of the unfinished work.

There is an important historical inscription in this temple which is known to researchers as Mozhikulam kaccham. These lay down the rules and regulations which are to be followed by the management of the temple. The temple was managed by a body

of 24 persons known as coraalars as also Ooran Makkars. The Thiru mozhikkalam kaccham was considered as ideal and accepted as common code by almost all temple trustees of Oorala Samathis of Kerala for a long time.

This temple which is housed in an extensive compound measuring 2 1/2 acres has a beautiful Koothambalam. The only festival of this temple falls in the month of Makaram (January-February). During the festival elaborate Koothu (dance) used to be organised for forty one days and for another three days Koodiyattam was also held. Besides vedas used to be taught, sastras would be read, teaching of dance, arts etc. were done in the temple precincts. Gurukula system was followed and hundreds of students read and many were fed in the temple. As proof that this temple promoted fine arts there is a big Koothu ambalam in the temple. The families of the artists, chakkiyars were assigned extensive land. Unfortunately, to-day for nearly three decades it is reported that no performance of koothu or koodiattam has been held. Yet another example of dying of traditional temple arts. The residence of outstanding Kooth Achayar Amman Parameswar Chakkiyar is located on the southwest of the temple.

Another peculiar custom noticed in this temple is that no vadyam is played while pooja is performed in the temple. It is not known how and why this custom arose.

The theertha is known as Sangha theertha. The legend is that as this is the place where Bharata helped in absolving Lakshmana of his sin, the pushkarini was named after Bharata who is the amsa of Perumal in the form of conch (sankhu - sanghu). Another legend says that as Lakshmana had his release from sin through a holy dip in this tank and as Lakshmana is Adishesha's amsam, a mighty big snake, the tank where he had his dip got the name Perumkulam (Peria kulam) i.e. big tank.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

There are virtually no epigraphical material available in this temple. Inscriptions in Madras Presidency by Sri V.Rangacharya refers to a solitary inscription on the base of the front mantapa of

the Vishnu temple. This has a record of the 48th year of Baskara Ravivarman ².

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalvar is the only alvar who has done mangalasanam to this Perumal. Beginning with pasuram 3623, Nammalvar as Parunkusanayaki sends winged messengers (birds) to Lord in His archa avatar and thro' them conveys her thoughts, words and pleas seeking salvation. Parankusanayaki thinks that the Perumal Who is happily staying with His consorts at Thirumoozhikalam might have forgotten about her very existence. She who is lost in the beauty of His lotus like eyes, lotus like feet and His bewitching lotus leaf coloured body, wonders whether Lord is aware of the suffering she is undergoing due to separation from her Lord. She asks the birds to go and tell her Lord that it is becoming increasingly difficult to live without her Lord. It is now proposed to give the free translation of these ten pasurams.

PASURAM 3623:

எங்கான லகங்கழிவாய் இரைதேர்ந்திங் கினிதமரும்
செங்கால் மடநாராய்! திருமுழிக் களத்துறையும்
கொங்கார் பூந் துழாய்முடி எங்குடக்கூத்தர்க்கு என் தால்
நுங்கால்கள் எந்தலைமேல் கெழுமீரே நுமரோட

Meaning:

Alvar says:

Oh beautiful red legged stork found in our garden canal and staying there searching for your prey! Please go as my winged messengers to the Lord residing at Thirumoozhikalam. He is seen wearing sweet honey scented basil garland on His crown. He is the one Who once performed without any flaw the kudakoothu dance. When you and your flock return after meeting my Lord will you please rest your weary feet on my head?

The alvar uses the words “en kaanalagan kazhi vaai” (எங்கான லகங் கழிவாய்) which means he is referring to the easy

2. *Inscriptions in Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya page 1714 and Travancore Archaeological Series volume 2 page 45-46*

availability of stork birds in the water ways closeby. Thus he does not have to search for a messenger. The commentators read into the choice of the words made by Alvar, that he is happy and considers himself lucky as he has the messengers closeby!

The commentators also say that as alvar has requested the birds to place their red feet on his head, the winged stork bird symbolise the Achaarya i.e. teacher. The alvar is therefore seeking the intervention of an acharya to attain God. That is why the alvar requests the birds on their return to place their red coloured feet on his head. In reality it means he is seeking the blessing of acharya Thiruvadi or acharya paada dhooli (dust from the holy feet of acharyas) to be associated with him in the holy task of attaining God.

PASURAM 3624:

நுமரோடும் பிரியாதே நீரும் நும் சேவலுமாய்
அமர் காதல் குருகினங்காள்! அணிமுழிக் களத்துறையும்
எமராலும் பழிப்புண்டு இங்கு என்? தம்மாலிழிப்புண்டு
தமரோடு அங்கு றைவார்க்குத் தக்கிலமே? கேளிரே.

Meaning:

Oh You flock of Herons all staying together and some moving happily together as couples, please go to Thirumoozhikalam and ask the Perumal (Lord) of what avail is it for me to continue to stay here when the Lord Himself has rejected me and apparently despises me and so my kith and kin accuse me and are not willing to accept me? Ask Him in what way I am not fit to stay with Him there or in the alternative let me end my life.

The alvar as Parankusanayaki here wants the winged messengers to ask God why the alvar should not be admitted into the group of kainkaryaparars (persons rendering service to God) staying with the Perumal at Thirumoozhikalam. She wants to know why the door is not open but shut for her? What is it that is disqualifying me from joining that inner circle she asks.

Parankusanayaki says her plight is very pitiable as God has not accepted her (the words used are "thammaal ezhippundu")

and her kith and kin rebuke her and shun her as once she had close association with God the words used are “Yamaraalum pazhippundu. She says that God has not opened His arms for her and so she is of no use to Him and her relatives shun her and so have let her down. So she has lost on all fronts. She is in an unenviable predicament. She therefore asks the winged messengers to find out the reason for this, her plight, from Him and ask Him why He is prolonging this agony? How could He forget her?

PASURAM 3625:

தக்கிலமே; கேளீகள் தடம் புனல்வாய் இரைதேரும்
கொக்கினங்காள் குருகினங்காள்! குளிர்முழிக் களத் துறையும்
செக்கமலத் தலர் போலும் கண்கை கால் செங்கனிவாய்
அக்கமலத் திலைபோலும் திருமேனி யடிகளுக் கே.

Meaning:

Here the alvar as Parankusanayaki again sends birds as messengers to the Perumal at Thirumoozhikalam. She says:-

“Oh ye flocks of Cranes and herons flying about in search of your prey in the vast water resources here, please meet the Perumal, Who is residing at cool Thirumoozhikalam, and enquire from Him whether I am not a fit person for the Perumal Whose eyes, hands and feet are like red lotuses and whose charming body has the colour of a lotus leaf and Whose mouth is red like the colour of a ripened fruit?

Here Parankusa nayaki feels that Lord in the company of His consorts and devotees is so happy that He is oblivious to the outside world and has forgotten about her. The alvar think that by reminding Him about His enchanting form, He will immediately realise that there are some who cannot bear to be seperated from that beautiful form due to a state of infatuation. So the alvar wants to prod God's memory and make Him realise his pining presence by reminding Him of the power of His enchanting beauty! The spell of magic cast by His beauty.

The alvar uses the words “Thakkilamae enru kaleergal”. Nampillai in his commentary on the choice of those words says

these words amount to Parankusa nayaki giving an ultimatum to God. She is asking the birds to find out from God and tell her whether He is favourably disposed towards her or not. If He is favourably inclined, she will somehow grit her teeth and bear with the pangs of separation from Him however unbearable it may be. She will live in hope. But if she is told that God is not favourably inclined towards her, she will somehow find a way to put an end to her life. Such is the unswerving devotion of the alvar to God.

We find that the alvar compares the Lord's complexion to the lotus leaf. In Ramayana also while describing God, the words used are "**tam padmadala patraaksham**". The word aksham refers both to eye and body.

PASURAM 3626:

திருமேனி யடிகளுக்குத் தீவினையேன் விடுதாதாய்
திருமுழிக் களமென்னும் செழுநகர் வாய் அணிமுகில் காள்!
திருமேனி அவட்கருளிர் என்றக் கால் உம்மைத் தன்
திருமேனி யொளியகற்றித் தெளிவிகம்பு கடியுமே?

Meaning:

In this pasuram, the alvar as Parankusanayaki sends the clouds as her messenger to God. The alvar says:-

Oh Ye beautiful clouds! You were to go and meet my master with the enchanting bewitchingly beautiful form, residing at Thirumoozhikalam and tell Him that you have been sent as messengers by this sinner and request Him to bless Parankusanayaki by agreeing to offer Himself to her. Are you afraid that He is going to be angry with you? Is He going to transform your colour and banish you altogether and make it difficult for you to even stay in the clear skies?

The alvar describes God as "thirumeni adigal".

It means He is one with a beautiful form which is enchanting. God captures our imagination and enslaves all of us with His beautiful form (swaroopa) and/or with His enchanting qualities (gunas) or thro' His noble acts. Alvar considers the aspect of God enslaving us thro' the beauty of His form as most significant.

Hence it is that he addresses Him as “Thirumeni adigal”. His form is so compellingly beautiful that even the enemies fall a prey to that beauty. For example when Lord Krishna went as an envoy to plead the cause of Pandavas with the Kauravas, Duryodhana had given strict instructions to all seated in his durbar hall, not to get up when Krishna arrives. But the moment Krishna entered the sabha, all including the deadly Duryodhana spontaneously and effortlessly stood up lost in adoration of that ethereal majestic compellingly charming form of the Lord! Alvar here therefore refers to that beauty.

Another word used in this pasuram is also very significant. The words are “Theevinaiyen vidu dhoothai”. Literally translated it means the message sent by this sinner. The alvar refers to himself as a sinner as he has not yet had the good fortune of attaining God! The alvar therefore requests the clouds to convey the one word to the Lord that the alvar is eagerly waiting to be blessed with the vision of the divine form (Thirumeni aruleer).

PASURAM 3627:

தெளிவிசம்பு கடிதோடித் தீவனைத்து மின்னிலகும்
ஒளிமுகில்கான், திருமுழிக் களத்துறையும் ஒண்கடர்க்கு
தெளிவிசம்பு திருநாடத் தீவினையென் மனத் துறையும்
துளிவார்கட் குழலார்க்கு என் தூதுரைத்தல் செப்புமினே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram also the alvar as Parankusanayaki sends the clouds as her messengers to the Lord at Thirumoozhikalam. She says Oh cluster of clouds floating fast in the immaculate sky way, with the streak of lightning circling you adding to your beauty, please go and meet the Perumal residing at Thirumoozhikalam on my behalf. He is the personification and embodiment of beauty. He is the one Who, once upon a time, very happily resided in my mind as if it were Paramapada. He is the one Whose head is adorned with honey sweet basil garland. Please go and convey to that supreme Lord the message sent by this sinner.

In this pasuram Parankusanayaki sends the clouds as her messengers to the God. The commentators read a lot of inner

significance (swapadesa artha) meaning into this pasuram. They say that the alvar deliberately identifies the Perumal as the one Who once regarded her mind as Paramapada as she feels that the moment the clouds tell Him about that, God will come rushing to her as He enjoys staying in Paramapada.

The commentators also say that when the alvar refers to lightning encircling her messenger clouds, he is obviously referring to rain laden clouds as lightning always precedes heavy rain. What is more important is that these clouds are like acharyas (teachers) because both can move freely in ubhaya vibhoothis i.e. this world as well as in Vaikunta. Further the rain bearing clouds empty their life giving water to usher in prosperity. Similarly, the acharyas are capable of raining wise words on to the minds of their sincere followers and bless them with intellectual wealth and prosperity. The alvar therefore while apparently sending the clouds as his messengers is in reality seeking salvation through the intervention of acharyas. To seek moksha thro' the intervention of an acharya is the ideal Vaishnavite precept.

The alvar is requesting the clouds to carry her message to the Lord Whose crown is adorned with scented basil garland. It is as if she is laconically reminding the God that while He is bedecked with flowers, She is not, due to her mental state of anguish when she is in no mood to adorn herself with flowers!

PASURAM 3628:

தூதுரைத்தல் செப்புயின்கள் துரமொழிவாய் வன்டினங்காள்!
போதிரைத்து மதுநுகரும் பொழில்முழிக் களத்துறையும்
மாதரைத்தம் மார்வகத்தே வைக்கார்க்கு, என் வாய்மாற்றம்
தூதுரைத்தல் செப்புதிரேல் கூடர்வனையும் கலையுமே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram, the alvar as Parankusanayaki sends bees as the messengers to God. She says:-

Oh swarm of bees voicing sweet sounds. Please carry my message to the Lord Who is residing at Thirumoozhikalam full of luscious groves and flowers overflowing with honey which can be

sucked by you with a loud noise. That Perumal has Mahalakshmi on His chest. Please remind Him about my bangles and my saree.

Here Parankusanayaki wants the bees to convey her message to God when Mahalakshmi is seated on His chest so that she could play her Purushakara role. What is more Parankusanayaki does not say “Bring back His reply” as she is sure that God along with Mahalakshmi cannot but listen to her supplication and fulfil her request. She is convinced and conveys to us the thought that Perumal is ever eager to help, those who seek Him. While describing His role it is said He is “**Rakshyaa Rekshaam Pratheekshathae**” i.e. He anxiously waits for someone to seek His help. They have to only ask, He is generous and prompt to give protection. That is why she says if they just mention one word she is sure she will regain the saree and bangles i.e. she will be in a mood to wear her saree well and adorn her wrists with bangles.

In this pasuram Parankusanayaki makes one other interesting point. She says Thirumoozhikalam where the Perumal stays is full of scented honey filled flowers and that the beetles can suck that sweet nectar to their hearts content. It appears as if she is subtly but effectively tempting them to agree to go as her messengers to Thirumoozhikalam by holding the carrot of sweet honey! She is saying that by becoming her messengers she will also benefit and they will also benefit!

PASURAM 3629:

சுடர்வளையும் கலையும் கொண்டு அருவினையேன் தோள்துறந்த
படர் புகழான் திருமுழிக் களத்துறையும் பங்கயக்கண்
சுடர் பவள வாயனைக்கண்டு ஒருநாள்ஒர் தூய்மாற்றம்
படர் பொழில்வாய்க் குருகினங்காள்! எனக்குஒன்று பணியிரே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram alvar as Parankusanayaki again sends the Kurugu birds as her messengers to the God residing at Thirumoozhikalam. She says:

“Oh ye koel birds living in the thick wide spread luscious groves; When you meet the Perumal at Thirumoozhikalam Who is

famous and has lotus-like eyes and has lovely red coral like mouth and has robbed this sinner of her beautiful bangles and her clothes and deserted her, please at an appropriate propitious time utter one word atleast on my behalf. That is enough for me.

Here the alvar says that God is known forensaving all those devotees who are lost in admiration and adoration with His bewitching and enchanting form. Such devotees are no good for any other work. So Parankusa nayaki who has enjoyed the bewitching beauty of the Lord asks here the rhetorical question can such a Parankusa nayaki live even for a moment seperated from her Lord after having tasted this bliss earlier? Can she bear with equanimity the burden of seperation from her Lord? She asks the koel birds to convey that message to the Perumal residing at Thirumoozhikalam.

PASURAM 3630:

எனக்கு என்று பணியின்கூடும் பொழில்வாயிராதேர்ந்து
மனக் கின்பம் படமேவும் வண்டினங்கள்! தும்பிகாள்!
கனக்கொள்தின்மதிள்புடைதூழ்திருமுழிக்களத்துறையும்
புனக்கொள்காயாமேனிப் பூந்துழாய் முடியார்க்கே.

Meaning:

Here the alvar as Parankusanayaki sends the winged messengers to plead her case with Perumal at Thirumoozhikalam. She says

Oh ye bees and beetles living happily together and searching for sweet honey in the thick luscious groves! please meet the Lord Who is residing at Thirumoozhikalam surrounded by high fort like walls, and Who has a body with the colour of the blue lily flower, and Who has basil garlands adorning His head and just put in one word on my behalf to that God.

The commentators say that Parankusanayaki refers to the divya desa surrounded by walls likewise of a fort so as to assure us that there is no danger to the beautiful Lord and that He is safe and well protected in Thirumoozhikalam. What is more as He does not have to worry about His safety, His only duty is to now

worry about the plight of His devotees and rid them of all sadness. She therefore tells the bees and beetles to go and report to Him her sad plight. Surely He will then come rushing to her aid.

The commentators also say that when Parankusa nayaki addresses the bees and beetles as a swarm living happily together (Irumpozhi vaai manda kinbam pada mevum) she is indirectly in a veiled way telling them that it is not enough if they are happy. They should make others also happy. Only then their happiness will double. So that is another reason why they should take on the job of meeting her Lord at Thirumoozhikalam as her envoys and tell Him that she is longing to see His enchanting form.

PASURAM 3631:

பூந்துழாய் முடியார்க்குப் பொன்னாழிக் கையாருக்கு
ஏந்துநீ ரிளங்குருகே! திருமுழிக் களத்தாருக்கு
ஏந்துபூண் முலைபயந்துஎன் னிணை மலர்க் கண்நீர்த்தும்ப
தாம்தம்மைக் கொண்டகல்தல் தகவண்றென் றுரையிரே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram also Parankusanayaki (Nammalwar) is requesting the heron to carry a message to her Lord. She says:-

Oh tiny heron birds strutting happily in the waters in tanks, please go and meet the Lord at Thirumoozhikalam. He is the one Who has the basil garland adorning His head, is holding the discus in His hands, Please tell Him that it is not fair and just on His part to have left me high and dry like this after making my delicate flower like eyes swell with unshed tears and making my bejewelled body loose its beauty and lustre due to the pangs of this seperation from my Lord.

In this pasuram nayaki asks the bird to describe her virahataapam (pangs of seperation from a loved one) to the Perumal and upbraid Him for having denied her His presence.

PASURAM 3632:

தகவண்றென் றுரையிர்கள் தடம்புனல்வா யிரைதேர்ந்து
மிகவின்பம் படமேவும் மென்னடைய அன்னங்காள்!
மிகமேனி மெலிவெய்தி மேகலையும் ஈடழிந்து என்
அகமேனி யொழியாமே திருமுழிக் களத்தார்க்கே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram Parankusanayaki sends the swans as her messengers to God. She says Oh ye swans with a slow arresting gait happily living together in the broad expanse of water ways, searching for your prey, please go and tell the Perumal residing at Thirumoozhikalam that it is neither fair nor just on His part to reject me like this. Request Him to accept me before this body of mine becomes very thin and emaciated and the jewels that I wear on the waist slip off.

Here Parankusanayaki pleads with the swans to convey her pitiable plight to the Lord before it is too late and her body gives up the soul. The commentators say that Parankusanayaki is telling the swans that the Perumal (Baghavan) Who is known severally as Arulaalan, Pare Arulaalan (i.e. kind person and extremely kind and merciful person) cannot behave like this, if He is to retain His titles! No one ever says that the water in the ocean has dried up. Similarly, it can never be said that this Lord Who is an ocean of kindness is behaving as if He is bereft of all His kind traits. She therefore wants the swans to remind Him that rejecting her is not an act of kindness of that Perumal Who is the embodiment of eternal kindness. She is politely reminding Him that He should live up to His reputation and justify the title conferred on Him as "Arulaalan" i.e. one Who is always merciful.

The alvar says that the swans are searching for their prey in the water ways (Tadamba nal vaai irai tharendhu). Usually swans stand for acharyas i.e. great teachers. When the alvar says they are searching for their food it means they are doing research and studying all the books to understand the fundamental truths about our Hindu philosophy. They enjoy such studies.

The alvar uses the term "Yen meni" to refer to his body. Usually while referring to jeevatma, paramatma relationship we refer to God accepting our atma. The body i.e. sareera is of no use. But in the case of the alvar God accepted both his body and atma so the sareera of alvar became the antaranga sareera for God. The alvar says that as he loves God most, his body is precious i.e. agameni to God. Before that precious body wilts and

wastes, he wants the messengers to go and tell God that it is neither fair nor just for Perumal to ignore him.

PASURAM 3633:

ஒழிவின்றித் திருமுழிக் களத் துறையும் ஒண்கூடரை
ஒழிவில்லா அணிமழலைக் கிளிமொழியான் அலற்றிய சொல்
வழுவில்லா வண்குருகூர்ச் சடகோபன் வாய்ந்துரைத்த
அழிவில்லா ஆயிரத்துஇப் பத்தும்நோயறுக்குமே.

Meaning:

This is a phalastuti pasuram. In this pasuram the alvar says:-

Whoever repeats this set of ten pasurams in the thousand pasurams, which are almost the embodiment of the Vedas, composed by Satagopan, will be rid of the troubles and tribulations of samsara, i.e. the worldly life. They will definitely be relieved from the cycle of birth and death which act as an impediment in attaining God. They will not suffer from the ills beleaguering worldly existence.

These pasurams can be likened to the beautiful-parrot like words of the lady who could not bear the pangs of separation from the effulgent Perumal residing permanently in Thirumoozhikalam. These are also the pasurams composed after a lot of research by the alvar Who is very great in his love for God.

The commentators say that the alvar deliberately uses the word “ozhivinri” to convey the thought that Baghavan (Lord) is residing permanently in Thirumoozhikalam. It is said that when the Lord manifested Himself as Rama or Krishna, in those avatars, He came to this world with a specific purpose and objective, once that objective was achieved and the task fulfilled in the pre-ordained timeframe, God returned to Paramapada. But in archavatara the position is not like that. God manifests Himself in different divya desas in archa roopa, so as to ensure that all His sincere devotees who seek His help are blessed with salvation (moksha) and only after that He will go back to Paramapada. It is said that many of the qualities like soulabhya, souseelya which are

not in evidence in Paramapada can be enjoyed only in this world. Those qualities shine in this world even as a candle lights up a dark room.

In this pasuram, the alvar uses the words “Kili mozhiyaal” through parrot like sweet words) and the people may feel that the alvar is praising himself through those words. The commentators say that the truth is not that. They say that the alvar is referring to the Thayar (Goddess) as “kili”. Once upon a time, the divine consort agitatedly and sorrowfully told the Lord that She cannot and would not live, even for a moment, separated from Her Lord i.e. during Rama Avatar when Rama asked her to refrain from accompanying Him to the forest. Parankusanayaki, that is the name assumed by the alvar expresses his love to God in a more telling manner, and says that these ten pasurams reflect faithfully whatever the divine consort tearfully told Her Lord earlier. The words of the alvar are therefore parrot-like repetition of the words uttered by the divine consort earlier. This is the interpretation given by the commentator in his “aaraayira padi”. The divine consort is usually referred to as “kili mozhiyaal” i.e. one with a sweet tongue like a parrot’s.

THIRUMANGAI ALVAR

Thirumangai alvar has composed three pasurams on the Lord of Thirumoozhikalam. It is now proposed to give a free translation of those three pasurams.

PASURAM 1553:

பனியேய்ப்பரங் குன்றின் பவளத் திரளே!
முனியே! திரு முழிக் களத்து விளக்கே!
இனியாய தொண் டரோம்பரு குஇன்னமு தாய
கனியே உன்னைக் கண்டுகொண்டு உய்த்தொழிந் தேனே.

Meaning:

Oh effulgent light of Thirumoozhikalam
Oh Perumal You are extremely sweet
You are sweet nectar fit to be tasted by sincere devotees
like us
You are amrith itself

You are sweet like a ripened fruit
 You are enchantingly beautiful like a string of corals
 You are eternally thinking of the blessings that
 You could confer upon Your devotees;
 You are the one seen at Thiruppiridhi divya desa in the snow
 clad Himalayan mountains
 By worshipping You I have prospered.

In this pasuram the alvar refers to Piridhi divya desa. In Peria Thirumozhi, in the second decad (Irandaam pathu) also Thirumangai alvar says "Piridhi senru adai nenjae" i.e. he is asking the mind to go and seek salvation at Thiruppiridhi divya desa.

Thirumangai alvar addresses the Lord as effulgent light of Thirumoozhikalam. He says that the Lord Who is staying at Thirumoozhikalam is displaying all His swaroopa, roopa gunas, all His enchantingly bewitching qualities and thus is radiating an unparralleled effulgence.

PASURAM 2061:

பொன்னானாய்! பொழிலேழும் காவல் பூண்ட
 புகழானாய்! இகழ்வாய தொண்ட னேன்நான்
 என்னானாய்! என்னானாய்! என்ன லல்லால்
 என்னறிவன் ஏழையேன்? உலகமேத்தும்
 தென்னானாய்! வடவானாய்! குடபா லானாய்!
 குணபால மத யானாய்! இமையோர்க்கு என்றும்
 முன்னானாய்! பின்னானார் வணங்கும் சோதி!
 திருமுழிக் களத்தானாய்! முதலா னாயே!

Meaning:

Freely translated this pasuram runs as follows:

Oh Lord the Nityasuris are able to enjoy Your presence every day; You are the eternal flame which could be worshipped by people like me. You are the primordial Creator, the first among all people; You are precious like gold. You have earned the fame of having saved the seven worlds from destruction during the 'Pralaya'. What else, can I this humble servant of Yours do, but with affection address You as my loving elephant. I, who am very humble, know nothing else, but to address You with affection. You

are the mighty elephant at Thirumalirunsolai in the South; You are the mighty elephant at Thiruvengadam in the northern direction. You are the mighty elephant at Kumbakonam in the east; You are the mighty elephant at Srirangam in the West.

In this pasuram, we find that Thirumangaialvar addresses all the archavatara forms of Perumal in different divya desas. He says that they are all “diggajams”, i.e. victorious elephants located in four different directions.

The alvar uses the words “pozhi ezhilum kaaval poonda pughazhannai”. Literally translated this refers to the Lord Who has earned the fame of having saved the seven worlds. The commentators while referring to these words say that even as the mere mortals tried to protect their landed property by putting up a hut nearby to keep a close watch over the property so also the Perumal Who is the supreme protector, i.e. Sarvarakshaka, assumes myriad archa forms (archavataras) and resides in different divya desas, so as to protect, safeguard and extend succour to all His devotees, Who are His responsibility. That is why the alvar says he has earned the reputation of a supreme protector.

PASURAM 2674 Line 129:

முன்னவனை முழிக் களத்து விளக்கினை

Meaning:

In Peria Thirumozhi, in one sentence, Thirumangai alvar refers to the Lord of Thirumoozhikalam. He says, “I will bow down before the Lord Who is superior to the Nityasuris, Who is the eternal light shining at Thirumoozhikalam and tell Him about my position so as to seek succour at His feet.”

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

காண்கின்ற ஐம்பூதங்கட்கும், இரு கடர்க்கும்
சேண்கலந்தஇந்திரற்கும் தேவர்க்கும் மாண்கரிய
பாழிக் களத்தார்க்கும், பங்கயத்து நான் முகற்கும்-
முழிக் களத்தான் முதல்.

Meaning:

The Lord at Thirumoozhikalam is the Creator of not only the (panchabhoothas) five elements (viz. air, sky, earth, fire and water) but also the two heavenly planets shedding kind light on this earth viz. Sun and Moon and also of Indra and all other devas as also Neelakanta Shiva, Who consumed poison, and the four-faced Brahma seated on the lotus flower.

* * *

TIRUVAN PARISARAM

This is one among the 13 divya desas of Malainadu. It is also known as Tirupatisaram. It lies on the Nagercoil-Tirunelveli bus route and is about three miles from Nagercoil. The moolavar here is known as Tirukkuralappan as also Tiruvazhmarban. He is seen in a sitting posture facing east. The moolavar has four hands. The upper arms hold shanku and chakra. The lower right arm is seen in abhaya hasta pose and the left is placed on the knees. The idol is nearly 9 feet tall. It is made through the kadu sarkara yoga process. This is the same process described earlier while mentioning about the idol at Tiruvattar. In brief, the idol is made out of granite and lime with a paste formed out of a mixture of molasses and mustard applied on it. So the moolavar can never have an abisheka and water cannot be poured on such idols. The utsava deity therefore receives all the daily abisheka. The moolavar is surrounded by the Saptha rishis. The thayar is known as Kamalavalli Nachiyar. The Theertha is known as Lakshmi theertha. The vimana is Indra Kalyana vimana.

Some say that this place is known as Tirupatisaram as it is the essence of all sacred places and having a temple of great antiquity held in reverence by innumerable devotees. Yet others say that the place is known as Tiruvanparisaram as the great king Kulasekhara of the 8th century A.D. found his favourite horse lost while marching back after his victorious foray into the neighbouring countries in that region. He found it peacefully grazing on the banks of Soma theertha. the king was immensely pleased and named the place as Tiruvan pari saram. In Tamil the word "pari" means horse. As the king found the horse in that place, he named it Tiruvan pari saram. He is said to have taken a bath in the theertha and worshipped at the small Vishnu temple in the place and as a thanks-giving offer, reconstructed the same temple on a grand scale.

The sthala purana has a different story to relate. It is said that once upon a time the Saptha rishis were doing penance at Asrama, a vil'age near Suchindram in the hermitage of Atri. After their intense prayer, God appeared before them in the form of

Shiva, the saptha rishis then expressed a desire to see Lord Vishnu. They were advised to go due northwest and pray on the banks of the Soma theertha. Perumal was pleased with their deep devotion and in due course appeared as Maha vishnu. The sages requested Perumal to continue to stay in the sacred place and give darshan to the other devotees as well and confer moksha on them. God consented to this request. That holy place is the present day Thiruvanparisaram.

Yet another story explains why the theertha got the name as Lakshmi theertha. It is said when Lord Narayana assumed the form of Narasimha in order to destroy Hiranya kasipu, the demon, seeing that ferocious form, even Mahalakshmi Thayar was frightened. She is said to have proceeded to Gnanaranyam which is to the south of Mahendragiri and started meditating on the banks of the theertha. Hence the theertha came to be known as Lakshmi theertha. It is said that Perumal came in search of Thayar to this place and Thayar got on to His chest. Her usual place of residence. Hence it is that Perumal here is known as Tiruvazhmarban which means the Lord who has Goddess Lakshmi on His chest. There is no separate shrine dedicated to Goddess Lakshmi here. It is believed that the image of Lakshmi has been enshrined in the heart of the Lord, the moolavar. The Lord is seen wearing a golden necklace with a locket containing the image of Lakshmi.

On the right side of the moolavar, we can see the images of Sri Rama along with His consorts Sita and His brother Lakshmana. These images of Rama and others are seen in the pattabhisheka form. It is believed that Vibhishana after attending the coronation ceremony at Ayodhya was returning to Lanka. When he reached this place, he requested God to appear before him in the same pattabhisheka roopa in which he saw Him last at Ayodhya. Rama obliged.

Yet another cause that contributes to the holiness of this divya desa is the fact that the great vaishnavite saint Nammalwar was born here. A vysya by name Tiruvazhmarba was married to a lady by name Brindha. They had no children. They prayed to the Lord of Tirupatisaram and were blessed with a daughter named

Udaya nangai. In course of time, she grew up. At about the same time in Tirukkurugoor, an equally devoted vaishnavite by name Pon Kariyar had a son by name Kari. He was searching for a suitable girl to marry his son. Kari was married to Udaya nangai. As they were also not blessed with progeny for a long time, they went to Kurugoor near Tirunelveli, prayed to the Lord of Tirukkurugudi (Nambi Perumal) who promised that He Himself would be born as a child to that divine couple. In course of time, Udaya nangai became pregnant and she returned to her mother's place viz. Van Tirupatisaram for the delivery. This it was that Nammalwar was born in this divya desa. The story as to how this unusual child who was in deep meditation for sixteen years under a holy tamarind tree in Alvar Tirunagari is too well known to be repeated here. It is this great child who later composed thousand out of the 4000 verses of the Naalaayira divya prabandha which is held in high regard by all the vaishnavites.

The dwajasthamba in this temple is also famous, as the base and the top of the dwajasthamba is covered with golden plates. It is believed that dwaja pratishtha was done by king Kulasekhara alvar. The steps of the Soma theertha tank are believed to have been built by Tirumala Naik of Madurai (17th century A.D.) The Naik king also gave many valuable gifts to this temple.

The temple is also known for its beautiful pieces of sculpture and paintings. The inner top of the Indra kalyana vimana mandapa is full of beautiful paintings depicting the dasāvatara of Lord Vishnu. One side of the mandapa there is a beautiful life like image of a small monkey which cannot be missed by any visitor to this temple. It looks as if the monkey is about to jump. It is carved in a very realistic manner.

There are certain important festivals connected with this temple. The Anusha Tirunal was commenced as a thanks-giving offer by the king Marthanda varma. It is said that once Marthanda varma Maharaja was trying to escape from the enemies the Ettu Veettu Pillaimars. The king, incognito, along with the Dalavai Ramanujan reached Tirupatisaram and stayed in Soma Desika mutt on the banks of Soma Lakshmi theertha and worshipped the Lord at Tirupatisaram. One day the Lord appeared in his dream

and assured him that he need have no fears and that support will come the next day. True to the prediction in the dream, the next day the Man Koyilkkal Karuppu and other Nadar warriors came to Tirupatisaram to lend support to the king. The combined troops went to Nagercoil, fought with the Ettu Veettu Pillaimars there and defeated them. Later on his return, the king rebuilt the Desikar mutt where he stayed and organised a number of functions and strengthened the routine administration in the Tirupatisaram temple. As a thanks-giving offer, on his birth star day i.e. Anusham, he arranged for anusha Sri Bali Tiruvizha. It is said that he rewarded Desika and Mel veettu Narayana Pillai, who helped him during his stay in Tirupatisaram, by making them dharma kartas of the temple and ensured that they get prasadas from the temple every day.

Yet another important festival which is celebrated here is known as Karthikai Sri Bali utsavam. It is said that Dharmaraja enroute to Rameswaram stayed in the palace built by the king and the day he visited Tirupatisaram was Karthikai star and hence this festival is celebrated in commemoration of the visit of Dharmaraja.

The Radha in this place is believed to have been built by Sri Moolam Tirunal maharaja as a thanks-giving offer to the deity when a son was born to him in 1088 Kali era. This Radha is used for drawing the Lord on Chitra Tiruvizha. Sri Chittirai Tirunal Maharaja is believed to have had an idol of Nammalwar made for this temple.

The most important festival is the Adi Swati festival as it is believed that it was on that day that Perumal appeared before King Kulasekhara alvar and took him bodily to Paramapada.

EPIGRAPHICAL EVIDENCES:

We come across three inscriptions in this temple¹. One inscription which is on the eastern wall to the right of the entrance in the first prakara of the temple is in Tamil and relates to the Kollam year 789. It refers to the gift of money for offering to the Perumal.²

1. *Travancore Inscriptions - A Topographical List* by R. Vasudeva Poduval.

2. *Travancore Archaeological Series Vol. V* page 160.

Yet another inscription found on a slab of stone built into the floor next to the entrance into the first prakara of the temple is also in Tamil. It relates to the Kollam year 961. It records the building of the Othaikal mandapa in this temple as also the front portion of the mandapa in this temple by a person of Kalkulam Pillaiyar Koil.³

Yet another inscription on the west base of the second prakara in this temple is also in Tamil. It relates to the Kollam year 304. It mentions that one Natesan Cetty of Vilinam alias Rajendrachola pattinam, an ancient port in Kerala gifted some articles to the Perumal here.⁴

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalvar has sung one pasuram about the praise of the God in Thiruvanparisaram divya desa.

PASURAM 3475:

வருவார் செல்வார் வண்பரி சாரத்து இருந்த என்
திருவாழ் மாப்பிற்கு என்திறம் சொல்வார் செய்வதுஎன்?
உருவார் சக்கரம் சங்கு சுமந்து இங்கு உம்மோடு
ஒருபாடு மூல்வான் ஓடி யானும் உலளளெனே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram Nammalvar, who is staying at Alvarthirunagari under a tamarind tree, sees lot of bustling activity with people from Alvar Thirunagari going hither and thither. He thinks they are all going to thiruvanparisaram and returning. He wishes they would go and meet the Lord at Thiruvanparisaram on his behalf and tell Him that there is one devotee (Nammalvar) at Alvarthirunagari who is only too eager and waiting to render kainkarya to the Lord residing at Vanparisaram in the manner in which Lakshmana did to Lord Rama. When he looks at them going, the alvar thinks they are going to convey that wish of his to the Lord. When they are returning he thinks they must have met the Lord and they are coming to meet him and tell him God's reply. But he is disappointed as a number of them are going and return-

3. Travancore Archaeological Series Vol. V page 160.

4. Travancore Archaeological Series Vol. 4 page 198.

ing but none comes to meet him with any word regarding the much expected, eagerly awaited word of cheer. So the alvar ends up by throwing up his hands and saying what am I to do O Lord?

To now explain this pasuram:-

The alvar says

Oh what am I to do? I see so many coming and going but not one seems to have met my Lord at thiruvanparisaram and put in even one word on my behalf with Him that there is a humble devotee here who is ever ready and eagerly waiting to be permitted to be by His side and help Him with carrying His beautiful disc and conch and who will regard such a call to be of service to Him as fulfillment of his sole purpose in life.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

அடியும் குளிர்ந்தான், அறிவும் குலைந்தான்
முடிகின்றான்; முச்சு அடங்கு முன்னே, கடிதுஒடி,
பெண் பரிசு, ஆர், அங்கும் பிறப்பித்து மீளுவார்-
வண் பரிசாரம் சிறந்த மாற்றா?

Meaning:

In this verse it appears as if the disciples of Divya kavi seeing the pitiable condition of their teacher suffering due to his not having attained God are bemoaning the state where there is none to convey this condition of their master to god.

Divya kavi says: Is there none to rush to Thiruvanparisaram, meet the Lord Thiruvaazhmarban there and relate to Him the pitiable condition of this girl? Her feet have become cold. She has lost her senses. It appears as if her time for departure from this world is closing in. Before her life ebbs away some one must convey to the Lord her pitiable condition and return (so that she knows God is aware of her condition and once He is aware He will not fail to rescue His devotees).

THIRUVANVANDUR

This divya desa in Malainadu is one amongst five associated with the Pandava princes. It is generally believed that Nakula did punarudharana (renovation) of the temple in this divya desa.

This divya desa is four miles to the north of Chengannur. The moolavar here is Pambanaiappan, known as also Kamalanathan. He is seen in a standing pose, facing west. The Goddess is known as Kamalavalli Nachiyar. The theertha is Papanasa theertha alias Pampa theertha. The vimana is Vedalaya vimana. The Lord appeared here to Markandeya and Narada.

Thiruvanvandur is situated on the banks of Pampa river. It is also said that the images of Vishnu and Gopalakrishna worshipped by Nakula, one of the five Pandavas were originally consecrated by Brighu Mahamuni. Some say that the place got its name after the Pandavas. Originally it was known as Thiru Pandava oor, as the Pandavas and Panchali stayed in and around that place during their agnatavasa. Further, the names of the few places in and around this town, as for example Pandava Nadu evoke in us an etymological interest, as it is apparent that the name is associated with the Pandavas. Some say that Nakula who was wandering about during Agnatavasa period was so impressed by the scenic beauty of this town that he asked the local residents the name of the place. They replied that in that place "Thiruvan undu". In Malayalam it means that in that place the Lord Vishnu is residing! So the place came to be known as Thiruvan undu oor!

Among the 108 divya desas only three have the prefix "Van" attached to them. One is the divya desa in Chola nadu known as Thiruvan Purushothamam amongst a cluster of eleven divya desas known generally as Thirunangoor divya desas. In Thiruvan Purushothamanoor the Lord is seen facing east. The other divya desa with the prefix "van" is in Malai Nadu itself where also the Lord is seen in a standing pose and is known as Thirukuralappan. That place is known as Thiruvan Parisaram. The third divyadesa with "Van" as prefix is also in Malainadu. There also the Lord is seen in a standing pose, He is known as Pambaniappan and He is seen facing west i.e. Thiruvanvandoor.

As stated earlier, Nakula the youngest amongst the Pandava brothers is closely associated with this divya desa. Amongst the Pandava brothers, Nakula is noted for his beauty, Bhimasena is known for his strength and Arjuna for his heroism.

To now turn to the mythology connected with this divyadesa.

It is said that once upon a time, Narada, the Brahmagnani, initiated the Brahma putras, Sanaka, Sanandanas into the intricacies of Tapobala (efficacy of deep penance). Consequently the Brahmaputras lost interest in the routine family life. They were not happy to obey their father's instructions to engage themselves in the activities of creation and procreation. Instead, they spent their time in doing tapas. Brahma was annoyed that it was at the instance of Narada that his children disobeyed him and so he cursed that Narada should become a Triloka-sanchari and not develop any roots in anyone place. Consequently, Narada started wandering about and in the course of his wanderings, he reached Thiruvānvandur. He had his bath in Pampa river. He felt supreme spiritual satisfaction and is said to have become aware of his tatva gnana. He meditated upon Srīman Narayana. God appeared in response to his sincere prayers and asked him to choose his boon. Narada requested that as he had acquired spiritual knowledge in this place (tatva gnana), he may be blessed with the ability to impart this knowledge to others. Besides he also desired that he should be blessed to remain stationary in this place (that is contrary to the Brahmasaapa of being an eternal Triloka sanchari) till such time as he completes the puranas in which he would expound the basic Vishnu philosophy, so that the devotees of Vishnu could comprehend the supremacy of Vishnu, the manner of worshipping Him etc. The Lord conceded both the requests. It is said that as a result of the boon conferred by Lord Vishnu, Narada stayed on in the same place and wrote Naradiya purāṇam in which he states that Sri Mahavishnu is the Supreme (the Supreme Paratva Truth). He also delineated the manner in which one could meditate upon Vishnu. All these are to be found in the great books written by him, Naradiya purāṇam which is said to run into 25000 granthas.

It is believed that in response to the severe penance, Lord Vishnu gave darshan to Markandeya also in this place. Markandeya wanted to experience the maya of Vishnu. God conceded his request and allowed him to enter His body and the Maharishi was able to roam about inside Mahavishnu and saw that the entire world with its flora and fauna was in Lord Vishnu Himself.

It is said that Nakula heard this mythological story from the local residents of the place and felt attracted to the Vishnu temple in the area and he decided then and there to stay on and also renovate the temple. As he did the major work people started saying that the idol itself was installed (prathistai) by Nakula.

The Lord here is known as Pambaniappan. Literally translated it means that the Lord who is having the snake as his couch, i.e. Lord Vishnu. But there are some others who say that the Lord got the name Pambaniappan as the river Pampa circumbulates the town gives the appearance as if it is holding within its arms Lord Vishnu here. Hence, the Lord Who has been held within the arms of Pampa nathi)Pampa nathial Anaya petra appan) came to be known as Pamba anai appan, which in course of time got corrupted as Pambaniappan.

This temple town had a glorious time during the reign of Kulasekhara. One of the records clearly states that the temple was managed by the Venad ruler Sri Vallachan Kodhai. He was appointed by the Chera ruler to rule Nan thuzhai Nadu. After the rule of Kulasekhara the temple and its management passed on into the hands of a local Nambuthri of Gnazhapally. It is said that Champakassery Raja a nearby chieftain once made a bold bid to invade this town and carry away the image of Gopalakrishna for consecrating it in his newly built temple at Ambalapuzha. But the chief of Gnazhapally was so attached to the idol of Gopalakrishna in this Vishnu temple that he decided to drown himself with the idol safe in his arms in a nearby tank. Thereafter only the Vishnu shrine continued to exist. But later during the reign of Sri Mulam Thirunal (1885 to 1924) this temple was renovated and the present Sri Koil erected. The lost idol of Gopalakrishna was re-discovered in the year 1963. It is said that one day a local devotee had a dream in which it was revealed that the Gopalakrishna idol is

lying buried in an ancient tank close to the Vishnu shrine. The local people were so impressed with this dream that they decided to carry out a major digging operation of the nearby dried up tank. It took them 41 days of digging and at last they came across a perfect image of Gopalakrishna along with a shanku (conch) and several utensils used for worship. The recovery of the idol thus reaffirmed the people's faith that the idol which they recovered was none other than the same idol with which the Namboothiri trustee had earlier drowned himself in the 16th century in order to prevent the carrying away of the idol by Champakassery raja. The image was duly consecrated with holy rituals and a small shrine constructed within the old Vishnu temple and the idol of Gopalakrishna reinstated. Thus, miracles did happen even in as recent a time as within the last three decades.

The existence of Pampa river very close to this temple town has lent its name to the pushkarini which is known as Pampa theertha.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

This temple has only a few inscriptions.

An inscription on the base of the surru mantapa records that Sri Vallavan Godai, the Governor of Venadu made a grant of land to the God at Thiruvandoor for providing food offerings and other offerings. The expenses were to be supervised by 300 members of Nanrulai Nadu.¹

Another inscription on the outside base of the same surru mantapa, there is a similar record of the same king making arrangements regarding the Tiruvayambadi temple which relate to the north west of this Vishnu temple. But unfortunately, that other temple is now in ruins².

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalvar is the only alvar who has done mangalasaana to this Perumal. Beginning with pasuram 3227, the alvar takes on

1. *Travancore Archaeological Series Volume 2 page 23-24*

2. *Ibid page 24*

the role of Parankusanayaki and while expressing her all-consuming desire to attain God without any further delay resorts to sending the birds as her emessaries to God to appraise Him of her pitiable condition. Nammalvar resorts to sending birds as his emis-saries in 4 decads, in each decad addressing the archa, vyuha, vibhava, antharyami forms of the Lord. In this set of ten pasurams, he is approaching the Lord in His vibhava form. Manavala Mamuni in his Thiruvaimozhi “Nootru andaadi” says “Vaigal Thiruvanvandoor, vaighum iraamanukkae”(வைகள் திருவண்வண்டுர் வையும் இராமனுக்கே) i.e. Thiruvanvandoor is always for the living Rama. In the 10th pasuram of this decad (i.e. Pasuram No. 3236) the alvar refers to Rama avatar. It is therefore claimed that the entire decad is addressed to the archaroopa Lord at Thiruvanvandoor, the birds are sent by the alvar as mes-sengers with the vibhava avatar Rama at the back of his mind.

One of these pasurams with its meaning is given below:-

PASURAM 3235:

அடிகள் கைகொழுதுஅலர் மேலசை யும் அன்னங் காள்!
விடிவை சங்கொலிக் கும்திரு வண்வண் டுருறையும்
கடிய மாயன்தன் னைக்கண்ண னைநடு மாலைக் கண்டு
கொடிய வல்வினை யேன் திறம் கூறுமின் வேறு கொண்டே.

Meaning:

Here the alvar as Parankusanayaki sends the swan as her messenger to the Lord. She says:-

Oh swans gliding gently in a leisurely manner amidst the blossomed flowers, please go to Thiruvanvandoor where the early morning is heralded with the blowing of the conches. Please meet the enchanting Lord Who is residing there. He is ever eager to help His devotees. He is fond of those who seek Him for help. Bow down before His twin lotus feet and when He is alone in the company of His consort convey to Him the condition of this piti-able sinner.

The alvar uses the words “Adigal kai thozhudhu” (அடிகள் கை தொழுது). Literally translated it means to catch hold of His feet physically and then represent to Him her plea. It is said that

the moment one catches hold of another's feet, one's wish will definitely be achieved and the request will not be negated. (**"Anathi kramaneeyamhi charanam grahanam"**)

The alvar uses the words "Kannanai kandu" (கண்ணனைக் கண்டு) while referring to the Lord at Thiruvandoor. The word clearly seeks to convey the meaning that the Lord is virtually like a puppet in the hands of His true devotees and He will act as per the wishes of the true devotees. God with this quality is referred to as Vidheyana. To illustrate the God at Yadothkari temple in Kanchipuram got up, rolled His bed and followed His devotee who was banished by the king. The alvar uses the words "Nedu maal" while referring to the Lord. This typifies the Asritha vyamoha quality of the Lord, when he feels that however much He has helped a devotee, He feels lots more could be done! He is ever eager to bestow largessees on deserving sincere devotees.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

தேவும், உலகும், உயிரும், திரிந்து நிற்கும்
யாவும், படைத்த இறைகண்டிர் - பூவிலு
திருவண் வண்டுர் உறையும் தேவாதி தேவன்
மரு வண் வண்டு ஊர் தூளவ மால்.

Meaning:

Oh devadi deva!

Oh Lord adorned with scented basil garland attracting a lot of bees by its sweet smell!

Oh Lord residing at Thiruvandoor!

You are the primordial creator Who created the Devas, worlds, all living beings, sentient and non-sentient things;

You Oh Lord are the Creator of all the worlds (**Jagat shrishthi karta**).

THIRUVALLA (THIRUVALLAVAZ)

This divya desa is popularly known as Vallaba kshetra. This temple is about three miles away from the Tiruvalla railway station on the Kollam-Ernakulam rail line. The moolavar is known as Kolapiran as also Tiruvazhmarban and Sri Vallabha. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The consort is known as Selva Thirukozhundhu Nachiyar as also Vatsalya devi. God gave darshal to Gantakarna. The theertha here is known as Gantakarna theertha as also Pampa river. The vimana is known as Saturanga kola vimana.

Thiruvalla, Chengannoor and Aranmula were the three most important places in the mid Travancore area. It is generally believed that the place got its name Thiruvalla in honour of Sri Vallabha, the presiding deity of Vishnu temple in the area. This town was a great centre of learning. It was once a strong pole of the nambudiris, the priestly class in Kerala. The Tiruvalla copper plates have a worth of material relating to the history of this town. Apparently, in the early days there were several upagramas i.e. subordinate villages attached to Thiruvalla. Vellappalli in the north was an upagrama under Thiruvalla and in the south Thirupparappuram (the Kanyakumari district of present Tamilnadu) was also one of the upagramas. Dandin, the great Sanskrit poet who lived in Kanchipuram in the 7th century also has praised the vaishna brahmins of Thiruvalla which only means that the culture of Thiruvalla was wellknown even long before the 7th century A.D. Historians say that the brahmins established themselves in Kerala in 64 villages and Thiruvalla happens to be one of those 64 villages. Thiruvalla was also famous during the Chera times. It was a city of learning as it had a number of Salas i.e. school of learning for vedantha in particular. These cities of learning were popularly known as Thiruvalla salas. Today Thiruvalla has become cosmopolitan in its outlook. It is one of the important commercial towns of Kerala with a sizable Christian population.

The Thiruvalla plates describe in detail the manner in which the temple was administered in those days. The rituals of the temple, the properties of the temple, the endowments made by

various devotees and kings and the purpose for which such endowments were instituted are all detailed in those plates. To illustrate from the plates one can note that for the purpose of feeding brahmins alone extensive lands which could be sown with 12634 kalams of paddy seeds were set apart. These lands were in the possession of the temple. Another set of lands sown with over 2000 kalams of paddy were set apart for burning perpetual ghee lamps in the temple. The revenue derived from 13685 paras of paddy was earmarked for preparing daily food offerings to the deity. The copper plates also indicate the existence of peculiar practices in the temple administration. It says that personal fines were imposed by the temple administration on the residents of the town for various acts of omission and commission. These fines were mostly payable in gold in those good olden days. All these added to the gold deposits of the temple. The temple also used to grant loans to the members of the community living in and around the temple. The interest on such loans were also collected in gold. The copper plates mention the names and addresses of several of the loanees along with the terms of the lending. The Thiruvalla salas i.e. the patasalas or seats of learning also had students with the Gurukula style of functioning. Hundreds of students were regularly fed. The subjects offered in these patasalas ranged from philosophy, grammar, Tarkasastras, vedas, etc.

It is believed that the original temple was just a small shrine constructed by the ten potties i.e. ten outstanding illams i.e. families. These potties were known as Pathu illam potties. These pottimar exercised full powers over the temple including the life and properties of the people around the temple. They were as good as the rulers of the locality. Later on the administrative powers were handed over to the Venad rajas in 1750. Yet another peculiarity about the poojas performed in this temple is the fact that the priests are rotated between Tulu brahmins and the local pottis each fortnight. This has got an interesting background. It is believed that the idol in this temple was the handiwork of Visvakarma himself. It was sculpted at the behest of Lord Krishna who gifted it to His friend at Dwaraja Satyaki just before the end

of Dwapara yuga i.e. the time when Lord Krishna left this world having completed His avatar in this world. It is said that towards the end of Dwapara yuga the Lord asked Garuda to keep the idol safe to be installed later by His followers. Garuda put the idol into the river Netravati which flows through Karnataka to Kerala. The story is that one day, the royal consort of Cheraman Perumal had a dream saying that an idol of Krishna was lying on the bed of Netravati river and it should be brought to Thiruvalla installed. Soon expert divers both in the North and South of the river were engaged in the task of locating the idol. Finally in 59 B.C. the idol of picked up. As the Tulu brahmins as well as the local potties of Thiruvalla played a prominent part in locating the idol, the right to perform the poojas is shared between these two communities as the recognition of their joint efforts in locating the idol.

The flag mast in this temple is also worthy of special mention. It is a huge manolithic structure of black granite almost 50 feet in height above the ground level. The popular belief is that it extends to an equal extent under the ground as well. It has a circumference of about two feet. The entire flag mast is encased in a three storeyed minaret structure. On the top of the flag mast there is a panchaloka idol of Garuda about three feet in height. Some feel that this flag mast was modelled on a Bhuddist stupa. The Nalambalam is also made of granite. A look at the flagmast as well as the Nalambalam makes us wonder as to how the people who built this temple in those days had access to the stock of granite as nowhere around within a radius of ten to fifteen kilometers is there any hill or any rocky formation. As to how this granite was brought, from where it was brought and it was erected at the workspot are all clothed in mystery.

There is a huge tank inside the temple itself. Usually, the temple tank will lie outside the temple premises. It is believed that this tank is also the work of supernatural powers. It has a permanent unfailing underground water source.

The Sri kovil i.e. the sanctum sanctorum is circular in shape. The eastern shrine is that of Sri Vallabha. In the same structure facing west there is a shrine for Sudarsana chakra. The Lord is

known as Vallabha. The image is nearly 5 feet tall having the conch and the disk in the two hands, the right hand holding the lotus and the left hand resting on the waist. A peculiar feature noticed while having the darshan of Sri Vallabha is that if one sees the face of the God one cannot see the feet very well. Similarly if one has the darshan of the feet, one cannot see the face very clearly. This is because the garbagriha is built in a peculiar fashion. As stated earlier, at the back of the garbagriha facing west is the shrine for Sudarsana i.e. Lord's disc. In the sannidhi of Sri Vallabha sandal paste is given as prasada, but in the sannidhi of Sudarsana alvar, Vibhoothi is given. Nobody is able to explain the reason for this peculiar custom. Some say that it is a standing example for the philosophy of unity in diversity and illustrating that saivism as well as vaishnavism are only two paths to reach the same goal. Some others say that as Lord appeared to Gantakarna in response to severe prayers here and conferred moksha on him and as Gantakarna was a staunch saivite before he became a vaishnavite, there is this practice of giving the holy ash i.e. vibhoothi also as prasada here.

To now briefly mention the legends connected with this kshetra. As stated earlier, God gave darshan to Gantakarna in this place and gave him moksha. Gantakarna was a staunch saivite. He did severe penance to Siva and asked Him to confer moksha to him. Lord Siva then advised him to pray to Lord Vishnu Who was the deity responsible for conferring salvation. Accordingly, Gantakarna did equally severe penance to Lord Vishnu. It is said that this person got the name Gantakarna as he used to carry two small bells in his ears. His intention was that he would keep on shaking his head so that the bells would continuously ring in his ears and he would not hear anything other than what he wishes to hear. Basically, he wanted to prevent any name other than Narayana entering his mind through the ear and so he would shake his head continuously even as he was repeating the name of Narayana so that exchange of sound would never distract him. The Lord Vishnu is believed to have appeared in this place and rewarded Gantakarna for his sincere prayers.

Another legend connected with this place relates to the devotion shown by a lady by name Sankara Mangalathamma. This lady did not have any progeny. Somebody told her that earlier, Athithi had observed Ekadasi vratha seriously and then performed Parana on Dwadasi day (i.e. feeding a brahmachari on the next day) and she was blessed with giving birth to the Lord Himself (the Lord as Vamana was born to Athithi). Sankaramangala ammai therefore also started observing this Ekadasi vratha seriously. On Dwadasi she would offer her prayers and then have her food only after feeding a brahmachari. After a long time, one asura by name Tolakasuran came to this place. He was a terror to the local residents. He used to trouble the sadhus. Most of them therefore left the place. Sankaramangalla amma however, continued in the same place and with great difficulty used to observe the Ekadasi vratha as on each occasion it became more and more difficult to find a brahmachari to feed on a dwadasi day. Tolakasuran also knew about this lady's devotion. He wanted at any cost to break her spirit. One day, the lady had absolutely none to come and partake of her food on Dwadasi day. She therefore meditated on Sriman Narayana and asked Him to find a solution for this problem of hers. Lord Vallabha then took on the form of a brahmachari and came to the house of Sankaramangala amma. The brahmachari told her that He had fasted the previous day (i.e. the Ekadasi day) and heard about the parana offered by the devout lady and had come to partake of the food. He said He will go to the tank, have His ritual bath and return. As the brahmachari was proceeding to the river, Tolakasuran met him and a severe fight ensued. The brahmachari finally let lose His disc (Sudarsana weapon) and the asura was killed. Having performed its task, the disc struck the earth. A spring emerged. The disc got rid of the blood of the asura and went back to its permanent resting place viz. the the hand of Lord Narayana. The brahmachari had His food in the lady's house. In the meantime, the lady heard that the asura was killed. She had had doubts regarding the divinity of this brahmachary boy. She noticed that the brahmachari had covered His chest with the Krishnajan hiding His chest. She realised that it was a bhagavatha leela. She requested the brahmachari to give

her darshan of Himself with His consort on His chest. It is said that God obliged her. That is why, the Lord here is known as Thiruvazhmarban i.e. a Lord on Whose chest resides Thiru i.e. Mahalakshmi. In response to the prayer of the lady devotee, the Lord is continuing to reside in this kshetra. The Lord assured her that whoever had a bath in the Chakra theertha (i.e. the spring created by the disc for cleansing itself after having killed the asura) will rid themselves of all their problems and their desires will be fulfilled. The Lord also blessed and assured that whoever worships Him at the Vallabha kshetra will be blessed with similar merit as those who have observed Ekadasi vratha and later performed the Dwadasi paarayana.

Yet another story connected with this place attributes the installation of this idol to Durvasa rishi. It is believed that even today Durvasa rishi comes here and worships the Lord at midnight. There are some devotees who believe that they hear the sound of the conch and other sounds connected with the offer of prayers like the tinkling of the bells etc. in the middle of the night.

The idol of Sri Vallabha is very beautiful to look at. For a long time, ladies would not be allowed near the sanctum sanctorum. It is said that the idol of Sri Vallabha was so beautiful that one day a lady devotee seeing the Lord bedecked in all His glory found in so irresistably enchanting that she entered the sanctum sanctorum. To prevent the recurrence of such situation when the lady devotees get lost in the beauty of the idol, it is said women were not allowed to enter the Nalambalam. Even in those days this tabu did not apply on two occasions. One was on the Thiruvathira day in the Dhanur month i.e. December end and on Vishu day in Chitirai month (April). On both those occasions, the Lord would be dressed as a hunter and probably it was felt that He did not look of that enchanting and captivating in that dress. However, thus tabu was lifted in the year 1967 August. Today both men and women have free access to the sanctum.

The neivedhyam offered in this temple is a peculiar type of a plantain viz. the Kadali plantain. It is believed that this was the

fruit offered by the sage Durvasa when he first installed the idol here and that even to-day the same practice is continued.

Yet another unusual practice followed in this temple is offering Katakali programme as a thanks giving offer to the Lord. Any devotee whose prayers are offered, promises to offer a Katakali performance arranged in the temple as a token of his promise for his prayers having been answered by the God. This is the proof of the fact that very often our temples were centres of not only religion but also promotion of the fine arts. Usually the katakali items performed are Sri Vallabha charitram, Tolakasura vatha. That is why many of the great exponents of the Katakali art hail from Thiruvalla.

Another peculiar custom observed in this temple is that food is offered to a brahmin before neivedhyam is offered to the Lord. The peculiarity is that the food is served in an arecanut leaf instead of a plantain leaf which is the normal practice. It is said that this practice started as the lady devotee Sankaramangala amma fed the brahmachari on the Dwadasi parana day by serving food on an arecanut leaf. It is believed that even today this custom continues.

Yet another unique feature observed in this temple is the festival conducted in the month of May. It is a one day festival. But on that single day, the deities from the three Bhagavati temples, the Devata of Kavil temple and that of Padappad temple and the deity from Alamthurath temple pay a visit to the Sri Vallabha temple. All these deities are carried with all their splendour. They are carried in a peculiar palanquin by the pottis. Only on that day the door in the northern gopuram in the Vallabha temple is kept opened. The rest of the year, the northern gopuram remains closed. These deities after having visited Sri Vallabha return the next day by about noon to their respective places after receiving the customary Vishu offerings (Visukkni neetam) and new cloth (Onappudavas).

There is an architectural wonder connected with this temple. It is an underground strong room with only a single horizontal door opening to it. From the south western portion of the floor of

the Nalambalam. In that room, exquisite wood carved images of Gods were recently discovered. In addition, a Vishnu image made out of pure molten gold was also found. Besides paintings of deities, Dwara Palakas, Sudarsana and beautiful wooden carving of Vishnu resting on Adishesha and certain records relating to the period of Rajasekara varman, Kulasekhara etc. were all discovered.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

On the eastern base of the central shrine of the Vishnu temple, there is an inscription in Tamil. It states that one Narayanan Senan of Perungaraceri bathed the God in butter¹.

Yet another interesting epigraphical highlight available from the material in the Travancore² Archaeological Series says that in the Huzur treasury, there were a set of copper plates available. From the inscriptions on those plates it was clear that they belonged to the Vishnu temple at Tiruvalla. Now also these plates are preserved in the Napier Museum. Apparently, originally there were 44 plates. Now only 36 are available. The fate of the balance of the 8 is not known. These plates contain a lot of information. They mention several institutions and customs which are of great importance to socialogy. They mention details regarding poojas to be offered, offerings to be made to the deities, gifts donated by several devotees and the manner in which those gifts are to be safeguarded and used for the purpose for which they were given.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalvar has composed ten pasurams on the Lord of Thiruvallavai divya desa. In the following paragraphs a free translation of those pasurams with its meaning is given.

It is said that Nammalvar went to Thirukkudandai, but he was not able to satisfy his desire and his wish to become one with

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1. *Travancore State - a Topographical list of inscriptions by R.Vasudeva Poduval Page 249*
 2. *Travancore Archaeological Series Vol.2 Part 3 P.131*

God was not fulfilled. He therefore proceeded to Thiruvallavai and hoped that atleast there his wish would be fulfilled. Due to the separation from the Lord and the disappointment of not having attained salvation the alvar had become weak and sad. He assumes the role of a nayaki and expresses his disappointment and his difficulties through these pasurams. It is said that the nayaki reached the outskirts of Thiruvallai. The thick luscious groves filled with soft tender breeze and the sweet music of the beetles and the sound emanating from the recitation of the vedas and the smoke rising high and spreading over entire sky from the homa (holy fire) lit for performing the rituals and hearing the other auspicious sounds connected with holy acts being performed at Thiruvallavai, only intensified her pain and drove home to her more tellingly the fact of separation from her Lord. She started hastening her steps to reach Thiruvallavai, all the time uttering words with which she wanted to impress upon the God that what he was doing to her was not fair and just. Her companions were trying to restrain her and saying that it is not proper on her part to behave like that. But the alvar as Parankusa nayaki says that he has only one objective in view and that is to attain and become one with God at Thiruvallavai. It is almost as if Parankusa nayaki was so close to God, i.e. while she was on the outskirts of Thiruvallavai, she still was far away from her desire to become one with God. This is the situation. The commentators say that this is very reminiscent of what was the feelings experienced by a disciple of Bhattar. That disciple was in Mysore. Once he was consumed by a compelling desire to proceed to Srirangam and participate in the utsava being celebrated in the holy town. He therefore started from Mysore. He reached a place called Thirukaramban thurai. That is on the banks of Kaveri river; Srirangam was on the other side of the river. But suddenly when this disciple reached Thirukaramban Thurai, there were flash floods in Kaveri; the flood waters were rising. The disciple had perforce to stay at Thirukaramban thurai for the night. That night he could hear all the sounds connected with the celebrations of the festival at Srirangam. He was terribly upset that he could not go to Srirangam and render service to the Lord to his heart's desire. He kept

awake the whole night, thinking of the missed opportunities. The commentators say that the feelings expressed by Nammalvar through Parankusa nayaki's words reflect almost the same feelings as experienced by the disappointed desciple of Bhattar.

The commentators compare this agony of Nammalvar with another example. They say that the manasaputras of Brahma, Sanaka, Sanandana maharishis once reached very near Swetha deepam. Swetha deepam is said to be almost the end of this world and hence very close to Vaikunta and so the Sweta deepa vaasis were able to see and hear all that happened in Vaikunta. But no one other than the Sweta deepa vasis could stay in Swetha deepam. Therefore, Sanaka, Sananda maharishis also had to stay on the outskirts of Swetha deepam, but could hear all the joyous sounds expressed and exclamations of happiness uttered by the residents of Swetha deepam while enjoying the enchanting sights and sounds of Vaikunta. Thus, the manasaputras of Brahma could hear the joyous sounds reflecting the happiness of the Swethadeepam residents, but they themselves had to accept the disappointment at their inability to enter Swethadeepa and participate and join those residents in having a darshan of the Lord. The ears could hear the divine notes, but the eyes could not see that happiness. The commentators cite these two examples to illustrate the agony experienced by Nammalvar on reaching the outskirts of Thiruvallai divya desa and yet not attaining God. A typical case of so near yet so far.

PASURAM 3206:

என்று கொல்? தோழியீர் காள்! எம்மை நீர் நலிந்து என்
சய்தீரோ?

பொன் திகழ் புன்னை மகிழ் புது மாதவி மீதணவி
தென்றல் மணங்கம ழும்திரு வல்ல வாழ்நகருள்
நின்றபி ரான்அடி நிறுஅடி யோம் கொண்டு சூடுவதே

Meaning:

In this pasuram, alvar as Parankusanayaki pleads with her companions not to stand in the way of her going to Thiruvallavai. She says:

Oh companions of mine, what is the use of your tormenting me and making me more sad. Please tell me which is the day when I will be able to anoint myself with the Sripadadhooli of the Perumal, Who is residing permanently at Thiruvallavai divya desa where cool breeze is wafting through punnai, magizha, kurukuthai trees and fills the air with sweet scent.

Here the words present an eloquent picture. It is as if Parankusa nayaki is upbraiding her companions and saying O friends of mine, you are fully aware of my mental state of attraction towards the Lord at Thiruvallavai and consequent turmoil. In such a situation, you should use sweet words to help me to bear the pain of separation. Instead, you are questioning and criticising my action. What is the use of this sort of behaviour? The soft breeze enveloping Thiruvallavai is bewitching and is inexorably drawing me to that place. You are trying to hold on to me at this place; but my desire is to be anointed with Sripada renu (dust from His holy feet) adorning the Padara vinda of Perumal. If there is any way by which you can help me in fulfilling this desire, please do so; otherwise, it is best you don't criticise me and question me. I would even welcome silence from you.

The alvar here says that to keep the dust from the divine lotus feet of the Lord on her head is her goal. The commentators say that this wish of alvar is reminiscent of what once Bharata, the loving brother of Sri Rama said. While at Chitrakoot some one asked Bharata as to when his mind would be at utter peace. Bharata replied that his mind would be at peace only when Sri Rama wears the crown which befits only His head and he places on on his head those feet. In Tamil these words are more eloquent. Bharata is said to have replied: "Perumal thanakku uriya mudi choodi, naanum yenakku uriya mudi choodi murai thappamal vazhunda than mana varutham neengum" (பெருமாள் தனக்குரிய முடி சூடி, நானும் எனக்குரிய முடிசூடி முறை தப்புராமல் வாழ்ந்தால் தான் மனவருத்தம் நீங்கும்)

As stated earlier, literally translated this means that the sadness of his mind will disappear only when Rama wears the crown, which befits His head and I (i.e. Bharata) bear on my head what

befits it, i.e. the feet of Lord Rama. Bharata wants Rama to wear the crown on His head and he should have the Thiruvadi of Sri Rama as his crown.

The same thoughts are expressed by Kulasekhara alvar also when he said “maal adi mudi mel kola maam” (மால் அடிமுடி மேல் கோலமாம்) i.e. Kulasekhara alvar asserted that ruling the kingdom is not his crowning glory, but having the lotus feet of the Lord (Thiruvadi) on his head is more appropriate crowning glory for him. The alvar through the pasuram says that the objective of the sincere devotee should be to cling to the lotus feet of the Lord so as to attain salvation. All of them advice us to place our implicit trust and faith on the divine anchorsheet of Thiruvadi of Perumal.

PASURAM 3208:

நிச்சலும் தோழியீர் கான்! எம்மைநீர் நலிந்து என்
செய்தீரோ?

பச்சிலை நீள்கழும்புல வும் தெங்கும் வாயைகளும்
மச்சணி மாடங்கள் மீதணவும் தண் திருவல்லவாழ்
நச்சரவின்னணை மேல்நம் பிரானது நன்னலமே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram again alvar as Parankusanayaki tells her companions that her welfare is the responsibility of Perumal. Alvar says

“Oh companions of mine, what is it that you gain by teasing me all the time? I have no doubt that my soul belongs to God Who is seen lying down on Adishesha and residing in cool Thiruvallavai with palatial mansions, over which tall coconut trees, plantain trees and betel nut trees with green leaves are hanging down gracefully”.

In this pasuram, the alvar refers to the Perumal lying down on Adishesha. The words are “Nachchara vin anaimale” (நச்சரவின்னணை மேல்). Usually Adishesha is associated with doing eternal kainkarya to God. He is the Paduka when God walks; he is the throne on which God sits, he is the bed on which God lies down, he is the cloth which God wears; thus he is regarded as

Nithya kainkarya para i.e. the person who renders eternal all round service. Lakshmana, brother of Rama is regarded as reincarnation of Adishesha. To illustrate the extent of services rendered by Adishesha, even during his manifestation as Lakshmana, Nampillai quotes an instance from Ramayana. It is said that Rama and Sita were walking in the forest to which they were banished by Kaikeyi. Rama with a bow in His hand would proceed first, Sita would faithfully follow Him and Lakshmana kept up the rear. When they reached Sringeri Berapuram where Guhan was the Chief, Guhan also joined the entourage and provided protection and food for the divine couple. One day seeing Lakshmana maintaining a lone vigil, ever alert, with the bow in his hand, Guhan asked Lakshmana also to rest his limbs by lying down at the feet of Rama and Sita. Guhan assured Lakshmana that no ill can befall them as long as they were in his kingdom. He said Bharata and others cannot enter this area. He further added that Lakshmana, as a royal scion, would have been brought up with tender love and affection and so he asked him to rest his tired limbs for sometime. He assured him that he and his followers would guard all of them. Lakshmana then replied "**Katham daasaradho bhoomow sayanae saha seethayaa**". Translated it means "when Rama born to Emperor Dasaratha, after lot of prayers and tapas, along with Seetha is sleeping on the ground, will I be able to get any sleep?" Lakshmana thus made it clear that his only thought was the welfare of his brother and the safety of Rama was his paramount duty. The alvar by referring to this fact of the Perumal lying down on Adishesha is referring to the supreme kainkarya i.e. service rendered by Adishesha and is reminding the Perumal at Thiruvallavai to permit her to emulate Adishesha in rendering service to Him.

PASURAM 3205:

மானேய் நோக்குநல் லீர்வைக லும்வினை யேன்மெலிய
வரனார் வண்கழு கும்மது மல்லி கைகமழும்
தேனார் சோலைகள் சூழ்திரு வல்ல வாழுகையும்
கோனாரை அடி யேன் அடி கூடுவது என்னுகொலோ?

Meaning:

As stated in the introductory part, alvar as Parankusa nayaki and her companions have reached the outskirts of Thiruvallavai. The companions are trying to restrain Parankusa nayaki; but the nayaki is eloquently pleading with them her inability to accept their advice.

In this pasuram she says

O you companions, with doe-like eyes, please tell me which is the day when I will join the divine lotus feet of the Lord, residing at Thiruvallavai, surrounded by sweet luscious groves and orchards full of honey and full of cool fragrant jasmine flowers and skyhigh betal nut trees. He is the cause for this singer becoming thinner and thinner with the unbearable sorrow of separation. The alvar uses the words “manaenooku nalleer”. The commentators have a beautiful interpretation for the selection of these words by the alvar. They say that the companions wanted to protect Parankusa nayaki from the likely disappointment at not being able to attain her Lord at Thiruvallavai. So to prevent her from possible further pain caused by disappointment, with their eloquent eyes, they convey the message to her that her plan to proceed to Thiruvallavai may be postponed. But Parankusa nayaki is appealing to those very same eloquent eyes of her companions and asking those very eyes with their cool glances to bless her with anugraha. The companions try to prevent Parankusa nayaki proceeding to Thiruvallavai, not by uttering any words but by the silent language spoken by their eloquent eyes. Parankusa nayaki replied to that silent plea by asking benediction and blessings from those very same cool friendly eyes.

The alvar uses the words “Thiruvallavazh uraiyum Konaarai adiyani kooduvadu yenru kolo”. These words, the commentators say, are the true reflection and expression of the great tatva expressed through Ashtakshara mahamantra. The pravava word ‘OM’ is a combination of Paramatma, Jeevatma and the connection between the two. The two are therefore not separable. That is why, the alvar, through the words “Thiruvallavazh uraiyum konar”

refers to the Narayana sabhdam and the word “adiyen” (humble servant) refers to the Pranava and the words “adi kooduvadu yenru kolo” refers to the prayer to do kainkarya and thereby attain the Lord. Thus, this simple sentence viz. which is the day when I will attain His divine feet, has got a much greater inner philosophy embedded in it is evident from the explanation given by the commentators.

PASURAM 3207:

தடு மலர் குழ லீந்துய ராட்டியே னைமெலிய
பாடுநல் வேத வொலிபர வைத்திரை பேபெல் முழங்க
மாடுயர்ந் கோமப் புதைகம ழும்தண் திருவசல்லவாழ்
நீடுறை கின்றபி ரான்கழல் காண்டுங்கொல் நிச்சலுமே?

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar as Parankusanayaki again in an impatient manner is asking her companions as to which is the day when she will be able to have a darshan of divine lotus feet of the Lord at Thiruvallavai? She says

“Oh you companions, having strings of flowers in your hair. I hear the recitation of Sama Veda, producing a musical sound like the gentle lapping of the waves in the ocean. I see holy smoke from the holy homa fires spreading on all four sides and filling the air with its sweet scent; but even so, those very sights and scenes are making me sad. I am becoming thinner and thinner and wasting away with sorrow. Please let me know when will I behold the divine lotus feet of my Lord residing permanently in cool Thiruvallavai?”

Alvar uses the words “paadu nal veda oli”. It is said that he is referring only to Sama veda as that is the veda which is very old and which creates melody and music even when it is repeated. The vedas are the most valuable heritage of our times. God is Veda swaroopi. While referring to God it is said “ulam sudar migu suridhiull”. Literally translated, it means that Perumal is the one Who is in the vedas. Amongst the vedas, Sama veda is the greatest “**vedaanam Sama vedosmi**” i.e. God Himself stated that

among the Vedas, He is the Sama veda. That is why the alvar uses the words which convey the thought that it is the Sama veda which is being recited.

Parankusanayaki refers to her companions as having beautified their hair with strings of flowers. The Eedu interprets these words of the alvar to say that Parankusanayaki is not referring to some ordinary set of flowers being worn by the companions; but she is referring to the fact that those are the flowers which earlier adorned God and which tho' old, because of Bhagavat sambandam make the companions look beautiful.

PASURAM 3209:

நன்னலத் தோழிமீர் கான்! நல்ல அந்தணர் வேள்விப்புக்கை
மைந்நலங் கொண்டுயர் விண்மறைக்கும் தண் திருவல்லவாழ்
கன்னலங் கட்டிதன்னைக்கனியைஇன் னமுதஞ்சுதன்னை
என்னலங் கொள்குட ரைஎன்று கொல்கண்கள் காண்பதுவே?

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar again asks her companions as to when her eyes will be blessed with the vision of her Lord? She says

Oh my very loving companions!
When will these eyes of mine see the radiant Lord
Who is as sweet as the sweetest ball of candy;
Who is like a delicious ripened fruit;
Who is sweet like nectar;
Who is effulgent and

Who is residing in cool Thiruvallavai where the smoke arising out of the homa fire (sacrificial fires) lit by purohits performing yagas becomes black like the kaajal applied to the eyes and hides even the distant skies.

PASURAM 3210:

காண்பதுஎஞ் ஞான்றுகொ லோ? வினை யேன்கனி வாய்மடவீர்!
பாண்குரல் வண்டினொடுபுகந் தென்றலு மாகிஎங்கும்
சேண்சினை யோங்கு மரச் செழுங் கானல் திருவல்லவாழ்
மாண்குறள் கோலம் பிரான் மலர்த் தாமரைப் பாதங்களே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar as Parankusanayaki again asks her companions as to which is the day when she will be able to see the lotus feet of her Lord. She says

Oh companions of mine with beautiful ripened pomogranet fruit like mouths, please tell me when will that fortunate day dawn when this sinner will be able to have darshan of the divine lotus feet of the lovely midget Vamana Who resides at Thiruvallavai which place is reverberating with the music of the humming of the bees, and is cool with fresh tender breeze and is bounded with the sea shore on one side and is full of tall trees with wide spread branches forming a canopy on the skies.

The alvar uses the words “maan kural kola piraan” to say that the Perumal Who is at Thiruvallavai is the one Who earlier took the form of Vamana. God is the supreme master and everything in this world belongs to Him. Yet when the just emperor Bali had to be subjugated, He had to resort to a small trick and the supreme Lord, possessor of viswaroopa, voluntarily took on the garb of a lovable dwarf and begged three feet of land from the king. He begged three feet of land from the very world which was His. As Vamana He displayed His sowlabhya guna and with His dazzling enthralling beauty tricked even Bali. The alvar wants to have a darshan of the lotus feet of that lovable brahmachari who came as a dwarf and assumed a gigantic form to later dwarf the entire world.

PASURAM 3211:

பாதங்கள் மேலணி பூந்தொழக்கூடுங்கொல்? பாவைநல்லீர்!
 ஒத நெடுந்தடத் துள்உயர்தாமரை செங்கழுநீர்
 மாதர்கள் வாண்முக மும்கண்ணு மேந்தும் திருவல்ல வாழ்
 நாதன் இஞ்ஞாலமுண்டநம்பி ரான் தன்னை நான் தொறுமே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram alvar as Parankusanayaki wants to know whether she will be blessed with the opportunity to daily worship with reverence the flowers placed at the lotus feet of the Lord! She says:

Oh companions of mine looking like beautiful dolls; please tell me will I ever be blessed with the opportunity to daily atleast worship the flowers which are adorning the lotus feet of the great benefactor Perumal Who swallowed all the worlds and kept them safe in His stomach and saved them from destruction during pralaya and who is the master of Thiruvallavai with ocean like huge tanks filled with lotus and senganeer flowers and where the sweet damsels have bright faces.

In this pasuram the nayaki refers to her companions with a lot of affection as “paavai nalleer”. These words draw different interpretations in the aaraayira padi and Eedu. The commentators in Aaraayira padi say that because the companions did not upbraid the nayaki for her thoughts or behaviour and because the nayaki knew that her friends sympathised with her, she addresses them with affection as companions who look like beautiful dolls. In Eedu on the other hand the commentator feels otherwise. He says that the companions tried to prevent the nayaki from pining for her Lord. They tried to divert her thoughts and her desire to go to Thiruvallavai. But they failed. They did not know what more or what else they could do to prevent the nayaki going to Thiruvallavai. They were stunned into inaction and so they looked like beautiful lifeless painted pictures. That is why the commentator says they are addressed by the nayaki as “paavai nalleer”! Thus the same two words has evoked diametrically different interpretations as to the thoughts of the alvar!

PASURAM 3212:

நாஸ்தொஹும் வீடின்றியேதொழக் கூடுங்கொல்? நல்துதலீர்!
ஆடுறு தீங்கரும் பும்வினை செந்நெறு மாகி எங்கும்
மாடுறு பூத்தடம் சேர்வயல் சூழ்தண் திருவல்லவாழ்
நீடுறை கின்ற பிராந்திலம் தாவிய நீள் கழலே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram again Parankusanayaki poses a question to her companions and says:

Oh companions with beautiful bright foreheads! Will I ever get the opportunity to worship without any break on every day the

glorious feet of the Lord Who once spanned the worlds and Who has kindly manifested Himself in cool Thiruvallavai surrounded on all four sides with fields and tanks filled with flowers and rich sennal rice paddy fields and sweet sugar cane crop.

Here the alvar says that the Perumal as Vamana made no discrimination between those who deserved His grace and those who did not and instead placed His divine lotus feet on the heads of all those in the worlds measured by His feet. What is more, the alvar says, Perumal is residing for ever in Thiruvallavai unlike in His incarnations when as soon as the purpose for which He took the avatar is achieved He goes back to Paramapada.

PASURAM 3213:

கழல்வனை பூரிப்ப யாம்கண்டு கைதொழக் கூடுங்கொலோ?
குழலென்ன யாழுமென் னக்குளிர் சோலையுள் தேனருந்தி
மழுலை வரிவண்டு களிசை பாடும் திருவல்லவாழ்
கழலின் மலிசக் கரப்பெரு மானது தொல்லருளே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar as Parankusanayaki poses yet another question to her companions. She says:

In Thiruvallavai full of cool luscious groves the bees having sucked honey hum in sweet unison deluding us to think it is the beautiful musical notes from a flute or a veena. The Perumal of Thiruvallavai is the one Who holds the dynamic disc in His hand. With the benign grace of the Perumal of such a place will these bangles of mine which are slipping off my hands (i.e. hands are becoming thin due to the sorrow at separation from the Lord) ever glow with happiness so that I may have the fortune to lift those very hands in veneration and offer prayers to that Lord?

The alvar says that the bees of Thiruvallavai having had their fill of the sweet honey available in plenty in the cool luscious groves of Thiruvallavai hum and produce a sound which the alvar refers to as “mazhalai” dhvani. Usually the word “mazhalai” is used to refer to the sweet lisping words of a child which may not be very intelligible but yet makes the parents feel intoxicated with

happiness. The alvar then goes on to say that those musical notes of the beautiful bees sound like flute and veena music one may wonder as to how it is possible that the humming of bees could resemble at one and same time the music from two musical instruments? The commentators say that it is possible in the same way in which one Rama could be compared to various others with reference to His various quality. It is said

“Vishnu naa sadruso veeryae”

(comparable to Vishnu in valour)

Soma vath priya darsanaha

(His affectionate glances are like those of the Moon)

Kaalaagni sadrusaha krodhae

(In His anger, He is like Agni during pralaya times)

Kshamayaa prithvee samaha

(In His quality of tolerance He is like mother earth).

Similarly the humming of the bees was like the music of the flute or veena. It could mean different things to same person at same time or different times!

PASURAM 3214:

கொல்சலருள் நல்வினை யால் சொலக் கூடுங்கொல்? தோழிர்களா!
தொல்லருள் மண்ணும்விண் னும்தொழு நீன்ற திருநகரம்
நல்லரு ளாயிர வர்நல னேந்தும் திருவல்லவாழ்
நல்லருன் நம்பேரு மான்ரு ராயணன் நாமங்களே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar as Parankusanayaki poses yet another question to her companions. She says

O companions, will I ever have the fortune of repeating the myriad names of our Swami (Lord) Narayana, Who is the embodiment of Kripa (kindness). He resides at Thiruvallavai, to enable all those who are residing in this world and also those who are residing in Paramapada to worship Him. His noble qualities and grace are like second nature to Him (swabhavikam). In Thiruvallavaithousands of well-versed pious Srivaishnavas are eternally singing His praises (mangalasaasanam).

In the pasuram, the alvar makes it very evident that even to be able to repeat His myriad holy names we require His grace and kindness. The alvar says that Perumal has taken archaravatara and is residing at Thiruvallavai, so as to be easily accessible to the people in Vaikunta as also the people in this world, all the great men of that town to worship Him.

The alvar uses the word “nal vinai yaal” to make it evident that even to repeat the Thirunamas, one needs the anugraha of Perumal. In this context it is relevant to recall what was stated by Ammangi Ammal, the great prayachana expert. He used to say “Naa neeraatru irukkai papa phalamirar naa neerundaai Thiru naamam solla vallo mae”. He says if the tongue does not naturally and automatically ooze water, it is a great sin; but once the tongue us automatically oozing water, it should be regarded as a poorva janma phala. Why should those who possess such a tongue which oozes water not repeat the glorious myriad names of the Perumal? This recalls the famous song sung by the Edayars in Silappadhikaram when they said that the tongue which does not repeat the glorious name of Narayana is no tongue at all.

PASURAM 3215:

நாமங்க ளாயிர முடைய நம்பெரு மானடிமேல்
சேமங்கொள் தென்குரு கூர்ச்சட கோபண் தெரிந்துரைத்த
நாமங்க ளாயிரத் துள் இவை பத்தும் திருவல்லவாழ்
சேமங்கொள் தேன்னகர் மேல்சேப்பு வார்பிறந் தார்பிறந்தே.

Meaning:

This is a phalastruti pasuram. The alvar says that this set of ten pasurams on Thiruvallavai Divya Desa forms part of the thousand pasurams composed by Nammalwar which are like the thousand names of the Lord (Thirunaamam). These pasurams have been composed by Nammalvar who has great faith in the lotus feet of the thousand named Lord of Thiruvallavai. Those who repeat these ten pasurams even if they are born in this world will be blessed with fame, and distinction.

The Alvar assures that all those who repeat the ten pasurams will be free from the shackles of birth and re-birth. He uses the

word "pirandae sirandar" (பிறந்தே சிறந்தார்). The alwar says that those who repeat these ten pasurams will definitely have the Bhagavat Anubhava (experience of God) and therefore will become great. Thus the experiencing of God itself will make a person a class by himself. There is a popular phrase which is as follows: "Seedhanaiyai thozhuvaar vinnulaavilum seeriyar" (சீதனையைத் தொழுவார் விண்ணுலாவிலும் சிறியர்). It means those who bow down and worship Sridhara are greater than even the Nityasuris. The words "Seedhanaiyai" (சீதனையை) can also be interpreted to refer to those who worship of Lord who has a cool, calm and composed Swabhava. Even the mere mortals who worship Narayana are held as greater than the Mukthars and Nityasuris.

The Name Sankeertana is a very efficacious way to attain salvation. While referring to, God, it is said "Devo Naama Sahasravaan" i.e. God has 1000 names which describes His prowess, qualities. He is sarvesvaran.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGA'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

உதந்தார்க்கு எஞ்ஞான்றும் உளன் ஆய், உகவாது
இகந்தார்க்கு எஞ்ஞான்றும் இலன் ஆய், திகழ்ந்திட்டு
அரு அல்ல, என நின்னான்
திருவல்லவாழ் உறையும் தே.

Meaning:

For the believers (asthikas) the Lord at Thiruvalla is the eternal Truth with a beautiful enchanting form (roopa). For the non-believers (nasthikas) the Lord at Thiruvalla does not exist as they describe Him in detail and then say such a form does not exist (aroopa). Thus at one and the same time to the believers (asthikas) He is not a formless abstract and for the non-believers He is a form which does not exist; Thus, the Lord at Thiruvalla is thus Roopa and Aroopa at one and the same time and Pillai Perumal Iyengar asks us in this verse to think of that Lord at Thiruvalla.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar says that the nasthikas by describing the form of the Supreme being in detail and then

denying the existence can say He has no form, but they cannot deny its existence as a statement of nothingness deserves or needs no denial. The asthikas are however enslaved by His enchanting, bewitching form. Thus, He is formless and of magnificent form at one and sametime.

Nammalwar expressed similar thoughts in Thiruvaimozhi pasuram 2683 which runs as follows:

*"Ulan enil ulan, avan uruvam iv uruvukal;
Ulan alan enil avan aruvam iv aruvukal;
Ulan ena, ilan ena, ivai gunam udaimaiyil;
Ulan iru thakaimaiyodu, olivu ilan parante"*

*உள்ளனனால் உளன் அவ னுருவம் இவ் வருவுகள்
உள்ளல லெனில் அவ னருவம்இவ வருவுகள்
உள்ளன இலனென இவைகுண முடைமையில்
உள்ளாரு தகைமையொடு ஒழிவிலன் பரந்தே.*

Here, Nammalvar says "if you say He is, then He is, (asthikas i.e., thiets). If you say He is not (nasthikas, i.e. athiests) then the denial has to be referring to a description and then saying that such a thing does not exist, i.e., denial has to be with reference to only atleast a notionally existing thing as denial of a non-existing thing has no meaning. "Nothing" as such deserves no denial. Only an existing thing merits denial. Thus, when they say the Supreme Lord is Roopa and Aroopa (formless and the one with form) at the same time to each as per his concept;ion, understanding and visualisation, we are only describing His two qualities (gunas). He exists at all times, in all places. He is the chit and achit (i.e. sentient and non-sentient). What is apparently invisible is really not non-existent, but an existing thing too subtle to be visible. To illustrate with a mundane example. We have a very popular curio from Moscow as well as Chennapatna toys set w;hich is a wooden doll with removable two hollow halves. The moment we remove the outermost top and bottom half you get another doll of smaller size, thus each layer can be removed to disclose another smaller and smaller doll. Similarly, when we buy stainless steel set vessels for storing grains, the shop keeper offers a set of ten or twelve

vessels with closed lids where each will go into the other and only the outermost vessel with closed lid can be seen. In both the cases when we see with the naked eye, only the outermost Russian or Chennapatna or eversilver vessel set. It does not mean that the other dolls and vessels inside the first one are non-existent. Similarly, the Upanishad says that this world which forms Brahman's body was gradually reabsorbed by the preceding element which was also its immediate cause at the time of creation. It says:

*"Aakaasath vayuhu
Vayore agnihi
Agnae jaapah
Abhyaha prithvee
Prithivya oshadyeha
Oshadeepyo annam
Annath purushaha".*

This is known as uthpathi kramam, i.e., order of creation. During pralaya the destruction takes the reverse order viz.,

Prithvi (earth) gets merged up by ocean
Jalam (water) gets merged up by agni
Agni (fire) gets merged up by vayu
Vayu (wind) gets merged up by Aakasam (sky)
Aakasam (sky) gets merged in Paramakasam
Paramakasam in Sookshanakaasam which is Brahma.

In effect, therefore, Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar and Nammalvar assert that the Supreme Lord exists at all times and in all places (omnipresent and omniscient) and He has in Himself formless sentient things as also the non-sentient things with a gross form that is visible objectively perceptible. He is and He is not at one and same time. A pithy subtle truth that is at the same time easy and difficult to understand. The profound meaning is so simple that it sinks into our gross not so subtle brains after repeated concentrated readings.

SRI PADMANABHASWAMY TEMPLE THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Sri Padmanabhaswamy temple in Thiruvananthapuram is held in high regard by all Vaishnavites. It is located on the most elevated part of a vast plain in the city of Thiruvananthapuram. When one reaches the city the tall eastern gopuram (temple tower) which is seven storeys high strikes one's eye. The very name Thiruvananthapuram means it is the abode of the Lord who reclines on the sacred serpent viz., Anantha or Adishesha. The great Vaishnava saint Nammalvar who lived in the 9th century A.D. has composed verses in praise of Sri Padmanabhaswamy. Hence this temple must have existed even before the 9th century A.D. The hoary antiquity of this temple is revealed by the mention of it in the various puranas. In Padmapurana there is a reference to the temple of Ananthasayanam where the Lord is said to be lying in Yoga nidra pose. In Skanda purana, Sethu Mahatmya, Brahma Kanda Chapter 52, verses 102 to 105 the temple for Sri Padmanabhaswamy at Tiruvananthapuram is referred to as one of the important places of pilgrimage. Bhagavath purana Canto X Chapter 79 says that Balarama visited Syanandoorapuram which is another name for Tiruvananthapuram. This temple owes a lot to the Rajas of Travancore. The Rajas are known as Padmaniabha dasas, that is, they are the ever-obedient vassals of Lord Padmanabha. Even today the members of the princely family go to the shrine every day. It is said that they used to partake of their morning meals only after the noon-day worship at the temple was over. It is also believed that once Umayamma Rani, grandmother of Marthanda Varma, during her reign 1677-1684 had to forego her noon meal as for some unknown reason worship could not be performed in the temple that day. Even upto the 1930s any poor brahmins, orphans, widows or destitutes who came to the temple for darshan were given two free meals a day, thanks to the liberal munificent donations made by the Maharajas.

One writer waxes eloquent about this temple and says¹ "Volumes after volumes can be written about the various aspects of the temple; the stupendous structure, its sumptuous architecture, its prodigious lay out, its thematic brilliance, the conceptual grandeur and above all the magnificence and profundity of the devotional belief of the long line of rulers of Travancore whose dedication to the enshrined tutelary deity alone has been responsible for the glory of this great temple and its undying fame The abiding faith of the founding fathers of Travancore Royalty, their faith and devotion alone has sustained the temple, preserving its great traditions in their pristine purity and sweep".

Architecturally this temple is a marvellous one. To quote Sri K.R. Vaidyanathan² "it is architecturally the most notable of temples in Kerala with both the indigenous style and the features of Dravidian architecture harmoniously blended". The eastern tower built in granite and brick in pyramidal shape with seven storeys typifies the Dravidian influence while the subsidiary entrance to the north of the gopura is built in the traditional Kerala style with gabled roof.

The Padmanabhaswamy temple is the exact replica of the temple at Tiruvattar In Kanyakumari District. Many believe that the Tiruvattar temple is the more ancient one as it is referred to as Aadhi Anantapura. No one knows when exactly the temple at Thiruvananthapuram was built. One legend has it that it was built somewhere around 3000 B.C. An inscription engraved in Sanskrit and Malayalam characters on the base of the mandapa inside the temple says that the temple was reconstructed from the Vimana down and the work was started in 1729 A.D. It is said that in the year 1686 there was a big fire which destroyed the entire structure with the exception of the Moola vigraha. It was Marthanda Varma who reconstructed the temple as is seen today. He rebuilt the sanctum-sanctorum, replaced the old recumbent idol of Sri Padmanabhaswamy made out of wood with a new one

1. *Pilgrim guide to Guruvayoor and a few other vaishnava temples* 1990 edited by Shri S.P. Nayar pp 68
2. *Temples and Legends of Kerala* by K. R. Vaidyanathan page 28

made out of 1200 salagramas which were specially brought to Kerala for this purpose. It is said that the manner in which the Moolasthanam vigraha was moulded is similar to that adopted while making the idol at Thiruvattar. The salagramas in this idol are said to have been moulded into shape with a particular kind of mortar made of Kadusarkara which is a compound of lime and granite covered with the paste of molasses and mustard. The salagramas are so ingeniously built into the form of the idol itself that one cannot separately identify them. To quote Sri K.R. Vaidyanathan again, the manner in which the idol which is seen today was made was "a feat, unique in conception, combination and construction"³

The area covered by the temple is believed to be around seven acres. The temple faces east. The temple tower in the east is about 100 feet in height and has seven storeys with window-like openings in the centre of each one of the storeys. These openings as well as the face of the tower are lighted every evening. This illuminated temple tower is visible from a very great distance. On the top of the tower are seven gold steeples (Swarna sthupies). These can also be sighted from a very long distance. As soon as one enters the temple the tall tower, gateway, broad open and neat corridors impress one with a feeling of divinity and serenity. The long open corridor inside the temple is supported by 324 stone pillars and is covered by a terraced roof. It is called Seeveli mantapa i.e. the pathway through which the utsava deities i.e. processional deities are taken every day round the temple. This corridor is 450 feet long on one side and on the shorter side it is 350 feet long. It is 25 feet broad. Each one of these pillars has the figure of a woman bearing a lamp in the palm of her hands joined together and raised above her waist like a hollow saucer. It is said that the hollow will hold four ounces of oil which is enough to keep a light burning for four hours at a time. At the top of the pillar is the head of a unicorn with a rolling ball of stone in its mouth. This seeveli mantapa was once upon a time also used as a dining hall on important occasions. Sri V.Nagam Aiyar says that on one occasion he "counted as many as 2500 leaves laid in this

corridor. It is mind-boggling and beyond the ken of one's imagination to visualise the fact so many people could sit down simultaneously and have their breakfast!". Sri Nagam Aiya goes on to say, "I don't think that the wealthiest Duke or Marquis in Great Britain can ask so many quests to dinner at a time and this is a spectacle unrivalled in any part of the world"⁴. Thus the four walls of the temple are silent witnesses to the pomp and prosperity of princely days. As proof that so many were fed on certain occasions in the temple corridors one has to only see the cooking apartments in the northern corner of this corridor. There are huge hearths of the height of a full grown man and big enough to hold tonnes of firewood at a time. There are giant bell metal cauldrons which they say required elephants to keep them in position over the 5 to 6 feet high ovens. Some of these were reportedly sold as scrap. The hollow of these cauldrons can contain material to feed 5000 people at one meal. They are so big that the local residents say a boy can swim in it if it is filled with water! Large canoes made of wood capable of holding several hundred pots of curries or butter-milk are also there.

Mr. Nagam Aiya refers to these appurtenances in great detail as these are the only proof we have today of the massive feeding done in the halcyon days. He says they are "presenting the appearance in every respect of Broddingnagian arrangements."⁵

Let us now turn to the Dwajasthamba. This is a fine log of teak 80 feet in height. As usual it is circular in shape and tapers off towards the top. What is unique about this Dwajasthamba is its bright shining golden encasing. It is said that the teak log is covered with a series of copper plate rings. These copper plates as well as the image of Garuda are gilded thickly with fine gold on the exterior through a peculiar process adopted only in Kerala. The gold used is of a very superior kind. It is beaten into thin

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4. *The Travancore State Manual* by Sri Nagam Aiya Volume 1 published by Asian Educational Services, New Delhi.
 5. *The Travancore State Manual* by Sri Nagam Aiya Vol. I published by Asian Educational Services, New Delhi

plates of the thickness of ordinary paper and later cut into small pieces and ground on a stone with sand and quick-silver. The resultant fine pasty substance is laid on the copper rings which are polished to the maximum. Later it is heated over the fire when the quick-silver disappears. This process is said to be repeated seven times and only then the original copper rings assume a shining liquid molten golden colour. The artisans of Kerala are experts in this work. It is believed that this Dwajasthamba built of special teak came from a site 48 kms. away without being allowed to ever touch the ground and get defiled. This colossal feat was possible with the help of elephants!

The moolathana (sanctum sanctorum) is a small room with three doors. This is also a unique feature to be found only in the Anantha Padmanabha swamy temple and in the temple at Tiruvattar. The devotees stand on a large single slab of granite (ottakkal mandapa) measuring 20' by 20' and 2 1/2' thick. The residents say that this huge single (ottakkal) stone was brought not by human hands alone but with the help of Lord Padmanabha Himself. The local residents point to a deep pit in the neighbouring mountains from which they claim this huge stone was quarried.

The darshan of the deity can be had by standing on the Mukha ottakkal mantapa. A darshan of the Thirumukham (face) can be had through the door on the southern side. The Thiruvadi (sacred feet) of the Lord can be seen through the door on the northern side and the middle part (Nabhikamala) can be seen through the doorway in the middle.

The deity here is seen in the Bhujangasayana pose facing east. The consort is known as Sri Hari Lakshmi. The theerthas are three viz. Matsya, Padma and Varaha theerthas. The tower over the garbhagriha, i.e. the vimana is known as Hemakuta vimana. The Perumal is said to have given darshan to Indra, Chandra and Rudra.

Let us now turn to the sthala purana of this divya desa. There are three stories connected with the origin of this temple. One story dealing with the origin of the Padmanabhaswamy tem-

ple is handed down from generation to generation and is still sung as a lullaby by women in Tiruvananthapuram. This version says that the Bilva Mangala Swamiyar whose name is associated with many a temple in the Malabar area of Kerala, is the sage who was closely associated with the consecration of this temple. It is said that he used to perform his daily pooja to the salagramas which he had. While performing the pooja and meditating on Mahavishnu he used to find that a young child would interrupt him every day by displacing the salagramas and flowers and annoying him. But when the Swamiyar opened his eyes the child would disappear. One day he felt that the child had crossed his own limits of tolerance and in a fit of anger he hit the child with his hand. The child felt hurt and told the Swamiyar that he was none other than the deity he was worshipping and as he had hit him, he was going away to Ananthankadu and that if he wished to see him he could come there. The swami opened his eyes and felt very dejected and distressed. He ran in the direction in which he saw the child run. Tantalisingly he could hear the jingling sound of the child's waist and ankle ornaments. He felt he also saw little footprints of the child on the loose sand. Yet he could never catch up. Unmindful of hunger or thirst the Bilvamangala swami went on following the direction from where the jingling noise of the anklets was heard. One day he reached a spot where he heard the cry of a child. He saw a Pulaya woman threatening her weeping child with the words that if it continued to weep she would throw the child out into the Ananthankadu. The moment the words "Ananthankadu" was uttered by the Pulaya woman the Swamiji perked up his ears and his joy knew no bounds. He asked the lady where that Ananthankadu was. The pulaya woman showed him the direction to the Ananthankadu whereupon the Swamiyar proceeded a few paces and lo and behold the sound of the waistband bells was heard again. Suddenly a huge 'Iluppa' (bassialongifolia) tree came down with a loud thud. The swami saw Vishnu lying on His Adishesha with all His four arms in a grand endearing pose. The idol however was so long that it extended from Thiruvallar to Thirupappur with only the middle portion at Thiruvananthapuram. The swamiyar fell at the feet of the Lord

and sought to be forgiven. The Lord blessed him! The swamiyar then asked the deity to contract himself into a smaller form so that he could offer his worship and stay in the same place. The deity shrank in fulfilment of the desire of the devotee. The Bilva Mangalaswami offered worship to the deity and did pradakshina to the smaller idol. It is said that the Iluppa tree which fell indicating the spot where the Lord was resting was carved out into the image of Lord Mahavishnu in repose. This was the idol which was worshipped for a long time until it was replaced by the present idol made out of salagramas. It is also said that the Bilva Mangala swamiyar offered neivedya of rice kanji along with salted mango pieces to the deity in a coconut shell during the morning pooja. These were articles readily available in the forest area. Even today, the neivedyam offered to the Perumal consists of sweet rice porridge along with salted mango pieces in a coconut bowl. But the bowl is today encased gold. The pulaya woman was believed to have helped the Swamiyar with husking the paddy with her own hands for being offered by the Swamiyar as neivedya to the deity. In recognition of the service rendered by her, the Maharaja of Travancore is believed to have offered her a patch of paddy field so that she and her family could live comfortably. This field is called Puthari Kantam and lies in front of the eastern fort gate at Tiruvananthapuram. As the Bilva Mangala swamiyar believed to be a Namboodiri brahmin was the first person to have discovered the deity at Tiruvananthapuram even today the Nambudiri sanyasins are given preferential right to perform the poojas to Lord Padmanabhaswamy besides the Pottis (poojaris) appointed specially for the purpose by the maharaja.

A slight variation of this story says that Bilvamangala swami himself hailed from Dakshina Karnataka region. There is a lake temple at Ananthapuram 34 kilometers south of Mangalore. The deity there is also Anantha Padmanabha and He is seen in a sitting posture on Adishesha. The peculiarity is that this temple is built in a lake. The bottom portion of the temple is submerged in water. There is a foot bridge connecting the main gopura with the sanctum sanctorum. There is a cave in the northeast corner of

the lake. It is believed that it was at this place that Bilvamangala swami was praying when the Lord appeared as a child and it was from here that the child disappeared when reprimanded by Bilvamangala swamy. He ran through that cave and the swamy also followed through that cave. The cave is believed to be about seven kilometers long and then comes out near the sea coast. Later the swamy walked along the sea coast till he reached Ananthankadu, the present Trivandrum. This is how the advocates of this slightly elaborated sthalapurana trace the presence of Tulu brahmin priests at Anantha Padmanabhaswamy temple to Bilvamangala swami who hailed from Karnataka.

The second story connected with the origin of the temple is found in Ananthasayana Mahatmyam. Some old palm-leaf records also contain this legend. As per this record this temple was established by a Tulu brahmin hermit by name Diwakar Muni on the 950th day of Kali yuga. It is said that Diwakar Muni was doing penance in Aathartha Desa. One day Lord Vishnu appeared before him in the form of a beautiful child. The sanyasi was taken up by the charms of the child and requested him to stay with him. The child agreed but laid down the condition that the sage should never get upset with his behaviour and not lose his temper whatever be the provocation. The hermit agreed. One day when the muni was in meditation the child took the salagramas being worshipped by this sage and put them into his mouth. The muni felt that this was an unforgivable desecration and so got angry with the child. The child then reminded the saint about his promise and as he had lost his temper he said he would leave. He however added that if the saint so wished he could see him again in Ananthankadu, i.e. the forest of Ananthan. The sage was very sad. He left the place where he was sitting and started searching for the Ananthankadu. He reached a wooded area near the sea coast and he felt that he saw the particular form of the child which was with him and vanishing into a huge Iluppa tree. He went running to the Iluppa tree. The tree fell down and he saw the shape of Mahavishnu in sayana pose. The divine form was nearly 13 kilometers in length with the head in Thiruvallar, a place about five kilometers from the present fort. The feet of the deity was at

Thiruppapur (eight kilometers in the opposite direction). The sanyasi was mesmerised by the majesty of the Divine form and he pleaded with the Lord to assume a smaller form which could match his limited field of vision. It is said that the Perumal obliged the devotee and that is the form of Lord Padmanabhaswamy in the present temple at Thiruvananthapuram.

It will be noticed that the two sthalapuranas are almost identical with the exception that one refers to Bilva Mangala swami and the other refers to Diwakar muni; but for the difference in the name of the sages, rest of the facts correlate. To substantiate the theory that it was Diwakar muni, the Tulu brahmin hermit who discovered this temple, even today nearly half the poojaris at the Padmanabhaswamy temple are from Tulu area in Karnataka. Bilva Mangala swami was a great Krishna bhakta. He authored the great book Krishna Karnamrutam. The swamiyar Madam at Tiruvananthapuram is believed to be built over his samadhi.

A third legend connected with this temple mentions one other episode. It is said that in Ananthankadu where the present temple stands there lived a pulaya couple. They were engaged in agricultural operations. One day the wife heard the cry of a baby and when she turned her head she saw a beautiful charming little child with a divine aura on its face. The cry of the child aroused her maternal instincts and she is said to have nursed the baby and left the contented baby under the shade of a tree and returned to her workspot. When she turned her head she was horrified to see a huge five-headed serpent spreading its hood and sheltering the child from the blazing heat in the forest. This miracle was noticed for many days. This news of the unusual phenomenon spread across the land till it reached the ears of the ruler of Travancore. He immediately visited the spot and ordered a temple to be built at the spot as he recognised Mahavishnu and Adishesha in the child and serpent.

As stated earlier, it was Marthanda Varma, the Maharaja of Travancore who did a lot for this temple. It was he who reconstructed the wooden sanctum sanctorum and replaced the old wooden idol of the Lord with a new one made out of salagramas.

And as a mark of total unconditional surrender to the Lord, it was this king who, in January 1750 (925 Malayala Era) came to the temple and surrendered the state, and all he had as a king to the Lord Sri Padmanabhaswamy at the sanctum sanctorum and proclaimed that henceforth he and his liege will be known as Padmanabha dasas. He also made the conch as the emblem of the State. Thus arose the close association of the Maharajas of Travancore with the temple, when Marthanda Varma proclaimed to the whole world that surrender to God, absolute surrender of all, will ensure absolute protection by the Supreme i.e. the philosophy of saranagathy.

The administration of this temple in the early days vested in a council of Ooralars, known as "Ettra Yogam". But later on with the rulers of Travancore taking more interest and especially from the reign of Marthanda Varma onwards, the powers of the Ooralars in the management of the temple diminished and the role of the Maharaja increased.

A day in the temple runs with clock-work like precision, beginning at 4 a.m. Between 8.00 and 9.00 a.m. even today members of the royal family visit the temple everyday. In the evening there are two poojas known as Attazha pooja and Arthajama pooja. The former takes place a little after the evening deeparadhana which is one of the most important pooja timings in this temple. At that time, the image is beautifully decorated with sandal, flowers, silk clothes and the inner shrine is brilliantly lighted. The daily run of poojas closes at about 10.00 p.m. Mr. Nagam Aiya details the worship offered on any one day at this temple and concludes by saying that this temple "is a centre of attraction to the young and old by its perfect system of worship, by the sweet fragrance and peace it permeates, the health and recreation it offers, its remarkable neatness, its marvellous punctuality and regularity in all its varied functions, the divine beneficence which it dispenses and built by the devotion and reverence and the order which it silently inculcates on the thousands of votaries that visit it"⁶. Even today for many of the local residents the half an hour or

more spent in circumambulating the temple is a spiritually ennobling experience.

SCULPTURE:

This temple has a wealth of excellent sculptured pieces. Even here, Sri Nagam Aiya in his book "The Travancore State Manual" has really done yeoman service in elucidating and recording for readers in great detail the marvels of the sculptured items found in the precincts of this temple. Earlier in this chapter, mention has already been made of the figures of ladies with lamps carved out of the stone in the Seeveli mantapa. The "Aayarkkal mantapa" which is also known as Kulasekhara mantapa is also full of excellent specimens of carvings in stone, which an author refers to as "ageless exquisite pieces of sculptural rethrin"⁷. It is said that the Maharaja of Travancore brought talented artisans from all parts of India and personally supervised their work to ensure a very high quality of artistic pieces inside the temple. In this context, there is an interesting story (however not corroborated with any recorded evidence) which is often told. It says that once an artisan who was working on a delicate figure was concentrating so much on his work that without turning his head he called out to his assistant to hand over to him betelnut for chewing. Unfortunately the assistant was not present at that time, but the Maharaja who was passing by did not want the concentration of the artisan to be distracted by having to call for the assistant again. So without any hesitation, he is believed to have handed over the chew to the artisan. Such was the Maharajah's enthusiasm and concern for filling the temple with excellent sculpture. The sculptor knew from the manner in which the chew was handed over to him that it was not his usual assistant! When he turned his head and found to his dismay that it was the Maharaja who had acted the part of his servant, he felt so frightened and humbled. He attempted to cut off his own finger as he felt that the finger had offended the royalty. Of course the king prevented such an extreme proof of loyalty. The story even if not true, illustrates the

7. *Pilgrims Guide to Guruvayoor and a few other Vaishnava temples*
Page 81.

fact that the Maharajas of Travancore have taken and continue to take a personal interest in the affairs of the temple. To quote Mr. Nagam Aiya again, the excellent specimens of stonework displayed in the Kulasekhara mantapa prove "that the obdurate granite has been made to bend and mould in obedience to the artist's chisel in very remarkable and unlikely ways"⁸ He continues and says that some of the pillars "are so richly and delicately carved that words fail to express the delight and admiration which every visitor feels".

What is more, as illustration of the cosmopolitan outlook of healthy religious toleration in evidence among the Hindus of those days, one finds that though this temple is dedicated to Lord Vishnu, the corridors in this temple have many sculptured figures of Siva and allied deities. At one place one can see the figure of Lord Mahavishnu portrayed as sitting on Adishesha with his five hoods held as a canopy over the god. The hoods are so delicately the realistically carved out that one cannot but notice the true to life delicate lines with black marks in the hoods. Close to that idol are portrayed Garuda and Hanuman standing in reverential pose. Not very far away is the carved image of Vignesvara in a sitting posture with His unmistakable portly belly. The artisans have made Ganesa's figure so realistic that they even depict three Potti brahmins performing pooja to Him! One has neivedyam in his hand. To quote Mr. Nagam Aiya again "the solid figure of Potti brahmin performing pooja in a sitting posture, an image a foot and a half in height seems to be a most magnificent piece of artistic work."⁹ The picture of Siva with the deer in His hand with the Moon and the Ganges in the form of a woman very clearly displayed on the jata or the plaited hair shown as a knot on the crown, all these are illustrative of the excellent manner in which even delicate details are eloquently depicted veritable sermons on stone. Scenes from Ramayana and Bhagavata in a connected manner are depicted on the pillars and the verandahs of Kulasekhara mandapa. To quote Sri Nagam Aiya again, the verandah beam

8. *Nagam Aiya's Travancore State Manual Volume P.77*

9. *Ibid*

with the first scene in Ramayana, viz. the Putrakameshti yagam, and going on to entrusting of Rama, Lakshmana by Dasaratha to Visvamisra, the killing of Tataka in the forests, the Ahalya sapavimochana scene, the departure of Sri Rama, Lakshmana and Sita for the forests, the crossing of the river Bhagirathi in a boat, the chariot that brought them from Ayodhya to the riverside standing on the banks of the river, the interview of Rama with the hermits of the forests, the joy visible on their faces, the stealing of Sita by Ravana, the fighting between Rama and the rakshasas, the friendship of Sugriva, Hanuman and Sri Rama, the death of Vali, the rough sea with its huge waves and Hanuman crossing it to Lanka and later his setting fire to the city of Lanka, with beautiful discernible depiction of smoke arising from the fire are all presented in sequential breathtaking beautiful manner. The beams also contain scenes from Bhagavatam again represented in a connected manner. Trees, bushes, parrots, squirrels, monkeys, elephants etc. are all carved in a lifelike and artistic manner. Nagam Aiya says "such a magnificent work of art cannot but excite wonder and admiration in the minds of the aesthetic among the connoisseurs of the west or the east. Broadly stated, in these sculptured figures are correctly represented the elements embodied and passions personified. Some are figures represented as grasping sceptres and shields, symbols of justice and ensigns of religion or weapons of war and trophies of peace. Some of them have aspects that inspire terror while others are distinguished by placid serenity and benignity of countenance and some others again betray evident marks of dejection and inward anguish"¹⁰. As it is not possible in this short chapter to quote more elaborately from the poetic prose of Sri Nagam Aiya, I would sincerely and seriously suggest that those who are interested in studying about the wealth of the sculptural reliefs found in this temple along with details of temple rituals and practices of this temple, refer to the highly readable, engrossing and interesting Manual produced by Sri Nagam Aiya in three volumes on Travancore State. Usually state manuals of post independence vintage are dry as dust chronicles but this is an ex-

ception as it is evidently the work of a great committed and gifted writer. Needless to say similar pieces of beautiful carvings are available in many of the equally famous temples in the south, especially the temple of Lord Srinivasa at Tirupati or of Lord Ranganatha at Srirangam. The mere fact that other temples have equally brilliant sculptured pieces in no way reduces the beauty and life that has been blown into these pieces of stone by the highly skilled artisans of Kerala.

THE FESTIVALS:

There are two main festivals celebrated in this temple. One is in the month of Meenam (March-April) while the other one is celebrated in the month of Thulam (September-October). Both the festivals last for ten days with Kodiyettam (flag-hoisting) on the first day, Palli Vetta and procession on the 9th day with the Arattu of the deities (ritual bath) on the 10th day. The hunting ceremony on the 9th night is very symbolic. Vishnu as the Supreme Protector of the Universe sets out on His hunt to destroy the demons. In the pre-independence days the Maharaja used to go in the procession in front of the God to a place which is a furlong outside the temple. The procession would just stop in front of the Sundara Vilasam palace in Tiruvananthapuram fort. It is said that about 200 years ago this was the very spot where an unsuccessful attempt was made on the life of Marthanda Varma. Even today a tall shrubbery in the spot stands for the forest. In the ancient days it must have been a thick jungle. The mock hunt is acted to such perfection that absolute silence is observed till the hunting spot is reached. The deities march is accompanied by torches; but there is no music, no conversation, but only absolute silence so that the evil forces would not get forewarned! On reaching the spot, the Maharaja draws a bow and lets loose arrows at three coconuts placed in the shrubbery. These coconuts symbolically represented the evils to be destroyed! The Maharaja does the hunting as the God's representative. As soon as the arrows are shot, music is played and drums are sounded, victory is heralded and the victorious joyous procession gets back to the temple. This ceremony is known as Palli Vetta. After the trium-

phal return, the image of Vishnu is accommodated in a separate place. It cannot return to the sanctum sanctorum till it is given a purificatory bath the next day as it has undergone symbolic pollution due to the blood shed in the hunting expedition and killing of the demons! This explains the Aarattu procession the next day. The images of Padmanabha, Krishna and Narasimha are carried along a three mile route to the edge of the Arabian sea to a place known as Sankhumukham. The members of the royal family, the armed police contingents along with temple accessories accompany the procession. The processional deities are then given a ritual bath in the sea at sun set, and are brought back to the temple. Thus, the pollution caused by taking of life in the hunting expedition is symbolically ceremonially washed away. The pomp and pageantry accompanying this festival in the princely days was akin to what was associated with the Dasara celebrations of Maharajah of Mysore.

Sri K.R.Vaidyanathan in his book says "the two processions are perhaps the most esoteric in symbolising spectacularly the triumph of good over evil, the extirpation of that which obstructs the spiritual life and the attainment of purification and peace through destruction of the passions. If the temple, is a representation of the cosmos, such ceremonies carried out through the art of symbolic presentation, anticipate the final withdrawal of external universe into the being of Brahma"¹¹.

I.H. Cousins refers to this festival and says "assuredly art has no profounder impulse or vision"¹².

Besides these two festivals, one other important event celebrated in this temple is the Bhadra deepam, in the month of Mithuna (July) and Kanya (January). This festival lasts for seven days. The other great festival celebrated once in six years is the Murajapam. The Murajapam is a fantastic ceremony. The first Murajapam was celebrated in 925 M.E. (1749-1750) by Maharaja Marthanda Varma. It is said that he started this massive

11. *Temples and Legends of Kerala* by K. R. Vaidyanathan

12. *I.H.Cousins - Arts & Crafts of Kerala, Paico, Cochín*

ceremony lasting for 56 days to expiate for the sins of having taken the lives of so many people during the innumerable wars of conquest that he undertook while expanding his small Venad territory to bigger Trivandrum State. In order to re-establish peace, prosperity and happiness in his kingdom through divine grace, he performed the Mura japam. Sri Nagam Aiya has elaborately written down the details of the Murajapam function which was celebrated in 1905. As this festival both in its content as well as its duration is something unique, I have given an extract of the Murajapam ceremony held in 1905 as detailed by Sri Nagam Aiya in Appendix I of this book. However, here I wish to only briefly touch upon the highlights of that Japam festival for the benefit of those who may not have the time to read the details. The word Murajapam literally translated means "a course of recitation of Vedas". This ceremony is said to have a religious as well as a political aspect. The religious aspect is the focus on the expiation of sins and the overall welfare of the kingdom, by propitiating the deities especially Sri Padmanabhaswamy. The political aspect of this festival arose out of the fact that when the festival was started, it was an 'at home' extended by the Maharaja to the Nambudiris who were the original landlords of Kerala, so as to keep them in good humour! The Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda and the Sama Veda are recited seven times over during this festival lasting for 56 days and the grand finale is lighting of Laksha deepas. During the festival, Murajapam (recitation of vedas) Mantra Japam, Sahasranama Japam, Jala Japam (standing in knee deep water and reciting) ceremonies are observed. On all the 56 days thousands of people used to be fed. Today feeding on that scale does not take place. On the last day of Mura japam as well as Badra Deepam festivals, the temple is illuminated. It is a rare sight. In the words of Sri Vaidyanathan, "once upon a time all the Laksha deepas were oil lamps which surged with life and wove endless patterns in the waters of the temple tank, viz. Padma theertha; but today it is mostly electric bulbs; still it is fun, glory and gaity"¹³. The corridors of Seeveli mantapa, the outer walls of the sanctum

sanctorum, the temple tower are all lighted with coconut oil lamps or electric bulbs as the case may be. But the overall impact on the minds of the visitors is something divinely awe-inspiring. Sri Nagam Aiya goes to the extent of saying "Readers will not have seen anything like it in any other part of India. It is impossible to describe in words what beggars the imagination"¹⁴.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

There are a number of interesting inscriptions in this temple.

On the northern wall of the Krishna swami shrine in the Padmanabhaswamy temple records a gift of a silver drum to the Krishna temple at Trivandrum by Goda Marthanda of Kolamba in the month of Dhanus when Jupiter was in Kataka¹⁵.

On the mantapa in front of the Krishna shrine in the Padmanabha swamy temple, there is a record relating to the period of Adityavarman which says that he built the temple of Krishna and mantapa in front it as well as the Gosala¹⁶.

On the southern wall of the Krishna shrine in the Padmanabha swamy temple, there is a record to the effect that two lamps were gifted to this shrine¹⁷.

On the base of the eastern and southern wall of the Krishna shrine, there is a record to the effect that land was gifted to the temple in order to meet the expenses towards burning a lamp¹⁸.

On the two bases of the Tulabharakkal in Padmanabhaswamy temple, there is a record which says that king

14. *The Travancore State Manual - Sri Nagam Aiya Volume 1 pp.*

15. *Travancore Archaeological Series Volume 3 P.46 and Travancore Inscriptions - a Topographical list by R.Vasudeva Poduval page 276 item 10 and Topographical list of inscriptions by V.Rangacharya S.No.203 P.1717..*

16. *Ibid volume 1 page 172 Item 9 of R.Vasudeva Poduval's book page 276 and S.No.204 of V.Rangacharya's book page 1717.*

17. *Ibid volume 3 page 44-46 Item 13 of R.Vasudeva Poduval's book page 277 and S.No.205 of V.Rangacharya's book page 1717.*

18. *Travancore Archaeological Series Vol. 3 page 44-46 Items 13 & 14 of R.Vasudeva Poduval's book P.277 and S.Nos. 206 and 207 of V.Rangacharya's book Page 1717.*

Vira Ravivarma performed the Tula purusha ceremony and that the Tula purusha mantapa in commomeration of the event was built by the king's consort Iraiymkuttiyammal. The inscription even says that on the when the Tula purusha ceremony was performed, Saturn stood in Tula rasi and Jupiter in Kanya rasi on Saturday 12th Muthuna Nakshatira Punarvasu. It is indeed a perfect recording of the event. This incident is equated to the 20th of June 1601 AD¹⁹.

On the base southern side of the front mantapa close to the Orraikkal mantapa, there is an inscription relating to the period of the king Balamarthandavarman which says that the image of Padmanabhaswamy was set up with the help of Balaranya Ksoni Deva and his disciples²⁰.

On the same southern side of the front mantapa close to the Orraikkal mantapa mentioned above, there is an inscription relating to the same king viz., Balamarthandavarman records that Balamarthandavarman, the nephew of Ramavarman and the new ruler of Vancibhumi began re-constructing the temple of Padmanabha with the help of brahmin archetect Balakanta and he had it completed in K.A. 908²¹.

On the base of the mantapa front of the central shrine of Padmanabhaswamin temple at Trivandrum, there is an inscription relating to the Travancore dynasty of king Virarama Keralavarman. It records grant of land for feeding brahmanas and for raising flower gardens²².

Another inscription on the slab forming the base of the Orraikkal mantapa records that the stone reached Trivandrum in K.A. 906 on Chaitra sukla paksha dwadasi Thursday²³.

19. *Ibid* volume 2 page 28-30 and S.No.213 of V.Rangacharya's book Page 1717

20. *Ibid* volume 1 page 40 Item 4 of R.Vasudeva Poduval's book page 275 and S.No. 218 of V.Rangacharya's book page 1717.

21. *Ibid* page 41 Items 4 and 5 of R.Vasudeva Poduval's book P. 275 & S.Nos. 217 of V.Rangacharya's book page 1717.

22. *Ibid* volume 6 page 66 Item 2 of R.Vasudeva Poduval's book page 274.

23. *Travancore Archaeological Series Vol. I* page 41 S.No.219 of V.Rangacharya's book page 1717

On the eastern base of the mantapa to the right of and contiguous to the Krishnaswamin shrine in the Padmanabha swamy temple at Trivandrum, there is an inscription. It is not dated to any particular year. But it is presumed that it approximately relates to the 12th century AD based on the script in the inscription. It registers a gift of land made by Jotiyagnan alias Sri Padmanabhapiyan of Salagramam for the supply of oil for the bath of God Krishna of Tiruvayambadi in Trivandrum²⁴.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalvar is the only alvar who has done mangalasasana to the Lord of this divya desa. He has composed eleven pasurams praising this Lord. In the earlier Thiruvaimozhi pasuram starting with the words "Tala Tamarai", he has sung the praise of the Lord at Thirumoghur. In this set of pasurams, he is singing the praise of the Lord at Thiruvananthapuram. In the later pasurams, Nammalvar sang the praise of the Lord in the different divyadesas like Thiruvattar, Thirumaliruncholai and Thirupaer Nagar etc. Some wonder why this decad of Thiruvaimozhi is so full of references to the various Lords of different divya desas. The commentators say that the alvar is aware that his time in this world is fast coming to a close and that he will be ascending to Paramapada soon and that Lord will be conferring moksha on him shortly. Like any traveller who before boarding train takes leave of all his favourite relatives whom he may not meeting again, the alvar in this pasuram is taking leave of the Perumals of different divya desas for whom he has a special affection and soft corner by mentioning them in his pasurams. Thirumangai alvar in his Peria Thirumozhi, in the decad starting with the words "Oru nall sutram", in each pasuram mentions two divya desas atleast. Bhattar a noted commentator said in very pithy terms that this is symbolic and reminiscent of what happens in usual life. He said when a girl is given in marriage, there comes a time when she has to leave her parental roof for that of her husband and that it is but natural that she then goes about visiting her relations and friends at this end to

take leave of them. So also the alvar, as the time for departing to Heaven draws near, he takes leave of the Lord in His archa roopa at various favourite shrines of His. This set of ten pasurams starting with pasuram 3678 are couched in words which explicitly mention the love and affection that the alvar has to the Lord at Thiruvananthapuram.

The pasurams of the Alvar with their meaning is given below:

Pasuram 3678:

கெடும் இடராய வெல்லாம் கேசவா வென்ன நாளும்
கொடுவினை செய்யும் கூற்றின் தமர்களும் குறுக கில்லார்
விடமுடை யாவில் வள்ளி விரும்பினான் கூரும்ப லற்றும்
கடமுடை வயல்அ னந்த புரநகர் புகுதும் இன்றே

Meaning:

In this Oh ye devotees come with me, let us go to Thiruvananthapuram today itself. The moment we utter the name Kesava, all our ills will disappear and the messengers of Yama who are known for their cruel deeds will not come near us and will run away from us. Thiruvananthapura is reclining on the snake Adishesha. That place is full of ponds and luscious fields and reverberates with the melodious music of t In this pasuram, the alvar says that whatever may be the obstacles in the way of their reaching the Lord at Thiruvananthapuram, the moment we utter the word “Kesava”, all the obstacles will automatically be removed and the path would be cleared. The Lord got the name Kesava, mainly because He destroyed the Asura Kesi who disguised himself as a horse and at the behest of Kamsa came to Gokuthe sole purpose of killing Krishna. Krishna split open the mouth of that Asura horse and killed him. Hence it is that it we utter the word Kesava, all the obstacles are removed.

Besides, the removal of the obstacles, the alvar also says that mere uttering of the name of Kesava will put God’s fear into the hearts of the messengers of Yama, the God of Death. He uses the words “Kootrin tamargalum kuruga gillaar” (The alvar

therefore reiterates that Kesava nama sankirtan will obviate experiencing the troubles associated with hell.

The alvar uses the words “Vida mudai aravil” and refers to the divine serpent Adisesha as a venomous serpent. All snakes have venom. But why does the alvar specially refers to this trait of the Divine couch Adisesha also having venom? It is said that in Paramapada where also the Lord is seated on Adisesha when the Nityasuris recite Sama gana, the serpent Adisesha which hears that sound waves produced by the chanting thinks that the enemies are marching towards God and is therefore agitatedly waiting to let loose tongues of poisonous flame (vishal) one of the pasurams, the alvar refers to the multifarious kainkaryas done by Adisesha, who is never away from his beloved Lord. He is the peethamba (yellow silk cloth) worn by the Lord; he is the sandals worn by the Lord when He walks. He is the bed when the Lord lies down. He is the chair on which the Lord sits; he is the umbrella which protects the Lord when he walks; this is no kainkarya which he does not render to his Lord; he is the inseparable among the Nityasuris, staying all the time with the Lord.

Pasuram 3679:

இன்றுபெயெய்ப் புது ராகில் எழுமையும் ஏதம்சாரா
குன்றுறேர் மாட மாடே குருந்துசேர் செருந்தி புன்னை
மன்றலர் பொழில் அனந்த புரநகர் மாயன் நாமம்
ஒன்றுமொ ராயிரம்மாம் உள்ளுவார்க்கு உம்பருநே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram, the alvar again praises the Lord at Thiruananthapuram divya desa. He says:

Oh Ye devotees, let us go to Thiruananthapuram which has huge mountain like mansions and luscious groves of Kurunda, punnai and sura punnai trees. Let us hasten to that place today itself so that we will be rid of birth in this world. If we utter anyone of the names of the Lord at Thiruananthapuram, we will reap the benefit which flows out of recitation of His thousand names (Sahasranama). To all those who utter even one name of the Lord at Trivandrum, that divya desa itself becomes Paramapada i.e. heaven.

Very often performing any good action in this world is faced with a number of obstacles which may delay the completion of the act. The alvar therefore says that if our good intention to reach Thiruvananthapuram meets with any obstacles, we should utter the magic word viz. anyone of the thirunamas of the Lord at Thiruvananthapuram and that would confer on us the same benefit which comes out of uttering the sahasranama; not only will we reach the Thiruvananthapuram, but we will also attain Paramapada. He therefore asks the devotees to involve their mind, body and tongue i.e. Trikarana in repeating God's names. He uses the words 'Ullu vaarku' referring to devotion thro' meditation with the mind (i.e. thought). He uses the words 'Narayana namam' (நாராயனநாமம்) to refer to the using the tongue for reciting the name of the God (i.e. word). He uses words "poi pugutheer" (போய் புகுதிர்) to refer to making the body involve itself in walking all the way to Thiruvananthapuram (i.e. deed). Thus, the Trikaranas, i.e. thought, word and deed would ensure attainment of salvation.

Pasuram 3680:

ஊரும்புட் கொடியும் அ:தே உலகெல்லாம் உண்டு மிழ்ந்தான்
சேரும்தண் ணனந்த புரம் சிக்கென்ப் புகுதி ராகில்
தீரும்நோய் வீணாக ளெல்லாம் திண்ண நாம் அறியச் சான்னோம்
பேருமோ ராயி ரத்துள் ஒன்றுநீர் பேசு மினே.

Meaning:

The alvar says:-

Oh ye men I assure you that all your ills and sins will get wiped out if with unswerving devotion and singleminded attention you reach cool Thiruvananthapuram and offer supreme devotion to the Lord Who resides there. He has Garuda as His vahana and also on His flagmast. He is the Lord Who during the great deluge swallowed all the worlds, kept it safe within Him and later brought them out to continue this creation. Please without fail utter atleast one of His thousand names and I assure you it will rid you of all your ills.

Here the alvar says that uttering even one amongst the myriad names of the Lord will help in ridding us of all our sins. Similar view is expressed by Andal also when she said "Theeyinil doosaagum seppu" (தீயினில் தூசாகும் செப்பு) i.e. she says that with the recitation of the name of Bhagavan our sins will get destroyed without any trace even as cotton consumed by fire. Such is the efficacy of chanting Bhagavat nama.

Pasuram 3681:

பேசுமின் கூசமின்றிப் பெருயநீர் வேளை துழ்ந்து
வாசமே கமழும் சோளை வயலணி யனந்தபுரம்
நேசஞ் செய்து உறைகி ன்றாளை நெறிமையால் மலர்கள் தூவி
பூசனை செய்தின் நார்கள் புண்ணியம் செய்த வாறே!

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar says as follows:

Oh ye Men! Without any hesitation, proclaim loudly that those who are able to worship and shower flowers on the Lord Who is residing at Thiruananthapuram, surrounded by the sea and full of luscious fields and scented flower groves are indeed very fortunate. What is the good deed they have done to merit such fortune?

Pasuram 3682:

புண்ணியம் செய்து நல்ல புனலொடு மலர்கள்தூவி
எண்ணுமின் எந்தை நாமம் இப்பிறப் பறுக்கும் அப்பால்
திண்ணம் நாம்அறியச் சொன்னோம் செறிபொழி லனந்தபுரத்து
அண்ணலார் கமலபாதம் அணுகுவார் அமர ராயார்.

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar assures us of the merits that flow out of worshipping the Lord at Thiruananthapuram. He says as follows:

Oh Ye man! I categorically, with conviction, affirm that those who worship the twin divine lotus feet of the Lord at Thiruananthapuram, full of scented groves, are equal to Nityasuris in being able to enjoy the divine presence. I request you to offer

flowers along with holy water and to repeat the Thiru nama of the Lord at Thiruvananthapuram and He will relieve you of all troubles and turmoils attendant with existence in this world.

The alvar uses the words “Ennumin entha namam” (எண்ணுமின் எந்தை நாமம்). The commentators say that there is no limitations of time or any other constraints for repeating the Thirunama of the Lord. The desire to utter the myriad names is itself enough to put an end to the cycle of birth, death, rebirth.

The alvar advises the devotees to sprinkle flowers along with holy water and then worship the Lord. It is said that it is not necessary that one should sprinkle only costly scented water for worshipping the Lord. So long as the water is pure, the Lord is willing to accept. That is why in the Gita Lord Krishna uses the words “**Patram, pushpam, phalam, toyam**”, thus conveying the thought that ordinary flowers, fruits, water and leaves will suffice for worshipping the Lord.

Pasuram 3683:

அமரராய்த் திருகின் றார்கட்கு ஆதிசே ரன்ந்தபுரத்து
அமரர்கோ னாச்சிக் கின்றுஅங் ககப்பணி செய்வர் விண்ணோர்
நும்களோ! செல்லக் கேண்மின் நாமும் போய் நனுக வேண்டும்
குமரனார் தாதை தூன்பம் துடைத்தகோ விந்தனாரே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram again the alvar pleads with us to worship the Lord at Thiruvananthapuram. He says that all those who worship the Lord at Thiruvananthapuram are equal to Nityasuris and they will be given the opportunity to render Antharanga kainkiarya to the Lord like Nitya mukthars. The Lord at Thiruvananthapuram is the one who rid even Lord Siva, the father of Muruga of His troubles. He is the master of Nityasuris. Oh Ye men, please listen to what I say. Let us go there and recite the holy names of that Supreme Lord.

Here the alvar refers to the incident in Lord Siva's life when it was only due to the intervention of Lord Vishnu that the Brahmakapala which had stuck to the finger of Lord Siva got

removed. The alvar also uses the words “Amarar aai Thirginraarkatku” (அமரராய்த திரிகின்றார்க்கு). This means that Brahma and other Devas are also coming to Thiruananthapuram to worship the Lord there. Further, by using the words “Amarar kone archikinru angu” (அமரர் கோன்ர்ச்சிக்கின்று) the alvar makes it clear that Vishvakṣenar along with his group is also coming to Thiruananthapuram and worshipping the Lord. What is more, the alvar uses the words “Naamum poi naduga vendum”, (நாமும் போய் நாணுக வேண்டும்) clearly conveying the thought that we should also hasten to that place and worship the Lord there. Thus, the alvar refers to the three classes of devotees worshipping the Lord at Thiruananthapuram. The acharya hrudayam says that this may perhaps be the reason why the Lord at Thiruananthapuram has the unique distinction of being seen by His devotees through three doorways! The Nityasuris to whom the Lord reveals His face worship the Lord through thye Mukhadwara. Brahma and other devas worship the Lord through the Nibhidwara (middle opening). Devotees like us are expected to worship Him through the Thiruvadi dwara, i.e. the doorway through which His divine lotus feet can be seen (Paada dwara).

Pasuram 3684:

துடைத்தகோ விந்த னாரே உலகுயிர் தேயும் மற்றும்
படைத்தளம் பரம முர்த்தி பாம்பனைப் பள்ளி கொண்டான்
மபைத்தனை வாளை பாயும் வயலணி யாந்தபுறம்
கடைத்தனை சிப்க்கப் பெற்றால் கடுவிறன களைய லாமே.

Meaning:

Here again the alvar expounds on the compelling need to worship the Lord at Thiruananthapuram. He says:

Oh Ye Men! Go to Thiruananthapuram, where fishes can be seen gamboling about in the waterways. The place is full of luscious fields. The Lord is seen in Seshasayana pose, i.e. lying down in the divine couch - Adishesha. He is the Lord, Who during the great deluge swallowed all the worlds including the living creatures in them, the devas and Mahath and Ahankara, and after the deluge was over, He recreated the entire world. He is the one

Who destroyed all the evil forces. Come to that Thiruvananthapuram, sprinkle scent around the temple precincts and decorate the place with coloured powder and do such other kankaryas and thereby get rid of even your worst sins.

It is said that even today some of the very sincere devotees who go to Thiruvananthapuram obey the instructions of Nammalvar in both letter and spirit and do take a few brooksticks in their hand and sweep the entrance to the temple at Thiruvananthapuram so that their path to heaven is smoothened!

The alvar uses the words “Pambanai male pallikondar”

The commentators say that while reposing on His divine couch Adidesha, the Lord in His yoganidra pose is all the time contemplating how to safeguard and protect the worlds that He Himself created.

Pasuram 3685:

கடுவினை களைய லாகும் காமனைப் பயந்த காளை
இடவகை கொண்ட தென்பர் எழிலணி யனந்தபுரம்
படமுடை யரவில் மள்ளி பயின்றவன்பாதம் கானி
நடமினோ நமர்களுள்ளிர்! நாம்உமக் கறியசொன்னோம்.

Meaning:

Here again the alvar exhorts us, mere mortals, to go and seek the Lord at Thiruvananthapuram. He says as follows:

Oh Ye men who are with me! Do not tarry. Immediately go to beautiful Thiruvananthapuram where the Lord, Who is the father of Manmadha, is residing happily. He is seen lying down on the many-hooded Adishesha. Worship that Ananthapadmanabha's lotus feet. Let me make it very clear to you that if you adhere to my advice, you can rid yourself of all your sins.

The alvar is asking his friends and devotees to make haste and without wasting any time go Thiruvananthapuram and worship the Lord there. It is said that sins are of two kinds i.e. one category are the sins which can be atoned for and got rid of by our own efforts. The second category of sins cannot be got rid of thro' our efforts but can be got rid of only thro' the Lord's help.

That is why the Lord uses the words “kodi vinai kadayal aagum” i.e. to say that even the worst of the sins will be redeemed with the Lord’s help.

The alvar addresses the Lord as the father of Manmadha. Manmadha is the child born of Krishna and Rukmini, known as Pradyumna. Manmatha has the unique quality of being eternally young and youthful. That is why the alvar uses the words “Kaamanai payantha kaalai” i.e. the young bull which fathered Kaaman, that is the Lord of Love (Manmadha). The alvar uses the words “Naam umakku ariya sonnome”.

The commentators refer to a story while explaining these words. It is said that Manakkal Nambi the sishya of Naathamuni, taught Alavandar all the basic tenets of Vaishnavism. But he advised him to go and meet Kurugai Kaavalappan and learn at his feet Yoga Rahasyas. Alavandar accordingly went to Kurugai Kavalappan and requested him to teach him Yoga rahasya. Sri Kavalappan specified a particular date and asked him to return on that day for learning from him yoga rahasya. In the meanwhile, Alavandar went to Srirangam. It was the Adyayana utsava period (Pagal Pathu - Raapathu festivals) i.e. the Thirumozhiand Thiruvaimozhi festivals were being celebrated. The Araiyaars were singing the songs; Alavandar was listening to their discourses. On a particular day, the Araiyaar was singing this particular pasuram i.e. pasuram 3685. He looked at Alavandar and went on repeating the last two lines in the pasuram which runs as follows: -

“Ezhil ani Ananthapuram padumudai aravill palli payinravan
paadam Kaana nadamino Namargalulleer naam umakku ariya
sonnom”

Alavandar felt that it was the divine message of the Lord conveyed to him through the Araiyaars asking him to proceed to Thiruananthapuram and worship the Lord there. Alavandar therefore went to Thiruananthapuram and stayed there. Suddenly one day he was going through the palm leaves (olai suvadi) in his possession and he saw that the date indicated on the palm leaf was the very day prescribed by Sri Kurugai Kavalappan to him for.

imparting the important basics of yoga rahasya. Alavandar felt sad that he was in distant Trivandrum and could not reach the teacher i.e. Kavalappan as he had no pushpaka vimana at his disposal! The story repeated by the commentators ends at this stage to convey the thought that even as Kavalappan fixed a day to his student the alvar is also fixing a time limit by which we should go to Thiruvananthapuram. But I am sure everybody will be eager to know whether at all Alavandar later mastered Yoga rahasya through Kavalappan or not. The untold story is that Kavalappan passed away before Alavandar could reach him. While Alavandar could not learn Yoga rahasya at the feet of Kurugai Kavalappan, it is said he did master it later either on his own or through some other acharya.

Pasuram 3686:

நாம் உமக்கு அறியச் சொன்ன நாள்களும் நணியவான
சேமநன் குடைத்துக் கண்டர் செறிபொழி லனந்தபுரம்
தூமநல் விரைம லர்கள் தூவளற ஆய்ந்து கொண்டு
வாமன னடிக் கென் றேத்த மாய்குதறும் வினைகள் தாமே.

Meaning:

The alvar here again says that worshipping the Lord at Thiruvananthapuram will redeem us of our sins. The alvar says as follows:-

Oh Ye men! Even as I warn you that my end is nearing, I exhort you to please go to Thiruvananthapuram full of flower gardens. A visit to that place will only bring you benefit. You will be able to personally experience the bliss. Please take with you scented sticks (dheepa), scented flowers and place them at the feet of Lord Vamana. Once you decide to go there and worship the Lord, your sins will automatically be redeemed.

The alvar is aware that time for his salvation is fast approaching and the day he is to leave for Paramapada is close. He therefore is concerned about the interests of those who are living in this world and appeals to them saying that they should listen carefully and follow very faithfully his last advice. This is very

reminiscent of the scene when during the great Mahabharata war, Bhishmacharya was lying down on his bed of arrows and waiting for the dawn of Uttarayana to give up his mortal coils. At that time, Lord Krishna took Dharmaputra to meet the grand old sire and told him that when the great Acharya gives up his mortal coils there will be none to authoritatively explain the true principles of dharma. Who will be there to listen to it even? Krishna therefore advises Yudhishtira not to waste time and before Bhishmacharya gave up his life, to receive instructions in the intricacies of dharma, morality, ethical values etc. Similarly, Nammalwar occupying a place similar to that of Bhishmacharya, so far as we are concerned, is, therefore requesting us to pay heed to this last sincere advice of his. This is the interpretation given by Nampillai in his "Eedu".

Pasuram 3687:

மாய்ந்தறும் வினைகன் தாமே மாதவா! என்னநாளும்
எய்ந்த பொன் மதிள் அனந்த புரக ரேந்தைக் கென்று
சாந்தொடு விளக்கம் தூபம் தாமரை மலர்தள் நல்ல
ஆய்ந்து கொண்டு ஏத்த வல்லார் அந்தமில் புகழி னாரே.

Meaning:-

In this pasuram the alvar says as follows:

Oh Ye devotees! The moment you utter the word Madhava, all your sins will automatically get destroyed. Oh you devotees who worship daily with dhoopa and scented flowers the Lord at Thiruananthapuram full of golden mansions where resides my Swami, will be blessed with everlasting fame.

The alvar says:

Those who worship the Lord at Thiruananthapuram will be blessed with a place and happiness which exceeds even that enjoyed by Nityasuris in Paramapada. It is said that in Paramapada there are no obstacles or distractions for worshipping the Lord. The only job of Mukhtars in Paramapada is to eternally enjoy the presence of the Supreme Lord in that land of unalloyed bliss and

beauty. But the devotees who are residing in this world, struggling all the time to have their minimum wants of food, clothing etc. met, will always have obstacles in the path of their attaining the Lord. In such trying circumstances those who still wish to have a divyadesa anubhava are very very few. Such rare mortals are said to be even greater than Nityasuris. The telling words used in Tamil to explain this situation are: “Vin ulaarinum seeriyarae”. Literally translated it means “more famous than the residents of heaven”.

Pasuram 3688:

அந்தமில் புகழ்அ னந்த புரநக ராதி தன்னை
கொந்தலர் பொளில்கு ராகுர் மாறன் சொல் லாயிரத்துள்
ஐந்தினோ டைந்தும் வல்லார் அணையர் போய் அமரு லகில்
பைந்தொடி மடந்தை யர்தம் வேய்மரு கொளினையே.

Meaning:

This is a phalastuthi pasuram. Nammalvar says that those who recite this decad of pasurams in the thousand pasurams composed by Kurugur Maran relating to the endless theme of Adi Purusha residing at Thiruvananthapuram full of flower groves, will be assured of a place in Paramapada. They will be blessed to enjoy the presence of the Lord in the company of the bejewelled divine damsels (divya apsaras).

The “Arayirapadi” one of the great commentaries on the Naalaayira divya prabandha, while commenting on this pasuram says, that the benefits promised by Nammalvar to those who recite this decad of pasurams on the Lord at Thiruvananthapuram is that they will be able to enjoy the company of the damsels in Paramapada! The words used in “aarayirapadi” are as follows:

“Priya thamargalukku

Priya thamaigal bhogyam aamaa polae”

It means those who recite this Thiruvaimozhi decad are the beloveds of the celestial damsels in Paramapada who play host to all newcomers to Heaven.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

கோள் ஆர்பொறி ஐந்தும் குன்றி உடலம் பழுத்து
மாளாமுன் நெஞ்சே! வணிங்குதியால் - கேளார்
சின்ந்த புரம் சுட்டான், சீசை முகத்தான், போற்றும்
அனந்தபுரம் சேர்த்தான் அடி.

Meaning:

Oh mind! offer worship to the Lord Padmanabha of Anantapuram before Your life ebbs out and you lose control over your senses and it becomes too late. Even the Creator four faced Brahma and Lord Shiva Who destroyed the Three towns (Thripura samhara) also worshipped that Lord at Thiruananthapuram.

* * *

TIRUVATTAR

Tiruvattar is one of the 13 divya desas in Malai nadu. It is situated in the Kalkulam taluk of Padmanabapuram division and the God Kesava Perumal of that temple is believed to have been worshipped by Moon God and Parasurama.

Tiruvattar is a sleepy village in the district of Kanyakumari. It derives its name from the river Paraliyar which encircles up this place. The temple can historically claim considerable antiquity among the temples of South India. It is situated about 18 miles west of Nagercoil and 28 miles east of Trivandrum. The temple is located in sylvan surroundings. It is a very ancient temple as it finds mention in Purananooru, an old Tamil anthology which has a verse mentioning Tiruvattar as the headquarters of an ancient chieftain called Elini Aadan. That chief was well known for his munificence and patronage to men of letters. His motto was Dharmosmat kula deivatam". This temple was also eulogised by Nammalwar in his Thiruvaimozhi. He called the place "Valamikkavaatharu". Thus, the temple at Tiruvattar can be held to have been in existence for nearly 1200 years and more. The poet Mangudi Kilar in verse 396 of Purananooru refers to the neervalam (abundance of water) in this place when he describes the place as "Valanir vaatharu". It is perhaps this proverbial prosperity of the land which added to the wealth of its charitably disposed chief Elini Aadan.

The place is also known as Adi Dhamasthalam, Dakshina Vaikuntam, Parasurama kshetram, Srirangam of Cheranadu. The temple is located in a compound of about 3 acres and 30 cents in extent. The temple stands on an elevated plane at nearly 55 feet above the ground level. A flight of steps from the roadside leads to the main entrance. The four walls surrounding the temple are more than 30 feet in height. From the top of the steps a gigantic gopuram built mostly in the Kerala style with a slant towards the traditional Tamil school is seen standing majestic with the sky as the background. Hundreds of bold reliefs of the gods of the Hindu pantheon beautifully and artistically sculpted are set on the four sides of the gopuram. The daily rituals in the temple are even today done as per Kerala tantram by Malayalee brahmins. The

head priests or Peria Nambi of Tiruvattar” as they are referred to is even today appointed by the Maharaja of Travancore. The said priest is to officiate for a period of three years during which he resides in the temple itself. He lives in Nambi madam. During that period he will have no contact with his wife and children.

It is believed that before Kaliyuga there were five mutts here on the banks of the Vattar. Sages like Vasishtha, Bharadwaja and others had their asrams here. The five mutts were known as Munikkal mutt, Ramana mutt, Panchanda mutt, Kanchi mutt and Marthanda mutt. As soon as Kali age started, the rishis are said to have entrusted these mutts to the Sri vaishnavas of Tirupati and the local Pillaimars. Later these priests also handed it over to the Travancore raja for maintenance. It is claimed that this was the temple which was originally worshipped by the Travancore maharajas and it is older than the Padmanabha swami temple at Trivandrum. The location of the Padmanabha palace near Tiruvattar lends credence to this theory.

The Perumal of this temple is known as Adikesava Perumal. He is seen lying down in bhujanga sayana pose facing west. The Thayar is known as Maragathavalli Nachiyar. The theerthas are Vattar and Rama theertha. The vimanam is Ashtanga vimanam. The decor inside and outside the temple reminds one very clearly of Lord Sri Padmanabha temple at Trivandrum. The similarity between the two with reference to the structural and sculptural and thematic details is so striking that one is forced to accept the theory that the temple of Sri Padmanabha was built with the Tiruvattar temple as model. That is why the former temple is an exact replica of Tiruvattar temple. In both the temples, the garbagriha has got three open doorways through which only one can view the moola vigraha. The two however differ in the following aspects. The Sri Padmanabha temple differs from the Tiruvattar temple slightly with reference to the internal construction. In the Sri Padmanabha temple at Trivandrum, there are two flag masts i.e. dwajasthambas one for Lord Padmanabha and the other for Lord Krishna whose shrine is also a part of the Padmanabha swami temple complex. The dwajasthamba in Padmanabha swami temple is golden whereas the dwajasthamba

in front of Lord Krishna's shrine in that temple itself is silver. In Tiruvattar temple, there is only one dwajasthamba, and that is encased in copper plate. In the Sri Padmanabha swami temple, the figures of dwara palakas, the Garuda and Sri Hanuman are sculpted in a very artistic manner. In Tiruvattar temple, the figures of Lakshmana, Indrajith, Pathanjali, Parasakthi, Kali, Bharata and others are sculpted. In Padmanabha swami temple in Trivandrum, Lord Siva is near the head of the Perumal whereas in Tiruvattar, He is seen near the foot. In Trivandrum Brahma emerges from the nabhi kamalam of the deity whereas it is conspicuous by its absence in Tiruvattar. The ottakal mandapa of Tiruvattar temple is slightly bigger in size. The mukha mandapa in front of the Sri Koil in Tiruvattar is a monolith mandapa. It is really an engineering marvel. It is 3 feet thick and measures 18x25 feet. The mandapa in Sri Padmanabha swami temple is slightly smaller and is about 20 feet square. Hanuman is sculpted in one of the pillars of Thiruvattar. There is no pooja for such Upadevas in Tiruvattar temple. It is believed that Adikesava Perumal of Tiruvattar is the elder brother of Sri Padmanabha at Trivandrum! The two idols are facing each other. The deity in Tiruvattar is facing west while the deity in Trivandrum is facing east so that it lends credence to the theory that the two brothers are facing each other exuding warmth and affection! The rituals and the festivals of the two temples are also very similar. It is believed that nearly 12000 salagramams covered by kandasari have gone into the making of Sri Padmanabha. The deity of Tiruvattar is also made in the same way, but it contains more than 16008 salagramams. The entire body of the Tiruvattar deity is covered with gold and sprinkled all over with small sand size diamonds and other precious stones. That is why, there is no abisheka for the main deity. In both the places, abisheka is performed only to the abisheka vigrahas (i.e. the archana murthis). Here let us digress a bit and see the interesting manner in which the idol of the main deity in Tiruvattar is believed to have been cast. The procedure is referred to as Kadu sarkarai yogam pratishtai i.e. first the idol is made with all the limbs as a human form. The idol is made out of copper, silver, gold, metals all molten together. In crucial places

like the heart etc. the salagramams are placed and then the form is shaped and moulded. While moulding some of the medicinal herbs and oils are also applied. Next jeevaa vahanam (uyir oottam) ritual is performed. Literally translated it means that life is transferred to the diol by performing certain specified poojas. It is because of this peculiar method of moulding the idol as against the normal sculpted pieces which one finds in the garbagrihas in the other divya desas, the main vigraha in this temple is not bathed with water. With reference to the celebration of the festivals also there is similarity in the procedures followed in both the temples. In Tiruvattar also there are two main festivals. One is in the month of Tula and the other is in the month of Meena. while the Maharaja of Travancore accompanies Arattu festival of Sri Padmanabha temple carrying the insignia of royalty viz. the sword, it is the representatives of His highness, the Travancore Maharaja viz. Avantharath potti who accompanies the procession with the royal insignia of the sword at Tiruvattar. This sort of connection with the Trivandrum royal family continues to be close even today as on the Tiruvonam day the main deity at Tiruvattar is covered by a silk cloth presented by the Maharaja of Travancore. There is a peculiar practice that is followed on Thiruvonam day when the carpenter of Tiruvattar will present to the temple a bow and a "palli villu" and an arrow after observing the stipulated austerities for three days. The carpenter makes the bow at a specified place. Once the job is completed, he is to return without looking back. Next day one of the brahmin priests collects the bow and delivers it to the maharaja of Travancore.

As stated earlier, the Sree kovil i.e. garbagriha has three doorways. The god Adikesava Perumal is seen reclining on the serpent king Adishesha. A full view can be had only through the three door openings of the Sri kovil. The left hand of the idol is hanging down. The right hand is in yoga mudra pose. The head is in the southern direction. While the head is placed in the southern direction, the face is facing the west. Adishesha has spread its hood on the head of the idol like an umbrella. A darshan of the Lord with His magnificent and majestic figure in solemn repose brings incomparable peace and happiness to the devotee. Adishesha

is represented as a three tiered coiled bed. We can see only one hood out of the five hoods as the other four hoods covering the god's head cannot be seen as the head of the deity with the crown (kireeta) goes into the hooded shade and hides the view of the hoods. The kireeta fits as it were into the alcove formed by Adisesha's spread out hoods. Through the first doorway one can see the Thirumukha (face) of the deity and the hood of Adisesha. Through the central doorway, one can see the archamurthi as also the vigrahas of Bhoomidevi and Lakshmidēvi. All these vigrahas are almost life sized. Everyday the archa vigrahas are taken around the prakaras of the temple. They are placed on a sila peetam outside the sanctum sanctorum for performing the abisheka. Through the third doorway one can see the Tiruvadi (Divine feet), Kasi linga and Thirparappumahadeva vigraha. Close by to the abisheka vigraha, there is a Garuda vigraha made out of pure gold. Two precious maragatha stones serve as the eyes of the vigraha and on its chest is placed another precious stone i.e. manikya. The invaluable precious stones and the pure gold with which the Garuda vigraha is made make the idol of Garuda absolutely enchanting. On the two main festivals held every year viz. during October-November and April-May respectively, the Lord is installed on the golden Garuda and taken round the streets. It is said to be a very beautiful sight.

Though the temple is facing west one has to enter the temple only through the eastern gate. Yet another interesting and intriguing factor which speaks volumes about the engineering skill of those who built the temple nearly 12 centuries ago is the fact that it has been built in such a manner that the rays of the Sun will fall on the feet of the God in the garbagriha in certain select months of the year. Thus in the month of Phanguni (March) from the 3rd to the 8th day, in the month of Puratasi (October-November) from the 3rd to the 4th day, the rays of the Sun directly fall on the feet of the deity in the garbagriha.

KESAN KESI ASURA SAMHARA LEGEND:

To now turn to the legends i.e. the sthala purana associated with this divya desam. The legend says that once upon a time,

Brahma wanted to have Vishnu darsanam in Kanchana Sringam. He therefore decided to perform a yaga at a place known as Mahendiragiri situated a little to the east of Tiruvattar. Somehow he failed to inform and associate His divine consort Goddess Saraswati with this yagna. The goddess was annoyed at this slight. As She was the goddess of learning, it is said that She decided to teach a lesson to Brahma by entering the tongues of those who were reciting the mantras and ensuring wrong rendition of the mantras. She wanted to thus strike a blow at the ahamkara of Brahma Who presumed that He could perform a yaga without associating His consort. As the yaga was not performed as per the ordained rites, two evil spirits one male and the other female emerged from the homa kunda (sacrificial fire). They were Kesan and Kesi. Kesi is also known as Parli. As they emerged out of the Homa kunda, they automatically became blessed with immortality which factor made them arrogant and aggressive. They started teasing the rishis and the devas. The rishis ran away in fright. The asuras became such a menace destroying everything around that the devas along with Brahma approached Lord Vishnu. The Lord listened to their tale of woe and promised to set right the situation. He took the form of Kesava and set out to destroy the asuras. There was a fierce fight for seven days. Due to the immortality and invincibility conferred on Kesan, he could not be killed. In the course of the fight, Kesava lifted the asura up and threw him down from the top of Mahendragiri. The place where Kesan fell is even today known as Kalligesam. But the asura was still not down and out. The lord residing in Shenbaga vanam i.e. Tiruvattar, then blew the conch i.e. Pancha janya and assumed His virat roopa. Kesan got frightened at the sound and the vision and he tripped and fell. Immediately Adishesha jumped into the fray and sprang on the fallen Kesan, coiled himself tightly round the body of Kesan and immobilised him. The Lord put the lid on the whole show by promptly lying down in His sayana pose on Adishesha. Thus, in spite of his immortality, Kesan was immobilised and he could not wriggle out. This explains how the Lord got the name Kesimadana nathan. Even though he was immobilised, Kesan was struggling hard to free himself. Though his body was

in a strait jacket, he started pushing his long arms out trying to get out of Adishesha's coils. Lord Kesava then installed Sivalingas on the outstretched palms. This accounts for the 12 Siva temples in places nearby. Siva is also believed to have offered prayers for the victory of Vishnu over Kesi. These 12 Siva sthalas which have Sivalayas even today are in and around Tiruvattar. The Siva sthala and the name of the Lord Shiva in the respective place is as follows:-

Tirumalai (Soolapani)

Thireeparappu (Jatadhara)

Thikkurichi (Mahadeva)

Thirunandikkara (Nandikesvara)

Ponmanai (Thimbilesvara)

Pannippakkam (Kirata murthi)

Kalkulam (Nilakanta swami)

Melaankodu (Kaala kaalar)

Thiruvidaicode (Jadai appar)

Thiruvithamcode (Parithipani)

Thiruppaniyode (Bakthavatchala)

Thirunattalam (Ardhanareesvara)

An interesting feature is that on Maha Sivarathri day even today the pilgrims, after visiting these 12 Sivalayas, finally worship Vishnu at the temple at Tiruvattar and only then treat the cycle of their pilgrimage as complete to get full blessings from the Lord.

Seeing her brother Kesan defeated, the sister Kesi got angry. She along with her friend Kodhai assumed the form of rivers and decided to seek vengeance. They started flowing fiercely from Malaiyagiri and encircled the shenbaga vanam (the place where the temple is situated). Some say that Bhoomidevi immediately raised the ground where Perumal was staying and that is why even today the temple at Tiruvattar is about 55 feet above the ground level. Yet another story says that seeing the waters of Kesi and Kodhai rushing towards the temple, Kesavan turned the flow of the water towards the ocean. The two rivers joined at a

place known as Moovaatru mukham. God is said to have cursed that they will not have punaragam. Kesi and Kodhai regretted and repented and sought sapa vimochanam from Perumal. Perumal graciously had a dip in the place where the two rivers joined and blessed them. That is why even today in the month of Panguni (March-April) when the utsavam is celebrated Perumal comes to the place where the two rivers meet viz. Moovatrumukham and has a holy bath thus reenacting every year the sapa vimochana incident.

THE STORY OF WASPS AND THE MOGHUL EMPEROR:

There is a very interesting story illustrating how Adikesava Perumal rushed to the rescue of His sincere devotee, the Raja of Travancore. It is said that in the latter half of the 17th century in Venadu kingdom, there was turmoil and unrest. Venadu consists of a part of present Kanyakumari district and present Trivandrum districts. The queen of Venadu Umai Emmai Rani left Trivandrum and went away to Nedum Mangadu about twenty kilometers away from Trivandrum after the murder of her five sons in a pond known in history as Kalippan Kulam incident. She was overcome with the grief at losing her five sons. She therefore paid no attention to the affairs of the kingdom. Seeing the capital without a ruler, an army chieftain under the Moghul emperor thought it was the best time to raid and annex the kingdom. He reached Manakadu, a place near Trivandrum and camped. Realising the danger to her kingdom, the queen approached and sought help from Raja Kerala Varma a relative of hers. The Raja collected his army to meet the moghul army on the battle field. The moghuls retreated southward. The moghul army chief camped on a hillside near Tiruvattar (Mukilankarai). The hill had only shrubs enough to hide the army chief. A fierce battle took place. Many died. When the final outcome was hanging in the balance, the raja got a bit worried. He went to the temple and prayed to Adikesava Perumal for help to vanquish the moghul army. He sang a self-composed song (14 verses) known as Pada Sankirthana or Adikesava sthavam. Even today every day at about 6 p.m. when deepa aradhana is done these 14 verses are sung. He finished his prayers. From no where

a swarm of wasps from inside the temple came out, went straight to the battle field and to Mukhilankarai stinging and attacking the moghuls including the chieftain and his horse. The frightened horse threw down the chief who was seated on him. The chief fell on the rocks and died. The moghul army was demoralised by the death of their leader. The rudderless army lost the battle and ran helter skelter. Many were imprisoned. Kerala varma Raja captured the 300 horses of the moghuls and formed a cavalry unit of his own! Even today there is a grave stone to indicate the spot where the mughal chief was buried; Nearby there is another mound where his horse was believed to be buried.

THE STORY OF ARCHA VIGRAHA:

It is said, in 1740 that Dasth Ali Khan, a nawab of Arcot plundered this temple and carried away the archa murthi. He dumped the vigraha in a lumber room along with heavy rubbish. Yet everyday the archa vigraha would come to the top. The relatives of the nawab, Chanda Sahib and Bada Sahib were intrigued by this unusual inexplicable occurrence. They made a hole in the pedestal (peetam) of the idol and tied it down with a chain. Yet the next morning the idol came up on the top! They tried their best to hold the idol down, but failed. Meantime, the Nawab's wife got severe stomach ache and was generally ill which defied all cure. Meantime, a temple officer (azhatti) had a dream directing him to go and meet the nawab and recover the idol. The azhatti accordingly went and told the nawab to restore the idol to its place and assured him that when he did so, his wife would be cured of the illnesses. Nawab returned the idol. Lo and behold his wife got cured. The repentent and thankful nawab is said to have gifted a gold cap and a gold plate weighing 388 tolas to Adikesava Perumal. Even today the cap and the plate will be shown by the priests to the devotees. Everyday when the idol is brought out for Sreebali i.e. food offerings, these two articles viz. the plate and the cap are used. In addition, the nawab made an endowment for a special pooja called Thiru Alla Pooja. This festival is celebrated in a small mantapa inside the temple. On the top of that mantapa, there is a vessel (kudam in tamil) with its mouth open on the top. It is said

that it is the practice amongst muslims to have the kudam i.e. vessel with its mouth open on the top when there is any joyful event like birth in their homes. The kudam or the vessel is kept upside down with its mouth down when there is death or mourning in the family. This festival is celebrated for 21 days and the neivedhya that is offered to the Lord on those occasions consists of a preparation made of beaten rice (avul and arisi pori அவல், அரிசி, பொரி). This neivedhyam is a typical muslim preparation.

There is another small side story connected with this main legend. When the azhatti was returning with the idol returned by the Nawab, he halted near a Siva temple at a place called Thaliyal to have his bath and perform other ablutions. He placed the idol on the ground. After he had finished his pooja, he tried to lift the idol and found that he could not lift it as the idol had got stuck to the ground. The azhatti reported this to the Travancore raja. The raja ordered a suddhi kalasam to be performed (purificatory rite). Only after the rite was performed the idol could be moved. In the months of October-November, even today this purificatory festival is performed at this place. It is known as Tulam Araatt. This holy immersion takes place in river Parali near the Shivalaya of Thaliyal. The idol of the Perumal is taken all the way from Tiruvattar to that place on the golden Garuda referred to earlier.

THE STORY OF THE BRAHMIN WIDOW AND THE PLATE OF RICE, SALT AND MANGO:

Raja Marthanda varma instituted an offering of a big size plate of rice and salted mango to Perumal. Story goes that once Marthanda varma was having a lot of problems. He was going about incognito trying to escape from his enemies who were pursuing him. At that time, he happened to reach a brahmin widow's hut for a night's rest and food. Not knowing that her visitor was a royal person, the brahmin widow offered a plate of rice with salted mango as a meal to the incognito king. Later when Raja Marthanda varma regained his kingdom and was safely esconsed on the throne, he remembered with gratitude the timely help ex-

tended by the poor brahmin widow to appease his hunger. He therefore instituted a permanent offering of a plate of rice and salted mangoes to the perumal in Adikesava temple and conferred the right of receiving this cooked rice salted mango offered as neivedhyam to the Lord to the brahmin widow and her family members. This arrangement is said to be continuing even to this day.

The legendary Tamil poetess Avvaiyar also stayed for several days at Tiruvattar. There is a place called Avvai ilam close to the temple which testified her stay in Thiruvattar.

Besides Kerala varma who prayed to Adikesava Perumal and then successfully defeated the enemies on the battle field, another raja who also met with success in the battle field after offering prayers to Adikesava Perumal was Raja Marthandavarma who visited this temple in 1741 BC and sought divine help for fighting the Dutch in the battle of Kulachal. He also vanquished Dutch armies.

POOJAS :

Some of the important festivals celebrated in this temple have already been mentioned in the preceding pages. One other festival which requires special mention is an annual festival known as Pushpanjali when flowers are offered to the deity at Tiruvattar by the priest of Trivandrum temple. In the usha pooja besides offering of rice and salted mango (story mentioned earlier), payasam is also offered to the Lord. Then follows what is called Veeralam payasam. This payasam commemorates the endowment by Raja Veera Kerala varma of ancient Travancore royalty. Veeralam is an abbreviation for Veera Kerala Varma. It is said that once upon a time, neivedhyam would be offered to the deity at the rate of one padi of rice per day for each saligramam inbuilt into the moola vigraha. But today what with the land reform legislations, AdiKesava Perumal Who was once the biggest landlord of Nanjainad has reached a situation where sufficient rice is not available even for performing all the nitya poojas and offerings.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

There are quite a few inscriptions relating to this temple detailed by R. Vasudeva Poduval in his book. A few amongst those are mentioned in the following pages¹.

There is an inscription on the north and east bases of the central shrine of Adi Kesava Perumal temple in this plate relating to the reign of Sri Vira Ravivarman Kulasekhara Perumal in Tamil records the additions and repairs made to the temple by the king, his two younger brothers Aditya varman and Ramavarman, their consorts Iraiyyuma Kuttiammai, Naacciyarammai².

Another inscription on the pillar of the surru mandapa in this temple records that that portion was built by two private persons³.

On a second pillar in the same surru mandapam, there is another inscription which says that the row of pillars was set up by Deiva Puthiran Iravi⁴.

On the southern wall of the Sri koil of this temple relating to the period of the king Sri Vira Udaya Marthandavarma Tiruvati refers to a gift of a land for services in the temple⁵.

On the northern wall of the western side of the first prakara in this temple, there is an inscription which records repairs and additions effected to the temple and grants of land made to the temple for lighting lamps⁶.

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1. *Travancore Inscriptions - A topographical list by R. Vasudeva Poduval Pages 253 to 259*
 2. *Ibid page 253 and Travancore Archaeological Series Volume I page 177*
 3. *Ibid page 253 and Travancore Archaeological Series Volume 7 page 122*
 4. *Ibid page 253 and Travancore Archaeological Series volume 7 page 122*
 5. *Ibid page 253 and Travancore Archaeological Series Volume I page 296*
 6. *Ibid page 254*

Yet another inscription on the western side of the temple of the first prakara records arrangements made for temple services⁷.

On the north and western bases of the Othakkal mantapa in this temple, there is an inscription relating to the reign of Vira Ravivarman alias Kulasekhara Perumal which records that the Othaikkal mantapa was constructed by the king and that the king was born in Kettai nakshatra. The names of his brothers and queen are also mentioned⁸.

Yet another inscription on the Balikal temple records that the metal casing for the stone bali kal in the temple was put up by one Kuttatti Icchamma Kutty⁹.

Another inscription on the base of the wall to the south of the Udaya Marthandan mantapa in the temple contains a portion of the historical introduction of the Chola king Rajendra Choladeva I (1013 - 1045 AD)¹⁰.

Another inscription on the base of the wall to the north of the same Udaya Marthanda mantapa, though damaged, appears to record some gift of lands made by Arasu Kesavan of Devanceri in Irana Singanallur for offering to the Perumal of Tiruvattar¹¹.

On the southern base of the mantapa in the first prakara there is yet another inscription relating to the reign of Vira Koodai Marthandavarman which records that some repairs were made to the temple by the agents of the said king when he was the hair of Travancore and that the old inscriptions of the temple were re-engraved on the walls and that certain renovations were made in the establishment¹².

7. *Ibid* page 2548.

8. *I bid* page 255 and Travancore Archaeological Series Volume-I Page 178.

9. *Ibid* Page 255 and Travancore Archaeological Series Volume 7 page 120

10. *Ibid* page 256 and Travancore Archaeological Series Volume 6 page 146

11. *Ibid* page 256 and Travancore Archaeological Series Volume 7 page 120

12. *Ibid* page 253 and Travancore Archaeological Series Volume 7 page 118

Another inscription on the northern base of the same Udaya Marthanda mantapa relates to the period of Ravivarman alias Kulasekhara Perumal and states that one Iyyappan built a portion of the mantapa during the time of Aditya varman, the younger brother of the king¹³.

Another inscription on the base of the mantapa in the north-eastern corner of the inner prakara relating to the reign of Ravivarman alias Kulasekhara Perumal says that the mantapa was built by an individual of the Tekki Netattu Illam in Tiruvattar desam¹⁴.

Another inscription on the base of the same mantapa is in Sanskrit and though damaged appears to be a Sanskrit version of the inscription mentioned in the immediate previous para¹⁵.

Another inscription on the base of the southern verandah says that one Patti was contributed by Kittinan¹⁶.

Another inscription on a stone partly underground in a surru called Taliyal at Tiruvattar says that one Dattan, Kandan of Mamballi gave Tamaraitturutti Puraijatam for a perpetual lamp to be lighted in the temple at Tiruvattar¹⁷.

SCULPTURE, PAINTINGS AND WOOD CARVINGS:

The temple is noted for its exquisite workmanship in stone, wood and paintings. The Udaya Marthanda mantapa in front of the sanctum sanctorum is elaborately carved and is regarded as a shining example of Kerala art and architecture. In the wooden ceiling of the mantapa, the picture of Vinayaka with His worshippers and a marriage procession is very exquisitely carved with

13. *Ibid* page 257 and *Travancore Archaeological Series* volume 7 page 121

14. *Ibid* page 257 and *Travancore Archaeological Series* volume 7 page 122

15. *Ibid* page 258 and *Travancore Archaeological Series* volume 7 page 122

16. *Ibid* page 258 and *Travancore Archaeological Series* volume 7 page 123

17. *Ibid* page 259

great attention to intricate details. Another mantapa near the sanctum sanctorum has a chain with all the links carved out of a single piece of wood. It is so delicate and looks like any usual iron chain with its links. The life size images of Lakshmana, Indrajith, Venugopala, Parasakthi, Brahma, Vishnu, Kalabhairavan, Nandhi, Nammalvar, Vyagrapadha rishi, Hanuman etc. seen in the Balikalpura mantapa are excellent marvellous pieces of sculpture. The images of Rathi and Manmatha also present a very enchanting picture. There is a wooden carving of Krishna playing on the flute. The fact that the people were so mesmerised by the sound of His music is brought out even in the wooden carving piece as we see that at the feet of Lord Krishna playing the flute, there is a tiger cub sucking milk from the udder of a cow and a calf sucking milk from the udder of a tigress, two snakes have their hoods raised and spread as if swaying and enjoying the music and on one hood the artist has shown a mouse also standing near the snake and enjoying the music without any worry. On the side opposite to this wooden carving of Krishna with flute is a piece depicting Shiva dancing with Vishnu playing on the drum and Brahma playing on another musical instrument. Another piece of carving depicts Kalabhairava i.e. God of Death also carved out with attention to very intricate fine details. These beautiful wooden carvings are found near the Sree Kovil and Udaya Marthanda mantapa.

The walls are full of oil paintings, but due to the ravages of time they are all fast fading out.

The four sides of the Sree Balippura have 224 granite pillars, each of them projecting a marvellous sculptured image of Deepa Lakshmi, the traditional female lamp bearer. Each of these images is unique as pillar to pillar there is a different style of dress or hairstyle!

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalvar has composed eleven pasurams in praise of the Lord of this divya desa. Nampillai in his Eedu while introducing this decad of ten pasurams says that in the previous pasurams the language used and the tenor of the words used conveyed the

idea that alvar was seeking God. But from pasuram 3722 onwards the stance appears to have been reversed i.e. it is God Who is seeking the Alvar and not the alvar the God as before! Lord is anxious to take the alvar along with his body to Paramapada. He is anxious, impatient to enjoy the company of the alvar. The enjoyment sought by God is similar to what transpired on earlier two occasions during Krishna avatar. Once as Krishna when he danced the Kuruvai Koothu (Rasa Krida) he manifested Himself into as many forms as there were gopikas and thus enjoyed the company of each and every gopika in Gokulam. Similarly, the Lord after He destroyed the demon Narakasura and released the 16,000 beautiful damsels kept as prisoners at Dwaraka, Lord again manifested Himself into several forms and married each one of those 16,000 women. Similarly, Nampillai says that in order to enjoy the company of the alvar, God is seeking the alvar's permission and Nampillai says that from this decad onwards the Supreme Lord is showing an anxiety and an eagerness to locate the alvar and seek his company and lift him bodily to heaven. It is said that the desire of the Lord to enjoy the alvar was greater than the desire of the alvar to attain God. The Almighty allowed the alvar to stay on in this world for some time so that he could allow him to compose the honey-sweet pasurams and the moment that work was over, the Lord was ready to take the alvar to Paramapada. Let us now go through each of these ten pasurams wherein the alvar converses with his own mind and tries to impress on it the great simplicity of the Lord, the immensity and magnitude of His love towards the alvar. The alvar therefore sees in this desire of God to enjoy Him as a magnificent gesture of the Lord to him, a worthless devotee.

Let us now go thro' these pasurams and enjoy their contents.

Pasuram 3722:

அருள் பெறுவார் அடியார்தம் அடியனேந்கு ஆழியான்
அருள் தருவான் அமைகின்றான் அநுமது விதிவகையே
இருள் தருமா ஞாலத்துள் இனிப் பிறவி யான் வேண்டேன்
மருளெழிநீ மடநெஞ்சே! வாட்டாற்றா னடிவணங்கே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar says as follows:

O mind, I do not have desire to be born in this world any more as existence in this world only confers agnana (ignorance) on me.

O mind get rid of that foolish feeling born out of ignorance to continue to stay in this world and enjoy its ephemeral pleasures.

O mind bow down to the twin lotus feet of the Lord at Thiruvattaru. The Lord holding the disc in His hand is ready to confer His benign grace on me and graciously is insisting on conferring salvation on me.

The alvar here says that the Lord at Thiruvattaru is ready to confer His blessings on him. What is more, He is willing to confer on him whatever he desires. The alvar says that he is lost in this great trait of loving condensation (seela guna). The alvar is therefore asking his mind to get ready to follow the Lord to Paramapada and enjoy His company for ever.

While identifying the Lord at Thiruvattaru the alvar uses the words "Aazhiyaan" i.e. the holder of the disc in His hand. The alvar also uses the words: "Athu namadu vidhi vagaiye" and thus makes it clear that besides conferring His grace, the Lord is waiting, ever ready to fulfil the wish of the alvar as if it is a directive. The commentators say that this is similar to what was expressed by Lakshmana when he accompanied Sri Rama to the forests. Lakshmana then assured Sri Rama that He will render all possible services to Him (**Aham sarvam karishyaami**). What is more Lakshmana also asked Rama to specifically mention his wishes and said that they would be fulfilled. (**Kriyataam ithi maam vadha**) i.e. he told Rama to issue instructions as to what remains to be done and that immediately Lakshmana would fulfil those wants. Similarly, the Lord Who has come to take the alvar to Paramapada, looks at the alvar and tells him He is ready to fulfil every wish of the alvar even as Lakshmana told Rama. The alvar therefore tells his mind about this amazing situation.

The alvar uses the words “Piravi yaan vendene” i.e. he says he has no desire to be born in this world, as this world is full of ignorance. It is as if the alvar says that the purpose for which he came into this world, viz. to compose the songs in Thiruvaimozhi, having been completed, his object in entering this world is over and therefore, he has no desire to be born again in this world.

The alvar directs his mind to bow down before the Lord at Thiruvattaru and uses the words “Vattattraan adi vanange”. The commentators ask the question as to why it is that the alvar who was on his way to Paramapada, instead of asking his mind to bow down before Vaikunthanaatha, is asking his mind to bow down before the Lord at Thiruvattaru. Nampillai answers this doubt by saying that the Lord Who had decided to take the alvar to Paramapada, had en route taken residence at Thiruvattaru. He is therefore asking his mind to follow the path shown by the Lord and to first bow down before the Lord at Thiruvattaru from where the Lord is planning to lift alvar to heaven. So the alvar asks his mind to bow down to the Lord at Thiruvattaru as He has come there only to expedite the alvar's ascent to Paramapada.

Pasuram 3723:

வாட்டாற்றாநாடி வணங்கீ மாஞாலப் பிறப்பறுப்பான்
கேட்டாயே மடநெஞ்சே! கேசவன்எம் பெருமானே
பட்டாய பலபாடிப் பழவினைகள் பற்றறுத்து
நாட்டாரோடு இயல்வொழிந்து நாரணனை நண்ணினமே.

Meaning:

Freely translated, this pasuram runs as follows:-

Oh mind of mine, how can I satisfactorily explain your great luck?

Oh mind, we bow down before the Lord and request Him to see that we are not reborn in this world. But He has given us more than what we asked. He has mesmerised us by blessing us with a sight of His beautiful hair. He has enabled us to sing several songs in His praise. He has also ensured that we do not fall into the trap of ahankara and mamakara by becoming closely associated with the people living in this world. He has made us

realise that Lord Narayana is everything. He has removed all the obstacles in our path and made us reach Him, which was the goal we sought. All this is nothing but the manifestation of His benign limitless grace.

Pasuram 3724:

நண்ணினம் நாராயணனை நாமங்கள் பலசொல்லி
மண்ணுலகில் வனம்மிக்க வாட்டாற்றான் வந்துஇன்று
விண்ணுலகம் தருவானாய் விரைகின்னான் விதிவகையே
எண்ணினவா எனாகஇக் கருமங்கள் என்னெஞ்சே!

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar again addresses his mind and enumerates the blessings conferred on him by the Lord. Freely translated the pasuram conveys the following meaning:-

Oh mind of mine, we recited the myriad divine names of Sriman Narayana and have therefore attained Him. While that is the situation, the powerful Lord of Thiruvattaru has come into this world and is ready to fulfil my wish and confer Paramapada on me. He is impatient to fulfil my desire. My expectations have been more than fulfilled.

The alvar here clearly expresses the impatience felt by the Lord in fulfilling the wishes of His sincere devotee, the alvar. He says that God has come to Thiruvattaru in order to fulfil the wishes of the alvar to attain Paramapada. The benign qualities of the God do not shine so much in Paramapada even as a candle-light does not shine bright in day time. But all His qualities shine more in the divya desas even as a candle-light is brighter in a dark room. The words in this pasuram clearly bring out the picture that in Thiruvattaru, God is only too willing to listen to the alvar and fulfil every wish of his. Though God can physically take the alvar away to heaven, He does not do so but waits for the alvar to accept the gift of Paramapada first!

In this context Acharya Hridayam has the following words to explain the stand. It says

"Moksha daanathil parantha paarathanthriyam valam mikka nadhiilae karai puralum".

Translated this means that the desire of the Lord to confer Moksha on the alvar who is worshipping only Him is like a river threatening to break its bund and overflow, and that in the process, the Lord is even prepared to be subservient to the alvar. The Lord regards it as a matter of great condescension on the part of the alvar if he accepts Gods gift to confer moksha on the alvar. The impatience shown by the Lord in this context is like the surging waters in a river, waiting to breach its bund and overflow. The alvar says the Supreme Lord, Who is above everyone and Who is in a position to dictate to others, is yet willing to subject himself to wishes of the alvar.

Pasuram 3725:

என்னஞ்சத் துள்ளிருந்து இங்கு இருந்தமிழ் நூ லிவை
மொழிந்து
வன்னஞ்சத் திரணியனை மார்விடந்த வாட்டாற்றான்
மன்னஞ்சப் பாரதத்துப் பாண்டவர்க்காய்ப் படை
தொட்டான்
நல் நெஞ்சே! நம் பெருமான் நமக்கு அருள்தான்
செய்வானே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram again the alvar addresses his mind and explains to it the benefits conferred on him by the Lord. The alvar says as follows:

Oh Good mind of mine! The powerful Lord Who split open the chest of Hiranyakasipu the asura and destroyed him is now residing at Thiruvattaru. He is the one who took up arms for the Pandavas entered the battlefield and struck terror in the hearts of the kings in the opposite camp. He is my master. He is the one residing in my mind as Antaryami and made me compose the Thiruvaimozhi. He is ever ready and prepared to confer even more benefits on me out of His boundless grace.

The alvar here makes it clear that God is ever willing to help His devotees and there is nothing which He will not confer on them out of His limitless love and affection. He is ever ready to act as per the wishes of His devotees. How else can one explain

His benign grace when He emerged out of a pillar just to live up to the word given by the child devotee viz. Prahlada, that He is omnipresent and present in the pillar pointed by Hiranyakasipu. Similarly, when Arjuna asked him to drive the chariot and stop it in the middle of the battle ground facing the enemy forces, Krishna as the charioteer acted accordingly. What is more, when the horses drawing the chariot of Arjuna were almost dying of thirst, He let loose an arrow (vaaruna astra) and made the water from the river flowing underground to gush out and quench the thirst of the horses. The alvar is therefore reassuring us that no task is mean or beneath His dignity for the God so far as His devotees are concerned.

Pasuram 3726:

வானேறவழி தந்த வாட்டாற்றான் பணிவகையே
நான்ஏறப் பெறுகின்றேன் நரகத்தை ரகுநெஞ்சே!
தேனேறு மலர்துளவம் திகழ் பாதன் சேழும் பறவை
தானேறித் திரிவான தாளினைஎன் தலைமேலே.

Meaning:

Here again the alvar addresses his mind and says as follows:

Oh mind of mine! The Lord at Thiruvattaru has made it clear that my days in this world are numbered. He is about to show the Archiradhi path to me to proceed to Paramapada. I am ready to follow Him and go up to heaven. Oh my mind, look at this world to which we were shackled so long and laugh. The Lord Who rides on beautiful Garuda, the celestial vahana, has placed His twin lotus feet adorned with basil garland on my head.

The alvar here says that God has indicated to him the date and time when He is going to take him to Paramapada. It is as if the alvar is repeating the famous words of Lord Krishna when He said

“Moksha yisyaami maa suchaha”

That is, the Lord assured that it is He Who will confer moksha on individuals and therefore they need have no fear.

In this pasuram, the alvar asks his mind to look at the samsara to which he was bound so long and which he was going to give up shortly and laugh. He tells the mind that it need have no regrets at leaving this world. In this context, the commentators refer to a particular story which is well worth repeating here. It is said that Pillai Azhagiya Manavala Perumal Arayar was at one time confined to the sick bed due to illness. Sri Ranganatha decided to confer moksha on him. The Lord therefore sent the temple honours like the garland worn by the Lord and parivattam (i.e. holy cloth which is tied round the forehead of the devotee before placing the Satari on his head) to the arayar's house. The arayar realised that the time for him to attain moksha had come. He then uttered the following words in this pasuram viz. "Naanei peruginren narakathai nagu nenje" i.e. he repeated the words which Nammalvar addressed to his mind in this pasuram! The arayar asked his mind also to laugh at the samsara from which he was to depart. The use of the word "narakam" should not be literally construed to mean hell. It has to be understood that the word hell is used to depict this very world. The arayar therefore told his mind that living in this world is as good as living in hell and so he asked his mind to be happy at the prospect of leaving this world.

Pasuram 3727:

தலைமேல் தாளினைகள் தாமரைக் கண் என்னம்மான்
நிலைபெருன் என்னெஞ்சத்து எப்பொழுதும் எம்பெருமான்
மலைமாடத் தரவனைமேல் வாட்டாற்றான் மதம்மிக்க
கொலையானை மருப்பொசித்தான் குரைகழுல்கள் குறுகினமே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar says that he has attained the lotus feet of the Lord. Freely translated the pasuram runs as follows:-

The twin lotus feet of my Lord are resting on my head. The lotus eyed lord, my Master, has entered my heart and has decided to stay there permanently, for ever and ever. He has revealed to me His pristine glory. It is for this very purpose the Lord has come to Thiruvattaru, full of huge mountain like mansions. He is seen reposing on Adishesha, the divine couch. I have attained the twin lotus feet of the Lord Who broke the tusk of the mighty el-

ephant Kuvalayapeetam to kill it. His ankles are adorned with the anklet ornaments worn by valarous heroes (veera kappu).

In this pasuram the alvar enumerates in detail all the benefits conferred on him. He says that the Lord has blessed him and placed his twin lotus feet on his head in response to his prayers. What is more, the Lord has cast His cool benign glance, from His lotus like eyes on him. Further, he has entered his heart and has decided to stay there permanently. There are some, who may raise a doubt as to how it is possible for the Lord Who has entered the heart of His devotee to also to stand in front of him and cast His divine glance on the devotee. Nampillai answers this doubt by referring to the story of sage Sowbhari, the great rishi. He is said to have assumed, at one point of time, fifty similar forms in order to marry fifty daughters of a king. Is it then any wonder that the Lord should have assumed two forms in order to enjoy the alvar both from within and outside.

The alvar uses the words “Malai maadathu vaattaru aravanaimelaan”.

In the upanishads there is mention of words known as “Paryanka vidya” i.e. it mentions the way one should reach the Lord, lying down on Adishesha. It says that a mukta seeing the God lying on Adishesha, should place his feet on the coiled Adishesha and climb on to the lap of the Lord! Here the alvar who knows he is being taken to heaven therefore visualises how he will climb on to Adishesha and then reach the lap of the Lord. That is why he uses the words “Aravanai male vattatran” i.e. Lord reposing on Adishesha. He also uses the words “Malai maadathu vaattatran” referring to the mountain like huge mansions in Vattaru. Thus, he uses two adjectives to refer to the Lord. One is the Lord lying down on Adishesha. The other is the Lord residing in Vattaru with huge mountain like mansions.

Pasuram 3728:

குரைகுழலகன் குகீனம்நம் கோவிந்தன் குடிகொண்டான்
திரைகுழுவு கடல்புடைதழ் தென்னாட்டுத் திலதமன்ன
வரைகுழுவு மணிமாட வாட்டாற்றான் மலரடிமேல்
விரைகுழுவு நறுந்துளவம் மெய்நீன்று கமழமே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram again the alvar says that the Lord has become one with him. Freely translated the pasuram runs as follows:-

Govinda has made me His abode as a result my body is also having the fragrance of the basil garland which adorn the feet of the Lord at Thiruvattaru. That divya desa surrounded by an ocean with lashing waves, and with its palatial mansions is like a jewel of the south.

The alvar says that the association of the basil leaves adorned divine lotus feet of the Lord has lent its fragrance to him also!

Perialvar also once said that the Lord along with Adishesha, the cosmic ocean, Mahalakshmi and others had chosen to reside in his heart. It appears that by using the word Govinda, the alvar says that Krishna along with cows and five lakh Gopikas in Gokulam and His other entourage, has come and taken residence in his heart!

Pasuram 3729:

மெய்நீன்று கமழ்துளவ விரையேறு திருமுடியன்
கைநீன்ற சக்கரத்தன் கருதுமிடம் பொருது புனல்
மைநீன்ற வரைபோலும் திருவுருவ வாட்டாற்றாற்கு
எந்நன்றி செய்தேனா என்னெஞ்சில் திகழ்வதுவே!

Meaning:

Here the alvar says as follows:-

I do not know what is the great merit that I have done to the Lord of Thiruvattaru which made Him reward me with His presence in my heart. He is the one whose body is darkhued like an ocean and like collyrium (kajal) and like a mountain. He holds in His hand the disc which goes wherever the Lord thinks it should go and having defeated the enemies and achieved the set task returns to its place of rest in the hand of the Lord. He is the Lord Whose body upto the top of His hair is filled with the fragrance of the basil garlands adorning His feet.

Here the alvar is so touched by the benign grace of the Lord Who has rewarded him with His presence in his heart. He wonders what it is that he has done to earn such a great unbelievable reward. It is as if the alvar is saying what is it that I have done. I have not like Jatayu fought with Ravana to rescue Sita Devi. Neither have I like Hanuman caused great happiness to the Lord by saying “Dhrishtwa Seetha” (saw Seetha) nor have I led a life as per the model dharmic principles laid down by Him? Alvar is therefore wondering as to which action of his has earned him this blessing.

The alvar uses the words “Ninru kamazh thulava virai aeru thiru mudiyān”. This can be interpreted in two ways one interpretation is to say that the fragrance of the basil garlands adorning His feet has enveloped His whole body and is wafting its sweet smell even upto His hair! Nampillai has an interesting comment in this context. Normally we say that the fragrance moves from head to feet. But here alvar says it has moved up from His feet to head! Nampillai says this is like “Kadalill neer sahyathill aera kozhithaar polae kaanum thirumeni ill thiru thuzhai parimalam aanadhu mei illam, kondu thalaikku maleae pona padi”.

These words of great commentator are very graphic words. He says that to say that the fragrance has travelled up from the foot to the head is like saying that the waters in the ocean have risen upto the top of the Sahya mountain! Usually water from the top of the mountain, collect and grow into rivulets, then rivers and flow down into the ocean and not the other way about!

The commentators also interpret these words as conveying the thought that the body of the alvar is fragrant with the sweet scent of the basil garlands adorning the Lord’s head because the alvar has been warmly embraced by the Lord even as Rama embraced Hanuman!

In this pasuram one of the features by which the alvar identifies the Lord of Thiruvattaru is by referring to the disc held in His hand. He says “Karudhu midam porudhu kaininra chakrathan”.

Lord has several weapons in His armoury. One of His famous pancha aayudhams is the chakra (disc). This weapon is

ever ready to obey even God's unspoken instructions by its ability to read and understand the thinking process or thought of God. For e.g. during Krishnavatar Lord was one day busy playing a game of dice (sokkahaan) with royalty. The enemy hordes chose that time to descend on them. The disc held in the Lord's hand read the unspoken word of the Lord and started with all its glowing fury from the Lord's hand, chased the enemies upto Kasi and burnt up that city itself and returned to its resting place viz. the hand of the Lord having successfully completed its task. Such is the close association of the disc with God. It is almost like an extension centre of Lord Himself with enviable ability of precision to hit the target.

Pasuram 3730:

திகழ்கின்ற திருமார்பில் திருமங்கை தன்னோடும்
திகழ்கின்ற திருமாலார் சோவிடம்தண் வாட்டாறு
புகழ்கின்ற புள்ளூர்தி போரரக்கர் குலம் கெடுத்தான்
இகழ்வின்றி என்னெஞ்சத்து எப்பொழுதும் பிதியானே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar again wonders as to what it is that he has done which has earned him the rare honour of God's presence in his heart. Freely translated the pasuram says:-

The Lord affectionately addressed as Lakshminatha has Mahalakshmi seated for ever on His beautiful chest. Such a Lord is residing in cool Thiruvattaru. He is the Lord Who rode on His famous vehicle the divine bird, Garuda, fought and vanquished the asuras. Such a Lord is residing without any reservations for ever in the heart of this lowly person.

The alvar here refers to the beauty of the Lord's chest with Mahalakshmi seated on it. It is as if the beauty of the chest got enhanced not by wearing any ornaments but by the sheer presence of the lotus born consort of Mahalakshmi.

The alvar mentions about His riding on Garuda. Garuda is referred to as "Vedaathmaa vihageswaraha" i.e. the bird is itself a vedaswaroopi and the fact that he is the vahana for the Lord also adds to His glory.

Having thus enumerated all His noteworthy plus points, the alvar is even more non plussed as to what was it that attracted such a great person to stay firm and fast in his simple abode viz. alvar's heart. Alvar almost says it is the eighth wonder of the world!

Pasuram 3731:

பிரியாது ஆட்செய் யென்று பிறப்பறுத்தாளாக் கொண்டான்
அரியாகி இரணியனை ஆகங்கண் டான்அன்று
பெரியார்க்கு ஆட் பட்டக்கால் பெறாதபயன் பெறுமாறு
வரிவான்வா யரவணமேல் வாட்டட்ற்றான் காட்டினனே.

Meaning:

Freely translated this pasuram conveys the following thoughts. The alvar says:-

The Lord is not away from me even for a moment. He has blessed me and permitted me to do kainkarya (service) to Him. He has enslaved me by putting an end to this cycle of birth, death and rebirth. He is the Lord Who once manifested as Narasimha (Man-lion avatar) and split open the chest of Hiranyakasipu. Is it to get over that exertion that He is now seen reposing on Adishesha at Thiruvattaru. He has proved to me that with His sweet grace if only we render service to acharyas we can achieve even the apparently impossible benefits.

In this pasuram the alvar drives home the point that Bhaagavatha kainkarya is even superior to Bhagavath kainkarya.

Pasuram 3732:

காட்டித் தன் கணிகழல் கடுஞரகம் புகலொழித்த
வாட்டாற்றெம் பெருமானை வளங்குருகார்ச் சடகோபன்
பாட்டாய தமிழ்மாலை ஆயிரத்துள் இப்பதிதும்
கேட்டு ஆரார் வானவர்கள் செயிக்கினிய சேஞ்சொல்லே.

Meaning:

This is a phalastuthi pasuram. The alvar says that the Nityasuris ask the Mukhtars to recite this decad of sweet sounding, melodious to the ear string of pasurams in the garland of 1000 Tamil pasurams written by Nammalvar on the Lord at Thiruvattaru Who will rid us of birth in this hellish samsara. Hearing these

pasurams instead of satiating their desire only kindles it further making them want to listen to it more often.

The alvar says that his pasurams are “sevikku iniya soll” i.e. words that are gentle sweet on the ears. Thondaradi Podi alvar concluding his Thirumalai referred to his pasurams as “Ilaya punn kavithai” i.e. fresh, immature tender poetry. Nammalvar says that some mukhtars were on their way up to Srivaikunta. The Nityasuris residing in Vaikunta asked the Mukhtars as to what was the latest news in this sinful world. The mukhtas then said at Alvar Thirunagari Nammalvar was born and they had heard these milk-porridge like honey sweet pasurams composed by him on the Lord of Thiruvattaru and they had been blessed with a place in Vaikunta. The Nityasuris asked them to recite those ten pasurams and on hearing the same from the mukhtars they felt transported to seventh heaven of supreme bliss and requested the mukhtars to repeat it. Thus, the mukhtars entertained and provided happiness to the Nityasuris at Vaikunta with the insatiable treat of hearing these ten pasurams on Lord of Thiruvattaru.

DIVYAKAVI PILLAI PERUMAL AYYANGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

பமாலை முடி நீத்து, மலர்ப் பொன் அடி நோவப்
பாலைவனம் புகுந்தாய் பண்டு என்று, சாலவும் நான்
கேட்டால் துயிலேன்காண்-கேசவனே! - பாம்பு அணை மேல்
வாட்டாற்றுக் கண் துயில் கொள்வாய்.

Meaning:

Oh Kesava! When You incarnated as Rama, You live upto the word given by Your father Dasaratha to Kaikeyi You gave up Your crown palace etc. and tho' Your feet must have pained when You roamed about in the Dandakaranya forest. Even when some one reminds me of what You went thro' at that time, I cannot help but cry, feel sad and terribly upset and I cannot even sleep a wink. But how is it You Who went thro' all that are however happily calmly, with no worries seen lying down on Adishesha for a long time at Thiruvattaaru.

ARAMULA

This *divya desa* is also known as Thiruvananvilai. It lies six miles to the east of Chengannoor. The moolavar is known as Thirukkuralappan, more popularly known as Parthasarathi. The consort is known as Padmasini Nachiar. The moolavar is seen in a standing posture facing east. The theertha is known as Vedavyasa theertha as also Pampa theertha. The vimana is known as Vamana vimana and Lord is believed to have given dharshan to Brahma and Vedavyasa.

Aramula, Chengannoor and Thiruvalla are three well known holy places in the erstwhile Travancore State. They are not only religious centres but also historical and cultural centres and economically very prosperous with fertile lands. Amongst the three, Thiruvalla is an active commercial centre and the town reflects the prosperity that flows out of it. Chengannoor takes the second place. Aramula though lower in the economic scale occupies the top place so far as cultural traditions are concerned. The scenic beauty of Aramula with the hillocks in the north is more breathtaking than that of the other two places. The captivating scene of the quiet flowing river Pampa at Aramula along with the verdant paddy and sugarcane fields and thick bamboo groves is so bewitching and inviting that people refer it a visit to Aramula as a tryst with nature. The soil is very fertile so much so one of the mythological stories connected with this *divya desa* says that when the boatmen discarded the bamboo poles used as a catamaran to reach God to Aramula on the sandy banks near the shore itself, those bamboos took roots and grew into luscious bamboo fields. It is from those bamboo groves that one long pole is cut and brought as flagmast for a festival in the temple.

The great temple dedicated to Lord Krishna is believed to have been constructed on a plateau-like formation raised at the behest of the Lord Himself by the demons overnight for providing the area required for constructing the temple. More about this story later on in this chapter.

There are four *gopurams* on the four sides of this temple. The eastern tower of the temple is the main and most impressive

tower. It has eighteen steps leading to it. Many compare it to the eighteen steps at the Sabarimala shrine. Some believe that these eighteen steps represent the eighteen forces which one has to conquer in order to attain moksha. Others say that the eighteen steps represent the Shadchakras of the Nadi system, each chakra having three steps. Yet others say that they represent the five sensory organs, five pranas, five karmendriyas, the mind, the intellect and the ego of man. The number 18 is well known and has lot of significance in Hindu philosophy. Bhagavata has 1800 slokas. Mahabharata has 18 parvas. The Bhagavad Gita has 18 chapters. The Mahabharata war was fought for 18 days. Thus, these 18 steps leading to the temple has a holiness associated with it. The eastern temple tower has two storeys, typical of the Kerala style of architecture. The northern gopura has about 57 steps and its beauty lies in that the river Pampa flows at the foot of the northern gopura. Thus, one can get down 57 steps from the northern gopura and enter the bathing ghat on the banks of the river Pampa. This temple is believed to be more than 3000 years old.

As stated in the other chapters dealing with the divya desas in Kerala nadu, there are five divya desas associated with Pancha Pandavas. Dharmaputra is believed to have consecrated the idol of Lord Krishna he had been worshipping at Tiruchitraaru. Bhima is associated with having consecrated the idol of Krishna at Kuttanadu Puliur. Nakula is connected with Thiruvannandoor. Sahadeva with Thirukodidanam and Arjuna is associated with Aramula. Many believe that when Mahabharata war was over Arjuna had no peace of mind and decided to go on a pilgrimage to atone for his sins. During the Mahabharata war when Arjuna was fighting with Karna, the left wheel of the chariot of the latter sank into the mud and Karna wanted to physically lift it. He requested Arjuna not to let loose the arrows till he extricated the left wheel of the Ratha. But Krishna Who was the charioteer advised Arjuna not to wait and said that the request needed no consideration, as earlier on various occasions, the Kaurava princes had not shown any respect for the rules of Dharma or justice. Lord Krishna recalled to Arjuna how the Kaurava princes shamed Draupadi in the open court and how they had set fire to the palace made of lac

hoping that the Pandava brothers would perish in the fire. What was more shameful, the bowstring of Abhimanyu was cut on the sly from behind by no less a person than Karna. Krishna therefore felt that such evil-minded persons had no right to speak of Dharma and ask for time when literally and metaphorically their time was up. Egged on by Krishna, Arjuna fought and killed Karna. But now after the battle was over Arjuna felt that he could perhaps have afforded to give the time to Karna to re-assemble, even as Sri Rama magnanimously allowed the nearly-vanquished Ravana to retire for the night and re-assemble his forces and then meet him the next day. In order to let at rest all these conflicting thoughts racing thro' his mind Arjuna decided to go on a pilgrimage. In the course of his travels he reached Aramula. He heard about the mythological stories connected with Aramula from the residents and is believed to have decided to stay on in the place. The local residents told him that Aramula was the place where Brahma Who lost the Vedas to the demons Madhukaitapa and consequently had lost His srishti gnana had approached Lord Narayana to recover the vedas for him. The fourfaced one is believed to have done tapas at Aramula. God appeared and then rescued the Vedas and re-conferred the knowledge of creation to Brahma. The local residents also said that saint Vedavyasa had lived in that place for a very long time and the local Thirtha was known after the great sage as Veda Vyasa theertha. Hearing all this, Arjuna felt that the place was ideally suited for him also to do penance and seek Lord's blessing for peace of mind. It is believed that Arjuna installed in Aramula the very idol of Krishna that he was worshipping. He consecrated and renovated that temple so much so people say that it was Arjuna himself who built the temple!

It is also said that the idol originally consecrated by Arjuna was at a place near the river Pampa known as Nilakkal Narayanapuram, which is a little out of the way surrounded by forests with wild animals etc. It is said that the deity Himself decided to migrate to Aramula where we see Him today. Legend says that the Lord installed at Nilakkal one day decided to move out. He decided to disguise Himself as a young brahmachari

and came southward with the insignia of an umbrella and a stick typical of Vamana avatar. When He came to the banks of Pampa river Lord was taken in by the beauty and scenic splendour. He saw local workmen building a catamaran which would be used as a float to carry bag, baggage and persons. The brahmachari requested those simple workmen also to accommodate Him also on the craft, as He also planned to go down the stream. Seeing the effulgence on the face of Brahmachari the workmen felt that He was a holy person and they therefore built another barge with six bamboo pieces which would float on the water as a vehicle to carry the brahmachari. They used six pieces of bamboo for creating the float and the brahmachari boarded the float and moved down the stream and reached a place near Aranmula known as Idayaranmula. Idayaranmula means intermediary Aranmula. This brahmachari disembarked at Idayaranmula. It was almost dusk and seeing the shining face of the brahmachari the local villagers accompanied Him, placed a lighted lamp before Him to enable the brahmachari to perform His evening prayers. It is believed that the place where the lamp was lit is the place which is now known as Vilakkumadam. After performing Sandhyavandana the brahmachari started moving and the local villagers followed Him. Finally the brahmachari reached the place which is now known as Keezhthrikovil. The brahmachari decided to take rest for the night there. That area was a low level area. The brahmachari Who was none other than God Himself, is believed to have ordered the demons residing there to erect overnight a raised platform for a temple. Thus, a plateau-like platform was prepared on the bank of the river. The gigantic hollow dug on the northern bank of the river for raising mud is now known as Ottakuzhi. Later the idol from Nilakkal was also shifted to Aranmula as the place is now known at this place that Arjuna is believed to have consecrated the idol which he was worshipping. The place is known as Aranmula as the brahmachari came to this place on a raft made of six bamboos. Mula in Malayalam means a barge, 'ara' refers to the six bamboos used to construct that barge. There are some others who say that the name of the place Aranmula is the corruption of the word "Aarin vilambu" which means the fringe of

the river, in this case the Pampa river i.e. it refers to the town on the bank of the river.

It is said that the idol of the Lord at Aranmula is a representation of a profound moment in Mahabharata war when Krishna faced Bhishma and Arjuna, both of whom were His ardent devotees. Before the start of the war Krishna had given His word to the Kauravas that He would not take up arms Himself but would only be a charioteer for Arjuna. Arjuna had to fight with Bhishma his teacher, the student realised that he was no match to the rain of arrows let loose on him by Bhishma. It looked as if Bhishma would fell Arjuna. Krishna is reported to have lost His cool for a moment, He got down from the chariot that He was driving, took a chariot wheel lying on the ground and proceeded toward Bhishma holding that chariot wheel looking a disc in His hand. Bhishma then smiled and with folded hands awaited his end at the hands of the Lord. What more could he wish for. Krishna seeing Bhishma with his bow held down realised His fauxpas. This incident is quoted as illustrative of Krishna's love for Arjuna. The idol of Parthasarathy at Aranmula reflects this benign expression of God's vatsalya to His devotee when He even momentarily forget the word He solemnly gave not to fight in the war. It only proves that for the sake of saving a mere nara (mortal) devotee Lord even forgot His solemn word though it be momentarily.

To now turn to an interesting story connected with the world famous boat race conducted at Aranmula on the Onam day (Malayalam new year). The Aranmula boat race is a religious ceremony unlike the other boat races conducted as sports events in the backwaters of Kerala. Once upon a time there lived a rich Namboothri family known as Mangad at a remote village known as Kattoor. The senior members of the family had the practice of giving Bhiksha to brahmins (food offered as a ritual) on the Onam day. This practice of feeding the brahmin before the conclusion of the noon pooja was being strictly followed by the family for a long time. On one Onam day the chief of the Mangad family was very anxious as no brahmin came to receive the Bhiksha before the noon pooja. He was very worried and sad and thought it

angured ill and that perhaps God was not pleased with his prayers. The chief prayed to Lord Parthasarathi of Aranmula and said that if God did not send a person to receive his bhiksha he would have to fast on that Onam day. After the prayers when he opened his eyes he found to his surprise that a young, handsome smiling brahmin boy was entering his house. The chief felt that this was indeed the answer to his prayer as the brahmin boy asked for food. The chief felt that his bhiksha penance had been rewarded. After feeding the boy he requested the boy to come well on time for the next and subsequent Onam days. That night the Mangad chieftain had a dream in which Lord Parthasarathy appeared and told him that from next Onam onwards the chieftain should make arrangements for sending provisions for neivedyams to the temple at Aranmula itself as he would not be able to make a trip to Kattoor. The chief realised that the beautiful young boy who visited his house on the Onam day was none other than the Lord Himself. He decided to carry out His command and from the next year onwards he carried all the provisions for the neivedyam in a big country craft to Aranmula and spend the Onam day at the feet of the Lord, Parthasarathi. On one such occasion when the country craft loaded with provisions was floating along the river from Kattoor to Aranmula, a few antisocial disgruntled elements planned to way lay the craft and steal the provisions. The villages came to know about this nefarious hold-up plan. As the news spread like wild fire the residents from the neighbouring 28 villages rushed to Kattoor in their tiny canoes to thwart the attempted plunder and to escort the Thiru Ona Thona (i.e. onam boat) safely to Aranmula. From that day onwards, whenever the provisions started from Kattoor to Aranmula, several country crafts bedecked in all their beauty with armed men seated in it would accompany the craft like a convoy to Aranmula. This procedure has now become a religious ritual when the canoes go in a procession with temple orchestra etc. People on either bank of the river would receive the procession of the boats with religious fervour, offering obsequence to the provisions being taken for preparing the neivedhyam for the Lord on the Onam day. Slowly the tiny canoes were replaced with bigger boats for transporting people also

with provisions. It was then that this idea of snake boat evolved. These snake boats were used as armoured war transport vehicles for soldiers by Champakasseri Raja. Each snake boat would carry not less than hundred people. Later the Mangad Bhattathiri shifted from Kattoor to Kumaranallur and instituted an endowment for conducting the Onam neivedhyam procession for Lord Parthasarathi from Kattoor to Aranmula and even today this practice continues. A similar boat procession is held on the Uthirattadhi day when the anniversary of the consecration of the idol installed by Arjuna is celebrated.

There is one other religious festival conducted in this temple which has a certain religious significance. There is a function known as Khandavadahanam celebrated in the months of December-January. At that time, a forest is improvised in front of the temple. This make-believe forest consists of twigs, dry leaves and dried arecanut palms. This heap would be set fire symbolically so as to recall the puranic event of Khandava forest fire. That incident relates to Krishnavatara when Lord Krishna helped Arjuna in setting fire to the Khandavana forest and thereby humbled Indira. This puranic event is re-enacted every year in this temple even to this day.

Another festival celebrated in the month of Makha (November) lasting for ten days is another of the important festivals. At that time, a number of caparisoned elephants along with temple orchestra will leave for Idayaranmula which is the place where the Lord initially alighted when He left the country craft made of six bamboos. Even to-day the bamboo will be cut at Idayaranmula and brought down to the temple when the tantri of the temple Parapat Bhattadri would hoist the flag heralding the commencement of the ten day festival. These bamboo groves are believed to be the ones which took roots and grew into thick cluster from the six bamboos abandoned at the river site when the Brahmachari (god in disguise) alighted from the country craft initially on His way from Nilakkan Narayanapuram to Idayaranmula and finally Aranmula itself.

One other interesting festival is celebrated in the month of Meenam (March-April). There is a temple for goddess at Punnamthode, a place about four kilometres east of Aranmula. The Arathu festival of Devi celebrated in the month of Meenam takes place on the banks of the river Pampa in front of one of the temple towers of Lord Parthasarathi of Aranmula. On that day Lord Parthasarathi seated on Garuda vahana is taken to the river bank dressed in all his regal splendour. Then the Goddess and the God are worshipped together and then the two leave for their respective temples.

Like most of the temples in Kerala this temple also owns a number of elephants. Many are the interesting anecdotes related about the acts of these pachyderms. Of course there is nothing to scientifically substantiate these stories. But one story which is very interesting often repeated in this area with respect relates to one elephant by name Balakrishnan who was apparently irritated by the constant ringing of the giant bell from a Church nearby. One day, it is said, the elephant walked into the Church, plucked the giant bell from its height and brought it and deposited in the temple premises, thus summarily dispensing with the ringing of the Church bell near the temple. As stated earlier, this could be a tall story. Yet it makes interesting reading.

Aranmula is also the place where the jewellery of Lord Ayyappa of Sabarimala are kept in safe custody and taken out in a procession for adorning the idol on the eve of Makarajyothi Thiruvizha at Sabarimala.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalvar is the only alvar who has sung ten pasurams in praise of the Lord here. The commentators give an interesting introduction to the composition of these ten pasurams. It is said that the alvar was feeling dejected and worried as to what is the type of *kainkarya* (service) that he could render unto the Lord. The Lord then comforted the alvar and asked him not to lose heart and said that He proposes to use him shortly. The Lord recalled that long ago during the Rama avatar, His sons Kusa and Lava had

come to Ayodhya and sung the Ramayana in His presence and listening to them sing, He was very happy. The Lord said that in a similar manner the alvar should come to Thiruvaranvilai and sing the Thiruvaimozhi. The Lord added that when He heard the Ramayana, Sita Devi was not with Him, but at Thiruvaranvilai, the Lord along with His consort wished to have the pleasure of hearing the alvar rendering the Thiruvaimozhi. The alvar therefore proceeded to Aramula to render that specific kainkarya as ordered by the Lord.

These pasurams with their meaning is given below:-

Pasuram 3436:

இன்பம் பயக்க எழில் மலர் மாதரும் தானும்இவ்
வேழலகை
இன்பம் பயக்க இனிதுடன்வீற்றிருந்து ஆள்கின்ற
ஹேகள் பிரான்
அன்புற் றமர்ந்துறை கின்ற அணிபொழில் சூழ்திரு
வாறன்வினை
அன்புற் றமர்ந்து வலஞ்செய்து கைதொழு நாள்களு
மாகுங்கொலோ?

Freely translated this pasuram says:

Oh will that day dawn when I could lovingly circum ambulate the Thiruvaranvilai divya desa which is surrounded by beautiful groves? In that divya desa the Lord stays in the company of Mahalakshmi the lotus born one.

Oh Lord! The people living in the seven worlds are happy to be enslaved by You”.

Here the alvar says that even as the Lord and His consort are enjoying each other's company, the chetanas are happy enjoying the company of the Divine couple. It is as if the Lord felt that Thiruvaranvilai with its scenic splendour is the ideal place for listening to Thiruvaimozhi to be rendered by the alvar.

The alvar uses the words “Ivvezhu ulagai inbam payakka” The Eedu has an interesting comment to make on the use of these words. Literally translated these words mean that the happy

Divine couple radiated their happiness to the seven worlds. The Eedu says when the parents are together and look after the children, those children will have no unfulfilled wants and will be well-protected. Because the father and mother are together they are happy. Seeing them happy, the world itself is steeped in happiness. Nampillai says that infectious happiness is like the happiness that the mother experiences when looking at the suckling babe.

Pasuram 3437:

ஆகுங் கொல்? ஐயமொன் றின்றி அகலிடம் முற்றவும்
 ஈரடியே
 ஆகும் பரிசு நிமிர்ந்த திருக்குற ளப்பன்
 அமர்ந்துறையும்
 மாகம் திகழ் கொடி மாடங்கள் நீடு மதிள் திரு வாரன்விளை
 மாகந்த நீர்கொண்டு தூவி பல செய்து
 கைதொழக்கூடுங்கொலோ?

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar raises the rhetorical question as to whether he will be ever blessed with the opportunity to do pradakshina and bow down before the Lord at Thiruvananvilai. He says

Oh will I get the chance to sprinkle scented water and do pradakshina and bow down and pay my obeisance to the Lord at Thiruvananvilai? Will this wish of mine be fulfilled without any slip?

The Lord Who manifested Himself into vishwaroopa so as to span the wide worlds with just two steps is living happily, of His own volition, in that divya desa which is full of sky high mansions with flags fluttering atop their flag masts and mansions with fort-like walls.

The alvar uses the words “Ayyam onru inri aagungle” (ஐயமின்றின்றி ஆகுங் கொல்).

These words, the commentators say can be interpreted in two ways viz. first as reflecting the intention of the alvar and secondly as reflecting the intention of the Lord at Thiruvananvilai i.e.

Thirukuralappan Himself. If these words are to refer to the Lord, then it is interpreted to say that when the dwarf Vamana asked for the gift of land to be covered by His two feet, He had no doubt whatsoever in His mind that He would, on receiving the gift, be able to cover the entire world. He had no doubts about achieving His objective. If the words however, are to be interpreted as reflecting the thoughts in the mind of the alvar, it only means that the alvar is wondering as to whether his only desire, viz. to do pradakshina at Thiruvananvilai and then bow down before His Swami would, without any iota of doubt, be fulfilled. Thus, the same set of words, can with reference to the God, be interpreted as the doubtless certain feeling that He had. But with reference to the alvar, it refers to his doubts whether his all consuming desire will be achieved.

Here the alvar uses the words, "Maa gandha neer kondu thoovi valam seidu" (மாகந்த நீர் கொண்டு தூவி வலஞ் செய்து)

Literally translated it means that as one does pradakshina, one sprinkles scented water. It is amazing that Nammalvar who never left his perch under the tamarind tree in distant Thirukurugoor could depict with such great accuracy the peculiar practice followed by the pilgrims even to this day viz. when the pilgrims sprinkle rose water mixed with sandal paste, camphor and other scented articles while doing the pradakshina.

Pasuram 3438:

கூடுங்கொல்? வைகலும் கோவிந்த னேமது ஆதனைக்
கோளரியை
ஆடும் பறவை மீசைக் கண்டு கைதொழு தன்றி
அவனுறையுப்
பாடும் பெரும்புகழ் நான்மறை வேள்விலைந்து
நீடுபொ ழில்திரு வாறன்வி னைதொழ வாய்க்குங்கொல்?
நீச்சலுமே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar raises a question wanting to know whether his one wish of worshipping the Lord at Thiruvananvilai would be fulfilled or not. He says:

Will I be blessed with the opportunity to stay for ever in Thiruvananvilai divya desa and pay my adoring obsequence to the Lord in Thiruvananvilai full of luscious groves. The Lord in that divya desa is none other than the Master of aayarkula people (cow-herds); He is the one Who destroyed the asuras Madhu and Kaitapa. He is the one Who manifested Himself as Narasimha. I wish to bow down before that Lord Who is seated on Garuda. What is more, Thiruvananvilai is the place where He is residing of His own free volition and is also the place where the scholars who chant aloud the vedas and the Pancha Mahayagnas and the six angas (adjuncts) reside.

The alvar uses different words to refer to his lord. Thus, to reflect the aasrita vatsalya bhava of the Lord he refers to the Lord at Thiruvananvilai as "Govinda". When he wants to refer to the heroic valorous qualities of the Lord destroying the evil forces, he refers to Him as "Madhusudanana" as well as "Kol ariyaa". Nampillai in his famous commentary Eedu says that the alvar uses the words, "Adum paravai misaikandu" when he refers to the Lord seated on Garuda. Usually the Lord uses the Garuda as a vehicle when he has to travel from one place to another. Nampillai says that even as the alvar was wanting to go to Thiruvananvilai to see the Lord, the Lord was also anxious to see His devotee, He therefore got on to the bird (Pakshi vahana) and was rushing towards Kurugoor. That is why the alvar says that he wants to see God seated on the flying Garuda bird. The two therefore met midway says Nampillai.

Pasuram 3439:

வாய்க்குங்கொல்? நீச்சலும் எப்பொழுதும்மனத் தூசங்கு
நீனைக்கப்பெற
வாய்க்கும் கரும்பும் பெருஞ்செந்நெ லும்வயல் சூழ்திரு
வாறன்விளை
வாய்க்கும் பெரும்புகழ் முவுல கீசன் வடமது ரைப்பிறந்த
வாய்க்கும் மணிநிறக் கண்ண பிரான்தன் மரலடிப்
போதுகளே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram, again, the alvar is impatient to know when he will get the opportunity to visit Thiruvananvilai. He says:-

Thiruvananvilai divya desa is surrounded by rich sugarcane crop fields and luscious fields rich with sennal paddy crop. In that place is seen the supreme Lord Who is the master of the three worlds and Who chose to incarnate as Krishna in Mathura and Who is a thing of beauty like a blue coloured sapphire.

Oh when will I be able to stay at that divyadesa for ever and ever and have the opportunity to mediate without any break on the divine twin lotus feet of that Lord?

In this pasuram the alvar wonders whether even if he is not able to go all the way to Thiruvananvilai will he at least be blessed so as to perpetually meditate upon the twin lotus feet of that Lord even staying in the existing place. He says that the enjoyment derived from mediating on the twin lotus feet of the Lord even for a few moments from where he is will give him the same satisfaction as having enjoyed the Lord for eternity! The all consuming desire to enjoy a thing is normally greater than the actual enjoyment derived thro' the fulfillment of that desire. The anticipatory pleasure in thinking of a journey is more than the joy in reaching the destination! Commenting on this Nampillai says there are two states of mind known as "Manoradha" (dreaming of a thing) and "anubhava" (realising the thing) i.e. savouring the anticipatory pleasure and enjoying the actual pleasure. By dreaming of a pleasurable event it is as good as having enjoyed it to the full thro' ones minds eye. He says that by comparison the actual pleasure derived by shedding these mortal coils and attaining Paramapada even will be less when compared with the manoradha enjoyment of Lord's presence!

In this context, the commentators refer to a story. There was a famous vaishnava savant, Elaiaatrakudi Nambi. He was a great devotee of Lord Ranganatha. During Brahmotsavam days he would set out from his village, go to Srirangam and worship Lord Ranganatha and after returning to his village, till he goes

again to Srirangam for the next utsavam (festival), he would spend all his time cudchewing, recollecting and enjoying himself thro' recollecting, the various incidents connected with the Brahmotsavam. The utsava anubhava carried him through between one festival and the other. But in course of time, the inevitable, irretrievable damage due to the passage of time affected him. He became a hundred years old and very weak and once he could not go to Srirangam in time for the ankuraarpana utsava. When the ankuraarpana utsava started, it is said that Lord Ranganatha was searching in the surging crowd for His loving sincere faithful neverfailing devotee Elaiatrakudi Nambi. He could not find him; He wondered how that devotee could miss His kalyama utsava' But on the sixth day Nambi managed to reach Srirangam; He worshipped the Perumal. The Lord then out of His happiness asked His devotee whether He could help him in any manner. Nambi replied that the body gifted by the Lord was proving to be a burden and that he was not able now to render any kainkarya to the Lord in the manner he wished. The Lord then asked Nambi to stay on at Srirangam. Having said that Lord Ranganatha proceeded with His festival procession. It is said that before the idol of the Lord reached Thiruvasal, Nambi reached Thirunadu (moksha). This story is repeated to say that the Lord conferred moksha, that is salvation, even to those who spend their time thinking of Him, even though physically they are not able to visit him in the divya desa.

Pasuram 3440:

மலராடிப் போதுகள் என்னெஞ்சத்து எப்பொழு
தும்இருத்தி வனநிகப்
பலராடி யார்முன் பருளிய பாம்பனை யப்பன்
அமர்ந்துறையும்
மலரின் மணிநெடு மாடங்கள் நீடு மதிள்திரு வாறன்வினை
உலக மலிபுகழ் பாடநம் மேல்வினை யொன்றும்நில்
லாகெடுமே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram the alvar mentions about the merits that will flow from singing the praise of the Lord of Thiruvaranvilai. The

alvar says that the Ananthasayana Perumal has ensured that his twin divine lotus feet are for ever firmly placed in this devotee's heart. Even when there are many other devotees worshipping only Him, the Lord out of His abundant grace chose to give precedence to the alvar and has blessed him. Such a Perumal, of His own free volition resides happily at Thiruvananvilai. The stone studded tall mansions and the fort like walls in that divya desa are covered with the flowers rained by the Devas.

The sins of all those who sing the praise of that divya desa will get wiped out completely.

The alvar uses the words of "Palar adiyaar munbu aruliya" and says that the God shed His special grace on him in precedence over many other devotees. Nampillai in his Eedu comments on this as follows:

Sri Vedvyasa Bhagavan, Sri Valmiki Bhagavan, Sri Parasara Bhagavan, the first three alvars are still waiting to receive the blessings of the Lord. Yet the Lord turned His benign glance (visesha kataksha) on Nammalvar first. Sri Veda Vyasa wrote Mahabharatha, Sri Valmiki authored Ramayana, Parasara wrote Vishnu purana. The first three alvars, i.e. Bhutat alvar, Poigai alvar and Pey Alvar are the first three great sages who were blessed with the vision of Lord with His consort. Yet even when such great men were there, Nammalvar says that he received the special attention at the hands of the Perumal and he was asked to recite Thiruvaimozhi in His presence. This situation, Nampillai says, is reminiscent of what happened when Rama cast His benign glance first on Hanuman eventhough there were many others surrounding Him like Sugreeva and other monkey heroes. **(Bahumaanena Mahataa Hanumantham avekshitha)**. Similarly, though there were other great devotees waiting in the presence of the Lord, He chose Nammalvar to bestow on him His visesha kataksha. There is a story connected with this train of thought. One of the Chola kings known as Krimi kanta (worm necked) was a Vaishnava dweshi. He hated vaishnavism so much that he used to systematically break the idols in the Vishnu temples and throw them into the ocean. Many advised him to give up

this illogical antagonism and told him that the idols which were installed after a lot of sanctification by rituals and prayers should not be desecrated in such a manner and if the king were to persist in his iconoclastic misdemeanours, it would spell doom to his own country. The king then ordered that the divine power instilled in the stone idols through the mantras may be removed by special incantations and then the idols be broken. He therefore commissioned a sorcerer, lured him with a lot of money, to remove the power in the idols. Lured by the gold the sorcerer obliged and many idols were deposited into the ocean. Ramanuja came to know about these acts of desecration and vandalism. He felt it was only a question of time before the same fate would befall the temple at Srirangam. He therefore approached his acharya Peria Nambi. Peria Nambi then said that he would go round the precincts of Srirangam temple in a pradakshina and that one of the sishyas of Ramanuja should follow him closely like a shadow, without getting distracted. Ramanuja then felt that Koorath alvan was the only disciple who had such a quality of unquestioned obedience and unshakeable loyalty. However, Ramanuja wanted Peria Nambi himself to select Koorath alvan and not recommend the name himself. So he told his Guru that he was not aware of any such sishya who would measure up to the strict requirements prescribed by Peria Nambi. Hearing this, Peria Nambi himself came out with the words, please send your devotee Koorath alvan to follow me like a shadow. While there were many students of Ramanuja, Koorath alvan who was specially selected by Peria Nambi, felt extremely happy at the visesha kataksha of the senior sage falling on him. He therefore followed Peria Nambi like a shadow. It is said that the spiritual strength and divine grace of Peria Nambi was so great that when he walked round the Srirangam temple precincts, it was as if he drew a Lakshmana Rekha and no enemy could set his foot inside the area covered by him. This story is repeated by the commentators to explain the feeling of supreme happiness which Nammalvar had when he knew that the Perumal had selected him to sing his songs in His presence in preference to the claims of various other devotees waiting in the queue earlier!

Pasuram 3441:

ஒன்றுநில் லாகெடும் முற்றவும் தீவினை உள்ளித்
 தொழுவின் தொண்டிற்
 அன்னை கமர்வென்று உருப்பிணி நங்கை அணிநேடுந்
 கோள்புணர்ந்தான்
 என்றுமெப் போதுமென் னெஞ்சம் துதிப்பஉள் ளேயிருக்
 கின்றபிரான்
 நின்ற அணிதிரு வாரன் வினையென்றும் நிள்நக ரமதுவே.

Meaning:

O comrades! Think of the beautiful Thiruvananthapuram divya desa and bow down before the Lord there. Once upon a time, He fought a battle, emerged victorious in order to win the hands of Rukmini. He is the one Who is enshrined in my heart so that all the time, I can sing His praises. By worshipping that Lord, all your dire sins will get wiped out.

The alvar here says that even if one thinks of Thiruvananthapuram, all one's sorrow will be removed. The alvar uses the words "Theevinai ondrum illamutravum azhiyum". Very often if we try to atone for our sins, it will not be possible to completely have a clean slate. Some of the sorrows and sins will stick to us like leaches. But if God so desires and wants to reward us for our sincerity and devotion, He will be able to redeem us of all the sins. It is said **Merumandara mathropi rasi papasya karmanaha kesavam vaidhyam asatya dhur vyudhi riva nasyathi**". This means even if the sins which result out of our actions are as high as the Meru and Mandara mountains, if we seek Kesava, the doctor, He will get rid of that burden of that sin even as a doctor cures the sickness. (This is a sloka from Vishnu Dharma).

In this pasuram, the alvar refers to the manner in which Krishna won the hand of Rukmini. Kuntinapura was a town in Vidharba desa. Bhishmaka was the king who ruled the kingdom. He had five sons and one daughter. The daughter was Rukmini. She was the avatar of Mahalakshmi. When she attained marriageable age, Krishna went and asked the king for his daughter's hand. At that time, Rukman, the eldest son of the king of Vidharba

desa wanted that Rukmini should be given in marriage to Sisupala and not Krishna. The father therefore announced a swayamvara and called all the kings. Coming to know of this, Rukmini decided to send word to Krishna and requested Him to come over to Vidharba desa and carry her away. She sent the message through a brahmin. As soon as He got the message, Krishna, along with Balarama, started posthaste to Vidharba desa. He lifted Rukmini into the chariot and tried to drive away. Sisupala and others chased Him and fought with Him. Rukman got angry with Krishna. He took a knife in his hand and was about to kill Krishna. When Krishna wanted to kill Rukman, Rukmini pleaded with Him to spare his life. Krishna conceded her request. He tied Rukman to the chariot and shamed him in the presence of all the public and asked him to get back to his palace. After reaching His palace, Krishna married Rukmini. The alvar refers to this incident to prove his point that even faced with stiff opposition, the Lord will destroy all one's enemies.

Pasuram 3442:

நீணக ரம்மதுவேமலர்ச் சோலைகள் சூழ்திரு
 வாரன்வினை
 நீணக ரத்துறை கின்ற பிரான்நெடு மால் கண்ணன்
 விண்ணவர்கோன்
 வாண புரம்புக்கு முக்கட் பிராணைத் தொலையல வெம்
 போர்கள் செய்து
 வாணனை ஆயிரந் தோள்துணித் தான்சர ணன்றிமற்
 னொன்றிலமே.

Meaning:

In this pasuram, the alvar again enumerates the great qualities of Thiruvananvilai divya desa. He says Thiruvananvilai divya desa full of flower groves is a Tirupathi fit to be attained by us. In that great desa, resides the Perumal Who has a great attachment to His devotees. He is the one, Who took the avatar as Krishna. He is the master of nityasuris. He is the one, Who went all the way to the town where Banasura, the demon stayed, fought with him and defeated him. Lord Siva who fought on the side of Banasura also got defeated and took to his heels. After the fierce

battle, the Lord severed the thousand shoulders of the asura. He is the supreme protector and our sole succour. The place to be reached (prapyam) is Thiruvaranvilai and the person to be attained (Prapakan) is the Lord at Thiruvaranvilai.

Pasuram 3443:

அன்றிமற் றென்றிலம் நின்சர ணேயென்று அகலீரும்
 பொய்கைவின்வாய்
 நின்றுகன் நீள்கழ லேத்திய ஆணையின் நெஞ்சிடர் தீர்த்த
 பிரான்
 சென்றங் கினிதுறை கின்ற செழும்பொழில் சூழ்திரு
 வாரன்வினை
 ஒன்றி வலஞ்சேய்ய ஒன்றுமோ? தீவினை உள்லத்தின்
 சாச்வல்லவே.

Meaning:

Freely translated, the alvar in this pasuram says:-

The lord Who is at Thiruvaranvilai is the one Who rushed to the rescue of Gajendra, the mighty elephant whose foot was caught by the crocodile. Realising that there was no other protection than His twin lotus feet, Gajendra cried out to Him for help. You Oh Lord then rushed to His rescue and relieved him of his pain. Will I be able to reach Thiruvaranvilai and circumambulate i.e. do pradakshina? Only then, will my mind be rid of all its sins and troubles.

In this pasuram, the alvar says that the God Who relieved Gajendra of his pain is residing at Thiruvaranvilai in order to relieve us also of our troubles and turmoils. He says go to Thiruvaranvilai and do pradakshina to the Lord there and all your worries, sins will fly away.

The story of Gajendra is only too well known. The mighty elephant had entered the tank in order to pluck a beautiful lotus to offer to the Lord. But the moment its foot stepped into the tank, the crocodile caught the foot. Even as Gajendra was trying to pull its foot out, the crocodile was pulling it in. **Akarshathe theeray graaha akarshathe jale** i.e. the elephant pulled the crocodile towards the shore. The crocodile pulled the elephant into the water.

This tug of war lasted for thousands of years. The effort made by Gajendra was standing in the way of the Perumal rushing to His rescue. Only when it threw up its trunk and cried aloud "Athimoolame" and sought its rescue by placing itself completely in the hands of Perumal, did God rush to his rescue. Similarly, when Drowpathi Mana Bhanga episode took place, only when she stopped making attempts to protect herself and threw up her hands and placed complete faith in God and sought His intervention, did He rush to Her rescue. The alvar is therefore referring to the need for this quality of complete absolute surrender at His feet.

The alvar uses the words "Aanaiyin nenju idar theertha piran" These words are given two interpretations. One is the straight interpretation when it is said that when God rescued Gajendra by letting loose His Sudarsana chakra and severing the head of the crocodile, He relieved Gajendra of his agony. The other interpretation is that Gajendra was not so worried that his life will be lost if the crocodile succeeded in pulling him into the tank. The elephant was more worried and deeply distressed that he will not be able to offer the lotus flower plucked at such great cost at the feet of the Lord. What is more, it was also worried that even after he cried out for help if by chance God did not respond, it may be said that the Lord was not able to protect even His ardent devotee and that He did not deserve the name of sole saviour and supreme protector thus spoiling His reputation. The elephant was worried on these two grounds and when God rescued him, the elephant was happy that such dangers to the name and fame of the Lord was averted. It is therefore those painful thoughts which got resolved by His timely appearance.

Pasuram 3444:

தீவினை உள்ளத்தின் சார்வல்ல வாகித் தெளிவிகம்

பேறலுற்குல்

நாவிலுள் றும்உள்ளத் துள்ளும் அமைந்த தொழிலிறுள்

றும்நவின்று

யாவரும் வந்து நணங்கும் பொழில்திரு வாரன்
 வினையதனை
 மேவி வலஞ்செய்து கைகொழக் கூடுங்கொல்?
 என்னும்என்சிந்தனையே.

Meaning:

Freely translated this pasuram runs as follows:-

The alvar says "My mind was, all the time concerned that it should reach Thiruvaranvilai surrounded by luscious groves and do pradakshina (circumulate) and bow down before the Lord there. Even if all my sins were to be redeemed and I were fit to go to Paramapada, I would not desire that. My thought, my word and my body would only seek to go to Thiruvaranvilai to which place all the pious people flock and congregate.

The alvar says that given the choice to go to Paramapada or to go to Thiruvaranvilai, his mind would not be eager to go to Paramapada. The mind would only desire to go to Thiruvaranvilai with beautiful scenic splendour and bow down before the Lord there. So even high heavens recede before the holy pilgrim centre of Aranmula!

Pasuram 3445:

சிந்தைமற் றொன்றின் திறத்ததல் லாத்தன்மை தேவ
 பிரானறியும்
 சிந்தையி னால்செய்வ தானறி யாதன மாயங்கள்
 ஒன்றுமில்லை
 சிந்தையி னால்சொல்லி னால்செய்கை யால்நிலத் தேவர்
 குழுவணங்கும்
 சிந்தை மகிழ்திரு வாரன் வினையுறை தீர்த்தனுக்கு
 அற்றபின்னே.

Meaning:

Freely translated, this pasuram runs as follows:-

The all-knowing Lord Himself knows that my mind will think of none else especially after it has become a bounden slave to the supreme Lord (Parama pavithra) residing in beautiful Thiruvaranvilai. The brahmins worship Him with their words, deeds

and actions. He is aware of all my thoughts. None of my thoughts are a secret to Him. My thoughts are centred only on Him.

The commentators while explaining this pasuram have an interesting conversation built up between the alvar and the God. They say that the alvar had earlier very often asked for Paramapada. So surely God will confer a place in Heaven to the alvar. Someone is said to have asked alvar what he would do if Paramapada is forced on him when now his precedence was for Aranmula. The alvar then replies that Baghavan (Lord) is known as Purushartha Pradan i.e. He will give whatever the devotee asks. At present, in my mind, says the alvar there is no thought other than Thiruvaranvilai. The alvar continues Do you mean to say He is not aware of my thoughts? When such is the situation, how will He confer paramapada on me when I am thinking and asking Him only the privilege to visit Thiruvaranvilai and bow down before Him.

Pasuram 3446:

தீர்துதனுக் கற்றபின் மற்னோர் சரணில்லை
 யென்றெண்ணித் தீர்த்தனுக்கே
 தீர்த்த மனத்தன னாகிச் செழுங்குரு கூர்ச்சட
 கோபன்சொன்ன
 தீர்த்தங்க ளாயிரத் துள்ளிவை பத்தும்வல் லார்களைத்
 தேவர்வைகல்
 தீர்த்தங்க ளேயென்று பூசித்து நல்கி யுரைப்பர் தம்
 தேவியர்க்கே.

Meaning:

This is a phala stuthi pasuram. The alvar says that the Nityasuris are always telling their wives that all those who have read and understood these ten pasurams out of the holy immaculate thousand pasurams written by me (Nammalvar) are very holy people entitled to great respect and reverence.

The alvar says that the nityasuris in Paramapada respect those persons who are familiar with this decad of ten pasurams. The nityasuris are Garuda, Adishesha and Vishvaksehar. The alvar says that these nityasuris told their wives about the greatness of

those who have understood these ten pasurams. Garuda's patni is Rudra and Sukeerthi. Vishvakssenar's patni is known as Sutravathi and it is to these three that the alvar is referring as Deviyar.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

சென்று புனல் முழுகிச் செய் தவங்கள் செய்தாளும்
வென்று புலன் அடக்கி விட்டாலும், இன்தமிழல்
மாறன் விளைத்த மறை ஒதார்க்கு இல்லையே-
ஆறன் விளைத் திருமால் அன்பு.

Meaning:

Even if one visits pilgrime centres, has a holy dip in holy tanks, does japas, controls the five senses, one will not earn the blessings of the Lord at Thiruvaranvilai so long as one has not read out and understood the sweet Tamil verses composed by Nammalvar viz. Thiruvaimozhi also regarded as the Tamil Vedas.

Here Divya kavi says that one cannot earn the grace of the Lord at Thiruvaranvilai until and unless one repeats the Thiruvaimozhi pasurams composed by the great vaishnavite sa-vant Nammalvar.

THIRUVITHVACODE

This is yet another of the Kerala Nadu divya desas. It is locally popularly known as Anju murthy koil i.e. a temple with five main idols. It is also known as Thiruvichicode as also Thiruvinjicode, Thirumithacode. This divya desa is located two miles from Pattambi railway station, on the Shoranur-Calicut line. It can also be approached by bus from Guruvayoor as it is ten miles from Guruvayoor on the Guruvayoor-Shoranur route. If one gets down at Pattambi railway station, one has to cross the Bharatpuzha river and walk about one mile to reach the temple. The moolavar here is known as Uyyavandha Perumal. He is seen in a standing posture, facing south. The consort is known as Vithvacodevalli as also Padmapani Nachiyar. The theertha is known as Chakra theertha. The vimana is known as Thatwakanchana vimana. God appeared in response to the prayers of Ambarisha rishi.

Bharatpuzha river is the longest river in Kerala. It flows westward and around its scenic beauty and on its banks are located quite a few famous temples. Among such temples is the one at Thiruvithvacode. It lies on the western bank of this river. The temple has become famous because Kulasekhara alvar has composed ten pasurams on the Lord of this temple. But when one reaches the village, one is struck by the sleepy village, far away from the dust and din of the city life. It is now proposed to quote a little bit from the description of this desa as found in a book "Pilgrim's guide to Guruvayoor and a few other vaishnavite temples" as it paints a graphic picture of the village scene. It reads as follows:

"The temple located in the heart of the village entertains no sound that tends to unsettle its tranquillity. Amidst the solemn stillness it holds sway to the rhythmic ripples of the tiny waves of the gentle river, timelessly complemented by the rustles of long-leaved trees that encircle the complex. Chirps of the sparrow nesting in the wood-shed lend a background music of a sort and help in creating a format of a sylvan backdrop. No raucous cries of any speeding vehicle could reach the vicinity of the temple. As

it is so withdrawn in the heart of the village with no motorable road to offer any easy access. The narrow gravelled-footpath leading to the temple is unfriendly to any vehicular traffic. The beautitude that envelops the temple atmosphere overwhelms a devotee the moment he sets his foot inside the temple complex. The rustic simplicity of the surrounding is such that one cannot escape the feeling that the absence of modern infrastructural facilities which is so conspicuous, is indeed a blessing in disguise. As inevitable sense of other-worldly charm is there when one is inside the shrine, what with the timeless rythm of the river, the rapturous sculpture enshrined around and the deity of the Lord Vishnu depicted in the traditional style flashes a benign smile at the viewer, the shrine symbolises real peace and calm”.

With a mental image emerging out of this beautiful description, let us now turn to the sthalapurana i.e. the mythological stories associated with this divya desa.

It is said that the Pandava princes had set out on their pilgrimage after the cataclysmic Mahabharata war, in order to have some peace of mind and to calm their troubled mind which felt guilty at the death of such huge number of their relatives as well as soldiers belonging to innocent armies of the Kauravas. In the course of their wanderings, they reached Thiruvithvacode on the banks of Bharatpuzha river. They met a number of sages there, all doing penance at that sylvan spot. They bowed down to the Maharishis and requested them to enlighten them with the stories connected with that kshetra. The rishis said that Thiruvithvacode was a place where king Ambarisha was blessed with the vision of the Lord Himself. Ambarisha was a just king who followed all the principles laid down by Manu for ruling a kingdom. However, he felt sad as he did not have a son to succeed him and rule the kingdom. He went to Thiruvithvacode and did severe penance. Lord Narayana was pleased with his tapas but wanted to test the king's devotion and therefore he assumed the form of Indra riding on Iravata the elephant and appeared before Ambarisha. He requested Ambarisha to ask for any boon saying that he was pleased with his penance. When Ambarisha saw that Lord Indra and not

Lord Narayana was standing before him, he politely declined the offer of the boon from Lord Indra and told him that he would like to continue his tapas again till such time as Lord Narayana appeared. Hearing this, Lord Narayana pleased with the sincere devotion of the rishi, disclosed His true form. The king then told the Lord that the only sorrow that he had was that he had no sons to whom he could entrust the Rajyabhara, i.e. the burden of ruling the kingdom. The Lord assured him that he could go back to his kingdom, and that shortly he will have a daughter and later he should perform the putrakameshti yaga and he will be blessed with two sons. Having said this, God disappeared. Ambarisha went back to his kingdom. As promised by God, first a daughter, whom he named Srimathi, was born. He gave that daughter in marriage to Lord Narayana Himself. Later he performed the Putrakameshti yaga. He had three sons. He entrusted the kingdom to them and went back to the forest to meditate and in due course attained moksha. Hearing this story, the Pandavas then asked the rishis as to why there were four Vishnu murthis in that temple. The rishis explained that when Ambarisha did tapas he wanted the Lord to give him darshan in His Vyuha avatar. Hence it is that the Lord Himself manifested in His four Vyuha forms viz. as *Pradyumna, Aniruddha, Sankharshana and Para Vasudeva*. It is believed that the Pancha pandavas worshipped these four Vyuha murthis and renovated and consecrated the temple. Dharmaputra worshipped the idol of Vishnu situated in the Centre, Arjuna worshipped the idol on the west, Bhima worshipped the idol on the left side while Nakula and Sahadeva worshipped the idol on the right side. This is how the strange factor of four idols of Lord Vishnu enshrined in one complex in close proximity to one another is explained. The existence of four murthis is a very unique feature not seen in any other temple.

Yet another unique feature that strikes one as soon as one enters the temple is the presence of the idol of Lord Shiva in this Vishnu temple complex. As soon as one enters the temple from the south, one comes across the sannidhi for Lord Shiva. It is believed that this idol is a Swayambhu idol i.e. one that has come into existence of its own and not installed by any human being.

There is an interesting story connected with this idol which bears repetition here. It is said that a devotee of Kasi Visvanatha was residing at Kasi and worshipping Lord Visvanatha for a long time. But one day he had information that back home his mother was on her death-bed. While he was reluctant to leave Kasi, he felt compelled by his sense of duty and affection to his mother to reach her side before she passed away. He prayed to Lord Visvanatha to resolve the emotional problem that he faced. That night Lord Visvanatha appeared in the dream of the devotee and told him to go home and assured him that He would accompany him right through. This devotee reached Thiruvithvacode temple on route to his house. As it was evening time, he decided to perform sandyavandana on the river bank. He placed the umbrella which he was carrying near the altar stone in front of the idol of Lord Vishnu. When he returned after sandyavandana, he tried to lift the umbrella and to his dismay found that the umbrella had got entrenched in the altar. He tried to pull it out with force. The altar stone broke and a Siva linga emerged. This legendary version explains the presence of the idol of Lord Shiva right in front of the Vishnu idol. This also explains the construction of two garbhagrihas under one roof in one temple. As the four idols of Lord Vishnu (the four vyuha forms) along with one idol of Lord Shiva exists in the same complex, this temple is popularly known as Anju murthi temple i.e. a temple with five Moolavars. May be this is also indicative of the spirit of tolerance that existed in those days when Saivism and Vaishnavism flourished together and did not view each other with suspicion.

The walls in this temple have quite a few beautiful murals, depicting Dasavatharas, Putana vadha, Kamsa vadha and other themes.

HYMNOLOGY:

Kulasekhara alvar is the only alvar who has composed pasurams on the Lord at Thiruvithvacode.

Kulasekhara alvar was born in the royal family and as such was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He had wealth and

power. Yet he did not desire that lotus eaters life. He had great devotion to Perumal. He realised that this jeevatma was beholden to paramatma and the latter was eager to protect this jeevatma. In this set of ten pasurams, the alvar makes it abundantly clear that there is no other succour and protector than Sriman Narayana. In these pasurams on the Perumal of Vithvacode he gives pithy illustrations and relationships to drive home the point of our dependence on Him and the role of Perumal as the only saviour and protector. There are ten pasurams composed by Kulasekhara alvar vide 688 to 698 pasurams. Each pasuram reflects one aspect of the sambandha (relationship) between jeevatma and paramatma.

In pasuram 688 the alvar picturises Perumal as a mother and himself as a child. Thus, he says that the relationship between jeevatma and paramatma is that of a child and its mother.

In pasuram 689 he eulogises Perumalas the husband and himself as the dutiful ideal wife (Nayaka nayika bhava). He thus says that the relationship between Paratma and Jeevatma is that which exists between the husband and the wife (Pathi pathni bhava).

In Pasuram 690 the alvar places God in the position of a king (Raja) and himself as a subject (praja). Hence he says that the relationship between paratma and jeevatma is that which should exist ideally between a ruler and the ruled (Rakshakan-Rakshya bhava).

In pasuram 691 he puts God on the pedestal as a doctor (vaidya) and himself in the position of a patient. He thus expatiates that the relationship between paramatma and jeevatma is that which exists between a doctor and a patient i.e. one of ability on the part of the doctor and faith on the part of patient (Doctor patient relationship of absolute faith and surrender by jeevatma to paramatma).

In pasuram 692 he picturises Perumal as a ship in mid ocean and himself as a lone bird perched on the sail of that ship. He thus says that Paratma is the sole support for survival (aadhara) for the jeevatmas.

In pasuram 693 he compares paramatma to the Sun and himself as the lotus flower. Thus, he says that paramatma is the giver of happiness and jeevatma is the one who enjoys that happiness.

In pasuram 694 he describes Perumal as a dark rain bearing cloud (Kalamegha) and himself as crops needing that rain. Thus, he makes it evident that Paramatma is the life giving, life sustaining force for jeevatmas (jeevaadhaara rain).

In pasuram 694 he compares God to an ocean (samudra) and himself as a river that flows into the ocean. Thus, he establishes the allencompassing greatness of paramatma and the insignificant atom like particle of jeevatma and says that ultimately all roads lead to God even as all rivers flow into the ocean.

In pasuram 696 he places God as the repository and owner of all wealth and himself as an item of property. Thus, he makes it abundantly clear that paramatma is Swami and Jeevatma is Swa (i.e. unit of property). This is called Swa Swami bhava sambanda.

In pasuram 697 he says that Paramatma is benevolent, compassionate and extremely kind. He places himself in the position of a supplicant mendicant. Alvar says that because he has cried aloud so often seeking God's benign interference, the ever kind Paramatma will not only reward the jeevatma of the alvar but also all those jeevatmas who read and repeat these ten pasurams composed by the alvar.

Thus, these lines of poetry steeped in Bhakthi and extreme devotion have a deep inner significance which expounds the relationship between paramatma and jeevatma. An attempt is now made to freely translate one of these pasurams into simple English.

Pasuram 688:

தருதுயரம்டாயேல்உன் சரணல்லால் சரணில்லை
விரை குழுவும் மலர்ப் பொழில் சூழ விற்றுவக் கோட்டம்மானே
அரிசினத்தால் ஈன்றதாய் அகற்றிடினும் மற்றவள் தன்
அருள் நினைந்தே யழும் குழவி யதுவே போன்றிருந்தேனே

Meaning:

Freely translated this pasurams runs as follows:-

Oh Perumal of Vithvacode which is surrounded by sweet scented flower groves.

Even if you do not on your own remove all the hardship and troubles I am facing, I have no other salvation and protection other than your twin lotus feet.

I am like a small child which is spurned by its mother in a moment of anger, crying seeking only that very mother's loving kindness.

Alvar says that even if God fails to help him, he will continue to cry and seek only Him as he knows that ultimately like a loving mother He is the only refuge for a crying child. Similar thoughts are expressed by Alavandar also in his Stotra ratna when he says

**“Rushaa nirasthopi sisu sthanandayaha na' jaathu
Maathuscharanow Jihaasathi”.**

It means a small baby thrust aside by its mother in a fit of anger will cry continuing to hold on to its mother's feet till it catches her attention and affection. The alvar says that God has made him go thro' this cycle of birth and death and rebirth thus making attainment of salvation a goal that is distanced. Yet he seeks only the twin feet of that very same God as he knows that nothing else will act like an anchor to survive in this turbulent ocean of a samsara. The Divine feet are the only certain definite, unfailing means of salvation.

Pasuram 689:

கண்டா ரிகழ்வனவே காதலன்தான் செய்திடினும்
கொண்டாளை யல்லால் அறியாத் குலமகள் போல்
விண்தோய் மதிள்புடைசூழ் விற்றுவக் கோட்டம்மா நீ
கொண்டாளா யாகினும்உன் குரைகழலே கூறுவனே.

Meaning:

Freely translated, this pasuram runs as follows:-

Oh Perumal of Vithvacode surrounded by huge fort like walls rising up to the sky.

Even as a noble ideal wife will not think even for a moment, in her mind, of anyone else as her husband, even though the husband is held in ridicule due to his misdeeds, similarly even if you do not resolve any of my problems, though I am your bounden slave, I will still hold on only to your divine lotus feet adorned with jingling anklets as my sole support.

Here the alvar says that a devoted noble wife will not take any notice of her husband's drawbacks even if the entire world speaks ill of him. 'Similarly, the alvar says that a sincere devotee like him will regard God as the sole saviour and protector even if He has not lessened the burden of that devotee and has not favoured him. In brief, the alvar says a devotee should have unshakeable faith and a firm belief that God and God alone is our saviour and none else.

PASURAM · 690:

மீன்நோக்கும் நீள்வயல்தழ் விற்றுவக்கோட் டம்மா என்
பால்நோக்கா யாகிலும்உன் பற்றல்லால் பற்றிலேன்
தான் நோக்காது எத்துயரம் செய்திடுனும் தார் வேந்தன்
கோல்நோக்கி வாழும் குடிபோன் றிருந்தேனே.

Meaning:

This pasuram freely translated runs as follows:-

Oh Perumal of Vithvacode where the fishes are very happy and free of worries as the place is full of fields with plentiful water supply where they can stay comfortably; Even though you have not blessed me I will never seek refuge (saranam) with any one else but You. In this, I am like the subjects of a king who look up only to the king even if that king is not a benevolent king and has ignored his subjects and has done nothing good for them.

Here the alvar says that the subjects look up only to their king to protect them as it is the king's duty to guard his subjects. Thus, even if the ruler has failed in doing his job, the ruled will only pray and hope he will realise his duty and perform it well. On similar lines the alvar says that though the Perumal Who has left

Paramapada and has taken residence at Vithvacode has not as yet cast His benign glance on him, yet he would continue to pin his faith on that Perumal only. The following couplet from Tirukkural reflects the very same thought viz.

*“Vaan nokki vazhun ulagelaam
Mannavan kel nokki vazhum kudi”*

It means that all the living creatures in this world will live looking up expectantly at the skies to release life giving rain. In a similar manner the subjects will live pinning their faith on the Senkole i.e. rod which is the insignia of rulership of a king.

The alvar says that the fishes are happy with the prospect of living in Vithvacode. Peria Vachan Pillai the great commentator while commenting on this says that the fishes in the ocean feel that even if the ocean were to dry up, (which is highly unlikely) they need not worry as they are near Vithvacode which is full of water resources i.e. Vithvacode is a place which is blessed with plentiful water supply.

PASURAM 691:

வாளால் அறுத்துச் சுடினும் மருத்துவன்பால்
மாளாத காதல்நோ யாளான்போல் மாயத்தால்
மீளாத துயர் தரீனும் விற்றுவக் கோட் டம்மா! நீ
ஆளா உனதருளே பார்ப்பன் அடியேனே.

Meaning:

Oh Perumal of Vithvacode! Even as a patient has only eternal grateful love and affection for the surgeon who has operated on him or used a heated needle to cauterize his wound, I, Your eternal slave, look forward only to Your compassion and mercy tho' You have chosen to burden me with troubles.

Here the alvar says he is like a patient who has received medical attention from a surgeon. Tho' the surgeon uses the sharp knife and other cutting instruments which initially inflict pain, but ultimately cures the disease, the patient forgets the pain and has nothing but gratitude and affection towards the doctor. Similarly, God is like a doctor. Though He gives us troubles, out of His limitless compassion He ultimately blesses us and rewards us with

salvation. Usually the scriptures refer to God as “Vaidyo Narayano Harihi”. The alvars also have addressed Perumal as “Maruthuvanaa ninra Maamanivanna! i.e. Oh Precious jewel Who stand like a doctor.

This pasuram thro’ its comparison of God with a doctor clearly brings out the rakshya and rakshaka relationship (one who is to be protected and one Who protects) between devotee and God.

PASURAM 692:

வெங்கண்திண் களிறடர்த்தாய்! விற்றுவக் கோட்
டம்மானே!
எங்குப் போய் உய்கேன்? உன் னிணையடியே
அடையலல்லால்
எங்கும் போய்க் கரைகாணாது எறிகடல்வாய்
மீண்டேயும்
வங்கத்தின் கூம்பேறும் மாப்பறவை போன்றேனே.

Meaning:

Oh Perumal of Vithvacode!

With your eyes red with anger You destroyed Kuvalayapeeta the elephant; where else can I seek succour than at Your twin divine lotus feet? I am like a bird which was perched on the mast of a ship sailing in mid ocean. It flew away from the mast, hither thither in all four directions, yet could not reach the shore, it came back to its original resting place on the mast! Similarly, Your divine feet are my only solace. Nothing else can harbour and protect me.

The alvar here says that this world (samsara) is like an ocean (sagara) a turbulent one at that. The bird thought that it could wing its way to the safe shores. But alas try as it might it could not reach the shore. So it came back to seek safe shelter on the mast. So also Oh Lord mere existence in this world exposes me to numerous pitfalls. The only dependable anchor in this turbulent world is Your divine lotus feet (thiruvadi). The alvar says oh supreme Protector of Vithvacode, Your feet are my sure succour for salvation.

Pasuram 693:

செந்தழலே வந்துஅழலைச் செய்திடினும் செங்கமலம்
அந்தரம்சேர் வெங்கதிரோற் கல்லால் அல்ராவால்
வெந்துயர்வீட் டாவிடினும் விற்றுவக்கோட் டம்மா! உன்
அந்தமில்சீர்க் கல்லால் அகம் குழைய மாட்டேனே.

Meaning:

Oh Perumal of Vithvacode!

The lotus flower will blossom only when the warm rays of the rising Sun in the sky fall on it. But the flower will not open up even if the heat of red hot burning coal is turned on to it. Similarly, tho' You have not redeemed me of my sins and have not accepted me, Oh Perumal, this heart of mine will open up and I will bend my head in reverence only before You the embodiment of great incomparable qualities and not before anyone else.

Pasuram 694:

எத்தனையும் வான்மறந்த காலத்தும் பைங்கூழ்கள்
மைத்தேழுந்த மாழுகிலே பார்த்திருக்கும் மற்றவைபோல்
மெய்த்துயர்வீட் டாவிடினும் விற்றுவக் கோட் டம்மா! என்
சித்தம் மிக உன்பாலே வைப்பன் அடியேனே.

Meaning:

Oh Perumal of Vithvacode!

Even if the rain bearing clouds have failed to bring life sustaining rains, the fresh crops will continue to look up to the sky hoping against hope for the arrival of those dark messengers of hope. I am like those crops. Though You have not redeemed me of my sins and solved the problems I am facing, yet this slave of Yours will ever focus all his thoughts, his mind and heart only on You and You alone.

Here the alvar says that the crops look up only to the rainbearing clouds to survive and flourish. So also he looks up only to God to cast his cool benevolent glance on him the loyal faithful devotee.

Pasuram 695:

கொக்கிலங்கு யாறெல்லாம் பரந்தோடி கொடுகடலே
 புக்கன்றிப் புறம்தீர்க மாட்டாத மற்றவை போல்
 பிக்கிலங்கு முகில் நிறத்தாய்! விற்றுவக்கோட் டம்மா! உன்
 புக்கிலங்கு சீரல்லால் புக்கிலன் காண் புண்ணியனே.

Meaning:

Oh Perumal of Vithvancode!

Oh You who have the dark hue of a rain bearing cloud!

Oh embodiment of dharma and punya (merit)! All the rivers full of freshes flow all over but ultimately flow into and merge with the deep ocean. They cannot continue to remain outside the ocean. Like those rivers I will also seek only You and for ever enjoy the experience of drinking deep from the cup of joy, enjoying the great qualities of the Perumal Who has taken residence in my heart. I would not like to have a taste of any other experience.

Here the alvar says that all rivers ultimately flow into the sea. Similarly, all jeevatmas have to ultimately reach Paramatma. Before flowing into the sea the river may miander over a vast area. So also the alvar says that he may have strayed a lot and got involved in this worldly life but ultimately his salvation lies only in becoming one with God and merging into Him.

The alvar refers to God as "Punyan"

i.e. as embodiment of dharma. This identification is a normal practice for e.g. it is said **Ramo Vighrahan Karmaha and Krishnam Dharmam Sanatanam**. This means that both Rama and Krishna were dharma swaroopies.

Pasuram 696:

நின்னையே தான் வேண்டி நீள்செல்வம் வேண்டாதான்
 தன்னையே தான் வேண்டும் செல்வம்போல் மாயத்தால்
 முன்னையே சேர்த்திரி விற்றுவக் கோட்டம்மா!
 நின்னையே தான்வேண்டி நிற்பன் அடியேனே.

Meaning:

Oh Perumal holding in the hand the lightning like effulgent discuss;

Oh Lord of Vithvacode!

To all those who desire only You, even if they do not desire aiswarya (wealth), that aiswarya automatically devolves on them when they wholeheartedly seek You. On the same lines even when You do not want me, I your slave will eternally stand desiring You and You only. (Implying thereby that he will attain Him finally).

Here the alvar says that the devotee Who firmly seeks spiritual wealth will find that unasked for he will be blessed with the worldly wealth also. He also expresses his unswerving steadfast devotion to God even in the face of seeming rejection by God. The word "Selvam" used by the alvar is also said to refer to Mokshalakshmi. It then becomes clear that if one shows steadfast devotion to God automatically salvation is conferred on you.

Pasuram 697:

விற்றுவக்கோட் டம்மா! நீ வேண்டாயே யாயினும்
மற்றாகும் பற்றிலே னென்று அவனைத் தான்ருயந்த
கொற்றவேல் தானைக் குலசே கரன் சொன்ன
நற்றமிழ்பத் தும்வல்லார் நண்ணார் நரகமே.

Meaning:

Oh Perumal of Vithvacode!

Even if You say you do not want me and You spurn me, I will not go elsewhere. I will cling on to Your divine lotus feet seeking salvation. I Kulasekhara alvar holding a spear in my hand and head of a large army have expressed this very clearly in these beautiful ten pasurams written in good Tamil. Whoever reads and repeats those ten stanzas will definitely not go to hell.

The alvar says that even as he defeated many enemies with the spear and his armies, the enemies inside one's soul caused by the weak sense organs seeking ephemeral evanescent pleasures, can be overcome and be defeated by sincere unswerving devotion to the twin divine lotus feet of the Lord.

In this pasuram the alvar expresses his conviction that as he has pleaded with God not once but many times, the ever kind

compassionate Perumal will not fail to answer his prayers, and that the benign compassionate glance of Perumal will also extend to all those who repeat his pasurams.

**DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108
TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:**

வாய்த்த கருமம் இனி மற்று இல்லை, நெஞ்சமே
தோய்ந்த தயிர், வெண்ணெய், தொட்டு உண்ட கூத்தன்
திருவிறுவக் கோடு சேர்ந்தால், பிறவிக்
கருவின் துவக்கு ஒடும் காண்.

Meaning:

Oh mind! Go to Thiruvithvacode where resides the Lord Who once manifested as Krishna in Gokulam and performed several pranks (leelas) like stealing and eating on the sly fresh butter, curds from the houses of Gopastrees. By visiting that divya desa you will rid yourself of all your sins which cause rebirth. There is nothing greater than this that you could ever hope to do.

* * *

VADA NADU DIVYA DESAS

BADRINATH - THIRUPIRIDHI - DEVAPRAYAG

It is proposed to deal with all these three divya desas in one chapter as Thirupiridhi and Devaprayag divya desas can be covered while doing a pilgrimage to Badrinath. It is therefore appropriate that these three divya desas are dealt with at one place.

In the not too distant past, pilgrimage to Badrinath was regarded by the devotees as almost the last great journey in one's life on this earth. But today the bus or the car, as the case may be, takes the pilgrims directly to the temple at Badrinath. It is therefore not so risky and tough as of yore. But the journey is still very ennobling, out of this world experience.

All these three divya desas are situated in Central Himalayas in Garhwal district of Uttar Pradesh. This region is traversed by such streams as Alaknanda, Bhagirathi and Mandakini. These very names themselves cast a purificatory holy spell. These are the rivers, so goes the story, that sprang from the matted locks of Lord Shiva to form the holy Ganga. The great sage Kahnu must have lived here, as he is the one who drank up the Ganga and later relented and allowed the river to flow out of his ear!

As one proceeds from Haridwar to Badrinath, the first divya desa one crosses is Devaprayag, also popularly known as Thirukandam as also Kadi Nagar. This divya desa lies on the 45th mile from Rishikesh to Badrinath. It is about 1700 feet above sea level. The moolavar here is known as Neelamega Perumal as also Purushothaman. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The consort is known as Pundarikavalli. The theertha is Mangala theertha as also Ganga river. The vimana is known as Mangala vimana. God appeared to Bharadwaja rishi.

It is at *Deva Prayag* that Alaknanda and Bagirathi mingle and the river comes to be known thenceforth as Adi Ganga. The entire place casts a spell on us with its bewitching natural beauty. The Lord to whom Perialwar did mangalasasana is known as Raghunathji. This is the place where Brahmadeva, emperor Dasaratha, and Sri Rama are believed to have done tapas. The idol of Raghunathji is believed to have been installed by Adi Sankara

himself. Perialvar is the only alvar who has done mangalasaṣana to this Lord through eleven paṣurams.

As one proceeds further from Devaprayag to Badrinath, about 154 miles from Haridwar one reaches *Joshimat*. Many believe that Joshimat is the divya deśa known as Thirupiridhi. There are some who believe that Thirupiridhi is located elsewhere in the interior of Himalayas and not on the banks of river Ganga. Yet others hold that Nandaprayag is Thirupiridhi. Notwithstanding these diverse claims, the devout pilgrims who go to Badri believe that Joshimat is the Thirupiridhi divya deśa. The moolavar here is known as Paramapurusha. He is seen in a bhujaṅga sayana pose, facing east. The consort is known as Parimalavalli. The theerthas are Indira theertha, Govardhana theertha and Manasaśaras. The vimana is known as Govardhana vimana. God appeared to Parvati at this place. But today the temple that is seen here is the one that was built later by Adi Sankara. The idols are of Narasiṁha and Vasudeva. Vasudeva is seen in a standing pose. It is believed that this is the God to Whom Thirumangai alvar did mangalasaṣana. To reach this place and the temple one has to climb down steps for nearly three quarters of a mile. Adi Sankara also established in this place a Peetam. He did tapas at this place and attained divya gnaṇa and wrote "Sankara Bhaṣhya". Thirumangai alvar is the only alvar who has done mangalasaṣana to this Lord in ten paṣurams.

After passing through Devaprayag and Thirupiridhi one reaches *Badrinath*. The moolavar here is known as Badrinarayana. He is seen in a sitting posture facing east. The consort is known as Aravindavalli. The theertha is Tapthakunda. The sthala vriksha is Badari vriksha. The vimana is known as Taptha Kanchana vimana. God appeared to Naran. According to popular belief the main idol in the sanctum sanctorum was installed by Adi Sankara around the 7th century. The idol of Adi Sankara also adorns this temple. Some claim that the idol representing the image of Lord Viṣṇu in the Padmaśana pose was taken out from Naradakunda, one of the four hot water springs near the present shrine. Some others claim that the idol was found washed ashore on the banks of turbulent Alaknanda near the place

where the temple now stands. Both these theories are contradicted by the Buddhists who claim that the two feet high statue of Badrinath represents the image of Lord Buddha and that it was brought to the present place for worship from a Tibetan monastery! Jains also claim that it is a faithful image of Lord Mahavir. But Hindus universally believe that the image is that of Narayana along with His divine consort Goddess Lakshmi.

In the Mahabharata Shiva addressing Arjuna says **“Thou wast Nara in a former body and with Narayana for thy companion didst perform dreadful austerities at Badari for many myriads of years”**.

The famous shrine at Badri remains open only for six months in a year from mid-May to the third week of November. The actual days of opening and of closing of the temple are decided by the temple authorities. The temple remains closed for six months on account of heavy snow-fall during winter months. Not only is the temple closed, but the whole town with the supporting pilgrim shops and restaurants are also vacated and the residents also move out of the town as it is covered under several feet of snow. During these winter months when the temple remains closed the uthsava idols are ceremoniously transported to Pandukesapuram near Joshimut where worship is continued. Similarly when the temple opens in May after winter the idols are brought back to Badrinath with the chief priest heading the procession. It is said that the present temple was a small structure built by Adi Sankara and later a Garhwal king built the present structure. The golden canopy adorning the top of the sanctum was a gift by a king of Nepal. The chief priest here by age old convention is a Namboodri brahmin from Kerala. Custom ordains that he should be a bachelor and a celibate. The temple opens at 6 am remains closed between 10.30 am and 4.30 pm, and after it opens for the evening, it is closed at 9.00 pm. The most important worship in the shrine is the Nirmalya darshan prior to the closing of the temple at 9.00 pm. At that time after the usual evening poojas and chanting of vedic hymns, all the decorations, flowers and garlands that adorn the deity during the day, are removed so that the unadorned idol is seen in pristine glory.

To the right of the flight of steps leading to the Badrinath shrine are four hot water springs. Down below flows the turbulent Alaknanda tumbling down over giant boulders and rocks with a milky foam.

Badrinath is regarded as the pre-eminent among the four great Dharmas, i.e. holy places. The other three being Rameswaram, Dwaraka and Jagannath. Similarly the five Kedars are Kadarnath, Madhyameswar, Tunganath, Rudranath and Gopeshwar. There are five Badris viz. Vishal Badri, Dhyana Badri, Yoga Badri, Vridha Badri and Bhavishya Badri. The five Prayagas are Devaprayag, Rudraprayag, Karnaprayag, Nandaprayag and Vishnuprayag. Similarly, the five Shilas in Badrinath (rocks) are Narada shila, Narasimha shila, Varaha shila, Ganesha shila and Kubera shila.

After passing through Devaprayag, Srinagar, Rudraprayag and Karnaprayag, one reaches Nandaprayag. About six miles from Nandaprayag is the interesting spot where Ravana is believed to have done tapas to Lord Shiva and it is the spot where he lifted the Kailash mountain itself.

At Vishnuprayag, Alaknanda and Adi Ganga have their sangamam (confluence). There is a temple for Mahavishnu there. It is believed that Narada Maharishi worshipped Lord Vishnu here with the Ashtakshara mahamantra.

Further down from Vishnuprayag is the Pandu Kesavapura, i.e. the spot where the idols from Badrinath come for stay during the six winter months. This place has come to be known as Pandu Kesavapura as it is believed to be the place, i.e. the Janmasthana of the Pandavas. It is the place where Pandu maharaja did tapas. Further down is the Hanumanchatti where Bhimasena and Hanuman had a friendly tiff and the latter taught a lesson to Bhimasena to shed his ego.

Legend has it that Badrinarayana is seated under the Badri tree which is the favourite of Mahalakshmi. The idol of Badrinarayana with its Jatas, four hands with the top right hand holding the chakra and the top left hand holding the conch, the

other two right and left hands in a yogamudra pose and seated in a padmasana gives the impression of a tapasvi in deep meditation. To the right side of the Lord is Kubera and Garuda, also seen seated. To the left side of the moḷavar is the Devarishi Narada, Naran etc.

On the banks of the river Ganga, a little to the north of the Badrinath shrine is the Brahmakapalam. It is believed that if one offers pinda (rice ball) to the pithrus (one's forefathers) at this shrine, seven generations will attain moksha and thereafter even if one does not perform shraddha ceremonies it would not matter. This is also the only place where in anticipation of one's end, one can do shraddha to oneself also to ensure moksha.

The legend connected with Narada theertha:- As stated earlier, there are five shilas near Badrinath, one of which is known as Naradashila. Closeby lies Narada theertha. Once upon a time, a brahmin by name Vishnumanas lived in Dhrushadwathi desa. He had a son by name Vishnuvathi. When his father asked him to study the sastras, he would not listen and instead he would join the musicians and spend his time singing. This angered his father. One day he asked him to leave the town and get out. The son however continued to eke out his living by singing and begging for alms. Owing to his constant singing of devotional songs he developed Vishnu bhakti. Singing the praise of Lord Vishnu, in course of time, he reached Badrinath. It is said that hearing him engrossed in singing devotional songs on Lord Narayana, Badrinarayana appeared in His full regalia with His conch, disc, mace etc. and blessed him. Vishnuvathi then asked Perumal for four boons. One was that he should henceforth be known as Narada and that he be blessed with profound intelligence and knowledge (sarvagnan) and that he should be recognised as a yogi and he should be further blessed to be able to roam about freely wherever he willed. God conceded all these four wishes of Vishnuvathi and henceforth he became Narada. Thus, it was that Badrinarayana gave darshan to Narada.

Yet another story connected with this place relates to Brahmadata sapa vimochana. This is the story as to how

Brahmadatta was able to redeem his sin. Once upon a time in a town known as Pratikshana, a rich ~~Saisya~~ name Sankara gupta lived. He had no children. He therefore decided to gift his entire wealth to the brahmins living at Prabhasa theertha. The brahmins however took pity on him and said that they would use that wealth for performing a puthra kameshti yaga and assured him that he would be blessed with a son as a result of the yaga. Accordingly, they performed the puthra kameshti yaga and gave the prasada to him. However, they also told him that he would be blessed with a son who would be very cruel. At the same time, they assured him that if that son went to Badrinath he would be able to get rid of his cruel nature and would be a blessing to his father. Accordingly in course of time, Sankara Gupta had a son who was named Brahmadatta. As predicted by the brahmins, as he grew up, he became a very undesirable character, lost all his wealth, left his house, moved into the forest and took to robbery. In due course realisation dawned on him and he realised that he was God's gift to his father because of the puthra kameshti yaga done by pious brahmins and he had been killing people indiscriminately. He returned to his father who remembered the forecast given to him long ago by the brahmins at Prabasa theertha. He advised his son to go to Badrinath and said that even as the Janamejaya raja was able to atone for the sin of killing 18 brahmins by going to Badrinath and praying to the Lord, he felt that his son also would be redeemed of his sin if he prayed to the Lord Badrinarayana. Brahmadatta followed his father's advice, proceeded to Badrinath, had his bath in the theerthas there and prayed to Lord Badrinarayana. It is said that God forgave him his sins and also blessed him with moksha.

Yet another legend connected with Badrinath, mentioned in passing in an earlier paragraph, refers to the story of Janamejaya and relates to the redemption of the sin committed by Janamejaya after he visited Badrinath. It is said that once Vyasa maharishi visited Janamejaya and told him that however great a person is, he cannot escape his pre-ordained destiny. Janamejaya then asked Vyasa to elaborate his statement. Vyasa said that fate and destiny are something that cannot be altered and whatever is destined to

happen will happen irrespective of whether one is a powerful king or a well-read saint. That is why Indra, Naksha, Nalan and Sri Rama all had to bow down to destiny and accept whatever was pre ordained. Vyasa then told Janamejaya that he would commit Brahmahatti dosha and that try as he might, he would not be able to avoid that sin of killing 18 brahmins. Hearing this Janamejaya felt that it cannot be true, as he had no reason to kill 18 brahmins. Vyasa then left and told him that before the evening a trader by name Kshemadarnaka would bring thoroughbred horses for sale to the king and that Janamejaya would be taken in by one of the horses which would be very fleet-footed. He would ride that horse, go into the forest, meet a beautiful woman there, fall in love with her, and as per her instructions he would kill 18 brahmins shortly. Saying this Vyasa left the place. As soon as Vyasa left Janamejaya retreated into his bed room, hoping that he would escape his fate. As predicted by Vyasa, Kshemadarnaka brought war horses from Sind for sale. Consequently there was a lot of commotion in the market place. The crowd moved on towards the palace telling the trader that such thoroughbred horses would be bought only by the king. Hearing the news the king came on to the balcony curious to know what the commotion was and as predicted one of the horses captured his imagination and he thought he would indulge himself by buying a horse and still hoped that he would not ride it into the forest as predicted by Vyasa. He bought the horse and just got on to the horse to test it. But suddenly the horse darted, the horse and the rider entered the forest and as predicted the king saw a beautiful damsel there, fell in love with her and asked her to marry him and return to the palace. She told him that she has got 18 husbands who are brahmins and if the king could kill them all, she had no objection to accompanying him to the palace. Blinded by his love for her, Janamejaya killed all the 18 brahmins. But as soon as he completed the dastardly act the woman disappeared. Janamejaya was reminded of the prediction of Vyasa. He decided to immediately go give up his palace and proceed to Badrinath and to Vyasa ashram. He met Vyasa who told him about Badri mahatyam. He also related the Mahabarata to him. Hearing both the stories, the Raja was able to get rid of Brahmahatti dosha. He went back to his kingdom. Thus, it is

believed that a mere visit to Badrinath would cleanse even the most heinous crime of any sinner.

Sri Desikan the great Acharya, singing the praise of Lord Badrinarayana has said: "**Bhandus sadaam Badrikashrama Tapaso Namaha**". Sri Desika further says in his Sankalpa Suryodaya that even today Hanuman the Chiranjeevi is sitting in the Kadalivana inside Gandhamadana Parvata near Badri.

Having broadly highlighted some of the important features of these three divya desas, I now propose to present a detailed article on "Badrinath", written by Dr.M.S.Rajajee, published in New Swatantra Times, as that not only covers in great detail the route from Haridwar to Badrinath but also mentions legends connected with the holy spots lying enroute to Badri and also the legends associated with Badrinath.

BADRINATH

BY

Dr. M.S. RAJAJEE

Every Indian has a pious hope that he should take a dip in the Ganges and go on a pilgrimage to the Himalayas. It is believed that a dip in the Ganges will wash away all the sins. It is believed that a pilgrimage to the Himalayas will enable a person to visit the various Ashramas here, worship at the various temples here and obtain salvation. The Himalayas are the home of Gods. Swami Sivananda writes "....The Himalayas are His Vibhuthi. They are, as old as Manifestation or creation itself. The very fact that the Himalayas represent the Lord's vibhuthi, has made the Himalayas the holiest of holies and made holy men dwell here and continue the holy tradition. In the Himalayas, we therefore find spiritual vibrations in a most concentrated form. Sages like Vasishta, Vyasa et al are Chiranjeevis. They still reside in the Himalayas in their subtle form. Those who are endowed with subtle vision, through Sadhana and self-purification, will be able to behold them and to get their blessings. What a powerful home of spirituality should the Himalayas be with all those immortal Maharishis continually radiating sublime thought-currents, grace and blessings.

Blessed are they that live in the Himalayas....". It is to seek the blessings of such people and the divinity that resides here, that pilgrims flock from far and near, to visit the "chardham" as the Garhwalis put it - the Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath.

The pilgrimage to Badrinath commences from Haridwar and Rishikesh. Haridwar is really Gangadwar - the entrance of Ganga into the plains. To the Saivites, this is Hardwar and to the Vaishnavites, it is Haridwar. Perhaps, keeping this in mind, Hardwar and Haridwar are spelt differently, in English and Hindi, by the local administration! The most important worship which is to be participated in by all the visitors to Haridwar is the evening "arathi" worship to Ganges at Hari-Ki-Pauri, wherein, on a stone, are impressed the feet of the Lord. The devout release into the river lit-lamps and take a dip in the Brahmakund, into which it is believed all celestial rivers flow. Haridwar (which was earlier known as Kapilasthan because Sage Kapila worshipped here and also as Mayapuri as the Goddess Maya was worshipped here) is drenched with devotion and piety. There are temples here for Goddess Manasa Devi (who is also worshipped as Vaishnavi, Shaivi, Mahadurga, Nitya etc. and stands for the Devi of Devi Bhagavatha) Chandi Devi, Maya Devi (the three Devis are located at the apexes of a triangle, a symbol of great tantric importance), Anjani Devi, Bilvakeshwar Mahadeva, Neeleshwar, Navagrahas, Mrithyunjaya Mahadeva, Dattatreya, to name only a few.

Due North 24 kms. away, is Rishikesh and a little away from the town is Muni-Ki-Reti (the abode of rishis). It is considered very sacred to do oblations to the ancestors at Triveni Ghat at this place. Rama and Lakshmana did penance at Rishikesh to seek expiation for the sin of killing many "rakshashas". Bharata did great penance here. There are therefore temples here for Rama, Lakshmana and Bharata, apart from temples for Vishwanatha and other Gods. The place is full of Ashramas, as many pious people, Sadhus and Sages retreat to this place, seeking spiritual solace. The Kailasa Ashrama dedicated to Adi Shankara, the Sivananda Ashrama, the well known spiritual retreat started by Swami Sivananda, the Gita Ashrama, the Swarga

Ashrama, Paramartha Niketan are some of the well known ashramas. The suspension bridge across the river Ganga, Lakshmana Jhoola, is in a sense the starting point for the pilgrimage to the "Chardhams".

The road to Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath are not common all the way. The road upto Deva Prayag is common from where the branch road on the left goes to Yamunotri and Gangotri (the road again branching off into two at Dharasu). The branch road on the right goes to Kedarnath and Badrinath (with the road again branching off into two at Rudra Prayag). This entire area is Uttarkhand, the abode of sages and saints, of pandits and patriarchs, of astronomers and grammarians. Veda Vyasa, Narada, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara, Kapila, Gouthama, Kashyapa, Jaimini, Kanwa, Yagnavalkya, Atri, Daksha, Vasishtha, to name only a few, did penance in the hills and valleys here. It has therefore been said that this is "the land of penance, the storehouse of wisdom, the arena of sages, the forum of prophets, the soil of bliss and the abode of the Almighty". As stated earlier, the first important place after Rishikesh on the route to Badrinath (common to others) is Deva Prayag. Devaprayag is the place where Alakananda joins Bhagirathi. The name Ganges is applied to the river only after this confluence. Bhagirathi is named after King Bhagiratha who did severe penance to save the souls of his forefathers, Sagara and his children who had been burnt to ashes as they had disturbed the penance of Sage Kapila. Bhagiratha prayed to Ganges and then again to Shiva at Bhagiratha Shila at Gangotri and succeeded in bringing Ganges down to earth, after a difficult effort, the Bhagiratha Prayatna, because of which Ganges (in this reach) is known as Bhagirathi. It is this Bhagirathi which Alakananda joins at Deva Prayag. Alakananda originates beyond Badrinath from the Alakananda glacier at Alakapuri. Alakapuri is the residence of Kubera. It is believed by the pious that there are eight divine sentinels in the Universe — Agni has charge of South East, Surya of South West, Soma of the North East, Vayu of the North West, Indra of the East, Yama of the South, Varuna of the West and Kubera of the North. It is from the land of this sentinel of the North, that Alakananda (the indescrib-

ably beautiful), the beautiful damsel) originates and flows, just in front of the temple of Badri Narayana, gathers several rivers including Mandakini into herself at different Prayags (confluences) and joins Bhagirathi. The confluence at Deva Prayag, as is to be expected, is a grand sight - Alakananda is gentle and sedate while Bhagirathi which is tumbling down a slope is a roaring torrent. Shri Rama, Lakshmana and others offered penance here also, as expiation for the killing of rakshashas. There is a temple for Sri Ramachandra here and a bathing ghat at the confluence. This also is a sacred spot for offering oblations to ones ancestors, as this is the first originating point for Ganga (prior to this point, she is Bhagirathi, etc.). In 1803, the temple was destroyed due to an earthquake. The temple was reconstructed with the help of the Scindia family of Gwalior. Near Devaprayag is Kirthinagar, where the ashrama of King Janaka is located. Janaka was the king of Videha and was known for his principles and knowledge. Yagnavalkya was his priest. Janaka withdrew to Uttarkhand for meditation and contemplation, after he handed over his kingdom at Videha.

19 miles from Devaprayag is Srinagar, at an elevation of about 1600 feet. This was the old capital of the Tehri Garhwal kingdom, which merged with India in 1949. Prior to 1803, the Kingdom had many chieftains. This was overrun by the Gurkhas in 1803 and taken back by the British in 1812. They divided it into British Garhwal (retaining with them places like Nainital, Ranikhet, etc.) and native Garhwal. The British appointed a Panwar Rajput as the King of Garhwal and Sri Nagar was the capital. The original town of Sri Nagar is believed to have been laid out by Adi Shankara in the form of a Srichakra Yantra, because of which the town got its name. In 1894, floods in the Rirahi Ganga destroyed much of the town, except the temple. The town was rebuilt. As the houses are on the hill sides and the town is in a valley, it presents a pretty picture. The temple here is for Kamaleshwar Mahadeva. It is said that Shri Ramachandra desired to offer worship here with one thousand Brahma Kamals, a special variety of lotus obtained here. The Lord wished to test him. As Sri Ramachandra was about to finish the worship, he realised that he was short by one

flower, it having been removed by the Lord. Sri Ramachandra, unhesitatingly plucked out his eye (as he is a Kamalanayana) and continued the worship. The Lord gave him back the eye. This place came to be known as Kamaleshwar Mahadeva.

19 miles away is Rudra Prayag where Mandakini, clear and blue, rushes to join the muddy Alakananda. Mandakini rises near the Kedarnath temple from the Chorabari glacier near the Kedarnath peak. It joins Sone Ganga at Sone Prayag, on the Kedarnath route, joins the Madhya Maheshwar near Gupta Kashi (where there is a famous shrine of Ardha Narishwar) and finally joins the Alakananda. Situated at 2000 feet, Rudra Prayag is the point at which the Kedar and Badri routes diverge. There is a temple for Rudranath at the confluence of the rivers. Narada offered penance here to Rudra, an aspect of Shiva and was initiated into some aspects of music. 20 miles away, past Gauchar is Karna Prayag, where Pindar river joins Alakananda. Pindar river originates in the Pindari glacier which is by the side of the well known mountain peak, Nanda Devi. Karna Prayag is the place where Karna did penance and obtained his boon of arrows and quivers. 13 miles away is Nanda Prayag, where Nandakini (not Mandakini) taking birth on the western slope of Mount Trisul joins Alakananda. Maharaja Nanda and even Ravana are believed to have done penance here. 7 miles away is Chamoli, which is now the headquarters of a district. There is now a (difficult) road which connects Kedarnath and Badrinath via Gupta Kashi and it is no longer necessary to come via the farther Rudra Prayag. Chamoli is also the place where another tributary, Birahi Ganga joins Alakananda. The Birahi Ganga valley earlier had a beautiful lake, the Gohna lake, which breached in 1970 and the lake itself disappeared. Past Pipal koti is Garuda Ganga, where Garuda worshipped Lord Vishnu. Garuda is the son of Kasyapa and Vinata. Vinata was very much troubled by Kadru, the mother of serpents. Garuda therefore became the mortal enemy of the serpents and when they attacked him, fearing that Garuda and his progeny may destroy all of them, Garuda killed all of them, excepting one which he wore as a noose round his neck. Another story is that having come to know that only Amruta (Nectar) would save his mother

from the snakes, Garuda snatched the nectar from Indra and while rushing back, spilt some on the Kusha grass on the ground, because of which 'kusha' grass became important for all sacrifices. The snakes, being avaricious, tried to lap up the nectar on the kusha grass, but succeeded in getting their tongues cut, because of which the snakes have a forked tongue. Because he had destroyed so many snakes, Garuda did a deep penance as expiation for his sin. He also desired to become the "Vahana" of Lord Vishnu. Both the prayers were granted. Garuda is usually depicted with a golden human body, a white face with the beak of an eagle and the red wings of a bird. Since he is a destroyer of serpents and also the "vahana" of Lord Vishnu, when Lord Rama was felled by the serpent arrows of Indrajit, the son of Ravana, Garuda went to the battle field and -

*As the Vaanars gazed, appeared,
King Garud's self a wondrous sight,
Disclosed in flames of fiery light
From his fierce eyes in sudden dread
All serpents in a moment fled
And those transformed to shafts that bound
The princes, vanished in the ground.
(From Griffiths "The Ramayana")*

Garuda, who is called Vishnu-ratha, is also known as Naagantaka or as Pannaganaasana. Because of this, people pick pebbles from Garuda Ganga and take it home to be placed in the 'pooja' room in the house or underneath a pillow to ward off snakes and evil spirits. Some even tie the small pebbles to the waist of a pregnant woman, so that she may have an easy delivery. Ultimately, it is the faith that matters in these cases. In many rural areas, a mere stone anointed with turmeric and "kumkum" is worshipped as a Goddess - as Maariyamma, as Brathukamma or as Poleramma.

A few kilometres away of Helang. The speciality of this place is that nearby is one of the 5 Kedars and one of the 5 Badris. It is believed that in Uttarkhand there are five Prayags (Deva Prayag, Rudra Prayag, Karna Prayag, Nanda Prayag and Vishnu

Prayag), five Kedars (Kedarnath, Tungnath, Rudranath, Madya Maheshwar and Kalpeshwar) and five Badris (Vishal Badri, Dhyan Badri, Yoga Badri, Vriddha Badri and Bhavishya Badri). Near Helang is the Vriddha Badri where there is a temple for Lord Narayana and Kalpeshwar, where there is a temple for Shiva, which is to be approached through a cave. Beyond Helang and at an elevation of 6000 feet is Joshimath or Jyothirmath. This is one of the 4 principal Maths founded by Adi Shankara. This Math was located at the extreme North to prevent the infiltration of non-Hindu religions from Tibet and China. Closeby is the Niti Pass, through which one can easily reach Tibet and is actually the route to go to Kailas and Manasa Sarovar. Adi Shankara installed at Jyotirmath the idol of Jyothishwar Mahadev and an outstanding Salagrama of Lord Narasimha. There is a local belief that this Salagrama which is about 7 feet high is capable of pronouncing verbally the sins of the pilgrims who stand before it. The temple itself looks like a private home. It has a sloping roof of copper plates. There is a small "kund" in front. There is also an image of Ganesha outside. The locals state that the arms of Narasimha are thinning and when it finally falls off, Badrinath will become inaccessible, possibly due to a landslide. They state that the temple of Badri Narayana would then be located at Adi Badri or at Bhavishya Badri, which is about 8 miles from Jyothirmath on the road to Niti Pass. The devout who have visited Bhavishya Badri maintain that the idol here is already shaping like the one at Badrinath. At Joshimath, there are also temples for Vasudeva, Raveshwar, Nava Durga and Sita. Below Jyothirmath is Vishnu Prayag where Dahuli Ganga (also called Vishnu Ganga) joins Alakananda. Along the road is Govind Ghat, named after the famous Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. There is a confluence here of Bhyunder Ganga which comes from the Valley of Flowers and Hem Ganga which comes from Hemkund (the lake of ice). 20 miles away from the main road is the Valley of Flowers where flowers not seen anywhere else grow wild (like the Brahmakamal, Neel kamal, Hema kamal, etc.). Another 7 Kms. away is Hem kund, the lake of ice, at an altitude of 15,000 feet, surrounded by seven snowy peaks, known as the "sapta Shrung". About eight miles from Joshimath is Pandukeshwar, where Pandu and Madri spent their time in

meditation. King Pandu built two temples, one for Shiva known here as Pandhishwar Mahadev and the other for Narayana known as Yoga Badri. When the temple at Badrinath is closed for the winter, the “utsava moorthi”, Uddhava, is moved to the temple of Yoga Badri. It is claimed that the pandava princes were born here because of which the place is called “Pandukeshwar”. 3 miles away and at an elevation of 8000 feet is Hanuman Chatti. Actually, the road goes up from Pandukeshwar but takes a steep descent at Hanuman Chatti, because of which the view from here of Neelakanta peak (21,700 feet) is even more gorgeous. King Vaikhanasa worshipped here Narayana as Ramachandra, because of which this place is also known as Vaikhanasa Teertha. The Ghrita Ganga and Ksheera Ganga join Alakananda here. Hanuman retired here, after the coronation of Shri Ramachandra, because of which this place is called Hanuman Chatti. An interesting story is said of how Anjaneya made Bhima shed at this place, his false pride. The Pandavas were residing at Pandukeshwar. It was the duty of Bhima to fetch daily for Draupadi the ‘Sowgandhika’ flower, from the valley of flowers. In course of time, Bhima’s ego grew and he came to think that only he could achieve this difficult feat of travelling through this arduous terrain and that there was none superior to him in strength. One day, while travelling on the same route, he saw an old monkey lying in his path and arrogantly asked the monkey to move away. The old monkey said that it was very old and weak, that Bhima himself could move the tail away from the path and proceed. Try as he did, Bhima could not move it even by an inch. Bhima was humbled and realised that the monkey was something supernatural. Anjaneya revealed his true form and told him that he was his brother (as both are Vayu Putras) and advised him to be humble. Anjaneya also told him that in the ensuing war with the kauravas, his roar would join that of Bhima and that he would be on the fluttering flag atop the chariot of Arjuna. This is also the place where Garuda was humbled. Sri Krishna noticing that Garuda was thinking that there was none superior to him in strength as he alone could carry Vishnu, deputed Garuda to fetch Hanuman. Garuda failed to move Hanuman and was humbled. The allegorical stories reveal that however

highly placed one may be, ego should be shed by them. If they fail to do so, they would be humbled and put to shame.

From Hanuman Chatti, an ascent of 2000 feet, brings one to Deva Darshini, the point from where one can see Badrinath. Swami Sivananda describes this beautifully "The glorious sight of the wide valley with the lustrous golden towered temple with two heaven kissing mountains on either side, their snow capped peaks brilliantly reflecting the rays of the sun, lifts the mind of the pilgrim to an ethereal plane. The vision rises before his mind's eye of the golden majesty of the Lord to which the entire Universe clings. It is as though the Temple itself represents Dharma with Purity and Divinity, the two great mountains, zealously guarding it and vigilantly keeping a watch over it".

The Nara and Narayana mountains have an overpowering presence at Badrinath. Nara Parvat is on the east bank of the river Alakananda while Narayana Parvat is on the west bank. The two mountains are always snow capped. The towering Nilakantha Peak (21,600 feet) is clearly visible behind the Narayana peak as a backdrop. The temple is located on the bank of the Alakananda river and between the two mountains. Nara mountain is also known as Kubera Bhandar, as it is believed that beneath the glaciers of the Nara mountain are diamonds, emeralds and other priceless gems. It is more likely that since Kubera is the sentinel of the North and since Alakapuri, Kubera's place is beyond this mountain, Nara Parvat got the name, Kubera Bhandar. It is said that Nara parvat gives prosperity as it is symbolising Kubera, that it will uplift the devotee while Narayana parvat will facilitate deep meditation as it faces East and that it will embrace the evolved. There are interesting mythological stories about Nara and Narayana. A demon called Sahasrakavacha was oppressing all the Devas. The Devas prayed to the Lord to rescue them from his clutches. Incarnating Himself as Nara and Narayana, the Lord descended at Badri and performed penance. Hearing about the glorious Avatara of the Lord (some believe that Nara Narayana are the 4th Avatara of Lord Vishnu), Sahasrakavacha rushed towards them to kill Him. Nara and Narayana fought with the demon, destroyed his thousand sheaths of armour one by one and

finally killed the demon. They made Badri their permanent home, so as to protect Dharma and destroy the wicked. The symbolic meaning of the story is that in each one of us resides the demon, Ahamkara, with a thousand fold coating. By practising Dharma, by austerities and by praying to Narayana, we will be able to wage a battle with the inner enemy and attain the Supreme Grace. Another mythological story is that Nara and Narayana are the children of Dharma and his wife Kala (some authorities refer to her as Ahimsa). At a very young age they renounced life, retired to this part of the world and started a deep penance. Dharmaraja and Kala, the Mata Moorthi came to Badrinath in search of their children. As the children wished to resist parental pressure, they prayed to Lord Narayana that they may be transformed as mountains. They also desired that the Lord should be near them. The children were transformed as Nara and Narayana mountains and the Lord agreed to reside between them, at Badrinath. The Lord also wished to bless the old parents and said that all those who sincerely worship will achieve Dharma. About 5 miles from Badrinath is "Dharma Shila" where Dharma Raja did penance. There is a small shrine for Dharma. There is also a separate small temple for Mata Moorthy. On the Vamana Dwadasi, Shravana Nakshtra day (September) the utsava moorthi from the Badrinath temple is carried to the Mata Moorthi temple for worship. On other days, there is no worship at this temple. It is said that a pilgrimage to Badrinath is not complete without visiting Mata Moorthi and Dharma Shila.

Another story is about Prahlada, the son of the Daitya King, Hiranyakasipu. He came to Badrinath and found Nara - Narayana worshipping the Lord. He took them to be impostors and directed them to vacate the place. A fight ensued. Since both were the favoured worshippers of the Lord (in the Gita, the Lord says "Among the Daityas, I am Prahlada"), the Lord intervened. Prahlada felt ashamed that he should have so dealt with a worshipper of the Lord, that he did penance at a nearby place. In front of the temple, just adjoining the Narada Kund, there is a Narasimha Shila and a Prahlada dhara (where lukewarm water flows through a snout). Yet another story about Nara and Narayana

is also available in the Puranas. Alarmed at the steadfast and deep penance of Nara and Narayana, Indra wished to disturb them, lest they acquire great powers as a boon from the Supreme Lord. Indra and other inferior Gods deputed celestial damsels like Rambha, Menaka and others to disturb their penance. Nara was not at all disturbed; Narayana saw through this subterfuge and created from his thigh a damsel, superior in beauty and grace to Rambha and others. Since she was born from the thigh, she was called Urvashi. Narayana asked Rambha and others to present Urvashi to Indra. The damsels were so ashamed at what they had attempted to do, that they requested Narayana to be allowed to remain with him. Narayana promised them that he will be later reborn as Sri Krishna and they would be born as Gopis.

The temple is between these mountains. In Badri Mahathmya, it is said that Brahma had created the Vedas and Lord Vishnu wished to propagate them. He started his penance at this place and sat in "padmaasana". As he was for long seated like this, Goddess Lakshmi spread herself like a Jujube tree (Badri tree) to protect Him from the sun and rain. Hence, the idol has come to be known as Badri Narayana and the ashrama as Badrikashrama. The idol also looks as if Narayana is addressing some one in front of him. It is commonly believed that He is explaining the Vedas.

The temple of Badri Narayana is just in front of the Tapta kund (to be referred to later) and Alakananda. A small flight of steps leads to the temple, which is about 50 feet high and is in the Garhwal style of architecture. By the side of the steps is a small shrine for Adi Kedareshwar Mahadev. The convention is that people must visit Kedarnath before visiting Badrinath and if that is not possible, they must offer worship at Adi Kedareshwar Mahadev, before worshipping Badri Narayana. Beyond the steps are the pillars of the temple which depict the ten avatars of Vishnu. At the inner thresh-hold of the entrance is the idol of Garuda, the Vahana of the Lord. Idols of Ganesha and Hanuman are in the wings of the temple. In another wing is an idol of Ghantakarana, a great devotee of Shiva who became a great devotee of Vishnu. It is said that he was such a devotee of Shiva he would have bells

rung so that he may not hear the name of Vishnu. Wisdom dawned on him that Shiva and Kesava are one and the same. Inside is a small shrine, housing Goddess Lakshmi, perhaps installed later than Adi Shankara's time. By the side in a hall is the seat of Adi Shankara. In the main 'Garbagriha' is the Badri Narayana seated in a padmaasana posture, flanked on the left by Nara and Narayana and on the right by Kubera (with a big silver face) as he is the regent of the north. The Utsava idol, explained here as Uddhava is in front, flanked by a silver image of Garuda. Sage Narada is also seen. There is also a silver Sudarsana Chakra, to spiritualise the shrine. A ghee lamp is constantly burning in the shrine, which is a highlight of the shrine. Badri Narayana, is a rare 'salagrama' taken out of the Naradakund by Adi Shankara, who was able to visualise its presence due to his spiritual powers. Because of this, this Kshetra is also known as Naradiya Kshetra. Shri Adi Shankara installed the Salagrama taken from the Naradakund at the Garuda Shila, near the Taptakund. In the 15th century, a Maharaja of Garhwal who was suffering from an incurable form of leprosy offered prayers here and was cured. He shifted the Salagrama idol to the present site above the Urvashi peetam and built a temple. Many improvements were effected by the House of Scindias and others. The salagrama idol of Badri Narayana appears differently to different people. Bejewelled and clothed, the Vaishnavites see Him as Narayana, while the Shaivites see Him as Shiva while the Buddhists believe He is Buddha as He is sitting serenely in a padmaasana posture, proving the Vedic adage **"I am One; People call me by different names"**. There are various poojas to Badri Narayana and there are various offerings to Him. What can be more efficacious than a sincere repetition of His name and what can be a greater offering than the surrender of the self? At the time of the 'Arathi', as the priests wave the lamp in front of God, they chant, among other prayers, the following:

Pawan Mandh Sugandh sheetal

Hem Mandir Shobhitam

Neelat Ganga Behat Nirmal

Shri Badri Nath Vishwambharam

O' Lord Badrinath, saviour of the world, You are adorned by the temple of snow and beautifully set near Holy Ganges, where the cool breeze is blowing.

Shesh Sumiran Karat Nisidin

Dhart Dhyam Maheshwaram

Ved Brahma karat stuti

Shri Badrinath Vishwambharam

Shri Badrinath, the Lord of Himalayas is being worshipped eternally by Ananta, the Lord among snakes and by Shiva, Brahma, holding the Vedas in His hand who are all chanting praises of Lord Badrinath.

There are other slokas also in this prayer repeated at the time of the Arathi. There are many other pooja services, including the chanting of the Vishnu Sahasranama in the evening. The ghee lamp is always kept burning. In winter when the temple is closed, the lamp is lit and when the temple is reopened after six months, the lamp is found to be still burning. The 'Jyothi Darshan' on the day of the reopening of the temple is one of the important festivals here. It is believed that when the temple is closed, with the utsava murthi alone being taken to Joshimath, the worship is taken over by the Devas, with Narada acting as the Chief Priest at this Naradiya Kshetra. The temple rituals and pooja practices have been laid down by Adi Shankara and are followed faithfully by a Namboodri Brahmin priest who is selected by the temple committee. This priest, called the Rawal Saheb, decides on the opening and closing days of the temple. At the time of the closing of the temple, the main idol is covered by a ghee soaked woollen shawl called the "Ghritha Kambal", woven by the villages of Mana (where there is a mountain pass to go to China, now guarded by our security forces).

There are a number of places around the Badri Narayana temple which need to be visited. Down below flows Alakananda, near which is Naradakund. Pilgrims take a bath in the icy cold water here and come to nearby Tapthakund, a hot water spring unbelievably hot (about 120 oF) - surely a geological marvel. Actually, the Badri Narayana temple is located atop the Tapta

kund, on the Urvashi Peetam. The water flows into the kund through a cavity on the side wall, called the Vishnu dhaara (also the Agni dhaara or the Mahadhaara). There are five dhaaras near Badrinath, the Prahlada dhaara, Kurma dhaara, Urvashi dhaara, Brighu dhaara and Indra dhaara. Similarly there are pancha shilas - the Narad shila, the Varaha shila, the Garuda shila, Markandeya shila and Narasimha shila. Another importance of Badrinath is the offering of oblations to the departed souls. It is believed that offering oblations at Badrinath has greater efficacy than offering oblations at Gaya, etc. This is done at Brahma Kapaal, by offering cooked rice procured from the temple. This is the only place where cooked rice from a temple can be offered as an oblation. This is also the only place where oblations can be offered for oneself also! Brahma Kapaal is the place where Shiva was able to shake off the fifth head of Brahma which He had removed with a trident. There was a contest between Vishnu and Brahma as to who could see the head or foot of Lord Shiva. Brahma went up to some height and stated that he had seen the head (while he really had not). Vishnu ferretted into the ground, could not see the feet and came back to report failure. As Brahma had uttered a falsehood, Shiva removed his fifth head with his trident. (It is not that Gods fight with each other; the symbolic significance is that howsoever highly placed a person may be, he cannot escape punishment for his sins). Shiva found that although he went round the three worlds, he could not shake off the head sticking to the trident. Vishnu then advised him to go to a Kund at Badrinath. The head fell off the trident. This was at the Brahma Kapaal. The moral is that all sins will get washed off at Brahma Kapaal.

Beyond Badrinath is Vyasa guha where Vyasa resided and wrote the Vedas and Puranas. Below this cave is another cave known as the 'Ganesha guha' where Ganesha took down the dictation when Vyasa dictated the Mahabharatha. Further ahead are Charan Paduka, Vasudhara, Sanaka's Ashrama, etc. Every place here has a spiritual history; every place here has a mythology; every place here has a religious significance. The place breathes piety and devotion. Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa has observed "From time immemorial numberless sadhus, devotees and men of

realisation have come to these holy places to have a vision of God and have prayed to Him with an outpouring of their hearts, setting aside all worldly desires. Therefore, though God is eternally present everywhere, God manifests Himself specially in these places". As one stands on the bank of the tempestuous Alakananda, on a chill early morning, gazes at the entrance to the temple and looks up at the glowing, effulgent sky-kissing, snow clad mountains, which seem to be like twin-suns (as the Sun has not yet risen and it matters not), one realises the significance of the verse in the Gita "Arjuna, I am that which is the seed of all life. For there is no creature, moving or inert, which exists without Me....". Writes Swami Akhandananda (a direct disciple of Shri Ramakrishna), while at Kedarnath, but equally applicable to Badrinath, ".....I was now present at one of the supernal spots on the earth. The King of the Mountains was unfolding his glory before me and I was viewing it with a peace filled mind. I painfully realised that while I had been viewing the Himalayas, so far my eyes never penetrated the outer crust. But now I was in his lap and amazed by his glory. I remembered Arjuna standing stupefied before Sri Krishna showing him His all comprehensive Form (Vishwaroopa). The Himalayas really appear here as a symbol of the great God - the Master of the Universe. I was convinced that the same Universal Spirit, which is beyond the comprehension of human senses, which controls everything in the Universe and which resides in the core of every being, has manifested Itself in this huge Form. How else could a man with his limited intelligence and cloudy vision, have a glimpse of the divine? This was all due to His compassion. Long ago, Lord Krishna, out of deep compassion and love for Arjuna, had assumed the all comprehensive Form in the battle field of Kurukshetra, to remove the clouds of ignorance from his vision and make him strong enough to discriminate and perform his duty dispassionately. Now I was before the same divinity in the huge snow-white form - the divinity so subtle and yet all powerful and eternal. When we bow before the clay image of the Mother, we become aware of Her subtle and all pervading Form. Similarly, the snow clad mountain spreading before me reminded me of the eternal Brahman. Verily, this was the supreme bliss (Bhumananda) in a concealed form".

BADRIKASRAMAM

Perialvar and Thirumangai Alvar have have sung 1 and 21 songs respectively in praise of the Lord in this divyadesa. Nine pasurams of Thirumangai Alvar are given below with its meaning:-

PASURAM 968:

முற்ற முத்துக் கோல்து னையா முன்னடி நோக்கி வளைந்து
இற்ற கால்போல் தள்ளி மெள்ள இருந்து அங்கு

இனையாமுன்

பெற்ற தாய்போல் வந்த பேய்ச்சி பெருமுலை யூடு

உயிரை

வற்ற வாங்கி யுண்ட வாயான் வதரி வணங்குதுமே.

Before we bend double with age and develop all the infirmities of old age like needing a walking stick to help our faltering feet and have to rest often to catch our breath, go to Badri and offer worship to the Perumal Who sucked the life out of Poothana the demoness.

Here the alvar says that to trek up to Badri is a very difficult task especially when one is old. At that time, both physically and mentally it will be a tough assignment. So he advises the devotees to go to Badri even when youth is on our side.

PASURAM 969:

முதுகு பற்றிக் கைத்த லத்தால் முன்னொரு கோலான்ற்
விதிர்வி திர்த்துக் கண் கூழுன்று மேற்கிளை கொண்டிருமி
இதுவென் னப்பர் முத்த வாறென்று இனையவர் ஏசாமுன்
மதுவின் வண்டு பண்கள் பாடும்வதரி வணங்குதுமே.

Before the young damsels have an occasion to see you holding your back with one hand and with the other holding a walking stick, with your body trembling with old age and eyes feeling dizzy and coughing loudly (i.e. exhibiting all the infirmities of advanced age) and dub you as a decrepit old man and make fun of you, go and worship the Lord at Badri where the honey bees are singing sweetly after having sucked honey from the luscious, scented groves.

Here the alvar exhorts the devotees to go to Badri even when young, hale, hearty and in full possession of all senses. Then, as now, a pilgrimage to Badri needs a healthy body.

The alvar refers to the singing of the honey bees at Badri. Bees are believed to represent Mumukshus i.e. enlightened souls. The commentators say that those souls have enjoyed the divine bliss to the utmost and so are singing in Sama gana style "Haavuu Hauvuu Hauvuu". That is the tune which the bees in Badri are singing after imbibing in full, the honey (Makarandha Maadhuree Jeevitha).

PASURAM 970:

உறிகள்பொல்லெய்ப்ந்நும்பெழுந்துஉண்தணர்ந்துஉள்ளமென்கி
நெறியை நோக்கிக் கண்க ழுன்று நின்று நடுங்காமுன்
அறிதியாகில் நெஞ்சம்! அன்பாய் ஆயிர நாமம்சொல்லி
வெறிகொள் வண்டு பண்கள் பாடும் வதரி வணங்குதுமே.

O Mind! Bedore the nerves in your body become prominent and loose, before you develop a weak heart and before your eyes become dizzy, merely looking at the path that you have to climb and you start trembling, be wise and utter the thousand namas of the lord with devotion. Let us go and offer worship to the Lord at Badri where the scented honey bees are singing.

PASURAM 971:

பீனாசோரக் கண்ணி டுங்கிப் பித்தெழு முத்து இருமி
தாள்கள் நோவத் தம்மில் முட்டித் தள்ளி நடவாமுன்
கடையாக்கி கன்று மேய்த்துக் குன்றெடுத்து அன்னுநின்னை
வாளை பாயும் தண்த டம்துழ் வதரி வணங்குதுமே.

Let us go to Badri before our eyes become diseased and weak and before our body becomes old and we are afflicted with cough and our legs are weak not able to stand firmly, and dash against each other with a nagging pain all the time and our steps faltur. Badri has a cool and celebrious climate and is full of flowing rivers where the fishes gambol about. In that divya desa resides the Lord Who, once upon a time as a young child, grazed the cattle and lifted the Govardhana hill on His little finger and held it aloft like an umbrella.

Here again, the alvar exorts us that the pilgrimage at Badri is arduous in nature and so one should visit the place even when one is young.

PASURAM 972:

பண்டு காம ரான வாறும் பாவையர் வாயமுதம்
உண்ட வாறும் வாழ்ந்த வாறும் ஒக்க புரைத்து இருமி
தண்டு காலா வூன்றியூன்றித் தள்ளி நடவாமுன்
வண்டு பாடும் தண்து முயான் வதரி வணங்குதுமே.

In this pasuram, the alvar says before your steps faltur and the walking stick becomes virtually your leg and you have to halt for a long time before taking the next step and before we become senial with age and though continuously coughing keep on recalling your youth when you were beautiful and spent all your time enjoying the pleasures of life with beautiful women, let us go to Badri and worship the Lord there. He is adorned with a basil garland which is full of honey bees.

Here the alvar uses the words “Okka uraithu irumi” (ஒக்க புரைத்து இருமி) which literally translated means that as he is continuously coughing and yet trying to talk. It is as if the alvar is saying that the person instead of using his limited strength to repeat the Sahasranama of the Lord, he is wasting it in recollecting the misdemeanours and the sensual pleasures that he enjoyed in his youth.

PASURAM 973:

எய்த்த சொல்லோடு இளையேங்கி இருமியினைத்து உடலம்
பித்தர் போலச் சித்தம் வேனாய்ப் பேசி அயராமுன்
அதன் எந்தை ஆதி முர்த்தி ஆழ்கட லைக்கடைந்த
மைத்த சோதி எம்பெ ருமான் வதரி வணங்குதுமே.

In this pasuram again the alvar says that before we become weak with age, we should go to Badri: He says let us go and bow down to the Lord at Badri before we are afflicted with cough due to old age and semelity sets in when we talk there is no connection between what we speak and how we act and our voice becomes low. There resides the colirium hued primeordial Lord Who churned

the milky ocean and Who is my father and Who is the Supreme Master.

PASURAM 974:

பப்ப அப்பர் மூத்த வாறு பாழ்ப்பது சீத்திரனை
யொப்ப ஐக்கள் போத வுந்த உன்தமர் காண்மினென்று
செப்பு நேர்மெ கொங்கை நல்லார் தாமிரீர் யாதமுன்னம்
வைப்பும் நுங்கள் யாழ்வு மானான் வதரீ வணங்குதுமே.

In this pasuram, the alvar says let us go to Badri. Before we get afflicted with flem due to severe cough and before the beautiful damsels laugh derisively at the disabilities due to our old age. In that Badri resides the Lord Who is our ultimate wealth and our sole succour.

Here the alvar says that as long as one has got youth and wealth on one's side, all people will claim relationship and friendship. But the moment the wealth is lost and youth is past, they may fail to even recognise the person and pass him off as some one else's responsibility. The alvar says that God at Badri is our wealth and our sole saviour. Thus making it clear that the Lord is the Upaaya as well as the Upeya. Vaippu is the word which refers to Upaaya. Vazhthu is the word which refers to upeya.

PASURAM 975

ஈசீ போயின் ஈங்குஇ ரேன்மின் இருமி இளைத்தீர் உள்ளம்
கூசீ யிட்டீர் என்று பேசும் குவனையங் கண்ணியர் பால்
நாச மான பாசம் விட்டு நல்நெறி நோக்கலுறில்
வாசம் மல்கு தண்து முயான் வதரீ வணங்குதுமே.

You are afflicted with continuous cough and have become weak. Old age has overtaken you. You better give up the evil habit of running behind beautiful eyed damsels who show absolute disrespect and disregard to you and are asking you to go away. Give up those loathesome ways. If you want to follow the right path, let us proceed to Badri and offer worship the Lord Who is adorned with the beautiful scented basil garland.

Here the alvar exorts us to follow the right path i.e. "Nanneri" (நன்னெறி). The commentators say that nanneri is the word which refers to archiradhi marga i.e. the path which leads to Heaven.

PASURAM 976:

புலன்கள் நைய மெய்யில் முத்துப் போந்திருந்து
 உள்ளமென்கி
 கலங்க ஐக்கள் போத வந்திக் கண்ட பிதர்னாமுன்
 அலங்க லாய தண்து முய்கொண்டு ஆயிர
 நாமம்சொல்லி
 வலங்கொள் தொண்டர் பாடி யாடும் வதரி
 வணங்குதுமே.

Before our five senses become weak and we lead a solitary life due to old age and our mind is disturbed and we swallow the flem and so whatever comes to our mind without weighing the consequences, let us hold a basil garland in our hand repeating the sahasranama and join the sincere devotees who are going to Badri and offer worship to the Lord there.

**DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108
 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:**

தாட் கடிமை யென்று தமையுணரார் கெட்டெழுத்துங்
 கேட்க வெளியிட்டருளுங் கேசவனை - வேட்கையொடு
 போவதரி தானாலும் போய்த் தொழுவோ நெஞ்சமே
 மாவதரி யாச்சிரமத்து.

Meaning:

Oh mind! Though it is difficult to go to Badri and worship Sriman Narayana Who with compassion and out of His magnanimity taught the Ashtakshara Mahamantra even to all those in this world who did not know that they are beholden to His feet for their salvation, I would advise you to somehow go with devotion to that famous Badrinath and bow down to the Lord there.

Here Iyengar refers to how Lord manifested Himself as Nara and Narayana at Badri in order to educate us on the Guru Sishya (Teacher-taught) relationship.

DEVAPRAYAG

Perialvar is the only alvar who has done mangalasasana to the Perumal of this divyadesa in eleven pasurams. One of the pasurams is given below with its meaning:-

PASURAM 400:

முன்றெழுத் ததனை முன்றெழுத் ததனால் முன்றெழுத்
 தாக்கி முன்றெழுத்தை
 என்கொண் டிருப்பார்க்கு இரக்கம்நன் குடைய எம்புரு
 டோத்தம னிருக்கை
 முன்டி நிமிர்த்து முன்றுனில் தோன்றி முன்றினில்
 முன்றுரு வானான்
 கான்தடம் பொழில்துழ் கங்கையின் கரைமேல்
 கன்டமென் னுமகேடி நகரே.

Meaning:

This is a very important pasuram in which the alvar through simple words expresses the evolution and the significance of pranava mantra.

The alvar says Thirukandam also known as Kadi nagar is on the banks of the Ganga and is full of luscious, scented groves. He is the Lord Who shows utmost compassion and kindness to those who are firmly and consistently of the belief that pranava mantra is our saviour. That pranava mantra (OM) consisting of three letters (a, u & ma) is also three independent words conveying three meanings. He is the one who made that pranava mantra into Ashtakshara mantra consisting of three words. Those three words in turn reflect the three aspects of the Lord as well as the devotee. The place where the Purushothama who gave us this Truth manifested himself in Thirukadi nagar (Devaprayag).

The alvar in the entire pasuram plays upon the word "moonru" i.e. the number 3. Using this number, he explains the intricacies of pranava mantra and the Ashtakshara mantra and the three qualities of God as well as the three qualities of the devotee as enunciated by that mantra. The pranava is OM which is a combination of three letters viz. (A) + (U) + (Ma). The word A represents Bhagavan Who is the sarva rakshaka. The letter Ma represents jeevathma who is the jnana swaroopi. The letter U says that the jeevatma who is the jnana swaroopi belongs to Bhagavan who is the sarva rakshaka. God obtained these three words A U and Ma by taking from the Rigveda the vyaahruthi (primordial utterance) known as Bhoooh and from the Yajurveda

the vyaahruthi known as Bhuvaha and from the Samaveda the vyaahruthi known as Suvaha. Baghavan out of His sankalpa combined these three vyaahruthis into one and from that took these three aksharas viz., A U and Ma. Those three when combined became the pranava. The three letters in pranava are also independent words with their own meaning. As stated earlier these three letters A, U and Ma have their independent meanings referring to God, Athma and the relationship between the two. The Lord added to that pranava word the two words Namaha and Narayana thereby making it the Ashtakshara mantra. That mantra is like two faces of a coin, one face reflecting three qualities of the Lord and the other face the three qualities of the devotee. The three qualities of God and the three qualities of the athma which as stated earlier are two faces of the same coin are as follows:-

If athma represents Ananyarha-seshathwam (one who is a slave to none other than the Lord), the other side of the coin reflects the seshithwam of Baghavan (i.e. God is Seshi. The subservient entity (sesha porul) is athma. Athma belongs to God and God owns the athma). The second quality of the athma that is enunciated through the Ashtakshara mantra is the ananya saranathwam i.e. the quality whereby one does not recognise others as a saviour and regards only the Baghavan as rakshaka swaroopi. The other face of the coin is that Baghavan has the quality of Saranyathwam (the ability to protect). Thus the jeevathma has saranathwam whereas God has saranyathwam. The third quality of the athma reflected through this Ashtakshara mantra is Ananya Bhogyathwam i.e. this athma is a source of pleasure to none other than God. The corresponding quality of God is Praapyathwam. The jeevathma wants to be an object of enjoyment only to Baghavan. It means that the Lord is the person Who is the enjoyer (Bhokthaa). In other words He has bhokhtrutwam i.e. the ability to enjoy the athma who has Praapthruthwam, while the Baghavan has praapyathwam.

In brief the pranava mantra has three letters. The Lord got it by combining the three vyaahruthis viz. Bhoooh, Bhuvaha and Suvaha from Rig, Yajur and Sama vedas respectively. This OM

consists of three letters viz. A U and Ma. But the three letters are independent words by themselves as they represent three different entities and relationships. Thus, He got three letters which were three words at the same time. The commentators explain this alchemy by giving the example of how a person who wants three different ornaments to be made may give three old gold ornaments. The goldsmith would melt the ornaments into one gold bar out of which he would again make three different ornaments. Another mundane example is that of how from three pots of curds one could get butter. The three balls of butter can be mixed and out of that ghee can be obtained. Thus, the three letters in pranava have veda sambandha and are also words by themselves. This pranavam when prefixed to the two words "Namaha" and "Narayana" becomes the Ashtakshara mantra which enunciates three qualities each of Baghavan and athma respectively. While reflecting the qualities of jeevathma it is referred to as aakaaratrayam and while reflecting the qualities of Baghavan it is referred to as swaroopatrayam.

As this pranava refers to the relationship between God and athma, the alvar says that the people who go to Devaprayag are all the time repeating the words OM and thereby ensuring that they reach the feet of the Lord which are their sure saviour and succour.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

மத்தாற் கடல் கடைந்து வானோர்க் கமுதள்த்த
வத்தா வெனக் குன்னடிப் போதிற் - புத்தமுதைக்
கங்கைக் கரைசேருங் கண்டத்தாய் புண்டரிக
மங்கைக் கரைசே வழங்கு.

Meaning:

Iyengar says:-

Oh Lord! You Who gave amrith (Divine nectar) to the Gods after getting the ocean churned with the Mandara mountain; Oh Master You Who are the Consort of Mahalakshmi seated in a lotus flower; Oh Lord You Who have so kindly manifested Your-

self in the Divya desa known as Kandan as also Kadi nagar! My only request to you is that You should give the best amrith (nectar) that never satiates and which flows out of Your Divine Lotus Feet.

Here Iyengar says that arranged to have the ocean churned and then produced the amrith which He distributed to the Gods for meeting their specific purpose of becoming invincible vis a vis the demons. Iyengar says his request is different. He wants only the naturally flowing and ever present amrith from His feet to him who is His slave and who is no good for any other purpose but to serve Him.

THIRUPIRIDHI

HYMNOLOGY:

Thirumangai Alvar is the only Alvar who has sung the praise of the Lord here. He has sung ten pasurams. All these pasurams is given below with their meaning:

PASURAM 958:

வாலி மாவலத் கொருவன துடல்கெட வரிசீலை
வளைவித்து அன்று

ஏலம் நாறு தடம்பொழி லீடம்பெற இருந்தன லீமயத்துள்

ஆலி மாழுகி லதிர்கா அருவரை அகடுற முகடேறி

பிலி மாமயல் நடஞ்செயும் தடஞ்கனைப் பிருதிசென்
றடைநெஞ்சே?

O Mind go to Thirupiridhi. In that divya desa full of thick scented groves the Perumal who during Rama Avatar let loose an arrow from His beautiful bow and destroyed the powerful monkey king Vali, resides happily. In that divya desa full of waterfalls in the midst of beautiful Himalaya mountains, the peacocks with their widespread tails with great difficulty crawl up to the tall mountain peaks and dance with abandon even as the rain laden clouds thunder along the skies.

Here, the alvar says, that the peacocks are not able to fly up to the peaks of the mountains due to the weight of their spread out tails and so they crawl along to the top on their bellies. He

adds that in the many water falls in that spot myriads of animate species live happily. The alvar therefore says Oh mind of mine! Do not tarry anymore, but proceed to that idyllic happy spot to have communion with Lord and be blessed with salvation. The alvar refers to Vaali vadha to describe the warrior like qualities of Rama. Vali was a very powerful monkey king. He is reported to have lifted with his tail Ravana the demon who once held aloft even Kailasa mountain! If such a Vali was destroyed with ease by Rama need we say anything more to extoll His strength, bravery and unsurpassable warrior like qualities?

PASURAM 959:

கலங்க மாக்கடல் அரிகுலம் பணிசெய்ய அருவரை
அணைகட்டி
இலங்கை மாநதர் பொடிசெய்த அடிகள்தாம் இருந்தந
லிமயத்துள்
விலங்கல் போல்வன விறலிருஞ் சினத்தன
வேழங்களுக்குயர்கூர்
பிலங்கொள் வாளெயிற்று அரியவை திருதரு
பிருதிசென் றடைநெஞ்சே!

The alvar says:-

Oh mind of mine, hasten, do not tarry, proceed to Thirupiridhi divya desa where resides the supreme Lord and master who destroyed the great big Lankapuri after crossing the mighty ocean on a bridge built by the monkey armies with huge mountain like boulders. In that idyllic spot in beautiful Himalayas even the mighty huge angry elephants live in moral fear of sharp toothed lions roaming about and staying in the caves in those mountains.

In the previous pasuram the alvar referred to the incident, where Lord Rama resolved Sugreeva's problems by destroying Vali. In this pasuram, he speaks of how Sugreeva's armies resolved Lord Rama's worries in crossing a mighty ocean to rescue Sitha.

It is said that Samudraraja told Rama that Nala one of the warrior monkeys in Sugreeva's army was blessed with a special

boon by which whatever he threw into the sea would float and never sink. So the boulders and rocks brought by the vanara sena would be thrown into the water by Nala and thus a floating bridge to cross the ocean was built.

PASURAM 960:

துடிகொள் நுன்னிடைச் சுரிசுழல துளங்கெயிற்
 றிளங்கொடி திறத்து ஆயர்
 இடிகொள் வெங்குர லினவிடை யடர்த்தவன் இருந்தந
 லீமயத்துள்
 கடிகொள் வேங்கைன் நறுமல ரமளியின் மணியறை
 மிசை, வேழம்
 பிடியா னோடுவண்டு இசைகொலத் துயில் கொளும்
 பிருதிசென்றடைநெஞ்சே!

In the previous pasuram alvar referred to the heroic act of Rama in destroying Lanka to rescue Sitha devi. In this pasuram he refers to the great act of valour when Lord Krishna subjugated seven oxen in order to win the hand of Nappinnai.

The alvar says:-

Oh mind of mine. Do not tarry. Speed your way to Thirupiridhi where resides the Lord Who subjugated the fierce team of seven oxen belonging to Idayars (cowherd community) which rushed on to Him with thunder like snorts in order to win the hands of Nappinnai, a delicate creeper like beautiful damsel, with curly hair, bright teeth, and a slender waist which puts to shame even the udukkai (chameleon?). That Thirupiridhi is located in the beautiful Himalayas where as the bees are humming a male elephant is seen sleeping with a female elephant on a blue emerald hue with slab, a female elephant covered with the scented flowers of the vengai tree serving as a cosy bed. To that idyllic divya desa oh mind of mine, rush.

Here the alvar indulges in sringara rasa bhava as he is referring to the incident of Krishna winning the hands of Nappinnai the princess of the cow herds against very heavy odds.

PASURAM 961:

மறங்கொ ளாளர் யுருவென வெருவர ஒருவனது

அகல்மார்வம்

சிறந்து வானவர் மணிமுடி பணிதர இருந்தந லீமயத்துள்

இறங்கி ஏனங்கள் வளைமருப் பிடந்திடத் கிடந்தரு

கெகிவிகம்

பிறங்கு மாமணி யருவியொ டிழிதரு பிருதிசேன்

றடைநெஞ்சே!

O mind of mine! Do not delay anymore. Proceed to Thirupiridhi. In that divya desa resides the Lord Who manifested Himself as the angry terrifying man lion (Narasimha avatar) and split open the wide chest of the mighty Hiranya Kasipu and which act made the devas bow down their heads adorn with crowns in a humble thanks-giving obseience to Him. This divya desa is located in the beautiful Himalayas where the forest pigs lower their heads and with their sharp snouts pierce the slabs and prise open slabs and the precious shining stones hidden under the ground falls out and flows down along with the waters in the cascading water falls. To that idyllic spot O mind of mine, hasten.

In this pasuram, the alvar says Thirupiridhi is the place where the Lord Who manifested Himself as Narasimha resides. Near that divya desa the mountain sides are full of precious stones, the maha varahas i.e. the forest pigs with their strong snouts pierce through those mountaneous sites and immediately the precious stones underneath the stony layers tumbling out. There are rivulets each cascading down from the heights as water falls. The alvar paints a beautiful pen picture when he says that the precious stones which were nosed out by the forest pigs get washed ashore by the cascading water falls. The commentator says that the alvar is referring to the cascading water falls perhaps keeping in his mind that he is referring to Narasimhavatara and the cascading water falls signify the blood that flood out as rivulets when the chest of the mighty demon was split open by the sharp nails of the Lord.

PASURAM 962:

கரைசெய் மாக்கடல் கிடந்தவன் கனைகழல் அமரர்கள்
 தொழுதேத்த
 அரைசெய் மேக்கலை அலர்மக ளவனொடும் அமர்ந்தந
 லீமயத்துள்
 வரைசெய் மாக்களிறு இளவெதிர் வளர்முனை அனைமீகு
 தேன்தோய்த்து
 பிரச வாரிதன் னீளம்பிடிக்கு அருள்செயும் பிருதிசென்
 றடைநெஞ்சே!

This pasuram the alvar says that the Lord Who is seen at Thirupiridhi is Ksheerabdhinatha.

The alvar says O mind of mine! Do not tarry. Go to Thirupiridhi. In that divya desa, the Perumal Who is lying down in the cosmic ocean resides. The devas come to worship His divine feet adorned with ornaments. His consort Mahalakshmi wearing the golden belt around Her waist is with Him. This divine spot is in the holy Himalayas. The mountain-like huge elephants in this place pluck out the tender bamboo trees and collect in their hollow the honey which drips from the trees nearby and affectionately feed it to its mates.

The alvar presents an idyllic picture of domestic bliss in Thirupiridhi divya desa where the elephants are reported to pluck the hollows bamboo shoots and use it as a receptacle to collect honey dripping from the trees nearby and then pour it into the mouth of the female elephant. A similar incident is described by Bhoothath alvar about Tirumala (vide Irandam Thiruvandadi) in the pasuram beginning with the words "Perugu madha vezham). The alvar says that the Lord at Thirupiridhi is Ksheerabdhinatha lying down along with His consort in Thirupparkadal.

PASURAM 963:

பணங்க ளாயிர முடையநல் லரவனைப் பள்ளிகொள்
 பரமா! என்று
 இணங்கி வானவர் மனிமுடி பணிதர இருந்தந லீமயத்துள்

மணங்கொள் மாதவி நெடுங்கொடி விசம்புற
 நியிர்ந்தவை முகிலபற்றி
 பிணங்கு பூம்பொழில் நுழைந்துவண்டு இசைசொலும்
 பிருதிசென் றடைநெஞ்சே!

Oh mind Don't tarry any further. Go to Thirupiridhi the divya desa located in beautiful Himalayas. Large groups of devas bend their crowned heads in obsequence before the Perumal residing there and address as "Oh Paramapurusha lying down on the 1000 hooded Adishesha". That desa is full of scented Kurukathi creepers having spread upto the sky, stand erect and climb on to the clouds and fight with the clouds. The bees enter those Kurukathi flower groves, collect the honey and sing beautifully. To that idyllic spot, oh mind of mine, proceed.

Anangaracharyar while explaining this pasuram says that the Kurukathi creeper (Madhavi creeper) symbolises Mahalakshmi and when the alvar says that the dense creepers fight with the dark clouds in the sky it means that Mahalakshmi is strongly pleading the cause of her children the devotees with Perumal who is the dark cloud. This scene is therefore depicting the Purushakara role of the Divine mother. What is more when the alvar says that the bees are singing, it means that the sages and saints (i.e. bees) seeing the consorts role are singing Her praise.

Pasuram 964:

கார்கொள் வேங்கைகள் கனவரை தழுவிய
 கறிவளர்கொடிதுன்னி
 போர்கொள் வேங்கைகள் புனவரை தழுவிய பூம்பொழி
 லிமயத்துள்
 ஏர்கொள் பூஞ்சனைத் தடம்படிந்து இனமல ரெட்டுமிட்டு
 இமையோர்கள்
 பேர்களாயிரம் பரவிநின் றடிதொழும் பிருதிசென்
 றடைநெஞ்சே!

Oh mind! Do not tarry! Proceed to Tirupiridhi located in beautiful Himalayas. On those scenic slopes we see the top of the tall vengai trees with pepper creepers intertwined with their trunks, kiss the clouds. Fierce vengai tigers roam about in the nearby Hilly areas full of flower groves. The devas in large num-

bers come to such an idyllic spot, have their bath in tanks filled with flowers, they utter Sahasranamas of the Lord and offer worship to Him with 8 types of flowers and bow down to the divine feet of the Lord there.

The alvar says that that divya desa is surrounded by vengai trees. These trees have peculiar striped leaves which resemble the stripes on the body of vengai tigers! The vengai tigers also roam about freely in that protective atmosphere. To that divyadesa, the alvar, says, the devas come to offer worship to the Perumal with 8 types of flowers. The 8 types of flowers are Sengazhineer, shenbagam, paadiri poo, Iruvaakshi, Punnai, Kurukathi, Karumugai and Thamarai.

PASURAM 965:

இரவு கூர்ந்திருள் பெருகிய வரைமுழை இரும்பசி யதுகூர
அரவம் ஆவிக்கும் அகன் பொழில் தழுவிய ருவரை
யிமயத்துள்
பரம் னாதிஎம் பனிமுகில் வண்ணனேன்று எண்ணிதின்று
இமையோர்கள்
பிரம னோடுசென்று அடிதொழும் பெருந்தகைப்
பிருதிசென் றடைநெஞ்சே!

Oh mind! Do not tarry! Go to Thirupiridhi. It is located in beautiful Himalayas with thick groves and steep slopes. In the nights the hungry mountain snakes take deep breaths and are resting in the dark caves. Brahma and other devas come there and offer worship at the Divine feet of the Lord all the time addressing Him as, oh dark hued all pervasive (Aadhimoolamae) Lord. To that idyllic spot hasten.

The alvar says the snakes are taking deep breath as usually the snakes can live on air for long time. In the Himalayas the snakes in the caves all the time breath the scented air wafting from the thick luscious groves.

PASURAM 966:

ஓதி யாயிர நாமங்க னுணர்ந்தவர்க்கு உறுதுய
ரடையாமல்
ஏத மின்றிநின் றருளாம்நம் பெருந்தகை
இருந்தநலியத்துள்

தாது மலகிய பிண்டிவிண் டலர்கின்ற தழல்புரை யெழில்
நோக்கி
பேதை வண்டுகள் ரீயென வெருவரு பிருதிசென்
றடைநெஞ்சே!

Oh mind! do not tarry; proceed to Thirupiridhi. In that place, located in the Himalayas, resides our Master, the supreme kind Lord Who ensures that the wise men who are always uttering His Sahasranama, do not face any difficulties in life. What is more He redeems them of all their sins. The foolish bees in that place mistake the fully blossomed Asoka flowers (red in colour) as hot burning fire and get frightened. To that idyllic spot, oh mind, proceed.

Commenting on this pasuram, Anangaracharyar swamy draws our attention to the fact that the pasuram refers to the fight of the bees and to the manner in which God removes the fears of the wise men. Swamy says that we all know God is the Supreme Protector (Sarva Rakshakan) and yet we are worried that evil may befall Him and so the devotee sings pallaandu (benediction) to protect Him! At other times, we cry for His protection. Thus, prapannars (wise men) who express Bhaya (fear) and speak of Bhaya Nivruthi (prevention of fear) reside at Thirupiridhi!

PASURAM 967:

கரிய மாழுகிற் படலங்கள் கிடந்தவை முழங்கிட
களிறென்று
பெரிய மாகணம் வரையெனப் பெயர்தரு பிருதியெம்
பெருமானை
வரிகொள் வண்டறை பைம்பெழில் மங்கையர் கலியன
தொலிமாலை
அரிய இன்னிசை பாடும்நல் லடியவர்க்கு அருவினை
அடையாலே.

This is a phalastuthi pasuram where the alvar says that no ills will trouble the sincere devotees who recite this garland of sweet sounding verses composed by the chieftain of Thirumangai nadu full of scented groves on the Lord of Thirupiridhi where the thundering thick rain bearing clouds, the big mountain, the snakes mistake them for elephants and pounce on them to swallow them.

It is said that there are some mountain snakes which can swallow with ease, an elephant. The alvar's picture of Thirupiridhi with growling dark, heavy, hanging rain clouds and the snakes slithering out of the rocky grounds and standing erect ready to pounce on those clouds thinking they are trumpeting elephants is a piece of unsurpassed poetic fancy.

DĪVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

வழங்கு முயிரினத்தும் வாரி வாய்ப் பெய்து
வீழங்குங் கவந்தன் விறற் றோட றடங்கைப்
பொருப் பிருதிக்குங் கிடந்தாற் போற்றணித்து விழ்த்தான்
றிருப் பிருதிக் கென்னெஞ்சே சேல்.

Meaning:

Oh mind! Go to Thirupiridhi divyadesa where Rama resides. He is the supreme one who served the mighty shoulders of Kabanda the asura who would collect and swallow at one point of time all the living things that came within the sweep of his outstretched arms. The felled shoulders of that asura lying on the ground looked like two hills.

Here Iyengar says that if we go to Thirupiridhi our enemies will be destroyed and good will befall us as the presiding deity in that desa is Rama who destroyed Kabanda the asura.

* * *

SALAGRAMAM

This vaishnavite divya desa is in Nepal. It is reportedly in a very remote place which one has to pass through forests to reach the spot. In the month of Masi when Sivarathri festival is celebrated, people come in huge numbers to visit Pasupatinatha temple at Katmandu. After visiting that temple they all proceed to Salagrama. At that time, no specific permission from the Government is needed to visit this place. But on other occasions, people have to get permission from the king of Nepal to travel to this spot and that the king will give permission only when a group of about 50 people plan to go to the spot. This restriction is to ensure the security of the pilgrims so that when they travel in large numbers, it is easy for the Government to arrange for protection. It is said that in the forests enroute there are wild man-eating animals. What is worse, there is also a lot of doubt as to which exactly is the spot which is the divya desa. About 170 miles from Katmandu, there is a place known as Mukti Narayana kshetra and enroute to that kshetra on the banks of Gandaki river lies this divya desa viz. Salagramam. But others say that Salagramam is not a different place and that Mukti Narayana kshetra itself is Salagramam as the river Gandaki has its origin at that place. Yet others say that about 65 miles from Katmandu on the banks of Gandaki river there is a place known as Damodara Kund and that spot is Salagramam.

The Lord in this divya desa is known as Sri Murthi Perumal. Thayar is known as Sridevi Nachiyar. The vimana is Kanaka vimana and Lord is facing north. The theertha is known as Chakra theertha as also Gandaki theertha. God appeared to Brahma, Rudra and Gandaki.

The Sthala purana: In Brahma Vaivarta Purana, we come across the mythological stories connected with this divya desa. Vrusha dwajan was a king belonging to Manu vamsa. He was a great Siva bhakta and with the boons conferred on him by Lord Siva, he became powerful and in course of time arrogant. He started looking down upon the other devas and creating a lot of trouble for them. One day the Sun god was irritated with his

behaviour and cursed him saying that all his wealth would be taken away by his enemies. Vrusha dwaja ran to Lord Siva and sought his help to get rid of this curse. Seeing that his bakṭha was thus cursed by Surya, Siva reportedly lost balance and started rushing towards the Sun god with the Sulayudha held aloft in His hands. Seeing the angry Siva marching towards him, Surya ran seeking shelter to His creator Brahma. Brahma asked him to approach Vishnu. Surya went and fell at the feet of Lord Vishnu. Seeing him rush towards Vishnu, it is said Siva also rushed in the same direction and he overheard Vishnu admonishing the Sun god and telling him as to why he acted in such a manner as to anger Siva. Vishnu also added that the prowess of Lord Siva was equal to that of His disc and that it would be very difficult to control Lord Siva. Hearing Vishnu's speech like this about him, Siva was very pleased and calmed down. He explained to Narayana that He always got very angry if any of His bhaktas were ill-treated and that He got angered with the Sun god only because he dared to curse Vrusha dwaja and hHe continued to praise Lord Narayana and stayed on in that place forgetting the very purpose for which He had come rushing towards Lord Narayana. Days passed by. Then Vishnu politely reminded Siva about His purpose and told Him that while He was praying time had elapsed and Vrusha Dwaja had also passed away. His son Hamsa Dwaja also has ruled the kingdom and passed away. His children Dharma Dwaja and Kusa Dwaja had lost their kingdom and were suffering. He told Siva that the man whom he wanted to punish Vrusha Dwaja was no longer alive and therefore no purpose would be served in punishing the Sun god. Thus comforted Siva left the spot sparing the Sun God. It is said that a girl was born to Kusa dwaja who was the amsa of Goddess Lakshmi. She was able to repeat the vedas even as soon as she was born. She was named as Vedavati. In course of time when she came of age, she undertook a severe penance in order to attain Lord Narayana as Her consort. Ravana, the demon came one day. He happened to pass by and was attracted by the beauty of this damsel and wanted to forcibly take her to Lanka. Because of her tapo bala Vedavati ensured that the hands of Ravana got paralysed and prevented him from completing the

heinous act. At that time, an asareeri voice was heard in the sky assuring Vedavati that in the next birth she would attain Vishnu as her husband and that Ravana would again fall in love with her and carry her away and that he would meet with his end through her consort. It is believed that it is Vedavati who later reincarnated as Sita, the daughter of Janaka and married Rama who later killed the ten-headed Ravana. Kusadwaja's second wife was known as Madhavi. She also did severe tapas for a long time and was blessed with a daughter who was also believed to be an amsa of Mahalakshmi. That child was very beautiful and as there was none to equal her in beauty in this world, she was named as Tulasi (Thulanam Asyathi). When she did tapas to attain Vishnu, Brahma appeared and told her that her wish would be fulfilled only in her next birth. He also enlightened her and said that in the previous birth, she was a Gopastree and Sudhama, an amsa of Krishna had left her and that Radha had cursed Sudama to become a demon. Sudhama was reborn as Sankha choodan. Brahma therefore advised her that she who was an amsa of Radha would marry Sudhama who was an amsa of Krishna and that later in the next birth she would be able to attain Vishnu. Accordingly the second daughter of Kusadwajan married Sankhachoodan. Sankhachoodan had defeated many of the devas and expanded his kingdom and became an asura chakravarti. The devas along with Brahma sought protection from Vishnu. Vishnu then entrusted the sulayudha to Siva and requested Him to kill Sankhachoodan. Siva then is reported to have told Vishnu as long as Sankhachoodan had his protective armour (kavacha) on his body and as long as his wife remained a chaste woman, it would be impossible to kill him. Siva however fought with Sankhachoodan. The fight lasted for many years. After a long time, Srīman Narayana under the guise of a brahmin approached Sankhachoodan, praised him to the skies and asked as a gift the kavacha worn by Sankhachoodan. The demon king little realising the game that was being played by God taken in by the sweet words of the brahmin removed his kavacha and handed it over to the brahmin. The brahmin then wore that kavacha and went to the residence of Sankhachoodan. The wife thought that it was her husband who had returned victorious from the bat-

tlefield and came with open arms to receive the brahmin who had come dressed as Sankhachoodan. Thus, both the conditions laid down by Siva viz. that the wife should lose her purity and that Sankhachoodan should be deprived of the armour were fulfilled due to a lila of Lord Narayana. Siva then killed Sankhachoodan with His sula. The wife realising her mistake asked Vishnu as to why He performed that deceitful, hateful act. Then Lord Vishnu explained to her the entire story and said that Sankhachoodan was His amsa and that she was an amsa of Radha and that as an amsa of Mahalakshmi she would attain Him as her husband. When Sankhachoodan was killed her period as an amsa of Radha was also over and that she was born as the daughter to Kusadwaja and was doing tapas in order to attain Him viz. Vishnu and that her prayers have been answered. The lady then requested Vishnu to continue to live in that place known as Salavanam as a huge mountain and that she would continue to stay there in the form of Gandaki river. God conceded her request. In the midst of the Salavana, He manifested Himself as a big mountain and she became the Gandaki river. It is said that it is the long tresses of that damsel which became the tulasi vana. The bones of Sankhachoodan were thrown by Lord Siva into the ocean. They became the conches. It is said that henceforth people used to place tulasi leaves in the conches and that the salagramas would be washed with the water that is poured through such a conch. Whoever worship the salagrama in such a manner are said to be able to rid themselves of all the sins. That was the assurance given to her by Vishnu. That is why even today we have the practice of doing thirumanjanam to the Lord with a few leaves of tulasi placed in the conch and water poured through the nose of the conch on to the vigraha.

Gandaki river is full of salagramas. It is said people who visit the Gandaki river collect the precious stones and people who are experts in the line are able to disaffor the lines and the pattern of the salagrama stones and identify the stone with the particular avatara of the Lord. Whoever household has a collection of 12 salagramas is said to be equal to a kshetra i.e. a divya desa. Such a house would be considered as very holy. Every kshetra has a

salagrama stones kept in the sanctum sanctorum. Many are the stories connected with the position of the salagramas by the individuals. Some say that only even number of salagramas i.e. as 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 should be worshipped and that nobody should have just two salagramas. If anybody has two, some advise them to even gift away one. But there are others who hold that there is no truth in such beliefs and in support of such a theory, they quote the following sloka from Brahmanda purana which says **Salagrama silal Yatra Hyakathvis Thisra yeva cha sadasro va munisreshta Tat tama paramam mama**". This sloka makes it that there is no significance in the number of salagramas that can be possessed by a person. It is also said irrespective of whether the salagramas is smaller or big it will confer a lot of benefit on those who possess such precious stones.

HYMNOLOGY:

Thirumangal Alvar and Perialvar have done mangalasasana to the Lord of this divya desa in Ten and two pasurams respectively and one pasuram of Thirumangai Alvar is given below with its meaning.

PASURAM 996:

தொண்டா மினழும் இமையோரும் துணைநூல்
 அண்டா! எமக்கே யருளாயென்று அணையும் கோயி
 லருகெல்லாம்
 வண்டாற் பொழிலின் பழனத்து வயலி
 தொண்டா மினழும் இமையோரும் துணைநூல் மாப்பி
 னந்தனாகும்
 அண்டா! எமக்கே யருள யென்று அணையும் கோயி
 லருகெல்லாம்
 வண்டாற்பொழிலின்பழனத்து வயலி னயலே கயல்பாய
 தண்டா மரைகள் முகமலர்த்தும் சாளக் கிராமம் அடை
 நெஞ்சே

In this pasuram the alvar exhorts his mind to go to Salagrama and worship the Lord there. He says that the Salagrama divya desa is surrounded by flower groves filled with honey bees. To enable the groves to be luscious there are numerous water re-

sources like tanks, ponds etc. The fields near those water resources have the kadal fishes. Those fishes, the alvar says, jump from the fields on to the lotus buds which blossom the moment the fishes land on the closed buds.

The alvar says:- The temple at Salagrama is the place to which the Sri vaishnava pilgrims intent on doing kankarya, Nityasuris and brahmins wearing the sacred thread have all assembled requesting Devadideva to enlighten them. The area surrounding the temple is full of luscious groves filled with honey bees. The kadal fishes are jumping about in the fields surrounding those groves. They gambol about and jump on to the lotus buds which immediately blossom. To such a Salagrama, O mind of mine, proceed immediately.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATHI ANDAADHI:

உண்டா முறைமை யுணர்ந்தடிமைப் பேர் பூண்டேன்
பண்டாங் குடிகுலத்தாற் பன்மதத்தாற் கொண்டாட்டா
லனாக் கிராமத்தாலல்லற் பேர் பூணாமற் சனாக் கிராத்தரீதாட்கு

Meaning:

Here in this verse Iyengar speaks about how it is very necessary to have a name suggesting association with the God at Saligram.

He says:- I realised how futile it was to have a name which merely links me and speaks about a hoary lineage, or about the varna to which I belong or about my religious belief or my vocation or about my birth place only. I realised that it is better to have a name which speaks about my association with the lotus feet of the Lord at Salagrama and says that I am His vassal.

Here Iyengar's plea is to shed ones ego evidenced through proclaiming the name of ones village or varna or religion or work and so on. Instead he says identify yourself merely as a daasaanu daasa of Lord! (most humble servant of Lord).

DWARAKA

This is the solitary divya desa in Western India. It lies on the Bombay-Oka Port rail line. One has to go via Ahmedabad, Veeraamgaam, Rajkot and Jam nagar and reach Dwaraka. The Dwaraka railway station is about twenty miles away from the Oka port. In and around Dwaraka, there are numerous other small holy centres connected with Dwaraka like Pate Dwaraka, Prabas theertha, Raivatha hill and Palaka Town. The temple lies about 1 1/2 miles from the railway station. The moolavar is known as Kalyana Narayanan as also Dwarakadeesan. He is seen in a standing pose facing west. The consort is known as Lakshmisri as also Kalyana Nachiyar. The eight Mahishis of Lord Krishna also have their sannidhis here. The theertha is Gomathi river and it joins the sea at Prabas theertha. The vimana is known as Hemakuta vimana. At Dwaraka God gave darshan to Drowpadhi, Kuchela, Jambavan, Satyabhama, Rukmini, Arjuna etc. All the stories connected with the life history of Krishna as a youth took place in and around Dwaraka.

The sthala purana of Dwaraka is basically the Krishnaleela stories. In the following paragraphs, a brief account will be given of the various incidents in the life of Krishna connected with Dwaraka.

As is well known, Krishna killed Kamsa. Immediately, the two wives of Kamsa viz., Asthi and Prasthi went to their father Jarasandha and bemoaned their fate saying that they had been widowed because of Krishna. Jarasandha got furious and immediately he assembled a huge army and proceeded towards Mathura. Seeing the armies, Sri Krishna and Balarama with their divine power got two chariots full of weapons. Balarama and Krishna got on to those chariots and fought with the army of Jarasandha and defeated it. When Balarama was about to kill Jarasandha Krishna prevented him and said that once Jarasandha is killed, the other evil asuras will hide and go underground and evade destruction at their hands. As a result, they will not be able to rid the society of such bad elements. He therefore advised Balarama to let go Jarasandha, so that the evil forces could be re-

assembled by Jarasandha! As expected by Krishna, Jarasandha attacked Mathura again and again and every time was defeated by Krishna and Balarama.

Meantime, elsewhere in the neighbourhood of Mathura lived a king by name Gargeya. He had no progeny. The yadhavas used to tease him and call him as *bedi* i.e. a person without children. The king got annoyed and determined to do severe penance and be blessed with a son who would wipe out the yadhava race. He prayed to Lord Shiva. During his severe penance, the rishi was believed to have lived on a staple diet of crushed, powdered iron pieces! In due course, Pasupathinatha blessed him. The king had a son. He named him Kaalayavanan. He had a strong physique. Gargeya handed over the kingdom to him and went into the forests to do *tapas*. In due course, Kaalayavanan learnt from Narada the humiliation suffered by his father at the hands of yadhavas. He therefore wanted to wreak vengeance on the yadhavas at Mathura and attacked that town with his armies. Krishna knew that Kaalayavanan, would destroy the yadhava army and later it would become easy for their old enemy Jarasandha to capture Mathura. Sri Krishna therefore requested the king of the oceans to give him land with 12 yojanas width. The Lord of the Ocean conceded the request. Lord asked Visvakarma to build a town in that reclaimed land. Visvakarma built a huge temple with imposing towers, tanks, streets etc. The place was so beautiful that it was regarded as the entry point i.e. *dwaaram* to heaven. Hence the place came to be known as Dwaraka. In this place Sri Krishna with his powers of *maya* was able to transport all the men and the cattle from Mathura. Thus Dwaraka was the city to which Lord Krishna transported the people of Mathura to save them from the onslaught of the enemies.

Later as expected Kaalayavanan attacked Mathura when Krishna and Balarama alone were there. As Krishna and Balarama had taken avatar as normal human beings and not as divinity itself, they behaved like human beings on very many occasions. That is why the story goes that when Kaalayavanan besieged Mathura, Krishna and Balarama took to their hills. Kaalayavanan laughed at this sight and chased them. Krishna

entered a cave and disappeared. Kaalayavanan followed Him into the cave. But in that cave, Musukundan was resting to recover from the strain of having participated on behalf of the devas in the devasura yuddha when the asuras were defeated. The haughty Kaalayavanan kicked Musukundan. The sleeping Musukundan had a peculiar boon viz. whoever wakes him up from slumber would get burnt to ashes. Accordingly when Kaalayavanan kicked awake Musukundan, the eyes of Musukundan opened on Kaalayavanan who was burnt to ashes. Musukundan sighted Krishna and prayed to him seeking moksha. Krishna assured him that his next birth his wish would be fulfilled. It is this Musukundan who is believed to have gone to Badarikasramam and as a reward for his severe penance got blessed by Narayana later.

As Krishna was transporting the men and the cattle from Mathura again Jarasandha attacked Mathura. It is said that immediately Krishna along with Balarama ran and hid Himself in the Prasravana hill. Jarasandha ordered that the entire hill be burnt. Even as the 10 yojana high hill was being burnt, Krishna and Balarama took an alternative route and reached Dwaraka safely.

The story of Krishna's wedding with Rukmani is also well known. Rukmani was the daughter of Bishmakan. On the swayamvara day, Krishna carried away Rukmani in His chariot and drove away to Dwaraka. About one mile from Dwaraka is situated Rukmini Devasthanam which is believed to be the place where Krishna married Rukmini. That temple houses numerous pieces of beautiful sculpture.

The child born to Krishna and Rukmani was known as Pradhyumna. He was in the previous birth Manmatha who was burnt to ashes by Shiva. It is said that the child Pradhyumna was one day thrown into the sea by one Sambaran who regarded him as his enemy. A fish swallowed the child. Later that fish was got caught in the net of a fisherman who handed it over to the king. In the kitchen when the fish was cut open, the child was discovered. It is said that Rathi devi, the wife of Manmatha was in that kitchen and she recognised her husband in this child. Later Pradhyumna

fought with Sambaran, defeated him and continued to live in Dwaraka along with Rathi devi.

Krishna married Jambavathi and brought her also to Dwaraka. The story of Jambavathi's wedding with Krishna is also well known. To briefly recall the same, Sathraajit was a great devotee of Sun God. One day he wore the Somanthaka jewel given to him by Sun God and came to Dwaraka to visit Krishna. Because of the dazzling bright light shed by that jewel all the people thought that Sun God himself had come to Dwaraka! Krishna then looked at the jewel and said that the priceless jewel is fit only to be worn by a king. But Sathraajit would not part with it. One day Sathraajit's younger brother Prasenana wore that jewel and went hunting. A lion attacked him and stole the jewel. Jambavan killed the lion and took the dazzling stone and tied it as a play thing on the cradle of his son. Meantime, people came to know that Prasenana had been killed and the jewel stolen. They all thought that it was Krishna who had killed him as Krishna had earlier asked that jewel. To absolve Himself from this blot on His name, Lord went to the forest. He discovered the jewel tied to a cradle. He fought with Jambavan. Jambavan later told the Lord how he got the jewel. He realised that Krishna was God himself and parted with the jewel to Krishna and requested Krishna to marry his daughter Jambavathi.

Krishna related this story to Satraajit also and returned the precious stone to him. Satraajit sought His forgiveness as he along with the others had earlier thought that it was Krishna who had robbed the jewel from Satraajit's brother Prasenana. Satraajit then asked Krishna to marry his daughter Sathyabama. Thus Krishna married the eight damsels viz. Rukmani, Jambavathi, Sathyabama, Mithravinda, Kalindhi, Badra, Lakshmana, Srutakeerthi and stayed with all of them in Dwaraka. It was also around that time that He had killed Narakasura and released the 16,000 damsels kept in prison by Narakasura and married all of them also. They also resided happily in Dwaraka.

The story of Kuchela, the poor brahmin who studied with Krishna is also wellknown. Dwaraka was the city to which

Kuchela came to meet Krishna. As soon as Krishna saw Kuchela he seated him on a throne and along with his Ashtamahishis extended all courtesies to his erstwhile classmate and friend unmindful of his dire poverty. Kuchela never asked him for anything though he came there specifically with the hope of redeeming his abject poverty. But before Kuchela reached his home town, Krishna had ensured that all prosperity and wealth was conferred on that family.

It was from Dwaraka that Krishna went to attend the Rajasooya yaga performed by Dharmaputra. Dharmaputra did the agra pooja to Krishna. Sisupala could not bear these honours being conferred on Krishna and he humiliated Krishna. Krishna released the Chakrayudha and severed the head of Sisupala. The story goes that a bright light emerged from Sisupala's body and merged with Krishna. Thus, Krishna gave moksha even to the person who incessantly cursed him.

The story of Jarasandha vadha is also well known. Arjuna invited Jarasandha for a wrestling bout. But Jarasandha refused to fight with Arjuna as he felt that he was not his equal in might and instead invited Bhima to fight with him. As the fight was going on for a long time and even Bhima was getting tired, Sri Krishna, unknown to Jarasandha, gave a hint to Bhima indicating that he will be able to kill Jarasandha only if he splits him into two and throws the severed parts far apart. Bhima did accordingly and Jarasandha was killed. After his death, Krishna released those imprisoned by Jarasandha and took them also to Dwaraka.

It is from Dwaraka that Krishna answered the piteous call of Droupadhi when she was humiliated in the court of Duryodhana (Vastraapaharana episode). It was at Dwaraka that Arjuna as well as the Kauravas met Krishna seeking His assistance in waging the Mahabharata war. At the end of Mahabharata war when the kauravas were destroyed, Gandhari, the mother of the kauravas cursed that even as she suffered because of the death of all her children in the Mahabharata war, similarly the yadhavas as a race would be destroyed in another 36 years and that Krishna also would suffer along with them. Accordingly, after the war when

Krishna returned to Dwaraka 36 years rolled by. The yadhavas became wicked and cruel. One day they dressed up Krishna's son Samban as a woman and took her to Narada, Visvamitra and Kanva rishis and introduced her as the wife of Brighu maharishi and asked those rishis as to what will be the gender of the child that was to be born to her! The maharishis knew the truth and replied that a piece of iron rod which will destroy their entire clan will be born to that lady. Accordingly she gave birth to an iron rod. The yadhavas handed over that piece of iron rod to their king who powdered the iron rod and threw it into the ocean thinking thereby he had outwitted the rishis. But one small piece in that powdered lot was swallowed by a fish. Later that fish was caught by a hunter by name Jara who split open the stomach of the fish and found the iron piece. Without knowing what it was, he used that iron piece as an arrow head to one of his arrows. The rest of the powdered iron pieces got washed on to the shore and grew into sharp edged kora grass. The time limit set by Gandhari in her curse was nearing. Krishna decided that He would go away. The yadhavas also followed Him. On the banks of Prabasa theertha, the yadhavas got drunk and started quarelling amongst themselves and killed each other with the kora grass that was growing there. Meantime, Krishna was resting under peepul tree. A hunter Jara who was passing by mistook the soul of Krishna's foot as a fleeing deer and he let loose the arrow which he had earlier capped with the solitary iron piece found inside the stomach of the fish. Thus, the curse of the rishis Visvamitra, Narada, and Kanva as also Gandhari came true. Meantime, Krishna called Daruka and asked him to go to Dwaraka and evacuate all the residents there as He said that but for his one house all the other houses would get swallowed up by the ocean. Daruka accordingly evacuated the residents.

Thus, Dwaraka is the divya desa where many of the incidents connected with the life of Krishna took place. The temple is situated in the place where the river Gomati joins the sea. The temple is open for worship from 5 am in the morning. Everyday the God is dressed and decorated first as a child, then as a king and later as an old revered sage. Everyday thirumanjanam (bath with the holy waters) is offered.

On the banks of the sea peculiar types of stones are found. These are known as Dwaraka stones. Some are said to be having one chakra, others two yet others many. They are of different sizes and shapes. These are also collected and worshipped by the devotees. But unlike the Salagrama stones, there are no special rites prescribed while worshipping these Dwaraka stones. The puranas say that the stones found in the Salagrama represent God and the stones at Dwaraka represent goddess Lakshmi. It is believed that those who worship salagrama stones, Dwaraka stones will be assured of moksha.

Thirty miles away from Dwaraka is a place known as Okha. Half a mile from there there is a place in the ocean known as Pate Dwaraka. To reach this place, one has to go by boat for about 15 minutes into the ocean. It is said that the word "Pate" in Gujarathi has several meanings like junction, dried rice (aval). It is said that this is the place where Kuchela met Sri Krishna with a fistful of dried rice in his hand. This is the only place where there is a sannidhi for Sri Devaki, the mother of Lord Krishna. This sannidhi is in front of the sannidhi for Sri Krishna. It is believed that that is the spot where the palace of Sri Krishna was located. It is a small place. It is barely three miles x 3 miles in area. An idol of Sri Krishna is seen there holding the conch, the disc and the mace in His hands.

About two kilometers from Dwaraka, there is a separate temple for Sri Rukmini. It is very close to the road. The idol is made out of white marble and is seen in a standing pose and is very beautiful to look at. The consort is shown having four hands holding the disc and the conch. The other two hands pointing downwards. The right hand is having the mace and the left is holding a lotus.

From Dwaraka if one goes towards Rajkot, one will reach a place known as Viraval. Closeby is Prabasa theertha. From Junagad station, one can reach the famous place. Even today there is a place known as Palaka where there is a temple for Krishna. It is believed that this is the spot where Krishna got hit by the arrow let loose by Jara. The idol of Krishna in this temple

is claimed to be many as the most beautiful idol. Lord Krishna is seen in a sayana pose with right leg in a folded posture and the left leg balanced on the knee of the folded right leg. It is said that this was the pose where the hunter by name Jara saw only the sole of the Lord, mistook for a dove and let loose the arrow. The idol is therefore having the puranic story. What is more near the foot of the idol is seen the hunter on bent knees with the bow and the quiver of arrows on the shoulder as if he is seeking forgiveness from the Lord. On the wall nearby the sloka said to be uttered by this hunter is written in Sanskrit. This sloka is to the effect that O Krishna! Madhusudhana! Please forgive this sinner who unwittingly have committed this sin. The reply given by Krishna is also written on the wall which comforts the hunter by telling him that it is not his mistake and that it was His will which made him act as he did. It is said that this hunter Jara was none other than Vali during Ramavatar. It is wellknown that Sri Rama killed Vali by standing behind a tree. While that action of His was justified, yet Vali was angry as he felt that Rama was not fair to him. At that time, Rama told him that while he had to act as he did, yet Vali would have his opportunity when God manifested Himself as Krishna. At that time, on one occasion when He would be relaxing and lying down, Vali would be given an opportunity to let loose the arrow on God thus calling it quits. Thus, the Vali vadha during Ramavatar is tied with Krishna vadha during Krishnavatar. The idol of Krishna in this temple is claimed by many to be the most beautiful idol.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

ARIE Appendix B sl. Numbers 39 to 108 refer to various inscriptions found in the ground floor, second, third and fourth storey of the Dwarakadisa temple as well some of the inscriptions found in the Devaki shrine in the compound of the Dwarakadisa temple and in the Pradhyumna shrine in the same compound and in the Trivikrama shrine in the same Dwarakadisa temple and in the Rukmani temple, about a mile east of the village and at the entrance to the Sarada matha temple. But it is a pity that none of these inscriptions seem to convey anything outstanding. They are

all broken and not complete inscriptions. They refer to some names of people. In some cases it records the successful completion of the pilgrimage of several persons and in some cases the names of masons, etc. Thus, these inscriptions do not throw any interesting light on either the practices followed at that time or the donations given by any devotees to this temple. The only exception to this general unsatisfactory nature of the inscriptions found in this temple is what is mentioned as sl.no. 89 in ARIE 1969-70 which is on the silver simhasana near the footprints of the image of Pradhyumna. It states that the donation evidently of the simhasana was made by Kalyāṇaraya probably for the merit of Sita magana lala of Brahmakshatriya caste belonging to Mumbai. The name of the father, mother and other relations are also mentioned.

HYMNOLOGY:

Perialvar (5 pasurams), Andal (4 pasurams), Thirumangai Alvar (2 pasurams), Thirumazhisai Alvar and Nammalvar (one pasuram each) have done mangalasasana to the Lord here. One pasuram of Perialvar with its meaning is given below:-

PASURAM 333:

பொல்லா வடிவுடைப் பேய்ச்சி துஞ்சப் புணர்முலை
வாய்மடுக்க
வல்லானை மாமணி வண்ணனை மருவு மிடம்நா ஓதிரேல்
பல்லாயிரம்பெருந் தேவி மாரொடு பெளவம் எறிது வரை
எல்லாகும் சூழச் சிங்கள சனத்தே இருந்தானைக்
கண்டாருளர்

The Alvar says:

If you want to know the place where the Lord who was capable of destroying the fierce looking demoness Poothana by sucking the poisoned milk offered by her, go to Dwaraka, surrounded by the wavy ocean. The body of the Lord there has the hue of the precious blue emerald. There are many who have seen Him at Dwaraka seated on the throne surrounded by the 16000 damsels as well as His consorts.

Here the alvar refers to the incident in Krishnavatara when He defeated and released the 16000 princess kept captive by him.

All those princess as well as His consorts, the alvar says, are around Him as He is seated on the throne at Dwaraka.

**DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108
TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:**

திறந்திற மாத்தாந்துய்க்குந் தீஞ்சுவையை நாடி
யறந்திரம்பிப் பாதக ரோரைவர்-ருறுந்துளவ
மாது வரையோனே மனந்துணையாக்
கொண்டென்னைக்
காது வரையோ மெய் கலந்து.

Meaning:

Here Iyengar makes a heart rending piteous cry of despair to the Lord to release him from the clutches of Panchendriyas (five sense organs).

He says:

Oh Lord adorned with the scented basil garland and seen at famed Dwaraka, what is this weak person to do when the Panchendriyas having conquered my mind and taking full control of my body are making me transgress all principles of dharma and seek all the sweet forbidden pleasures for the enjoyment of those sense organs and are giving me no end of problems. (i.e. to say I am helpless, I seek your help to control my weak mind and body and to direct the sense organs in the proper path).

* * *

NAIMISARANYAM

To reach this place, one has to get down at Palamav junction on the Calcutta Dehradun line. After alighting at Palamav junction, one has to take another train which goes to Sitapur and alight at Naimisaranya station. The town is about two miles from the railway station. Neither the temple nor the presiding deity in the temple on whom the Alvar composed verses is in existence now. But the general belief is that God is in the form of a forest here. May be once upon a time, this town had the temple. This is still regarded as one of the 108 holy divya desas. The name of the moolavar is known as Devaraja. The consort is known as Sri Harilakshmi as also Pundareekavalli. The theertha is Chakra theertha, Gomukhi river, Nemi river, Divya Visranta theertha. The vimana is known as Sri Hari vimanam. The sthala viruksha is Tapovanam. God is believed to have appeared in response to the prayers of Indra, Sudharma, Devarishi Suta Puranika and Veda Vyasa.

This is regarded as one of the eight svayam vyaktha kshetras. The svayam vyaktha kshetras are Srirangam, Srimushnam, Tirupati, Salagramam, Thothadri (Vanamamalai), Pushkaram, Badri and Naimisaranyam. As stated earlier, this place is also referred to as Tapovana. There are nine tapovanas viz., Dandakaranya, Saindhavaranyam, Jambukaranyam, Pushkararanyam, Utpalaranyam, Badarikaranyam, Gurujangalaranyam, Arputharanyam and Naimisaranyam. This Naimisaranya tapovanam is regarded as a very holy forest.

The sthala mahatmyam of this place is reported to have been related by Lord Shiva to Parvati. It is said that once upon a time, Sounaka and other maharishis went to Brahma and asked Him which is the place best suited for performing yaga, dhana and tapas. Then Brahma lifted a darba grass nearby, rolled it into a shape of a wheel and let it loose. He said that the place where this wheel goes and stops will be the ideal spot for performing yagas. The wheel rolled on to earth and is reported to have reached the spot which is now known as Naimisaranyam. Nemi means a

wheel (chakra). This place got the name Naimisaranyam as the Nemi i.e. chakra landed in this area which was an aranya (forest). So the kshetra was first known as Naimism. When the chakra fell a deep pit emerged in that area. Water bubbled out of that pit and that pit became the holy tank and got the name Chakra theertha as the chakra i.e. wheel rested in this spot. It is believed that whoever has a bath in this kshetra will have the same benefit as if he has had a bath in Kurukshetra during the eclipse time. This eclipse represents the following episode in Mahabharata war. As is well known during Mahabharata war in order to enable Arjuna to locate and kill Jayadratha before Sunset, Lord Krishna played a small leela when He hid the face of Sun with His disc for a split second and made Jayadratha think the Sun had set while it really had not. Jayadratha came out of hiding, Krishna also recalled the disc and Arjuna let loose the arrow and killed Jayadratha. It is believed that a bath in this chakra theertha will ensure moksha. What is more if one has a bath for 30 days in this chakra theertha, is regarded as equivalent to having had a bath in the theerthas of all the 108 divya desas.

It is believed that Veda vyasa came to Naimisaranya and divided the vedas into four parts. It is wellknown that once a demon by name Hayagriva stole the vedas from Brahma. Brahma felt he had lost his eyes. He went and prayed to Lord Narayana who assured him that the vedas will be restored. He said that a son would be born to Parasara maharishi and Satyavati, he would be the amsam of Narayana Himself and that He would restore the vedas and classify them into four parts and that he would thenceforth be known as Vedavyasa. Accordingly, in course of time, Vedavyasa was born and in the course of his pilgrimage, he reached Naimisaranyam. He restored the vedas as promised by the Lord, he classified them into four parts. Brahma and the other devas were very happy and blessed Vedavyasa. It is held that Vedavyasa wrote the eighteen puranas, Bhagavata as well as Mahabharata in this place. Near Gomukhi river even today there is a place known as Vyasaghat (cave) where there is a temple for Vedavyasa. Sukar maharishi is said to have resided here and gave his discourses on the vedas. As corroborative evidence for

this even today there is a temple known as Purana mandir in one part of this town where there is a temple for Sukar maharishi. In that temple, there is a bronze idol of Sukar with his nose like that of a parrot.

Once when Sukar was himself young, he used to move very freely with the local children. One day when Parikshat maharaja came there on a hunting expedition, he identified Sukar very easily. He immediately had a ratna simhasana (a throne studded with precious stones) brought there and seated Sukha on that throne and asked the child to give him advice as to how he could attain moksha. Sukha then advised the king to do tapas in that kshetra itself and informed the king that Naimisaranyam was the place where Druva did tapas and was able to receive the blessings of Sriman Narayana and attained Dhruva padham (mandalam). This kshetra is also the place where Manu chakravarti did tapas on the banks of Gomati river and became the king of Ayodya.

Once upon a time Balarama, the brother of Krishna also came to this kshetra. As soon as the maharishis saw him, one of the maharishis viz., Romaharshana commented within the hearing of Balarama himself that he was one who had not yet got complete control over the senses and that he is one who adopts very often a non-compromising stand. Angered by this, Balarama hit that rishi with a piece of dharba grass and thus committed an unforgivable sin. In order to rid himself of that sin, he decided to go on a pilgrimage for one whole year. After one year, he returned to Naimisaranyam. At that time, a demon by name Vilvalan was making life miserable for the maharishis and not allowing them to perform the yagas and offer prayers to the Almighty. The maharishis came and complained to Balarama and sought his help in getting rid of that demon. Balarama got angry with that demon. He fought with Vilvalan and killed him. The maharishis were very happy. They crowned Balarama.

It is also believed that Sri Rama performed ten asvamedha yagas in this place.

Once upon a time, Daksha Prajapati came to Naimisaranya. All the rishis with the exception of Rudra stood up and welcomed him. Rudra alone did not get up. This is said to have angered Daksha Prajapati and so when the king performed a yaga, he did not give any portion of the havis to Rudra.

It is believed that in Krita yuga Gayasooran did tapas in this place and in response to his prayers, Mahavishnu appeared before him and asked the demon to choose a boon. Gayasooran in a haughty manner replied that he was so powerful because of his tapas and that he was in no need of receiving any boon from Vishnu and that on the other hand with his topobala he will be able to grant whatever the Lord asked! In order to teach him a lesson, the lord replied that the only boon He wanted was that the cause of death of Gayasooran should be none other than Vishnu Himself and he asked the asura to grant Him that boon. The asura granted the boon. Immediately, the Lord let loose His chakra and the asura was cut into three parts. The three parts were known as Charana gaya (foot), Nabhi gaya (navel) and Siro gaya (head). The Gaya kshetra is known as Charana gaya. Naimisaranya kshetra is known as Nabhi gaya. Badariksramam is known as Sirogaya. It is believed that it is very good to offer prayers to one's forefathers in all these three places. At Gaya kshetra (Charana gaya) the pindas for the forefathers are offered at the feet of the Lord viz., Vishnupadha. At Badariksrama which is known as Sirogaya, people offer oblations to their forefathers at Brahma kapalam. At Naimisaranyam also similar offerings are made to the pitrus and it is believed that such offerings will bring untold blessings to the devotees.

As is in the case of all divya kshetras it is believed that dhana or gifts made in the divya desa bring untold blessings to the devotees. What is peculiar about Naimisaranya is that the best dhana is regarded as a vruksha dhana i.e. the best gift that can be given in this kshetra is to plant a tree. From this it is evident that our forefathers also had a well developed concept of environmental protection, afforestation and concept of renewable balanced ecology etc. For performing this vriksha dhana, one has to plant a

tree and ask a brahmin to look after the tree and protect it till it grows up. As a recompense, the services rendered by the brahmin will be suitably compensated.

Close to the temple for Sukha maharishi, there is a small mountain. On the top of the mountain, there is a temple for Hanuman. The place is known as Hanuman Ghat. In that temple, the idol of Hanuman is seen standing holding Rama and Lakshmana on His two shoulders. The idol is so big that the people refer it to as Visvaroopā Anjaneya.

Ahobila mutt has a choultry here. The 43rd Ahobila mutt Jeer Sri Azhagiya singar attained paramapada at this spot. The mortal remains have been interred in a Brindavan at this place. This is the only mutt which has got comfortable rooms for the pilgrims to stay.'..

HYMNOLOGY:

Thirumangal Alvar is the only Alvar who has done mangalasasana to the Lord of this divya desa. He has praised the Lord in ten pasurams. One of the pasurams is given below with its meaning.

PASURAM 1006:

ஊனிடைச் சுவர்வைத்து என்புதூண் நாட்டி
உரோமம் வேய்ந்து ஒன்பது வாசல்
தானுடைக் குரம்பைபிரியும்போது உன்றன்
சரணமே சரண்மென் றிருந்தேன்
தேனுடைக் கமலத் திருவினுக் கரசே! திரை
கொள்மா நெடுங்கடல் கிடந்தாய்!
நானுடைத் தவத்தால் திருவடி யடைந்தேன்
நைமிசா ரணியத்துள் எந்நாய்!

The Alvar says:- O Lord! You Who are the consort of Mahalakshmi, born in a honey filled lotus are lying down in yoga nidra pose in the wavy cosmic ocean have manifested Yourself in Naimisaranya. I am of the firm belief that it is only Your lotus feet which will save me when my life ebbs away from this body, which is like a hut with nine entrances, the bones acting as pillars and the

flesh is the wall in between those pillars. The roof of this hut is the hair on my head. Because of Your grace, and my thapo baghya I have reached Your divine feet.

In this pasuram, the alvar first addresses the Lord as the consort of Mahalakshmi and then ends the pasuram by saying that he has reached the divine lotus feet of the Lord, thus making it evident that he has sought the help of Mahalakshmi to act Her role as a purushakara and plead on his behalf with the Lord when he falls at His feet and seeks saranagathi. In this pasuram, the alvar compares our body to a hut. Even as we live in the hut, the athma is living inside this body. When the athma is seperated from the body i.e. during death the athma should reach the feet of the Lord. The alvar says that he has been firmly believing that the divine lotus feet are his sure saviour. He is not tormented by any doubts or nagging fears that he will have to go to hell to pay for his sins. He is confident that the Lord has already blessed him and that he has been assured of salvation. The alvar says that Baghavan's Thiru arul (grace) is his Baghya.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATHI ANDAADHI:

ஓரறிவு மில்லாத எவன் போல்வார்க்க குய்யலாம்
பேற்றிவபவுண்டேனும் பிறர்கரிது - பாரதிய
நைம்மி சாரண்ணியத்து நாதரடி யாரோடு
மீம்மி சார்வுண்டா யினால்.

Meaning:

Here Iyengar says how moksha can be attained with Bhagawata sambandam and not thro' mere acquisition of gnana.

He says:- Even foolish people like me will be blessed with moksha if one has atleast slight association with the devotees (Bhaaghavata sambanda) of the Lord who to the knowledge of everyone in the world is residing at Naimisaranyam. But those who do not have this bhagavatha sambanda, will not attain moksha if they merely have a high standard of knowledge (vishesha gnana).

An ancient Sanskrit verse reflects the same truth when it says :

**“Pasur Manushyaha Pakshee vaa aecha vaishnava samsrayaaha
Thaneaiva thae prayaasyanthi
Thadh vishno paramam padham”**

Literally translated it means:

Whether it be animals or human beings or birds, they will attain Paramapada the supreme residence of Lord Vishnu only thro' bhaaghavatha sambandha with devout Sree vaishnavas.

* * *

MATHURA

This divya desa lies on the Delhi-Agra railway line. After alighting at Mathura Junction, one has to travel about two miles to reach the temple. About seven miles away is Brindhavan. When one speaks of Mathura one has to simultaneously think of Brindhavan as well as Govardhan. The Lord here is known as Balakrishna. He is seen in a standing pose facing east. The consort is Satyabama. The theertha is Indra theertha, Govardhana theertha and Yamuna river. The vimana is known as Govardhana vimana. God appeared to Indra and other devas as also Brahma, Vasudeva, Devaki etc. About 1 1/2 miles away from Mathura is the place known as Janma bhoomi where a new temple has been built. Besides the prison cell where Sri Krishna was born is next to the temple. About 8 miles away from Mathura is Govardhanagiri, where Krishna and his cowherd friends grazed cows. Vallabacharya has built a small temple on the top of this hill. The deity is Srinatha. The devotees even today circumambulate this Govardhanagiri whose circumference is 15 kilometers long. At the foot of the hill, there is a Lakshminarayana temple where worship is offered as per the regulations laid down by Ramanuja. It is said that the temple and the murthis to which the alvars did mangalāsana are not there now. The frequent mohamedan invasions had taken their tolls in all the divya desas in North India. Mathura is regarded as one of the seven mukthi kshetras. The other six are Dwaraka, Maya, Avanti, Ayodhya, Kanchipuram and Kasi.

Let us now turn to the sthala purana of Mathura. Once upon a time when Rama was ruling the country and Ramarajya was the order of the day, some of the rishis like Bhargava, Shravanar who were residing on the banks of Yamuna river came and met Sri Rama and complained to Him that an asura by name Lavana was giving them untold hardship. They said that during Kiruta yuga a very just king by name Mathu did deep penance to Rudra. Pleased with his devotion, Rudra gave him an amsa of His holy trident viz. Sula. Siva then said that whenever Mathu took that Sula for any warfare, the Sula would help him by burning to ashes the entire army of the enemies and would return to his hands.

But He said that if he were to invite the wrath of devas and the brahmanas then the sula would disappear from his hands. Mathu was very pleased with this gift and requested that that particular gift should become his heirloom and should be effective for all the subsequent generations also. Siva said that it would be effective only for one generation and not all generations. In course of time, Mathu handed over the kingdom to his son Lavana. This son was quite unlike his father. He was very evilminded and derived great pleasure in doing evil deeds. He was troubling the rishis. That is why they came to Sri Rama for help. Sri Rama then requested Shatrugna, His younger brother to go and protect the rishis. Rama gave a bow to Shatrugna. It was a swayambu bow i.e. it was not created by any human hands. It emanated by itself. Rama said that this particular bow was created in order to destroy the asuras Mathu and Kaitapa and after having killed them it was in His possession. He said that He did not use it during the war with Ravana as every time the bow is used the world itself would shake. He therefore advised Shatrugna to use this if necessary for destroying Lavanasura. He also told Shatrugna that the army which accompanies him may be kept far away from the town and that Shatrugna alone should go to the place where Lavanasura lived. He further added that he should notice when Lavanasura left his house in search of food. As soon as he left his house, Shatrugna should enter his house and wait patiently till he returns and not allow Lavanasura to enter his house and then fight with him as then he would get access to the Sula weapon. He said that he should at no cost allow him to take the Sula which was blessed by Siva. Accordingly Shatrugna proceeded towards the place where Lavanasura was living. Enroute he passed through the asrama of Valmiki and Syavana maharishi. The latter told him again about the power of the Sula in the possession of Lavanasura and asked him to be careful. Shatrugna reached Mathu's town and as advised by Rama waited patiently till Lavana went out of his house and then occupied his house and prevented Lavanasura from entering his house. Later when Lavana returned after a successful hunting expedition, he engaged him in the wrestling bout. Meantime, Lavanasura plucked a tree and hit Shatrugna with it. Shatrugna fell down and fainted. Thinking he had killed him,

Lavanasura tried to enter the house. Meantime Shatrugna recovered. He immediately lifted the bow entrusted to him by Sri Rama. The world itself shook. The devas were all frightened wondering as to what was happening. Shatrugna let loose an arrow from that bow and killed Lavanasura. Immediately the sula which was in his possession went back to Shiva. The devas showered petals on Shatrugna and asked him to choose any boon. Shatrugna requested that the town of Mathu should become a big town with great warriors, beautiful temples, wide roads, tanks filled with water etc. It is believed that the present Mathura town is that town which originally housed Lavanasura and which was later rebuilt by Shatrugna. Shatrugna continued to rule from Mathura. Later Mathura was captured by the yadhavas. One of the yadhavas was Vasudeva who married Devaki. The story as to how an asareeri voice proclaimed at the time of the wedding of Devaki with Vasudeva that the 8th child that would be born to this couple will be the death of Kamsa, the king, is too well known to bear repetition here. Kamsa the king imprisoned his sister and brother-in-law and one by one all the children that were born to them were killed. The 8th one was Krishna who as soon as he was born was taken away to safety to be brought up by Yasodha. Thus, Mathura is the place where Lord Krishna, the Paramapurusha lived as a child.

Brindavan and Gokulam and Gavardhanagiri are all the places where Krishna spent his childhood. It is therefore regarded as a very holy spot and a visit to that spot is said to rid one of all one's sins.

As stated earlier, six miles northwest of Mathura lies Brindavan and five miles to the east of Mathura is Gokulam and nine miles to the west of Mathura is Govardhanagiri. In 1017 B.C. the Mohammed Gazni raided this town and looted crores worth of jewellery and other ornaments. Later Sikkandar Lodi in 1661 B.C. again invaded Mathura. Later for a third time Mathura had to face the mohammedan invasion led by Abdul Nabi. He built a mosque in the very place where Krishna was born. In 1668 B.C. Jahanghir raided this town. Thus, many of the old idols were all destroyed by the mohammedan invaders.

When Sri Krishna's birthday is celebrated i.e. on Krishna Janmashtami day, the entire town presents a very enchanting sight with lakhs of people assembling to worship the Lord. For one week, the entire life history of Sri Krishna is enacted by people so that the pilgrims could enjoy the same.

Even to-day the pilgrims will be shown different places connected with the life history of Krishna in and around Mathura. Thus, the spot where Krishna killed Kamsa and the spot where he fought with Kuvalayapeeta the mad elephant, and broke its tusk and the spot on the banks of Yamuna river where He relaxed after killing Kamsa etc. are all shown to the pilgrims.

On the banks of the Yamuna river, there is a temple known as Rangaji Mandir. This temple is built in the typical south Indian style with prakaras, temple towers and there are some thirty priests who go from Tamil Nadu to perform the poojas here. This temple is believed to have been built in 1849 B.C. and the rites are performed as per the Pancha ratra agama. In this temple, there are sannadhis for Sri Ranganatha, Andal, Lord Srinivasa, and Sri Rama. It is indeed amazing to find that in the heart of North India one finds a temple vahana and chariot similar to the ones to be found in the heart of Tamilnadu in South India. Brahmotsavam is also celebrated and early in the morning everyday the pasurams of alvars are sung in the temple.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS - BRINDAVAN:

ARIE 1959-60 Sl.No.539 to 542 refers to a slab in the Madan Mohan temple which records the construction of the temple of Krishna by Gunananda son of Ramachandra. Another inscription No.542 on a pillar in the mantapa of Govindadyo temple is very fragmantry. It records the construction of the temple at the Yogapita of Brindavan by Manasimha son of Bagavanta dasa belonging to the Kurma kula.

HYMNOLOGY:

Perialvar (16 pasurams), Andal (19 pasurams), Tondarappodi Alvar (one pasuram), Thirumangai Alvar (4 pasurams) and Nammalvar (10 pasurams) have sung the praise of the Lord here. Two pasurams are given below with its meaning:-

PASURAM 617:

மற்றிருந் தீட்கட்கு அறிய லாகா மாதவ
 னென்பதோர் ரன்பு தன்னை
 உற்றிருந் தேனுக்கு உரைப்ப தெல்லாம்
 ஊமையரோடு செவிடர் வார்த்தை
 பெற்றிருந் தானை யொழிய வேபோய்ப்
 பேர்த்ததொரு தாயில் வளர்ந்த நம்பி
 மற்பொருந் தாமற் களமடைந்த மதுரைப்புறத்து
 என்னை உய்த்திடுமீன்

In this pasuram, the mistress is asking her companions and relatives to take her to the place where Lord Krishna is residing.

The alvar says:- You who are not in the same position as me, are not able to appreciate and understand my love for Madhava. That is why when you advise me it is as wasteful as a deaf person trying to have a meaningful conversation with a dumb person (the alvar says that they are not on the same wave length). The only thing that you can now do is to take me and leave me near Mathura town where the Lord who was born to Devaki but grew up in the house of Yasodha and the Lord Who proceeded to the arena where the boxing competition (malyuddha) was to take place is residing.

The commentators say that the mistress who is in love with Lord Krishna wanted to embrace Him. But Krishna had already started to the arena at Mathura to fight with the boxers arranged by Kamsa. The mistress is therefore asking her companions to leave her near Mathura so that before Krishna enters Mathura and proceeds to participate in the malyuddha she could have her desire fulfilled.

* * * *

GOVARDHANA**PASURAM 270:**

஁டங்கள் பலவு முடைப்பாம் பரையன்
 படர்பூ மியைத்தாங் கிக்கிடப் பவன்போல்
 தடங்கை விரலைந்தும் மலர் வைத்துத்
 தாமே தரண்தாஸ் குதட வரைதான்

அடங்கச் சென்றிலங்கை யையீ டழித்த
 அனுமன் புகழ்பா டித்தம் குட்டன்களை
 குடங்கைக் கொண்டு மந்திகள் கண்வ ளர்த்தும்
 தோவர்த்தன மென்னும் கொற்றக் குடையே

In this pasuram the alvar says that Krishna held aloft the Govardhana mountain on His five spread out fingers even as Adisesha holds aloft the world on his spread out hoods.

The alvar says:- Lord Krishna opened out the five fingers in His hand like a flower and held aloft the Govardhanagiri even as Adisesha holds aloft the wide world on its many hoods. In that Govardhanagiri one can see the female monkeys cradling their babes in their arms and singing as a lullaby the praise of Hanuman Who destroyed Lanka.

The alvar says that the female monkeys here cradle their babes in their arms and sing in their lullaby the glories of one of their veteran ancestors viz. Hanuman!

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDHAADHI:

செல்வமு யிருடம்பு சேரவுரித் துக்கி
 வல்வினை யினிங்குமினோமாந்தர்கா-டொல்லை
 வடமதுரையான் கழலே வாய்த்த தஞ்சமென்று
 திடமதுரை செய்தான் றிறத்து.

Meaning:

Here Iyengar recalls for the benefit of devotees what Lord said in Geetha viz. to surrender at His divine feet. The poet says that surrender as an upaaya is more effective than even gnana yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga and prapatti.

Literally translated the verse runs as follows:

Oh ye men! Go to the Lord Who informed us that His feet are our sure succour and saviour and is now manifested at Mathura and surrender unto Him all your wealth, your body, your life and all that you have and tell Him that He has absolute full rights over you. Only then you will be able to rid yourself of all your sins.

AYODHYA

This is one of the divya desas in North India. It is located on the Kasi-Varanasi-Lucknow rail route. One should alight at Faizabad station and Ayodhya is about three miles from there. The temples visited by the Alvars and the idols for which they did mangalasanas are no longer in existence. But when one hears or reads about the names of the different idols in that town or about the important landmarks in the area, the theerthas there etc. what hits us in the eye is its close association with the great epic Ramayana.

The moolavar in this divya desa is Sri Rama. He is seen in a sitting posture, facing north. The consort is Sitadevi. The main theertha is Paramapada pushkarini and Sarayu river. The vimanam is known as Pushkala vimanam.

Ayodhya is one of the seven Mukthi kshetras. It is situated on the southern bank of Sarayu river. It is said that earlier Ayodhya had nearly 2700 temples for Sri Rama! 'Ayodhi' means one which cannot be conquered by enemies.

Let us now turn to the sthala purana of this divya desa. Swayambhu Manu, first son of Brahma met his father in Satyaloka, paid obeisance to him and then asked his father as to which is the place where he should attend to the task of creation - allotted to him. Brahma and his son went to Vaikunta, met Sriman Narayana and asked Him for the necessary guidance. Sriyahpathi is reported to have taken a part of Vaikunta and through Brahma handed it over to Manu who carried it to the earth and placed it on the southern banks of Sarayu river. That is the city of Ayodhya. That is why the alvars say "Ambuyathon Ayodhi mannarkku aliththa kovil" i.e. that is the temple gifted to the rajas of Ayodhya by the lotus-eyed Lord. Thus, Ayodhya divya desa is the gift given by Sriman Narayana Himself to His grandson Manu.

As stated earlier, Ayodhya is regarded as one of the seven mukthi kshetras (i.e. holy cities which will ensure moksha). Usually these seven cities are said to represent different parts of the body of Perumal. Avanthi represents the Divine Feet,

Kanchipuram the waist, Dwaraka the Nabhi, Maya represents the Divine Chest, Mathura represents the neck, Kasi the nose, and Ayodhya the Head. Ayodhya is therefore regarded as the most important of the mukthi kshetras.

The sthalapurana of Ayodhya is so well known that it bears no repetition. This is the place where the Ikshvaaku dynasty kings ruled, the most notable among them being Sri Rama Himself. This is the city where He was born and this is also the city from where He left for Paramapada on completion of His Avatar. In this chapter, I therefore propose to only broadly cover the stories connected with the different thirthas and the various important Sabhas and temples in this town.

This city is on the banks of Sarayu river. Let us now turn to a brief history of that river. It is said that in the days of yore when creation just started one day Brahma worshipped Mahavishnu. As Brahma emerged from the naabhi kamalam of Mahavishnu, when the divine father saw His son singing His praises, He was so emotionally moved that Aanandabashpam (tears of joy) swelled in His eyes. Brahma did not allow those tears to fall on the ground and instead collected the same in his kamandala and with his manasika power he created a tank and let those tear drops mix with the water in that tank. That tank is the famous Manasasaras in the heights of Himalayas. As the tank was created by Brahma it is also known as Brahmadravam. Later, six manvantharas were over. During the seventh manvanthara the Ikshvaku clan was ruling over Ayodhya. Vasishta maharishi was adorning their court. He felt that a river should be near the town. He therefore ordered Manasasaras to flow near the city. The river which then emerged is the Sarayu river. As Vasishta walked in front and a part of Manasasaras followed him it got the name Sarayu. In Sanskrit it is said "**Saranaadhi ithi Sarayu**". That is how the origin of Sarayu is explained. The river is regarded as a very holy one and whoever does dhyana on the banks of that river is assured of all the good things in life.

There are a number of theerthas in this place each having a story of its own. It is proposed now to relate a few stories con-

nected with the important land marks in this city. Kusa the son of Rama one day was having his bath in the Sarayu river. At that time, Kumudavati, a Naga princess, sister of the Naga king Kumudan was so captivated by the beauty of Kusa that she caught hold of his hands and tried to take him to her palace but did not succeed. Instead she only got the bangle worn by Kusa as it slipped off his hands. When Kusa returned to the palace, he noticed the missing bangle. He realised that it must have fallen in Sarayu river. He therefore let loose the Agneya astra by which the entire water in the river dried up. Sarayu devi, the River Goddess rushed to him and said that for no fault of hers, she was being punished and it was the Naga princess who had taken away the bangle. Immediately Kusa let loose Vainatheya astra. The Naga princess then got frightened of the Garuda astra. She returned the bangle and fell at the feet of Kusa. Kusa then said that the bangle was the one which was given by saint Vasishta to Sri Rama and in turn his father gave it to him. Hence the tank where the bangle was lost and found shall in future be known as 'Nagesvara theertha'. It is believed that Dharma installed an idol of Hari on the banks of this theertha and hence that idol came to be known as 'Dharma Hari'!

Another important landmark in this city is known as Ayodhya Peeta. In the middle of that Peeta is the place where Rama used to hold His sabha. It is regarded as more holy than Indra sabha. That is the place where Rama attended to all his royal duties. Even today there is a place which is shown to us as the place where Rama used to brush His teeth viz. 'Danta Davana Kunda'! It is said that one day near that Kunda a brahmin was having his bath and after his ablutions started meditating on Lord Rama. Suddenly a strong breeze wafted away his krishnajanyam i.e. (deer skin) and it fell into the waters. On touching the waters, the krishnajanyam became a beautiful prince and even as people were watching he got on to a vimana and was flying off heavenwards. Rama asked the heavenly body as to who he was and why and how he had changed his form. He then replied that previously he was a vaisya and he had led a sinful life. One day he spilt the water he was carrying in a vessel. That water flowed towards a

tulasi tree and because of that unintended good act done by him, inspite of his sinful life he was born as a deer in his next birth. It was the skin of that deer which the rishi was using for his holy prayers. When the wind wafted the deer skin on to this theertha the erstwhile vysya sinner claimed he got his 'release'!

Another important place in this town is Rama durga. Sri Ramanavami is celebrated with great eclat at this spot. In the city of Ayodhya there is a place known as Rajadwara where one sees the idol of Hanuman. Very closeby is idol of Sugriva and Angada. In the southern gate there are idols of Nala and Neela. On the northern gate, idol of Vibhishana is seen. In Ayodhya there is yet another place known as Ratnamandapa. In that place Rama used to sit on His Ratna simhasana with Lakshmana standing behind him while Bharata and Satrughna stood by his side waving the chamaras (fan). Sugriva, Jambavan, Sushenan, Vibhishana, Neela, Nala, Angada and Rishiban are on the eight directions. Vasishta and other rishis along with Indra and other devas are said to have been standing watching the sight of Rama seated on that mandapa. On Sri Ramanavami day special poojas are offered in this place. It is regarded as very holy.

People believe that even Lord Yama, the God of Death has given instructions to his accountant Chitragupta that whoever observes Sri Ramanavami vratha in Ayodhya will have all his accumulated sins wiped out for having observed that vratha in Ayodhya!

There is also a place known as Sita Pakasala i.e. the kitchen of Sita devi. It is said that Parasurama got rid of the sins due to the killing of the Kshatriyas only after visiting the Sita Paka sala. This Pakasala is to the northern end of Sri Rama janmasthana. Closeby to Rama Jasmasthana is Bharata Janmasthana, Lakshmana janmasthana, Satrughna janmasthana as also a Sita well which is believed to have been used by Saint Vasishta and Vamadeva. It is also believed that even today whoever drinks the water from this well will become a great 'gnani', i.e. intelligent person. Closeby is also the Sugriva kunda, Vibhishana Kunda, Hanuman Kunda and Swarna kani. These are important landmarks connected with the birth place of Rama and associated

with the history of Ramarajya and even to read about them makes one go back in time to the period of Rama avatara.

Swarnakani is yet another important spot which has a story of its own. It is said that Siva related the greatness of this well to Parvati. Once upon a time a king by name Raghu was ruling this town. Saint Visvamitra was also living in this place. He had a student by name 'Kowthsar' who mastered all the arts from Visvamitra. Visvamitra blessed him for having mastered all the arts and in turn the student wanted to give a Gurudakshina and asked Visvamitra as to what he would like to have. At first, Visvamitra refused and said that his diligence, devotion and sincerity itself were sufficient Gurudakshina. But when the student insisted, an irritated Visvamitra said, "You have learnt 14 types of arts from me and therefore get me 14 crore gold pieces". The student felt that the only person who could come to his rescue and provide him with the fourteen crore gold pieces was Raghu maharaja. He went to his palace. The king had just then completed Viswajit yagnya and had distributed a lot of gifts to many scholars and saints and sages. Kowtsar had a misgiving whether the king would be able to give him the fourteen crore gold pieces that he wanted. The king found out from Kowtsar as to what had brought him to his kingdom. Hearing his story, the king asked the student to stay in his place for one day and assured him that meantime he would make necessary arrangements for meeting the student's request. The king decided that he would approach Kubera for lending him the gold pieces. Kubera was mightily pleased with the good intentions of the king who wanted to live up to his reputation of being a Daanakarta. Kubera showered gold rain on the kingdom of king Raghu and the place where literally gold was showered is the place which today is known as Swarnakani. The king collected the gold coins and gave it to Kowtsar. However, Kowtsar took only fourteen crore gold coins and left the balance to remain in the area itself. The king is reported to have distributed that balance also to brahmins and other holy persons.

To the south of this Swarnakani area is the place where Rama performed the yagnas. Sri Rama performed numerous Aswamedha yagnas. Even today the place is considered holy as

one could derive the benefit of having visited the place where the yagaagni was lighted by Sri Rama when He ruled Ayodhya.

Yet another important landmark in this area is a small hill-ock known as "Kreedachalam". It is said that once Sitadevi wanted some place for her and her friends to play in. Rama then requested Vainateya to help. Vainateya went in the northern direction and brought a mountain which was full of precious stones. Sitadevi and her friends happily played on that hill.

Once upon a time, Urvasi came to disrupt the meditation of Raipya rishi. Raipya rishi got angry and cursed that she become ugly and lose all her famed beauty. She fell at the feet of the rishi and said that she was helpless as she had come there at the behest and orders of some of the Devas. The rishi then relented a little and asked her to go to the banks of the Sarayu river and have her bath and assured her that she will then regain her beauty. Today there is a spot known as Urvasikund and it is said that is the spot where Urvasi had her bath at Sarayu river and regained her lost beauty.

There is a Ksheerakunda which is believed to be the place where Dasaratha maharaja after performing his yaga received the 'payas' (sweetened milk) from the Gods. Closeby is the place known as Yakshakunda. It is believed that it is the spot where Harischandra had stored his treasures and appointed a Yaksha to guard it.

Yet another important spot here is known as Shahasradhara theertha. When Rama avatar was about to end, Yamadharma raja came to Ayodhya to remind Rama about it. Rama and Yama moved into an inner room to discuss matters. Rama then instructed Lakshmana to stand guard outside the room and not allow anyone to come inside. But Doorvasa rishi chose that particular time to come to the palace and he insisted on meeting Rama immediately. Poor Lakshmana was in a quandary. If he tarried, Doorvasa would curse him, if he agreed and took Doorvasa inside to meet Rama, Rama would get angry as he would be violating his orders not to disturb him while he was with Yama. Indeed it was a case of being caught between scylla and charybi dis. Having no alterna-

tive Lakshmana entered Rama's room and informed him about the arrival of Doorvasa. However, as he had violated Rama's orders, he decided on his own to leave the palace and go to the banks of Sarayu river and spend his time in meditation. He got down into the river Sarayu and it is said that he transformed himself into Adishesha and went to Vajikunta so as to precede Sri Rama and receive him at Paramapada. That spot is known as Sahasradara theertha.

Closeby is equally famous theerthas known as Vaidaheeya theertha, Surya theertha, Ratha theertha etc. There is also Indra theertha where Indira is believed to have had a bath and got rid of the sin due to Vrithirasura vadha.

To the south of Vaidaheeya theertha is Surya theertha. It is believed that a king belonging to the Surya vamsa by name Goshan had his bath in this theertha and attained moksha. Closeby to this theertha is Rathi Kunda and Kama kunda. It is believed that whoever has his bath in these two tanks would become as beautiful as Rathi and Manmatha. Closeby are several other theerthas like Bandhi theertha where a bath would enable a person to get rid of all the worldly attachments. Closeby to Bandhi theertha is a small temple for Chutika Devi. Whoever offers worship to her has also to perform an unusual rite viz. to snap one's fingers near the idol and produce a sound thereby. With the snapping of the fingers one is sure to attract the attention of the Devi and have his or her wishes fulfilled!

At a distance of one and half yojanas to the west of Ayodhya lies the Gobradhara theertha. It is believed that that theertha is the spot where Rama avatar came to an end. When Rama realised that His time was up and His avatar was coming to a close and He should return to Vaikunta, He wanted to take leave of all His people and subjects. The subjects would not however agree to be away from Him. They also wanted to accompany Him to the heavens. So Rama, followed by His devoted subjects started on His march and went to the banks of Sarayu river and entered the waters of the Sarayu river. As soon as He entered the waters, Brahma and the other devas showered flower petals on Him

and Rama, along with His subjects went to Paramapada. The spot where Rama entered the Sarayu waters is known as Swarga Dwara theertha. Even today whoever has a bath there is assured of moksha. It is also referred to as Mukthi theertha.

One of the mighty kings who ruled Ayodhya during the Treta yuga is the great upholder of truth viz. Harischandra. It is said that because he was such an ideal king who never uttered a lie, he as well as his subjects earned moksha for themselves because of their blemishless life.

There is yet another theertha in Ayodhya known as Bilva theertha. Bilva was a wicked demon who used to harrass the rishes and the brahmins. Narada one day saw his atrocities and cursed that the asura become a bilva tree. The asura then fell at the feet of Narada and sought forgiveness and wanted redemption from the curse. Narada then told him that he would be born as a bilva tree in Ayodhya and when Rama came to Ayodhya, he would be redeemed of the curse when he has a darshan of Rama. Accordingly Bilva redeemed his curse when Rama ruled Ayodhya. That is the place which is today reportedly known as Bilva theertha.

Yet another theertha is known as Tintira theertha. It is said a hunter by name Tintir in the course of his hunting expedition one day reached Ayodhya. He saw the rishis meditating and observing perfect silence. He wondered whether their silent attitude was to capture some particular animal. He therefore asked them what is the animal which they wished to hunt. The rishis took pity on him as they realised he had not as yet attained the intellectual maturity to realise the animal in man which they wished to control through their meditation. The curiosity of the hunter was aroused and he wanted to be initiated into the mysteries of meditation. The rishis out of consideration taught him the art of meditation. Tintira did his tapas without any interruption. So much so, an ant hill grew on him. When Rama came to Ayodhya, He touched the ant hill and immediately the ant hill changed into a beautiful human being. That human being was the original hunter. The hunter fell at the feet of Rama and Rama gave him moksha. That is the spot which is today known as Tintira theertha.

There is also a theertha whose waters are said to have curative effect of those affected by the spirits and the devils.

The spot known as Barata Kundam is said to be a theertha in the place where Barata ruled. Closeby the Tamasa river flows. On its banks Gowthama, Asthiga and Mandarya rishis had their asrams. Close the place where Dasaratha performed Puthra Kameshti yaga is the Manorama theertha.

Yet another interesting anectode is told in relation to the Kuppju theertha. It is said that once upon a time, in Shanbaga puram, Kalava rishi got his daughter married to one of his disciples. When his daughter was expecting a child, Kalava rishi is said to have recited the vedas during the Pradosha time. The child in the womb of its mother then spoke and told the rishi that he had committed a mistake in repeating the vedas at that time and reprimanded the rishi for having recited the vedas during Pradosha time. Taken aback, the rishi got annoyed and cursed that the child in the womb should be born as an ugly duckling. Accordingly when the child was born as a crooked child it was known as Ashta vakra. After the child grew up, the father advised the child to go to Yamuna river and stand inside the water with only his chin above the waters and meditate on Lord Narayana. One day when the princess of Ayodhya were passing by, they saw the beautiful face of the rishi's son. They fell in love with him and asked him to marry them. He agreed and came out of the waters. Lo and behold, the princess saw his ugly crooked frame and they started laughing at him. The rishi got annoyed and cursed that they also should become ugly and crooked. The princesses lost their beauty. They went running to their father seeking a solution. The father advised them to go and have a bath in Sarayu river. The daughters had their bath and regained their beauty. The place where that miracle occurred is known as Kupja theertha. The place where they were cursed by the rishi is known as Kanya Kupjam.

Thus, every stone, every temple, every mantapa and all the idols in this temple town bear the names of characters from Ramayana and have a story to tell. A visit to the Ammaji Mandir

which is believed to be the temple which has been built in the place where the old temple worshipped by the alvars was located thus takes us down the memory line to Ramavatara days.

HYMNOLOGY:

Perialvar (six pasurams), Kulasekhara Alvar (four pasurams), Tondaradippodi Alvar (one pasuram), Thirumangai Alvar (one pasuram) Andal (one pasuram) and Nammalvar (one pasuram) have done mangalastasana to the deity of this divya desa. The pasuram sung by Andal is given below with its meaning:-

PASURAM 639:

மாலாய்ப் பிறத்த நம்பியை மாலே செய்யும் மணாளனை
ஏலப் பொய்க னுரைப்பானை இங்கே போதக் கண்டே?
மேலால் பரந்த வெயில் காப்பான் வினதை சிறுவன்
சிறகென்னும்
மேலப் பின்கீழ் வருவானை விருந்தா வனத்தே
கண்டோமே.

In this pasuram Andal addresses her companions and wants to know whether they had seen Lord Krishna anywhere around. She says:-

O Did you see Krishna, Who is beautiful, considerate and is the very embodiment of the affection and love that He gives to the damsels coming this side? He is the one who very convincingly utters numerous lies. When that Krishna goes out to play in the hot Sun, Garuda spreads out its wings and provides the protective umbrella against the severe Sun's rays. He is the one who has manifested Himself at Brindavan.

Here Andal says that the widespread wings of Vainatheya and like a vithanaam over Lord Krishna. "Vithanaam" is a white cloth which is usually spread out on four poles to serve as a roof under which the utsava vigraha stands. Andal therefore says that the spread out wings of Garuda were like vithanaam to the child Krishna Who was playing about in the hot Sun. During Ramavatara also, a similar incident is mentioned. When Jatayu was wounded and had fallen on the ground, it is said that Sampathi spread out

its wings and covered Jatayu from the severity of the Sun. Here Andal says that Garuda protected Krishna in a similar manner.

DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108 TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:

ஆர்க்குமிது நன்று தீதானாலு நெஞ்சேநீ
பார்க்கும் பலகலையும் பன்னாதே-சீர்க்குஞ்
திருவையோத்திப் புயலைச் சீரிய மெய்க்ஞானத்
துருவை யோத்திற் பொருளை யோர்.

Meaning:

Iyengar in this verse advices his mind to meditate on Rama of Ayodhya instead of wasting time on mastering sastras!

He says:- Oh mind! What I am saying is just for the good of all. Some may even get annoyed with what I say; But my advice to you is to meditate upon Sri Rama who looks like a dark hued rain bearing cloud, Who is at Ayodhya, Who is the embodiment of Tatwagnana and Who is the quintessence of the veda itself. Do not waste your time trying to master the sastras thinking salvation lies in that direction.

Divya Kavi's exhortation reaffirms what was stated in an old Sanskrit neethi sloka i.e. verse which runs as follows:-

Saashtra gnaanam bahu klesam
Buddhaes chalana kaaranam
Upadesaath Harim Budhwa
Viramathae sarva karmasu.

Literally translated the sloka says:-

To gain mastery and become an expert on sastras is very tough. On occasions trying to learn the sastras confuses even the existing knowledge and understanding. Getting to know God thro' acharya upadesa is best. May you give up all other activities - so says the verse. It is this truth which Iyengar reiterates.

AAYPADI (GOKULAM)

This divya desa is about eight miles away from Mathura. To reach this divya desa, one has to go about three miles from Mathura and cross the bridge on the river Yamuna. After crossing the bridge, one can take a bus and cover about five miles to reach this place. The Lord here is known as the Navamohana Krishna. He is seen in a standing pose facing east. His consorts are Rukmani and Satyabama. The theertha is Yamuna river. The vimana is known as Hemakuta vimana. God appeared to Nandagopa.

In this divya desa also, the temple as well as the vigrahas to which the alvars did mangalasasana are not in existence now. The temple and the idols that we see today are those that have been installed at a later date. About 3 1/4 miles away from Gokulam is a place known as Purana Gokulam i.e. old Gokulam. There is a temple there. Some people say that that is the original Gokulam. Yamuna river flows in front of the temple at Purana Gokula. The idols of Nandagopa, Yasodha, and Balarama can be seen there. A small idol of child Krishna lying down in a wooden cradle is also there. A peculiar feature of all these idols is that they are made out of wood. As we are not sure as to which is the original divya desa, the pilgrims are advised to visit both the places named as Purana Gokulam as well as Gokulam.

Krishna though born to Vasudeva and Devaki was brought up completely by Nandagopa and Yasodha. Ayarpadi i.e. Gokulam is the place where Nandagopa and Yasodha brought up Krishna. The great poet Surdas who was the disciple of Sri Vallabhacharya visited Ayarpadi and it is said that only when he stood in front of the idol of Navaneetha Krishna in this temple, poetry flowed out of his tongue. It is believed that Surdas is the re-incarnation of Akroora, another famous devotee of Lord Krishna. Gokulam is the place where Krishna performed all his childhood leelas. It is the place where Yasodha tied Him with the coir rope to a pestle. It is the place where Krishna tore to pieces the rope with which Yasodha tied Him. It is also the place where Yasodha collected all the torn bits of rope and knotted them together, made a fresh

rope and re-tied Krishna. It is also the place where Krishna, as a child crawled through two Marutha trees, and felled them down to the ground as those trees were asuras in disguise. It is also the place where Krishna as a child opened His mouth to Yasodha to prove that he did not eat mud, but instead gave Yasodha a glimpse of all the seven worlds inside His Divine mouth. It is also the place where He killed Poothana, the demoness. It is the place where He destroyed Sakatasura who disguised Himself as an innocuous cart wheel and rolled towards child Krishna to kill Him by kicking the cart wheel with His baby foot! It is also the place where Krishna running away from Yasodha hid himself in the hut of Dadhipandan in a huge empty pot and escaped the wrath of Yasodha. It is also the spot where Dadhipandan weeded moksha for himself as well as for the pot where Krishna hid Himself. Thus, Ayarpadi i.e. Gokulam is full of stories that one who is familiar with the history of Krishnavatara knows only too well.

HYMNOLOGY:

Perialvar (10 pasurams), Andal (5 pasurams) and Thirumangai Alvar (7 pasurams) have sung the praise of the Lord here. One of the pasurams sung by Andal is given below with its meaning:-

PASURAM 618:

நாணி இனியோர் கரும மில்லை நாலய லாகு

அறிந்தொழிந்தார்

பாணியாது என்னை மருந்து செய்து பண்டுபண் டாக்க

உறுதி ராகில்

மாணி யுருவாய் உலக ளந்த மாயனைக்காணில் தலைம

றியும்

ஆனையால் நீர்என்னைக் காக்க வேண்டில்

ஆய்ப்பாடிக் கேஎன்னை உய்த்திடுமீயின்.

In this pasuram Andal addresses her companions and requests them to take her to Lord Krishna as that is her only wish.

Andal says:- There is now no point in feeling shy. All the people in this town are aware of my feelings towards Him. So if you really wish to help me and restore my original sanity and rid

me of these pangs of seperation, I request all of you to leave me at Gokulam. I am convinced that when I worship that Lord Who first manifested as Vamana and later took on the form of Thrivikrama and measured the worlds, all my problems will get resolved.

**DIVYA KAVI PILLAI PERUMAL IYENGAR'S 108
TIRUPATI ANDAADHI:**

கலந் தமர ரோடுங்கரை கண்டா ரோடும்
பொலிந்து திருநாட்டிருக்கப் போவீர்-மலிந்தபுக
ழுண்டராய்ப் பாடிய மலரடி யாரடியார்
தொண்டராய்ப் பாடித் தொழும்.

Meaning:

Translated this verse says:

Oh you men living in this world! Become the humble vasals of the devotees of immaculate Lord Krishna Who is in Gokulam the town where the famed cowherds live. Sing the praises of that Lord and bow down to Him. Only then along with the Nityasuris and Mukthas, you will be able to go with fame and name to Paramapada.

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