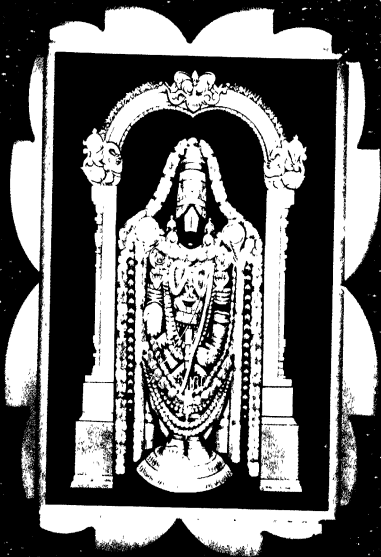


108 VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS

VOLUME - TWO
DIVYA DESAMS IN CHOLA NADU

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



Published by
Executive Officer,
T.T. DEVASTHANAMS, TIRUPATI.

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VOLUME TWO

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TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS
TIRUPATI
2000

**108 VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS
VOLUME II**

**(A descriptive study of 23 well known Vaishnavite
shrines of Chola Nadu)**

By

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

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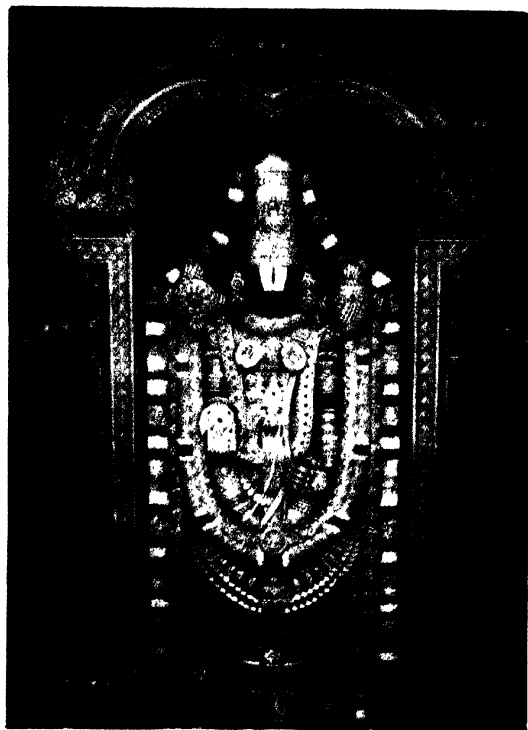
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LORD SRI VENKATACHALAPATHI



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

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FOREWORD

The 108 divya desas are the most sanctified places of worship in our country. These pilgrim centres rapturously praised in the hymns of the great Alvars are not only very ancient but also the formidable citadels of piety. The forms of Sriman Narayana as consecrated in these holy shrines have a special place in the heart of every devotee.

Though Maha Vishnu assumes various aspects such as Para, Vyuha, Vibhava, Antaryami and Arca, it is in the worship of His iconic form the Alvars found immeasurable joy and ecstasy. They realized that the Lord is the very acme of simplicity reaching out to reclaim the fallen souls. These mystic bards, soaked in divine love, visited the divya desas, admired the towers and turrets there and described the grandeur and glory of the Deities enshrined there in exquisite poetry.

Among these divya desas, the temples in the Chola nadu are invested with great antiquity. These hallowed places where Lord Narayana revealed Himself in various auspicious forms to uphold Dharma are notable for their sculptural and architectural wealth. Myths, legends and history blend together to give these sthalas a unique place among the sacred temples of this great land.

The present book is the second of the series in the 108 Vaishnavite divya desams. The first volume dealing with 22 Vaishnavite shrines in Tondai nadu (consisting of old Chengalpet and Madras revenue districts) was well received by the discerning public. In this work Miss. M.S. Ramesh, who had a distinguished career as a senior civil servant, traces the origin and antiquity of a score of temples. She has also incorporated relevant passages from the Divya Prabandha to establish their relative superiority.

We invite our readers to share in the supreme bliss of rediscovering our spiritual heritage as embodied in these divya desas.

It is with utmost pleasure we present the second reprint of this volume.

Executive Officer

PREFACE

In Volume I of this series on the 108 Vaishnavite Divya Desams, I had dealt with 22 Vaishnavite Divya Desams in Thondai Nadu covering old Chengelpet and Madras Revenue Districts in Tamil Nadu. There are 42 Divya Desams in Chola Nadu. To cover the entire lot in one volume will make it too bulky and inconvenient for handling. To facilitate easy reading, it is proposed to deal with it in two volumes. This volume, therefore, deals with only 21 of the 42 Divya Desams in Chola Nadu.

The manner of presentation of the material is the same as was followed earlier in Volume I viz. the Mythology, Hymnology, Archaeological and Epigraphical highlights of each Divya Desam is presented in a brief manner. Surprisingly there are not many epigraphical materials in these temples in the Divya Desams of Chola Nadu. But these temples make up for the absence of epigraphical materials by their sculptural and artistic excellence.

My task in presenting the material in this book has been affectionately shared by many. I will be failing in my duty if I do not place on record my deep debt of gratitude to them. First and foremost I most sincerely thank my family members who not only encouraged me in this work but also lent all support by going through my drafts, collecting material, photos, arranging for binding etc. But for their continued moral and physical support I would have found the work too exacting.

I also owe a deep debt of gratitude to many of my friends and colleagues who have extended to me their unstinting cooperation in collecting the material from the respective devasthanams, old residents of those places. They collected both published and unpublished material relating to each of these Divya Desams. Special mention in this regard should be made of my colleagues viz. Thiru R.Chandrakanthan, Thiru Ramanujam and Thiru K.Bhakthavatsalam, who have taken a lot of trouble

in collecting not only the material but also taking the trouble of personally taking photographs of the various temple towers and collecting photographs of the various utsavars so as to make the book more interesting and illustrative. I can only pray to God to bless them for the affectionate sincere manner in which they helped me in this task. Tvl. K.Ramji and N.Muthukrishnan have again proved their mettle as efficient stenographers by willingly and cheerfully typing out all the material that I dictate to them. The secretarial assistance extended by them was so excellent that it made my task easy. I would be failing in my duty if I do not publicly acknowledge my continued thanks to Mr.V.N.Srinivasan who willingly took on the task of writing the pasurams in Tamil in the Hymnology sections. Shri. Sthala Sayana Thuraivar Avl. continued to extend to me his scholarly assistance in selecting specific mangalasasana pasurams for each divya kshetram and explaining to me its meaning. My special thanks are also to him. Mr.M.N.Krishnaswamy the Publisher of Ramanujavani also was of immense strength to me, as, whenever I had any doubts or needed clarifications, he was only too willing to help me with pleasure. My special thanks are also to Dr. R. Ananthan, Professor and Head of the Department of English, Vivekananda College, Madras, who read through all my manuscripts with a professorial discipline so as to ensure that good grammatical English is used.

I hope that with grace of Lord Venkatachalapathy the balance of work relating to 65 Divya Desams will also be completed at an early date.

- AUTHOR

ஸ்ரீ :

ஸ்ரீமதே ராமாநுஜாய நம:

நித்யஸ்ரீ: நித்யமங்கனம்

அணிந்துரை

இவ்வுலகில மானிடராயப பிறப்பது அரிது. அதிலும் விஷ்ணுவிடததில பகதி உள்ளவர்களாக இருத்தல் மிக அரிது. அப்படி உண்டானவர்கள் கடைத்தேற சுலபமான வழி ஒரு ஆசாரியனை அடைந்து உபதேசம் பெற்று, அவ்வாசாரியன நியமனப்படி நடந்து கொள்வதேயாகும். அதிலும் சுலபமான வழி, இந்த 108 திருப்பதிகளின் பெயர்களைக் கேட்டு அவைகளை அனுதினமும் பக்தியுடன் உச்சரித்து, அந்த திவ்ய மூரததிகளை வணங்குவதேயாகும்.

சென்ற பதிப்பில் தொண்டைநாட்டு கேஷத்திரங்களை ஆங்கிலத்தில் பலரும் எளிதாக அறியும் வண்ணம் பெருமுயற்சி எடுத்து அந்தந்த திவ்ய தேசத்து எம்பெருமான்களை சித்திரங்களுடன் வெளியிட்டிருப்பது மிகவும் பாராட்டுக்குரியது. இவ்விதமே, இப்பதிப்பில் சோழநாட்டுத் திருப்பதிகளான திருவரங்கம் முதல் திருக்கண்டியூர் வரை 21 திவ்ய தேசங்களை மிக அழகாகக் குறிப்பிட்டுள்ளார்கள். கூடியவிரைவில் மற்ற திவ்ய தேசங்கள் பற்றிய விவரங்கள் அடங்கிய பதிப்புகளும் வரவிருக்கின்றன.

பலருக்கும் உபகாரமாயிருக்கும்படியான அவர்தம் இப்பணி சிறப்பாக அமையவும் , இததொண்டில் ஈடுபாடு கொண்ட இவ்வாசிரியருக்கு மேலும் உற்சாகமும் ஆரோக்கியமும் அருள பொன்னி சூழ திருவரங்க திவ்ய தம்பதிகளைப் பிராரத்திக்கிறேன்.

ஸ்ரீரங்கநாராயண ஜீயர்.

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14-8-1993.

ஸ்ரீரங்கம் - 620006.]

Blessings From Srirangam Srimad Andavan

Sri Rangaramanuja Mahadesikan

ANUGRAHA SRIMUHAM

Taittiriya Upanishad says that the omnipresent and omnipotent God is Panchadha and Panchatma which means Lord Sri-man Narayana is in five different forms. They are Para (in Sri Vaikuntam), Vyuha (in the ocean of the Milk), Vibhava (10 incarnations), Antaryami (Supreme soul of all beings both animate and inanimate), Archa (being worshipped in all the 108 Divya Desas).

Only Nityas and muktas enjoy the paraswarupam in Sri Vaikuntam. Divine people like sage Narada enjoy the vyuham. The people born at the time of incarnations of the Lord as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna had enjoyed the vibhava swarupam. The Antaryami swarupam of the Lord can be enjoyed by yogis who do constant meditation on the supreme soul. To shower the divine grace on the people of yesterday, to-day and to-morrow god is present in the Archa form in all the 108 Divya desas sung by Alwars and countless temples which are built in all places.

3. Thirumangai Alwar says Archa form as “Pinnanar Vanan gum shodhi” (A light which can be seen and prostrated by posterity).

4. The Divya desas in which the Lord Sri-man Narayana is in archa form for ever are classified as swayam vyakta, daiva, saiddha and manusha.

5. There are 8 swayam vyakta divya desas in this world which are listed below. Swayam vyakta means god appearing in the Archa form on his own.

6. The first swayam vyakta kshetra is Srirangam known as Bhooloka Vaikuntam which is the foremost and most important among the 108 divya desas. The others are Srimushnam (Abode of Lord Varaha), Venkatadri (Abode of Lord Venkatesa), Salagrama (in the Himalayas where the Lord appears in the form

of Salagrama sila, a crystalline form), Naimisharanya (in Uttar Pradesh where the Lord is in the form of a forest), Vanamamalai known as Totadri, Pushkaram (near Ajmer in Rajasthan where the Lord is in the form of water), Nara Narayana Ashramam (Badarikashramam in the Himalayas).

7. Daiva means Lord in the Archa form installed and consecrated by the Devas having heavenly abode. Saiddha is that type of Archa form installed and consecrated by Siddhas by spiritual power acquired by them through deep meditation. Manusha is the deity installed and consecrated by human beings.

8. The greatness of the deities in all the 108 divya desams has been sung by twelve Alwars including Andal in the Nalayira Divya Prabandam.

9. It is a matter of great gratification that Miss M.S. Ramesh, I.A.S., who has already written the first volume of 108 Vaishnavite Divya desams published by M/s T.T. Devasthanams, Tirupati has written the second volume of the above book covering 20 divya desams in Cholanadu comprising the districts of Trichy, Tanjore and South Arcot. There are 40 divya desams in Cholanadu out of which 21 are being dealt in the second volume. The book contains an exhaustive and authentic account of salient features of each temple supported by inscriptions in the temple singing of Alwars and works of Acharyas with colour photographs of the temples and deities.

10. The major highlight of the first volume is a beautiful treatise on Lord Vishnu--his traits. The essence of Sri Bhagavad Ramana's Philosophy is that the divine couple (Mahalakshmi and Sri Nityanarayana) are the Supreme being Paratattvam. Wherever there is Lord Narayana in five different forms there is also Goddess Mahalakshmi his consort in the same five different forms. So when the first volume contains an exhaustive revelation of the greatness of Lord Vishnu (Sri Nityanarayana) it is an obvious corollary that there should be a beautiful treatise on Goddess Mahalakshmi also. So the Author keeping in with the Srivaishnavite cultural tradition has really incorporated a masterly depiction of the greatness of goddess Mahalakshmi in the second volume in the very first few pages with quotations

from the Chatusloki of Sri Alavandar, Saranagati gadyam of Sri Bhagavad Ramanuja and Sri Stuti of Sri Vedanta Desika etc. Sage Parasara (father of sage Vyasa, author of Mahabharata) tells Maitreya in Sri Vishnupuranam that just as Sri-man Narayana is omnipresent both inwardly (Anthrivyapti) and outwardly (Bahirvyapti) in the entire universe, comprising 14 Lokas, Goddess Mahalakshmi is also similarly omnipresent as the divine couple are inseparable from each other.

11. The Cholanadu divya desas numbering twenty covered exhaustively in this second volume are listed below :

Name of Divyadesa	Names of Alwars who have done Mangalasanam.
1. Sri Rangam	All the Alwars including Andal except Madhura Kavi.
2. Thirukkannapuram	Nammalwar, Perialwar, Kulasekara Alwar, Thirumangai Alwar & Andal.
3. Thirukkannangudi	Thirumangai Alwar
4. Thirukkudanthai (Kumbakonam)	Nammalwar, Poodattalwar, Peyalwar, Thirumazhisai Alwar, Perialwar, Thirumangai Alwar, Andal.
5. Thirusirupuliyur	Thirumangai Alwar.
6. Thiru Nangur (11 Garuda Sevai)	Thirumangai Alwar.
7. Thiru Manimadakoil	Thirumangai Alwar.
8. Thiru Arimeya Vinna-garam	Thirumangai Alwar.
9. Thiru Vellakkulam	Thirumangai Alwar.
10. Thiru Kavalambadi	Thirumangai Alwar.
11. Thiru Thettriyambalam	Thirumangai Alwar.
12. Thiruvanpurushothaman	Thirumangai Alwar.
13. Thiruvaikundha Vinna-garam	Thirumangai Alwar.
14. Thiru semponsainangur	Thirumangai Alwar.
15. Thiru Manikkoodam	Thirumangai Alwar.
16. Thiru Parthanpalli	Thirumanagai Alwar.
17. Thirudevanar Thohai	Thirumanagai Alwar.

18. **Thirukazhiseerama Vi- Thirumanagai Alwar.**
nnagaram (Sirkazhi)
19. **Thiruvaliyum Thirunaga Thirumanagai Alwar.**
riyum
20. **Thiru Indalur Kulasekara Alwar, Thiru**
managai Alwar.
21. **Thirukkandiyur Thirumanagai Alwar.**

12. This book serves as an ideal tourist guide to those who want to go on a pilgrimage to divya desas to worship the deities there.

13. The Author deserves all congratulations on her abiding interest and praiseworthy attempt to write such a monumental book which will be ever useful to all. The entire Shrivaisnavite community is grateful to her for this marvellous work which kindles a deep curiosity and interest in each person to have the darshan of the lords in the divya desams and receive their grace to attain all the four purusharthas of human beings which are Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Putting in a nutshell this book elaborates the basic tenets of Srivaishnavism which are: 1. Lord Sriman Narayana whose consort is goddess Lakshmi is the supreme being. 2. All the animate and inanimate objects of the universe are his bodies and he is the supreme soul dwelling in them and controlling their activities. 3. Attaining his lotus feet in Sri Vaikuntam and doing kainkaryam (service) to him there is the Moksha which is called parama purushartha and 4. Means of attainment of Moksha is saranagati at his feet by uttering Divya mantra.

14. His Holiness Srimad Andavan Sri Ranga Ramanuja Maha Desikan of Srirangam Srimath Andavan Ashramam, Srirangam, is extremely happy to note the zeal of the author in undertaking the writing of such research oriented books useful to all and showers His choicest blessings on her for a long and healthy life so that the community gets immensely benefited by more and more of her such monumental works which provide a deep insight into our holy scriptures.

15. M/s T.T. Devasthanams deserve all our praise and gratitude for undertaking the publication of such precious books.

Samastha Sanmangalani bhavanthu

By Order of H.H. Sriman Andavan
Vidwan R. MADHAVACHARIAR,
Sri Karyam, Srirangam Srimad Andavan Ashramam.

108 Vaishnavite Divya Desams

Volume - II

GODDESS MAHALAKSHMI

In the first volume, in the introductory chapter, the qualities of Lord Vishnu were enunciated. As a complementatry follow up in this volume, a brief account of the greatness and glory of Mahalakshmi Thayar is given.

There are four famous stotras in praise of Goddess Lakshmi. They are Saint Yaamuna's Chatussloki, Kurattalwar's Sristava, Parasara Bhatta's Sri Gunaratnakosa and the fitting finale is Sri Stuti by Vedanta Desika. Needless to add there are very many other famous stotras like Sri Suktam, Kanakadhara Stotra etc. In the following pages select verses from the above mentioned stotras with their meaning will be given so as to present the picture of the Thayar through the eyes of those great seers and sages.

The first and foremost description of Thayar is what is given by the Three Alvars who were blessed with the vision of the divine couple. The story is so well known yet it bears repetition. One day the rains were lashing. To escape from the fury of nature the three Alvars one after another took shelter in a narrow verandah of a house in Thirukkovalur in South Arcot District in Tamil Nadu. The verandah was so narrow that only one could comfortably lie down, while two could comfortably sit. But if three had to take shelter, they could only stand huddled together. These three great seers decided to stand. Two of them separately lit lamps. With the help of those lamps, the third Alvar viz. Pey Alvar saw the divine vision. He began to describe what he saw. The words uttered by the Alvar at that time were:-

*Thiru kanden ponmeni kanden tigazhum
Arutkanni niranmum kanden - serukkilirum
Ponnazhi kanden - parisangam kaikanden
Yennazhi vannan pal inru*

திரு கண்டேன பொன் மேனி கண்டேன் திகழும்
அருட் கண்ணி நிறமும் கண்டேன் - செருக்கிலரும்
பொன்னாழி கண்டேன - பரி சங்கம் கை கண்டேன்
என்னாழி வண்ணன்பால நின்று.

The words uttered by the Alvar first are Thiru Kanden, ponmeni kanden. Literally it means I saw Thiru. Thiru in Tamil stands for Lakshmi or Sri. Thus, the three Alvars had the first glance of the God only after they saw the Goddess Lakshmi. Pey Alvar continues his description of the vision by saying "Ponmeni Kanden" i.e. to say he saw a golden hue Form. It is only later that he adds that he saw Azhivannan i.e. ocean hue person. The Swaroopa of Goddess Mahalakshmi is said to be bright and effulgent having the yellow colour of molten gold. That is why the Alvar first sees the yellow-coloured body. It is only later that he saw the ocean hue person. After he saw the dazzling golden colour, he saw the colour of the rising Sun, then he saw the colour of golden chakra and then only he saw the shanku. It is therefore apparent that the Lord whose body is severally described as one with the colour of a dark rain bearing cloud or the colour of maragatham i.e. a precious stone with the deep green colour or one with a blue hue i.e. Neela meni - Shyamala meni had a yellow glow only because of the effulgence of Lakshmi reflected on His dark background. Many of the Upanishads describe the Lord as one who has the body with a colour of a dark rain bearing cloud with an yellow "prabha" because of the effulgence shed by Goddess Lakshmi seated on His chest. One Upanishad describes the Lord as having a golden colour right upto the tips of his fingers! Yet another describes him as shining like a streak of lightning in the midst of a blue cloud. All these descriptions are nothing but

describing a picture which reflects the glory and the beauty of the Lord along with Sri.

The word Sri has been interpreted in six ways in Bhagavat sastras (Pancha ratra). The word Sri has been etimologically interpreted in six different ways viz.

S'riyate	(is resorted to)
S'rayate	{ resorts to)
S'rnoti	{ listens)
S'ravayati	{ makes listen)
S'rnati	{ removes)
S'rinati	{ makes ripe)

Sriyate and Srayate means that the Goddess Lakshmi is resorted to by those who desire spiritual rebirth and that She resorts to the Supreme Ruler in order to give them spiritual rebirth. It is said that when God gets angry with a person for the sins committed by him and like a father tries to chide him, Goddess like the typical mother intercedes on behalf of the erring devotee and asks God whether there is any man in the world who has no faults and thus persuades the Lord to accept the offender also. She therefore helps to mitigate the anger of the Supreme Lord and ensures that the Lord's compassion becomes the cause of the man's spiritual rebirth. She is thus a great mediator (purushakara) who intercedes on behalf of the devotees due to Her excessive love like that of a true mother. Thus the whole world depends on Her for support, all things depend upon Her for protection and at the same time She is attached to all the things. The characteristics of S'rnoti and S'ravayati mean that when we have committed some sin and the Lord is angry with us, She listens to the cry of the children who have sought Her as a refuge and pleads to the Lord on their behalf and thus mitigates their suffering. Out of compassion, She listens to all of us and intercedes on our behalf with the Lord.

The etymological meaning of Sri when it refers to S'rnati means that She removes all hinderances in the way of those who have adopted the upaya of absolute surrender. It is always said that when the Lord affords protection, He does it only when He has Lakshmi by His side as She is the embodiment of compassion. Whenever He destroys, Lakshmi is never by His side. Thus, the presence of the Goddess is very essential for removing all our faults and enabling us to obtain the grace of the Lord.

The etymological interpretation of the word Sri-nati would mean that she makes the world ripe by her qualities of compassion. All those who have sought her protection are made fit to receive the benedictions of the Lord. The grace of Thayar is therefore very essential before one can obtain the blessing of the Lord. It is because of all these comprehensive qualities that Alavandar finally exclaims and says how can we have the fitness to praise Her? Bhattar in his book, Guna Rathna Kosa also refers to these aspects in his work when he says that Bhagavan is ever gracious only because of his association with the Goddess and the graciousness of the Goddess is not due to any cause or pre condition but it is innate and inborn in Her. It is her natural Svabhava. Alavandar says that the greatness and mahima of Lakshmi is not fully known even to the Lord. Kurattalvar goes one step further and says that the extent of her glory is not only not known to the Lord but even to Lakshmi herself. Desika also says that no one can ever grasp and understand fully the eminence of Lakshmi. It is this which makes Desika in his Sristuti say that while he has the desire to praise the Goddess, he feels he is not upto the task. Yet he continues that the greatness of the Goddess is such that his arambha i.e. starting the attempt to praise her will be a siddaramba i.e. a beginning with a satisfactory end. He thus conveys the idea that it is not due to his efforts that he is able to describe the glory of the Goddess, but it is all only because of the divine mother's

blessing that he is able to satisfactorily attempt to picture her greatness.

The Goddess is said to be mangalanam mangalam. Mangalam means auspicious. Mangalanam means most auspicious of the auspicious. It is the same tenor as when we refer to the God as Pavitranam Pavitram i.e. most holy of all holy things. Desika says that the purity as well as the auspiciousness of the Perumal is because of Lakshmi. He says God is the only pure person because Lakshmi resides in Him! In his Sree Stuti also Desika says that the auspiciousness of the Lord is the result of His Lakshmi sambanda as Lakshmi is the only source of all auspiciousness.

It is said in Sanskrit "Sraddhayaa devo devatvam Asnute" meaning that Deva (Lord) attains devatvam (divinity) because of Sraddhaa (Lakshmi). Such is Her greatness.

It is said that those who do nama sankirtanam i.e. repeating the myriad names of Lord Vishnu will be able to escape from the clutches of Yama the God of Death and escape the tortures of Hell. However, those who repeat the names of Goddess Mahalakshmi are said to reap a higher benefit as that nama sankirtanam is more efficacious. Those who repeat Lakshmi's names are blessed with complete relief from the cycle of births and deaths i.e. to say they do not have to go through the problems of samsara again.

Lakshmi has got several names. Some of them are as follows:

- Padma- primarily meaning a lotus
- Pamdapriya - one who is fond of the lotus
- Padma hasta - one who has a lotus in her hands
- Padmalaya - one who resides in the lotus
- Padma dalayadakshi - one who has eyes like the petals of a lotus
- Padmasini - one who has the lotus as her seat
- Padmavarna - who has the hue of the lotus

Padmakshi - lotus eyed

Jaladhi tanaya - daughter of the ocean

Vishnupathi - wife of Vishnu

Hiranmayeem, Hiranya varnam - one whose body is of golden colour.

Harinim - one who signifies life and energy, one who take the form of a deer.

Hemamalini - one who wears a garland of gold.

In the following paragraphs select stanzas from various stotras praising Mahalakshmi are mentioned and the meaning given so that it enables one to understand the divine mother. To start with the sloka which praises Padmavati the divine consort of Lord Srinivasa is given below:

Esanam Jagadosya Venkatapate

Visno Param Preyaseem

Tat vakshasthala nitya vasa-rasikam

Tat shanti samvarthenim

Padmalankrutha pani pallava

yugam padmanasastam sriyam

Vatsalyati Gunojvalam bagavatim

vande jagan matharam

In this, the author pays respectful obeisance to the empress of the universe who is the greatly beloved consort of Lord Vekatachalapati and

Who permanently resides on His chest and

Who makes His quality of patience grow from time to time and

Who in Her two delicate light tender hands holds two lotus buds

Who has a lotus as Her seat

Who is known as Sri

Who is Bhagavati and

Who is the mother of the entire world.

The poem says that if Lord Srinivasa is considered as the master of all the worlds, Padmavati is the empress i.e. Sarvalokeswari. Lakshmi dwells on the chest

which she has chosen as her permanent abode (nitya vasa). Nammalvar also refers to this aspect when he says "Akala killen iraiyum" This means that Lakshmi will not be separated even for the shortest point of time from this abode of hers. This permanent residence and inseparability has great spiritual significance as by sitting there she intercedes on behalf of the devotees and ensures that the Lord's quality of patience is increased i.e.

Tat shanti samvarthanam is achieved by her divine presence She holds lotus buds in her hands. She is also padmasanasta i.e. one who has lotus for her seat (Padmasani). She is born out of a lotus (Padmaja).

Baghavan is said to be one who has six fold qualities (shadgunas) viz. Gnana, bala, aiswarya, veerya, shakthi and tejas. Lakshmi who is Baghavati not only possesses these six qualities but has one other great quality viz. vatsalya. The poem referred to above uses the word vatsalyati gunojvalam. It means that Vatsalya and other qualities are possessed by the Goddess. Ramanuja lists out some of the other qualities as Maardava (Softness), Aarjava (Straight forwardness), souhaarda (good heartedness), saamya (equality), Kaarunya (Mercy) and maadhurya (Sweetness) etc. While all these auspicious qualities are there both for the Lord and Sri, the emphasis whenever one refers to the Goddess is on the quality of vatsalya. The stotra ends up with the beautiful word "vande jagan matharam" meaning salutations to the mother of the world. In Daya satakam this role of the mother is referred to by using the word "Samasta jananee" i.e. mother of all persons and all things. We are all the children of this Goddess and She is the preyassee of Vishnum and thus the Lord and Sri become our divine parents from whom one - with a certain authority can seek solace, comfort and unfailing help.

Chatussloki: By Yamunacharya
First stanza:

कान्तस्ते पुरुषोत्तमः फणिपतिः शय्यासनं वाहनं
 वेदात्मा विहगेश्वरो यवनिका माया जगन्मोहिनी ।
 ब्रह्मेशादिसुरव्रजः सदयितः त्वदासदासीगणः
 श्रीरित्येव च नाम ते भगवति ब्रूमः कथं त्वां वयम् ॥

Meaning:

O Bhagavati! What shall I say about you? Your husband is the Lord of all men. Your bed is the lord of serpents. Your seat and vehicle is Garuda, the embodiment of vedas. Your screen is maya, the jagan mohini. Your servants and maids are Brahma, Siva, the other Gods and their wives. Your name is also Sri.

Chatussloki IIInd Stanza:

यस्यास्ते महिमानमात्मन इव त्वद्दल्लभोपि प्रभुः
 नालं मातुमियत्या निरवधिं नित्यानुकूलंस्तवः ।
 तां त्वां दास इति प्रपन्न इति च स्तोष्याम्यहं निर्भयः
 लोकैकेश्वरि लोकनाथदयिते दान्ते दयां ते विदन् ॥

Meaning:

O Lokeswari! You are immeasurable, even as greatness of the Lord cannot be measured. But I who am your dasa (servant) and prapanna (one who comes to you for succour/help) fearlessly pray to you with the full belief and trust in your mercy to this prapanna.

Stanza three:

इषत् त्वत्करुणानिरीक्षणसुधासंधुक्षणा द्रक्ष्यते
 नष्टं प्राक् तदलाभतास्प्रभुवनं संप्रत्यनन्तोदयम् ।

श्रेयो न ह्यरविन्दलोचनमनः कान्ताप्रसादादृते
संसृत्यक्षरवैष्णवाध्वसु नृणां संभाव्यते कर्हिचित् ॥

Meaning:

The three worlds, their lustre and all their beauties and prosperity are retained by them only due to your nectar like glance. There is no prosperity in the worldly things, kaivalyam and moksha paths without the favour of the beloved of the lotus eyed Lord.

शान्तानन्तमहायिभूति परमं यदब्रह्म रूपं हरेः
मूर्तिं ब्रह्म ततोपि तत्प्रियतरं रूपं यदत्यद्भुतम् ।
यान्यन्यानि यथासुखं विहरतो रूपाणि सर्वाणि तानि
आहुः स्वैरनुरूपरूपविभवैर्गाढोपगूढानि ते ॥

Meaning:

Parabrahma swaroopa is always calm, has many virtues. Whatever form He takes in His maya are all closely followed by you also taking suitable forms.

Saranagathi gadya by Sri Ramanuja:

भगवन्नारयणाभिमतानुरूपस्वरूपरूपगुण इवैश्वर्यं
शईलाद्यनवधिकातिशयासंख्येयकल्याणगुणगणां पद्मवनालयं
भगवतीं श्रियं देवीं नित्यानपायिनीं निरवद्यां देवदेवदिव्य-
महिषीम् अखिल अखिल जगन्मातरम् अस्मन्मातरम्
अशरण्यशरण्याम् अनन्यशरणः शरणमहंप्रपद्ये ।

Meaning:

There is no one else from whom I can seek help except you Sridevi. You are full of benevolent qualities, are seated in a forest of lotus flowers, you are the refuge for the helpless you are the mother of the whole world, you are the crowned divine queen of the lord of the devas, you are never separated from the Lord. Your

form of auspicious qualities and great virtues are all liked by the Lord and are worthy of the qualities of Bhagavan Narayana himself.

Sristuti by Vedanta Desika: Stanza 4:-

यत्सङ्कल्पात् भवति कमले ! यत्र देहिन्यमीषां
जन्मस्थेमप्रलयरचना जङ्गमाजङ्गमानाम् ।
तत्कल्पाणं किमपि यमिनामेकलक्ष्यं समाधौ
पूर्ण तेजः स्फुरति भवतीपादलाक्षारसाङ्कम् ॥

Meaning:

O Devi Kamala! That glorious effulgence which is the cause for the creation, sustenance and destruction, of the entire world, and which is auspicious and which is the target for contemplation of the yogis; which is omnipresent and which is beyond description - that effulgence is brilliant and glorious only because it bears the marks made by the imprints of your feet adorned with the juice of the lac. Here Desika says that the Lord is what He is only because he is Lakshmi's consort. His jagat karanatva (creator's role), Kalyanatva (his auspiciousness), Lakshayatva (high principled qualities) and Poornatva (the supreme all pervading omnipresent nature) are all only because of his Lakshmi patitva i.e. because he is the divine consort of Goddess Lakshmi. He is the creator, the preserver and the destroyer. He is tejas only because of Lakshmi. If he is the Sun, she is the bright rays which emanate from the Sun and which alone can be seen. Thus, he is Baskara, She is prabha which is the lustre of the Sun. There are certain leaves which when crushed give a coloured pigment which is used to adorn the dainty feet of ladies of nobility. This is known as Laaksharasa. The sloka says that the feet of Lakshmi was adorned with this Laaksharasa. These feet are said to have left red imprint on the chest of the Lord where she resides and in poetic liberty it is claimed that the Lord is shining because of

the red imprints of the dainty decorated feet of the divine mother. Similar words are expressed by Parasara Bhatta in his Srigunarata Kosa. When he says that the vedantas which are in search of the Supreme being felt convinced that they found what they were searching for only when they recognised the imprint of Lakshmi's feet on the chest of Murari. Tirumazhisai Alvar also voices similar thoughts when he says:

திருவில்லாத் தேவரைத் தேறேன் மின் தேவு

("Thiruvillat tevarait teren min tevu")

Through these words, the Alvar advises us not to accept any one as to be the God unless He has Lakshmi as his consort!

The Lord thus has become supreme only because of Sraddha which is the vedic name for Lakshmi. This accounts for the statement Sraddhaya devo devatvam asnute.

Sristuti Vedanta Desika - 13th sloka:

अग्रे भर्तुः सरसिजमये भद्रपीठे निषण्णम्
 अम्भोराशेरधिगतसुधासंप्लवादुत्थितां त्वाम् ।
 पुष्पासारस्थगितभुवनैः पुष्कलावर्तकाद्यैः
 क्लृप्रारंभाः कनककलशैः अभ्यषिञ्चन् गजेन्द्राः ॥

Meaning:

You emerged from the ocean of milk when it was full of nectar obtained by churning. You were seated on an auspicious throne of lotus. The Lord was watching this. At that time, clouds known as Pushkala and Aavartaka showered flowers on you in plentiful manner so that it enveloped all the worlds. The elephants performed abishekam to you pouring water from the golden vessels.

This sloka describes the coronation of Sri Mahalakshmi when she emerged out of the ocean of milk; The milky ocean was to be churned. The host of Gods and powerful demons extracted Mandara mountain and put it into the milky ocean. To prevent the mountain from sinking into the bed of the ocean, Vishnu the creator took on the form of a tortoise and bore the mountain on his back. All the Gods and demons then churned the ocean, after encircling the Mandara mountain with Vasuki the serpent. First came up the very strong kalakuta poison which is said to be very painful, very fierce and radiates heat like a fire of universal destruction. The Gods and the demons were not able to stand near that poison. They started to run away. At that time, Siva meditated upon the Lord and Sri and Bhoomidevi and swallowed the poison. He kept it caged in his throat. Hence it is that his throat has the dark blue colour of the poison. Again the ocean was churned and then Jyestha Devi covered with gems, wreaths and garments came up. She was very inauspicious and she would give misery and poverty to all. She was therefore asked to go away and stay with Kali who is also equally sinful. Again, the milk ocean was churned. Then Goddess Varuni came up. Ananta, the lord of serpents took her. Then Sura (spirituous liquor) adorned with all ornaments came up. She became the wife of Garuda. Then came a host of celestial nymphs and strong Gandarvas singing sweetly. Then came Īravata the elephant followed by Uccaihs'ravas, the horse. Both were taken by Lord Indra. Then came Danvantri, Parijata and Surabi. Indra took all these. Then came Sri Mahalakshmi the auspicious Goddess of all the worlds. She was so effulgent that she resembled a crore of young Suns. She was adorned with golden armlets and was seated in a golden lotus. Her eyes were large like lotus petals. Her hair was dark and curly. Her body was smeared with fragrant sandalwood paste. She was adorned with divine flowers. She had four hands, her face was like a full moon. She was wearing a garland of unfaded lotuses. As soon as she

emerged, hosts of Gods beat the drums loudly. The deities showered flowers. The Gandarvas sang, celestial damsels danced. The elephants guarding the eight directions came and showered petals on her and also showered holy water as abisheka on her. Thus, the churning of the milky ocean while it yielded the nectar, is more famous for having yielded the supreme undiluted concentrated nectar viz. Mahalakshmi. She was followed from the milky ocean by moon. Soma i.e. moon is regarded as the brother of Goddess Lakshmi. The assembled Gods pleaded with her to remain with them for ever and look after the three worlds.

This verse which is the middle one in the 25 stotras in Sree Stuti very fittingly and aptly deals with the Coronation of Mahalakshmi.

Sreestuti by Desika - Sloka 14:

आलोकय त्वाममृतसहजे विष्णुवक्ष-स्थलस्थां
शापाक्रान्ताः शरणमगमन् सावरोधाः सुरेन्द्राः ।
लब्ध्वा भूयः त्रिभुवनमिदं लक्षितं त्वत्कटाक्षैः
सर्वाकारस्थिरसमुदयां संपदं निर्विशान्ति ॥

Meaning:

O Lakshmi! You emerged out of the nectar - the devas who were under a curse saw you seated on the chest of Vishnu and immediately along with their wives fell at your feet and sought your intervention on their behalf, with the Lord. You allowed your glance to rest on them. As a result, they got back their worlds. Blessed by your glance they enjoyed all the regained wealth and prosperity permanently and safely only because of you.

In the earlier stanza, Desika had elaborately described the coronation of Mahalakshmi. Now in this stanza, he deals with Lakshmi kalyanam. He says that

the Goddess was bedecked with garlands and ornaments. She took her seat on the chest of the lord while all the devas looked on. Earlier, the devas had been cursed by the sage Durvasa. It is said that once Durvasa gave a garland to Indra. But Indra gave it to his elephant Iravatam. The elephant threw it down and trampled on it. Seeing this Durvasa cursed Devendra and all the devas. As a consequence they lost their wealth and kingdoms. These devas fell at the feet of Lakshmidēvi seated on the chest of Lord Vishnu and pleaded for relief. She, out of her supreme kindness, is believed to have turned her glance on the devas. Immediately, they were freed from their curse, they regained their lost riches and kingdoms. Such was the power of Lakshmi's *kataksham*. This incident is also related in Vishnu purana by sage Parasara. Apparently, the lord himself knows the power of such a benign glance of the goddess. That is why during his Ramavataram, when he and Sita sat in the pushpaka vimanam and were leaving Lanka which was destroyed during the great war, Rama requested Sita to bestow her glance on Lanka so that Vibhishana who was crowned as the king by Rama may rule over a prosperous Lanka and not a Smasaana Sadrisee i.e. a cremation ground.

Sreestuti by Vedanta Desika - Slokam 15:

आर्तात्राण व्रतिभिः अमृतासारनीलाम्बुवोहेः
 अम्भोजानाम् उपासि मिषताम् अन्तरङ्गैरपाङ्गैः ।
 यस्यां यस्यां दिशि विहरते देवि दृष्टिस्वदीया
 तस्यां तस्याम् अहमहमिकां तन्वते संपदोधाः ॥

Meaning:

Devi! Your eyes have taken a vow to protect those in distress. Your eyes are like dark clouds showering nectar. They resemble lotuses that have just blossomed with the advent of early morning. The glances from such eyes, wherever they are directed, result in a scramble

among the streams of wealth which rush competing with each other so as to reach quickly the place where your glance rests.

This sloka beautifully epitomises the efficacy of Lakshmi kataksha. The eyes are said to have taken a vow to protect persons in distress. The benign look is said to act as a balm on the troubled soul. The eyes of the Lord are usually compared to a lotus, as he is a Pundarikaksha. But the eyes of Goddess are said to be dark as blue rain-bearing clouds. Parasara Bhatta had an interesting comment to make about the differing colours of the eyes of the Lord and the Goddess. It is said that once he saw Lord Ranganatha adorned as Mohini. He carefully looked at Lord Ranganatha and said that while the God resembled closely the divine mother, yet the disguise could not carry conviction with those who are familiar with the beautiful eyes of Mahalakshmi. He said that the eyes of the lord were not dark and cool as Sriranga Nachiar's gracious eyes. Thus, Lord Ranganatha, though dressed up as Mohini, could not change the colour of his eyes which continued to be red like that of a lotus. A similar thought is expressed by Nammalvar also. When he describes the eyes of Lakshmi, he refers to Lakshmi as "Maiya kannal" 'மையக கனாளுள்' i.e. one who has dark eyes as if Kajal has been applied to it. He refers to the Lord as Seyya kolat tadankannan 'செய்யக கேரலத்தடங் கண்ணாள்' "Seyya" means red. In the above sloka, Desikan goes further and describes the eyes of Mahalakshmi as a fresh blossomed lotus. Here the comparison with the lotus is not with reference to its colour viz. red but with reference to its other quality of freshness and fragrance of an early morning fresh blossomed lotus flower. That is why he used the words "Ushasi mishataam ambho-jaanam".

Literally it means lotuses which have opened their petals at the first touch of the rays of the early morning Sun. The same sentiment is expressed by Nammalvar

when he describes the eyes of Mahalakshmi and uses the words ' அப்பொழுமைத் தாமரைப் பூ ' Appozhumai tamaraipoo i.e. lotus flower which has just blossomed. Kamban also uses a similar words when he says 'அப்பொழுது அவர்ந்த செந்தாமரை ' "Appozhuthu malarnda sentamarai" i.e. freshly blossomed lotus flower. Thus, having waxed eloquent about the colour of the eyes and the beauty of the eyes, the poet also explains the significance of a glance from those beautiful eyes. He says that Lakshmi is the giver of all aishvarya ad sampath (prosperity). It is said that all kinds of wealth converge to the very spot where the glance of Mahalakshmi falls. In brief, the poet says that the different types of wealth and prosperity compete with each other as to who can first fulfil the wishes of the Goddess. Usually Lakshmi kataksham is not only coterminus with prosperity but also signifies mercy. A mercy that is tinged with love and affection (vatsalya). Vatsa means calf, a love of a cow towards its calf. Mahalakshmi being the divine mother her infinite love and affection for her children makes her glance have that nectar of a mother's selfless love and affection. The merciful glance i.e. Lakshmi kataksham is also compared to the waves of an ocean of nectar. Desika, in one of his slokas compares the two i.e. Lakshmi's kataksham and the waves of an ocean of nectar as Sabrahmachari. Literally it means that the two are classmates! They are so similar in nature, both are infinitely sweet.

The glance of Mahalakshmi is said to be free from all faults. The glance of the Lord has both anugraha and nigraha. But the beauty of the glance of Lakshmi is the absence of nigraha.

The kataksham of Mahalakshmi is also said to have two other great qualities viz. sithala and Udhara i.e. while on one side her glance is cool, on the other side she is generous with her gifts, generous almost to a fault. It is said that she is known for giving to her devotees everything that a human mind can de-

sire and yet after having flooded the devotee with her abundance and her generosity, she still feels and she still wonders whether there is something more that she could give. Parasara Bhatta as well as Desika refer to this Udhara i.e. generous quality when finally in their Srigunaratna kosa as well as Sri Stuti they say that in the light of what the Goddesses give and what she is continuing to give there is nothing more left to ask of her! Her generosity is said to have almost created a sense of supreme satisfaction and perfect happiness.

Kanakadhara stotra by Sankara: Poem 6:

कालाम्बुदालिललितोरसि कैटभारेः
धाराधरे स्फुरति या तडिदङ्गनेव ।
मातुस्समस्तजगतां महनीयमूर्तिः
भद्राणि मे दिशतु भार्गवनन्दनायाः ॥

Meaning:

May the lovely form of the daughter of the sage Brighu, the mother of the entire universe, that shines on the chest of the foe of the Kaitapa, beautiful in His dark complexion looking like trailing clouds of glory like a golden streak of lightning on a dark rain bearing cloud, confer on me every boon.

Kanakadhara stotra 9:

दद्यादयानुपवनो द्रविणाम्बुधाराम्
अस्मिन्नकिञ्चन विहङ्ग शिशौ विषण्णे ।
दुष्कर्मधर्ममपनीय चिराय दूरं
नारायणप्रणयिनी नयनाम्बु बाहः ।

Meaning:

May the laden cloud of the eye of the beloved of Narayana motivated by a gust of compassion torren-

tially rain gold on this sorrow stricken ill fated person suffering in penury. May She banish for ever the burden of the sins of the former birth.

Sri Suktam Verse 4:

कांसोस्मितां हिरण्यप्राकारां
आद्राम् ज्वलन्तीं तृप्तां तर्पयन्तीम् ।
पद्मे स्थितां पद्मवर्णां
तामिहोपध्वये श्रियम् ॥

Meaning:

I request the indescribable Lakshmi decked with the ripples of a gentle smile and who is surrounded by walls of gold and one who is full of compassion and one who is ever pleasing and rushes to satisfy the desires of the devotees and one who dwells in a lotus and has its beauty to bless me.

Verse 14:

आद्रां यः करिणीं यष्टिं
सुवर्णां हेममालिनीम् ।
सूर्याहिरण्ययीं लक्ष्मीं
जातवेदो म आवह ॥

Meaning:

O Agni Deva! Please bring into my house Lakshmi who is the supporter of all activities for whose grace even the heavenly Gods are striving, who holds the sceptre in Her Hand being personification of power and authority, she whose complexion is golden and lovely and who wears a garland of golden flowers and is effulgent and bright like the Sun.

Let us conclude with two stotras invoking the blessings of Goddess Lakshmi.

श्री सूक्तम्:

हिरण्यवर्णं हरिणीं
 सुवर्णरजतस्रजाम् ।
 चन्द्रां हिरण्मयीं लक्ष्मीं
 जातवेदो ममावह ॥
 तां म आवह जातवेदो
 लक्ष्मीमनपगामिनीम् ।
 यस्यां हिरण्यं विन्देयं
 गामश्व पुरुषानहम् ॥

पद्म पुराणे:

सर्वज्ञे सर्ववरदे
 सर्व दुष्ट भयङ्करि
 सर्व पाप हरे देवि
 महालक्ष्मि नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

Sree suktam :

Hiranya Varnam Harinim
 Suvarna rajatha srajam
 Chandram Hiranmayim
 Lakshmim Jatha Vedo
 Ma avaha.
 Tham ma avaha Jatha vedo
 Lakshmim anapagaminim
 Yasyam Hiranyam Vindeyam
 Gamasvam Purushanaham.

Padma Purana :

Sarvaghe Sarva Varadae
 Sarva dusshta Bhayankari
 Sarva papa hare Devi
 Mahalakshmi Namo stute.

SRIRANGAM

The famous temple city of Srirangam is popularly known as Bhooloka Vaikuntham (Paradise on earth). Thirumangai Alvar said that all the other "divya desams" are like gardens surrounding the main mansion viz. Srirangam (Aramam Soozhnda Arangam). The devotees who visit the other divya desams while worshipping the Lord in those places chant the following words which highlight the significance of Srirangam as a holy centre. "Sriman! Srirangasriyam/nupathravam/anuthinam/samvarthaya Sriman! Srirangasriyam/nupathravam/nuthi/namsamvarthaya" Srirangam is considered as *primus inter pares* among the 108 vaishnavite "divya desams".

Srirangam is situated about 8 kms. from Tiruchirappalli. It is a picturesque island which lies between the two rivers, the Kaveri and the Coleroon. These two rivers encircle the temple town like a beautiful garland. This town has got three outstanding features. First is the "sthala visesham" i.e. significance of the place itself; the second is the "Murthy visesam" i.e. significance of the idol; the third is "Thirtha visesam" i.e. significance of the holy tank. Very few of the divya desams have all these three outstanding features in them

Temples are generally categorised with reference to the manner in which the idol is instituted. Broadly, they are classified under four heads viz. Swayam vyaktha kshetram (self-originated centres), Divya kshetram (installed by the Devas), Saiddham (set up by Siddha purusas sages and saints), Manusam (installed by humans). There are eight **swayam vyaktha kshetrams**

viz. Srirangam, Sri Musanam, Tiruvengadam, Salagramam, Naimisaranya, Vanamamalai, Pushkaram and Badrikasramam. Amongst these eight, except for Sri Musnam and Pushkaram, the other six places have been sung on by the Alvars and hence they are also "divya desams". It is also believed that Swayam vyaktha kshetrams are places the Lord Himself is fond of and He stays in those holy places of his own volition, out of His own desire and sweet will and not at the request of the sages or human beings. Amongst the "swayam vyaktha kshetrams", the pride of place belongs to Srirangam.

The Srirangam temple covering an area of about 156 acres is the largest as well as the most ancient temple in the country. In Ahananuru, one of the early Sangam works in Tamil there is a reference to Arangam and the Panguni festival of that temple. Ahananuru belongs to the first three or four centuries of the Christian era. Silappadikaram which is one of the famous five Tamil epics belonging to later Sangam period also mentions about the existence of this temple and describes the idol in the temple viz. Lord Ranganatha. The temple finds mention in ancient Sanskrit literature also. The Valmiki Ramayana, the Padma and the Matsya puranas refer to this Lord at Srirangam. The Sanskrit hagiology viz. Prappannamrutham has numerous references to this temple. A 15th century book Lakshmi Kavyam describes the celestial marriage of Uraiyur valli with Lord Ranganatha and also describes in detail the Adi Brahmotsavam festival of this temple. Other works like Maduravijayam and the Saluvabhyudayam refer to the Muslim occupation and subsequent restoration of the temple by Vijayanagar rulers. Thus, the temple is clearly very ancient. This place is unique inasmuch as all the Alvars have sung in praise of the Lord here. Thondaradipodi Alvar lived for a long time at this place. The famous Vaishnavite philosopher, Ramanuja also lived for a long time at this place and there is recorded evidence of the detailed instruc-

tions given by him regarding the manner in which the festivals "utsavams" are to be celebrated in the temple and the manner in which the different rituals are to be performed. He has also classified, in the thorough manner of an administrator the different categories of temple servants and the duties to be performed by each category of persons. Thus, the rules for the tightening of the administration of the temple were first laid down by Ramanuja and even today, these instructions are carefully observed and whenever any doubts regarding the rituals arise, it is what is decreed by the great Ramanuja that is accepted as authoritative. There is an idol of this great Acharya in the temple. The idol is popularly known as 'Thanana Tirumeni'. (the body that he became) Bhattar Piran, Pillai Ulagacharyar, Peria Nambi are a few among the Vaishnavite religious teachers who were born in this place. Famous saints like Nathamunigal and Sri Alavandar lived in this place and conducted religious discourses. The famous Tamil poet Kampan released his Tamil 'Ramayana' at Srirangam, in the presence of Nathamunigal. This is also the place where three famous women devotees of the Lord attained salvation and merged with the Lord himself. One was Sultani, a Mohamedan princess, daughter of a Delhi Badsha., She is known as Thulukka Nachiar. The second was Chola Kulavalli, daughter of the Chola king Dharma Varma. She is known as Woraiyur Nachiar. The third is the daughter of the Chera king Kulasekara, known as Chera Kulavalli. This temple town is also the place where Manavala Mamuni revealed to Uthama Nambi, that he was an incarnation ("avatar") of Adishesha, the divine serpent-couch of Lord Narayana. This is also the place where Manavala Mamuni, the last of the famous lineage of "poorvacharyas" repeated "Tiruvaimozhi" for the benefit of Lord Ranganatha Himself. It is believed that one day, Lord Ranganatha called Manavala Mamuni and requested him to chant the soul stirring "Tiruvaimozhi". Accordingly, in the Peria Mantapam, discourses were held for nearly one

year. It is believed that Lord Ranganatha and His Divine Consort were part of the august assembly for the whole year and listened to these discourses. For that one year, all the other festivals were suspended. Manavala Mamuni recited the last stanza in Tiruvaimozhi and before the year-long discourses could be declared as concluded, Lord Ranganatha assumed the form of a young boy and stood reverentially before the Mamuni with folded hands and in His own voice uttered the following verse which is repeated even today both at the commencement and at the end of the recitals of Divya Prabhandham: (Divine compositions).

*"Sri Sailesa Dayapathram dhi bakthyathi gunarnavam
Yathindra pravanam vande ramvajanataram munim"*

This sloka has almost become the "pranava mantra" which is held in high reverence by all the Vaishnavites as this sacred "Taniyan" (a single verse) emerged from the divine lips of Lord Ranganatha Himself. Even today, this event is commemorated in an annual festival conducted in the temple in the month of Ani when the star Moolam is ascendant. There is also a separate shrine for Manavala Mamuni and his annual ceremony "sraddha" is reportedly performed with temple honours by Lord Ranganatha Himself, on the day the Mamuni left for his heavenly abode.

There are three Perumal temples which are remembered and reputed for the embellishment of their processional idols. The Varadaraja Swami temple at Kanchi is famous for the beauty of the umbrella (Kodai Azhagu) the temple at Thirunarayanapuram (Melkote) is known for the beauty of the diamond crown (Mudi Azhagu) while the temple at Srirangam is known for the captivating and enthralling gait (Nadai Azhagu) of the "utsava moorthy".

This is the only temple where one set of people (Sripadam Thanguvor) alone are entitled to sing the "suprabatham" to the Lord i.e. the invocatory song

sung every morning to wake up the Lord from His divine sleep. These people are paid specially by the temple. This hereditary right for one set of persons to render service to the Lord early in the morning is not to be found in any other temple.

The number of acharyas who had stayed in Sri-rangam and made the city the holiest is legion. The following acharyas are a few of such gifted noble souls.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Srinan Nathammuni | 15. Bhattar |
| 2. Uyyakondar | 16. Nanjeer |
| 3. Manakkal Nambi | 17. Nampillai |
| 4. Sri Alavandar | 18. Siriyayee-Periyayee |
| 5. Thiruvaranga Perumalārayar | 19. Pin Pazhagia Perumal Jeer |
| 6. Peria Nambigal | 20. Peria Achan Pillai |
| 7. Emperumanar (Ramanuja) | 21. Azhagia Manavala Perumald Jeer |
| 8. Mudaliandan | 22. Vadakku Thiruveethi Pillai |
| 9. Kandadaian | 23. Pillai Ulagacharyar |
| 10. Kurathalwan | 24. Azhagia Manavala Perumal Ninaracharyar |
| 11. Thirukurigaipiran Pillan | 25. Kura Kukothamadasar |
| 12. Enbar | 26. Thiruvaimozhi Pillai |
| 13. Thiruvarangathanndamar | 27. Peria Jeer yemmun Manavala Mammigal |
| 14. Srinan Nigamantha Mahadesikan | |

This temple is known as Peria Koil. Everything connected with the temple has got this adjective of Peria i.e. 'big' attached to it. The deity here is known as Peria Perumal (Great Lord). The Goddess is known as Peria Pirattiar i.e. Senior Goddess. The place itself is known as Peria Arangam i.e. Big place. The musical instrument used in this temple is known as Peria melam. Even the eatables given as prasadam in the temple are known as Periya thiruppaniyarangaḷ. The influence of the temple on the life in and around has been so tremendous that even today the farmers, when they measure the grain that is harvested in the fields, adopt the practice of not counting the first measure but

calling it as the measure for the Lord of Thiru Aranga Peria Koil. Only the second measure is reckoned as the first and given for consumption by the human beings!

There is a lot of inter connection between the Vedas and this temple. The Lord here, Peria Perumal, is said to be "vedaswaroopi". The sikaram of the vimanam i.e. the topmost part of the "vimanam" is known as Vedasringam. The "vimanam" itself is known as "Vedapranavam". The Gayathri mantapam in the temple has 24 pillars which are said to represent the 24 letters of the Gayathri mantram. The Sriranga vimanam is itself in the form of letter 'Om'.

The unique feature of this temple is that it has got seven "prakaras" i.e. circumambulatory passages. Such a big temple is not to be seen anywhere else in the country. These seven prakaras are said to represent the seven worlds. Today these seven prakaras are known by the names of the devotees who have done the maximum to renovate the temple and the "prakaras". The seven "prakaras" their extent and the worlds which they represent and the names of the devotees with whom they are today identified are as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| i) Bhoolokam | - Madangal soozhundulla suttru (the place having residential houses) (3072/ 2521 ft) |
| ii) Buvar lokam | - Thrivikrama Cholan suttru (suttru means the encircling passage) (2108/1846 ft) |
| iii)Savar lokam | - Kili Cholan suttru (1653/1270 ft) |
| iv) Mahar lokam | - Thirumangai Mannan suttru (1235/849 ft) |
| v) Jana lokam | - Kulasekaran suttru (767/503 ft) |
| vi) Thapa lokam | - Raja Mahendran Cholan suttru (426/ 295 ft) |
| vii)Satya lokam | - Garbagriha suttru (Dharmia varma Chola Mannan suttru) (240 ft/181 ft). |

As on date, the first three "prakaras" i.e. counting from the outermost are full of shops and dwelling houses. In the olden days, acharyas were living in these

places and even today, many of the houses are recognised as the residential houses of those famous saints, sages and seers. From the 4th prakara onwards, the various sannidhis begin. The fifth prakaram houses the Garuda mantapam. Unlike the usual practice in all vaishnavite temples, Peria Tiruvadi i.e. Garudalwar is not seen in his usual seated form with hands folded in obeisance and facing the main idol in the temple. Here a colossal plaster figure of Garuda about 12 ft high is seen seated on a pedestal which is itself 5 ft high!. This unusual posture has got a story about it. It is believed that once upon a time, Sri Ranganatha had ordered Garuda to stay in that spot till he was called. In strict obedience to the orders of the God, Garuda is said to be continuing to stay in that particular place waiting for the permission of the Lord before moving to his usual place which is right in front of the main deity viz. Moolavar. This is the only place where Peria Thiruvadi i.e. Garudalwar is seen far away from the main shrine of the Lord.

There are about 21 towers in this temple. Each one of them is a masterpiece, full of fine ornamental images. Till recently, the Vellai Gopuram (the white tower) was regarded as the tallest of all with a height exceeding 200 ft. But recently, the nonagenarian Vaishnavite Jeer, the ninety year old pontiff Srimad Azhagiasinger Jeer Swamigal of Ahobila Mutt took upon himself the gigantic task of building a 236 feet high Rajagopuram at the southern entrance to the temple. Generous contributions were made by various State Governments and individuals. 300 years ago, the Nayak rulers had left this main gopuram incomplete because of the constant disturbances caused by muslim invasions. Lord Ranganatha, it is believed, appeared in a dream to the Jeer and directed him to take on the task of completing this incomplete temple tower. At a cost of nearly Rs.2 crores, this tower has been completed. The height of the tower is 222.5'. It has got thirteen tiers. On the top, there are "kalasams"

which are themselves 12.5' high. This tower excluding the base and including the "kalasams" rise to a height of 236' and is said to be the tallest in Asia. Mahasamprokshanam of this monumental Rajagopuram was celebrated on 25.3.87. A flight of steps has been provided to enable the physically doughty and fit persons to climb to the top of the heavenly spire.

The temple has got nine "punya thirthams". The sacred "Chandra puslikarani" forms the centre of all these sacred theerthams. The eight tanks are situated in the eight directions around "Chandra puskarani". Some of these are in use, while some are fast falling into disuse. The location of each of these "theerthams" is as follows:-

No.	Name of the tank	Where situated	Direction	Distance in Miles
1.	Chandra Pushkarani	Inside the temple		
2.	Kadamba Theertha	Uttamarkovil	North	2
3.	Almara Theertham	Talakudi	North East	3.5
4.	Vilva Theertham	On the banks of the Coleroon	East	1.5
5.	Jambu Theertham	Jambukeswaran	South	
	(Achutha Theertham)	(Thiruvanaikoil)	East	1.5
6.	Asvatha Theertham	Near the Govt. Hospital, S. Rangan	South	0.5
7.	Palasa Theertham	Near Jeeypuram Railway Station	South West	8
8.	Pumaga Theertham	Melur (Lakshmi Narayana Temple)	West	3
9.	Vakula Theertham	Near Rettai- mandapam	North West	4

The temple is protected, as specified in the Agamastra, on the eight sides (ashta dhikku) by shrines of eight devathas. These shrines are as follows:-

South (தெற்கு)	Ulagalanda Perumal who is known as Ayanar here.
Southwest (தென்மேற்கு) moolai	Azhagia Singar was said to have been set up here but today after renovations, the moolavar and the utsava-murthi of Narasimha Perumal are reported to have been moved to the Sannidhi of Koorath Alwar.
West (மேற்கு)	Durga. She is also known as Pidari. Even today this shrine is seen at this place.
Northwest (வடமேற்கு)	Varadanarayana sannidhi was there and is said to have been lost due to dilapidation.
North (வடக்கு)	Dasavatara sannidhi is to be seen even now.
North east (வடகிழக்கு)	The sannidhi of Adikesava Perumal was there. But when this sannidhi became old, the moolavar is said to have been shifted to a nearby place.
East (கிழக்கு)	There is the sannidhi of Lakshmi Narasimhar.
Southeast (தென்கிழக்கு)	The sannidhi of Sri Kothandarama was said to be there. It is believed to have been shifted to the banks of the Chandra puskarani by one Rayar who was a minister during Moghul period. Thus, on all the eight sides eight Gods are protecting the main shrine of Lord Ranganatha.

The Brahmanda Purana says that the mythological story of this divya kshetram was narrated by Lord Siva Himself to Narada that Srirangam is the kshetram which has received the blessing of Goddess Lakshmi Devi in abundance and so all those who visit the place will definitely have the full kataksham (blessing) of the

Goddess and that there will be an end to the cycle of births and deaths and the consequential pains and ills of having to live in this world. The mythology of this place is very voluminous and deeply interesting but bearing in mind the compulsions of space, an attempt is made here only to kindle the interest of the readers and to give a broad outline of the story leaving it to interested persons to study the original sources for a more detailed account. The mythological stories are available partly in the "koil olugu". Koil olugu is a chronicle of this famous temple at Srirangam. It records the series of benefactions that the rulers in different ages made to the temple. It connects the different Vaishnava Acharyas with the rulers of the land and thus gives a detailed account of the property of the temple. "Olugu" means a record or a register. "Koil" refers to Srirangam temple. The olugu is written in the manipravala style. While the olugu is not perfect with reference to sequences and chronology, yet it is a valuable record of the history of the temple. Besides this, some of the stories mention the folk tales and folk songs connected with the place. Some of these are corroborated by historical evidence. Some are not. Instead of dissecting the mythological stories on a scientific plane of historical corroboration, it is better to accept the stories woven around the place, derive spiritual solace by allowing logic, reason and historical accuracy to take the back seat and allow religion, mythology, folklore, vaishnava hagiologies, to take the driver's seat.

ORIGIN OF SRIRANGA VIMANAM AND ITS MYTHOLOGY:-

The tradition of the temple is interesting. In the Brahmanda purana, Lord Siva related to Narada Mamuni the greatness of Sri Ranga Vimana. It is said that the first archa vigraham i.e. manifestation (of Lord Narayana) as an idol, is the self-originated

(swayam vyaktha) idol of Lord Ranganatha. Several million years ago, this idol is believed to have emerged from the milky ocean (Thirupparkadal) along with the Ranga Vimana, in response to the severe penance lasting about 1000 years undertaken by Lord Brahma. Convinced of the deep devotion of Brahma, the Lord appeared before him. The brilliant, effulgent, divine Vimana (tower) borne on the shoulders of Garuda emerged out of Thirupparkadal. Tumburu and Narada provided the divine music. Inside the Vimana were seen Lord Indra and other Devas along with the Gunas and Nityasuris who are seen with the Lord in Vaikuntam. Adishesha had his hood spread out as an umbrella over the head of the Lord who was seen in a reclining posture. Visvakshena, the "senathipathi" of the Lord was also in it. Lord Chandra, Lord Surya were also in the "Vimana" and were gently fanning the Lord. The "saptharishis", the ashtavasus, the "navagrahas" were all present. Brahma was immensely pleased with this divine presence. He desired that the Lord should stay on at this place and give him the opportunity to worship Him in the same Form and in the same manner in which He had appeared before him. The Lord agreed and gave Brahma detailed instructions as to the manner in which worship is to be conducted. It is said that Brahma faithfully followed these instructions and worshipped the Lord in Satyaloka. He located this Vimana on the banks of Viraja river in Satyaloka. Everyday, he used to have his bath in the river and then worship the Lord. In course of time, Lord Brahma initiated Dakshaprajapathi, Manu, Lord Surya and others into the intricacies of the worship of the Lord. They also faithfully followed the instructions given by Brahma. Then the son of Manu, Ikshvaku did severe penance and requested Brahma to allow him to take the Sri-ranga Vimana to Bhooloka. Brahma was a bit worried that his favourite idol would leave Satyaloka. But Lord Ranganatha is reported to have assured Brahma that he could continue to worship Him even in Bhooloka everyday in the hours just before morning (ushas).

Lord Ranganatha also revealed to Brahma that first He would go to Ayodhya and later He would shift to the banks of the river Kaveri near the Chandra Pushkarani tank. He also assured Lord Brahma that everyday, mid-afternoon, He would visit Brahma and thus Brahma need not feel the pangs of separation from his Lord. Accordingly, Brahma allowed the Sri Ranga Vimana to be taken to Ayodhya. Seated on His Hamsa vahana, he accompanied Sri Ranga Vimanam to Ayodhya on the banks of the Sarayu river. Ikshvaku Raja was very happy that in response to his prayers, Sri Ranganatha had come to Bhooloka. Much later, one of the Ikshvaku descendants i.e. Dasaratha Chakravarthi who had no issues conducted a mahayagna. He invited many princes to grace that function. One of the princes who were invited was Dharma Varma, a Chola King. This Chola King saw the idol of Sri Ranganatha in the Sri Ranga Vimana and was consumed by a great desire to take the Lord along with the Vimana to his kingdom and thereby afford an opportunity to his people to worship the Lord. On return to his country, he started a deep penance on the banks of a tank ("pushkarani"). Many of the rishis told him that the Ikshvaku kuladanam (the heir loom) i.e. Sri Ranga Vimana now with the Ishvaku Maharaja would definitely, in course of time, reach the banks of the Kaveri and that the sincere prayers of Dharma Varma, the Chola King would bear fruit. The rishis with their foresight told him that after Ravana is killed, Sri Rama would gift this Vimana and the idol of Lord Ranganatha to Vibhisana and that Vibhisana would bring it to the banks of the river Kaveri. The story of Ramayana is known so well that it needs no repetition. Lord Rama, son of Dasaratha Maharaja, after defeating Ravana, and rescuing Sita, returned to Ayodhya for the coronation. After the coronation, Lord Rama gave gifts to all his followers like Jambhavan, Sugreeva, Angatha, Anjaneya etc. When it came to the turn of Vibhishana, the Lord gave the Ishkvaku kuladhanam i.e. Sriranga Vimana along with the "swayam vyaktha" idol of Lord

Ranganatha worshipped by so many generations in his family to Vibhisana. This incident of the gifting of Ishkvaku kuladhanam by Rama to Vibhisana is mentioned in Valmiki Ramyana, Yuddha Kandam 128th sargam 87th sloka as follows:

*Vibhishanopi Dharmathma
Saha Dhair Nair ruthair shapaihe
Lapthava Kuladanam Raja Lankam
Prayan Mahayasahi!!*

This incident is also referred to in Valmiki Ramayanam Uthara Kandam 108th sargam, as also in Padma Puranam, as also in Parameswara Samhita, Kriya kadam tenth adhyayam.

Vibhisana took the Vimana and started on his journey towards Lanka. By midday he reached the banks of the Chandra pushkarani tank. He placed the Vimana on the banks of the river Kaveri. He had his bath in the pushkarani and performed the mid day pooja (uchi kala pooja) to the Namperumal. At the same time, Dharma varma heard that Sriranga Vimana had come to the banks of the river Kaveri. He and his people, as also the rishis in and around the area, rushed to the place, in order to have a dharshan of the Lord. All of them requested Vibhisana to stay on in the same place for some more time so that a greater number of people could have the "dharshan" of the Lord. Vibhisana hesitated as he wanted to carry the Vimana and the Lord to Srilanka and perform Brahmotsavam in his kingdom. Dharma Varma then offered to give all the necessary assistance to conduct the Brahmotsavam in the same place on the banks of the river Kaveri. Accordingly, the utsavam was celebrated. When Vibhisana tried to lift the Ranga vimana and resume his journey to Srilanka, to his astonishment, he found that he could not lift the vimana as it had got fixed on the banks of the river Kaveri itself! Lord Ranganatha then

told Vibhisana that much earlier. He had promised the Chola King, Dharmavarma, that He would settle down on the banks of the river Kaveri and hence He would have to continue to stay on in that place. He requested Vibhisana to return to his place. But He assured Vibhisana that He would be lying down in such a manner that He would always have His eyes towards Lanka. He also assured Vibhisana that at the end of Swetavarahakalpa he would attain moksha. Vibhisana was heart broken that after all he could not install the idol gifted by Rama in his kingdom. But he had to accept the inevitable. This in brief is the story of Sri Ranga Vimana.

The temple in its present shape and size is the result of various expansions and improvements made by the kings over the years. Starting with Tirumangai Alvar to the Ahobila mutt Jeer, numerous additions, and renovations have been done and the result is a magnificent temple with seven prakaras and twenty one towers covering a vast area.

KILI CHOLA STORY:

It is believed that the temple established by Dharmavarma in course of time got covered up by sand from the river Kaveri and was forgotten. After many aeons, one of the descendants of Dharmavarma, a Chola King, during his hunting expedition, reached the sand dune area. He was tired. He therefore sat down under a tree for some time. He heard a parrot sitting on one of the branches of the tree recite as follows:

कावेरी विरजा सेयम् पैकुण्ठम् रङ्गमंदिरम्
 स वासुदेवो रङ्गेशः प्रत्यक्षं परमं पदम् ।
 विमानम् प्रणवाकारं वेदक्षङ्गम् महाभुदम्
 श्रीरङ्गंशायी भगवान् प्रणवार्थं प्रकाशकः ॥

The meaning of the above sloka is as follows:-

River Kaveri is the same as the river Viraja in Vaikunta. The Srirangam temple is Vaikunta itself, the Lord of Arangam.

is none but Vasudeva, God's eternal abode is here perceptibly.

The vimana is in the form of the Pranava (Om), Its four towers are marvelously like the four vedas and Sri Rangasayee is expounding the import of the pranava.

The Chola King who heard this, was amazed and curious. Even on return to his palace, the words of the parrot were ringing in his ears. That night, in his dream, Lord Ranganatha Himself appeared and told him that His "Vimana" was under the sand at the very place where the parrot had sung. Immediately, the king went to that place and reverentially removed the sand and he saw the Vimana underneath the sand dune. He then renovated the old temple and re-installed the Lord in all His glory. As it was the parrot's words that led to the discovery of the Lord by the Chola king, he constructed a "kili mantapam" (i.e. parrot collonade) near the Perumal sannidhi. This is to be seen even today and the King himself came to be known as Kili Cholan (i.e. parrot Chola). Of course, here history and mythology part ways. History has no record of any Chola king by name Kili Cholan! However, the koil olugu records this incident. It is believed that the story of a reported sand storm covering the original temple is an attempt to bridge the gulf in the yugas between the coming of the Ranga Vimana to Bhooloka and today.

THE TEMPLE AND MOHAMEDAN INVASIONS:-

History records that between the 12th and the 16th centuries, Muslims raided the Hindu temples in

South India, very many times. Srirangam temple was also one of such temples ravaged by successive Muslim invaders. Many of the acharyas, the sages, the seers and the common people had to make a lot of sacrifices in order to protect the 'utsava murthi', the processional idol, endearingly called Namperumal. The 'koil olugu' recognises clearly two Mohammedan invasions of Srirangam. On each occasion, the utsavar viz. Azhagia Manavalan was removed from the temple for safe keeping. It is believed that during the first sack of the temple, a Nawab at Delhi invaded Thondai Mandalam and Chola Mandalam. The marauders entered Srirangam temple through the northern gateway of the third enclosure. There is an interesting story regarding the removal and the restoration of the utsava vigraham. It is said that a woman of Karambanur (near Srirangam) had the habit of taking her meals only after worshipping the God at Srirangam. When the idol was removed by the Mohamedans, she is reported to have followed the army upto Delhi and entered the Sultan's palace in disguise. There she found, that the daughter of the Sultan had taken a fancy for the idol of Lord Ranganatha and was keeping it all the time by her side. The woman returned to Srirangam, informed the people of the place ("stalattars") of the incident and earned for herself the name of "Pin senra Valli" i.e. the person who dutifully followed the God. The 'stalattars' therefore decided to bury the image of Sriranga Nachiar in the Temple beneath a 'bilva' tree near Her shrine. They closed the shrines in the temple and went to Delhi as suggested by Pin Senra Valli. They pleased the Sultan with their songs and dances and got in return the idol which they desired from the Sultan. But the Sultan did not bargain for the reaction of his own daughter who had by then developed a great love for the image. Unable to be separated from the idol, the daughter of the Sultan, a Muslim lady, made her father permit her to follow the idol. In the meantime, the temple servants who got the idol from the Badshah dispersed, so as to confuse the army which may follow them. Three

of them belonging to the Kodavar community, an uncle, the brother-in-law and a nephew were entrusted with the sacred idol. They went to Thiruvengadam hill and hid themselves with the idol in a lonely cave in the midst of the thick jungles. The Mohamedan party accompanied by the Sultani thus missed them. They reached Srirangam. But the idol had not reached Srirangam. Unable to bear the pangs of separation from her favourite idol, the Sultani is said to have died in Srirangam. This devotee of Lord Ranganatha, though belonging to a different faith, is duly honoured even today. Her shrine is to be seen in the northwestern corner of Arjuna mantapam. Even today, her association with Namperumal is celebrated and some of the strange customs followed in the temple bear a distinct stamp of the practice of the Muslims. She is worshipped as Bibi Nachiar. The image of the princess is painted on the wall and the daily offering at this shrine is wheat bread!

Let us now turn to the story connected with the Mohamedan invasion of the temple. In the meantime, at Srirangam, as the original idol had not yet returned, new idols were installed and consecrated. A fresh icon of the Nachiar was also made as people forgot about the original image of the Goddess buried beneath the bilva tree outside Her shrine. The three kodavas who had hidden in the Thiruvengadam hills continued to perform the usual poojas to the idol. They were in exile for 59-1/2 years. Old age took the toll of the lives of the uncle and the brother-in-law. The nephew had become an old man of 80. One day, two hunters found this old man with an idol in a cave. The old man told them about the story of the idol and requested them to take him back to Srirangam. The old kodavar thus came to Srirangam. But as nearly sixty years had elapsed, the inhabitants of Srirangam had forgotten about the loss of the original image. They thought that the poor kodava had lost his senses. However, mysteriously, the moment the original idol of Lord Ranganatha reached the temple precincts, the image of

Sriranga Nachiar hidden beneath the bilva tree became visible. The "parijanas" were surprised at this exposure of the image underneath the bilva tree. They felt instinctively that perhaps the idol which the kodava brought had something to do with this divine revelation. They requested the King, Rajendra Chola, to sort out the mystery. The Chola king wanted to test the veracity of the story mentioned by the Kodava. He collected the old residents of Srirangam. One such was a 93 year old washerman who, in his young days, used to wash the clothes which adorned the Lord. He remembered the Mohammedan invasion. The King wanted him to look at the idol brought by the Kodava and say whether this was the original idol. The washerman said that he would be able to identify the idol provided Thirumanjanam was offered to the idol and the theertham squeezed out of the wet cloth of both the Perumals i.e. the original idol and the latter idol, was given to him to drink. Accordingly, a Thirumanjanam was performed. The sacred water was given to the washerman for drinking for giving his opinion. On drinking the theertham from the wet cloth of the idol brought by the kodava, the washerman burst out with joy and said 'It is He, our Perumal' (Nam Perumal). The king was curious to know how he could arrive at this conclusion. The washerman then explained that in earlier days when he was washing the clothes of the original idol, as a sacred duty, he used to drink the holy water squeezed out of the cloth worn by God. He said that he had therefore no doubt that the idol brought by the Kodava was the original idol. Accordingly, the original image of the Perumal and the image of the Nachiar which was dug out from underneath the bilva tree were re-installed.

It must be stated that there is no historical evidence of the existence of King Rajendra Chola, who conducted this litmus test for establishing the identity of the idol! The reign of the last of the Cholas, Rajendra III, came to an end in 1279 A.D., and it is not

historically possible to accept that there was a Chola king in 1311 A.D. There is also no epigraphical evidence to support this story. Whatever may be the historical truth of this story, the existence of the shrine of Bibi Nachiar or Tulukka Nachiar as she is popularly known is a proof of the fact that Srirangam temple was ravaged by the Mohammedans at one point of time. What is more, the 'koil olugu' records the washerman incident. Besides, a Telugu folk song, called "Suratani Kalyanam" also records the story of devotion of the Muslim princess. The sack of Srirangam by the Mohammedans and their carrying away of the idol of Ranganatha is referred to in all the Vaishnavite hagiologies, Guru parampara prapann-amrutham and the Telugu hagiology viz., Acharya Sukthi Mukthavali. All these stand testimony to this story. These incidents are also referred to while describing the lives of Lokacharya and Vedanthadesika. Therefore we have to believe that perhaps historical evidence will be discovered in the future to corroborate this mythology.

There was also a second invasion of this temple by Mohamedans. This second invasion is also mentioned in the 'koil olugu'. At that time the idol is believed to have been removed and hidden in the Tirupati Hills. It is believed that the Vijayanagara generals, during the time of the reign of Bukka and Harihara Raya discovered the idols and brought them back to Srirangam. There are some who believe that the two accounts in 'koil olugu' of the two invasions of Srirangam are perhaps one and the same and that the stories may be overlapping. May be the first invasion was when the original image was taken by the Mohamedans to Delhi. The second invasion perhaps resulted in the new image being taken by Pillai Lokacharya and others from Srirangam to Tirupati. Perhaps, both these idols were kept safe at different points of time in the thick jungles at the foot of the Tirupati hills. May be the Vijayanagara generals discovered both these images and the original idol was identified by the old washerman

in the manner already described. However, it appears that Srirangam suffered twice once in 1310-11 A.D. and another time in 1323-24 A.D. due to Mohammedan invasions. It is said that the final restoration of worship in the temple was effected in 1371 A.D. by the generals of the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar.

During the Mohamedan occupation of Srirangam in 1323-24, another interesting event occurred. This is also reported in the "koil olugu". It is said that a Mohamedan chief took up his residence just opposite the sanctum sanctorum of the temple near the Azhagia Manavalan Thirumantapam. From there, he terrorised the villages around Srirangam. He also used to cause a lot of trouble to the devotees who came to worship the Lord. The Mohamedan general took a fancy for one of the temple courtesans. She tried her best to dissuade him and his other Mohamedan colleagues from desecrating the temple. But the Mohamedan continued in his evil ways. The temple courtesan was much annoyed. She decided to teach a lesson to him. When the Muslim chief asked her to show the Lord to him, she persuaded him to climb up the temple tower along with her, under the pretext of showing him the image of Paravasudeva, in one of the temple tower niches on the eastern gopuram. As he bent to look at the niche, she pushed him down. Worried by this act of hers and fearing retribution from the other Mohamedan invaders, she jumped down from the tower. The temple servants rushed to the Perumal and appealed to Him to save her. She prayed to God to give her "moksha" and she also prayed that whenever any one of her tribe died, the fire needed for the cremation should be fetched from the temple kitchen and that a certain quantity of rice from the temple store should be offered to them and that temple garlands and "parivattam" worn by the Lord should be given to them. It is said that for a long time, as long as the institution of the courtesans (Devadasis) lasted, these privileges were extended to them.

THE STORY OF GODA DEVI AND LORD RANGANATHA:

Goda Devi is believed to be an incarnation of Bhodevi, one of the divine consorts of Lord Vishnu. She is also known as Andal. She is an Ayonija. She was found as a baby one day by Vishnu chittar (Peri-alwar) in his thulasi (basil leaf) garden in Srivilliputtur in Ramnad District. Vishnu chittar brought her up with the same affection as he would have brought up a child of his. In course of time, this girl developed a deep attachment to Lord Ranganatha. The story of Andal is too well known to need repetition. To recapitulate, it is said that Vishnu chittar used to take a thulasi (basil leaf) garland to the Perumal Vata patra Sayee in Srivilliputtur everyday. His foster daughter used to bedeck herself with the garland and then send it to Lord. Of course, this was without the knowledge of the father until one day he discovered it by sheer accident. He reprimanded her for that act of sacrilege. But that night Perumal appeared in his dream and told him that he liked only the garland which was worn first by Andal! In course of time, Andal told her father that she intends marrying only Lord Ranganatha. The Lord appeared in a dream of Vishnu chittar and asked him to bring her to Srirangam. She was bedecked like a bride and taken from Srivilliputtur to Srirangam in a palanquin. When Andal reached the sanctum sanctorum, she merged with the Lord and disappeared. There is a shrine for Andal in the precincts of this temple near the southern entrance.

THE STORY OF TIRUPPAN ALWAR:

Like Andal, this saint was also not born in the normal manner. He was discovered by a Harijan in a flower garden on the banks of the Kaveri river near Woraiyur town. The foster father brought him up with affection. Even from a young age, the child showed unusual traits. All the time he was singing the praise of

Lord Ranganatha. However, he could never enter the precincts of the temple as he was a Harijan. But this little boy always used to go to the banks of the river Kaveri and with his face towards the temple, meditate and sing the praise of the Lord. One day, when as usual he was lost in deep devotion, Lokasaranga Mahamuni, who was a priest in the temple of Lord Ranganatha came to collect water from the river for the sacred bath of the "moolavar". He asked the Harijan to move away from his path. As the boy was lost in devotion, the priest threw a stone at him to draw his attention so as to ask him to move away from his path. The stone hit him on the forehead and there was slight bleeding. But Panan did not at all mind this humiliation and on the other hand he felt that he had sinned by standing in the path of a great priest taking water for the holy bath of his favourite God! On his return to the sanctum the priest saw that the idol of the Lord was shedding drops of blood from the very spot where the stone had hit Panan. He realised the sin. What is more, that night the Lord appeared in the dream of the priest and told the priest to bring Panan to the temple. As the priest carried Panan on his shoulders, the devotee Panan came to be known as Munivahana i.e. one who was carried on the shoulder of a muni (saint). When Panan reached the sanctum sanctorum, what he saw and experienced in the divine presence poured forth in the form of ecstatic verses. He spontaneously composed a garland of ten verses praising the Lord from His feet upwards. This garland of verses is known as Amalan Adipiran. This Panan was none other than Tiruppan Alvar. The last verse of this sage says that the eyes which have seen the beauty of the Lord would not like to see anything else. Accordingly, Panan completed the song and merged with the Lord and could not be seen by mortals around. There is a shrine for Tiruppan Alvar in the temple precincts as a constant reminder of this saint who, along with Andal, had the unique glory of attaining "moksha" and merging with the Lord in the temple itself.

ATHYAYANOTSAVAM AND RECITATION OF TIRUVOIMOZHI:

Yet another story connected with this temple is regarding recitation of Tiruvoimoli. Once upon a time, during a grand Karthigai festival, the Perumal and His two consorts had their holy bath (Thirumanjanam) and were dressed fittingly for the occasion. At that time, Thirumangai Alvar recited the prabandams like Thirunedunthandagam in the presence of the God. The God is said to have listened to this recitation with keen interest and was so pleased with the divine melody of the composition and the recitation, that He asked the Alvar to choose a boon. Thirumangai Alvar immediately prayed that the Lord should hear Thiruvoimoli, the word of Sadagopan, recited along with the Vedas on the Ekadasi day in the bright half of the month of Margazhi during the Athyayanotsavam festival. The Perumal was delighted and granted Thiruvoimoli a place of equality with the Vedas. Even today, in the month of Margali, the Divya prabandham is sung along with the Vedas.

There is yet another small story linked with this incident. It is said that after having heard the Divya prabandam, the God felt that the throat of Thirumangai Alvar must be paining, as the warrior saint had sung the lines continuously for a long time. The God therefore ordered a temple priest standing nearby to smear the oil left over after the divine bath on to the neck of the warrior saint, Thirumangai Alvar! Thirumangai Alvar also built a 100 pillared mantapam where an annual athyayanotsavam festival could be celebrated. It is also said that once when the Perumal was unable to enjoy the annual ceremonial bath, He commanded his retinue to bathe Thirumangai mannan himself. As such, since that time, virtually the hero of the Athyayanotsavam festival is Thirumangai mannan himself. All these stories have a ring of reality and therefore of acceptability and bear witness to the fact

that long ago, God resided at this place and was a participant in the day-to-day incidents in the lives of the people of that area.

Another story connected with the history of this temple concerns the great Vaishnavite seer and philosopher, Nampillai who was conducting a kalakshepam (religious discourse) along with his team of musicians. Perumal Himself came out of the garbagriham (sanctum sanctorum) and was intently listening to the vyakyana (commentary) given by Nampillai. At that time, a temple servant by name Pichai whose duty it was to top up the oil in the Tiruvilakku i.e. holy lamp and keep the light eternally burning saw the Lord sitting outside and hence casually ordered Him to get back into the garbagriham. Even today, the place where the Lord was standing and was ordered to move in by Pichai is shown to the pilgrims.

PERIA TIRUNAL AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE:

Sri Ranga Nachiar, the consort of Lord Ranganatha has a separate shrine dedicated to her in the temple precincts. All the festivals for the consort are conducted within the precincts of Her shrine as She is considered to be a very devout Hindu wife to whom Her home is her entire world. In the month of Panguni, when the star Uthiram appears, the utsavamurthi (precessional deity) of Lord Ranganatha i.e. Namperumal is brought to the shrine of the Goddess, the God and Goddess are seated on one and the same throne and the festival celebrated. This festival occurs once a year. On one such festival, Ramanuja, the great Vaishnavite Acharya is said to have recited his Saranagathigadya at the feet of the divine couple and sought Their blessings for the welfare of the world. It is believed that even as Saranagathigadya was being recited, the Goddess granted the wish of Ramanuja and promised salvation not only to him but also to all those linked with him for all subsequent generations. This boon granted to

the great saint is referred to by Sri Vedanta Desikar in the 22nd sloka of Nyasa Tilaka. Even today, every year, on the Panguni Uthiram day, when this great festival is celebrated, the festival is known as Peria Tirunal (big festival) as on this occasion, long ago, the Goddess assured salvation and mukthi to entire generations who are connected with saint Ramanuja. On this day, the Gadyatraya of Saint Ramanuja is recited by the temple priests in the presence of the divine couple seated on a throne in the mantapam, near the shrine of the Goddess.

ARCHITECTURAL HIGHLIGHTS:

This temple is one of the architectural masterpieces truly representing the best in the Dravidian style of architecture. There are some who say that it is a unique example of the best type of temple described in the "silpa sastras". Vaikanasa agama classifies the temples into various types. A temple of Vishnu which has only one enclosure and contains the images of Vishnu, Sri Bootha, Mahaboortha, Garuda, Chakra, Dwaja and Shanka is classified as Class C3 temple or Adhamadhamama. A class C2 temple which is known as Adhama madhyama temple will, in addition, have a few more deities like vimana palas and loka palas. A Vishnu temple which has got a second enclosure which, in addition to the images mentioned above, has those of Havi Rakshaka, Pushpa rakshaka and Bali rakshaka belongs to the CC1 class or Adhamottama. A temple which has a third enclosure with images in it belongs to the B3 class and is known as Madhaya madhama temple. A temple having a fourth prakaram with some more images gets classified as B2 class or Madhyama madhyama. The addition of a few more images of Jaya, Vijaya, Sapta, Matrikas etc. pushes the temple up to class B1 or Madya mottama. A fifth enclosure along with some more images gets classified as A3 category or Utamadhamama. The addition of the successive enclosure takes it to class A2 or Uthama madhyama. A temple

with seven enclosures as at Srirangam is the ideal temple which belongs to the A1 class and is known as an Uthamottama temple. Sri Ranganatha temple at Srirangam is said to be the only temple belonging to the Uthamottama class. No wonder therefore that even the United Nations Organisation viz. UNESCO has selected Srirangam as the first temple in India to be given assistance.

SCULPTURES

The sculptures in the temple provide a great feast to the eye. The subsidiary columns on the gopurams (temple towers) as also on the columned pillars in the various mantapams in the temple contain a plethora of intricate and fine sculptures. To illustrate, the Sesha-giri Rayar mantapam has a number of carved pillars with the figures of rearing horses beautifully carved with an eye to detail. The hind leg of the rearing horse is seen resting on the back of the pedestal. The trunk of the horse lies diagonally across the pillar. A defeated lion is shown beneath the forelegs of the horse and the victorious prince or the warrior is shown seated on the back of the horse. It appears as if the rider is pulling hard at the reins to bring it almost to a vertical position. The horse is furious and bares its teeth while the rider holds aloft a sword in his hand to strike. The head of the lion, that of the horse, etc., have all been carved realistically. The beauty of these famous horse brackets has been immortalised by Percy Brown, an enthusiast of Indian Architecture (Hindu & Buddhist periods) who says "they are executed in a technique so emphatic as to be not like stone but hardened steel".

OIL PAINTINGS:

The temple has also got numerous oil paintings. The paintings in the first prakaram (vimana pradakshina) clearly illustrate the origin of this temple as mentioned in mythology. Various incidents starting with God lying down in Tiruparkadal, His vimanam being carried on the head of Vibhishana to the banks

of the Kaveri river etc., are depicted through these paintings. At the bottom of each of these paintings, the details and significance of each incident is written in Telugu. It is believed that these paintings are nearly 3000 years old. A confirmation of the mythological origin of the temple can be seen also in the pillared mantapam near the shrine of Lord Krsna where a sculpture depicting Vibhishana carrying Sriranga vimanam on his head can be seen.

INSCRIPTIONS:

The temple has nearly 400 inscriptions - both in copper plates and on stones. These are reported in detail in the Annual Epigraphical Reports and also in the volumes titled "South Indian Inscriptions". To refer briefly to some of the interesting inscriptions:

The earliest inscription of this temple ¹ relates to the 17th year of the Chola King Parantaka I. It refers to a gift of 30 gold pieces for lighting a permanent lamp, 40 pons for buying camphor, one pon for cotton wick and in addition a silver lamp-stand was gifted to the temple. A similar inscription relating to the 15th year of Kulotunga I records a grant of 50 kalanju of gold for recitation of Tirupallieichi and Tiruvoimozhi by five nimantakaras of the temple.² Another inscription relating to the same king refers to the organisational details introduced by Ramanuja to control the administration of the temple. An inscription of the reign of Kulotunga III refers to the attempts made by the king to settle the boundary dispute between Srirangam and Jambukeswara Temples consequent upon the floods in the Coleroon eroding the lands belonging to these two temples. ³

¹ Annual Epigraphical Reports 72 of 1892.

² Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy Inscription 61 of 1892.

³ Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy Inscription 113 of 1938-39 Part II Para 23.

Let us now turn to some of the inscriptions relating to the reign of the Pandya Kings. An interesting inscription⁴ relates to the reign of Jatavarman Sundara Pandya I (1251-68). It is in Sanskrit. It says that he built the shrines of Narasimha, Viswaksena and covered with gold plates the vimana of the main shrine. He is also reported to have gifted a garland of emeralds, a crown with precious stones embedded on it, a golden image of Adishesha, a pearl garland, a gold car, garments of gold for the Moolavar, a simhasana of gold and a gilded image of Garuda etc. Apparently, his munificence to the temple was very high.

There are inscriptions relating to the Hoysala period. One such relates to the 16th year of Somesvara.⁵ It records the gift of a garden by one of the queens who is said to have purchased 20 kulis of land for 3000 kassus for this purpose. Another interesting inscription⁶ relates to the year 1257 when an Arogyasala was reportedly set up in the 3rd Prakara of the temple by one Singana Dandanayaka. Its running was entrusted to Garudavahana Pandita!

There is one interesting inscription which refers to setting up of an agraharam by name Ravivarman Chaturvedi mangalam in Srirangam by a Kerala ruler viz. Ravivarman Kulasekhara. It also says that the King provided for annual payment of 100 panas each to 50 learned men.

Let us now turn to the inscriptions relating to the period of the Vijayanagara rulers. There is one inscription which refers to the restoration and reconstruction of the Srirangam Temple in 1371 when the

⁴ 18 Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy Inscription 45 of 1891.

⁵ 19 Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy Inscription 45 of 1891.

⁶ 20 Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy Inscription 45 of 1891.

idols of the Lord and Sridevi & Bhudevi were brought from Triupati and reinstalled⁷. Another inscription⁸ says that during the reign of Devaraya II (1422-46) one Chakraya gifted a gold dish, a gold pedestal for the Goddess, a gold lampstand, a gold kalasa, a pearl garment (Muthangi) and a gold platter each costing about 1000 kalanjus of gold. A few inscriptions⁹ of Krishnadevaraya's time refer to gifts of villages to temple. The King is said to have visited the temple in 1516 and on that occasion gifted 5 villages towards the up-keep of the temple. Later in 1526 he is said to have gold plated the doors of the Mukhamantapa.¹⁰

There are inscriptions relating to the period of Nayaks of Madurai. An inscription dated 1583 refers to the period of Veerappa Nayak¹¹ (1572-95). It refers to endowment of money for feeding Srivaishnavas in the Ramanuja Kutam in Srirangam. Two other inscriptions (1659-82) refer to the construction of Ashtabhuja Gopalakrishna Shrine by one Chinna Bommayya Nayudu of Madurai and gift of one village for the maintenance of the shrine.¹² There are other inscriptions which refer to grants of villages/lands for maintenance of Ramanuja Kootam etc.

The constraints of space necessarily make it difficult to refer to many more interesting inscriptions. Those who are interested in depth in inscriptions and

⁷ Epigraphia India VI page 322

⁸ Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy Inscription 50 of 1938-39.

⁹ Epigraphic India XVIII pp 160-62. Copper Plate No.23 of 1905-06.

¹⁰ Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy inscription 98 of 1938-39 and 120 of 1937-38.

¹¹ Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy inscription 91 of 1936-37.

¹² Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy inscription 102 and 104 of 1937-38 Part II p.88.

copper plates found in the temple are requested to read the koil olugu of the temple.

JEWELS OF THE TEMPLE:

The temple jewels are very valuable. A detailed and appreciative description of these jewels can be read in detail in Ind.Art 113. Suffice it to say here that perhaps the Lords at Tirupati and Srirangam vie with each other so far as the number of jewels, ornaments, costly clothes possessed by them are concerned!

Amongst the gifts of historical importance that should be recorded here is the gift of a gold plate presented by the Prince of Wales when he visited South India in 1875.

It is believed that the celebrated orloff diamond which was the chief ornament in the Imperial Sceptre of the Czar was once one of the eyes of the idol at Srirangam and it is said to have been stolen by a French deserter in the 18th century.

Hymnology:

A few Pasurams with their meaning is given below:

1. Poigai Alwar: Mudhal Thiruvandadhi Sixth pasuram

ஒன்றும் மறந்தறியேன் ஒதநீர் வண்ணின நான்
இன்று மறப்பேனா ? ஏழைகான் - ஆன்று
சுருவரங்கத்துன் டெடுத்து கைதொழுதேன் கண்டேன்
திருவரங்க மேயான் திசை

Meaning:

Even when I was in the womb of the Lotus flower and was not yet an enlightened soul, with my minds eye I came to know about the great qualities of Lord Ranganatha and I raised my hands in salutation to

Him; I can never forget even for a moment, that Lord, who has the same enchanting colour as the blue sea;

Ye fools! when I did not forget Him even when I was in the womb, how is it you think that I will forget Him now when I am a more emancipated, enlightened soul?

(Poigai Alwar was born in a lotus flower in a tank in Thiruvehkaa near Kanchi).

2. Boothath Alvar:

Second Thiruvandhadhi, 28th Verse

மனத்துள்ளான் வேங்கைத்தான் மாகடலான் மற்றும்
நினைப்பரிய நீளரங்கத் துள்ளான் எனைப்பலரும்
தேவாதி தேவனெனப் படுவான் முன்னொடுநான்
மாவாய்ப் பிளந்த மகன்

Meaning:

The Lord who is known as Devadideva to innumerable of His devotees;

The Lord who is seen in the reclining posture in Thiruparkadal;

The Supreme Lord;

The Lord who in His Krishnavatar killed the demon Kesi

The Lord who resides at Thiruvengadam and Sri-rangam (Even when we think of these two places, a certain feeling of inexplicable serene peace descends)

That Lord has now made my mind as His permanent abode.

3. Pei Alwar:

Third Thiruvandadhi Pasuram 62

விண்ணகரம் வெஃகா விரிதிரைநீர் வேங்கடம்
மண்ணகரம் மாமாட வேளுக்கை .. மண்ணகத்தே
தேன் குடத்தை தேனார் திருவரங்கம் தென்கோட்டி.
தன் குடங்கை நீரேற்றான் தாழ்வு.

Meaning:

Lord Narayana who in His Vamana avatar stretched out

His hand seeking a gift of land that could be covered by

His three steps,

That Lord resides among other places

at Thiruvenkadam filled with plentiful water resources;

at beautiful Thiru Kudanthai

at Srirangam filled with sweet smelling luscious groves;

at Thirukoshtiyur;

at Oppiliappan Sannidhi in Thiruvinnagaram;

at Sonnavannam seida Perumal shrine in Thiruvehka

at Azhagiya Singar shrine in Thiruvelukkai

4. Thirumazhisai Alvar:

Nanmugan Thiruvandathi Pasuram No.60

ஆட்பார்த்துழிதருவாய் கண்டு கொள்ளேன் நின்
காட்பார்த்துழிதருவேன் தன்மையை கேட்பார்க்கு
அரும் பொருளாய் நின்ற ஆங்கனே! உன்னை
விரும்புவதே விள்ளேன் மனம்

Meaning:

O! Lord you are beyond the comprehension of mere mortals;

But at the same time, you wander about seeking your devotees so as to help them to realise You. I for one, am wandering about seeking Your lotus feet. Bless me O Lord so that I, for ever seek none else but You and for ever think of none else but You.

5. Nammalvar:

Thiruvaimozhi - Seventh decad

கங்குலும் பகலும் கண்துயி வறியாள்
 கண்ணீர் கைகளால் இறைக்கும்
 சங்குசக்கரங்கள் என்று கை கூப்பும்
 தாமரைக் கண்ணென்றே தளரும்
 எங்கனே தரிக்கேள் உன்னை விட்டு என்னும்
 இருநீலம் கை துழாவிருக்கும்
 செங்கயல் பாய்நீர்த் திருவரங்கத்தாய்
 இவள் திறத்து என் செய்கின்றயே ?

(This is a pasuram where the mother is asking God as to what are His intentions towards her daughter Parankusa Nayaki. Parankusa Nayaki is the Alwar himself who portrays the role of a love lorn lady who loves the Lord to distraction).

Meaning:

O Lord! my daughter Parankusa Nayaki has not had a wink of sleep for several days and nights. She weeps so copiously at the separation, that the tears that flow from her eyes have to be baled out! Suddenly in ecstasy she folds her palms in salutation and cries out aloud

"Look! There is the sankhu (conch) and chakram (disc) (God's weapons)".

She is lost in contemplation of Your bewitching lotus eyes. She cries out aloud

"How can I live without you"?

Suddenly she bends and starts searching for something on the ground as if she has lost something very precious. O Lord of Thiruvaramangudi, which is surrounded by river Kaveri where the fishes gambol, please tell me what You propose to do with her? What are Your intentions?

(Note: Here, through this pasuram, the Alvar tries to convey that while it is great to forget about oneself and be lost in thinking about God, yet it is better still if God thinks of us!)

6. Kulasekhara Alvar:

Perumal Tirumozhi - First Tirumozhi Pasuram
No.8

கோலார்ந்த நெடுஞ்சார்ங்கம் கூனற் சங்கம்
கொலையாழி கொடுத்தண்டு கொற்ற வொள்வாள்
காலார்ந்த கதிக் கருடனென்னும் வென்றிக்
கடும் பறவை இவையனைத்தும் புறங்கூழ் காப்பச்
சேலார்ந்த நெடுங்குழனி சோலை சூழ்ந்த
திருவரங்கத் தரவணையில் பள்ளி கொள்ளும்
மாலோனைக் கண்டு இன்பக் கலவி யெய்தி
வல்வினையேன் என்று கொலோ வாழும் நாளே

Meaning:

The Lord is resting on His serpent couch (Adise-sha) at Srirangam, which is filled with lush green fields and thick groves. He is well protected on all sides by the beautiful bow Sarangam, the white conch Panchajanyam, by the disc (chakram) which can destroy all enemies, by Kaum odaki the mace, by the sharp sword Nandakam and above all by the divine bird Garuda who has the capacity to fly as fast as the wind;

That God has unbounded affection towards His devotees;

Please tell me when will that day dawn
when I will attain His holy feet and become one with
Him and attain supreme unadulterated bliss?

7. Peria Alvar:

2nd decad Seventh Thirumozhi - Pasuram 8

மோலிகனவனோடு தோழமை கொள்ளவும் வல்லாய்
சாமாறு குலனை நீ யெண்ணிச் சேகரத்தால் தலை கொண்டாய்

ஆமாற்றியும் பிரானோ அணியரங்கத்தே டெத்தாய்
ஏமாற்றம் என்னைத் தவிர்த்தாய் இருவாட்சிப் பூச்சூட்ட வாராய்

Meaning:

O God you are capable of making friends even
with that arrogant Sreemalikan;
Under the pretext of teaching him to use Your
disc(chakra)
You made him chop off his own head!
You are omniscient' You are the master of time -
past, present and future;
You know the fate of each one of us;
Lord! You are residing at Srirangam;

I have brought a beautiful garland of your
favourite flowers viz. Iruvatshi jasmine. Please come
near me so that I could adorn You with this scented
garland.

8. Andal:

Nachiar Thirumozhi - 11th Thirumozhi - Pasuram 9

கண்ணாலம் கோடித்துக் கன்னி தன்னைக் கைப்பிடிப்பான்
திண்ணூர்த் திருத்த சிசுபாலன் தேசுழித்து
அண்ணாத்திருக்கவே ஆங்கவனைக் கைப்பிடித்த
பெண்ணாளன் பேணும் ஊர் அரங்கமே

Meaning:

O Lord! Sisupalan had fianlised all the arrange-
ments for his marriage with Rukmini. At the last
minute, You disgraced and humbled Sisupala and
carried away Rukmini and married her.

You are the sure saviour of all women and the
city of your preference is Thiruvarangam alone.

9. Tondaradipodi Alvar:

Thirumalai Pasuram No.2

பச்சைமா மலைபோல் மேனி பவளவாய் சுமலர் செங்கண்
அக்கதா அமரரேறே ஆயத்தம் கொழந்தே என்னும்

இச்சைவ தவிர யான் போய் இத்திரலோகம் ஆனும்
அச்சைவ பெற்றிடும் வேண்டேன் அங்கமா தருளானே

Meaning:

O Lord Ranganatha even if I were to be offered suzerainty over Indra loka, I would decline that offer. I would always prefer to stay in Srirangam, chant Your divine names and derive unalloyed bliss in enjoying the sight of Your wide lotus-like red-hued eyes; I would like to sing Your praise as the Lord of all Lords, as the gem of the Idayarkulam (cow herds) as the person who never lets down those who repose absolute faith in You; I would like to be lost in admiration of Your majestic body which has the ethereal beauty of an enchanting emerald coloured mountain.

10. Thiruppan Alwar: Amalanadipiran 9th pasuram:

ஆலமா மரத்தின் இலைமேல் ஒரு பாலகனாய்
ஆலமேழு முண்டான் அங்கத் தரவினன்னயான்
கோலமா மணியாரமும் முத்துத்தாமழும் முடிவில்லதோர்எழில்
நீலமேனி ஐயோ நிறை கொண்டது என் தெஞ்சினையே.

Meaning:

Lord Ranganatha is none other than the Lord who, during the great deluge (pralaya) took the form of a child and swallowed all the seven worlds, kept them safe in His stomach, lay down calmly on a banyan leaf that was floating in the midst of the turbulent waters.

My heart is enslaved, captivated and lost in admiration at the incomparable beauty of that blue hued Lord, wearing rows and rows of pearls and the beautiful kausthuba garland.

11. Thirumangai Alvar:

Peria Thirumozhi Vth Decad - 8th Thirumozhi last pasuram:

ஏழை ஏதலன் கீழ்மகன் என்னாது
 இரங்கி, மற்றவர்க்கு இன்னருள் சிரந்து.
 மாயை மாள் மடநோக்கி உன் தோழி,
 உம்பி எம்பி என்று ஒழிந்திலை, உகந்து
 தோழன் நீ எனக்கு இங்கொழி என்ற
 சொற்கள் வந்து அடியேன் மனத்து இருந்திட
 ஆழிவண்ண நின்னடியினை அடைந்தேன்
 அணி பொழில் திருவரங்கத்தம்மாளே

Meaning:

Oh Lord Ranganatha Your body is ocean hued; You are residing at Srirangam which is full of beautiful groves; Out of the largeness of your heart, You accepted the Tribal chieftain Guhan as your bosom friend and did not bother about the fact that he was a hunter a person of low birth, with very little knowledge. Yet you went to the extent of telling him that he could regard your brother Lakshmanan as his brother and that he could regard your guileless wife Seetha devi with eyes like those of a doe, as his friend. These sweet words of yours are etched indelibly in my heart. I sincerely pray that like Guhan, I should also receive Your munificent grace. That is my only prayer. I seek solace at Your divine feet and surrender myself at Your lotus feet.

Amalanadipiran:

Tirupannalvar is the one Alvar who enjoyed and lost himself in the ecstasy of describing the enchanting form of Lord Raṅganatha's from His lotus feet upwards. He described Him in just ten verses starting with the Lotus feet, His raiment i.e. Pithambara, His navel, His waist band, His throat, His red mouth, His lotus eyes and His whole body. Finally the Alvar rhetorically queries that the eyes which saw his sweet favourite can they see anything else? With that significant statement the Alvar merged with the Lord having seen what alone was worth seeing.

Amalanadipiran is the Ten verse composition of Tiruppan Alvar. It is the shortest and 17th in the chronological order of the 24 Prabandhas. It derives its name from the opening words of the first verse viz. Amalan. Tiruppan Alvar was brought up by a family of wandering minstrels in Uraiyur (Trichy Dt). He is said to be the amsavatharam - i.e. partial incarnation of Srivatsa the divine gem adorning the Lord's chest. Sri Vendanta Desikan wrote a commentary on the 10 verses of Tiruppan Alvar. It is known as Muni-vahana Bhogam and Anubhava Parivaham - i.e. experience of supreme ecstatic enjoyment. Periyavachan Pillai known as Vyakyana Chakravarthi has also paid glowing tributes to the excellence of this composition. What is unique is that in that entire 10 verses not once does the Alvar mention his name. He calls himself as "adiyen" i.e. your slave.

Sri Vedanta Desikan in his Prabandhasaram also states that Amalanadipiran is a unique poem which is the very quintessence of innumerable vedantic texts. Such being its standing and importance in vaishnavite literature I feel it is very essential that while concluding this story of Srirangam I reproduce the Ten verses with their brief meaning as brought out by Dr. V.K.S.N Raghavan. ¹

Text and Translation of Panar's

Amalanadipiran

அமல னாதிபிரான் அடியார்க்கென்னை யாட்படுத்த
விமலன், விண்ணவர்கோன்விரை யார் பொழில் வேங்கடவன்
நிமலன், நிம்மலன் நீதி வானவன் நீள்மதிளரங்கத்தம்மாள்,

சுமல பாதம் வந் தென் கண்ணி னுள்ளன வொக்கின்றதே

¹ Dr. V.K.S.N. Raghavan "The Thiruppavai and the Amalanadipiran" published by Sri Visistadvaita Pracarini Sabha, Madras-4. PP 74-83.

Meaning:

He, the Lord Vishnu, is blemishless, the foremost God, and the resplendent One that has made me serve His ardent devotees; He, the Lord of nityasuris (celestial, eternal arch-angels), has taken his abode at the Venkatam hill surrounded by fragrant groves; He, the immaculate Lord, is the ever-pure, sacred God; (now I look at) Him who is the Overlord of supreme justful heaven (Vaikuntha and the divine God (Ranganatha) of Srirangam (girt with) long ramparts. (As I see Him) His sacred lotus feet enter into and become merged with my eyes”.

உவந்த உள்ளத்தனா யுலகமளந் தண்டமுற
நிவந்த நீள்முடியன் அன்று நேர்ந்த நிசாசரரை
கவர்ந்த வெங்கணைக் காகுந்தன் கடியார்பொழில்

அரங்கத்தம்மாள், அரைச்

சிவந்த ஆடையின்மேல், சென்ற தாமென சிந்தனையோ

Meaning:

Lord Ranganatha (Arangattu Amman) who has, with his heart full of pleasure, measured the worlds (earth and heaven) (in His descent as Trivikrama) shines with His tall and lofty crown; He, whose sharp and piercing arrows destroyed (devoured) the demons (night-wanderers) who came to fight with Him that day (i.e. in His descent as Rama), is the scion of the race of Kakutsa, He is the Lord of Srirangam full of (flowery and) fragrant gardens; now my mind becomes immersed in the Lord's reddish silk garment worn by Him around His waist”.

மந்தி பாய்வட வேங்கட மாமலை, வானவர்கள்
சந்தி செய்ய நின்று னரங்கத் தரவினனையான்
அந்தி போல்நிறத் தாடையும்தன் மேல்

அபணைப் படைத்த தோரெழில்

உந்தி மேலதன்றோ அடியேனுள்ளத் தின்றுயிரே.

Meaning:

The Lord, Ranganatha, who reclines on the serpent couch (Adisesa) in Srirangam, is the same Lord Vishnu (Srinivasa) who has stood in the North, at the great Venkatam hill, where monkeys jump (from one tree to another); Lord Srinivasa has stood there for the sake of the gods who come to worship Him; the sweet core (inner soul) of my heart rests on the twilight coloured garment of the Lord and on His beautiful navel, above it (the garment) - on the great navel that created the (four- faced) god Aja (Brahma)".

சுதரமா மதில் சூழ் இலங்கைக்கிறைவன் தலை பத்து
உதிரவோட்டிஓர் வெங்களை யுய்த்தவன் ஓத வண்ணன்
மதுரமா வண்டு பாட மாமயில் ஆடரங்கத்தம்மான், திருவயிற்
றுதரபந்தம், என்னுள்ளத்துள நின்றலாகின்றதே

Meaning:

The Lord of Srirangam (full of woods), where sweetly singing bees hum and great peacocks dance (happily), is the same as the Lord Srirama of (life-bestowing) ocean hue; Lord Rama vanquished Ravana, the king of Lanka which is surrounded by massive walls and square ramparts; after driving him out (once from the battlefield), Lord Rama later aimed an invincible sharp arrow at Ravana and made his ten heads fall down (simultaneously cut off); the waistband (of this Ranganatha), found on His beautiful belly, makes pleasant strolls within my heart".

பாரமாய பழவினை பற்றுத்து என்னைத்தன்
வாரமாக்கி வைத்தான் வைத்தன்றி யென்னும் புஞ்நதான்
கோர மாதவம் செய்தன்கொல் அறியேன் அரங்கத்தம்மான், திரு
வாரமார்வதன்றோ அடியேனை ஆட்கொண்டதே

Meaning:

The Lord of Srirangam (Ranganatha) has cut asunder all my burdensome old sins (ripe and heavy); He has now made me his (exclusive) servant; further,

He has also entered into (my heart); what a wonder! I do not know what severe and great penance I have done (to achieve such a great fortune of the Lord's immense grace over me); the Lord's chest, beautified by the Goddess Lakshmi and the great garland (Vaijayanti), indeed, has wholly captured and enslaved me"

துண்ட வெண்பிறையன் துயர் தீர்த்தவன, அஞ்சிறைய
வண்டு வாழ் பொழில் சூழ் அரங்கநகர் மேயவப்பன்,
அண்ட ரண்டபகி ரண்டத்தொரு மாநிலம்
எழுமால்வரா, முற்றும்
உண்ட கண்டம் கண்டரடி யேனை யுய்யக் கொண்டதே!

Meaning:

My master, Lord Ranganatha, has His abode in the holy city of Srirangam, surrounded by groves, wherein live the (swarms of) bees with fascinating wings; He is the One who has removed the sufferings of Lord Siva, with the crescent white moon on his head (when a skull got stuck to Siva's hand); Lord Ranganatha's throat (in days of yore) consumed in full the whole universe comprising (i) many worlds, inhabited by Andar (a class of people), (ii) the higher worlds and the nether worlds, (iii) this massive and vast earth, and (iv) all the seven kulacalas (elu-malvarai, mountains balancing the earth); hearken! such a throat of the Lord indeed, has saved me".

செயி னார்குரி சங்கன லாழியர், நீள் வரை போல்
மெய்யனார், துளப விரையார் கமழ்நீள் முடியெய்ம்
ஐயனார், அணியரங்கனார் அரவின் அணைமிசை மேய
மாயனார்
செய்ய வாயையோ என்னைச் சிந்தை சுவர்ந்ததுவே

Meaning:

The Lord of the beautiful City, Srirangam, and the one supreme God, Mayan (beyond the ken of all the ordinary individual souls), who reclines on the serpent couch (திருவனந்தாழ்வான் or Adisesa) holds on His hands, the Sankha (Conch) with winding rekha

and the Cakra (ali, the Discus) that emits fiery sparks; His divine body (arca form) is like a lengthy mountain range; He is our father and saviour who has a very long crown smelling exuberantly with the fragrance of Tulasī leaves! His beautiful red mouth (with rosy lips), ayo! (ஐயோ) has captivated and enraptured my mind and heart”.

பரியனாகி வந்த அபுண னுடல்சேனட. அமரர்க்கு
அரிய ஆதிப் பிரான் அரங்கத்தமலன் முகத்து,
சுரியமாகிப் புடைபரந்து மிளிர்ந்து செவ்வரியோடி. நீண்டவப்
பெரிய வாய கண்கள் என்னைப் பேதைமை செய்தனவே

Meaning:

The blemishless Lord of Srirangam is the supreme Being (i.e. the foremost creator and benefactor), who made the advent as Narasimha and tore into shreds the massive body of the demon (Hiranyakasipu) that came (to assault Him); Lord Narasimha was (and also is) unapproachable and inaccessible to the gods (Brahma, Siva, Indra and others); in the face of Lord Ranganatha, there are those wide eyes, which are very much black, broad and extensive towards the sides, glittering (restless), with ruddy rekhas (lines) running (across), and very much lengthy; these eyes of the Lord have made me a fool (and I am stupefied)”.

ஆலமாமரத்திலைமேல் ஒரு பாலகனாய்
ஞாலமேழும் உண்டான் அரங்கத்தரவின் அணையான்,
கோல மாமணி யாரமும் முத்துத் தாமமும்
முடிவில்ல தோரெழில்
நீல மேனி யையோ நிறை கொண்டதென் நெஞ்சினையோ

Meaning:

The Lord Ranganatha, reclining on the serpent couch (Adisesa) in Srirangam, is the One who (long ago) having devoured the seven worlds, was (seen by sage Markandeya and found to be) (lying) on the leaf of a great banyan tree as (an exquisite) Child, incomparable; the Lord Ranganatha is adorned with beau-

tiful garlands studded with peerless gems and pearl-neklace; His holy body (area form) of blue diamond lustre is of enormous beauty and excellent complexion; such a divine body of God has, ayo (ஐயோ), outweighed my mind (i.e. the Lord, showing his whole body full of beauty, has taken away everything of me - mind, heart, and soul)".

கொண்டல் வண்ணனைக் கோவலனாய் வெண்ணெய
உண்ட வாயன், என்னுள்ளம் கவர்ந்தானை,
அண்டர் கோனணி யரங்கள் என்னமுதினைக்
கண்ட கண்கள், மற்றொன்றினைக் காணுவே

Meaning:

The Lord Ranganatha is the Overlord (supreme sovereign) of the whole world and all the people (residing there); Him - who is of the black colour of the clouds as well as of the nature of the clouds; who, as Lord Gopala (kavalan alias Krsna), ate butter with his mouth; who has stolen my mind and heart; and who is my immortal ambrosia - have my eyes looked at; (I swear) these eyes of mine, that have seen Him, will never see anything else".

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108 Tirupati Andadhi: Srirangam

சேர் வந்த வந்தித் திசை முகனால் அல்லாதென்
சோர் வந்த சொல்லிற் சுருங்குமோ . ஆர்வம்
ஒருவர் அங்கங்கு ஓயில் உகந்தவரை ஆள்வான்
திருவரங்கம் கோயில் சிறப்பு

Meaning:

Lord Ranganatha is one who accepts as His loving devotees all those who have given up worldly goods and thoughts.

Brahma who was born out of a lotus emerging from the navel of the Lord and who has four faces, alone is fit to speak about the greatness of Srirangam.

How can I with my small vocabulary ever hope to adequately and fittingly be able to sing the glory of Srirangam? The greatness of Srirangam is beyond my repertoire of words.

MUSICOLOGY:

Music is one form of devotion and the Trinity of carnatic music have composed songs in praise of Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam. Just as an illustration two songs composed by Saint Thyagaraja on the Lord Sriranganatha with their meaning given below:

- 1) Chootamurare Sudathulara Rangapathin
Seethapathi Poojyudata Sringara Sekharudata
- 2) Sariganchu Saluvata, Chowgatala Pogulata
Paruvampu Prtayamata, Paramathmudata Ranganani
- 3) Mukhanirjitha Chandrudata, Muddumataladunata
Sukhamosagi Brochunata, Sundarangudata Ranganani
- 4) Agamasancharudata Akhjila Jagatpala Kudata
Tyagaraja Sannuthudata Tharunutara Rangapathini

Meaning:

Come along, let us see Rangapati. They say He was worshipped by Sri Rama; He is the repository of all charms; He wears a costly Jari bordered shawl and beautiful ear ornaments; He is of prime age; and above all He is Paramatma. His face defies the moon in beauty; He speaks very sweetly; He gives people happiness and protects them. He is a loveable personality. He permeates all agamas and vedas; He rules the whole universe.

(Refer the spiritual Heritage of Tyagaraja by C.Ramanujachari and Dr.V.Raghavan. R.K.Math; Mylapore, Madras-4)

2. "Raju Vedale".

- 1) Raju Vedalae Choothamu raree; kasthuri rangaraju vedalae
- 2) Te'Jinaekki Samastha raju lodigamu Jeya Tejarillu navarathnapoo divya bhoshanamu lidi ranga
- 3) Kaveri Theeramunanu Pavanamagu Rangapurini Sri Velayu Chitra Vedhilo Vegranga Raga Sevanu gani surulu virulachae premanu pooginchaga Bhavinchu Thyagaraju Padaga Vaibhoga ranga

Meaning:

Come, let us enjoy the sight. Sriranga Raja be-decked with shining and precious ornaments and attended by princes on horse back, has come out in procession in chitra vithi of Rangapuri, made holy by the Kaveri and made fit as the abode of Lakshmi. Devas enjoy the seva and worship with devotion and as Tyagaraja sings, the procession moves.

* * *

THIRUKKANNAPURAM

Thirukkannapuram is one of the forty divyadesams in Chola Nadu. It is located between Nagapattinam and Nannilam in Thanjavur Revenue district. The moolavar (main deity) is known as Neelamega Perumal and the utsavar (processional deity) is known as Sowriraja Perumal. The Goddess is known as Kannapuramayaki. The God is facing east and is seen in a standing posture.

Thirukkannapuram is one among the five Krishnaranya sthalams. The other four are Thirukkannangudi, Thirukkannamangai, Thirukapisthalam and Thirukovilur. This place is also known as Krishnapuram as Lord Krishna resides in this place. It is also known as Saptha punya kshetrams as it has got seven important holy attributes. They are relating to sthalam (place), vanam (forest), nadhi (river), kadal (ocean), nagaram (city), puskarani (holy tank), vimanam (tower on top of sanctum sanctorum). The place is significant because it is Krsna sthalam i.e. the place where Lord Krsna is residing. The forest is holy as it is Dandakaranyam or Dandaka vanam. The river which adds to the holiness of this place is Kaveri. The sea is the Kizhai kadal i.e. the sea near Thirumalaya-pattinam. The city is Kannapura nagar i.e. Lord Krsna's city. The tank is Nithiya pushkarani and the vimanam which adds to the holiness is known as Uthpalavathaka vimanam.

This place is also known as Ashtakshara mahamanthra siddhi sthalam (i.e. place where the efficacy of the Ashtakshara Mahamanthram is proved). It is believed that God taught Ashtakshara ma-

hamantram i.e. "Om Namo Narayana" mantram to Thirumangai Alwar in this place. At Srirangam Thiruvengadam, Srimushnam, Vanamamalai, Salagramam, Pushkaram, Badrikasramam, Naimisaranyam God is seen as only one letter of the Ashtakshara mantram. But in Thirukkannapuram God is known as Sarvakshara mantra swaroopi i.e. He is the full embodiment of the ashtakshara mantram as a whole - all the eight letters.

Srirangam is regarded as the God's heavenly abode while Thirukkannapuram is His residence in this world. It is said that during His Ramavatharam (Reincarnation as Lord Rama), Vibhishana prayed to God to allow him to have the pleasure of seeing the beauty of His gait. At that time, God told him that on every Amavasai day i.e. New moon day, Vibhishana could go to Thirukkannapuram which is His kezh vedu i.e. his home on earth as against Mel vedu ie Vaikuntam and enjoy the beauty of His gait. Even today, on every new moon day, the Lord at Thirukkannapuram is taken round the temple with a peculiar gait which is almost like a majestic dance. A number of devotees throng the temple town to behold this beautiful sight.

This temple town is bounded on the east by Garuda parvatham (the Garuda mountain), which is partly submerged in the ocean. On the south of this punniya kshetram lies Kakkai Kazhani. It is a holy river by name Kakatheerthavathi. On the west is Thirucheraï which is also one of the divya desams. On the north flows, the Kaveri river which is the most holy of the rivers to the south of the Vindiyas.

Yet another unique feature of this temple is that every year when the Brahmotsavam takes place, in the month of Vaikasi, on the seventh day in the morning for a few hours (oru muhurtha kalam), Perumal gives "dharshan" to His devotees as Lord Siva when He is annointed with the holy ash i.e vibhoothi.

The temple is a very old temple covering an area of 316 feet from east to west and 210 feet from south to north. The Rajagopuram is 95' tall. Originally, the temple was said to have had seven prakaras. But one of the Chola kings destroyed all the prakaras except one. The moolavar (main deity) is seen along with Sri Devi, Bhodevi, Padmini and Andal. He is holding in His hand a prayoga chakram (a disc which is held aloft as if it is about to be hurled). Instead of the usual Abhaya Hasta, God is seen with a Varada Hastam. In the sanctum sanctorum, to the right of the Lord is the idol of Dandaka munivar and to the left is the idol of Pakshi Raja i.e. Garuda. The Perumal is said to be a Sarvanga Sundaran (beautiful in all limbs) so much so even Kama the God of love stands no comparison with Him! Kulasekhara Alvar says in his pasuram "Karuvarai Pol Ninraṇae Kannapurathāṇae" - the Lord of Kannapuram is seen standing like a dark mountain (Anjanai Malai). Some others interpret it to say that the Lord is seen in a standing posture in the Garbagriha i.e. Sanctum Sanctorum and is willing to satisfy every wish of his devotees even as the mother gives everything to the child in the womb i.e. Garbam!

The tower on top of garbagriha is known as Uthpalavadaka vimanam. It is interesting to note that the vimanam at Thirukkannangudi as well as Thirukanna mangai also bear the same name.

UTHPALAVADAKA VIMANA - STORY:-

It is believed that long ago, there was a king by name Vasu. He was a friend of Lord Indra and hence had the privilege and ability to fly all over the sky. He was also known as Uparisaran. Once, Devendra told Vasu that as he was going to earth to perform a yaga he should guard Devalokam also. Even as Indra was performing the yaga, the rishis noticed a number of inauspicious portents like fluttering of the right eye etc. They were worried that the yaga may not be a

success. At about the same time, a messenger from the heavens came with a message that the demons had almost usurped the kingdom in heaven. Vasu left for Devaloka and promised Indra that he would keep his word and restore devaloka to the devas. A stiff fight took place. As the going was becoming tough, Vasu decided to let loose Narayana asthram. All the demons were annihilated. He stayed on in Devaloka for some time, re-established confidence among the devas and then decided to return to earth. While coming down to earth in the Indira vimanam he felt thirsty and hungry. He stopped the vimanam near a tank with crystal clear water. On the banks, there was a luscious tender food crop (thinai kathir) a crop almost like a maize from which flour is made. Vasu decided to quench his thirst as well as satisfy his hunger. As he was about to cut the tender shoots a young boy emerged from a nearby hut and said that the tender shoots should not be cut and threatened the king with dire consequences if he persisted in his act of cutting the crop. This infuriated Vasu who immediately lifted his bow. But at that time, he noticed to his amazement that the boy also had a bow and arrow in his hand. The arrows let loose by Vasu did not at all hurt the boy. Instead, they merely broke to pieces on touching on effulgent pendant like stone worn by the boy in a garland around his neck. Seeing the arrows let loose by the mighty king treated with scant respect by the youth, the king was intrigued, and decided to let loose the ultimate weapon in his armoury viz. Narayana asthram. As he closed his eye in deep meditation before letting loose this asthram, in his mind's eye, he saw a rich verdant field with full grown crop fit to be harvested. In the middle, there was a hut. Suddenly, he felt that he was drained of all his power. He was perplexed at this. He wondered why even as he was trying to concentrate on Narayana, he was only able to see this young boy. He put his bow down, lifted his hands above his head and prostrated at the feet of the boy, as he felt that the boy was none other than Narayana himself. He was

convinced that the bow wielded by the boy was none other than the "Sarngam" and that the boy with eyes bright and glowing like beautiful lotus petals was Perumal Himself. The boy ordered Vasu to get up and with an enchanting, bewitching, beatific smile asked him to go and have his bath in the pushkarani. Then he promised to show him His true form. On his return after the bath, he saw that what he thought was tender crop was nothing but numerous maharishis in deep meditation. In their midst, there was a big uthpalavadaka vimanam. In the middle of that vimanam was seated Sowriraja Perumal with a shining face which equalled the lustre shed by 1000 Sun Gods. The serene beatific smile, the wide eyes, the thulasimala (garland of basil leaves) worn round his neck were all captivating. God said it was understandable that, he, a warrior, when thwarted, itched to fight. The Lord said that that was a peaceful place occupied by venerable rishis in deep meditation. He said that the severe penance undertaken by these rishis had virtually deprived their bodies of all flesh. "Palam" means flesh. As the bodies of the rishis had become emaciated due to continuous meditation and least attention to human wants etc., they had become uthpalar (without flesh). God said that He was guarding them seated in that vimana. The vimanam itself was therefore known as Uthpalavadaka vimanam. The king sought to be forgiven and asked the Lord for a boon. Vasu then sought God's permission to build a beautiful city in the very same place. God granted his wish.

King Vasu built this city and the temple, which is Thirukkannapuram, with the help of the divine architect Visvakarma.

THE THEERTHAMS (HOLY TANKS) IN THIRUKKANNAPURAM:-

There are four theerthams or holy tanks in this place. The biggest and the most holy of these tanks is

Nithya pushkarani. This is about 450' long and 415' broad. This is in front of the temple. Waters from all the holy rivers in this world are said to be in this tank. Thus, the efficacy of the waters in this tank is multiplied manifold. A bath in this tank is therefore considered as very holy and will rid one of all sins. Another holy tank is Ananthapilam. It is to the west of the vimanam. The third theertham is Bhoothavatam. The fourth one is Mukthakaram. This is to the north of the vimanam. Let us now briefly turn to the story connected with each of these theerthams:

NITHYA PUSHKARINI:-

Long ago, in Pandya Nadu at a place known as Manalurpuram, there was a good king by name Chithasiravas. His wife was Suseela. He had three sons, Puru, Veeran, Sushenan and one daughter Uthamai. He was very fond of his daughter. One day, during Utharayanam period, along with his people, he went for a bath in the Thamaraparani river. When he and his daughter got into the river, suddenly, the river completely dried up and became a vast expanse of sand. The king and the daughter disappeared from sight, apparently sucked in by the sand. The sons as well as the wife and his subjects who had gathered there, saw all this happening in front of their eye, but could only helplessly cry. Puru, the son decided to stay on the banks of the river till his father and sister returned. At that time, one minister by name Suneethi recalled that on the previous day, early in the morning, he had a strange dream wherein he saw a hefty woman drag the king and the princess from their thrones by a rope tied round their neck. After having pulled them down, the lady disappeared. But neither the king nor the princess had any bodily injuries because of this rough handling. On the other hand, the king had a beautiful smile on his face and the minister said that in the dream he saw the king climb back to the throne. The minister was therefore convinced that though they were

all at present shocked by the mysterious disappearance of the king and the princess, surely shortly they would all be overjoyed by their equally mysterious re-appearance. He therefore requested the queen and the other two sons to return to the palace.

Puru, the eldest son continued his vigil on the banks of the river Thambaraparani. Suddenly, a brahmin appeared before him. He said that he also belonged to Manalur, that his father was Madhava Sarma and that his mother was one Somavalli. He said his name was Valahan. He said that as soon as he was born, his mother passed away and immediately after the thread ceremony (upanayanam) was performed, his father also passed away. He was adopted by a very kind person who taught him the vedas and also the Ashtakshara mahamantram. He advised him to go to Thirukkannapuram and repeat this ashtakshara mantram in order to get the full benefit of repeating that holy mantram. Accordingly, he went to Thirukkannapuram and did japa of the ashtakshara mantram for a long time. Perumal then blessed him and gave him the ability to fly in the sky. He said that he used that quality to visit the many kshetras as also the different holy rivers. He met many holy rishis. He went to the banks of the river Thambraparani. He wanted to have a bath on the new moon day at Ramasethu and he said that to his consternation, he found that the Sethu theertham had completely dried up. He was curious to know the reasons for this unusual incident. He therefore went and met Agasthiya maharishi. He asked the rishi the reason for all the holy rivers going dry and disappearing from the surface of earth. Agasthier repeated an incident which he had seen when he was in Brahmaloaka. On that day, Brahma was surrounded by a number of Devas. Suddenly all the holy rivers who had assumed a human form surrounded Brahma. They represented to Him that they were very worried, as all the sinners in the world had their bath in the holy rivers and got

rid of their sins, but the rivers which purified the sinners were finding it difficult to bear the burden of the accumulated sins. They wanted Brahma to tell them a way out of this tricky situation so that by cleansing others, they would not get polluted. Brahma advised them to go to Thirukkannapuram in Krishna kshetram in Krishnaranyam where His father stayed (Brahma was created out of the nabhi of Lord Narayana; as Sowriraja Perumal is Narayana Himself, Brahma states that Sowriraja Perumal staying at Thirukkannapuram is His father). Brahma advised the holy rivers to have their bath in the holy tank known as Nithya pushkarani situated opposite Uthpalavadaka vimanam in Thirukkannapuram. The waters of the tank, He said, would cleanse all sins. He also added that while it is the practice that on days other than the eclipse days (grahanam), people should not have a bath during the night, but in the nithya pushkarani be it day or night or evening, one could have a bath and be rid of all sins. Brahma advised all the rivers to go to that place and after having a holy dip in that pushkarani, leave behind in that tank a little bit of themselves (an amsam) so that their holiness is also added on to the nithya pushkarani. Further, he added that every year during utharayanam (i.e. the time when Sun shifts from the southern to northern hemisphere) the river Goddesses should visit nithya pushkarani and have a dip in the holy waters to rid themselves of the accumulated sins of that year. Accordingly, the river Goddesses went to nithya pushkarani, had their holy dip and prayed to Lord Sowriraja Perumal. God advised the rivers to leave an amsam (a bit) of themselves in the pushkarani and go back to their places. As the waters of all the rivers are mingled in nithya pushkarani, it became even holier.

It is believed that Lord Sowriraja Perumal Himself detailed the benefits that will flow out of taking a bath in the holy tank. He said that people will be rid of their diseases as also all their worries. He said

that those who fast the previous day and keep awake the whole night repeating the words 'Nadaya Sowraye Namaha' and then have a bath in nithya pushkarini, repeating the twelve names of Kesava would be blessed with happiness. Those who without fail have a holy dip in the river on every New moon day for one full year will get rid of their sins. If they do it for two years, they will be blessed with progeny; for three years, they will be blessed with health; for four years, they will be blessed with fame; for five years, they will be blessed with prosperity; for six years, they will be blessed with plenty of riches and wealth; for seven years, they will be blessed with a mighty kingdom; for eight years, they will be rid of their ignorance and will be enlightened; for nine years, they will be taken to the kingdom of the Gods (Deva Rajyam); for ten years, they may even be given the post of Brähma; for eleven years, they will be able to attain moksha. Thus, having elaborated the good that will flow out of a dip in the holy nithya pushkarani, God advised all the river Goddesses to return to their respective places.

As all the rivers were at the shrine of the Lord, Agasthier said that he saw the king Chithasiravasu and the princess Uthamai also in the presence of God and that surely they will be returning to Thamaraparani and emerge out of the river bed in good health and in tact.

Having repeated this entire story, Perumal asked the prince Puru to be happy and await the return of his father and sister. This story highlights the greatness of nithya pushkarani.

BHOOTHAVATAM THEERTHAM:

There is an interesting story connected with this theertham. It is believed that a demon (bhootham) which emerged out of this theertham was used by God to liberate Moon God from a disease which was almost killing him. Chandran, son of Athri was cursed

by Daksha and as a result, he suffered from a dreaded disease known as Rajyakshama. Afflicted by this disease, the Moon God was becoming thinner and thinner. The king of the ocean, Samudra Raja prayed to Sowriraja Perumal to liberate the Moon God from this curse. The Lord entrusted this job to a demon who was standing next to him, to rid Chandran of the disease and bring him to Thirukkannapuram. The bhootham i.e. the demon accordingly caught hold of Rajyakshama and brought Chandra to the Lord. At that time, all the other diseases also followed the demon and wanted that the king of diseases viz. Rajyakshama should be let off. The bhootham then released Rajyakshama from his hold. But the Lord on seeing that Chandran was very happy, gifted the lilylike cool-faced moon to Lord Siva and Lord Siva decoarated His head with the moon. Hence it is that Lord Siva is also known as Chandrasekar. It is believed that this theertham was created by the bhootham (demon) and hence is known as Bhoothavata theertham! Whoever has a bath and a holy dip in this theertham will be protected against all diseases.

ANANTHAPILA THEERTHAM:

This theertham lies to the west of the Sowriraja Perumal temple. It is believed that Ananthan, the serpent king, would, along with his relatives, come through this theertham and worship the Lord. Hence this theertham is known as Ananthapila theertham. It is said that whoever has a dip in this holy theertham, will attain fame and prosperity.

MUKTHAKARAM

This theertham lies to the north of the Uthpalavadaka vimanam. It is believed that King Vasu was blessed with an ability to roam about all the three world viz. hell, earth and heaven. It is said that he used to come via this theertham and worship Sowriraja

Perumal. On the banks of this theertham, very many rishis did their penance. Thus, the waters of this tank have become holy and whosoever drinks this water is supposed to attain moksha.

THE STORY OF GARUDA PARVATHAM:

As stated earlier, one of the eastern boundries of this temple is a mountain, known as Garuda parvatham. It is partly submerged in the ocean. Garuda parvatham is the son of Himavan i.e. the Himalayan mountain. Once upon a time, Lord Indra was terrorising all the mountains by cutting and destroying their wings. Garuda parvatham was frightened that it would also lose its wings. Hence, to escape from Lord Indra and to save its wings it came and submerged itself in the sea to the east of Thirukkannapuram. The holy strength of the Krishna kshetram as also the divine grace of the Lord Sowriraja Perumal, prevented the mountain from being harmed by Indra. But Indra was patiently waiting on the sea shore with the weapon Vajra in his hand so that if the mountain took refuge in some other place, he would follow it and cut its wings. At that time, Peria Thiruvadi i.e. Garudalwar was returning with amrith (nectar) in his hand, to fulfil the promise that he gave to his mother Kadru and to release her and himself from bondage. The fact that he had taken the amrith (nectar) after defeating the Lord of Devas is said to have made the bird feel that there was none to equal him in his prowess. As he was roaming about, he reached Krishnaranyam and did not show sufficient respect to the guards at that place. The warriors in Vishnu sena therefore caught hold of his shadow and pulled him down. Peria Thiruvadai fell on Garuda parvatham which was immersed in the ocean. As soon as he saw Peria Thiruvadi alighting on the Garuda Parvatham, Indra, who was standing on the shore, got frightened and forgot about his task of cutting the wings of the Garuda parvatham and instead returned to heaven. Meantime, Peria Thiruvadi realised

that Sowriraja Perumal, the Lord of this kshetram was able to humble him. He decided to do penance and seek the blessing of that powerful Lord. God was pleased with his deep penance and appeared before him. The Lord told him that those who do not pay due respect to the guardians of this kshetra are usually killed. It was his good luck that instead of killing him, the warriors only drained him of his strength and dropped him on the Garuda mountin. The Lord advised him henceforth to pay the respect due to the warriors of this place and also to the kshetram itself. The Lord asked him to choose any boon. The bird desired that the Lord should take him as His vahanam and wanted to be given the privilege of staying by the side of the Lord every moment of his existence. He also said that the Garuda parvatham which allowed him to land on it when he was dragged from the heavens may also be released from the fear of Indra. Perumal blessed Garuda parvatham and said that no evil will befall him thereafter and that he will continue to be one of the boundaries of this holy kshetram. The Lord also added that the sea had got polluted due to Brammahatya dosha of Indra. Therefore, it will be cleaned and allowed to stay behind the mountain range. Thus, since that day, Peria Thiruvadi became the vahanam of Sowriraja Perumal and the mountain became the boundary on the east.

Even today, during Masi makam (full moon day in the month of Masi), the God seated on Garuda Bird goes to the sea shore so as to give dharshan to the Garuda parvatham. The fact that this festival is celebrated even today lends credence to the mythological story related earlier.

The name of the town on the sea shore is Thirumalairayan pattinam. It is 15 kms. away from Thirukkannapuram. When the God and His vahanam reaches that place, a number of fisher folk wait to receive the Lord. They address the Lord as "Mapillai"

i.e. son-in-law. They spread nets all along the routes and also as a canopy right through the route.

Yet another story connected with Garuda Parvatham relates to the God wearing near the wrist an ornament meant to adorn the shoulder. It is said that Garuda parvatham also was initiated to repeating the Ashtakshara mantram by Perumal. As the mountain did japa of this ashtakshara mantram, God was pleased and appeared before the mountain and asked that it may choose any boon. The mountain asked God to reveal to it the Form in which God was seen in Ramavatara when He killed the asura by name Vikatakshan. God obliged. The mountain was lost in raptures on seeing the beauty of that divine Form. The mountain slowly allowed its eyes to feast itself on the divine Form starting from the Lord's feet upwards. At that time, the mountain noticed that the ornament which should have been near the shoulder had slipped to the wrist. He therefore addressed the Lord and said "O! Lord, this is very curious. Why are you wearing at the wrist, a jewel which should adorn the shoulder? Is there any special reason for this?" The Lord replied that long ago, he had arranged for the marriage of Uthama, the daughter of the Pandiya king, Chithasiravasu with Sushankan, the son of a Chola King. At that time, Chithasiravasu, the Pandyan king gifted this shoulder anklet to the God. As the jewel had passed the divine wrist, the king said that the jewel looked very beautiful even when worn near the wrist and therefore asked the Lord to continue to wear it around the wrist. The Lord obliged the king and hence it is that even today we see the ornament which normally adorns the shoulder, is adorning the wrist of the God.

RELEASE OF LORD INDRA FROM BRAHMAHATHY DOSHAM:

It is said that once upon a time, Lord Indra killed Viswaroopa, the son of Dwashta. Dwashta therefore

got angry and created a demon by name Viruthiran. Seeing him grow in size Lord Indra got frightened and ran to the Perumal to seek His protection. Perumal asked him to be friendly with the demon and that in due course, He would protect him. In the meantime, the asura had got boons from the various Gods to the effect that he cannot be killed either by anything which is dry or anything which is wet; that he cannot be killed either on the ground or on the sky; that he cannot be killed either by any weapon dipped in poison nor by any rope. As time passed by, one day, it was a dusk i.e. neither day time or night. Indra saw Viruthiran, the demon standing alone on the sea shore. Indra decided that the time had come for him to kill the demon. He felt that the foam on the sea waves was neither completely dry nor completely wet. Similarly, as it was dusk, it was neither day time nor night time and as he was on the sea shore that it was neither earth nor the sky. He decided therefore to make a rope out of the foam and kill the demon. He repeated the Vishnu mantram and then killed the demon. Since that day the Brahmahathi started troubling Lord Indra. To escape from Brahmahathi, Indra came to Garuda Parvatham and started a deep penance.

In the meantime, in Devaloka, as the Devas did not have their king, Lord Indra, they were looking for a substitute king. Narada told them that in Bhooloka, there was a king by name Nahushan. He lived at Prayag. He was courageous, humble, simple and kind. One day in his kingdom a Maharishi by name Siyavanar had immersed himself in the river Ganga at Prayag and was in deep meditation. Unaware of the rishi who was seated on the river bed, some fishermen in that area cast their nets to catch fish. While dragging their nets along with the catch, they were surprised to see this rishi also in the net. They pulled him also to the shore. But they were terribly frightened and unnerved. They bowed down before him and asked for mercy. The rishi advised them to sell him also along with the catch

of fish and collect the price from the king. The fishermen acted accordingly. The king gave them lots of gold, precious stones, clothes and yet the rishi said it was not an adequate compensation to the fishermen. The king then emptied the coffers of the treasury and offered half of his kingdom; later he offered his entire kingdom. Even then the rishi said that still it was not enough and that he would not accept it. The king offered his own life. Even then, the rishi was not satisfied. The king was very sad. At that time, another maharishi by name Kavijathar came to that place. He told the king that he should gift a cow and only that will satisfy the rishi as a cow having all noble qualities only is equal to a brahmin. The king was overjoyed. He got a good cow and offered it to the fishermen. Siyavanar then came out of the net. The simple fisherfolk offered the cow back as a gift to the maharishi. The rishi was so pleased with this child like act of the fishermen. He blessed them and rid them of all their sins. Thus, they attained salvation. Siyavanar then turned to Nahushan, the king and told him that his act of selfless generosity would also not go unrecognised. He told him that very soon he would become Devendran i.e. Lord of Devaloka. This story was repeated by Narada to the Devas in Indraloka and he told them to go to Prayag and get Nahushan to rule over them.

While that was so, at Thirukkannapuram, Indra was continuing his penance at Garuda Parvatham in order to rid himself of Brahmahathy dosham. He was praying to Saranagatha vatsalan i.e. Sowriraja Perumal. One day, Sowriraja Perumal called Vasishta and other maharishis and requested them to conduct an Aswamedha yaga on the banks of the nithya pushkarini on behalf of Lord Indra so that all the sins could be wiped out. He also said that the warriors of Visvakse-nar would guard the horses which are let loose as a part of the aswamedha yaga. Accordingly, the aswamedha yaga was started. The horses returned after a victorious ride through many kingdoms. Meanwhile, a woman

was brought before Visvakṣenar. She was having an iron pestle in her hand. Her hair was unkempt. Her eyes were emitting fire. She had a huge stomach and a long head. She was wearing torn clothes and looked a despicable character. On enquiry, Visvakṣenar learnt that the woman was none other than Brahmahathy. She said she was haunting Lord Indra. As he had entered Krishna kshetram, she was not able to trouble him and she had lost all her power. She added that she was patiently waiting outside hoping that some day he would come out of this place and she would be able to annihilate him. She however felt that if, in the meantime, Indra successfully escaped, she would be failing in her mission in life! Visvakṣenar who heard this story wondered as to how to resolve this issue. He repeated this to Sowriraja Perumal. As per the directive of Perumal, Visvakṣenar offered to Brahmahathy that she may stay on the earth, mountain, trees, ocean, rivers as an alternative to haunting only one person viz. Indra. With the widening of her jurisdiction she was happy and disappeared from the scene. The maharishis who were performing the yaga concluded the yaga successfully and Lord Indra was brought to the yagasalai from the Garuda parvatham. Indrani, his wife was also brought from Devaloka. Sowriraja Perumal Himself is said to have sat in the "sadas" in order to ensure that the yagam was completed as per the prescribed principles. On the conclusion of the yaga, Perumal told Indra to return to Indraloka. Perumal added that when he met Nahushan who was acting as Indra, he should think of the Perumal. Only then Nahusha will offer the kingdom back to Indra and return to earth.

Lord Indra went to Indra lōkam. But on seeing Nahushan, he forgot the advice given by Sowriraja Perumal. Nahushan expelled Indra again from his own kingdom. Indra ran away to the Himalayan mountains and hid himself in the stalk of a lotus flower. At Devaloka, Nahushan lost his balance of mind and wanted to marry Indrani, the wife of Lord Indra. She left De-

valoka, came to Krishna kshetram and started a severe penance. On utharayanam day, she had a bath in nithya pushkarini and prayed to the Lord to forgive her husband. God asked her to fetch Indra. Meantime, He said that with His mohini sakthi, He would make Nahushan lose his balance and pull him down. Indrani, went to the place where Indra was hiding in the lotus stalk, conveyed to him the Lord's plan of action and requested him to come to Krishnaranyam kshetram and seek God's forgiveness. Indrani and Indra came back to Krishna kshetram. They had their bath in nithya pushkarini. At that time, they met Agasthya maharishi who was seated by the side of the pushkarani tank. The rishi told Indrani that meantime, Lord Vishnu with His maya sakthi had created a figure which looked like Indrani. Nahushan took it to be the real Indrani and fell in love with her. The maya form persuaded Nahushan to come and meet her. Nahushan set out in a palanquin borne by the rishis viz. Naradar, Parvathar, Asithar, Devalar, Gowthamar and Agastiar. As they were walking, Nahushan, blinded by his arrogance, is said to have prodded Agasthiar with his leg. Agasthiar cursed that Nahushan should be transformed into a snake. As he was falling down from the palanquin, he sought mercy from the rishis, who took pity on him and told him that after thousands of years, he would regain his position as Indra. Hearing this story from Agasthier, Indra and Indrani went into the sanctum sanctorum to offer their heartfelt thanks to the Lord. The devas from the Devaloka had also come to the banks of Nithyapushkarani. The divine dundubi (drum) was heard. All of them went into the sanctum sanctorum and prayed before the Lord seated under Uthpalavadaka vimanam. They were completely captivated by the divine beauty of the Lord. They felt convinced that the Lord was verily Sarvanga Sundaran i.e. a perfect beauty in every limb. They sang the praise of the Lord. The Lord blessed all of them and asked Indra to go back to Indra loka and continue to rule his kingdom with justice and fairness. Thus, it was that Sowriraja Perumal released Lord In-

dra from his brahmahathi dosha. This story is told in Padma puranam.

THE SLAYING OF VIKATAKSHAN THE DEMON:

The Lord here is also known as Bhayari i.e. one who gets rid of one's fears.

Long ago there was a demon by name Vikatakshan. He entered Krishnaranyam and used to take the form of different wild animals like lion, tiger, elephant etc. and troubled the rishis who were doing penance in that area. The rishis prayed to Sowriraja Perumal and sought His help in getting rid of this demon. Sowriraja Perumal who is a Bhaktharakshakan i.e. saviour of His devotees is also a Dustanigrahan i.e. destroyer of evil. He promised to help the rishis. The God took on the form of a hunter. He lifted His bow and arrows and started on His journey of destruction. The Lord's bhoothaganangal converted themselves into arrows. The Ashtasakthi took on the form of horses. Peria Thiruvadi i.e. Garuda bird also followed the Lord. Maya became a net. The various other Gods also became hunters in order to help the Lord. Sruthi and Smriti blessed the Lord. The asuras also prepared themselves for the war. The mighty battle started. Indra fought with Sataparva, Yama fought with Ugradhanus, and so did the rest. A pitched battle took place. Finding that his warriors were losing ground, Vikatakshan himself decided to enter the fray. He fought with Visvaksenar. Lord Sowriraja also joined. A number of demons were killed. Blood started flowing like a river. Vikatakshan got angry and decided to fight with Perumal Himself. He shot a number of arrows at the horse which was carrying the Lord. The Lord also returned a shower of arrows with His bow sarangam. The astras of Vikatakshan were totally ineffective. Vikatakshan then let loose a Brahmastram. The Perumal decided to use His disc against the Brahmastram. The disc had

tongues of flame leaping from it. The disc with its deafening noise never knew defeat. It always achieved the God's orders. In this case also, it annihilated the asura Vikatakshan. Peace reigned in the world again. The Maharishis in their gratitude called the God as Bhayari - Bhaya + ari, He who eliminates all fear. Even today the vigraham of Sowriraja Perumal is seen holding the prayoga chakra in one hand.

THE MANNER IN WHICH PERUMAL RELEASED KING VASU FROM A CURSE:

As stated earlier, Vasu was a king who had helped in building Thirukkannapuram. Having completed his job of putting up a number of mansions, the temple, the vahanas, adorning the Lord with jewels, costly clothing etc., he decided that it was time that he went back to his kingdom. He met the Perumal to take leave of only Him. Sowriraja Perumal told him that Vasu had erred in not taking leave of Visvaksenar as well. Because of this serious omission, God said that Vasu will be cursed by some brahmins at a future date and will be going to hell. He however asked Vasu not to worry. He said that the curse would have effect only after he had ruled for a very long time, earned a good name for himself as a ruler. Even when he went to hell God assured him that He would Himself come to help and protect him and give him moksha. Vasu was frightened. However, he took leave of God as well as Visvaksenar and sought his forgiveness. He went to the place where the aswamedha yāga was being performed by the rishis in order to rid Indra of his Brahmahathy dosha. He saw a number of animals tethered to be sacrificed at the yāga. Seeing the fright in the eyes of the animals, the rishis suggested that symbolically animals could be created out of flour and could be sacrificed for completing the yāga. It would serve the religious requirements and that the animals may be spared from being killed. But the Devas differed. They wanted the animals to be killed in fulfilment of the requirements prescribed for

performing a yaga. The Devas and the rishis were taking opposite stands. They looked at Vasu and asked him to arbitrate. Vasu was in a quandary. If he supported the Devas, the rishis would get angry and curse him. If he supported the rishis, the devas would get angry and kill him. He remembered the words of Perumal who said that one day he would be cursed by brahmins. He felt that God has promised him protection, even after the brahmin's cursed him, He had full faith in the word of God. He therefore supported the theory of the Devas, thus provoking the rishis to get angry with him and curse him. Events took place as anticipated by Vasu. The rishis cursed Vasu as he supported the Devas. The Devas tried to modify the curse by saying that Vasu would go to hell only after a long successful reign in the world. Many years passed. Vasu went to hell. The demons in hell found that all their weapons could not trouble Vasu. The moment they approached him, the weapons became impotent. The demons were struck by this peculiar phenomenon. They went to their teacher Sukracharya and asked for the reason for this strange phenomenon. Sukracharya told them that Vasu was a great Vishnu bhaktha and he was being protected by Vishnu kavacham even in hell. He advised them that the only way they could cause him trouble would be to make him forget Vishnu, then go near him and destroy him. The asuras took on the form of brahmins and approached Vasu. But Vasu saw in them only Vishnu and went on singing the great qualities of Vishnu. The asuras then tried to argue with the king about athiesm i.e. denial of God. They started speaking ill of the Lord and berated Vasu for worshipping Vishnu. They said that when amrutham came out of the ocean, the Lord did not follow the straight method of distributing it equally amongst the asuras and the devas; instead He took recourse to cheating the asuras by taking on the form of Mohini and depriving the demons. They further added that on a other occasion when the demons stole the Vedas, God took on the form of a boar and then res-

cued the vedas. Similarly, during Ramavatharam, as well as Krishnavataram, the Lord suffered a lot. They further added that in Krishnavataram, He tried to run away from death. But in the end, death overtook Him and He was killed by an arrow let loose by a hunter mistaking his red feet to be the body of an animal. The demons therefore queried as to what was the use of Vasu continuing to have implicit faith in such a weak person. Vasu only felt sorry on hearing these words. He continued to pray with renewed rigour to the Lord asking Him to change the mind of these worthless men. God was very pleased and in response to the prayer of Vasu, blessed the asuras and granted them mukthi and prevented them from troubling Vasu. God commanded Peria Thiruvadi i.e. Garudalwar to go to hell and bring Vasu to the heavens. Accordingly, the bird went to hell (pathalam) picked up Vasu, reached the banks of Mukthakara theertham and stopped for a few minutes. Sowriraja Perumal Himself went to the banks of the theertham, met Vasu, showed him His true form and asked him to choose any boon. Vasu prayed that God should appear before him again in His beautiful Form so that he would look at Him to his heart's content. The Lord obliged him. The theertham where the Lord gave dharshan to Vasu is therefore considered as very sacred as it also gave moksham to Vasu.

THE MARRIAGE OF SOWRIRAJA PERUMAL WITH PADMINI:-

Yet another interesting sthalapuramam of this temple is the wedding of the Perumal with Padmini. Once upon a time, a noble Chera king by name Mithran married Prabha, daughter of a Pandya king by name Dharmaranyan. They had a daughter by name Sundari. As she grew up, they were searching for a suitable groom for her. A priest told them that a prince belonging to the Surya vamsam by name Vasu was a suitable groom for this girl. Accordingly, the king got her married to

Vasu. Vasu was a just king who ruled the kingdom for a long time. But he did not have an heir. He consulted a priest by name Vasishtar. Vasishtar told him that in his earlier birth, during Kritayugam, Vasu had given a lot of trouble to a brahmain couple by name Suseelan and Sunirmala. As a result of that sin, he did not have children in this birth. However, he advised him to pray to Lord Narayana, perform aswamedha yagam followed by puthra kameshti yagam. On successful completion of all these prayers, he assured Vasu that he would be blessed with children. Accordingly, Vasu performed Aswamedha yaga and puthra kameshti yaga. As he was performing the puthra Kameshti yaga, from the holy fire, a beautiful figure emerged and gave him two flowers asking him to give them to his wife. The lady assured that in due course, she would give birth to two children - a daughter and a son. Having uttered those words, the beautiful form disappeared. Vasu took those flowrs, gave them to his wife. In due course, she conceived. They had a daughter and a son. The daughter was named Padmini. The son was known as Padmathan. The children grew up. Vasu started looking out for a groom for Padmini. She told him that she would marry none other than Sowriraja Perumal. Vasu prayed to God to fulfil the desire of his daughter. God accepted. Vasu asked his wife, daughter, the ministers, the people and the priest to come to Thirukkannapuram. He beautified the temple town. In the month of Vaikasi, on the full moon day, under Anuradha star on a Monday, Padmini who was none other than Goddess Lakshmi was duly married to Sowriraja Perumal. At that time, the Perumal initiated Vasu in Ashtakshara mahamantram. He assured Vasu that He would always be residing at Thirukkannapuram.

THE STORY OF MUNIYODHANA PONGAL IN THE TEMPLE:-

Everyday in the night (artha jamam) pongal (a

food prepared with rice, greengram and ghee) is offered to Sowriraja Perumal. It is believed that the Perumal ate this pongal with obvious relish at the behest of one of His devotees. This offering is known as Muniyodhanam. Odhanam means cooked food. Muni is the name of a devotee of the Lord who offered this first to the Lord. Even today the same offering is prepared and is known by the name of the first devotee and called Muniyodharai or Muniyodhanam. The full name of the devotee Muni is Muniatharaiyan Pillai. He was one of the chieftains of a Chola King. He had the responsibility of collecting the taxes on behalf of the king in the area entrusted to him. He had great devotion towards Sowriraja Perumal. He had a big mansion built for himself in Thirukkannapuram and lived there. He used to give many gifts to the temple and undertook a lot of work on behalf of the temple. He was in love with a woman by name Viragadhibogam. At one time, a severe drought affected the kingdom. Muniatharaiyan diverted all the tax collections to feed the people in the area and also towards meeting the expenses for performing the poojas in the temple. The Chola king heard about this, got angry and imprisoned his chieftain. Viragadhibogam went to the temples and pleaded with Sowriraja Perumal to have her lover released. She virtually posed a challenge to God that if within five days, He did not arrange for the release of His true bhaktha Muniatharaiyar, she would immolate herself. Sowriraja Perumal then is reported to have appeared in the dream of the Chola king and asked him to release Muniatharaiyam as he had only diverted the funds for a noble cause. Accordingly, Muniatharaiyan was released by the king. Immediately, he went to the house of his lady-love Viragadhibogam and prevented her from immolating herself. She prepared a feed using 5 nashis (a measure) of rice along with 3 nazhis of greengram and 2 nazhis of ghee. The pongal that was prepared was almost like amrutham (nectar) for Muniatharaiyan who had been starved of good food in the prison. Before he put a morsel into his mouth, this true

devotee felt this run of the mill pongal was almost am-rutham - a food fit enough to be tested by his favourite God Sowriraja Perumal! But as it was almost post 10' clock in the night, he offered thi to his favourite deity through his minds eye as Manasika neivedhyam. The next day in the morning, the priest opened the doors of the sanctum sanctorum. He found that the beautiful body of the Perumal was covered with pongal and ghee was dripping. He was shocked; but he found that morsels of the pongal were dropped all over the place. He the morsels which were dropped outside the sanctum sanctorum, reached the house of Vigragadhibogam and the devotee Muniatharaiyar. He learnt what had happened the previous night. They were struck by the sousilya (loving condesension) and vatsalya (tender solicitude) and soulabhya (easy accessibility) of Sowriraja Perumal who had so lovingly accepted and obviously enjoyed the sincere offering made by his devotee even if the offering be something as unexciting as a mere rice preparation and offered mentally. As what was offered in a manasika manner was accepted so gladly by the Lord, it was decided that from that day onwards Perumal would every night be offered this neivedhyam i.e., pongal. Muniatharaiyan then and there gifted some land to the temple and decreed that everyday in the night at about 9 O' clock, Perumal would be offered this pongal neivedhyam. Thus, the pongal offered by Muniyodharaiyan long ago, is even today being offered to the Lord and distributed to the devotees who visit the temple in the night at 9 O' clock

To the north of the Perumal sannidhi, there are Dwarapalakas. To the north of these Dwarapalakas is the idol of Sowriraja Perumal. This is locally known as Maniam Sowri Perumal. Even today, the pongal is distributed to the devotees in front of this maniam Sowri Perumal's sannidhi.

THE REASON FOR BEING CALLED SOWRIRAJA PERUMAL:

Sowri in Tamil means a capillary adornment. The word Sowriraja Perumal literally translated would convey the meaning that God is having long hair. It is said that one day a priest by name Ranga bhattar promised to a Chola king to show the hair grown by the Perumal. Perumal was thus in a quandary as He had to uphold the rash promise given by His priest. The Lord is reported to have suddenly grown tresses when the Chola King came to verify. From that day, the Perumal was known as Sowriraja Perumal.

Goddess: To the right of the Perumal sannidhi (shrine) is the sannidhi of the Goddess. The name of the Goddess is Krishnapura Nayaki. The utsava murthi is known as Kannapura Nayaki. The garbagriha. Artha mandapam as well as the maha mandapam are all built of black stone.

Epigraphical highlights:

There are a number of interesting inscriptions relating to the period of Chola, Pandya and Pallava kings in this temple. Only a few of such inscriptions are mentioned below:

On the eastern wall of the second prakara of the Sowriraja Perumal temple, there is an inscription relating to the period of the Pallava king Perumingadeva. This records a sale of land by the headman of Kurudaiyadi in Thanjavore kurram.¹

There are a few inscriptions relating to the Pandya kings. To mention a few amongst them, on the northern wall of the first prakara of Sowriraja Perumal temple, there is an inscription relating to the period of the Pandya king Jatavarman Tribhuvana chakravartin

¹ 530 Appendix B ARIE 1922

Sundarapandya Deva. It registers a gift of land to the temple by three private individuals of Boolokamanicka Chaturvedimangalam.² There is another relating to the period of Tribhuvana Chakravartin Koner-inmaikondan Pandya king. This records a tax free gift of land to the temple of Narayana Perumal at Kallikar-richeri alias Virapandyan pattinam to the temple.³ Another inscription relating to the period of the same king registers a gift by a certain Somidevar for providing offerings and worship during the Virapandyan sandi service. This service was called after the King. This was a festival celebrated at the Sowriraja Perumal temple.⁴ Another inscription relating to the period of the same king records the gift of 400 kasus for burning a lamp in the temple by a certain Nallur Arulala Bhattan.⁵ Another inscription relating to the reign of Maravarman Tribhuvana Chakravartin Kulasekhara deva. This registers the sale of land by the temple to a certain Arulalapperumal Tambiran belonging to Pattanapakkam. He presented it back to the temple for converting it into a flower garden.⁶

Other inscription relating to the Pandya king Jatavarman Tribhuvana Chakravartin give an elaborate description of lands in several specified villages which were presented to the temple and to the brahmins.⁷ The other inscription relating to the period of the same king who is said to have conquered all countries refers to the setting up the image of the Ramanujamuni.⁸

Let us now turn to looking at a few of the inscriptions relating to the Vijayanagara dynasty. There

² 496 App. B ARIE 1922

³ 497 App. B ARIE 1922

⁴ 498 App. B ARIE 1922

⁵ 499 App. B ARIE 1922

⁶ 517 App. B ARIE 1922

⁷ 531 App. B ARIE 1922

⁸ 532 App. B ARIE 1922

is an inscription relating to the period of Vira Pratapa Mallikarjuna deva, the Vijayanagara king (S 1471). This records a gift of money and land by Kandadai Appanagar to this temple for meeting certain expenses connected with the car festival.⁹ Another four inscriptions relating to the period of Tribhuvana chakravartin Koneri mel kondan of the Vijayanagara dynasty refers to the gift of 30 velis of land in Kurugaiyadi and another 5 velis of land in Bhuvalekam free of all taxes for the maintenance of the Bhattars of Karavala Virachaturvedimangalam and for worship in the shrines of Bashyakara by one Narasingadeva who is styled as the Tiruvoimozhi Parikshai.¹⁰ The second inscription relating to this king records the gift of land for building a mandapa in the river Mudikondan Aru for the sacred bath of the God. The channel itself was apparently named after the king Bhuvaneka Vira Arui.¹¹ The third inscription refers to the gift of land for worship and meeting the expenditure towards repairs to the temple.¹² The fourth inscription of this Vijayanagara period records a tax free gift of land for a service in the temple called Kothandaraman sandi.¹³

There are a number of inscriptions relating to the Chola periods. Sri S.R. Balasubramanyam in his book, "Later Chola Temples" gives a fairly exhaustive account of these inscriptions. Besides, in the usual source for this material viz. the Annual Reports on Indian Epigraphy also there is a lot of light on the interesting gifts and donations made during the Chola period.

On a pillar in the northern verandah in the first prakara of the Sowriraja Perumal temple, there is an inscription relating to the period of the Chola king Rajakesarivarman. It refers to the gift of land for burning

⁹ 525 App. B ARIE 1922

¹⁰ 526 App. B ARIE 1922

¹¹ 527 App. B ARIE 1922

¹² 528 App. B ARIE 1922

¹³ 529 App. B ARIE 1922

a lamp in the temple.¹⁴ Another inscription relating to the period of the Chola king Rajarajadeva refers to the gift of 1000 kasus for a lamp by a certain lady of Idaiyarrukkudi.¹⁵ There is an interesting inscription relating to the Chola king Rajaraja III. It registers the lease of land in a street called Saveripperumal Perunderuvu for building shops and houses thereon for certain merchants with the stipulation that they should pay certain taxes on their goods to the temple. This order was issued in the presence of God Himself when He was seated with His consorts on the seat Nambikaliyan under the canopy of pearls called Ravna-antakan, in the Niravi mandapa. The leasing merchants were to engage themselves in the trade of gold and bell metal fabrications and they were allowed to fix for themselves the rate of tax to be paid to the temple. On the fifth day of the Kalyana utsavam in the month of Chittiri this lease was said to have been announced while the God was listening to the hymns of Satagopa.¹⁶ Yet another inscription relating to the period of the same king Rajarajadeva III records the gift of 70 velis of land in four villaes free of all taxes for worship and repairs in the temple.¹⁷

Another inscription relating to the period of Rajakesari varman alias Tribhuvana chakravartin Kulottunga cholan registers a gift of land lying uncultivated since the 20th year of the king's reign at Kakkaimangalam for worship and offerings to the God during the four ayanas of the year and during the three festival occasions in the month of Aipasi, Chittirai and Masi.¹⁸

Yet another inscription relating to the period of Parakesari varman alias Tribhuvana Chakravartin Vikrama Chola deva also registers a sale of land by

¹⁴ 494 App. B ARIE 1922

¹⁵ 500 App. B ARIE 1922

¹⁶ 503 App. B ARIE 1922

¹⁷ 504 App. B ARIE 1922

¹⁸ 501 App. B ARIE 1922

the temple trustees to a certain Kannalan on condition that he should bring it under cultivation and to utilise the produce for providing certain offerings in the temple after paying the dues on the land.¹⁹

Another inscription relating to the period of Tribhuvana Chakravartin Kulottuna Choladeva who is said to have taken Mathura ad Eelam (Ceylon) registers an agreement made among the Valanjiya community of Southern Ceylon that they would collect two kasus from each individual living at Tirunirruchoola puram and other places for maintaining a person to look after the affairs of the matha called Suchaker Karunakaravirar matham where Sri Vaishnavas were to be fed on all festival occasions.²⁰

There is a record relating to the 10th year of Vikrama chola which refers to a certain Kakkanayakan of Velur who made a gift of tax free land at Palli Tiruvarurkurram for growing red lotuses for use in the temple.²¹ Another inscription refers to the 10th year of the Vikrama Chola king. It refers to twenty families of weavers - 4 from each of the 5 specified villages who migrated to Tirukkanapuram for service in the temple in return for some privileges granted to them. This record is interesting as it refers to a community of weavers known as Ayogavas. Quoting a Sanskrit verse, it defines Utkrishta Ayogavar or Pattanava as weavers supplying cloth to the Gods, kings and people. It adds that an Ayogava was of a mixed caste born to a sudra male and a vysya female. It says that in the presence of the mahasabha consisting of 350 members, the merchants of 5 towns gave an undertaking to depute 4 weaver families each to settle down permanently at Thirukkannapuram and serve the Vishnu temple in consideration for being exemptd from all taxes. They were to supply cloth for the sacred banner of the temple

¹⁹ 502 App. B ARIE 1922

²⁰ 505 App. B ARIE 1922

²¹ 507 App. B ARIE 1922

and for other purposes during the Chithirai and Ippasi festivals each year and also to feed Sri Vaishnavas in a matha called Ayogaganavasalai.²²

In the 11th year of the Vikrama chola king, again, a brahmin of Tirumarugal made a gift of 20 kalanjus of gold 9.5 degrees fineness for burning daily a twilight lamp with ghee and to supply camphor both morning and evening., He also presented for the purpose a bronze lamp stand made in his own likeness. The gift was accepted on behalf of the temple by the Sri Vaishnavas of the village.²³ Also during Vikrama chola's days, a shrine for the vaishnavite saint Tirumangai Alvar was set up in the west street of the town by one Narayana Tadar and a gift of land was made as Archana boga.²⁴

Yet another interesting inscription relates to the period of the Chola king Tribhuvana chakravartin Rajarajadeva. It records the lease of house sites given to certain individuals in the streets around the temple of Saveripperumal at Thirukkannapuram, in return for the lease of the house site the lessees had to plant coconut palms in an allotted portion of the land from the yield of which coconut oil had to be extracted after the 6th year of their being planted and supplied for lamps to the temple. This illustrates how our ancestors not only thought of environment controlled through tree plantation but also thought of looking it up with end use of the products raised.²⁵

There are numerous other inscriptions like the one which refer to gift of lands for maintaining a flower garden by a resident for supplying flowers for worship.²⁶ Another records the gift of land for offering in the tem-

²² 508 App. B ARIE 1922

²³ 509 App. B ARIE 1922

²⁴ 510 App. B ARIE 1922

²⁵ 512 App. B ARIE 1922

²⁶ 514 App. B ARIE 1922

ple during certain festivals of the year and mentions the matha of Tirukovalur Emberumanar-Jiyar.¹ Another records a gift of money by two ladies for burning a lamp in the temple.² Another refers to a gift of money and lamp for burning lamps thrice daily in the temple by the chief Keralakesari Adiradhirajadevar and his minister Bharadvajan Maranarayanan of Tiruppattur. This inscription also refers to the liquid measure known as 'Kulottungacholan-nali'.³ Another registers a gift of lamps, silver utensils and land for a twilight lamp in the temple.⁴ Another inscription found in the temple records the sale of land for 5350 kasus to the temple by a certain Kadavarayan of Palaiyanur. It mentions a jewel with Virarajendrachola padakkam worn by the deity at Periyakoyil which was melted and converted into 13 kalanju of gold and paid towards the 5350 kasus.⁵

Another inscription records a settlement among the Nattar of Tiruvaippadi that they would collect every year from the tenants, ghee at the rate of a nali per cow and supply it to the same temple and that they would contribute a portion of the expenses for Srijayanti festival.⁶

In some of the inscriptions, there is a mention which says that gifts made to the temple are placed under the protection of Srivaishnavas of the 18 Nadus. This body is also referred to in a record in the Sundaravarada Perumal temple at Uttaramerur (ARIE 168 of 1923) and these Srivaishnavas are designated as the guardians of grants made to the temple. Their permission is sought by the temple authorities for receiving gifts and for entering into transactions of any type with

¹ 515 App. B ARIE 1922

² 518 App. B ARIE 1922

³ 519 App. B ARIE 1922

⁴ 521 App. B ARIE 1922

⁵ 522 App. B ARIE 1922

⁶ 523 App. B ARIE. 1922

the donors regarding the management of the temple. It appears that this high powered body had jurisdiction over a number of vaishnavite temples. Perhaps even in those days, somebody attempted setting up devasthanam boards like the ones we have today so as to control the administration of the various temples.

HYMNOLOGY:

Nammalvar (11 pasurams), Perialvar (one pasuram), Kulasekara Alvar (11 pasurams), Thirumangai Alvar (105 pasurams) and Andal (one pasuram) have all sung in praise of Sowriraja Perumal. Perialvar refers to the God here as "Kannapurathu amudhae" i.e. the nectar of Kannapuram. Kulasekara Alvar always likes to see and enjoy the Lord as in the Ramavataram form. While composing the hymns in praise of Sowriraja Perumal, Kulasekhara Alvar takes on the role of a mother and imagines that the Perumal is a small child and therefore he sings a lullaby to the Lord! The lullaby is nothing but an epitomized version of the Ramayana. Thirumangai Alvar who is very prolific with his pasurams, has sung 105 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. In one of the pasurams, Thirumangai Alvar refers to the Lord as Kannapurathu Ponmalai pol ninra van (The God who is seen at Thirukkannapuram with the effulgence of a golden mountain). He also refers to him as Vaikuntam kodukkum Piran (the Lord who will grant Vaikuntam). Given below is the pasuram sung by Perialvar with its meaning:

Perialvar Tirumozhi 1-5-8

உன்னையும ஓக்கவையிற் கொண்டு தமிழ் மடுவி
 உன்னொடு தங்கள் கருத்தாயின செயது வரும்
 கன்னியரும் மகிழக் கண்டவர கணகுளிரக
 சுற்றவர தெற்றிவரப் பெற்ற எனக் கருளி
 மன்று குருங்குடியாய் கொள்ளவையாய் மதின ஆறு
 சோலைமலைக் கரையே கண்ணாபுரத் தருதே
 என அலைம களையால் ஆடுக செங்கொ
 ஏழுலகு முடையாய் ஆடுக ஆடுகவே
 பெரியாயுடைய திருமொழி (158)

Meaning:

Oh Lord You are the nectar of Thiru Kannapuram You remove all my sorrows You are to be seen at Thirukkurungudi; You are the king ruling over Thirumalirunsolai surrounded by beautiful clouds; In order that the young damsels who carried you on their hips to their homes and enjoyed your company, to their hearts content, may rejoice

And

In order that the eyes of those who see you may light up with happiness

And

So that the young poets may burst into spontaneous simple poetry;

And

Above all, out of kindness for me, your mother - Dance and strike the captivating Sengerai pose* Oh master of the Seven worlds Dance;Dance.

*Sengerai pose is the pose adopted by the child, who while crawlign on the ground puts its weight on the palms of its two hands and its two knees, and tilts its head to look at some object.

Andal Pasuram No.

காட்டில் வேங்கடம் சுண்ணாபுர நகர்
வாட்டமின்றிஇ மகிழ்ந்துறை வாமனன்,
ஓட்டராவந்து என் கைபற்றி . தன்னெனும்
கூட்டுமாகில் நீ கூடிடு கூட்டலே

Meaning

Oh friend If Vamanan* Who lives happily and without any care in the midst of the forests at Thiruvengadam;

And

Who lives in Thirukannapuram which is the Ayodhya of the south;

Were to come running and hold my hand and hug me

N.B (*) Here Andal refers to Vamana as Kannan - meaning both are one and the same Lord).

Then you better draw an even number **

(**) The phrase, "drawing an even number"- is associated with one type of Kuri i.e. forecasting or prophesying. In that one big circle is drawn and inside that a number of smaller circles are drawn. The number of smaller circles are counted. If the number is even then all is well, and ones desire will be fulfilled. If the sum total is an odd figure, then it foretells disappointment! Here Andal is asking her friends to draw the circles so that she may assess her luck!)

Kulasekara Alvar- Perumal Tirumozhi

8th Tirumozhi - 8th pasuram

மலையதனால அணைக்கடா மதினிலங்கை அழித்தவனே
அலைக்கடலைக் கடைந்தது அமரர்க்கு அழிதருளிச்செய்தவனே
கலைவல்லவா தாம் வாழும் கணபுரத் தென சுருமணியே
சிலவல்லவா தேவகனே சீராமா தாலேலோ

பெருமான திருமொழி . 8ஆம் திருமொழி

8ஆம் பரிசுரம்

Meaning

Oh great hero!

You crossed the mighty ocean with a bridge built out of rocks and then entered Lanka and destroyed it;

Once you churned the ocean with Mandara mountain, got Amrit (nectar) which you very cleverly distributed only among the devas;

Oh priceless Jewel!

You of your own free volition are residing at Thirukkannapuram full of scholars and artists;

Oh master of archery

Oh Lord who are ever ready to rush to the succour of your devotees;

Oh Rama! Sleep peacefully even as I gently rock your cradle.

(Here the Alvar imagines he is Kousalya the mother. He addresses Sowriraja as Rama and is singing a lullaby so that the child may go to sleep!)

Nammalvar - Thiruvoimozhi 9-10-5

சகரமமாகும் தனஃ தாளரடைந்தாரகிசலலாம
மரணமானால வைகுந்தம் கொடுக்கு பிரான
அரணமைந்த மதின்குள திருக்கண்ணபுரத்
தரணியாளன் தனதனபர்க்கு அனபாகுமே

(திருவாய்மொழி 9-10-5)

Meaning:

You are the unfailing saviour to all those who seek refuge at your divine feet;

You ensure that such sincere devotees go to Vaikunta (heaven) when they shed their mortal coils;

This Sowiraja Perumal, the great saviour, the Lord at beautiful cloud crested Thirukkannapuram showers affection on his true followers.

Tirumangai Alvar - Peria Tirumozhi 8-9-5

ஆமையாகி அறியாகி அன்னமாகி, அந்தணர்தம்
ஓமமாகி ஊழியாகி உலவரிஞ்ஞந்த நெடுமபுறரி
சேமமதின்குழ் இலங்கைக்கோள விரமும் கரமும் குலவிநது, முன்
காமற பயந்தான் சுருதுமூர் கண்ணபுரம் நாம் தொழுதுமே
(பெரிய திருமொழி 8-9-5)

Meaning:

Let us worship the Perumal -

Who resides at Tirukannapuram-

Who at one time took the form of a tortoise (Koor-mavataram) and bore the Mandara mountain on His back to prevent it from sinking into the depths of the ocean, even as the ocean was being churned;

Who at one time took on the form of Narasimha so as to destroy the demon Hiranyakasipu;

Who at one time became a swan and rescued the vedas from the demons and restored them to Brahma;

Who is worshipped by the brahmins thro' yogas;

Who was the sole survivor after the great deluge (pralaya);

Who destroyed Ravana, the king of Lanka;

Whose son is Manmatha. *

*Pradyumnan is the son of Krishna and Rukmini. Pradyumnan is believed to be the reincarnation of Manmatha. Hence it is that Alvar here says Manmatha is Kannan's son.

The poem of Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar from his 108 Tirupathi Andaadhi is given below:

பேறு தரினும் பிறப்பிறப்பு தோய மூப்பு
 பேறு தரினும் விடேன கண்டாய் . ஏறு நீர்
 வண்ண புரத்தாய் என மனம் புருத்தாய் வொருந்தார்
 கண்ணபுரத்தாய் உள கழல்

(நா. ம. திருப். அந்-17)

Meaning:

Oh Lord who has a body with the enchanting colour of a blue ocean;

Oh Lord who stay in my mind;

Oh Lord who reside in Vaikuntam;

Oh Lord who stay in Thiru Kannapuram

Oh Lord I want you to understand that whether you give me moksha or even if you make me suffer in this samsara with cycle of birth, death, illness, old age etc. I will never, even for a moment, move away from your divine feet.

THIRUKKANNANGUDI

This is one of the divya desams in Tanjore Revenue District. It is near Nagapattinam. On the Tiruvarur-Nagapattinam railway line, this place is about 1 to 2 kms. from Keezh Velur railway station.

The moolavar is known as Loganatha Perumal. Thirumangai Alwar has described this Lord as "Shyama Mameni Yen Thalaivan". This means that my Lord and master has a complexion which is blue in colour. The moolavar is seen in a standing posture facing east. Along with the Moolavar Sridevi and Bhodevi are also seen. On one side, we have the idols of the rishis Gowthamar and Uparisaravas. On another side, the idols of Brighu and Brahma are seen. The Moolavar idol is very beautiful. The face reflects the quality of God as an ocean of mercy. It is said that in the early days, the idol of Madarar rishi also was in the sanctum sanctorum. But today it is not to be seen there.

The utsavar is known as Damodara Narayananan. Elders address the utsava perumal as "Sanhoteetham" (peaceful reposefull) as also Subha-srayam (good augury). The right hand has got the abhaya pose while the left hand is kept on His waist. The Lord is seen facing the east. Sridevi and Bhodevi are on either side of the utsavar.

The Goddess (moolavar) is known as Loganayaki. The utsava Goddess is known as Aravindhayaki. The vimanam is known as Utpalavadaka vimanam.

Garuda puranam details the story of this place. Garuda puranam refers to this place as "pancha

badra” It is also known as “pancha Narayana sthalam” as Narayana is seen in five different forms in and around this place. At Abharanadari, we see the Perumal as Anantha Narayanan, at Peria Alattur, He is seen as Varadha Narayanan, at Thevoor, He is seen as Deva Narayanan, at Keevalur He is seen as Yadhava Narayanan while at Thirukkannagudi, He is seen as Damodara Narayanan.

This place is a Krishna kshetram. There are five sacred places pancha ‘Krishna kshetrams’. They are Thirukkannamangai, Thirukovilur, Thirukkannapuram, Thirukapisthlam and Thirukkannangudi. The place is also known as Krishnaranyam. The tank here is known Nithya pushkarani as also “Sravana pushkarani”. The sthala vruksham i.e. the tree sacred to this divya desam is Makizha maram.(tree with vakula flower or little flower).

Thirukkannangudi is known for three things viz. “Kaaya makizham (a little flower tree which never dries up) and ora kinaru (a well which has no springs) and Thora vazhakku” (a dispute which can never be solved). These three characteristics are closely interlinked with the life history of Thirumangai Alvar. He is the last of the Alvars. He is also known as Thirumangai Mannan, Kalian, etc. He was born at Thirukkuraiyalur near Sirkazhi in Thanjavur District. He is believed to be the re-incarnation of Perumal’s bow viz. sarngam. In his early days, he was the head of a wing in the army of a Chola king. Later, he was even made a ruler of a part of the Chola kingdom. He wanted to marry one Kumudha Valli who was a great Vaishnavite devotee living near Thirunangoor-Thiruvellakulam divya desams. For marrying him, the lady stipulated that he should feed a thousand Sri Vaishnavites everyday for one full year! She apparently felt that while worshipping Vishnu is great, it is still greater to look after the needs of the devotees of the Lord. Thirumangai Mannan accordingly fulfilled the condition and married

her. He became a devout Vaishnavite. In order to get resources for feeding many devotees, he took to highway robbery. He perhaps felt that even in God's eye, it would not be a sin if he robbed the rich in order to feed the poor. Once Perumal and His divine Consort decided to spread the cult of bhakthi through Thirumangai Mannan. They transformed themselves into a young married couple. The divine couple in their disguise were described as "Sarva Alankara Bhooshitha". This means that the God and Goddess had bedecked themselves with every possible item of jewellery. It is not known whether the jewellery lent lustre to the couple or the couple added to the brightness of the jewels! They came to a place near Thiruvai-Thirunagari known as Thirumanam kollai. As expected, Thirumangai Mannan waylaid them and removed all their jewels. He could not remove the small ring worn on the toe in the foot (Mettu) by the Goddess. He is reported to have bitten that "mettu" with his teeth and removed it. This accidental touch of the feet of the Goddess earned him the Goddess's blessings. He tied all the jewels in a cloth bundle, tried to lift it and go away. To his utter dismay, he found that he could not lift the bundle. He then looked at the bride groom i.e. God in disguise and asked him what was the magic mantra he had uttered which made it impossible for him to lift that small cloth bundle. He wanted to learn the secret of that mantram. He even threatened to kill the couple then and there if he was not let on to that secret. God embraced Thirumangai Mannan and initiated him into the moola mantram viz. Ashtakshara mantram. The Goddess is then believed to have addressed him as "Nam Kaliano?" meaning (is he our strong man?). Since that day, Thirumangai Mannan came to be known as Kalian. As soon as he heard the Ashtakshara mantram from God, the Mannan changed his ways.

After this incident, Thirumangai Mannan set off on a long pilgrimage visiting the various divya de-

sams. He went to Badarikasramam and many other holy spots in North India. He came back via Tirupati to Srirangam, Thirukkannangudi and various other divya desams in the south. The hymns which he composed in praise of each of these Gods are known as Mangalasaana pasurams. He desired to do a lot of renovation work at Srirangam. He needed money for that. Once at Nagapattinam, he saw a gold idol. He and four of his ministers planned to bring that gold idol to Srirangam. Some tried to prevent him from carrying away the idol. He lifted the idol and left Nagapattinam by night and reached Thirukkannangudi. He reached a place known as Puliadi Vayal. He hid the gold icon in a field and went inside the temple and slept under the makizha maram i.e. (little flower tree). Unfortunately, the next morning, the owner of that field in the normal course of events brought seedlings and was getting ready to plough the field to plant the seedlings. Thirumangai Mannan got worried that his secret would get exposed. He had to prevent the farmer from ploughing the land. He felt that offence was the best part of defence. He obstructed the agriculturist and claimed that the field was his and hence the farmer had no right to plough the field. The argument became heated. A fight looked imminent. As usual, people gathered in numbers to watch. Thirumangai Mannan offered to produce the required documents the next day so as to prove his title. The Panchayat accordingly agreed to wait for a day and listen to both sides of the case. In the meantime, the Alvar was very tired. He was resting under the magizha maram. He saw a woman drawing water from a well nearby. He asked the lady for water. The lady replied:- "Just as you claimed that the field belongs to you, I am afraid you may claim that this vessel which I am using for drawing water belongs to you". She therefore refused to give him water. Mannan got angry and cursed that the well should go dry.

The above-mentioned incidents have contributed to the Tamil phrases (Kaaya Maram) Oora Kinaru and

Thora Vazhakku referred to earlier. The word "Ora kinaru" associated with Thirukkannangudi refers to the well which was cursed to go dry by Thirumangai Mannan. The "Thora vazhakku" refers to the incident when Thirumangai Mannan promised to produce the documents to prove his title the next day but disappeared from the scene that very night carrying the gold image which he had hidden in the field. Thus, this was a dispute which was never settled and hence the name "Thora vazhakku Thirukkannangudi". The phrase "kaaya maram" refers to the Magizha maram tree under which Thirumangai Mannan rested that day. It is unique in as much as it never goes dry or dead. Thus, these incidents in the life of Thirumangai Mannan contributed the three events related above which come to one's mind while referring to this divya desam.

STHALA PURANAM:-

The Lord here appeared before Brahma, Sithirar, Gowthamar, Uparisaravasu, Brighu and Madarar maharishis. He appeared before them when they did penance under the makizha maram (little flower tree) which is seen at the back of the Perumal sannidhi. It is said that Lord Brahma spoke about the greatness of the tank in this place as also that of the Perumal viz. Damodara Narayanan.

SRAVANA PUSHKARINI:-

Behind the Perumal sannidhi is Sravana pushkarini (holy tank). As the name itself signifies, even when one hears the name of the pushkarini (i.e. sravanam) all the sins will be washed away. Sravana means 'hear' and pushkarini refers to the 'tank'. A bath in the pushkarini will definitely ensure salvation and prevent even the Yama kinkaras i.e. the servants of Yama, the God of Death, from giving trouble to the person. To the east of this tank is the sthala vriksha i.e. makizha

maram referred to earlier in this chapter. It is claimed that whoever sits for some time in the shade of this tree would be cured of all their diseases. It is said to cure even leprosy. Long ago, to the south of this makizha maram, there were a number of ashramams where the rishis stayed and prayed to the Lord. One day, Manu, the king, was going in his chariot in the sky. Suddenly, the chariot would not move. He therefore came down from the sky to investigate to what was the pull and obstruction on the earth which prevented his chariot from flying through the sky. He saw that a number of rishis were praying at that place and the collective power of their holy meditation had prevented his chariot from moving. He got down from the chariot. He met Gowthamar, Brighu, Saithiar and other rishis who were offering prayers there. He offered obeisance to them. They related to him the greatness of this place. He decided to stay there and meditate at the same place. Lord Brahma was pleased with the deep penance of all these people. He took a kamandalam in his hand, appeared before them and asked them to choose their boon. Madarar asked Brahma to bless them with a darshan of Lord Narayana. Gowthamar and Brighu also praised Brahma and asked for the darshan of Narayana. Brahma told them that as they were praying on the holy banks of sravana pushkarini, definitely their wish would be fulfilled and God would appear before them soon. Brahma told them that even those who read about the greatness of Sravana pushkarini will be blessed with Lakshmi's kataksham (Grace). Those who bathe in the pushkarini will be freed from re-births; those who taste the water of this tank will definitely reach Heaven; those who sit for a short time underneath the makizha maram and pour a small quantity of water from the pushkarini at the root of the tree will definitely reach Heaven and have darshan of Lord Narayana. Brahma added that earlier He had performed an aswamedha yaga on the banks of sravana pushkarini at the behest of the Goddess and that Vishvakarma himself built the yaga mantapam.

He said that besides the Sravana pushkarini, there are eight other pushkarinis in it, each one representing one disai i.e. direction. All these tanks are said to have become holy because of their association with this Krishnaranya kshetram. Having said all these, Brahma Himself started His penance at that place. Perumal and Thayar appeared before Brahma. Brahma seated both of them on a throne and started worshipping them. All the rishis nearby viz. Madarar, Gowthamar, Brighu, Saithyar also came and had a darshan of the Lord. They prayed to God and Thayar to continue to stay on the banks of the tank and continue to give darshan to the devotees as well. It is said that in response to their request, God in His archavataram emerged at this place in the month of Panguni (March-April) on Ashtami thithi under Rohini star on a Friday. Brahma performed an utsavam to Damodara Perumal on Panguni Rohini i.e. the day God appeared at that place. On the ninth day, a Rathotstavam was also celebrated. It is believed that for the last three yugas, Brahma and other rishis worshipped the Lord here on the banks of the pushkarini at Thirukkannangudi. Brahma named this place as Pancha Badra i.e. a place having five fold significance. The significant aspects are as follows:-

Aaru (river) i.e. Kaveri

Kaadu i.e. Krishnaranyam

Nagaram i.e. Krishna kshetram

Aalayam i.e. temple of the Lord

Pushkarini i.e. the holy Sravana pushkarini tank.

ADI PERUMAL:-

On the southern bank of this Sravana pushkarini, the original Adi Perumal is seen in a sitting posture. It is at this place that Gajendra moksham festival and Raa pathu festival (i.e. second fortnight of Vaikunta Ekadasi festival) are celebrated. The God in Thirukan-nangudi is seen in three poses. He is seen in the standing, sitting and lying down postures as Damodara Narayanana, Adi Perumal and Anantha Narayanan.

VASHISTA MAHARISHI EPISODE:-

It is said that Vashista maharishi made an idol of Lord Krishna out of butter and was worshipping Him. Because of his holy powers, the butter never melted. One day, as Krishna decided to have some fun, he ate the idol made of butter. Vashistar saw this and started chasing the mischievous Gopalan who ran towards the makizha maram. A number of maharishis were in deep meditation under that tree. They caught Him, tied Him up near the tree with their bhakthi-pasam i.e. by the force of their prayers. Hence the place where Gopalan was tied up came to be known as Thirukkannangudi.

UNIQUE GARUDA:-

In the temple there are sannidhis for Nammalwar, Thirumangai Alwar, Ramanujar, Manavala Mamuni. The Garuda which is seen in the prakaram has a very unique appearance. He is seen with both his hands held close to his body (கைகளைபுடும் கட்டிக் கொண்டு திரிநாம தருகிறார்). Garuda is said to be seen in this posture only in Vaikuntam.

VELLAI SATHUPADI:-

There is another unique festival celebrated in this divya desam. The Bhashyakarar Thirunakshathira Brahmotsavam is celebrated on the southern bank of Sravana pushkarini near the Adi Perumal temple. On the seventh day of the festival, God is smeared with vibhooti (holy ash) and taken out in procession. This is known as "Vellai Sathupadi". This lasts for 3-3/4 nazhigai. (One nazhigai equals 2-1/2 hours). It is also called "Thiruneerani Vizha". Thiruneer refers to vibhooti as Thiruman refers to the sacred mud used for wearing the vaishnavite castemark. Perhaps this festival indicates that there is no difference between Saivism and Vaishnavism as far as Gods are concerned!.

Near the Perumal sannidhi, there is what is known as "Shobana mantapam" or "Maha mandapam". In the middle of that mandapam, there are four pillars in which there are beautiful sculptures. One pillar has the sculpture of Manavala Mamuni on it. There are also sculptures of Thirukkannangudi Pillai and Vilan chalai Pillai. Manavala Mamuni is depicted as asking the meaning of Thiruppallandu and the other pillar depicts Kannangudi Pillai as giving the explanation. This incident is beautifully sculpted here.

HYMNOLOGY:

Tirumangai Alvar is the only Alvar who has sung in praise of the Lord here. He has composed ten pasurams of which one pasuram viz. Peria Tirumozhi 9-1-8 with its meaning is given below:

அரவநீள கொடியோன அவையுள் ஆனந்ததை
 அஞ்சிடா தேயிட அதற்குப்
 பெரியமா மேனி அண்ட மூடுருவப்
 பெருந்திசையடங்கிட நிமிர்ந்தோன்
 வரயின் மாமனியும் மரசுதத் திரளும்
 வயிரமும் வெதிருதிர் முத்தம
 திரைகொணரநதுநதி வயல் தோறும் குவிசுகும
 திருக்கண்ணங் குடியுள் நிளநுனே

Meaning:

Once, Oh Krishna when you went as an envoy on behalf of Pandavas, to the Court of Duryodhana who has a snake as the emblem on his flag,

Duryodhana offered you a seat placed on a cleverly concealed deep pit;

Without the least hesitation or trepidation you sat on that chair. Lo and behold instead of the chair collapsing and you falling into the pit as planned by the evil minded Kauravas -

You assumed a majestic form which almost enveloped the skies (Viswaroopam).

That Lord Krishna is residing at Thirukannankudi Where the fields are full of precious stones like emeralds, diamonds and pearls washed ashore by the lapping waves of the ocean.

Verse of Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar:
(108 Tirupathi Andadi)

கூறுபுகழ்த் தன்னடிக்கே கூட்டுவனோ, இன்னம் என்னை
வேறு படப் பல் பிறப்பில் வீழ்த்துவனோ . தேறுகிலேன்
எண்ணங் குடியாய் இருந்தான் நின்றான் கிடந்தான்
கண்ணங்குடியான் கருத்து

Meaning:

The Perumal of Thiru Kannankudi who is residing in my mind, sometimes stands, other times sits and lies down in my mind itself.

I do not know what are His intentions? Will He give me the privilege of attaining and becoming one with His famous divine feet or is it His intention to make me go through the unwelcome cycle of birth, death and rebirth?

* * *

THIRUKUDANTHAI

This is a famous Cholanadu divya desam. The Sarngapani temple is located here. It is about one and half miles from the Kumbakonam railway station. The moolavar is known as Aravamudhan i.e. amudam (nectar) that never satiates, the never-cloying nectar. He is facing east in Udyoga Sayana pose (half-reclining).

The utsavar is known as Sri Sarngapani as also Sri Sarngaraja or Sri Sarnga Dharan or Sri Sarnga Kesan. Sarngam is the name of Lord Vishnu's bow. People usually call this deity by mistake as Sarangapani. Sarangam means "a deer". Lord Siva only will keep a deer in his hand. The letter "a" therefore makes all the difference! The name of the Goddess is Komalavalli Thayar. The vimanam is known as Vaithega vimanam. The tank here is Hema pushkarani. Perumal appeared before Hema maharishi at this place.

Old sanskrit books like Sesha Dharma, Vamana Puranam, Sri Aravamudha Vaibhavam, Kumbakona Mahatmyam, Thiruvinnagar Mahatmyam, Thiruchera Mahatmyam, Nandipura Vinnagara Mahatmyam, Vanamamalai Mahatmyam, Srimushana Mahatmyam etc. speak about the glories of the city of Kumbakonam. In 1952, the book Thirukudanthai Sarngaraja Vaibhavam was brought out by Sri U.V.Illayavilli Srinivasachariyar swami. In 1964, to commemorate the temple samprokshana festival a book was brought out by Sri L.Rajagopalan. The famous Tamil Pandit Meenakishi Sundaram Pillai also has written a book about Kumbakonam and the myriad stories associated with the temples of that town. A reading of all these helps one to understand the great-

ness of this temple town which is also known as the Cambridge of the East because of the many educational institutions, religious mutts, and Pundits and Vidwans who lived here. The great mathematician Ramanujam was born here. Some consider that Thirukudanthai is one among the eight Swayam vyaktha kshetrams.

Vaishnavites hold this place in high esteem and believe it to be equal in importance to Kanchipuram, Srirangam and Tirupathi. Many people speak in the same breath about Sri Ranganatha and Sri Aravamudan. It is said that one can see Vibhavam (i.e. incarnation) at Sri Ranganam and Soundaryam (i.e. beauty) at Kudamukku. On the south and the north of this town, the two rivers Arasalar and Kaveri are flowing, giving a feeling that this town is an island like Srirangam. While Srirangam is known as God's Mel Veedu (the house in the upper region i.e. heaven). Thirukkannapuram (yet another divya desam in Chola nadu) is considered as Keezh veedu (the house in this world). Thirukkudanthai is known as Nadu veedu (i.e. the house in the middle). This place has got various other names viz. Kudamukku; Bhaskara kshetram; Kalyanapuram; Devaloka pattinam; Sivavishnupuram; Mantradhi-Devathasthanam; Sarngarajan pattinam; Kshetra Saram; Olirmighu pattinam; Panchakrosa yathra sthalam.

The Bhavishyotra puranam explains how this place got the name Kudamukku. This Tamil word literally translated means Kudam (vessel in which water is usually collected) and mukku means (nose). Once upon a time, Brahma heard from Lord Siva that the great deluge was imminent. As per the tenets of Hinduism, the end of each yugam is heralded by a pralayam i.e. a deluge when all the creations get destroyed and the Creator again starts afresh for the new yugam. When Brahma heard that the deluge was not far way, He collected mud from various holy places, mixed it with Amudhu (nectar, honey) and out of that dough cre-

ated a vessel i.e. kudam. He filled the kudam with amruth i.e. nectar. He placed in it for safe keeping an embryo which was to be the seed for all the future creations. He placed the four vedas around the seed as a guard. He sealed the vessel, put it on the top of Meru parvatham. As anticipated, pralaya occurred. The flood waters reached even the top of Meru Parvatham, dislodged the kudam (vessel) and it floated down to a place near the present Kumbakonam. The amruth inside the kudam escaped at that place from out of the nose of the vessel i.e. Kudamukku and spread over nearly ten miles in and around Kumbakonam. As the amruth inside the kudam flowed out of the nose of the vessel at this place it is known as Kuda mukku alias Kumbakonam i.e. Kumbam meaning kudam and konam meaning nose.

As corroborative evidence for this story, we find in and around Thirukudanthai, a number of holy places and famous temples like Oppiliappan Koil, Nachiar Koil, Thirucheraï, Thiruvelliangudi, Adanur, Pullam Bhoothangudi, Kapisthala, Aduthurai Perumal Koil etc. All these eight are divya desams. Thirukudanthai is like a shining pendant hanging like an effulgent jewel in the chain of Divyadesams in that area.

Besides, these Vaishnavite temples, there are also famous saivite temples near this place e.g. Swami-malai, which is one of the six holy places of Lord Muruga. The famous saivite philosopher Sekkizhar also lived in this place for a long time. Tirumular, another saivite saint, was also living here. Thirunageswaram is also closeby. This place is thus equally holy both for the Saivites and the Vaishnavites.

This place is also known as Bhaskara kshetram. Once upon a time, Sudharsana chakram, the holy disc, which is one of the weapons held by Lord Vishnu and the Sun God had a competition. The Sun God lost in the bet and He was humbled. He then undertook a severe penance and prayed to Aravamudhan, the main

deity at Kudanthai. After a long penance, God blessed Him and said that he will continue to shine with his earlier effulgence and brightness for ever. The Sun God prayed to Perumal to continue to stay in the same place and that the place may be known after his sincere devotee viz. the Sun God. God conceded this request and from that day, this place came to be known as Bhaskara (Sun) kshetram. This story is related in Kumbakona Mahathyam (61st chapter).

This place is also known as Kalyanapuram as Lord Sarngarajan married Komalavalli Thayar here. Komalavalli Thayar was brought up by Hema maharishi. The details of that story will be told later in this chapter. This story is related in Kumbakona Mahathyam (52nd chapter).

This divyadesam is also known as "Panchakrosa yathra sthalam" as there are as many as 35 Siva-Vishnu temples in and around this place. There is a proverb in Tamil which while referring to Kumbakonam says "Engum Koil-Engum Kazhani" meaning to say that there are temples and verdant fields everywhere which is very true of Kumbakonam even today. The Vishnu temples in this place are Oppiliappan Koil, Nachiar Koil, Thirucheraikoil, Nathan Koil, Aduthurai Perumal Koil, Kapisthalam, Pullam Bhoothangudi temple, Adanur temple, Thiruvelliangudi temple. These nine are vaishnavite divya desams. The other famous temples are the Thirumandangudi temple (this place was the birth place of Thondaradi Podi Alwar), Thiruvaikavoor temple which is famous for its Sivarathri celebrations, Someswara Koil, Sri Abhimukeswarar Koil, Adi Kumbeswarar Koil, Naganatha swamy Koil, Swamimalai, Patteswaram, Thiruvalanchuzhi, Innambarar koil, Thirunageswaram, Thirubhuvanam, Thiruvaidaimurudur, Thiruvaduthurai, Thirupananthal, Panthanainallur and Darasuram temples. These are all famous saivite shrines. The Temple for Brahma and

the Kanchi Kamakoti mutt are other important places. An area of ten miles in and around Thirukudanthai is saturated with temples held in great esteem by the Saivites and the Vaishnavites. Hence it got the name 'Panchakrosa yathra sthalam'.

This place is also known as Ubhaya pradhana divya desam. As in Srirangam, the Alwars have sung separately (mangala sasanam) in praise of both the moolavar and utsavar of this place. Hence it is known as Ubhaya pradana divya desam.

Once upon a time, when things were not very peaceful, the utsava idol of this place viz., Thiru kudanthai was removed for safety to Thirukoshtiyur Perumal Koil near Devakottai for safe keeping. As proof of this, there is a raised platform in Thirukoshtiyur temple which is pointed out as the place where Shri Sarngapani was sojourning during his forced exile. Another evidence for this purported event is the fact that, as a thanksgiving gesture, even today, a pasuram in praise of the Thirukoshtiyur Perumal is sung in this temple at Kumbakonam in Nithya Anusandanam or daily worship.

The puranas say that Thirukudanthai is such a holy place that one can attain moksha by visiting this place. Hindus believe that a visit to Kasi (Varanasi) will wipe out all the sins. But the sins committed at Kasi can be got rid of only by visiting Thirukudanthai! Any sin committed in Thirukudanthai itself cannot be got rid of at any other place. It is to be propitiated and atoned only by sincere prayers at Thirukudanthai itself! Worship of the Perumal at Kudanthai will wipe out even serious sins like brahmahathi dosham. The sanskrit verse which refers to this aspect is as follows:

*Brahmahathya thayo, Goraha mahapataka
sanjayaha, Kumbakone sayanasya vishno Vishnor,
nasyanthi dharsanath*

Translated it runs as follows:-

Even heinous sins, Brahmahathya etc., will vanish by the mere seeing of Vishnu in this divya desam.

Vimanam:

The vimanam on the top of the garbagriha is known as Vaitheeka vimanam. It is also known as Vaikunta vimanam which is the same name as for the vimanam in Vaikuntam i.e. heaven. As in Srirangam, this palce also has the vimanam seen in Vaikuntam. It is therefore regarded as Bhooloka Vaikuntam. The vimanam is a feast of intricate art and is embellished with finely sculptured pieces.

This vimanam is also known as Pranavakruti vimanam. On this vimanam, we can see the idols of Lord Narasimhar, Lord Ulagalanda Perumal, Paramapada nathan, Gajendra Varadan, Venugopalan etc. It is said that once upon a time, the Sun God and Lord Brahma did severe penance. Pleased with their devotion, Narayana appeared before them. He then created three vimanams, known as Vaikunta vimanam, Vaitheeka vimanam and Pranavakruti vimanam. In these three vimanams, He installed Himself in archa form as three idols viz. as Sri Paramapada nathan, as Sri Sarnga rajan and as Sri Rangarajan. These three idols represent the Gods at Srirangam, Kudanthai and Tiruvenkatam. The first vimanam was left in Vaikuntam itself. The second vimanam, He gave to Lord Brahma. The third, He gave to Sun God for worship. Lord Brahma and Sun God continued to worship the Perumals in these vimanams. The son of the Sun God, Manu, in course of time, inherited the Vaitheeka vimanam. He brought it to earth and installed it on the banks of Sarayu river and continued the worship. Meantime, an Ikshvaku Raja, born in Surya vamsam, did a severe penance and prayed to Lord Brahma. Lord Brahma was so pleased with the penance, He granted him a boon. The Ikshvaku Raja sought the idol be-

ing worshipped by Lord Brahma in Satyaloka. Lord Brahma conceded that prayer. Thus, it was that the Pranavakruti vimanam as well as the Vaitheeka vimanam was brought to earth through the Ikshvaku line of kings. The two vimanams thus became one. Later, Sri Rama who was born in Ikshvaku vamsam, continued to worship the idol. After defeating Ravana, the Lord of Lanka, when He returned to His kingdom and celebrated His Pattabishekam, He gave gifts to a number of his faithful followers like Anjaneya, Vibhishana etc. Vibhishana got this vimanam along with the idol that Lord Rama was worshipping. He took this vimanam with the idol to Lanka. Enroute, he placed it at Srirangam and the story relating to this is mentioned in detail in the chapter dealing with the story of Srirangam temple. At that time, when the vimanam got entrenched, the Perumal is said to have told Vibhishana that as before, the vimanam would split itself into two viz. the Vaitheeka vimanam and the Pranavakruti vimanam. While the Pranavakruti vimanam continued at Srirangam, the Vaitheeka vimanam came to Thirukudanthai. It is therefore believed that Sarnga Perumal is none other than Sri Ranga Perumal himself.

Moolavar:

The remarkable feature of this temple is the reclining moolavar of Aravamudhan. He is seen lying down on Adishesha with the five headed hood providing shelter to the Lord's head. The moolavar is 12 feet long and in his reclining posture, is a grand inspiring and majestic sight. He is reclining on his left hand, bent below his head with the shoulders slightly raised. This is known as "uthyoga sayana" or "uthana sayana" pose. This posture makes it appear that God tilted his head

his boundless love, one day he came to have dharshan of the Lord. He addressed Him as follows:

“நடந்த கால்கள் நொத்தனவோ
எழுந்திருந்து பேசு”

The Alvar here is asking the Lord out of his boundless affection, to answer whether His feet were paining after the long walk in the forests (during Aranya vasam). He orders God to get up from his couch and answer his question! As proof of His bhaktha paradeena quality i.e. His easy accessibility to sincere devotees, God here is seen in a posture of His being about to get up and obediently answer the query of the Alvar. This pose is known as “uthana sayana” posture.

The moolavar was named Aravamudhan by Nam-malwar. In one of His pasurams he says:

“அப்பொழுதைக்கு அப்பொழுது என்
ஆராவமுதே”

Translated this means that however many number of times one may have a dharshan of this Lord, yet ones desire is only intensified and one feels that one has not seen enough of the beautiful figure of the Lord i.e. “Thigattadha amudhu”. Even sweets taken beyond a certain quantity give a feeling of satiation. But as far as this amudhu i.e. nectar is concerned, it is Thigattadha amudhu i.e. uncloying sweetness i.e. Ara amudhu.

Dakshinayana and Uthirayana Devatas:

To the south and the north of this Vaitheeka vi-manam are the entrances to the garbagriha. These two entrances are known as Dakshinayana vaasal and Uthirayana vaasal. Once upon a time, the Dakshinayana devata and the Uthirayana devata took on the form of these two entrances and wanted to remain as steps leading to the sanctum sanctorum so that the dust

from the feet of the number of sincere devotees would touch them and they would get purified. There are two separate towers on the top of these two entrances. Most people do not give much significance to the Dakshinayana period. This devata therefore approached Amudhan and wanted that He should be respected as much as Uthirayana devata and that He should be considered as holy as Uthirayana devata. Usually Uthirayanam is considered as holy. That is why even in the Mahabharatha war we hear that Bhishma Pithamaha lay down on a bed of arrows and waited for the uthirayanam period before he would shed his mortal coil. However, in response to the prayers of Dakshinayana devata at Kudamookku, Amudhan conceded the request and it is said that at Kudanthai, even those who die during the Dakshinayanam period will also definitely attain moksham. Hence it is that in the prayers offered to Sarngaraja, the following words are used:

*"Ayanath Vidayothkrantha prani moksha
Pradaya namaha"*

It means He grants Moksha to those who enter through the two Ayanas (Uthirayana and Dakshinayana)

It is said that Sarngarajan came via the southern entrance of this vimanam viz. the Dakshinayana vaasal when He went to get married to Komalavalli Thayar. Hence, this dakshinayana vaasal is also known as Kalyana vayil i.e. marriage entrance. Both the entrances have nine steps. From the Tamil month of Adi to Markazhi i.e. from July to January, the Dakshinayana vaasal is kept open and from Thai to Ani (i.e. from January to July) the northern entrance is kept open.

The Chariot in this place and its story:

This place is unique in as much as there is a story connected even with the Ratham of this place. Thirumangai Alwar sang in praise of this chariot of the Lord. There is no other divya desam where even the chariot

of the God is praised by the Alwars. The garbagriha of Aravamudhan is itself mounted on a granite chariot with caparisoned elephants and horses, all hewn in stone.

Some people wonder whether the song sung by Thirumangai Alwar is in praise of the garbagriha mandapam itself which is in the form of a chariot or it is in praise of the wooden chariot of Sri Sarngarajan which is used by the utsavar during Brahmotsavam and is seen outside the temple precincts. Some have resolved this issue by saying that the word "ther" i.e. the chariot which comes in the pasuram refers to the stone chariot of the garbagriham and the Thiruvezhu Kootrirukkai prabandham refers to the wooden chariot of Sri Sarnga Raja. The stone chariot of the moolavar Amudhan is referred to by some as Chithira Thiru Ther (Tamil) i.e. unusual holy chariot. While Sri Sarnga Raja's wooden chariot is referred to by them as Chithirai Thiru Ther i.e. chariot drawn during the festival held in the Tamil month of Chitrai. This chariot was last used in 1936. Now a small chariot is used.

Srirangam is famous for its Vaikunta Ekadasi festival. Kudanthai Thiruther utsavam is equally famous. Perhaps, this special significance of the Ther in Kudanthai prompted Parakala Naayaki to address the Perumal here as "Ther Aalan" (in Tamil) i.e. Oh! owner of the chariot.

There is a sannidhi for Sri Vedanta Desikan near the Perumal's sannidhi. It is believed that the gopuram on the top of this Desikar sannidhi was built by Thirukudanthai Desikan who in his poorvasramam (early days) was known as Gopalarya Mahadesikan. The Kundanthai Desikan Anthathi refers to this construction by him. Kundanthai Desikan was a great representative of Sri Vaishnavite Vadakalai sampradaya munithraya wing. He was born near Thiruvaiyaru, in the village of Rayam pettai. But later on, he moved on to Thirukudanthai and was a great devotee of Amud-

han. He has sung a number of songs in praise of Komalavalli Thayar and Aravamudhan and spent his time entirely serving and meeting the requirements of deities in this temple. Once Sri Sarnga Raja Thiru Ther ut-savam was being celebrated. But suddenly Perumal's Thiru Ther just stopped at a particular place and people were not able to move it. As the people were very worried and felt that this was an inauspicious omen, Thirukundanthai Desikan ran to the sannidhi of Sri Sarngarajan, fell at His feet and sought saranagathi. He refused to eat food till such time as the God concedes his request, moves the chariot and allows it to come back to its normal resting place. It is said that within a minute of his sincere prayer, the chariot moved and was brought to its usual resting place, with ease. Thus, immediately God conceded the request of His sincere devotee.

Maha Makham Festival:

Kumbakonam is famous for the Maha makha festival which is celebrated once in twelve years in the month of February. This festival is celebrated when Jupiter passes the constellation of Leo. A bath in Maha makha tank on that day is considered very sacred. This tank is situated in the heart of the town and covers an area of 20 acres. There are sixteen mandapas along the banks of the tank, dedicated to various deities. It is believed that the deities of all the nine sacred rivers meet on Maha makha day at Kumbakonam. The scientific explanation for this is that when the planet Jupiter passes over Leo on the great Maha makha day, the waters of the tank get saturated with mineral properties. It is believed that on this very same day, in the distant north, in Kashmir State, there is a lake in Kotihar which, as a result of the same planetary combination gets a full supply of water though it remains dry for the remaining eleven years! The temple for Brahma is also to be seen to the left of the Maha makha tank in the Pattunulkaara Street. Incidentally, no temple ex-

tank is situated in the heart of the town and covers an area of 20 acres. There are sixteen mandapas along the banks of the tank, dedicated to various deities. It is believed that the deities of all the nine sacred rivers meet on Maha makha day at Kumbakonam. The scientific explanation for this is that when the planet Jupiter passes over Leo on the great Maha makha day, the waters of the tank get saturated with mineral properties. It is believed that on this very same day, in the distant north, in Kashmir State, there is a lake in Kotihar which, as a result of the same planetary combination gets a full supply of water though it remains dry for the remaining eleven years! The temple for Brahma is also to be seen to the left of the Maha makha tank in the Pattunulkaara Street. Incidentally, no temple exists for Brahma any where else in the country. He has a temple only at Kumbakonam.

Lord Siva is said to have explained to Brahma the greatness of Maha makha tank. All the rivers complained about the burden of carrying the sins washed in their waters by the mass of humanity. They found it difficult to bear this ever-increasing burden of the accumulated sins of human beings. It was then suggested that all those river nymphs may go to the tank at Kumbakonam in the month of Masi i.e. February and have a bath in the holy waters that will rid them of their accumulated sins. On the right side of the tank, there is a shrine which contains the statues of the holy rivers, Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Narmada, Kaveri, Godaveri, Mahanadhi, Palar and Sarayu. It is said that, thanks to the prayers of Brahma, this cleansing of the sins, given as a boon to the nine rivers was extended to human beings also, who have a bath in the tank, on that occasion. Siva, Mahavishnu and other Devas are believed to be present at the centre of the tank on that holy day.

This tank is held in great esteem from time immemorial and this explains the thronging of people to this tank once in twelve years.

There is archaeological and epigraphical evidence to the celebration of this Maha makha festival. On the ceiling of the mandapam, on the northern bank of Ganga theertham, there is a sculptural representation of Tula purushana dana (when a devotee weighs himself against gold and gifts that gold for being used towards some work in the temple). It is said that the Prime Minister of the Nayak kings of Thanjavur by name Govinda Dikshithar utilised the wealth obtained from the Tula purusha dana of the then Nayak king in repairing the tank and constructing sixteen shrines, that are now seen on the sides of this tank.

There is epigraphical evidence relating to the period of the famous Vijayanagara king, Krishnadevaraya. He is said to have witnessed a Maha makham festival during his reign. This evidence is recorded on a stone at the entrance to the north gopuram of the temple at Nagalapuram, Chingleput District. This refers to the saka year 1445 and says that the king visited the village on his way to Kumbakonam to attend the Maha makha festival. The incident that Krishnadevaraya made gifts to a temple on this holy occasion is found in another inscription also on the northern wall of the mandapa in front of the central shrine at Kuthalam (Thanjavur District).²

The Lucky Devotee Lakshminarayana Swamy

Raghunatha Nayak, one of the 3 famous Nayak kings who ruled from Tanjore had an Asthana Pandit by name Iyyakumara Tatacharyar. He was a great devotee of Aravamudhan. He spent his whole life doing work in the temple. He built a separate sannidhi for

² South Indian Shrines by P.V. Jagadisa Iyer P.323.

Thayar near the Perumal sannidhi. The Thayar is believed to have appeared in a dream of the Nayak king and told him that a statue of Iyyakumara Tatacharyar may be set up opposite to Her sannidhi so that the devotee could, for ever, continue to worship the idol in Her presence. The idol seen even today in front of the Thayar sannidhi is said to be that of Raghunatha Nayak.

A close disciple of this Tatacharya, Lakshminarayana, also has been rewarded in an unusual manner by God for the sincere work done by him in the temple. Lakshminarayana was a Sri Vaishnavite brahmachari and an orphan. He lived in Kumbakonam. He used to worship Sarngapani very sincerely. Though he was not blessed with riches, out of his love and affection for this deity, Lakshminarayana decided to take on a tremendous task. He wanted to build the biggest gopuram in Chola desa for God Sarngapani. This would have been a very difficult task even for a rich man. It was almost an impossible task for an orphan like Sri Lakshminarayana. But his sincerity and faith were his riches. He did not think of himself. With all his enthusiasm, he approached a number of people and collected funds. He spent his entire life in collecting money and trying to achieve his objective in building the biggest gopuram for Sarngapani Perumal. Long years passed by. He grew old. People advised him to get married so that there would be somebody to at least perform his final obsequies and he could go to Vaikuntam. Lakshminarayana, however, replied that he was happy with the Loka offered to him by Sarngaraja Perumal in this earth at Kumbakonam and that he would not rest till the gopuram was completed. He also replied that if he were to die, the samskara would surely be done by God himself! In course of time, he achieved his objective and completed the gopuram. People called him Lakshminarayana Swami. When he died, people wondered as to what would happen. But it is believed that in the night, an archaka of Sarngapani temple dreamt that

Lord Aravamudhan appeared and told him to take the "dharba" from His hand and do samskaram for Lakshminarayana Swami. The next morning, the archaka did as ordered by God, as though the samskara was done by the Lord himself. Even today, every year, on the day Lakshminarayana Swami died, i.e. Deepavali Amavasai (New moon) day, his ceremony is performed by the temple after taking the dharba from Aravamudhan's hand. That day food prepared during the ceremony is offered to the Lord. This story was related by Sri Sankaracharya Himself.¹

Such an incident occurred in the life of Sri Rama also when He took on the role of a son and performed the last rites for the great bird Jatayu. This is reflected in the sthala purana relating to the Thiruputkuzhi (Thondai mandala desam divya Tirupathi). But in that place, the last rites were performed only once and not annually as at Kumbakonam.

Pottramarai Tank:

The temple tank in this place is very beautiful. On all the four corners of this tank, there is a four-pillared mandapam. In the middle, there is a mandapam. On one side, there is a sannidhi for Lord Narasimha and on other side, there is a sannidhi for Komalavalli Thayar and Hema maharishi. It is believed that it was in this tank that Goddess Komalavalli Thayar was found by Hema maharishi sitting in a 1000 petalled lotus flower. Hence, it is also known as Lakshmi theertham. Some say it is known as Pottramarai tank as Goddess Lakshmi was seated on a golden (pon) tamarai (lotus). It is also known as Amudha vapi as the amrutham which over-flowed from the kudam i.e. the vessel over-flowed into this tank. It is in this tank that during the month of Masi i.e. February, the Perumal's Theppa utsavam (Float Festival) is celebrated.

¹ Ref: Article in Tamil by His Holiness Sankaracharya in Kalki Deepavali Malar 1974.

The Thayar here is considered to be the daughter of Hema maharishi. She did severe penance and got married to the Perumal. Once upon a time, Brighu maharishi was entrusted with the task of finding out as to who among the three Lords viz. Vishnu, Siva and Brahma is the best and fittest person to whom the fruits of a yaga then being conducted by the rishis should be given. Brighu maharishi accordingly visited Satya loka, Siva loka and Vaikuntam. He found that none of the three Gods acknowledged and accepted his presence immediately. Because of his exalted ego, he felt offended at this. As he finally went to Vaikuntam, in his anger, he kicked Lord Vishnu on His chest. Even in the face of that severe provocation, Vishnu only held on to the foot of the maharishi and asked him whether his foot was hurt by the kick! The rishi realised his mistake. He was overcome by shame. He realised his folly. He wanted to atone by doing deep penance. It is said that Hema maharishi is none other than Brighu maharishi. He went to Meru parvatham and started his penance, for the sin committed by him in his earlier birth when he was Brighu. The Lord accepted his repentance. The rishi then requested that God should bless that the Goddess would be born as his daughter as the Lord would then become his son-in-law. The Perumal advised him to go to the banks of the river Kaveri where there is a pushkarani by name Pottramarai. God said that in that pushkarani, Mahalakshmi who is known as Komalavalli would be found in deep meditation sitting in a lotus flower with 1000 petals. He asked the rishi to adopt that girl Komalavalli, bring Her up and that in due course, He would marry Her. The Lord disappeared. Hema maharishi obeyed the Lord and went to Pottramarai pushkarani and saw Komalavalli Thayar. His joy knew no bounds. He adopted her as his daughter and brought her up. As she grew up, he was eagerly awaiting the arrival of Perumal, his would be son-in-law. In the meantime, at Srirangam, Lord Ranganatha had separated the Pranavakruti and Vaitheeka vimanam and had

sent the Vaitheeka vimanam with Sarnga Raja Perumal in it to Kudanthai. Sarngaraja appeared before Hema maharishi. He accepted Komalavalli Thayar as His Mahalakshmi and His divine consort. The divine marriage was celebrated. On the specific request of the maharishi, the Lord continued to stay in the place so as to bless the devotees who flock to that place.

Sri Pathala Srinivasa Sannidhi:

There is a Srinivasa sannidhi in this temple. It is situated almost underground as one has to climb down eight steps below the ground level to reach this sannidhi. Here the God is seen facing east. As the Perumal is seen below ground level, He is known as Pathala Srinivasan.

The Rescuing of the Pasurams:

Sri Nathamuni who is believed to have lived thousand years ago came to worship Aravamudhan. Near the sannidhi, he found an aged lady singing a Tamil prabhandham. She sang ten songs. The eleventh one indicated that it was a part and parcel of one thousand songs. The stanzas were so finely woven and expressed such beautiful sentiments that Nathamuni who heard it was completely captivated by the music and its substance. He was convinced that they were part of a great composition and asked the old lady as to where the balance of the 1000 songs could be found. The lady pleaded ignorance. But the saint would not give up. He went on searching for the remaining couplets. After considerable time, he was able to trace with the help of Divine Grace not only these thousand pasurams but the entire 4000 verses of the divya prabhandam. Thus, the Naalayira prabandham would have been lost to posterity but for a chance encounter by Nathamuni with that old lady in Sri Aravamudhan's sannidhi. It is therefore believed that it was Sri Aravamudhan Himself who was responsible for rescuing these hymns which

represent the quintessence of Vaishnavism. As a mark of gratitude for this discovery, Nathamuni initiated the practice of Adyayana utsavam in Sri Sarngapani swami temple on the first of Markazhi and the singing of Divya prabandhams during that festival.

Another peculiar event connected with this festival celebrated in the month of Markazhi is the one which takes place on the 19th day of the festival. On that day, God is dressed up as Thayar and the Nachiar is dressed up as Perumal. This peculiar event is not done anywhere else. It is not known as to what is the reason for this peculiar custom.

Architectural Highlights:

The tall main gopuram of Sarangapani swami temple is about 147 feet high and stands well above all the other temple towers in this populous pilgrim city of Kumbakonam. The closely studded stucco images reveal in sequence the puranic story of the avatars of Lord Vishnu. It is an eleven storied gopuram around each outer wall of which are figures depicting a luxurious and fine representation of Gods and Goddess. Just above the first floor, all round the tower are depicted, in granite, 108 dance forms. This is a marvel of architectural skill. The fine and rare dance poses in Bharatha natyam, as described in Bharatha sastra, are depicted. Above each picture is inscribed in Sanskrit the respective names of the mudras that are shown there. It is a great feast to the eyes.

Epigraphical Highlights:

The antiquity of Kumbakonam is well known and recognised. The God here viz. Sarngapani or Aravamudan has been sung in the Prabandas in the 8th century. But it is rather intriguing that no epigraphical evidences are available to prove its antiquity. As stated earlier, this place has got Saivite and Vaishnavite shrines besides a temple for Lord Brahma.

The temples are comparatively modern apparently the works of Naik Kings in the outer parts but ancient going back to the Chola period in the inner parts. A few epigraphical evidences available in the Chakrapani swami temple; the Ramaswami temple and Sarngapani swami temple are detailed below:

To take up the inscriptions found in the Chakrapaniswami temple first - in the central shrine of the Chakrapani swami temple on the southern wall, there is an inscription which records the gift of 120 panam for offerings to the God Tiruvali Alvar and to Bhuttatalvar probably by Koyil-kandadai Nayan Alvar-Jiyar. This offering was later distributed to Sri Vaishnava people.¹

On the western and southern wall of the same temple, central shrine, there is a record of the gift of one silver pitcher and a tiruttoppu (grove) to God Tiruvali Alvar by Peddappanayakkar for Tiruvandikkappu.²

On the northern wall of the central shrine of this temple, there is a record that the supply of garlands to Lord Chakrapani was the charge of one Venkatanayakkar.³

In the prakara around the central shrine of Chakrapani swami temple, there is a stone built into the northern (outer) wall which records the gift of Viraraghavan-tiruvidi to provide for the car procession of God Tiruvali-alvar of Chakkara-tirtham of Thirukkudandai. This inscription refers to the boundaries of this town as the river Kaveri on one side and Tepperumalnallurvaykkaḷ on the other side.⁴

To now turn to some of the interesting inscriptions found in the Ramaswami temple in Kumbakonam,

¹ 301 App. B ARIE 1965-66

² 302 App. B ARIE 1965-66

³ 303 App. B ARIE 1965-66

⁴ 307 App. B ARIE 1965-66

there is a stone built into the wall near the water tap in the Ramaswami temple. It records some benefactions like the donation of Aruna tirtham by an individual.⁵

An interesting feature in the Sarngapani swami temple is the labelled sculptures depicting the karanas on barata natya sastra. These are found on the first tier of the gopuram. This is in contrast to what is found in most of the temples containing the karana sculptures. Normally, such karana sculptures are found on the wall surface of the entrance portion itself or on the corner of the tiruch-chutru maligai as in the case of Tirukkamakkottam Udaiya Nachiyar temple and also the 1000 pillared hall both at Chidambaram. Below the panels representing these karanas of Bharatanatya, there are inscriptions in Sanskrit, Grantha language describing the dance poses depicted in the panels.⁶ Below similar panels built into the base of a mandapa adjoining the tank in the Kumbhesvaraswami temple also there are similar labels as found in the Sarangapani swami temple.⁷

In the mandapa, in front of the central shrine of this Sarngapani swami temple, on the southern wall there is a record of a gift of land by the King in Kulottungacholanallur kattalai for food offerings on the occasion of the early morning service to God Aravamuda Alvar at Thirukkudamukku. This relates to the period of Viruppana Udayar of the Vijayanagar dynasty.⁸

In the same temple, in the northern wall, again, relating to the period of the same King, there is a record of the gift of house sites in the main street west of Sarngapani Devar temple.⁹

⁵ 274 App. B ARIE 1964-65

⁶ 279 App. B ARIE 1964-65

⁷ 280 App. B ARIE 1964-65

⁸ 415 App. B ARIE 1954-55

⁹ 416 App. B ARIE 1954-55

Another inscription relating to the same Vijayanagar dynasty and again relating to the period of Virupanna Udayar records the gift of cows for lighting a perpetual lamp to the God by a woman by name Kannathal who was said to be in the service of the King.¹⁰

Another inscription in the temple refers to the period of Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagar dynasty. It records the gift of a pendant and a savara by Peddappanayaka to the God.¹¹

Another inscription in the first prakara of the northern wall of this temple contains an inscription relating to the Vijayanagar dynasty which mentions the King's victory over a Pandayan King.¹²

Another inscription relating to the reign of the Vijayanagara dynasty King Sadasivadevamaharaya is available on the base of the mandapa in the outer prakara of the Sarngapani swami temple. This records the gift of Kanaka Chettiyar of 25 pon for purchasing the lands for providing cake offerings for the God at this temple.¹³

Ratha Bandha:

The Ratha Bandha is a type of poem known as Chitra Kavi. The poem written in the squares comes out in the form of a chariot. The words which are filled in each square has got a relationship with the number indicated in the square. There are only four such Ratha Bandha poems. Two are in Saivite literature and two in Vaishnavite literature. The Vaishnaite Ratha Bandha poems are authored by Thirumangai Alvar and Thirukurukai Perumal Kavirayar. The latter has written about Nammalvar and Thirumangai Alvar has written about the God at Thirukkudanthai. The

¹⁰ 417 App. B ARIE 1954-55

¹¹ 419 & 420 of ARIE 1954-55

¹² 321 App. B ARIE 1955-56

¹³ 293 App. B ARIE 1927

Saivite Ratha Bandhas are written by Gnana Sambandar and Nakkirar.

The Ratha Bandha poem is in the form of a chariot. Parallel lines are drawn with the squares formed. In the squares, the words in the poem are fitted in, following the number method using the numbers 1 to 7 only. Hence it is that this type of poetry is also known as Elukurikkai. It contains seven graded parts. In this structure, the ratha is divided into two halves - upper and the lower. In each half there are 7 rectangles cut into squares. When cutting the squares, the first part viz. the top of the chariot has one square only. The second three squares and the third five, the fourth seven, the fifth nine, the sixth eleven and the seventh thirteen. In the upper half of the chariot each row therefore has two chambers of squares more than the preceding part as we go down from the top. The same is repeated in the lower part of the ratha with this difference that the top starts with thirteen chambers and ends with the base of only one chamber. Thus, the top and the bottom of the rathas have the squares in the ascending and in the descending orders respectively.

Filling in the numbers in the squares in the upper half only gives the following picture.

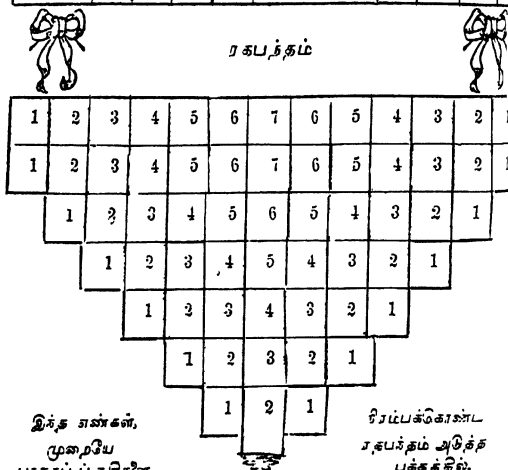
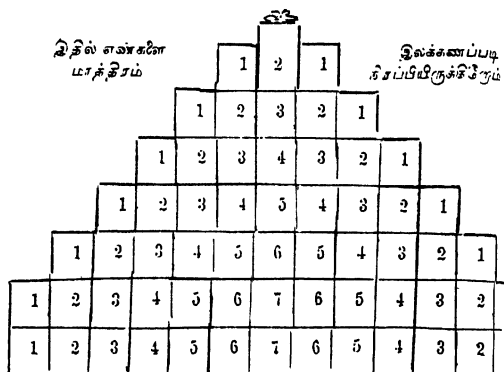
```

      1
     1 2 1
    1 2 3 2 1
   1 2 3 4 3 2 1
  1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1
 1 2 3 4 5 6 5 4 3 2 1
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

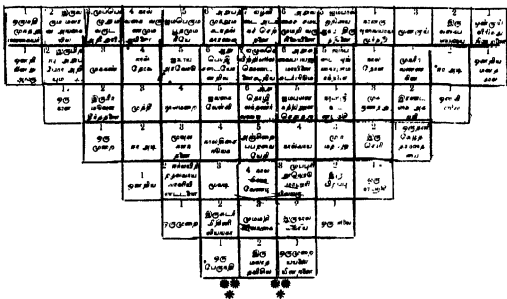
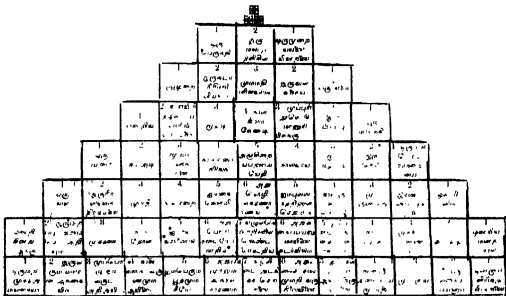
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The numbers are written in such a manner that when read horizontally the ascending order and the descending order is maintained in the pattern. As for example, in the fourth row the numbers that are writ-

Ratha Bandha Diagram 1



Ratha Bandha Diagram 2



ten are 1 2 3 4. In the ascending order and the second half of that row is in the descending order viz. 4 3 2 1. Similar is the position with reference to each row. Thus, the last row has numbers in the ascending orders upto 7 and from 7 it descends to 1. It will be seen that the outer wings of this triangle has consistently No.1. Similarly, each row read downwards also has the numbers arranged in the ascending order. A closer look will make it evident that the topmost step is 1^2 , second step is 11^2 , the third is 111^2 , the fourth 1111^2 , the fifth 11111^2 , the sixth 111111^2 , and the seventh 1111111^2 both in the arohana and avarohana gradation! What is more when the numbers in each step is added they present the following pattern viz. 1 (1^2), 4 (2^2), 9 (3^2), 16 (4^2), 25 (5^2) 36 (6^2) and 49 (7^2). In addition, when we read the numbers in the outer fringe and go inwards reading the subsequent numbers in each square, it is seen that the same number is arranged almost in the form of a garland. Thus, the outer fringe has the number 1 all over, the immediate inner row has got all the numbers 2 arranged in the form of a garland. Subsequently, also the numbers 3, 4, 5 and 6 thus giving an impression of having arranged rows of garlands. Thus, there is a mathematical beauty in the structure of the poem.

In the following pages, the ratha bandha diagram with numbers alone, then the ratha bandha diagram filled with the pasuram words and subsequently the stanzas with their meaning is given. The arrows marked on the ratha bandha indicates the manner in which it has to be read. This unique poem written extolling the Perumal at Sarngapani Koil is worth being recorded in full due to its uniqueness.

Stanza 1:

ஒரு பேருந்தி யிருமலர்த் தவிசில்

ஒரு முறை யயனை யீன்றனை

After the great deluge, in order to re-create the world, the Perumal created Brahma who emerged out of His navel, seated on a lotus. He re-entrusted the vedas to him and advised him to re-create the world as before.

Stanza 2:

- - ஒரு முறை
இரு சுடர் மீதினி வியங்கா மும்மதிள்
இலங்கை இருகால் வளைய ஒரு சிலை
ஒன்றிய ஈரெயிற்றழல் வாய்வாளியின்
அட்டனை

During your Ramavatara, you completely destroyed Lanka - A Lanka which was full of demons;

A Lanka which even the devas dreaded, so much so the Sun God and the Moon God used to avoid going over Lanka;

You destroyed that Lanka, with the matchless and unequalled bow - Sarnga -

a bow which had two teeth-

a bow which used to spit fire-

You let loose an arrow with that bow and annihilated Lanka.

Stanza 3:

- மூவுடி நானிலம் வேண்டி
முப்புரி தாலோடு மாலுரி யிலங்கு
மார்வினி னிருபிறப் பொருமானுகி
ஒரு முறை யீரடி மூவுலகாத்தனை

Once upon a time, you took on the form of a brahmachari and requested Lord Bali to give you just three feet of land and when your request was conceded, with your divine feet you covered all the three worlds.

Stanza 4:

நாற்றிசைஇ நடுங்க அஞ்சிறப் பறவை
ஏறி, நால்வாய் மும்மதத் திருசெவி
ஒருதனி வேழத் தாந்தையை ஒரு நாள்
இருநீர் மடுவுள் தீர்த்தனை.

Once upon a time, you were so angry on hearing the plaintive cry for help from your devotee, Gajendra. The people who saw your angry form, started shivering in their feet, with fear. You got on to the back of your vahana viz. Peria Thiruvadi and sped towards the tank where Gajendra, the elephant, was being pulled into the tank by the crocodile. You rushed to the rescue of that elephant which had two beautiful ears, a mouth which was hanging open and it was secreting maste from three spots. You rushed and rescued the elephant and thereby answered the sincere prayer of your ardent devotee.

Stanza 5:

- - - மூத்தீ
நான்மறை ஐவகை வேள்வி அறுதொழில்
அந்தணர் வணங்குந் தன்மையை.

O God! You have in you qualities which make the brahmins to worship you. These brahmins are the people who have expertise in three agnis (Garhapatyama, Ahvaneeeyama, Dakshinagni), four vedas (Rig Veda, Yajur Veda, Sama Veda and Atharvana Veda), five types of yagnas (Brahma Yagnam, Deva Yagnam, Bhootha Yagnam, Pitru Yagnam and Manushya Yagnam), six types of holy activities (i.e. to themselves repeat the vedas, to repeat the vedas for sake of others, to do the yagnas themselves, to get the yagnas done by others, to gift as well as to receive gift from others.)

Stanza 6:

.. ஐம்புலன்

அசத்திஹுள் செறுத்து நான்குடனடக்கி

முக்குணத் திரண்டவை யகற்றி ஒன்றினில்

ஒன்றி நின்றுங்கிரு பிறப்பறுப்போர்

அறியுந் தன்மையை - - -

You have a swaroopa (form) and a swabava (qualities) which can be understood only by the maha yogis.

Who have controlled the panchendriams (Panchendriams are the eyes, the ears, the nose, the mouth and body)

Who have controlled the desire for food, sleep and to enjoy the good things of life and have also got control over fear.

Who have adopted satva guna as against rajogunam and tamogunam (i.e. who are satviks)

Who have all the power to rise above the sorrows of the world.

Stanza 7:

.. முக்கண் நாற்றோள்

ஐயா யரவோ டாறுபொதி சடையோன்

அறிவருந் தன்மைப் பெருமையுள் நின்றான்

O Lord! You have a swaroopa and a swabhava which cannot be easily understood even by the great Lord Siva. It is said that once upon a time, Lord Siva wanted to teach a lesson to some of the rishis who did not give Him due respect. He therefore appeared before the munipatnis when the munis were not there and made them stray from the path of chastity. Coming to know of this, the munis did Abichara Yagnam and from that homam, serpents, domon, deer, tiger rabbits etc., came out and they were entrusted with the job of harming Lord Siva. When the serpents rushed towards

Lord Siva, He caught them and wore them round His neck as garlands; When the demons came near Him, He made them as His assistants; He held the deer in his hand; He removed the skin from the tiger and wore it as a dress, when the rabbits came near him, He stepped on them and killed them. Thus, He was able to set at naught all the weapons of destruction sent by the munis.

Yet another incident in the life of Lord Siva is also referred to in this poem, when it is said that He - Lord Siva bears on His head a river. Once upon a time, when Perumal measured the three worlds with his feet, Brahma in Satyaloka is reported to have washed the divine feet with the water from His Kamandalam. That water (Sri pada theertham) swelled into a flood and descended from Devaloka as Akasa Ganga. Akasa GANGA Was destined to be brought to the earth by the long penance of Bagiratha. Lord Siva felt that if the Akasa Ganga falls directly on to the earth, the earth may not be able to bear the burden and hence he received it on the locks of hair on his head and allowed it to flow slowly on to the earth.

The greatness of Siva is related in this poem just to impress on us that even such a great Lord could not comprehend fully the swaroopa and swabhava of Perumal.

Stanza 8:

ஏழு வ செயிற்றினிற் கொண்டனை, கூறிய
அஞ்சுவைப் பயனுமாயினை, கூர்விடும்
ஐம்படை அங்கையுளமர்த்தனை சுந்தர
நாற்றேள் முந்தீர் வண்ணை, நின்னீரடி
ஒன்றியி மனத்தால், ஒரு மதி முகத்து
மங்கையரிருவரும் மலரனவங்கையின்
முப்பொழுதும் வருட அறிதுயிலமர்ந்தனை.

O Lord! Once upon a time, you took on the form of a boar (varaham) and rescued the world which was

hidden in the Pathala loka by the demon Hiranyakshan. (The seven worlds referred to in this poem are Navalan theevu, Irali theevu, Kasaiyin theevu, Kiravugnasa theevu, Sanmali theevu, Thengin theevu and Putkara theevu). You Oh Lord are the essence of the famous six types of rasas. (The six types of tastes are uppu (salty), pulippu (sour), thuvorppu (astringent), inippu (sweet), karpu (hot) and kaippu (bitter). You hold in your beautiful hands the Panchayudhams. You have the colour and hue of the ocean. (Munneer i.e. three types of water referred to in this poem are the river water, spring water, and the rain water. All these three ultimately reach the ocean. Hence it is that in this poem it is said that Perumal has the colour of the three types of water). You are happily enjoying your yoga nidra even as your two divine feet are being pressed gently and affectionately by Thirumadanthai and Manmadanthai with their soft beautiful hands. Those two look as gentle as Lord Moon himself.

Stanza 9:

நெறிமுறை நால்வகை வருணமு மாயினை
மேதகு மைம்பெரும் பூதமும் நீயே
அறுபத முரலுங் கூந்தல் காரணம்
ஏழ்விடை யடங்கச் செற்றினை அறுவகைச்
சமயமு மறிவரு நிலையினை ஐம்பால்
ஒதியை ஆகத் திருத்தினை அறுமுதல்
நான்க வையாய் மூர்த்தி னான்றாய்
இருவகைப் பயனா யொன்றாய் விரிந்து
நின்றனை - - - -

O Lord! the four castes emerged out of the various parts of your body. The vedas say that the brahmins came from the face of the Lord, the kshatriyas came out of His shoulders, the vasyas came out of His thighs and the Sudras out of His feet. Thus, all the four castes are the intrinsic part of you Oh Perumal.

O Lord! you are yourself the Panchabhoothams. (The pancha bhoothams are earth, water, fire, sky and

time). You defeated the seven oxes so as to marry the cow-herd girl Nappinnai whose hair is adorned with such sweet scented flowers that the bees come humming to collect the honey from the flowers. O Lord! You have goddess Mahalakshmi residing permanently on your chest. Her hair has all the five lakshanas, Viz. Mrudhu (soft), kulir (cool), Narumanam (sweet smelling), mikkuruthai (in abundance), Karuth iruthal (shinning black), Neendiruthal (long tresses).

O Lord! You are the bestower of the four purusharthas like dharma etc. (the purusharthas are dharma, artham, kamam and moksham). O Lord! You are a Thrimurthi i.e. you are the Creator, the Destroyer as well as the Protector. You are the bestower of all the happiness as well as sorrows. O Lord! Yet you are the one supreme being who is omnipresent and omniscient. You are infinite and all pervasive.

The following line in Thiruvaimozhi also reflect this supreme nature in the following words:

“மாயா வாமனனே மதுகுதா நீயருளாய், தீயாய் நீராய் நில
ளாய் விகம்பாய்க் காலாய், தாயாய்த் தந்தையாய் மக்களாய்
மற்றுமாய் முற்றுமாய், தீயாய் நீ நின்றுவாறு இவை என்ன
தீயாயங்கனே”

These words from Thiruvaimozhi also say that Madhusudana and Vamana are everything. They are the fire, the water, the earth, the sky, the time, mother, father, the subjects, all other things and every other thing is the personification of the one and the only supreme truth viz. Perumal.

The ratha bandha pasurm is over with this stanza. But there is one more stanza which is almost like a concluding stotra. It runs as follows:

Stanza 10:

. . . குன்று மதுமலர்ச்சோலை
 வண்கொடிப் படப்பை வருபுனல பொன்னி
 மாமணி யலைக்குஞ் செந்தெலொண் கழனித்
 திகழ்வன முடுத்த கற்போர் புரிசெய்
 கனக மாளிகை நிமிர்சொடி விகம்பில்
 இளம்பிறை துவக்கும் செவ்வம் மல்குதென்
 திருக்குடந்தை யந்தணர் மந்திர மொழியுடன்
 வணங்க வாடர வமனியி லறிதாயில்
 அமர்ந்த பரம நின்னடியினை பணிவன்
 வருமிட ரகல மாற்றே வினையே

O Master of the entire world

You are very found of being seen in the yogic
 sleeping posture

I seek solace at your divine feet and pray that you
 may bless me and save me from the sorrows and
 ills of this world.

You O Lord are residing at Thiru Kudanthai

Which is full of gradens filled with honey laden
 flowers is full of betel leaves gardens

Where the ever plentiful waters of Kaveri brings
 and deposits on the sea shore precious stones

Where there are beautiful fields filled with rich
 and ripe crop waiting to be harvested

Which is surrounded by forests on all sides -

Which is well known as the home of number of
 scholars -

Which is full of palatial tall houses which almost
 touch the skies -

Which is a very prosperous town.

In brief the substance and the meaning conveyed
 by the Ratha Bandha poem is as follows:

O Perumal! It is you who created Lord Brahma
 who was seated on a lotus and emerged from your
 navel, It is you who destroyed Lanka - even at

the sight of which territory the Sun God and Moon God trembled with fear.

It is you who took the form of Trivikrama and covered the entire world with your two feet.

It is you who rushed to the rescue of Gajendra by speeding to the spot, riding post haste on your vahana i.e. Garuda.

It is you who have the form which can be understood by the satwik sages,

It is you have the unique distinction of not having been comprehended in full even by great Lord Siva.

It is you who assumed the Varaha avataram and rescued Bhoomi Devi from the clutches of the demon,

It is you who are the quintessence of the different tastes,

It is you who held in your hands the Panchayudhams,

O Lord with four hands (Chaturbhujane)

O Lord who has the colour of the ocean

O Lord! you are the originator of the four varnas

You are the embodiment of Pancha bhoothams

You are the person who conquered the seven oxes in order to marry Nappinnai

Your swaroopa and swabhava cannot be comprehended fully by those belonging to other religions

O Lord on whose chest Goddess Lakshmi resides

O Lord You are the embodiment of the purusharthas

O Lord You are the Trinity i.e. the Creator, the Destroyer and Protector

O Lord You are the controller of happiness and sorrow

O Lord You are the entire world

You are omnipresent and omniscient

O Lord you who reside at Thirukudanthai

Please rid me, your sincere devotee, of all my sorrows and problems.

Hymnology:

Seven Alvars have sung in praise of the Lord here. Perialvar has sung 3 pasurams, Andal one pasuram, Tirumalisai Alvar 7 pasurams, Bhuttattalvar 2 pasurams, Peyalvar 2 pasurams, Nammalvar 11 pasurams and Tirumnangai Alvar has sung 25 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. Thus, all told 51 pasurams have been sung by the Alvars praising the deity here.

Perialvar - Perialvar Tirumozhi - 2-6-6

ஆலத்திலையான் ஆர்வினணமேலான்
நீலக்கடலுள் நெடுங்காலம் கண் வளர்ந்தான்
பாலப்ராயத்தே பார்த்தற்குள் செய்த
கோலப் பிராஜுகோர் கோல் கொண்டு வா,
குடந்தைக் கிடந்தாற்கோர் கோல் கொண்டு வா
(பெரியாழ்வார் திருமொழி ஐ-6)

Meaning:

Oh crow! please bring for my son Kannan a beautiful stick used by the cow herds while tending the cattle;

He (i.e. my son) is the very same person who is seen in a sayana pose at Kundanthai;

He is very beautiful to look at;

He is the person who acted as the charioteer and initiated Arjuna into the nuances of fundamental philosophy (charama sloka).

He is the person who was in yogic sleep lying down peacefully on the blue waters of the ocean.

He is the one who is seen lying down on Adishesha.

He is the person who during the great deluge swallowed the entire world, kept it safe in His stomach and yet floated innocently like a cherub on a banyan leaf.

Andal - Nachchiyar Tirumozhi 13th Tirumozhi -

2nd pasuram:

பாலாலிலையில் துயில்கொண்ட பரமன்

வலைப்பட்டிருந்தேனை

வேலால் தன்னம் பெய்தாற்போல்,

வேண்டிற்றெல்லாம் பேசாதே

கோலால் நிரை மேய்த்து ஆயனாய்க்

குடந்தைக் கிடந்த குடமாடி

நீலார் தண்ணத்துழாய் கொண்டு என் நெறிமென்

குழல்மேல் சூட்டிரே.

நாச்சியார் திருமொழி

Meaning:

I am verily caught in the net of that Perumal - who is very noble; who is matchless (i.e. has no equals); who slept like a babe on the tender banyan leaf.

Oh ye companions!

Think before you utter your words;

Have some regard for my tender feelings;

Do not utter all that occurs to your mind;

Your unthinking words hurt me like the sharp thrust of a spear;

Go. Get that ever fresh and cool thulasi garland worn by Kannan-

Who as Gopala the cowherd wielded a stick in His Hands and tended the cattle; Who as Gopala danced on the Kundam (kuda kothu i.e. dance on the vessel holding the amrit)- Who is seen lying down in Thirukundanthai Adorn me with that Thulasi garland worn by my Lord. (Here Andal says that the cure for her love sickness is the thulasi garland of Perumal!)

Tirumalisai Alvar

Tiruchchanda Viruttam - 56th pasuram

இலங்கை மன்னன் ஐந்தொடைந்து பைந்தலை நிலத்துக்
 கலங்க அன்று சென்று கொன்று வென்றி கொண்ட வீரனே!
 விலங்கு தூலர் வேத நாவர் நீதியான சேள்வியார்
 வலங்கொள்க குடந்தையுள் கிடந்த மாலு மல்லையே!
 (திருச்சந்த விருத்தம் - ஐஆம் பாசரம்)

Meaning:

Oh victorious hero! Once you marched into Lanka, made Ravan the king of Lanka, tremble in fear. You engaged him in a fierce battle, cut off all his ten heads and made them roll on the ground. Are you not the same God who is seen in a reclining posture at Thirukudanthai? By your presnece at kudanthai, you have enabled all those who are well versed in vedas and sastras to bow down in deep reverence to you. (Alvar says that Aravamudan is none other than Sri Rama himself).

Bhuttattalvar

2nd Tiruvandadhi - 97th pasuram

எங்கள் பெருமான் இமையோர் தலைமகன் நீ
 செங்கண் நெடுமால் திருமாற்பா . பொங்கு
 படமூக்கின் ஆயிரவாய்ப் பாம்பணைமேல் சேர்ந்தாய்
 குடமூக்குக் கோயிலாய்க் கொண்டு
 (இரண்டாம் திருவந்தாதி - ஐஆம் பாசரம்)

Meaning:

Oh Lord! You who have red lustrous eyes; You who shower bountiful affection on your devotees; You who always have Goddess Lakshmi on your chest; Oh Devadhideva! You are lying down on the thousand hooded Adishesha at Kundathai only to protect and save us.

Pey Alvar - Third Tiruvandadhi - 30th pasuram

சேர்ந்த திருமால் கடல் குடந்தை வேங்கடம்
நேர்ந்த என் சிந்தை நிறை விசம்பு - வாய்ந்த
மறை பாடகம் அஃந்தன் வன் துழாய்க் கண்ணி
இறைபாடியாய் இவை.

(மூன்றாம் திருவந்தாதி - 30ஆம் பாசரம்)

Meaning:

The places where the God who adorns the Thulasimala resides permanently are

Thiruparkadal-
Thirukudanthai-
Thiruvankatam-
Paramapadam-
Thiru Padagam-
Adishesa-

And My mind which is ever beholden to Him.

Nammalvar - Tiruvoimozhi - 5-8-7

அறியேறே என்னம் பொற்கடரே செங்கட் கருமுகிலே
எறியே பவளக்குன்றே நால்தோளெந்தாய் உனதருளே
மிரியா அடிமை என்னைக் கொண்டாய்

குடந்தைத் திருமாலே
தறியேன் இனி உன் சரணம் தந்து என் சன்மம் களையாயே
(திருவாய்மொழி 5:8-7)

Meaning:

Oh Golden hued beautiful one;
Oh Lord who have red lustrous eyes;
Oh Lord you who have the enchanting beauty of
a thick dark cloud;
Oh Lord you who are a veritable precious coral
mountain;
Oh Lord you who have four arms;
Oh Lord you who are the personification and em-
bodiment of kindness;

Oh Lord you who have accepted me as your inseparable devotee whose one and only purpose in life is to be your faithful servant.

Oh Lord of Kundanthai

Oh Aravamudae (i.e. insatiable nectar)

I have absolutely no desire to live

I seek refuge at your divine feet please bless me so that I do not have to go through this cycle of rebirths and death;

Bless me, Oh God, with moksha.

Tirumangai Alvar - Peria Tirumozhi - 8-9-5

வந்தாய் என் மனத்தே வந்து நீ புருந்த பிள்ளை
எந்தாய் போய் அறியாய் இதுவே அமையாதோ
சொந்தார் பைம்பொழில் சூழ் குடந்தைக் கிடந்துகந்த
மைந்தர் உன்னை என்றும் மறவாமை பெற்றேனே!

(பெரிய திருமொழி 8-9-5)

Meaning:

Oh Lord you who are seen in a lying down posture at Kundanthai filled with thick luscious groves; Of your own sweet will and pleasure you came to me; You entered my mind; You are staying there now; Oh father of mine Cannot you continue to be with me for ever like this? The fact that I never forget you is also your kind boon to me!

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's

Poem from 108 Tirupati Andadi

Poem

தானே படைத்துலகைக் தானே அளித்து நீ
தானே அழிக்கும் தளர்ச்சியோ . வானில்
திரு மகுடம் தைக்கச் சிறு குறளாய் நீண்ட
பெரும குடந்தைக் கிடந்தாய் பேசு

Meaning:

At first you were born as diminutive Vamana but later as Trivikrama you assumed a gigantic form which encompassed the entire universe; Are you seen lying down in Kudanthai due to the exhaustion of having to create the worlds, protect them and also destroy them?

* * *

SIRUPULIYUR

This divya desam is in Nannilam Taluk of Tanjore District. On the Mayavaram-Tiruvarur rail line, one should get down at Kollumangudi railway station. It is located 1.5 miles to the east of that station. It can also be reached by road, as it lies on the 35th kilometer between Kumbakonam and Karaikkal. The moolavar here is known as Aruma Kadal Amudhan i.e. to say He is as sweet as the divine nectar that came when the ocean was churned. The utsavar is known as Krupa Samudra Perumal. The Thayar (moolavar) is known as Thiruma magal. The Thayar (utsavar) is known as Daya Nayaki. The vimanam is known as Nandya vatta vimanam. There are two pushkarinis in this place viz. Anantha pushkarini and Manasa pushkarini. The sthala vriksham is the Bilva tree. The dimensions of the temple are 142' from east to west and 255' from south to north. This is the only other place where as in Srirangam the Perumal is seen facing south while lying on Adishesha i.e. Bujanga Sayanam Temple.

This temple is located in the midst of idyllic surroundings in the midst of green fields, thick groves and silent streams. The sea coast is about 12 kms. to the east of this place. It is said that in those days, the waves of the sea would lash the shore and leave behind a trail of beautiful pearls and precious stones. A little to the south of this place, there is a small rivulet by name Naattu vaikkal. Thirumangai Alwar, while describing this place, referred to it as

அறையும் புனல் ஒரு பால். வயல் ஒரு பால்.
பொழில் ஒரு பால்

Literally translated this means there were green fields on one side, thick groves on another side and a bubbling rivulet flowing on one side.

To quote Thirumangai Alwar again, he said

சிறை வண்டிறையும் சிறு புலியூர்
தேனார் பொழில் தழுவும் சிறு புலியூர்
செந்தாமரை மலரும் சிறு புலியூர்
செழுநீர் வயல் தழுவும் சிறு புலியூர்

Literally translated this means that
In Sirupuliyur the humming of the beetles is like a song;
Sirupuliyur is full of honeyed groves;
Sirupuliyur is filled with tanks with lotuses in full blossom;
Sirupuliyur is full of fields which are hugged by water ways.

Thirumangai Alwar addressed this Lord as "Aruma Kadal Amudhae, Unadadiyae Saranamae"! Translated this means 'O Lord! You are the ocean of mercy, your feet, are my only refuge'. As, Thirumangai Alwar sought saranagathi at the feet of this Perumal, the Lord is also known as Saranagatha Rakshakan i.e. one who definitely rushes to the rescue of all those who seek solace at His feet. He is also known as Krupa Samudran as His boundless quality of mercy ensures that nobody who approaches Him goes back with his desire unfulfilled or without his sins being forgiven. Brahmanda Purānam says that Brahma came to this place and sang the praise of Kadal Amudhan and received the blessings of the Perumal. Brighu Maharishi said that whoever repeats this stotram in this place for a mandalam i.e. a period of forty days will definitely attain moksha and will be rid of his sins.

Divya desams where God is seen in a lying down posture are broadly classified as places where God is

seen in Thala sayanam, Vada sayanam or Sala sayanam postures. The places which are classified as Thala sayanam places are the ones where Perumal is seen sleeping on the Tharai (Tamil word) meaning floor. As for example, at Mahabalipuram where the Perumal is known as Tala sayana Perumal. The Vada sayanam places are those where the Lord is seen lying down on Vata patram as at Srivilliputhur. Vata patram refers to the leaf of a banyan tree i.e. Alamaram. The Jala sayanam places are those where the Perumal is seen lying down on water as in Thirupparkadal. At Sirupuliyur, God is seen reposing on Bhujanga i.e. Serpent on the Jala i.e. water. When the Adishesha couch is floating on the Jala i.e. water, it truly reflects the manner in which God is said to be seen in Thirupparkadal.

This place is also known as Thapa Prasidhi sthalam i.e. a place where God ensures that the prayers are invariably answered. This place is also one among the Krsnaranya kshetrams. It is known as Sirupuliyur as the young muni (Bala muni) alias Vyagra paada muni i.e. the muni with the feet of a tiger, was given mukthi and moksha by the Perumal here who appeared before him in the Bala sayana posture. All the places which were visited by this Bala muni or Vyagra paada muni are easily identified by the addition of the prefix "puli" to the name of the place. For example Perumpattra Puliyur, Perum puliyur, Pathiri puliyur, Erukkatham puliyur, Omam puliyur. As proof of the claim that Perumal appeared before the Bala munivar even today we find that at the feet of the moolavar i.e. Bala sayana murthi, there are idols of two munis, one is that of Bala munivar and the other is that of Kanva mahamuni.

The Story of Pulikkal Munivar:

Pulikkal munivar is the son of Madiyanthina munivar. He was known as Bala munivar i.e. the person who became a rishi at a very young age. He used to stay at

Chidhambaram, have his bath in Sivagangai theertham and then worship Lord Nataraja at Chidhambaram. He was a great devotee of the God who was the embodiment of the divine dance (Anandanatanam). He would pluck flowers from various trees in the surrounding areas and worship the Lord. He prayed to Lord Siva that he may be given feet like those of a tiger so that he may not slip when he climbed the trees early in the morning for plucking the flowers. He asked God to give him hands and feet which resemble those of a tiger so that the long claws may give him the necessary grip on the trunks of various trees while he plucked flowers from the top. He also desired that he should be blessed with the sight of a tiger so that he could see clearly even in the night i.e. before the Sun rises. Thus, all that he prayed for was only to enable him to pluck flowers and worship the Lord to his heart's content. His prayers were answered. Hence he is known as Pulikkal munivar i.e. a rishi having feet like those of a tiger. He is also known as Vyagra pathar, "Vyagra" meaning a tiger in Sanskrit. With this unusual body of his, he would, early in the morning, visit the forest and pluck all the rare flowers belonging to four types known as Kodi poo (Tamil) i.e. flowers found on creepers, Neer poo (Tamil) i.e. flowers found in water, Nila poo (Tamil) i.e. flowers found on earth and Kottu poo (Tamil) i.e. flowers which shed like Pari Jatha flowers. With this variety of flowers, he worshipped Nataraja Perumal. One day, God appeared before him and advised him to go to the place where Aruma Kadal Amudhan stays and pray to Him for moksha. Pulikkal munivar obeyed Nataraja's order and thus a Siva baktha became a Vishnu baktha! He visited several places before reaching Aruma Kadal Amudhan's Temple. All the places he visited were referred to later with the adjective 'Puliyur' meaning the place visited by the Pulikkal munivar. In course of time, he reached the place which is now known as Sirupuliyur. It is said that before he reached the present Sirupuliyur, he was searching for the sannidhi of Krupa Samudra Peru-

mal/Aruma Kadal Amudhan. As he could not locate the place and he was standing in a helpless manner, Lord Siva suddenly appeared before him in the form of a Lingam and showed to him the place where Krupa Samudra Perumal was lying in a Bala sayana murthi posture. Even now, in front of the Perumal temple, there is a field where there is a Siva lingam. People believe firmly that this was the murthi of Siva which showed the way to the Perumal temple for Pulikkal munivar. This story has no basis whatsoever in any of the puranas. But it has earned a certain credibility through constant repetition by word of mouth from generation to generation i.e. Karna Paramparai story. Pillai Perumal Iyengar who wrote the 108 Tirupati Anthathi also confirms this story in one of his songs and says that Pulikkal munivar prayed to this Lord and Perumal gave darshan in the Bala sayana pose to this Bala munivar and hence the place is known as Siru i.e. small puliyur.

It is said that in very few divya desams is the Perumal seen in this Bala roopam i.e. as a small idol. It is believed that the Alwar was a bit disappointed at the small size of the idol in the bhujanga sayana pose. To make up for that disappointment, the Perumal is believed to have told him that at Thirukkanna mangai he can see Him in a majestic big form.

HOLY TANKS

There are two theerthams in this place. The one to the west of the temple is known as Anantha Alwar theertham. The other is to the east of the temple known as Manasa pushkarani.

Anantha Theertham:

Once upon a time, Ananthan i.e. Adisesha, the snake and Garuda i.e. the vulture were sworn enemies.

They were eternally fighting with each other. Adisesha was frightened of Garuda. He was running from place to place to escape being caught by Garuda. He reached the bund of a tank at Sirupuliyur. He stayed there and undertook a deep penance. After a long time, God, out of His kindness, appeared before Him and promised him security. It is believed that God appeared before Adisesha in the month of Masi on a Ekadasi day during the New Moon half of the month. He made Adisesha His divine couch and as Bala Murthi, He adopted the sayana posture. The Perumal thus became a bhu-janga sayana i.e. lying down on bhujanga i.e. snake. Garuda who was chasing Anantha and searching for him in various places finally reached this tank bund. He saw that Anantha was very safely esconced with God Himself as the Protector. He could not therefore harm him. He offered his prayers to the Perumal. At that time, Anantha is supposed to have addressed Garuda and asked him "O Garuda! Are you happy"? Garuda replied, "If you remain in the place where you are, you will be happy" i.e. to say that no harm would befall Anantha as long as he was the couch for Perumal! The bund of the tank in which Anantha prayed and received the blessing of the Lord is known as Anantha pushkarini. It is only in this place that there is a separate temple for Adisesha. This story of Anantha being protected by Perumal is related in Brahmanda Puranam, 4th adyayam.

Sculptures and Paintings:

This temple is a very old one. The Rajagopuram is about 75' tall. It has five tiers. It faces south. Near the entrance itself, there is a beautiful idol of Hanuman. After the moolasthanam, there is the first prakaram. This is known as Thiru unnazhi. In this prakaram, the ten avatars of Lord Vishnu - Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama, Rama, Balarama, Krishna and Kalki avatars as well as the pictures of

the twelve Alvars are painted beautifully. The pasurams sung by Thirumangai Alvar about the Lord on this divya desam are also written on those walls. The temple towers also have beautiful, colourful images depicting the stories of the puranas.

Hymnology:

Tirumangai Alvar is the only Alvar who has sung in praise of the Lord here. He has composed 10 pasurams one of which is extracted below with its meaning.

Tirumangai Alvar: - Peria Thirumozhi - 7-9-9

சுருமா முகிலுருவா கனலுவோ புனலுருவா
பெருமால் வரையுருவா பிறவுருவா நினதுருவா
திருமாமகள் மருவும் சிறுபுலியூர்ச் சலசயனத்து
அருமா கடலமுதே! உனதடியே சரணமே

(பெரிய திருமொழி 7-9-9)

Meaning:

Oh! Salasayana Perumal!

Oh Lord with the enchanting hue of dark rain bearing clouds!

Oh Lord with glowing fiery effulgence!

Oh Lord refreshingly cool like water;

Oh Lord you are majestic like a mountain;

Oh Lord you are everything in this world;

To those who have attained you, you are a veritable

ocean of divine nectar;

Oh Lord of matchless beauty!

You along with Goddess are residing at Sirupuliyur

I seek salvation through your divine feet.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's**Poem from 108 Tirupathi Andadi:****Poem:**

ஆமருவி மேய்தத அரங்கர் எதிர் ஆர் நிற்பார்
 தாமருவி வாணனைத் தோள் சாய்ந்த நாள் . சேம
 முறு புலியூர் வன் தோலுடையான் உடைந்தான்
 சிறு புலியூர் எந்தை மேல் சென்று

ஞாந்திருப்-அந் 111

Meaning:

Once Lord Shiva -

Who wears the tiger skin and

Who stood guard by the side of the Lord who
 during His Krishna avatar fought with Banasura
 and severed with His chakra ayudham the 1000
 shoulders of that demon -

That same Lord Shiva was defeated and took to
 His heels when he tried to fight with the Perumal
 at Sirupuliyur

Who can successfully stand up against Lord Ran-
 ganatha who tended the cattle.

* * *

THIRUNANGOOR AND THE ELEVEN GARUDA SEVAIS

Thirunangoor is a famous ancient town in Thanjavur District in Chola Nadu. It lies about six miles to the south east of Sirkazhi. This place is also known as Nangai. Nangoor is the temple town of Chola territory even as Kancheepuram is the temple town of Pallava territory and Alwar Thirunagari is the temple town of Pandya territory. Nangoor was once upon a time an important centre of Vaishnavism as well as Saivism. Nangoor is a place of historical interest because of its contiguity to Poompuhar, the shipping centre in the hey day of ancient Tamils. Its historical importance relates not only to the Chola period but also to the period of the Muslim invasion. There are eleven temples dedicated in and around this town to Vishnu and eleven to Siva.

Sri Vaishnavites hold three places as of utmost holy importance viz. the Kovil (i.e. the Srirangam temple), Thirumalai (the Tirupati temple) and Perumal Koil (Varadaraja Perumal temple at Kancheepuram). The Gods of these three important holy places are represented at Nangoor in the Thiru The-triambalam Kovil (Ranganathar), the Thiru Mani Koodam Kovil (Varadaraja Perumal) and the Thiru Vellakulam Kovil (Annan Perumal). Even as one enters Nangoor, there is a holy tank which is known as Thirupparkadal which is the name of the milky ocean associated with the vyuha form of Narayana.

There are three important slokas which are of great importance to the Vaishnavites. They are

the Ashtaksharam,¹ the Dwayam² and the Charama³ slokam. All these three slokas were conveyed to the devotee by God in three temples in this place. Ash-takshara mantram was repeated by Narayana Perumal to Thirumangai Alwar. The Dwayam slokam was repeated by Annan Perumal to Swetaraja. The Charama slokam was repeated by the God at Parthan Palli to Arjuna.

Thirumangai Alwar was born in a place close to Thirunangoor viz. Thirukkuraiyalur. He has composed beautiful songs in praise of the scenic splendour of Nangoor. He waxes with poetic eloquence about the thick groves, the verdant fields, the dancing peacocks, dark rain bearing clouds, the chirping of the birds etc. In one of his pasurams, he says that the place is full of tanks and on the banks of the tanks there are tall betelnut trees which are surrounded by coconut groves. Even the coconut trees in those groves reflect the auspicious and prosperous nature of the place so much so the trees are full of ripe coconuts hanging heavily from the tree! He says that once in a way, a ripe coconut falls into the tank and the fishes which are gambolling about in the tank, hear the noise, get frightened and jump about in a wild manner! Such pen portraits are in abundance in the pasurams of Thirumangi Alvar and bring before

¹ The Ashtakshara Mantram is "Om Namo Narayanaya". Originally Narayana told this to Nara. This means "Salutations to Narayana whose qualities are OM".

² Dhwayam is known also as Mantra rathnam. The mantram is as follows: Sriman Narayana Charanou Saranam Prappadhyae. Srimathe Narayanaya Namaha. This means "I take refuge at the feet of Sriman Narayana. Salutations to Sriman Narayana".

³ Charama slokam was told by Lord Krishna to Arjuna. It reads as follows: Sarva Dharman Parithyajya Mam Ekam Saranam Vraja Aham Thwa Sarva Papebhyu Mokshayishyami Ma Suchaha. (Lord Krishna told Arjuna) Abandoning all rituals, take refuge in Me alone. I shall release you from all sins and grant moksha. Do not grieve.

our minds eye the scenic beauty of that place during the life time of the Alvar.

There is an old Tamil proverb which refers to 'Nangai Naalaayiravar (the 4000 people of Nangai). Thiru Nangoor, as stated earlier, is also known as Nangai. This proverb therefore says that once upon a time, there were 4000 Sri Vaishnavite scholars living in that place. A similar phrase is used to refer to the scholars at Chidambaram 'Thillai Moovayiravar' (i.e. the 3000 scholars of Chidambaram). Even today, there is an old temple for Lord Ganesa in Nangoor and He is here referred to as 'Naalayirathil Oruvar' (i.e. one among the 4000 famous persons of Nangoor). This town must have therefore hummed with religious and scholarly activities.

As stated earlier, there are 11 Vaishnavite Divya desams in this place and an equal number of Saivite holy places also in and around this place. There is an interesting story connected with this rather unusual incident of a place having an equal number of Vaishnavite and Saivite holy places. It is said that after pralayam (the great deluge), the Nagapuri kshetram i.e (the area in and around Nangoor) alone in Palasa vanam remained intact and was not submerged by the waters of the deluge. This area which was safe from the fury of the Pralayam was roughly the area between the two Kaveri channels. This area was bounded by Man-niyar on the north, Kaveri at Srirangam on the south, Poompuhar samudram on the east and Taragampadi on the west. After the pralayam, Perumal is said to have left for Badrikasram in the Himalayan hills. Siva i.e. Iswara was in Sivaloka. But at that time, Daksha Prajapathi did a yagam for which he did not invite Parvathi, his daughter and the wife of Lord Siva. In spite of it, Parvathi attended the yagam conducted by her father. She was not received with due respect at that assembly. Siva was not invited nor was havis offered to Him. She therefore got angry and returned

from the sacrificial site in a huff. She did not feel like going back to her husband Lord Siva either lest He should commiserate with her at the unfair behaviour of her father. She therefore left for Palasa vanam. She reached the āsramam of Mathanga Maharishi. She took the form of a child by name Poongothai and was brought up by Mathanga Maharishi. In course of time, Lord Siva also went to the banks of the Manikarnikai channel in this Palasa vanam as Yogeswaran. In the meantime, as both Siva and Vishnu had left the Heavens, the Devas felt very insecure. They had none to protect them from the evil demons. They therefore went rushing to Mathanga Maharishi and asked him to help them as both Vishnu and Siva had left their heavenly abode and that they were having none to rid them of asura bhayam (fear of demons). Mathanga Maharishi was offering his prayers in that place to Badri Narayanan for nearly 400 years. Pleased with his prayers, Badri Narayanan in Mohini roopam appeared before Mathanga Maharishi. At that time, Lord Indra, Brahma, Naradar came there and had a dharshan of the Perumal. Sitting in a Pranavakara Vimanam with four vedas as the four horses drawing His chariot and the Sun and Moon as the two wheels God is said to have appeared before all these people. He appeared on the banks of the Indra pushkarini near Nangoor. He knew that Iswara was also praying on the banks of the Manikarnika channel. With his Jnana dhrsti, He knew that Poongothai, being brought up by Mathanga Maharishi, was none other than Parvathi. He therefore got Parvathi married to Swetaranyeswarar i.e. Iswaran praying at Palasa vanam. After this marriage was celebrated, the Devas remembered the purpose for which they had come to this place. They prayed to Rudra i.e. Iswara to help them to fight the asuras. Rudra therefore is said to have taken eleven forms i.e. He manifested Himself as eleven Sivas and these are said to be the idols now found in the eleven Siva temples in and around Nangoor. Similarly, Vishnu also manifested Himself as eleven archa forms so that together

they could fight the asuras and save the sages and the rishis from the cruel acts of the asuras.

The eleven Rudras i.e. the eleven Siva kshetrams in and around Thirunangoor are the following:

1. Lord Siva at Chidambaram (Thillai)
2. Lord Siva at Kanchi
3. Lord Siva at Madurai
4. Lord Siva at Sethu
5. Lord Siva at Kasi
6. Lord Siva at Thirukkadavoor
7. Lord Siva at Thiruvavarur
8. Lord Siva at Thiruvannamalai
9. Lord Siva at Thiruvanaikka
10. Lord Siva at Thiruk Kalahasthi
11. Lord Siva at Thgirunangoor itself.

The corresponding Vaishnavite shrines and the names of the Perumals in the respective temples in and around Thirunangoor are the following:

Name of the Temple	Name of the Perumal
1. Thiru Manimada Kovil	Narayanan, Nanda Vilakku
2. Thiru Arimeya Vinnagaram Kovil	Kudamadu Koothan
3. Thiru Thetri Ambalam Kovil	Ranganathar, Senganmal, Sri Lakshmi Rangar
4. Thiru Vanpurusothaman Kovil	Thiru Purusothaman
5. Thiru Vaikunta Vinnagaram Kovil	Thiru Vaikuntanathan
6. Thiru Sempon Sei Kovil	Perarulalan
7. Thiru Mani koodam Kovil	Varadaraja Perumal, Mani Kooda Nayakan
8. Thiru Kavalampadi Kovil	Rajagopalan, Gopala- krishnan
9. Thiru Parthan Palli Kovil	Kannan, Tamaraialal Kalvan

10 .Thiru Thevanar thogai

Kovil

Deiva nayakan

11 .Thiru Vella kulam

Kovil

Srinivasan, Annan

Perumal

There is a belief that if one visits the eleven Vaishnavite temples in the area, it is equivalent to visiting eleven other well known important Vaishnavite shrines located elsewhere in the country. People who are not able to visit those eleven other shrines can hope to get the same benediction by visiting the eleven shrines at Nangoor. The eleven Vaishnavite shrines in Nangoor and the corresponding important Vaishnavite shrines elsewhere in the country are as follows:

Name of the temple in Thirunangoor	Name of the equivalent shrine
1. Thiru Mani mada Kovil	Badrikasramam
2. Thiru Arimeya vinnagaram Kovil	Govardhan temple
3. Thiru Thetri Ambalam Kovil	Srirangam
4. Thiru Vanpurushothaman Kovil	Ayodhya temple
5. Thiru Vaikunta Vinnagaram Kovil	Sri Vaikuntam itself
6. Thiru Sem pon sei Kovil	Thiru Narayana- puram (Melkote)
7. Thiru Mani koodam Kovil	Varadaraja Perumal at Kancheepuram
8. Thiru Kavalam padi Kovil	Temple at Dwaraka
9. Thiru Parthan Palli Kovil	Kurukshetram temple
10 .Thiru Thevanar thogai	Thiru Vidanthai near Mahabalipuram
11 .Thiru Vella kulam Kovil	Tirupati

This linkage with the other Vaishnavite shrines elsewhere was established by His Holiness the Andavan Swamy and his band of research scholars at

Tiruchy by referring to the various pasurams of Thirumangai Alwar. Thirumangai Alwar while doing mangalasaasanam to the Perumal in each of these Nangoor shrines links these eleven temples with the eleven famous temples elsewhere and thus establishes that offering prayers in the Thirunangoor temples is equal to praying in those other places. The linkage as mentioned in the pasurams are as follows:

1. The pasuram No.1218 which refers to the Perumal at Mani Mada Kovil (Nanda Vilakke) also refers to the Perumal (Nara Narayanan) at Badrikasramam.

2. The pasuram No. 1239 in which the mangalasaasanam for the Perumal at Arimeya vinnagaram is offered says that the God is equal to the Chaturbuja Gopalan at Govardhangiri.

3. The pasuram No. 1283 sung in praise of the Lord at Thiru Thetriambalam kovil establishes the samathvam with the Lord at Srirangam.

4. Pasuram No.1258 is sung in praise of the Lord at Thiru Van purushothamam kovil. It says that one can worship at Van purushothamam, Lord Rama of Ayodhya who went to Lanka, killed Ravana and installed Vibhishana on the throne.

5. Pasuram No.1228 which offers mangalasaasanam for the Lord at Vaikunta Vinnagaram exhorting the devotee by saying "Vaikunta Vinnagaram vanangum Mada Nenje" (O foolish mind! Worship the Lord at Vaikuntam in Vaikunta Vinnagaram). Thus, the pasuram equates the Lord at Vaikunta Vinnagaram with the Lord at Vaikuntam itself.

6. Pasuram No.1271 sung in praise of the Lord at Thiru Sem Pon sei kovil refers to the lord in His Chelva Pillai roopam. This Chelva pillai roopam is the name of the Lord at Thirunarayana puram.

7. Pasuram No.1294 sung in praise of the Perumal at Thiru Mani koodam kovil equates the lord with the presiding deity at Kanchi Varadaraja Perumal kovil.

8. Pasuram No.1298 sung in praise of the Perumal at Thiru Kavalampadi kovil refers to the lord at Dwaraka, and the thought that by approaching a devotee, one could attain the lord i.e. Archarya prathibakthi philosophy is enunciated.

9. Pasuram No.1325 sung in praise of the lord at Thiru Parthan palli refers to the lord at Kurukshetra when the words "Ulaga medum oru vannanonum" are used. These words mean that the lord at Parthan palli is the world itself i.e. the truth that Lord Krishna conveyed to Arjuna on the battle field when he said that He is the world itself.

10. Pasuram No.1248 sung in praise of the lord at Thiru Thevanar thogai using the words "Mannin then karai mel Madhavan than uraiyum edam". These words in Tamil mean that Lord Madhava slept on the ground at a spot on the sea shore in the south. This is taken to refer to the Perumal who slept on the sea shore at Thiru Vidanthai near Mahabalipuram (story told in the earlier chapter in Vol.I relating to Thiruvидanthai divya desam).

11. Pasuram No.1312 sung in praise of the lord at Thiru Vellakulam (Annan Kovil) by using the words "Thiruvenkata vilakke" clearly establishes the equivalence of this lord to Lord Srinivasa at Thiru Venkata-malai.

This above mentioned interpretation equating the eleven divya desams in Nangoor with other equally famous shrines leaves a devotee with the comforting thought that those who are not able to visit the eleven other shrines can get the same amount of punyam by visiting the eleven divya desams at Nangoor.

There are two festivals which are celebrated in Nangoor which associate the eleven divya desams in and around Nangoor. One is known as 'Manjal kuliya' (Tamil) (in English it means a holy bath with turmeric water). The second festival is a unique Garuda seva known as 'Pathinoru Garudasevai'. Literally it means eleven Garuda sevas. As both these festivals are common to the eleven divya desams in this area, it is proposed to give an account of these festivals in this chapter before proceeding with relating the sthalapurana of each of these eleven divya desams.

Manjal Kuliya (The Holy Turmeric Bath):

As is well known, Thirumangai Alwar before he became an Alwar was known as Thirumangai Mannan. He was the king ruling over a small area known as Thirumangai. He was a very pious person. He even indulged in highway robbery so as to raise resources for meeting the expenses towards the multifarious renovation work that he took up in various vaishnavite temples. His main love was for the Srirangam temple. When he was staying in Srirangam, he was responsible for having introduced the practice of rendering before God the Naalaayira divya prabandham along with the vedas. Once upon a time, in the month of Karthigai, he had rendered before Perumal the Thirunedunthandagam. God was so happy on hearing these verses that He was lost in joy. The Lord asked Thirumangai Mannan to ask for any boon. Thirumangai Mannan then said that his one desire was that in the month of Markazhi starting from Sukla Ekadasi when the Thiru Athayana utsavam is celebrated, the Thiruvoimozhi composed by Nammalwar should be rendered and heard by the Perumal along with the Vedas which alone were being recited before the God till then. Thus, he wanted that Thiruvoimozhi be given the same importance as and be made equal to the vedas. Lord Ranganatha granted this prayer. Thirumangai Man-

nan himself had the first Thiruvoimozhi Thirunal celebrated in great pomp and splendour. Lord Ranganatha wanted to reward him for his sincere devoted work and so after this Thiruvoimozhi Thirunal was celebrated, the Lord ordered that Thirumangai Mannan should be honoured with the Manjal Neerattam (the holy bath with turmeric powder) - a festival which was usually reserved for Lord Ranganatha Himself. This festival used to be celebrated on the banks of the river Vada Thiru Kaveri (i.e. Kollidam) on Thai Amavasai day. Thus, the first Manjal Neerattam to his favourite Alvar was supervised by Lord Ranganatha Himself. As long as Thirumangai Alvar was alive, this manjal neerattam vizha was celebrated with pomp and splendour in Srirangam on the banks of the river Kaveri.

After the passing away of Thirumangai Alvar, his sister's husband who was a great follower of the Alvar, shifted from Srirangam to Kuraiyalur; the birth place of Thirumangai Alvar. The brother-in-law was a great devotee of Thirumangai Alvar. He had a beautiful idol of Thirumangai Alvar made and installed it in a temple at Thirukkuraiyalur. He used to worship that idol. He started celebrating the annual manjal kuliya utsavam at Thirunangoor near Thirukkuraiyalur. Near Thirunangoor flows the Manikarnikai channel a branch of the river Kaveri. He therefore regarded this Manikarnikai channel as the Kaveri river itself on whose banks, earlier, the manjal kuliya festival was celebrated. Thus it was that the similar festival to Manjal Kuliya at Srirangam was started at Nangoor. It is being celebrated from early 8th century A.D. It is therefore a festival which has its roots in time about 12 centuries ago.

On the Thai Amavasai day early in the morning even by 3 A.M. the idol of Thirumangai Alvar is taken in a procession from Thiruvai Thirunagari. The procession winds its way visiting the five divya desams enroute at Thirukkuraiyalur, Thiruman-

gai Madam, Thirukavalampadi, Thiru Manikoodam and Thiru Parthanpalli. The procession stops in each of these places and the Alvar is taken to the Perumal sannidhis in each temple. The pasuram (mangala saasanam) composed by the Alvar is rendered before each Perumal and then before mid day the procession reaches the banks of the Manikarnikai channel. The pace at which this entire distance is covered within half-a-day and the manner in which the idol is taken into the channel along with the thronging devotees conveys a religious fervour which has to be seen to be believed. That channel usually has waist deep water. The devotees stand in that flowing water along with the idol of Alvar and recite the pasurams composed by Thirumangai Alvar to his Guru and Acharya Perumal viz. Thirunaraiyoor Nambi (Peria Thirumozhi 6-6-8). It starts with the words 'Puliarndha Pazhakkayum'. As is well known Thirumangai Alvar was made a Sri Vaishnavite by Perumal at Thiru Naraiyoor i.e. Nachiar Koil. The Thirunaraiyoor Nambi Perumal made the vaishnavite devotee Thirumangai Mannan into a Sri Vaishnavite by giving him Pancha Samskaram. There are forty samskarams among the Vaishnavites starting with Anna prasanam, chowlam, Upanayanam, Brahma upadesam and then pancha samskaram. This pancha samskaram involves imprinting the sankhu and chakra images on the shoulders of the Vaishnavite devotee. In Tamil this ceremony is referred to as "Mudra dhanam pettru kolluthal". Even today, the moolavar perumal at Thiru Naachiar Koil can be seen with His hands holding the sankhu and the chakram in a posture as if they are ready to give their imprint on the shoulders of the devotees.

Along with this Thiru Naraiyoor Nambi pasuram, the other pasuram in Peria Thirumozhi 5-8-9) which is sung in praise of the Perumal at Sriranga is also recited viz. "Thulangu Nela Mudiyaarasar Tham Kurisil". After these two pasurams are sung, there is a small function when, as a reward to the Alvar, gifts are given to

this Alvar by these two Perumals viz. Thiru Naraiyoor Nambi and Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam. The pithambaram which adorned the Lords in these two divya desams earlier along with the garlands which adorned those two Perumals are brought specially to this place and given to the Alvar.

After the rendering of the pasurams and the receiving of the gifts from the two Perumals, the Alvar is brought to the banks of this river and placed in an old mandapam nearby (Manjal Kuli mandapam). At that time, a small silver plate with lot of holes on it (i.e. Sahasradhara thattu with 1000 holes through which water flows like a shower of rain drops) is placed above the head of the Alvar and on that plate is placed the idol worshipped by Alvar whom he lovingly referred to as 'Sindanaikku Iniyar' (i.e. in Tamil it means a person who is sweet to reflect upon). The manjal neer (the holy yellow water) is then poured on this idol worshipped by Thirumangai Alvar. The water then flows on over the head of the idol of the Alvar himself who is placed below the plate. Thus, the Thirumanjanam i.e. the holy bath performed to the Iniyar covers also the Alvar. Turmeric powder is mixed with the water used for the holy bath. Hence it is known as Manjal kuliya i.e. a bath with turmeric water. As soon as this holy bath is over there is a sumptuous feast in which all devotees who have assembled for that function participate. In the evening, the Alvar again starts on his return journey to Thiruvali- Thirunagari. Enroute, he visits Thiru Mani Mada kovil, Thiru Vanpurushothaman kovil, Thiru Vaikunta vinnagaram kovil, Thiru Sempon sei kovil, Thiru Thetriambalam kovil, Thiru Arimeya vinnagaram kovil, thus covering five divya desams in the morning and six in the afternoon. In these six places also, the pasurams composed by Thirumangai Alvar in praise of the respective Perumals is rendered (mangala saasanam) and then the Alvar stays at Mani Mada kovil for the night. This in brief is the

Manjal kuliya festival celebrated from time immemorial in this town.

The Festival of the Eleven Garuda Sevas:

Nearly 125 years ago, a gentleman by name Sri Thirumalai Vinjamoor Srinivasa Tatachiar was working as an Inspector of Schools at Chidambaram. He was transferred to Tirunelveli. At Tirunelveli, he had occasion to visit Alvar Thirunagari and saw that every year in the month of Vaikasi, there was a Nava Tirupati Garuda seva festival celebrated i.e. a Garuda seva for the nine perumals near Alvar Thirunagari. In that festival, in the forenoon all the Perumals of the Nava Tirupathis would be brought one after another in a row and they would listen to the pasurams of the Alvar. That night, the Nava i.e. nine Garuda seva would be celebrated. He was so touched and moved by this festival that his heart immediately dictated to him that he should do his bit in organising a similar Garuda seva festival for the Perumals of the eleven divya desams in Thirunangoor. He wanted to duplicate this utsavam celebrated for Parankusa Perumal in Pandya Nadu to the Parakala Perumal in Chola Nadu at Thiru Nangoor. He returned to Thirunangoor and met a number of devotees, collected money, decided to link this Garuda seva festival with the annual manjal kuliya festival already being celebrated with pomp and splendour. Thirumangai Mannan had sung in praise of the Perumals in the eleven divya desams in and around Thirunangoor. As on the Thai Amavasai day, the manjal kuliya festival is celebrated, this eleven Garuda seva was organised. On the next day the eleven Perumals from the eleven Tirupathis in Nangoor would assemble and just as in Alvar Thirunagari, a mangala saasana utsavam in the morning and a Garuda seva utsavam in the night were celebrated. This festival was celebrated for the first time in 1894. Since then, this festival continues to be celebrated every year on the day following Thai Amavasai.

On the day following the New Moon day in the month of Thai, on the forenoon, a big pandal (covered place) is erected in front of Mani Mada kovil. All the utsava vigrahams of the eleven Perumals in the eleven Divya desams in and around Thirunangoor are assembled under the one roof. One by one, they are brought before the Thirumangai Alwar idol. The pasurams composed by the Alwar in honour of that particular Perumal is then rendered. Finally, Sri Manavala Mamuni, the faithful follower devotee of Thirumangai Alwar comes and renders some songs in praise of his guru Thirumangai Alwar. That night a big procession is headed by Sri Manavala Mamuni. He is followed by Thirumangai Mannan along with his wife Kumudavalli on a Hamsa vahanam i.e. a swan chariot. Then follow the eleven Perumals, each seated on the divine bird viz. Peria Thiruvadi i.e. Garuda. These eleven Perumals one behind the other form a long train. This huge procession goes around the four streets in the temple town of Thirunangoor. The next morning, the Alvar starts on his homeward journey from Thirunangoor. Enroute, he visits Thiru Vellakulam (Annan kovil), Thiru Thevanar Thogai, Thiruvali etc., and reaches Thirunagari. He visits the sannidhis of the Perumal in those respective divya desams and the pasurams sung by him in praise of those Gods (mangala saasanam) are recited and then he returns to Thirunagari. At that time, the Perumal of Thirunagari viz. Vayalali Manavalan is seated on Garuda Vahanam and waits at the entrance of the Rajagopuram almost as if He is waiting to receive the Alvar after his holy yatra. When the Alvar reaches the entrance of the temple tower, the pasuram in Thirumozhi (8-9-8) which is sung in praise of the Perumal at Thirunagari is recited. As soon as that is completed, both the Perumal and the Alvar get into the temple signalling the end of the eleven Garuda seva festival. That pasuram with which the Thirunangoor Peruvizha (Thirunangoor Big festival) gets completed runs as follows:- (Peria Thiru Mozhi 8-9-8)

சுற்றார் பற்றறுக்கும் பிறவிக் பெருங்கடலே
 பற்றா வண தடியேன் பிறந்தேன் பிறந்த பின்னை
 வற்றா நீர் வயல் சூழ வயலாவி அம்மாணப்
 பெற்றேன் பெற்றதுவும் பிறவாமை பெற்றேன்
 (பெரிய திருமொழி 8-9-8)

Meaning:

Many of the enlightened souls are able to appreciate the futility of life and their only desire is that the cycle of birth, death and rebirth should end. But earlier I thought that this life was meant to be enjoyed. But ever since I saw Lord Vayalali Manavalan at Thiruvai a place that is having natural scenic beauty - I have only one desire viz. to attain His holy feet and be released from this cycle of rebirths.

These two festivals thus weave together all the eleven divya desams at Nangoor. It is said that in his previous birth Thirumangai Alvar was a king by name Uparisaravas. Even then he did a lot of Brahmotsavams for Gods. So in his later birth also, even in Archa avataram today, he continues to worship all the eleven Gods on one day in the year. While the Alvar did mangalasasanam for the eleven Gods the following slokam chants the name of the eleven Gods along with that of the Alvar.

“Nandadeepa Kadapranarthaka Maha Karunya
 Rakthampaka, Sree Narayana Purushottamapathi
 Sreerathna Kootadhipan:
 Vaikuntae Svaramadhavowsa Kamalanatham
 Sa Gopepathim. Nowmeykada
 Nagapuryadhipathem Sartham Kalithvamsina”.

* * *

THIRU MANIMADA KOVIL

This place is also one of the Thirunangoor divya desams. This is about five miles from Sirkazhi. The moolavar here is known as Narayanan (Nanda vilakku). He is seen in a sitting posture facing east. The utsava murthy is also known as Narayana. The Thayar is known as Pundarikavalli. The theertham is Indra pushkarini, also known as Rudra pushkarini. The vimanam is Pranava vimanam. God is said to have appeared in response to the prayers of Indra and Ekadasa Rudra.

This story is related in Padma puranam in the portion dealing with Palasavana kshetram. Agasthiya mahamuni is said to have related this story to King Uparisaravas. Thirunangoor is in Palasavanam. Once upon a time, Palasavanam was full of jack fruit trees, mango groves and plantain trees. Besides, there were many huge trees providing shade. Trees with flowers like the shambagam and other creepers were in abundance. A number of Devas, sages and rishis stayed in this place. One such sage who lived in this place was Mathangar. He was all the time praying to Lord Krishna. It was said that in Kiruta yugam, Rudra plucked off the fifth head of Brahma. He thus committed Brahmahathy. In order to get rid of this curse, He went, accompanied by Parvathi, to Gokarna kshetram and prayed to Lord Vishnu. As a reward for his deep penance, Lord Vishnu appeared before Him. Rudra then asked Him as to how He could get rid of the Brahmahathy dosham. Narayana then asked Him to go to Nagapuri (Nangoor) in Palasavanam and perform an aswamedha yaga. Vishnu promised Him that He would appear before him then. Rudra accordingly went to

Nangoor and the eleven Siva temples in and around Nangoor are said to be the eleven archa forms in which Siva manifested Himself at the behest of Lord Vishnu. Even as there were three more days for the yaga to be completed, Vishnu came in a chariot with the Vedas as horses, Brahma as the sarathy and Pranava as the vi-manam and appeared before Rudra on the banks of Indra pushkarini. The God was accompanied by Sridevi and Bhoodevi. He was in Padmasana. He blessed Siva and Siva got rid of the Brahmahathy dosham. As Rudra was guided in doing this penance by Madanga Rishi, Rudra came to be known as Madangeswarar. As Rudra performed His yaga on the banks of the pushkarini, the pushkarini came to be known as Rudra pushkarini. Later, as Lord Indra also stayed on the banks of the Rudra pushkarini for a long time and used to have his daily bath in the pushkarini, it came to be also known as Indra pushkarini.

There is a story connected with this theertham viz. Indra pushkarini alias Rudra pushkarini. Once upon a time, in Treta yuga, Devendra was coming in a procession on Iravatham. En route, he met Durvasa rishi. Durvasa rishi was holding in his hands a garland which had adorned the Devi earlier. He gave this garland as a gift to Devendra. Indra received this garland and put it round the head of the elephant Iravatham. The elephant pulled it down with its trunk and stamped it with its feet. Seeing this Durvasa got very angry and cursed Devendra saying that he would lose all his riches and would suffer a lot. He also cursed that the elephant Iravatham be born as an ordinary elephant on earth and be troubled by the other elephants. Devendra then approached his guru Bruhaspathi and sought his help. Bruhaspathi told him that it was nothing unusual that happiness and misery should alternate and that even the great men are not exempt from this cycle of ups and downs. He said that nobody is above destiny and that just as the water in the coconut is destined to be drained, so also whatever is destined

to be lost will definitely be lost. He asked him to be brave in the face of adversity. He advised him to go to Palasa vanam and pray to Ekadasa Narayanan who had been worshipped by the Ekadasa Rudrar and that he would then be able to atone for his sin and be able to regain his lost happiness. Devandra accordingly went to Palasa vanam and worshipped Narayana known as Nanda deepan at Mani Mada Maharangam. He used to stay on the banks of the pushkarini in front of the temple and did severe penance. Narayana was pleased with his deep penance. He appeared before Indra and blessed him. In response to the request of Indra, the pushkarini is said to have been named as Indra pushkarini. It is said that a bath in this Indra pushkarini and worshipping Lord Narayana at Nangoor would definitely help in getting rid of one's sins and in attaining moksha. It is believed that Lord Narayana is seen in this place i.e. Manimada kovil in the same form in which He appeared before Indra and will continue to bless even today all the devotees who worship Him with equal sincerity.

To continue the story as to how the elephant Iravatham was able to redeem itself from the curse of Durvasa, Agasthya said that the elephant Iravatham also lost all his power and became an ordinary elephant and was born in this earth. It was roaming all over the forests. It felt hungry. It was afraid of the other elephants and was generally miserable. Luckily, once as it was roaming about in the forests, it entered Palasa vanam. It reached the place where Uthanga muni was doing his penance. Out of desperation, the elephant was about to attack the Uthanga muni. But because of his divya drushti, the rishi was able to know that this elephant was none other than Iravatham which had been cursed by Durvasa. The rishi therefore advised the elephant not to lose its head. He advised the elephant to gain control over its evil thoughts and give up the feeling of hatred and the desire to kill and destroy. He told the elephant that it will soon regain its

old position as Iravatham the divine elephant. He said that to get over the curse of Durvasa rishi, the elephant should go to the banks of Indra pushkarini and pray on all the thirty days in the month of Masi. He advised the elephant to have its bath in the pushkarini every morning, collect 1000 lotus flowers and worship Lord Narayana in that place. He assured it that at the end of the month, God would definitely appear and redeem the elephant of its sin. The elephant accepted this advice and acted accordingly. As expected at the end of the month, Lord Narayana appeared before the elephant and touched the elephant with His hands and immediately the elephant was rid of the evil of the curse of Durvasa rishi. As this elephant had, for one month, regularly had its bath in the pushkarini, the pushkarini came to be known as Iravatha pushkarini and also Gajendra pushkarini. The elephant regained its glory as Iravatham and went back to Deva lokam. Thus Mani Mada Kovil was the place where Rudra, Indra and Iravatha received the blessings of Narayana.

An interesting feature of this temple is that in the Garba griham on the front wall facing the Moolavar i.e. in the Prahara Vimanam there are three holes (dwarams). The sun's rays on sunrise will fall on the idol's face (Sirassu) through these holes on all days and there is no such thing as Utharayanam or Dakshinayanam and the positioning of the sun so as to enable the rays to fall or not on the idol. The positioning of the dwarams (holes) is thus a civil engineering marvel of the artisans who built the temple in those days.

Epigraphical highlights:

There is an inscription on the jamb of the doorway, ardha mandapa of the Narayana Perumal temple. These inscriptions are in Tamil, relate to the period of the Chola king Parakesarivarman. These register gift of land after purchasing it for 40 kasus by one Coman

Tattan. The gift was to meet the expenses of lighting a perpetual lamp in the temple at Tirumani madakovil¹

There is another inscription relating to the period of the same Chola king Parakesarivarman. It registers another endowment made by the same Soman Tattan of a piece of land purchased for 40 kasus. This was to meet the expenses of offerings and worship at the Ardhajama service to the God at Tirumani madakovil².

Hymnology:

Amongst all the Alvars, Tirumangai Alvar alone has sung in praise of the lord here. He has composed 12 pasurams of which pasuram No. 3-8-1 from Peria Tirumozhi alone is given below with its meaning:

நந்தாவிளக்கே அளத்தற்கரியாய்
 நர நாரணனே! சுருமாழுகில் போல
 எந்தாய்! எமக்கே அருளாய் என நின்று
 இமையோர பிறப்பிடம், எத்திசையும
 சுந்தாரமந்தேன இசை பாடமாடே
 சுளிவண்டு மிழற்ற நிளமல் துதைந்து
 மந்தாரநின்று மணமல்கு நாங்கூர்
 மணிமாடக் கோயில் வணங்கென் மனனே
 (பெரிய திருமொழி 3-8-91)

Meaning:

Oh effulgent embodiment of knowledge;
 You are immeasurable and beyond comprehension
 You took the avathar as Nara Narayana;
 You are captivatingly enchanting like a dark cloud;
 Oh Mind of mine
 Go to Manimada Kovil in Thirunangoor;
 Bow down to the Lord there

¹ Ins.No. 154 Appendix B ARIE 1951-52

² Ins.No. 155 Appendix B ARIE 1951-52

That is the place to which all the Devas come and pray to the Lord to bless them.

That is the place where as the bees collect honey, they hum the devagandhari raga;

That is the place where the Kalivandu (a type of beetle) rendered the alapana for the music session of the bees!

That is the place where the air is intoxicating with the delicate sweet aroma of the Parijatha flowers.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar

108 Tirupathi Andadi.

Poem:

சேரதரும் சுதியில் சேருகைக்கு நானுனை
தேரே வணங்கினேன் நெஞ்சேநீ . பாரில்
அணிமாடக்கோயில் அரங்கனார் நாங்கரை
மணிமாடக் கோயில் வணங்கு

(தூற்றிருப்.அந்தாதி 30)

Meaning:

Oh mind of mine

In order to attain moksha

I salute you who are the cause of all good and evil
(It is the mind which makes heaven of hell and hell of heaven).

In return I want you to do one thing for me

Go and pray at Thirumani mada kovil where Lord
Ranganatha of Srirangam - full of beautiful palatial
houses -

Resides.

* * *

THIRU ARIMEYA VINNAGARAM

This is one of the eleven divya desams in Thirunangoor. It is 5 kms. from Sirkazhi. Many people refer to this place as Kodamadum Koothan Kovil. The moolavar here is known as Kodamadu Koothar. He is seen in a sitting posture facing east. The ut-savar is known as Chathurbuja Gopalan. He is having four hands. The Thayar is known as Amruthakadavalli. The theertham is known as Kodi theertham and Amrutha theertham. The vimanam is known as Uchasrunga vimanam. God is believed to have appeared before Uthānga Munivar.

In the Padma puranam, the part relating to the Palasavana mahatyam there is a story relating to this holy place Ameya deva nagaram (Arimeya Vinnagaram). Agasthia Mahamuni related this story to the King Uparisaravas. Agasthia rishi said that the greatness of this place cannot be understood in full even by the Devas. Hence it is that this place is known as Ameya deva nagaram (a place whose holiness cannot be gauged in full even by the Gods). This place is said to have been referred to by Vyasa Muni as Kadasthanam. It is said that long ago, the wives of Kasyapar viz. Kadru and Vinatha had a friendly discussion. Kadru said that the tail of the horse by name Uchairsavas was black. Vinatha said that when Thirupparkadal was churned, the white horse viz. Uchairsavas emerged along with the white elephant viz. Iravatham and that she heard that Lord Devendra took both the animals. She therefore claimed that the tail of that horse Uchairsavas was white in colour. This friendly discussion became a serious difference of opinion. While Kadru held that it was black, Vinatha held that it was white. It

was agreed they would check up on this issue and if the tail was black then Vinatha should be subservient to Kadru. If it was white, then Kadru would be subservient to Vinatha. They decided to test it in the morning by inspecting in person the horse's tail. That night Kadru discussed this with all her children viz. the black serpents. She hatched a plot with them. She told them to go early in the morning even before Kadru and Vinatha go to see the horse. She asked them to cover completely the tail of the horse with their black bodies. Thus, she was sure that the tail of the white horse covered completely by her children viz. the black serpents would make her win the bet. The Krishna sarpams i.e. the children of Kadru obeyed their mother. When Vinatha and Kadru went to see the horse Uchaisravas, the tail was black. Vinatha thus accepted her defeat and became a slave to Kadru. Kadru then said that if Vinatha wanted to free herself she should ask her son Garuda to go to Devaloka and get the amrith kept in a vessel (Amrutha kudam) under heavy guard by Indra. Vinatha repeated this to her son Garuda. Garuda immediately set off to Devaloka. He was able to lift the amrutha kudam. The devas were very worried. They pleaded with him that the amrutha (Divine nectar) was meant only for the devas and that it would not be useful for the human beings and others. But Garuda pleaded that his mother's freedom was more valuable to him. He advised the devas that while he would take the vessel and place it before Kadru and thus get his mother released from her bondage, the devas could immediately follow him and take the vessel back before Kadru could taste the contents. Accordingly, Garuda brought the vessel and kept it in front of Kadru and got his mother released. Kadru and her children decided that before they taste the amrutham, they would bathe in the river. At that time, a Daithyan by name Mayavi appeared on the spot and took away the vessel filled with amruth. At that time, Vishnu appeared and let lose one arrow which hit the Mayavi's hand holding the amrutha vessel. The hand broke. The vessel and its

contents spilled on the ground at Palasaranyam. The place where the amrith spilled became a tank. This came to be known as Amrutha pushkarini. God in His bright effulgence appeared on the banks of this amrutha pushkarini and consumed the amrith. He is then reported to have danced with happiness, as he sucessfully prevented Amrith getting into the wrong hands. Hence it is that He is known as Kudam (vessel) Koothan (dancer). Thus, He got the name Kudamadu Koothan. Even today the moolavar idol is shown while sitting with one foot resting on a kudam i.e. vessel.

Hymnology:

Thirumangai Alvar is the only Alvar who has sung in praise of the deity here. Of the 10 pasurams composed by him, pasuram No. 3-10-1 from Peria Tirumozhi is given below with its meaning:

திருமடத்தை மண் மடத்தை இருபாலும் திகழத்
 தீவினைகள் போயகல அடியவர்கட்கென்று
 மருள் நடத்து இவ்வேருலகத்தவர் பணிய வானோர்
 அமர்த்தேத்த இருந்தவிடம், பெரும்புகழ் வேதியர் வாழ்
 தருமிடங்கள் மலர்கள் மிகு கைகைகள் செங்கழுநீர்
 தாமரைகள் தடங்கள்தொறும், இடங்கள் தொறும் திகழ
 அரு இடங்கள் பொழில் தழுவி எழில் திகழும் நாங்கூர்
 அரிமேய விண்ணகரம் வண்ங்கு மட நெஞ்சே

(பெரிய திருமொழி 3-10-1)

Meaning:

Oh you stupid mind
 Bow down and worship that Lord
 Who is flanked by Bhoodevi and Sridevi on either
 side of Him;
 Who is ever ready to redeem the devotees from
 their sins;
 Who has been worshipped by all people in the
 seven worlds;

Who is residing at a place where even the devas in vaikuntan can come and sing His praises;

Where there are a number of well read scholars;

Where there are luscious thick groves;

Where there are tanks filled with scented flowers like lotuses, thazhai (a cactus family flower but with divine faint all pervading scent) etc.

That place is Arimeya Vinnagaram in Thirunangoor.

(In brief the Alvar says that this divya desam has Neervalam (plenty of water), Nilavalam (fertile lands), Pozhilvalam (full of groves) and Ezhilvalam (natural scenic beauty).

Yet another Pasuram of Thirumangai Alvar from his Peria Thirumozhi is extracted below: 3-10-9.

வஞ்சனையால் வந்தவள்தன் உயிருண்டு வாய்த்த
தயிருண்டு வெண்ணெயழு துண்டு வலி மிக்க
கஞ்சனுயி ரதுவுண்டு இவ்வுலகுண்ட காளா
கருதுமிடம், காவிரிசந்து அகில் கனகம் உந்தி
மஞ்சலவு மீழிலூரும் வயலூரும் வந்து
வளம் கொடுப்ப மாமறையோர் மாமலர்சுள்தூவி
அஞ்சலித்து அங்கு அரிசரணென்று இறைஞ்சு

மணி நாங்கூர்

அரிமேய விண்ணகரம் வணங்கு மட நெஞ்சே

(பெரிய திருமொழி 3-10-9)

Meaning:

In this briefly he says that the Lord who swallowed the seven worlds, the Lord who, with relish, drank the poisoned milk brought by Poothana and the Lord who ate with relish the butter churned by the Gopikas is residing at Arimeya Vinnagaram and the Alvar asks all of us to bow down before that Lord.

To now quote the poem composed by Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar in his 108 Thirupathi Andadi:

Poem:

வாழும் அடியார் மட்டுநஞ்சே நம்மளவோ
தாழும் சடையோன் சதுமுத்தோன் . பாழிக்
கரிமேய விண்ணகரக் காவலோன் கண்டாய்
அரிமேய விண்ணகரத்தார்க்கு

ஞாந்திரு.அந்.ய

Meaning:

O you foolish ignorant mind!
Are you under the impression that only mere mortals like us are devoted slaves to the Perumal at Arimeya Vinnagaram?
Please note that
Lord Shiva the bestower of all knowledge
And
Lord Brahma who can understand the meaning of vedas
And
Lord of all devas viz. Indra
Are also His slaves.

* * *

THIRU VELLAKULAM (ANNAN KOIL)

This temple lies about 7 miles to the south east of Sirkazhi in Tanjore District. The moolavar here is known as Srinivasa Perumal. He is also known as Annan Perumal i.e. Annan in Tamil means elder brother. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The Thayar is known as Alarmel Mangai. The utsavar is known as Padmavathi. The theertham is known as Thiruvellakulam alias Sweta Pushkarini. The vimanam is known as Sweta Vimanam.

This temple is one of the eleven Thirupathis of Thirunangoor. It is also known as Then Tirupati i.e. the Tirupati of the South. People who are not able to go to Thiruvengadam i.e. Tirupati proper, believe that the vows meant for Srinivasa Perumal at Tirupati can be carried out at the Srinivasa Perumal temple at Thiruvellakulam itself.

The Perumal here is known as Annan Perumal as it is believed that He is the elder brother of Srinivasa Perumal at Tirupati. The close association between Tirupati (Thiruvengadam) and Thiruvellakulam is also reflected in the pasurams sung by the Alvars. To illustrate, Thirumangai Alwar while singing the praise of Lord Srinivasa of Tirumalai hills begins his pasuram addressing the Lord as "Kannar Kadal soozha" (in Tamil this means that He is like vast expanse of the ocean). The same Alwar while singing the praise of Thiru Vellakulam Perumal also addresses the God as "Kannar Kadal soozha". He then continues to say the Lord at Tirupati "Vengada maamalai meya Anna" i.e. the brother who is residing at Venkada Maamalai and

then says "Thiruvella kulathu Anna Adiyen Idari kilaiyaye" (in Tamil this means 'O Brother of Thiruvellakulam! Please remove the difficulties of this slave of yours). Similarly, Nammalwar while singing the praise of Srinivasa Perumal at Tirupati refers to Him as "Alar Mel Mangai uraimarba!" (in Tamil this means that He is the Lord who has the Thayar on His chest). Thirumangai Alwar also, while referring to the Perumal at Thiruvellakulam, addresses Him as "Poovar Thirumagal Pulgiya marai marba!" (in Tamil this means that He is the Devadeva who has the Goddess seated on the lotus flower on His chest).

The Perumal is said to have appeared in this place before Sweta Raja, the son of king Dundumaran belonging to Surya vamsam. The story of this divya desam is related in the 15th adyayam in Padma puranam. Agastya muni relates this story to Uparisarasvasu, the King.

Once upon a time, a king by name Dundumaran born in Surya vamsa was ruling his kingdom in a very just manner. He had one son by name Sweta. Vasishta muni, the family priest, looked at the horoscope of the son and told the father that the boy had a very short life span of only nine years. When the king heard this sad news, he was very upset. He asked Vasishta muni to suggest to him some prayer by which the longevity of his son could be attained. Vasishta mahamuni took the father and the son to Thirunangoor in Palasa vanam. A number of rishis were staying in that place. It was on the northern bank of the Kaveri. All the rishis in Palasa vanam welcomed Vasishta mahamuni and Sweta Raja. Vasishta mahamuni then explained to the rishis that the bright jewel born in the Ishvaku kulam viz. Sweta Raja was unfortunately cursed to have a very short life span. He wanted the rishis to suggest a way by which this prince could get over his untimely death and attain longevity. The rishis suggested that the prince may be initiated into repeating the mrutunjaya mahamantram.

They felt that the mantram repeated sincerely and with faith would surely invoke the blessing of Perumal. They advised him to go to the asramam of Marutha rishi in Palasa vanam. They said that nearby was Srinivasa sannidhi. They also added that there was a tank filled with lotus flowers just opposite the temple which was known as Thiru Vellakula pushkarini. They said that Lord Narayana in the name of MadhuSudana is residing in that place. The idol is seen facing the east. The rishis advised the prince to stay with Marutha rishi, repeat the maha mantram and invoke the blessing of Lord Narayana and thereby conquer the Lord of Death. Sweta Raja followed this advise. He went to the Anna Perumal Koil, had a bath in the tank, sat down under a bilva tree on the southern bank of the holy tank and repeated this japam for one month. The prince started the penance in the month of Aipasi (October-November) during Sukla paksha on Dasami. After one month, Narayana appeared before the prince in the month of Karthigai (November-December) during Sukla paksham Dwadasi day. It is said that when the God appeared before Sweta Raja, divine music viz., Dundubi was heard. There was a bright effulgence as if a myriad Sun Gods had risen in that place. Great sages like Sanaka, Narada as also gods like Indra and others accompanied the Perumal. The Perumal then said that He was pleased with the prayers of Sweta Raja and He blessed him with long life. He said like Markandeya who had the victory over the Lord of Death, Sweta also would be blessed with longevity. God asked Sweta Raja to ask for any other boon if he so desired. Sweta Raja then prayed to the Protector of the worlds Narayana to name the tank as Sweta pushkarini in remembrance of his name. He also requested that just as he was blessed, others who also repeat the Mruthunjaya mantram in this divya desam should be blessed in such a manner that they do not have to fear death and that they are relieved from successive rebirths. Madhusudana agreed. This was the story repeated by Agastiya Mahamuni to Uparisarvasu.

This place has another significance. It is said that it was in this place that Kumuda valli Nachiar who married Thirumangai Alvar was born. In a way God here became the father-in-law of Thirumangai Alvar as he gave the devakanni Kumudavalli Nachiar in marriage to Thirumangai Mannan.

Hymnology:

Amongst all the Alvars, only Tirumangai Alvar has sung in praise of the lord here. He has composed 10 pasurams of which pasuram No.4-7-9 from Peria Tirumozhi is given below:

பூவார் திருமாமகன் புல்கிய மாப்பா
நாலார் புகழ் வேதியர் மன்னிய நாங்கூர்
தேவா திரு வெள்ளக் குளத்துறைவானே
ஆவா அடியான் இவனென்று அருளாயே

(பெரிய திருமொழி 4-7-9)

Meaning:

The God

Who has a broad chest where Goddess Lakshmi,
born in a flower resides permanently -

Who stays at Thiruvellakulam in Thirunangoor
full of world renowned vedic scholars -

That God should accept me and bless me as His
sincere devotee and as one who belongs to Him.

Peria Thiru Mozhi Pasuram 4-7-5

வேடார்திரு வேங்கடம் மேய விளக்கே
நாடார்புகழ் வேதியர் மன்னிய நாங்கூர்
சேடார்பொழில் சூழ்திரு வெள்ளக்குளத்தாய்
பாடாவரு வேள்வினை யாயின பாற்றே

(பெரிய திருமொழி 4-7-5)

Meaning:

Oh Eternal light! Who is always
residing at Thiruvengadamalai!
Oh Lord who resides at Thirunangor
which is filled with luscious green groves
and where very enlightened famous
and noble persons reside
Oh Lord! Please rid me of all my sins.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar - 108

Thirupathi Andadi:

Poem:

நானடிமை செய்யலிடாய் நானானேன், எம்பெருமான்
தானடிமை கொள்ளலிடாய் தானானான் ஆனதற்பின்
வெள்ளக் குளத்தே விடாய் இருவரும் தணிந்தோம்
உள்ளக் குளத்தேனை யொத்து

Meaning:

I was eager to serve the Lord;
The God was even more eager to receive my service;
Both of us met in this town known as Thiru Vel-
lakulam
Now both of us are satisfied.

* * *

THIRU KAVALAMPADI

This divya desam is about 11 kms. from Sirkazhi and is one of the Thirunangoor divya desams. The moolavar here is known as Gopalakrishnan. He is seen in a standing posture, along with Rukmani and Satyabama. The Moolavar is facing east. There is no separate sannidhi for Thayar. The theertham is known as Thada malar poigai. The vimanam is known as Swayambu vimanam. Perumal is said to have appeared before Visvaksenar and Rudran.

The story relating to this divya desam is told in Padma puranam in the portion dealing with Palasavana mahathyam (13th and 14th adyayams). Agasthiya Mahamuni is said to have related this story to Vasu. It is said that a great devotee by name Harimitran undertook a deep penance in order to attain moksha. Perumal was pleased with his deep penance and He appeared before him in the beautiful form of Lord Krishna along with Rukmani and Satyabama. With one hand He was holding close a cow and in His right hand there was a stick (kol) which is usually used by the cow herds for controlling their herds. God thus appeared before the devotee in the form of Lord Gopala, the cow herd. God appeared before Visvaksenar also in that place as the latter was also doing a severe penance in order to be blessed by the Lord. Harimitran and Visvaksenar were said to have prayed to God to continue to stay in the same place and continue to bless the devotees who throng at that place. God conceded their request. It is believed that Lord Narayana appeared before Harimitran in the month of Masi on Hasta star day. He was seated underneath Madanakruta vimanam.

Thirumangai Alwar has sung in praise of the Lord here in his pasuram. He refers to the two incidents in God's life. These two incidents are illustrative of God's kindness. One such incident referred to by Thirumangai Alwar is of the occasion when Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana was given saranagathi by Rama. The other act of Rama which illustrates His ever ready kindness as stated by Alwar was when he rushed to the rescue of Sita who was abducted by Ravana, though He had no armies to equal that of Ravana, known for his ferocity and his strength. Yet Rama had no hesitation in fighting against Ravana.

In his Peria Thirumozhi (4-6-8) Thirumangai Alwar refers to the Lord here in His form as Krishna. He relates how the Lord along with Satyabama killed Narakasura and how the Lord for the sake of a cowherd girl Nappinnai fought with seven ferocious oxen and tamed them and how the Lord as Krishna at the behest of Rukmini rescued her and married her and how the Lord for the sake of Satyabama got the Parijatha tree itself. He says that this great Lord Krishna on His own accord came to Kavalampadi which is full of beautiful groves and stayed permanently to enable the devotees to have His dharshan.

Hymnology:

Tirumangai Alvar has sung 10 pasurams in praise of the deity here. The pasuram No. 4-6-1 from Peria Thirumozhi is given below with its meaning.

தாவளந்துலகமுற்றும் தடமலர்ப் பொய்கைபுக்கு
நாவள நவின்றங்கேத்த நாகத்தின் நடுக்கம் தீர்த்தாய்
மாவளம் பெருகி மன்று (மறையவர் வாழு நாங்கை
காவளம் பாடிமேய கண்ணனே களைகண் நீயே
பெரிய திருமொழி 4-6-1)

Meaning:

Once an elephant (Gajendran) wanted to pluck a beautiful lotus flower and offer it in worship for you. It entered the tank only to find that a crocodile caught hold of the foot and was dragging it into the tank. The elephant then loudly cried out for you to come to its rescue. On hearing its plaintive cry you rushed to its rescue and saved it. Oh Krishna you who reside at Thirukavalampadi Thirunangoor where a number of prosperous scholars live, are the sure saviour for me also.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's Poem - 108
Thirupathi Andadi.

Poem:

செப்பேன் மனிதருக்கு என் செஞ்சொற தமிழ்மால
 கைப்பேன் பிறதெய்வம் காண்பாரை . எப்போதும்
 காவளம்பாடித் திருமால் கால் தாமரை தொழுது
 நாவளம்பாடித் திரிவேன் நான்

(நூற்றிரு-அந்-35)

Meaning:

I will never sing the praise of mere mortals;
 I hate those who do not worship God but worship
 pseudo demi Gods;
 I will spend all my time singing in praise of only
 the Perumal at Kavalampadi,
 I will seek refuge only at the feet of the Lord
 Krishna of Kavalampadi.

* * *

THIRU THETRIAMBALAM

This is one of the divya desams in Thirunangoor near Sirkazhi. This place is about one mile to the south of Thiru Thevanar Thogai. The moolavar here is known as Senganmal Ranganathar. He is also known as Sri Lakshmi Rangan. He is seen in a lying down posture (Bhujanga sayanam) on Adisesha. He is seen with His four arms, facing east. The Thayar is known as Sengamala Valli. The theertham is known as Surya pushkarini. The vimanam is known as Veda vimanam. The Perumal here appeared before Anantalwar.

In Padma puranam, in the part dealing with the greatness of Palasaranyam, the story relating to this divya desam i.e. Lakshmiranga Vaibhavam is related. Agasthiya mahamuni is said to have related this story to king Vasu. Once upon a time, there was a demon by name Hiranyasuran. He was giving a lot of trouble to the sages and other devotees. The gods approached Perumal to rescue them from this evil force. God then left Vaikuntam, came to the place where the demon lived viz., Kalakeyapuram, fought with him and destroyed him. Meantime, in Vaikuntam, the Thayar and Adisesha felt sad at this separation from the Perumal. They came to Palasaranya kshetram and started a penance with the sole objective that they should never be separated from the Perumal and that the separation should end soon. Everyday Adisesha used to have his bath in the tank nearby. God was pleased with his fervent prayers, appeared before him and blessed him. Thenceforth the theertham in which Adisesha used to have his bath came to be known as Sesha theertham. The place came to be known as Seshapuram. The tank where the Thayar stayed came to be known as

Lakshmi pushkarini. When the Perumal destroyed Hiranyasuran, He came to Palasa vanam where Adishesha was praying, He appeared before him and lay down on Adishesha with His face facing east. The Thayars Sridevi and Bhodevi took their position near the feet of the Lord and continued to worship the Lord. As Goddess Lakshmi got happily united with Her Lord in this place, this place is also known as Lakshmi Rangam.

Hymnology:

Amongst all the Alvars, Tirumangai Alvar is the only one who has sung in praise of the lord here. He has composed ten pasurams of which pasuram No. 4-4-8 from Peria Tirumozhi is given below with its meaning.

சிலம்பினிடைச் சிறு பரவ்போல் பெரிய மேரு
 திருக்குளத்தில் கணகணப்பத் திருவாகாரம்
 குதுங்க நில்மடந்தை தனை இடந்து புல்கிக்
 கோட்டிடை வைத்தருளிய எம் கோமான் கண்டிற்
 இலங்கிய நான் மறை அணைத்தும் அங்கமானும்
 ஏழிசையும் கேள்விகளும் எண் திக்கெங்கும்
 சிலம்பிய நற்பெருஞ்செல்வம் திகழு நாங்கூர்த்
 திருத் தெற்றியம்பலத்தென் செங்கண்மாலே

(பெரிய திருமொழி 4-4-8)

Meaning:

The Lord at Thirunangoor Tetriambalam -
 (Whose glory, wealth and priceless possession is
 the resounding repetition of the four vedas and
 six Angangal).

Is none other than the Lord

Who

When He assumed the gigantic Varaha avatar was
 looking so fierce that even the Thayar residing
 always on His chest started trembling.

And

Even the Meru Parvat (mountain) was so struck
 with fear that one could hear the trembling of

its feet like the noise made by the tinkling of the stones in the anklet of a dancer!

Oh Lord

You as Varaha dived deep into the ocean, lifted mother Earth on your Snout and rescued Her Oh ye men

All of you come and worship this great God.

Diyakavi Perumal Pillai Iyengar's

Poem from 108 Tirupathi Andadi is given below with its meaning:-

சென்றது காலம் திரைநரை மூப்பு ஆனவினி
என்று கொல சாவு அறியோம் என்னெஞ்சே . கனரூல்
உருத்து எற்றி அம்பவத்தை ஓரவளவின வீழ்த்தான
திருத தெற்றியம்பலத்தைச் சேர்

(நூற் . திருப . அந . 86)

Meaning:

Oh mind

Time is fast running out;

The flesh in the body is shrinking;

Hair is becoming grey;

All the signs of old age are there;

It is not known when the final call (death) will be made;

So before it is too late and you are dead, think of the Perumal at Thiru Tetriambalam -

The Perumal who caught hold of the calf and threw it with force on the Vilamaram (wood apple tree) and thus with one shot, destroyed both the asuras Vatsasuran and Kapithasuran.

NB: Lord Krishna as a Cowherd boy was tending the cows and calves. At that time a demon took the form of a calf and another took the form of a big wood apple in a wood apple tree. Krishna saw through these disguises. He caught hold of the demon calf by its legs, whirled it above His head

and threw it with force on to the wood apple tree. The impact made the calf die and the giant wood apple along with other wood apples fell on the ground and broke into pieces. Thus he destroyed both the demons in one shot).

* * *

THIRUVAN PURUSHOTHAMAN KOIL AT THIRUNANGOOR

This is one of the divya desams in Thirunangoor village in Sirkazhi taluk of Tanjore District. It is five miles from Sirkazhi. The moolavar is known as Purushothaman. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The Thayar is known as Purushothama Nayaki. The theertham is known as Thirupparkadal theertham. The vimanam is Sanjeevi vigraha vimanam.

In Tamil Nadu this is the only Vaishnavite temple where the Perumal is known as Purushothaman and hence the place where He stays has come to be known as Thiruvan Purushothamam.

The temple of Sri Purushothama Swamy is the most important temple in Thirunangoor. The original structure was reportedly in bricks. It is believed that Thirumangai Alwar had this temple renovated.

The mythological story relating to this temple is interesting. It is said that sage Uthanga did penance in Nangoor according to Purushothama yoga as propounded in the 15th Chapter of Bhagvad Gita as also the Purushasooktha. He thus tried to realise God through severe penance. The severity and the depth of the penance sent ripples of fear among the Devas in Satyaloka. They approached Lord Vishnu for protection. Lord Vishnu agreed to go over to Uthanga and make him stop his severe penance. He appeared before Uthanga and blessed the sage. The sage prayed that the Lord may continue to stay in the same place so that

many others also could have the benefit of worshipping Him in the archa form at Thirunangoor. God is said to have conceded his request and the present idols of Lord Purushothama and the Thayar known as Purushothama Nayaki are said to be the idols which appeared at the behest of sage Uthanga and which were also worshipped by him.

Yet another story connected with this place relates to an incident that occurred in the life of the sage Vyagra pathar (Pulikkal munivar - the rishi having feet like those of a tiger). Once upon a time, Vyagra pathar and his three year old son by name Upamanyu came to Purushothaman Koil. Vyagra pathar is said to have left the child in the temple and went into the forest to collect flowers for worshipping the Lord. After some-time, the boy felt hungry and started crying. The Perumal and Thayar appeared before the child and out of their spontaneous grace and kindness are said to have brought ksheerabdi itself (i.e. the milky ocean in Heaven) to Nangoor so as to satisfy the hunger of Upamanyu. Later God is believed to have converted part of the ksheerabdi into a huge lake of water and even today this tank at the entrance to Thirunangoor is known by the name of Thirupparkadal. This episode is said to have occurred on Sukla Dwadasi i.e. the twelfth day after the New Moon in the month of Karthigai. It is believed that a dip in the lake on that day will wash away all sins.

The sthala vriksha is Palasa. Even today the descendants of Prathivadhi Bhayankarachary Anna, a direct disciple of Manavala Maamuni are maintaining this temple as hereditary trustees.

The most important festival celebrated in this temple is the 11 Garuda utsavam festival which has been described earlier in this book.

Hymnology:

10 pasurams have been composed by Tirumangai Alvar in praise of the deity here. Pasuram No.4-2-1 from Peria Tirumozhi with its meaning is given below:

கம்பமா கடலடைத்து இலங்கைக்குமன் கதிர் மூடியவை பத்தும்,
அம்பினால் அனுத்து, அரசு அவன் தம்பிக்கு அளித்தவனுரை.
கோயில்,
செபலா நிரை செண்பகம் மாதவி குதகம் வாழைகள் குழ்
வம்புலாம் சுமுகோங்கிய நாங்கூர் வண்டிருடோத்தமமே
(பெரிய திருமொழி 4-2-1)

Meaning:

Sri Rama
Who built a bridge on the awesome vast expanse
of the ocean and
Who severed with His arrows the ten heads of
Ravana and
Who installed Vibhishana, the brother of Ravana
on the throne at Lanka;
Is residing at
Van Purushotaman divya desam in Thirunangoor
That place has a scenic many splendoured beauty
with a number of jack trees, mango trees sweet
smelling arecanut trees and plantain trees, as also
flower plants full of scented flowers like shen-
bagam, etc.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's
poem (108 Tirupathi Andadi) composed in praise
of the Lord here is presented below:

Poem:

சாய்ந்த திருவரங்கம் தண் வேங்கடம குடந்தை
ஏய்ந்த திருமாலிருஞ்சோலை . பூத்துவரை
வண் புருடோத்தமாம், வானவர்க்கும் வானவனாம்
ஓண் புருடோத்தமன் தன் ஊர்

குறும் . திருப் : அந் ௩௩

Meaning:

The places where God is seen in a lying down posture are Srirangam; cool Thirumalai Thirupathi and Thirukudanthai.

The places which the Lord of Devas, viz. Thiruvanpurushothama Perumal, likes a lot are Thirumalirunsolai, beautiful Dwaraka and Vanpurushothamam.

* * *

THIRU VAIKUNTA VINNAGARAM

This is one of the eleven Tirupathis of Thiru Nan-goor. The moolavar here is known as Vaikunta Nathan. The ubaya Nachiars are also seated along with the moolavar. The God is facing east. The Thayar is known as Vaikunta Valli. There is no separate sannidhi for the Thayar. The theertham here is known as Lakshmi pushkarini as also Bujanga pushkarini, Viraja theertham. Viraja is the name of the river flowing in Vaikuntam. The vimanam is known as Ananta Satya vrata vimanam.

The mythological significance of this place is related in Padma puranam and Vaikunta nagara varnanam 5th adyayam in the chapter relating to Palasa vana mahatyam. Agasthier related this story to King Uparisaravasu.

Once upon a time, there was a great Ishvaku king by name Swetakethu. He wanted to go to vaikuntam. He therefore controlled all his senses, gave up eating food and undertook severe penance. His wife Dayamanthi also joined him in this penance. In course of time, they gave up their mortal coils and went to Vishnu lokam (Vaikuntam). But to their surprise, they could not see Vaikuntanatha there. They were very disappointed. What was worse, even after having reached Vaikuntam they started feeling the pangs of hunger and thirst. They decided to return to Bhooloka. Enroute, they met Narada, the triloka sanchara. They asked Narada to explain to them the reason for this strange phenomenon when they were feeling hunger and thirst

in Vaikuntam. Normally all those who attain vaikuntam are said to be beyond the reach of these usual human desire for food and water. Narada then replied that the king had, in his previous birth, not given any gifts (dhanam) to the brahmins and that he had not performed any yagams. Hence it was that though he had reached Sri Vaikuntam, he could not meet the Lord there and he could not rise above the human weakness for food and water. Narada advised him to go to a place known as Gajaranyam which is in the southern part of palasaranyam on the banks of the Kaveri. He advised the couple to do severe penance there. He assured them that God would appear before them and satisfy all their wishes. Accordingly, the king and the queen went to Palasa vanam. They had their bath in Kaveri and started worshipping Iravatheswaran who was worshipped by the divine elephant Iravatham. Iravatheswaran (Rudra) appeared before the king and the queen and asked them as to what was their desire. The king and queen then expressed their desire to see Lord Narayana (Vaikuntanatha). Iravatheswaran then expressed His desire to continue the penance along with the king and the queen. All the three of them prayed to Lord Vishnu. After a number of years, the Lord appeared before them, in response to the request of Iravatheswaran. That place came to be known as Vaikunta nagaram as Vaikuntanatha i.e. Vishnu appeared before Iravatheswaran at that place. Iravatheswaran and the king and the queen prayed to Lord Vishnu seated on Adishesha along with Sridevi, Boomidevi and Neeladevi to continue to stay in that place so that other devotees also could have His dharshan. God granted this wish. He also advised the king to feed a number of Sri Vaishnava devotees in this place and thus through the gift of food (anna dhanam) acquire a lot of punya. He assured the king that at the end of the yuga, if he acted as directed, he would attain moksha. Thus it is believed that Paramapada nathan appeared in His archavataram in Vaikunta Vinnagaram in response to the prayer of Iravatheswaran.

Hymnology:

10 pasurams have been sung by Tirumangai Alvar in praise of the deity here. Pasuram No.3-9-1 from Peria Tirumozhi with its meaning is given below:

Meaning:

சலங்கொண்ட இரணியனது அகல் மார்வம ணைடு
தடங்கடலைக் கடைந்தமுதம் கொண்டுகந்தகானை,
நலங்கொண்ட சுருமுகில்போல் திருமேனி அம்மான்
நாடோறும் மகிழ்ந்தினிது மருவியுறை கோயில்,
சலங்கொண்டு மலர் சொறியும் மலலிகை ஒண் செருந்தி
சண்பகங்கள் மணநாறும் வண்பொழிவினாடே
வலங்கொண்டு கயலோடி விளையாடு நாங்கூர்
வைகுந்த விண்ணகரம் வணங்கு மட நெஞ்சே
(பெரிய திருமொழி 3.9.1)

Meaning :

The Perumal, -
Who killed the evil demon Hiranyakasipu by splitting open his chest; -
Who churned the ocean with a mountain, got amrith and happily distributed it to Devas alone; -
Who has the secret elixer of eternal youth -
Who is as beautiful as the enchantingly blue azure sky; -
Out of His abundant love is residing at Thiruvinnagaram in Thirunangoor.
Oh stupid mind of mine
Bow down your head and pray to that Perumal at Thirunangoor

In that town the Kayal fishes¹ dance about in the luscious groves filled with scented jasmine and shenbagam flowers.

¹ The Alvar says that the Kayal fishes - a type of fish - which like all fishes should live in water are in this place, carried away by the divinity in the air, leave the water and gambol about in the fields filled with sweet smelling flowers!)

The song composed by Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar in his 108 Tirpathi Andadhi, with its meaning is given below:

Poem:

வணங்கேன் பிற தெய்வம் மாலடியாரல்லாக்
குணங்கேடர் தங்களுடன் கூடேன் . இணங்கி நின்று
வைகுந்த விண்ணகரம் வாழ்த்துவேன் ஈதன்றே
வைகுந்த விண்ணகர வாழ்வு

(நூற்றிருபதி-அந்-11)

Meaning:

I will not bow down before anyone other than God.
I will not associate with anyone else except the devotees of the Lord;
I will join the vaishnavite devotees and praise the Perumal at Vaikunthavinnagaram.
Only that is equal to the happiness that we attain in heaven.

* * *

THIRUNANGOOR

SRI SEM PON RANGA DIVYA DESAM

Thirunangoor is in Sirkazhi taluk of Tanjore District. The place is also known as Hema rangam, Naga Puri, Nangai, Nangai nagaram and Nangoor. The Perumal here has got several names as Hema Rangar, Sem Pon Arangar, Per Arulalan and Damodaran. The Thayar is known as Alli Mamalaral. The vimanam is known as Kanakavalli vimanam and the holy theertham is known as Nithya pushkarini. The God here is seen in a standing posture facing east.

There are several stories connected with this divya desam. It is believed that once upon a time, Lord Siva was very worried as He was suffering from Brahmahatty dosha. Madhava looked at Siva and advised Him to go to a place which is to the north of Kaveri, to the south of Nupura nadhi, to the west of Swetaranyam. It is known as Nagapuri. He advised Siva to go there, manifest himself in 11 forms and to perform the best among the yagas viz. Aswamedha yagam so as to get release from the Brahmahatty dosha which was afflicting him. Lord Siva accordingly came to Nagapuri. He manifested Himself into 11 archa forms. Thus, the presence of 11 Siva temples in and around Thirunangoor is explained. Lord Siva started the aswamedha yaga. Then Lord Madhava along with Bhoodevi and Neeladevi, worshipped by Brahma and other Devas, having the Pranava as his chariot, the vedas as his horses, with Sun and Moon as the two wheels of the chariot, and with Brahma as the Sarathy i.e. the charioteer came to the banks of Indra pushkarini. The Lord then appeared before Siva and gave Him abhaya

pradanam. Lord Siva accepted this abhaya pradanam and requested Mukundhan to show equal kindness and concern towards the other devotees who came to this town. Lord Siva asked for the boon that Perumal should also manifest Himself in the said kshetram in eleven archavatara forms, continue to stay in this great kshetram along with Siva and thus provide easy access to the devotees who may also get rid of many of their sins and attain moksha. This request of Rudra was conceded by Vishnu. Thus, the eleven archa forms of Siva and an equal eleven archa forms of Vishnu which are found in the eleven temples each for Lord Siva and Lord Vishnu in Thirunangoor are explained by this story.

Yet another story connected with the Perumal of this temple relates to the rags to riches story of a brahmin by name Kasyapa. It is said that a brahmin by name Kasyapa lived in Kancheepuram. He was very poor and was not able to meet the needs of his family. His eldest son Mukundan sought his father's permission to leave Kancheepuram and go to the fertile territory in which the river Kaveri flows. He hoped that in that prosperous tract, he would be able to earn a decent living and send sufficient money to his father so as to help him in bringing up the family. Having obtained his father's permission, the son Mukundan reached Nagapuri Kshetram. He went to the Sem Pon Rangar Sannidhi. He obtained mantropadesam from certain revered rishis in that area. He then repeated 32,000 times in three days the moola mantram. On the third day, in the evening, he went to a forest to the south of the temple. That forest was infested with number of monkeys. It was known as Kurangu pudur, (rendered into English this means a town of monkeys). As it was dusk, he performed his usual prescribed evening ablutions and felt that it was not safe to return to the town as it was getting dark. He thought he may lose his way in the night and may be attacked by the wild animals in the forest. He therefore climbed up a banyan tree and decided to spend the night sleeping as best as he could

on the branches of tree. Late in the night in the third Jama suddenly he saw that robbers were seated underneath the tree. They were having weapons in their hands as also lighted torches. They had kept a huge pile of loot consisting of gold and other jewellery. Perhaps that consisted of the loot of an earlier robbery somewhere. He heard them uttering the words 'Narayana boothame! Vilagi Iru'. Literally translated this means 'O Narayana devil! Please move out of the way'. They repeated these magic words ten times and then to the surprise of Mukundan, he saw a big stone slab at the foot of the tree move. The robbers deposited all their loot in that cave. They again repeated ten times the magic words 'Narayana boothame! Moodi kol' (Literally translated this means 'O Narayana devil! Close your doors'). As soon as this magic mantra was repeated ten times, the stone opening under the banyan tree closed leaving no trace of the loot hidden inside. Mukundan who was lying on the top of the banyan tree witnessed all this. After the robbers left the place, he slowly came down and decided to test what he had over heard and seen. He repeated the words 'Narayana boothame! Vilagi Iru' ten times. To his intense surprise, he found that the stone slab moved. He also heard simultaneously as asareeri voice (i.e. a Heavenly voice which could not be identified with any physical person present there) telling him that he could take as much of the jewellery and precious stones as he desired. He felt that it was the voice of Sri Sem Pon Arangar. Accordingly, Mukundan took some of the precious articles. He then repeated the magic words 'Narayana Boothame! Moodi Kol'. The cave closed. He tied up all his collections in a bundle, loaded it on the back of some cattle which were wandering in that area. He returned to Kancheepuram, stayed with his parents for a long time. He used the money that he got for doing dhana and dharma and later attained moksha. It is said that this divya desam where this sincere devotee was blessed with wealth came to be known as Hema (gold) Ranga Sthalam.

Yet another interesting story which reflects this sthala vaibhavam of Hema Rangapuri is connected with an incident in the life of Sri Rama. It is believed that Sri Rama decided to do a yagam (homam) to rid himself of the sin of having killed Vali (Vali vatha dosham). But when He started the homam, He did not perform the pooja to Visvakshenar as even He the great person was carried away by His ego of self importance. But to prove that even the Lord Himself is not above the evil effect of this ego, the story says that yagam started by Sri Rama could not at all be completed. Then He realised His fault in not having performed the pooja to Visvakshenar before starting His homam. He therefore did the pooja to Visvakshenar who then accepted the apology and gave Him Sankha Nidhi and Padma Nidhi. Rama used these two and completed his pooja. As stated earlier, there is a temple tank in Thiru Nangoor on whose bund, there is an idol of Vinayakar who is known as Naalaayirathil Oruvar'. Rama performed His homam on the bunds of this tank which is a short distance from the Sem Pon Sei Kovil. It is said that even today, the water of this tank is slightly coloured as if all the ashes of the homam performed by Sri Rama in those days are still mixed with the water. The greyish ash coloured water is thus today's proof of the yaga performed by Rama in those days.

After the successful completion of this yagam, Rama was advised by the famous sage Druda netra, the son of Kousika Maharshi, living in Swetaranyam to perform a Goprasavam ceremony. This religious function required a huge image of cow to be made out of gold. After this image of this cow was made, Rama stayed inside that figure for four days. On the fifth day, He came out and gifted the cow to the brahmins. It is said that gold was used by the holy people for renovating the temple tower, mandapam, the Garuda sannidhi etc. This explains the Sem Pon Rangar temple getting the name of Hema Rangapuri, Hema in Sanskrit meaning gold.

The pushkarini here is known as Nithya Pushkarini. In Padma Purnam when Agastiya mahamuni related the story of this divya desam to Vasu, he said that this tank was named as Nitya pushkarini as this tank survived even the great pralayam i.e. the deluge and it never dries up and hence it is known as Nithya i.e. eternal pushkarini.

Hymnology :

Amongst the Alvars Tirumangai Alvar is the only one who has sung in praise of the deity here. He has composed 10 pasurams of which pasuram No. 4 - 3 - 1 from Peria Thirmozhi with its meaning is given below:

பேரணிந்து உலகத்தவர் தொழுதேத்தும்
 பேரருளாளன் எம்பிநானை,
 வாரணி மூலையாள் மலர் மகளோடு
 மணமகளும் உடன் நிற்ப,
 சேணி மாட நாங்கை நன்னடுவுள்
 செம்பொன் சேய் கோயிலின் உள்ளே
 சாரணி மேகம் நின்று தொப்பானைக்
 கண்டு கொண்டு உய்ந்தொழிநொதேனே
 பெரிய திருமொழி 4-3-1

Meaning :

All the people in the world worship Him by chanting His 1008 names (Sahasranama)

He is known as Perarulalan as He is spontaneously generous to the devotees.

When I see Him standing along with Sridevi and Bhodevi at Sempon sei kovil He is as enchanting and captivating as if a dark rain bearing cloud is standing there.

I worshipped that Perumal and am the lucky recipient of His benevolent good wishes.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's Poem
(108 Tirupati Andadi) Poem:

ஊர்வேன் மடலை ஒழீவேன் மட நாணம்
சேர்வேன் கரிய திருமானைப் . பாரதிய
அம்பொன் செய் கோயிலரங்கன் அணி நாங்கூர்ச்
செம்பொன் செய் கோயிலினில் சென்று

Meaning :

Forgetting for a moment the innate qualities of bashfulness, shyness, modesty natural to all women, I will openly write a letter to Perumal so that the entire world comes to know about my feeling for the Lord. After writting this letter I will go to Thirunangoor Sem pon Sei Kovil which is the abode of Lord Ranganatha and will definitely attain and become one with my Lord.

* * *

THIRUMANI KOODAM

This place is about half a mile to the east of Thirunangoor near Sirkazhi. The moolavar here is known as Varadaraja Perumal, Mani kooda nayakan. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The Goddess is known as Thirumamagal Nachiar. The theertham is known as Chandra pushkarini. The vimanam is known as Kanaka vimanam. God is said to have appeared before the Moon God.

In Padma puranam (412th adyayam) the story relating to Thiru Manikodam also known as Rathna Kooda sthalam is mentioned. Agasthia maharishi is said to have related this story to king Vasu.

Once upon a time, Daksha Prajapathi gave all his 27 daughters starting from Aswini and ending with Revathi in marriage to the Moon God. All the daughters were beautiful to look at. Yet the moon God felt that only Rohini was equal to him in beauty and hence used to favour her. The other wives felt offended. They went to their father and complained about this. Daksha Prajapathi got annoyed with the Moon God (Lord Chandran - Soma) as the Moon God had not looked after the other daughters of his with the affectionate respect which was due to them. He cursed that the Moon God should suffer from Rajya kshama (kshaya rogam- Tuberculosis.) As a result, the Moon God got afflicted by the dreaded disease and started waning. In order to atone for his sin, he started on a pilgrimage. He reached Rathna kooda sthalam in Palasaranyam. There, he met a rishi by name Samvartha, obtained his permission, put up a Parnasala (ashram) and started his penance. The tank where

the Moon (Soma) God had his daily bath came to be known as Soma pushkarini. The Moon God continued his severe penance standing in the midst of fire even in the height of summer and standing in the tank even in the depths of winter. God was pleased with the severe penance and appeared before him. He passed his hands all over the body of Lord Soma. Immediately, the Moon God got rid of his disease and attained his original beauty. The Moon God prayed to Perumal to continue to stay in the same place and continue to bless the devotees who flock to that place. The Perumal agreed. This is the story of this divya desam.

Hymnology:

Tirumangai Alvar has composed ten pasurams in praise of the Lord here. Of these, pasuram No.4-5-1 from Peria Tirumozhi is extracted below. Its meaning is also given.

தூம்புடைப் பனைக்கை வேழம் தூயர் கெடுத்தருளி, மன்னு
காம்புடைக் குன்றமேந்திக் கடுமழை காத்த எந்தை
பூம்புனல் பொன்னி முற்றும், புகுந்து பொன் வரண்ட, எங்கும்
தேம்பொழில் கமழு நாங்கூர்த் திருமணிக் கூடத்தானே.
(பெரிய திருமொழி 4-5-1)

Meaning:

The God

Who rescued Gajendra the elephant with a long trunk like a palm tree -

Who held aloft Govardhana mountain and herded the cows, calves and protected the Yadhavas in Gokulam under that protective umbrella and saved them from a fierce hail storm -

Is residing at Thirumanikoodam in Thirunangoor So as to rid us of our sorrows and to protect us. Thirumanikoodam is the place where the river Kaveri flows and has deposited plenty of precious stones all over the place.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's poem from his magnum opus "The 108 Thirupathi Andadi" is given below with its meaning.

சேராது முன் செய்த தீவினை, பின் செய்வதுவும்
வாராது இனி நீ மட நெஞ்சே . நேராக்
குருமணிக் கூடத்து ஆனைக் கொம்பு பறித்தானைத்
திருமணிக்கூடத்தானைச் செப்பு

ஞாநம் - திருப்ப - அந் . ௩௩

Meaning :

Oh mind
If only you utter the name of the Perumal
Who fought with Kuvalayapedam the royal ele-
phant of Kamsa who had a stone studded palace
and
Who plucked its tusks and killed it - and
who is now at Thirumanimada kovil
Then
All your past sins will get redeemed
And
Even the sins that you may unknowingly and
unwittingly commit in future will not affect you.

* * *

THIRU PARTHAN PALLI

Thiru Parthan Palli is one of the eleven Thirunangoor Tirupathis. The moolavar here is seen in a standing posture facing west. The moolavar is known as Tamarayal Kelvan. The utsavar is known as Parthasarathy. The Goddess is known as Tamarai Nayaki. The theertham is known as Ganga theertham. The vimanam is Narayana vimanam.

It is believed that during the great epic war on the battle field, Arjuna suddenly lost his will to fight against his own kith and kin. He let Gandeavam fall to the ground and decided to start on a pilgrimage. He reached Palasa vanam. He was feeling thirsty. He reached a place where Agasthier, Bharadvajar and Gowthma rishis were doing penance. He met Agasthier and asked him for some water. But surprisingly, Agasthier found that even his kamandalam was empty and there was not a drop of water. But with his gnana drushti, Agasthier realised that it was God's will that his kamandalam should be empty. He asked Arjuna to pray to Lord Narayana. Accordingly, Arjuna did severe penance. The Lord appeared before Him. He gave him a sword. He asked him to draw a line on the ground with that sword. Water gushed out. 'This water is said to be the water from the river Ganges. This water collected in a pond near the temple and this pond is even today known as Khadga pushkarini. Khadga means sword in Sanskrit. As the pushkarini is said to contain the water of the holy Ganges, it also came to be known as Ganga theertham. It is also known as Sri Vishnupada theertham.

As Lord Narayana appeared before Arjuna here, Arjuna was able to get rid of his agnamam and was able to attain gnamam. The Lord appeared with His Chaturbujam before Arjuna. God is said to have explained the meaning of Charama slokam to Arjuna and made him realise that he should do his duty and leave the rest to God.

Charama slokam runs as follows :

*Sarva dharman Parithyajya
Mam Ekam Saranam Vraja
Aham Thvam Sarva papebhyo
Mokshya ishyam, Maa Suchaha*

This Sloka Means :

Abandon all rituals;
Take refuge in Me alone;
I shall release you from all sins
and grant moksha
Do not grieve.

This is the only temple among the 108 Vaishnavite Divya Desams where there is a sannidhi for Arjuna. In the sannidhi, Arjuna is seen with a sword. He is facing north. It is said that earlier when he left the battle field, Kurukshetra, Arjuna was facing south and started on his pilgrimage down south. In this place, he had the dharshan of Lord Krishna and got his enlightenment. Immediately afterwards he took the sword in his hand and was ready to start back to fight at the battle field. Hence he is seen facing North, ready to go back to the battle field in the north.

The only other place where there is a shrine for Parthasarathy i.e. the divine charioteer is at Triplicane in Madras. But it is noticed that the two moolavars at Triplicane and Parthan Palli are very different. The Parthasarathy idol at Triplicane has got only two hands. In one hand, He is holding the Sankhu and the other hand is resting on the waist. He is said

to be seen in the Sankhu nadham pose i.e. almost as if the God is going to blow on the conch heralding the starting of the war. The idol is seen facing east. But in Parthan Palli, the God is seen with Chathurbhuj pose (with four hands). The moolavar is seen facing west.

Hymnology :

The only Alvar who has sung in praise of the Lord here is Tirumangai Alvar. He has composed 10 pasurams. In the following paragraphs, pasuram No. 4-8-9 from Peria Tirumozhi is given with its meaning.

கண்ணனென்றும் வானவர்கள், காதலித்து மலர்கள் தூவும்
எண்ணென்றும் இன்பன் என்றும், ஏழுலகுக்கு ஆதி என்றும்
திண்ணமாட நீடு நாங்குகெதா தேவதேவன் என்றென்று ஒதி
பண்ணினன்ன மென்மொழியாள் பார்த்தன் பள்ளி பாடுவானே
பெரிய திருமொழி . 4-8-9

Meaning :

The girl with a voice like a note in music repeats
many times
That the Lord at Parthanpalli
Is none other than Lord Krishna
Who is always in the thoughts of Devas,
Who is the giver of happiness,
Who is the creator of all the worlds,
Who is the Deva-Deva residing at Thirunangoor
full of palatial mansions,

Let us now turn to Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's poem from his 108 Thirupathi Andadi :

Poem :

ஒத்தமரர் ஏத்தும் ஒளி விகம்பும் பாற்கலுவர் .
இத்தலத்தில் காண்பரிய என்னெஞ்சே . சித்துணர்ந்த
தீர்த்தன் பள்ளிக்கு இருந்து செப்ப வெளி நின்றாண
பார்த்தன் பள்ளிக்குள் பணி.

பூரற் . திருப் . ஆந் . 40

Oh mind of mine

You cannot see on this earth Parmapadam and
Thiruparkadal where the Devas and Nithyasuris
worship the Lord!

So give up your attempt in that direction;
Instead go to Parthanpalli and worship Lord
Narasimha who came out of a pillar to just prove
as true the words of His devotee, child Prahlada.

* * *

THIRU DEVANAR THOGAI

This is also one of the eleven Thirunangoor divya desams. It is about 4 miles from Sirkazhi. The moolavar here is known as Deiva Nayakan. This is also known as Madhava Perumal koil. The idol is seen in a standing posture facing east. Goddess is known as Kadal Magal Nachiar. The vimanam is known as Sobhana vimanam. The theertham is known as Sobhana pushkarini as also Deva sabha Pushkarini as it is believed that the Devas used to hold meetings in this place. The God is believed to have appeared before Vasishtar.

There is no particular story about this place.

Hymnology :

Tirumangai Alvar is the only Alvar who has sung (mangalasanam) in praise of the deity here. He has composed 10 pasurams of which pasuram No. 4-1-9 from Peria Thirumozhi is given below with its meaning:

கும்பமிகு மதயாணை பானொடும் குலைந்து விழ
சொம்பதனைப் பறித்தெறிந்த கூத்தனமர்ந் துறையுமிடம்
வம்பலிழும் செண்பகத்தின் மணங்கமழும் நாங்கை தன்னுள்
செம்பொன்மதின் பொழில்புடைசூழ் திடுத்தேவனார் தொகையே
பெரிய திருமொழி 4-1-9

Meaning :

Lord Krishna, who once broke the tusks of that rogue elephant Kuvalayapedam, is now seen at Thiru Devanar thogai in Thirunangoor. That place is full of

golden hued clouds and luscious groves, with the sweet scent of shenbaga flowers wafting in the air.

**Sri Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's Poem
(108 Tirupathi Andadi)**

ஆர்க்கும் வலம்புரியால் அண்டமும் எண்ணிசையும்
கார்க்கடலும் வெற்பும் கலங்குனவால் . சேர்க்கும்
திருத் தேவனார் தொகை மால் செவ்வாய் வைத்தூத்
தடுத் தேவனார் தொகையும் சாய்ந்து

Meaning :

Lord Krishna, the Perumal
Who is at Thiru Devanarthogai
Is none other than the Lord
Who
While carrying the Parijatham tree from Deval-
oka to satisfy the whim of Sathyabhama -
Blew the conch so loudly
That hearing that noise
The devas swooned and fell down;
The eight directions (disai), the eight mountains,
the seven oceans, were all disturbed and per-
turbed.

* * *

KAZHI SEERAM VINNAGARAM (THADALAN KOIL)

This place is about 1 km. from Sirkazhi railway station in Thanjavur District. The Lord here is known as Loganathan. The moolavar here is seen in a standing posture facing east. The utsavar is known as Thrivikrama Narayana. The Thayar is known as Loganayaki. The pushkarini is known as Sankha pushkarini. The vimanam is known as Pushkalavarttha vimanam. God is said to have appeared before Ash-takona maharishi. The Lord is seen in the form of Thrivikrama. The story of Thrivikrama is well known. Mahabali was a chakravarthi. He was known for his dharma and dhana (charity). However, over a period of time, he became egoistic and started giving a lot of trouble to Devas. Indra lost his entire kingdom. The devas were worried that Mahabali would completely over-run Devaloka. They rushed to Perumal for assistance. As Mahabali was known for his charitable disposition, God decided to punish him by exploiting his weakness viz. to gift liberally without thinking of the consequences. Moreover, Prahladha was one of the ancestors of Mahabali. Prahaladha was also a great devotee of Vishnu. God therefore did not want to punish Mahabali too much. He therefore approached Mahabali in the form of a young brahmin boy and asked him to gift a piece of land that could be covered by three steps of His. Mahabali felt that the area occupied by the feet of this small statured boy was well within his means to gift. So Mahabali agreed. As soon as he agreed, God changed from Vamana form to a Thrivikrama form. He became a gigantic figure and with one step, He covered the entire earth and with

the second step, He covered the Heavens and looked at Mahabali as to where was the land which He could measure with His third step. Mahabali then offered his head. God accepted this and pushed him down to the underworld. Thus, God protected the devas and got back to them all their lost kingdoms.

In Kazhi Seerama Vinnagaram, we see the Lord in this Thrivikrama pose with one foot raised - symbolically suggesting His measuring the heavens with that foot. But while in Kancheepuram, we see the God in a big form, in Sirkazhi, the idol is of a small size. The Lord here is also known as Thadalan. Thadu meaning three Alan meaning Alanthan i.e. measured.

It is said that once upon a time, Thirumangai Alwar went to Sirkazhi. Even as he was entering the town, he saw that Thirugnana Sambandar, a saivite scholar was already there. A doubt arose as to who was superior whether it was Thirugnanasambandar or Thirumangai Alwar. They decided to have a contest. Thirugnanasambandar asked Thirumangai Alwar to sing a kural. Thirumangai Alwar immediately recited the couplet "Kazhi Seerama Vinnagaram moovadi man vendi". Thirugnansambandar immediately appreciated the beauty of this couplet in simple Tamil. In Vinnagaram, the presiding deity originally was Sri Rama. Thirumangai Alwar by using the words "Kazhi Seerama Vinnagaram" had, in a simple way, played upon the words to indicate that in Sirkazhi, originally Sri Rama was the presiding deity. To explain, the word "Kazhi Seer" read in the reverse order would represent the word Sirkazhi i.e. the name of the place. But if the word "Seerama Vinnagaram" is read as such, it indicates that he is referring to the original presiding deity of the place viz. Sri Rama. Further, by using the words 'Moovadi man vendi' he is referring to the act of the God that He covered the entire world with His three steps. Thirugnansambandar then and there conferred on Thirumangai Alwar the title "Naalukavi

Perumal" and gifted to him his vel (the spear) and Gandasaram i.e. the chain which he wore round his neck. Even today, the idol of Thirumangai Alwar in this place is seen bedecked with the vel (spear) and the Gandasaram. Manavala Maamuni, the great disciple of Thirumangai Alwar, while describing the figure of Thirumangai Alwar sings as follows:

Anaitha velum
 (hugging the spear)
 Thozhutha kayyium
 (folded hands)
 Aashundia thirunamamum
 (wearing the vaishnavite caste mark)
 Om yenra vayum
 (the mouth is open as if it is repeating the
 Ashtakshara mantram beginning with Om)
 Uyarndha tholum
 (with straightened shoulders)
 Akanda marbum
 (with broad chest)
 Kundanai itta konai kalum
 (a posture with bent knee indicating that
 the person is bending and listening intently to
 the Ashtaksharam being told to him by the Lord
 Himself).
 Ashtaksharathai ketta sevi
 (the ear which heard the Ashtaksharam).

This is how Manavala Maamuni describes the beautiful posture of his guru. In Sirkazhi, when we see the idol of Thirumangai Alwar, we can almost see these lines coming to life as the idol reflects typically all the attributes attributed to the original Alwar by his devotee Manavala Maamuni.

There is yet another small story connected with this divya desam. It is said that this was the place where Brahma was humbled by a Muni by name Romasa Muni. Brahma was allegedly very proud of his longevity. The Romasa Muni then told him that the

alleged long life of Brahma was only equal to the life span of one single hair on the body of the Rishi.

Hymnology :

Tirumangai Alvar has composed ten pasurams in praise of the deity here. The pasuram No. 3-4-1 from Peria Tirumozhi with its meaning is given below:

ஒரு குறலாய் இரு நில மூவடி மண் வேண்டி
உலகனைத்தும் ஈடியால் ஒடுக்கி, ஒன்றும்
தருக வெனா மாவலியைச் சிறையில் வைத்த
தாடாளன் தாளணைவீர், தக்க சேர்த்தி
அருமறையின் திரள நான்கும் வேள்வி ஐந்தும்
அங்கங்களவையாறும் இசைகள் ஏழும்
தெருவில் மலிவிழா வளமும் சிறக்கும் காழிச்
சேராம விண்ணகரே சேர்மினீரே

Meaning :

If it is your desire -
To attain the lotus feet of the Lord
Who in his incomparable, matchless avatar as Vamanan
Made Mahabali agree to gift land covered by his
three petite steps;
And then assumed a Viswaroopa and covered the
earth and sky with His first and second steps.
And placed the Third step on the head of Mahabali and pushed him into the nether world (Pathala) -
Go to Sreerama Vinnagaram in Sirkazhi
which place is famous
One two and three are His three steps
for the four vedas and
for the five yagnams and
for the six angangal and
for the seven musical notes and
for the festivals celebrated in its streets.

(N.B. Here the use by the Alvar of the numericals one to seven in their natural order is to be noted. Four vedas refer to Rig vedam, Yajur vedam, Samavedam and Atharvana vedam.

The five yagnams refer to Brahma yagnam,

Deva yagnam, Bhootha yagnam, Pithru yagnam and Manushya yagnam.

The six angangal refer to Siksha, vyakaranam, chandas, Nirutham, Jothisham and Kalpam.

The seven musical notes refer to Shadjam, Rishabam, Gandharam, Madhyamam, Panchamam, Daivatham and Nishadham).

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar

108 Thirupathi Andadi:

செல்லும் தொறும் உயிர்ப்பின் செல்லும் இருவினையை
வெல்லும் உபாயம் விரும்புவீர் . தொல்லரங்கர்
சேராம விண்ணகரம் சேர்மின், பின் மீளாத
ஊராம் ஆவ்விண்ணகரம் உண்டு

Meaning :

When the breath ultimately leaves this body (last breath) and soul gets released

All the sins and good things done by you will follow your soul;

Only when you kick yourself free of those sins and good deeds will you be able to attain moksha

The only way you can do it is to go to Seerama Vinnagaram and pray to Thalala Perumal

Only when you worship that Lord can you get rid of those unwanted chains and avoid rebirths and attain Paramapadam.

THIRUVALI THIRUNAGARI DIVYA DESAMS

Thiruvali and Thirunagari are two different places separated from each other by about 3 kms. But yet when referring to these divya desams in Chola Nadu, one refers only to Thiruvali-Thirunagari as a single divya desam. It is therefore proposed to cover the story of these divya desams in this one chapter.

This place is also known as Lakshmipuram, Sri Nagari. Alinganapuram, Bilvaranya kshetram. This place is about 7 kms. from Sirkazhi. The moolavar is known as Lakshmi Narasimhar and as Vedarajan and also as Vayalali Manavalan. This is also regarded as one among the Pancha Narasimha Kshetras. This place is said to be in existence right through the last four yugas.

The god is said to have come to this place in search of Thayar who was born in this place as the daughter of Poorana Maharishi.

God was reunited with Her even as She was doing penance in the lotus flower in Halathini pushkarini in this place. As God was united with the Thayar here, it is said that the place came to be known as Alingana-puram.

The God is seen in a sitting posture facing west. The name of the Thayar is Amruthavalli. The name of the vimanam is Ashtakshara Vimanam and Sam-sana Vimanam. The Perumal is said to have appeared here before Thirumangai Alwar and the 5th son of God Brahma viz. Nikansama Prajapathi. Thirumangai Al-

war was born in the place known as Thirukuraiyalur which is about 3 miles from this place. This place was visited by Nathamuni, Ramanujar and Manavala Mamuni. The Sthala Viruksham of this place is Bilvam. It is seen in front of the sannidhi of Yoga Narasimhar. It is believed that underneath that tree Goddess lives unknown and unseen by us. Kulasekara Alwar and Thirumangai Alwar have sung in praise of the Lord here.

This place is also known as Ashtakshara kshetram as Lord Narayana came down to this world in this place in order to initiate the Naran i.e. human being Thirumangai Mannan into the intricacies of Thirumantram.

As the chieftain of the army of the Chola King by name Ali Nadar ruled over this place, this place is also known as Ali Nadu.

Sthala Puranam :

As stated earlier, Perumal is said to have been residing in this place for all the four yugas and hence this place is regarded as a puranam sthalam. The story of this place is related in Garuda purana in the part relating to Bhilvaranya kshetram through a conversation between Rudra and Narada.

Once upon a time, a group of rishis under the leadership of Sounaka Maharishi started a yaga known as Satram which was to be performed continuously for about twelve years. Sootha Muni, the disciple of Vyasa also came to attend this yaga along with his disciples. At that time, the rishis who had already assembled there looked at Sootha Munivar and asked him to relate the story of Thirurali Thirunagari and the story of Chaturbuja yoga Narasimhar and Sri Vedaraja Perumal who are said to be residing in that place continuously for all the four yugas. They also asked him to relate to them the story relating to the pushkarini, the

vimanam, the viruksham and the cause for Perumal appearing before Karthama Prajapathi.

In response to the request of the rishis Sootha Maharshi is said to have related the holy significance of this place. Sootha Maharshi said that he had heard this story from his guru Vyasa Maharishi.

The story relating to Halathini pushkarini is as follows:

Once upon a time, in the sabha of Lord Brahma, a beautiful damsel viz. Akasa Ganga lived. A King by name Mahabishak fell in love with her. They both came down to earth to lead a married life. It is said that these two persons are Santhanu and Ganga. Ganga had obtained a strange promise from king Santhanu. She decreed that the king should never question any of her actions and should not interfere with any act of hers. In case Santhanu questions her or prevents her acting in a particular manner, she threatened that she would leave him and go away. King Santhanu accepted these conditions. In course of time, seven children were born to them. But as soon as a child was born, Ganga would take it and drown it in the river. When she was planning to do the same for the eighth child, King Santhanu could not tolerate it any longer and tried to prevent her from the heinous act. Ganga then reminded him that he had broken the promise given to her. She announced that she was leaving Santhanu and going away. She wanted to atone for the sisu hatya dosha committed by her. She therefore manifested herself into eight forms viz. Halathini, Pavani, Nalini, Soobodaka, Soosakshu, Sootha, Sindu and Bagirathi. Each one of these forms went to a different place for doing penance. Halathini alone came to Thiruvall Thirunagari. Enroute she visited Nandavilakku Perumal at Thirunangoor. There she met Sriman Narayan along with the three Goddesses viz., Sridevi, Bhoomidevi and Neeladevi. Halathini repeated to them her sad story and wanted to know how she could atone for the sisu hatya and go

back to Brahmaloaka and prayed to God to help her in this. Perumal then told her that her wish would be fulfilled shortly and that He would be appearing on the banks of this Haladini Pushkarini as Vedarajan along with Thayar Sri Lakshmi Devi under an Ashtakshara vimanam. Perumal added that at that time, seven other theerthams also would come to worship Him here viz. Padma Theertham, Vasu Theertham, Karthama Theertham, Brahma Theertham Yugam Theertham, Runamosana Theertham, Kali Theertham. Besides, you will be protected on all the eight sides by the following viz. Garuda, Shanmugha, Surya, Vinayaka, Varuna, Badra Kali, Yama and Sasath. He said that at that time, all the devotees will have their bath in Halathini Theertham and worship Him. As the devotees will be having their bath in that Pushkarini before receiving God's blessings, the Perumal added that all those devotees would also bless Halathini. He also said that she would be known as Halathini as she brings happiness for all. (Halathini meaning one who brings happiness). It is believed that even today Lord Narayana continues to stay on the banks of this Halathini Theertham and blesses the devotees and through them Halathini herself.

Yoga Narasimhar Sannidhi :

The story relating to the presence of Yoga Narasimhar here is said to have been related by Lord Siva to Narada in the first chapter of Garuda puranam. It is said that the devas were suffering due to the evil deeds of the demon Hiranyan. They sought the help of Perumal. Perumal promised to kill Hiranyan and gave them all the necessary relief. God then left Thayar in Vaikuntam and came to this place, sat under the bilva tree. He then tore the chest of Hiranyan and killed him. Since that day, Yoga Narasimhar is said to be continuing to stay on under the bilva tree under the Kesari Vimanam. This is one among the Pancha Narasimha kshetrams. There five are:

The Narasimha shrine at Thirukuraiyalur :

The Narasimha kshetram at Mangaimadam (it is here that the Lord Narasimha split the chest of the demon Hiranyan).

The Narasimha kshetram at Thiruvall (Kalyana Narasimhar) (Here the Lord Narasimhar is seen having Thayar on th right hand side).

The Narasimha shrine at Thirunagari :

The fifth shrine is today in Thirunagari itself as Mettu Narasimhar in Vedarajapuram (where the Ash-takshara Mahamantram was imparted to the Alwar). He was brought and kept in Thirunagari shrine itself.

Karthama Prajapathi Story :

In the 5th adyayam of Garuda Puranam, this story is related by Siva to Narada. Karthama Prajapathi is the 5th son of Brahma. Once upon a time, Karthama Prajapathi asked Brahma as to how he could resolve the problems in his life and how he could attain moksha.

Brahma replied that due to a curse, Karthama Prajapathi had to be born in all the four yarnas and only after that cycle, will he be attaining moksha. He asked him to go to the Halathini pushkarini near Bilvaranya kshetram and to build a parnasalai in the south-west corner of the pushkarini and undertake serious penance and pray to Lord Narayana and that only then his problems will get resolved.

At about the same time, in Vaikuntam, Goddess Mahalakshmi was a bit disappointed as even when She was repeating the myriad names of the Lord, yet the Lord was unconcerned and continuing to keep His eyes closed. She therefore left Vaikuntam, came to the Halathini pushkarini. There were a number of lotus flow-

ers in that tank. She seated Herself in one of the lotus flowers and undertook deep meditation. Meantime, God opened His eyes and finding that Mahalakshmi was not with Him, He started searching for Her. He also came to the Halathini Pushkarini. He was not able to see in which flower Mahalakshmi was hiding. Perumal then closed His right eye and looked at the lotus flowers. The two eyes of the God represent the Sun and the Moon. As He closed His right eye, the eye representing the Sun God was closed. The flowers thought that the Sun had set and they closed their petals. But one lotus flower alone in which the Goddess was seated continued to have its petals spread wide. Perumal was thus able to locate the specific lotus flower in which Thayar was seated. As the God and the Goddess were re-united in this place, this place came to be called as Alinganapuram and also Lakshmipuri.

Perumal usually keeps Lakshmi on the left side. It is said that when the Perumal is shown in a sitting posture i.e. pattibhishekam kolam, the Thayar will be on the left side. But if Perumal is seen standing, the Thayar will be on the right side. It is said that the Thayar takes her position on the righthand side whenever God is seen in the Kalyana Thirukkolam as when kanya dhanam is done, the lady is usually on the right side. In Thiruvāli-Thirunagari, the Goddess is seen on the right side of the Perumal. It is also believed that as Lakshmi Thayar is seen in a Tapasvini pose with folded hands seated on the right side, she is perhaps supplicating to Lord Narasimha to calm down after the Hiranya Samharam.

When the God was reunited with Thayar here, immediately thereafter the Goddess told the Perumal that the fifth son of Brahma, Karthamar was also doing penance at that place. She prayed to God to give him dharshan and fulfil his desire.

The Thayar and the Perumal got into the Ash-takshara vimanam and went to the place where

Karthamar was doing penance. They appeared before him. Karthamar then prayed to God to give him mukthi and moksha. God then replied that Karthamar was destined to be born in all the four varnas as per a curse which he had earned earlier. He therefore said that He would not be able to give him mukthi immediately. He said that in Kiruta yugam, he was born as Karthamar and in Treta yugam he would be born as kshatriya by name Vasu and in Dwapara yugam, he would be born as a Vyasa Vairameyan by name and in Kali Yuga, he would be born in agricultural kallar family near Bilvaranyam as Parakalan. The Perumal also added that as Parakalan, he would engage himself in holy acts and he would worship God in several places and thus cleanse himself of all his past sins and then attain moksha. God assured him that He, along with Thayar would be with him always and finally take him to Vaikuntam. God also assured him that during Kali yuga, He would appear before him in the vimanam known as Samsanam and that all those who have a dharsham of Him at that time would also be rid of all their sins.

As decreed by the Lord, Karthamar in the Treta yugam was born as Vasu, the kshatriya king. In the sixth chapter of the Garuda puranam, Lord Rudra continues to tell Narada, the holy deeds done by Karthama Prajapathi in his role as Vasu. He was living in a place known as Indrapuri. At that time, a demon by name Indrasatru came from hell to earth as also Heaven and was troubling all the Devas. Lord Indra and other devas approached Narayana for help. Lord Narayana advised them to go and meet Vasu in Bhooloka and He assured them that with his help, they will be able to destroy the demon. Accordingly, they met Vasu and with his help, they were able to kill Indrasatru. Lord Indra hugged Vasu and rewarded him with a sword known as Darsanam and he also gave him a divine chariot. Vasu then called himself Parisaran and continued to rule the world. In course of time, Parisaran (Vasu)

was afflicted with a dreaded disease (Paandu noi). All his efforts to cure himself of the disease proved to be in vain. One day as he was riding the skies in the chariot gifted by Indra, he found to his consternation that as he was flying over the skies above Bilvaranya kshetram, the chriot stopped. The King Parisaran came down and learnt tht Vedaraja Perumal was residing at that place on the banks of the Halathini Pushkarini. He was overjoyed and with full faith, he got down from his vimanam, had a bath in the holy pushkarini and worshipped Lord Vedaraja. To his relief immediately he was cured of the dreaded disease. God also give him dharshan in His magnificent form with Shanku, Chakra and other weapons along with the Goddesses. The King prayed that He should continue to reside in that place everyday and continue to bless all those who worshipped Him.

Lord Siva continued the story of Karthama Prajapathi during his birth as a Vysya. Once upon a time there lived a vysya king by name Vajragoshan in Kayeri poompattinam. He was the descendent of Musukunda Charavarthi. He had a friend by name Sankhapalan. Vajragoshan's wife was known as Yasovathi and Sankhapalan's wife was known as Satyavathi. Neither of them had any children. After some time, due to God's grace, Satyavathi, the wife of Sankhapalan gave birth to two children. The elder of the two was named as Vairamegan and given in adoption to Vajragoshan. The younger one was named Nidhipalan. The children were brought up together. So when they came of age, Vajragoshan made his adopted son Vairamegan the King. Nidhipalan was then made the Minister to advise the King. Once the King and the Minister decided to perform a digvijaya yatra. (This involves covering a vast area on horse back and the entire area covered is said to be subject to the suzerainty of the said King). Both of them started on their victorious march in two different directions. Vairamegan came to Thirunagari. He heard about the greatness of

the place. He decided then and there to perform a yaga in that place. All arrangements were made. At that time, Perumal Himself came to attend the yaga and to receive the havirbagam. He came in the Samasnam vimanam along with Sridevi and Bhoomidevi. When Perumal appeared in the vimanam before Vairamegan, he prostrated before Him and worshipped Him. He prayed to God to continue to stay in that place and continue to bless other devotees also. God conceded his request and blessed him to rule his kingdom in a just manner and assured him that he would attain moksha in the Kali yuga.

In Kali yuga, Karthamar was born in Thirukuraiyalur in an agricultural kallar family. He was named as Neelan. In course of time, when he came of age, he married Kumudavalli. Both of them were great devotees of Lord Narayana. He came to be known as Parakalan. The rest of the story as to how Parakalan was generously devoted in renovating temples and feeding Sri Vaishnavites and how he took to even highway robbery to feed Sri Vaishnavites is too well known to be repeated. On one such occasion, he even waylaid at Thirmanam kollai the Perumal and the Thayar who came gorgeously bedecked as a bridegroom and a bride, adorned with rich raiments and plenty of jewellery. Parakalan removed the entire jewellery worn by the God and the Goddess, he bundled them up in a cloth and tried to lift it. To his dismay, he found that he could not lift it. He then realised that the people whom he had robbed were not the usual human beings. At that time, God gave him gnanam and initiated him into the nuances of the moola mantram viz. Ashtakshara mantram. From that day, Parakalan alias Thirumangai Mannan became Thirumangai Alwar. He worshipped the Perumal in a number of places. He read the Vedas and composed songs in praise of the Lord in various town that he visited. He undertook a lot of renovation work. As promised by Vedaraja Peru-

mal, Thirumangai Alwar worshipped Him at Thiruvali-Thirunagari and attained moksha.

The Perumal here is known as kalyana Ranganathar as He and Thayar appeared in Kalyana Thirukolam before Thirumangai Alwar. The place where God was waylaid is about 3 kms. from Thiruvali-Thirunagari. It is today known as Vedarajapuram. Even today in Thiruvali in the month of Panguni, a Brahmotsavam is celebrated for ten days. On the eighth day, at Thirumanam kollai, the Vedupari (hunter) utsavam is celebrated. This festival every year re-enacts the incident which occurred long ago when Thirumangai Alwar as a highway robber stole the jewels from the Perumal and Thayar. The Kaveri which flows near Thirumanam kollai is known as Ashtakshara Gangai as the Astakshara moola mantram was taught to Thirumangai Alwar at this place by Perumal Himself.

Epigraphical highlights :

There are very many stone inscriptions which speak about the greatness of this temple. The four stone inscriptions found in the walls of this temple are important. In this, the oldest refers to the period of Viruppana Udayar, a Vijayanagara King (1308 Saka era). It refers to the grant given to this temple.

The great deeds done by Krishnadeva Raya are described in one of the inscriptions found in this place. One inscription relating to 1517 A.D. says that to commemorate the victory of a Chola King, a number of exemptions were given for the sake of benefitting the Siva-Vishnu temples. One of such temples is the Thiruvali-Thirunagari sannidhi. Another stone inscription refers to the fact that gifts of land and cows as well as vessels were made in order to enable the vedas being repeated everyday in this temple. The entire Thirunagari village is believed to have been gifted to the Perumal. As proof

of this point, The Thalai nayiru irrigation system refers to Thirunagari Kalyana Ranganatha Swami channel in one of the stone inscriptions.

Thirunagari is also known as Vigneswara Nallooru. One of the inscriptions also refers to the name of the deity as Vayalali Manavalan. It can therefore be presumed that this temple was there even before the Chola times and that the various Kings belonging to Chola, Vijaya nagara and Naik period renovated it.

Thurumangai Alwar in some of his pasurams takes on the role of Parakala Nayaki, a damsel who is madly in love with the Perumal. As a lover, Parakala Nayaki expresses in beautiful thoughts her eternal longing and desire to become one with the Lord and the pain that she bears at separation from her Lord. Even today, in the month of Markazhi, during the Pagalpattu festival (i.e. the first fortnight of Margazhi month i.e. December-January) on one day, Thirumangai Alwar is dressed up as Parakala Nayaki. He is adorned with a silk saree, precious jewellery and long tresses adorned with beautiful flowers. As Parakala Nayaki, he is taken in a procession along with Perumal. This festival is known as Kalvan kol Piratti Thiruvizha.

On the northern wall of the central shrine in the Ranganatha Perumal temple at Thirunagari, there is an inscription relating to the period of Krishnadevaraya Maharaya (S 1439). This refers to the king's conquests and the remission of taxes made by him in favour of a number of Vishnu and Siva temples in the Chola countries. ¹

On the same northern wall of the central shrine for the Ranganatha Perumal temple, there is a list given of the brahmins who recited the vedas in the temple

¹ Ins. No. 406 Appendix B ARIE 1918

of Vayalali Manavalan and the share of land given to them for rendering the service to the Perumal. ²

In the same northern wall, there is another inscription which refers to the gift of land, cows and vessels to meet the expenditure towards the special service conducted in the temple of Vayalali Manavala Perumal. ³

On the same wall, there is another inscription relating to the Vijayanagara dynasty. Apparently, the king was Viruppana Udaiya (S. Era 1308). This inscription registers a list of Sarvamanya grants made to this temple. It is said to comprise the tract of land between Kaveri and Kollidam. ⁴

Hymnology :

Kulasekhara Alvar and Tirumangai Alvar have sung 43 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. 42 of those have been composed by Tirumangai Alvar. Perhaps, he has a special corner for the Lord here as he hailed from a place close to this divya desam. A Pasuram of Kulasekara Alvar - Perumal Thirumozhi - 8th Tirumozhi and 7th pasuram with its meaning is given below:

ஆலிநிலைப் பாலகனாய் அன்று உலகமுண்டவனே!
வாலியைக் கொன்று அரசு இளைய வானரத்துக்கு அளித்த-
வனே!
காலின் மணி கரையலைக்கும் கணபுரத்தென் சுருமணியே!
ஆலிநகர்க்கு அகிபதியே! ஆயோத்தியனே தாலேலோ!
பெருமாள் திருமோழி ௯)

Once during the great deluge you swallowed the seven worlds, kept them safe inside your stomach, and yet slept peacefully on the banyan leaf like an innocent child!

² Ins. No. 407 Appendix B ARIE 1918

³ Ins. No. 408 Appendix B ARIE

⁴ Ins. No. 409 Appendix B ARIE

Once when you were born as Rama you killed Vali and installed Sugriva as the king of Kishkinda kingdom! Oh precious jewel of mine who resides at Thrukannapuram situated on the banks of the river Kaveri whose waves lash on the shore and deposit precious stones on the banks;
 Oh king of Thiruvai-Thirunagari;
 Oh Lord of Ayodhya;
 Let me sing a sweet lullaby for you.

Thirumangai Alwar - Pasuram No. 3-5-8 from Peria Tirumozhi is given below with its meaning.

சங்கு தங்கு தடங்கடல் மல்லையுள் கிடந்தாய் அருள்புரிந்து
 இங்கு என்னுள் புருந்தாய் இனிப் போயினாள் அறையோ
 கொங்கு சென்பக மல்லிகை மலர்புல்கு இன்னிளவண்டு போய்
 இளந்
 தெங்கின் தாதனாயும் திருவாலி அம்மானே
 (பெரிய திருமொழி 3-5-8)

Meaning :

The bees while sucking honey from the Jasmine and shenbagam flowers were so close to the heart of the flowers that they absorbed their warmth; The same bees later went to suck the honey from the tender coconut flowers and have lost themselves while wallowing in that sweetness;
 Oh Lord you who are seated in the midst of such scenic beauty at Thiruvai Thirunagari were once lying down at Thiruparkadal and at Thirukadal-mallai full of conches;
 Now out of your benign kindness you have taken your residence in my heart.
 Oh tell me. Do you think it is possible for you to leave this latest residence viz. my heart?
 (Alvar is conveying the idea that God will even give up Thiruparkadal. He may even 'shift his residence from the divyadesams. But once He

enters the heart of the devotee. He will never leave him).

The Poem from 108 Tirupathi Andadi of Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar with its meaning is given below:

சுழன்று போம் வாயுவினைக் கட்டாமல், தீர்த்தும்
உழன்று போய் ஆடாமல் உய்ந்தேன் . ஆழன்று
பொருவாலி காலன் பரகாலன் பொற்றும்
திருவாலி மாயனையே சேர்ந்து

(நூற்-திருப்-அந்-18)

Meaning :

I have been blessed without having to visit the holy places and having a dip in the holy in those places;

Without even having to do pranayama and undergo the physical hardship of holding my breath; Because

I accepted as my sole saviour that Perumal praised by Thirumangai Alvar and residing at Tiruvali and That Perumal who became yama (Lord of death) for Vali, The monkey king who in a fit of anger started a fight with his brother. (The poet conveys the axiomatic truth that to attain salvation it is enough if we have implicit faith in the divine feet of the Lord. There is no need to undergo physical sacrifices or hardships).

* * *

SRI PARIMALA RANGANATHA SWAMY KOIL - THIRU INDALUR

Thiru Indalur is a suburb near Mayiladuthurai (Mayavaram) in Tanjavur District. Indalur in ancient Tamil denoted Dhoopakal (in English, it means a stand used for burning incense). This place is known in Sanskrit as Suganthavana or a perfumed forest. Thus, both the Tamil and the Sanskrit names refer to the fact that this place is a Sugantharanya kshetram. The presiding deity is Parimala Ranganathar. He is also known as Suganathavana Nathar and Vedamodan. The Goddess is known as Parimala Ranganayaki also as Suganthavana Nayaki. The name of the theertham is Indu pushkarini and Kaveri pushkarini. The vimanam is known as Vedamoda. The river Kaveri flows within one furlong to the south of this temple.

The moolavar is seen in lying down posture. It is believed to be a Veera Sayana posture. The God is seen with four hands. The God here is said to be seen lying down in the same posture in which He is seen in Thirupparkadal. The moolavar is made of a single beautiful pure green Emerald (maragatham) measuring 12.5' by 5.5'. The Sun God (Surya) is seen worshipping the moolavar with His hands folded and standing near the face of the moolavar (Mukaravintham - the face lotus). The Moon God (Chandran) is seen standing with folded hands near the feet of the Lord (Padhara Vintham) - the feet lotus. Brahma, as usual is seen seated on the lotus emerging from the navel. Inside the garbagriha, on one side is seen Kaveri Thayar and on the other side is seen the Ganga Thayar. Thus, both these holy rivers are seen worshipping the Lord here.

The story goes that Kaveri river is more important and holy in this place than even Ganga.

Amongst the divya desams, the following five arangams on the banks of the Kaveri are famous: They are:

Thiruvaramba Pattinam (Sriranga Pattinam) (Thala Kaveri).

Thiru Arangam (Srirangam)

Appa Arangam (Koiladi) near Kallanai i.e. stone dam.

Kumbakonam (Madhya Arangam)

Indalur (Parimala rangam)

Some refer to the Ranganathar at Kollidam as one of the five famous arangams instead of the one at Kumbakonam.

The Perumal here came to be known as Sugantha Vana Natha Swamy as well as Parimala Ranganatha Swamy as he is presiding over the Sugantharanya kshetram.

He is known as Vedamodar as he restored fragrance to the Vedas. It is said that once upon a time, when God created the world, he entrusted to Brahma the four Vedas. But unfortunately, the Vedas were stolen by the two demons Madhu and Kaitapa who hid them deep down under the ocean. Brahma rushed to Perumal and sought His help in rescuing the Vedas. Perumal took the form of a matsya (Fish). He dived deep into the ocean, killed madhu and Kaitapa and restored the Vedas to Brahma. But as the Vedas were stolen by the demons, by association, though it be for a short while, the Vedas started stinking (durgandham). In order to get rid of this bad odour, the Vedas did penance on the banks of the river Kaveri. God appeared at that place and the Vedas then prayed to

God to rid them of the bad smell. God conceded their request and as the fragrance was restored to the Vedas at that spot, that place came to be known as Veda theertham. The Vedas also prayed at God to continue to stay in that place and bless other devotees as well. They also prayed that the place should continue to be fragrant for ever. Hence it was that the place came to be named as Sugantharanyam. the banks of the Kaveri where the Vedas attained their prayers came to be known as Veda theertham and the Perumal who restored the fragrance to the Vedas came to be known as Parimala Ranganathar and as the God who restored the Vedas He came to be known as Vedamodar. The vimanam under which the Vedamoda Perumal appeared came to by known a Vedamoda vimanam.

The river kaveri here has a special significance. It is said that once upon a time, Kaveri prayed to Perumal that she should be given greater importance and precedence over even the river Ganga in the North. Towards this objective, Goddess kaveri undertook a severe penance at this place. As a reward for her severe penance, God appeared before her and granted her wish. He assured her that He would be residing in many of the temples situated on her banks. Amongst the many temples, the important places where He would reside would be Srirangam, Kumbakonam, Sugantharanya Kshetram. God also assured Kaveri that Ganga herself was very worried that she was getting polluted by the burden of the sins of the people who had their bath in the river Ganga. Ganga had prayed to God to purify her from all her accumulated sins. God ordered Ganga to visit Suganthavana Kshetram in the month of tula (October) and have her purificatory bath in the river Kaveri itself. Ganga is said to flow into the Kaveri during the Tula festival and thus purify herself. Hence whoever visits this kshetram in the month of Tula and has bath in the river Kaveri and then worships Parimala Ranganatha Swamy, will definitely be rid of all sins and attain mokasha. Perumal

told Kaveri that He would continue to rest on Adishesha in His Veerasayana pose under the Vedamodha vimanam in this Sugantharanya kshetram, so that Kaveri could continue to worship Him.

Even today in the month of Tula, a grand festival is celebrated on all the 30 days of the Tula month. On the First of the month and on the Amavasai day, Parimala Ranganathar, seated on His Garuda Vahanam, is taken to the banks of the river Kaveri, when He gives dharshan to the Kaveri Thayar. On the last ten days of the Tula month also, every day, the god is taken in a procession to the banks of the river Kaveri. On the other days in that month, Senai Mudaliar is taken in procession on behalf of the God to the banks of the river Kaveri. Thus, the river Kaveri at this place has a special significance.

In the garba-griham there are idols of Kaveri Thayar and Ganga Thayar placed on the two sides in front of the moolavar. An interesting fact is that when we are shown the ears of the original Idol (Vigraha) we can see that the silpi has adorned the ear-lobes of Kaveri Thayar with ear drops in stone (Lolaks). While carving the ear-lobes of Ganga Thayar he has shown the ear-lobes with huge holes like the ones we see amongst the Chettiar women even today. It is said that for the girl babies in Madurai and Ramnad Districts even today when a hole is bored in the ear lobe they insert a tender coconut leaf so that over a period of time as the rolled coconut leaf uncurls, the hole in the lobe also grows! Then they are able to wear the heavy big gold ornaments hanging from that large hole in the lobe. The ear itself extends with the weight of the ornament! Apparently that practice was there even in those days. That is why the sculptor who sculpted Ganga Thayar had given to her the ear of a Madura/Ramnad woman.

The theertham here is known as Indu pushkarini. This relates to another interesting episode connected with the life of Chandra. It is believed that once king

Daksha cursed the Moon God. As a result he was afflicted with Kshaya rogam (consumption). In order to absolve Himself from this sin, the Moon God came to this kshetram, had his bath in the river Kaveri and undertook severe penance on the banks of that river. In due course, pleased with his penance, Parimala Ranganatha Swamy appeared before him and cured him of his affliction. The Moon God also prayed to the Lord to permit him to stay at His feet and worship Him for ever and ever. Hence it is that in this kshetram we see the idol of the Moon God near the feet of the Lord. As a thanks giving gesture the Moon God is said to have celebrated a festival for nine days starting on the day of the Rohini star in the month of (Panguni utsavam) and ending on the Panguni Uttiram day.

There are the following eight other theerthams in this place viz.

1. Brahma Kousika theertham (the tank near the chariot) (Theradi Kulam).
2. Haythirasa theertham near the Ramasamy temple).
3. Rama theertham (not seen by the naked eye today).
4. Rudrakasaram (near Vallalar kovil).
5. Dharma theertham also known as Alwar kulam.
6. Sri Bhoo theertham (near Thanthoneeswarar kovil).
7. Parvathi theertham.
8. Veda theertham (Brahma theertham).

While these eight theerthams are mentioned in the puranam, today, on the ground, only a few can be seen.

Brahma, Yama, Visvamitra, Ambarisha also visited this place in the month of Tula, had their bath in the Kaveri and worshipped Parimala Ranganatha

swamy. It is believed that Ambarisha built some of the prakaras, the temple towers and the mandapas in this temple. He was also responsible for the first radhot-savam which was celebrated in the month of Vaikasi on the Visaka nakshatira day.

Epigraphical highlights:

On the western and southern walls of the Parimala Ranganatha swami temple at Thiru Indalur and on the southern wall of the same temple, there are two inscriptions. These refer to a sale of land to the temple of Maruviniya Maindar at Tiruvindalur by four private individuals. It also registers a royal gift of four velis of land to the temple of Pon Menda Perumal and 27 velis of land to 54 bhattars who were settled in Pon Menda Pandya chaturvedimangalam founded in the name of the king around the temple of Alaggappurumal at Kanja nagaram in Rajadhirajavalanadu.¹

Hymnology:

Thirumangai Alwar has sung 10 pasurams in praise of the God here. It is believed from the words in the pasurams itself that the Alwar was not able to have a darshan of the Lord when he sang the first 4 songs. The doors of the garba griha remained closed. So the Alwar got angry and virtually gave an ultimatum to the Lord. He said in his pasuram (4th verse of Peria Thirumozhi) -இந்தளறில் வாழ்ந்தே போம் நீரே The classic commentator Peria Vachan Pillai while referring to this phrase says that these words do not indicate well being for the Lord, but are something not far from a curse. The Alvar seems to tell the Lord that by not showing Yourself to us. You may feel you have done the right because I do not deserve better in Your estimation. If that is how you have estimated me (Vasee Valleer Indalureer), in that case I say to you 'vazhende

¹ appendix B 1925 ARIE

poem' i.e. Well, do as You please! It will not redound to your credit or welfare if you are going to deny your face and form to us who pine for one look just for once. The Alvar seems to say that God had made His Divyamangala vigraha for the enjoyment and delectation of his devotees. But if He does not allow devotees to see Him, the Alvar almost curses the Lord and orders Him to hug himself and feel happy. It is almost as if the Alvar said 'Alright O God. Let it be said that You are the only resident of this place. I will go and live elsewhere in this town! He went to a place in the same town and stayed there digging the tank. Even today that tank is known as Alwar Kulam. Only when the Alvar composed his 8th pasuram did God condescend to give darshan to the ardent devotee who virtually has a conversation with the Lord through his pasurams!

Tirumangai Alvar: Peria Thirumozhi - 8th verse.

முன்னை வண்ணம் பாலின் வண்ணம், முழுதும் நிலைநின்ற
பின்னை வண்ணம் கொண்டல் வண்ணம், வண்ணம் எண்
னுங்கால்
பொன்னின் வண்ணம் மணியின் வண்ணம் புரையும் திருமேனி
இன்ன வண்ணம் என்று காட்டி, இந்தமுனரீரே

Meaning:

Oh Lord of Indalur! If one comes to think of the colour of your Tirumeni (Divya Mangala Vighraha), its first colour was like that of milk, white; then it was glowing red like (molten) gold; then it was like a dark blue sapphire. Its ultimate colour which persists all through is that of the clouds (so we read and hear). Well you please show us your Tirumeni so that we may see for ourselves with which of the above objects it can be rightly compared.

It this pasuram, Thirumangai Alvar makes it clear that the Lord is seen in the different yugas in different colours. It is said that in Krita yugam when the satva guna was prominent, the Lord was seen in white colour.

In Treta yugam, He is seen in red colour. In Dwapara yugam, He is seen in the yellow colour. In Kali yuga, He is seen dark like the water laden clouds.

Tirumangai Alvar - Periya Thirumozhi 9th verse.
The Alvar then continues and says:

என்தை தந்தைதம்மாளைன்று எமர்ஏழளவும்
வந்து நின்ற தொண்டரோர்க்கே வாசி வல்விரால்
சிந்தை தன்னுள் முந்திநிற்றிர். சிறிதும் திருமேனி
இந்த வண்ணம் என்று காட்டிர். இத்தனூரிரே

In the above lines he says "Oh Lord of Indalur! We are your accredited servants from the time of our father, father's father and so on for seven generations (or several such sets of seven generations). Even in regard to us you are not showing special favours. As it is, you very readily reside in our mind (heart). But that does not satisfy us. Please show to us what your Tirumeni is like.

Thus, in this pasuram, we find that Thirumangai Alwas is almost commanding the Lord to appear before him in His true form and thus satisfy his only desire viz. to see and enjoy the true form of God.

To take one more Pasuram let us take the pasuram in Peria Thirumozhi 4-9-2. It is given below with its meaning:

சிந்தை தன்னுள் நீங்காதிருந்த திருவே! மருவினிய
மைந்தா, அந்தண் ஆலிமாலே சோலைமழ களிதே
நந்தா விளக்கின் சடரே நறையூர் நின்ற நம்பீ! என்
எந்தாய் இத்தனூராய் அடியேற்கு இறையும் இரங்காயே
பெரிய திருமொழி 4-9-2

Meaning:

Oh adorable one! You are never away from my thoughts even for a moment;

The more I think of you, the greater is my happiness;

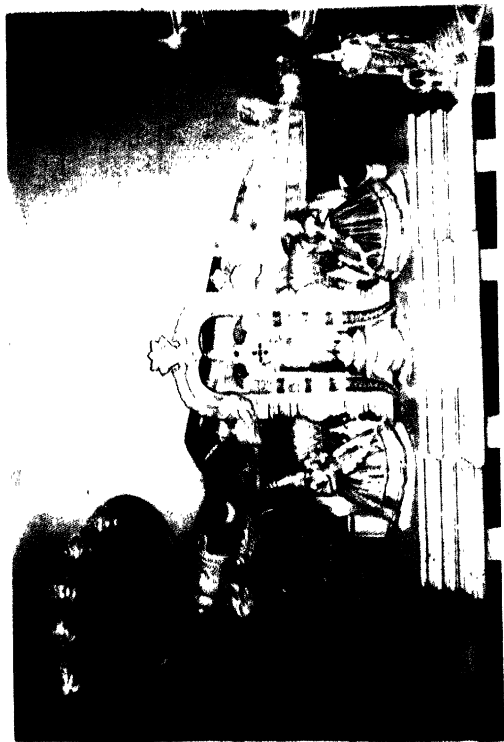
Oh Lord of beautiful pleasant Thiruvalinagar;



GODDESS MAHALAKSHMI



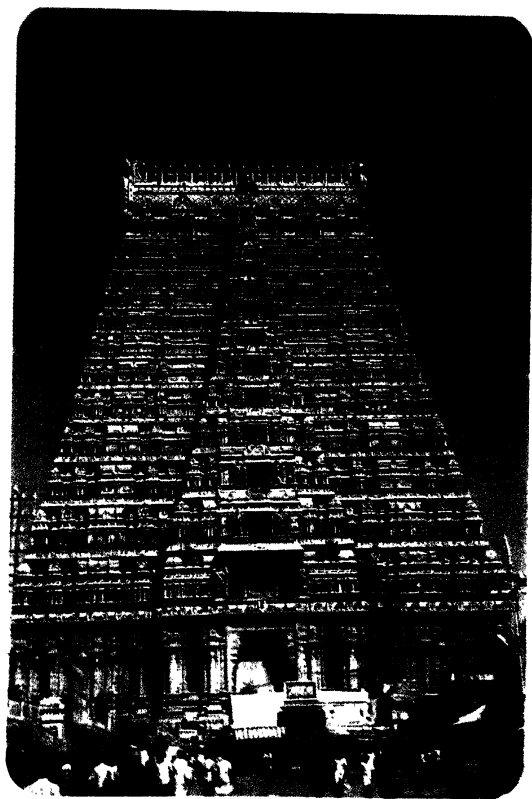
GODDESS MAHALAKSHMI



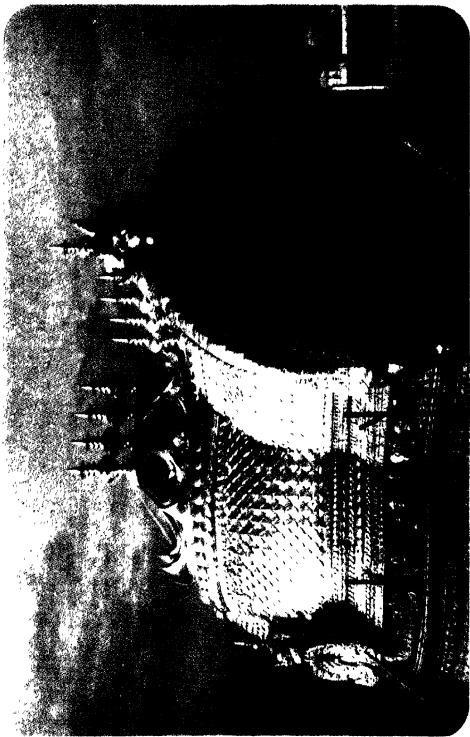
SRI RANGANATHAR



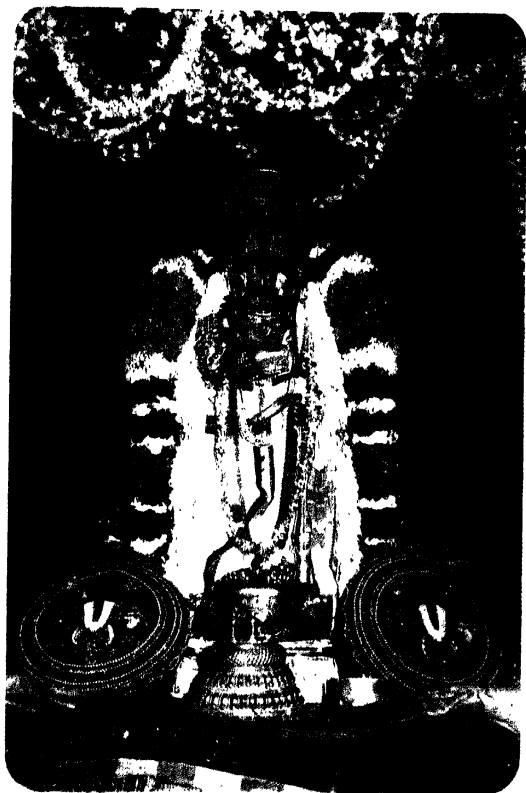
SRRANGAM MOOLAVAR



SRIRANGAM RAJAGOPURAM



SRRANGAM VIMANAM



SRIRANGAM UTSAVAR



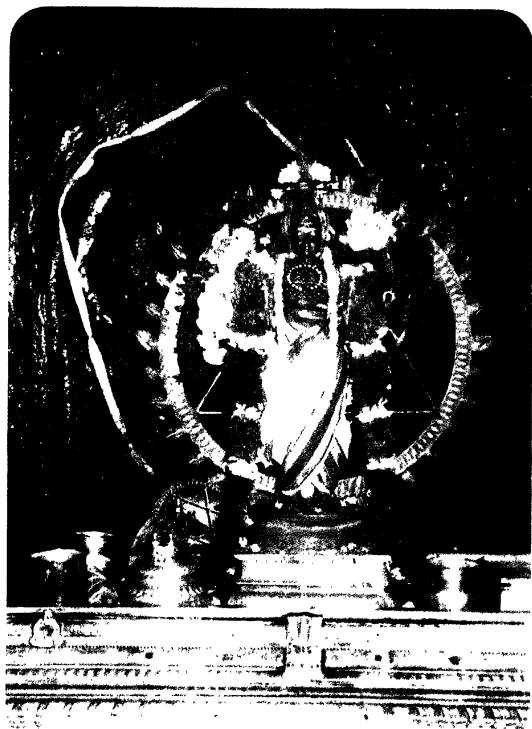
SRIRANGAM NAMPERUMAL



SRIRANGAM UTSAVAMURTHIS THAYAR AND PERUMAL



SRIRANGAM RANGANAYAKI THAYAR



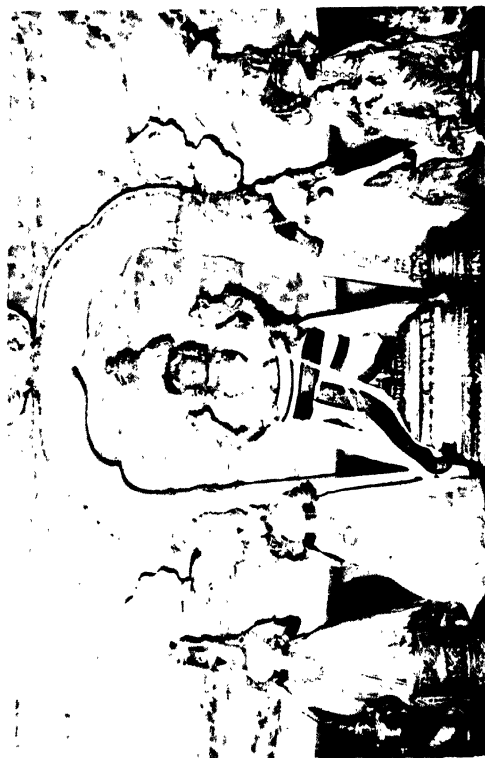
SRIRANGAM CHAKKARATTALWAR



SRIRANGAM GARUDA SEVAI



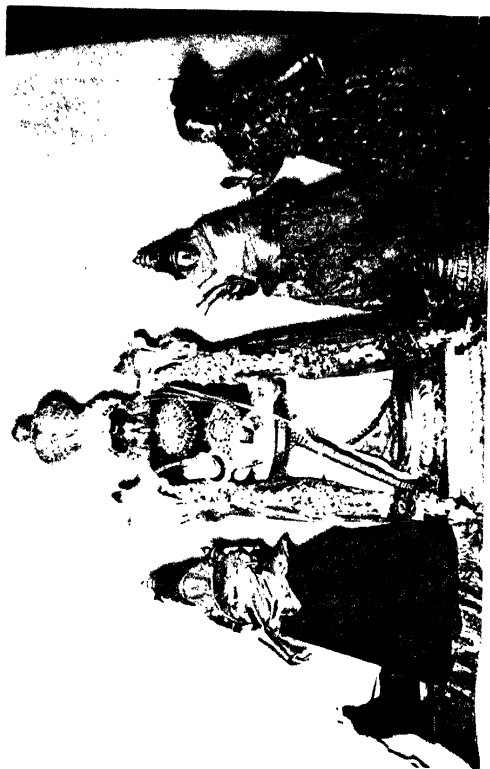
SRIRANGAM HANUMATH SEVAJ.



THIRUKKANNAPURAM UTSAVAMURTHI



THIRU KANNANGUDI - AN OVERALL VIEW OF THE TEMPLE



THIRU KANNANGUDI UTSAVAMURTHY



THIRU KANNANGUDI RAJAGOPURAM



THIRU KUDANTHAI UTSAVAMURTHI



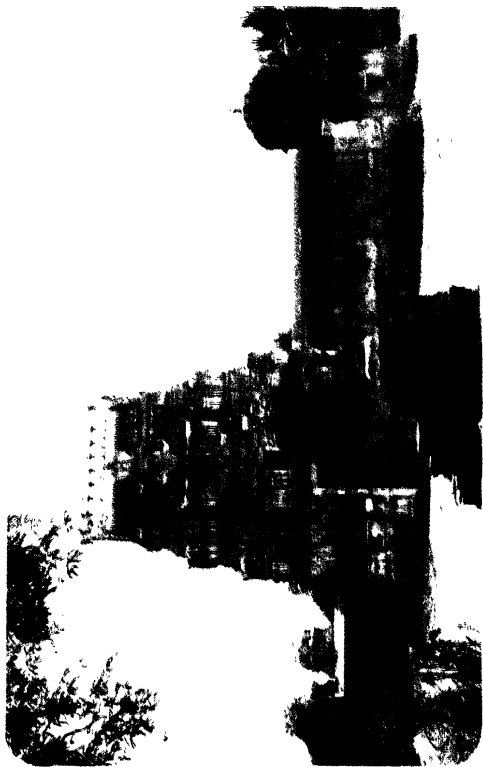
THIRU SIRUPULIYUR UTSAVAMURTHIS



THIRU MANIMADA KOVIL - OVERALL VIEW OF THE TEMPLE



THIRU MANIMADA KOVIL UTSAVAMURTHY



THIRU ARIMEYA VINNAGARAM - OVERALL VIEW OF THE TEMPLE



THIRU ARIMEYA VINNAGARAM - UTSAVAMURTHY



THIRU VELLAKULAM - ANNAN KOIL GOPURAM



THIRUVALLUVAR - NANJOTTAI SIVAMURTHI



THIRU KAVALAMPADI - AN OVERALL VIEW OF THE TEMPLE



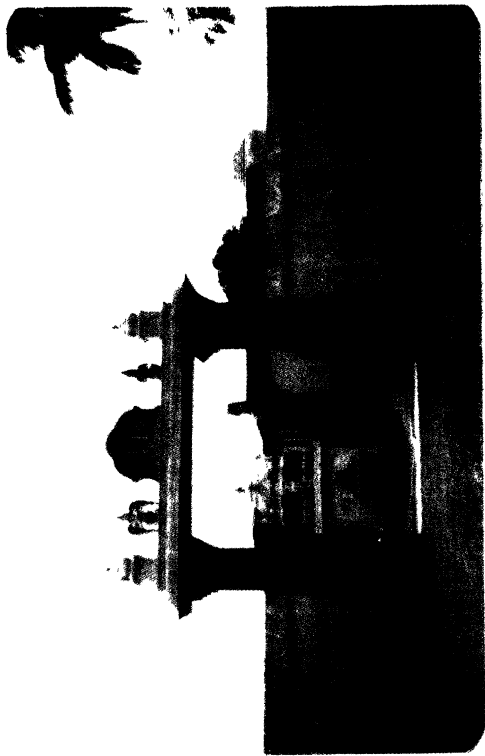
THIRU KAVALAMPADI - UTSAVAMURTHI



THIRU TETRIAMBALAM - GOPURAM OVERALL VIEW



THIRU TETRIAMBALAM UTSAVAMURTHI



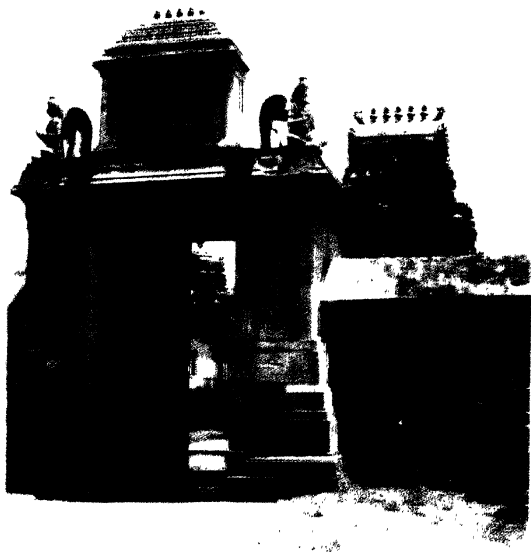
THIRU VANPURUSHOTHAMAM - OVERALL VIEW OF THE TEMPLE



THIRU VANPURUSHOTHAMAM - UTHAMAR KOIL - UTSAVAMURTHI



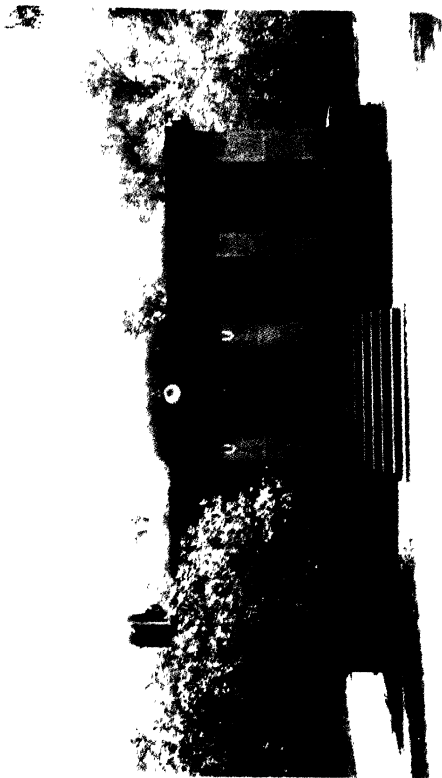
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THIRU VAIKUNTA VINNAGARAM - GOPURAM



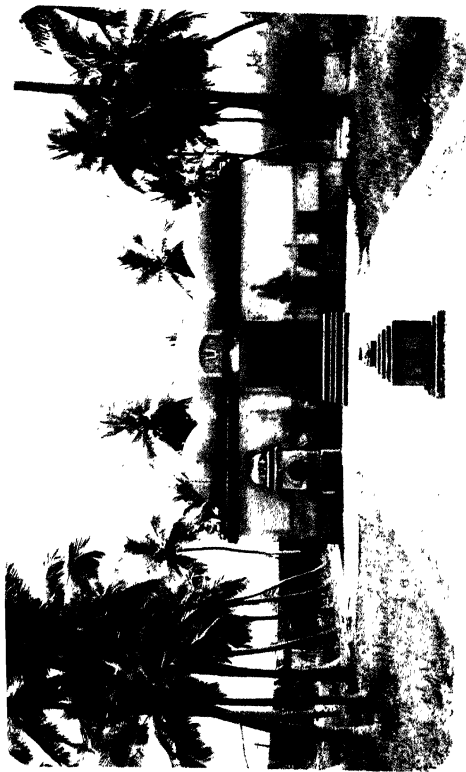
THIRU VAIKUNTA VINNAGARAM - UTSAVAMURTHI



THIRU SEMPON SEI NANGOOR . A VIEW OF THE TEMPLE



THIRU SEMPONSEI NANGOOR - UTSAVAMURTHI



THIRU MANIKOODAM . VIEW OF THE TEMPLE



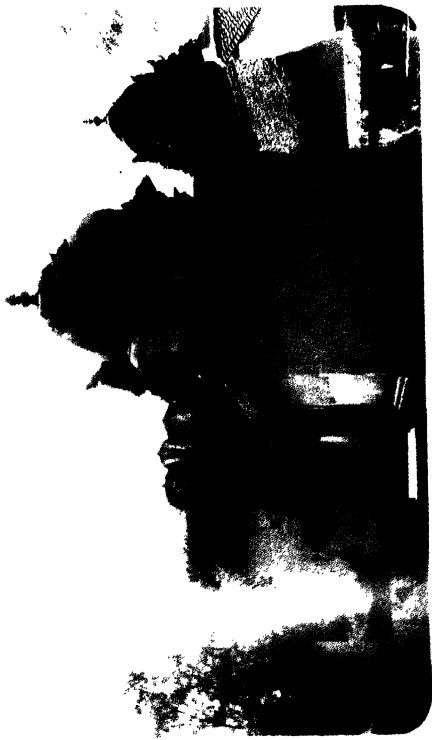
THIRU MANIKOODAM - UTSAVAMURTHI



THIRU PARTHANPALLI - RAJAGOPURAM



THIRU PARTHAN PALLI - UTSAVAMURTHI



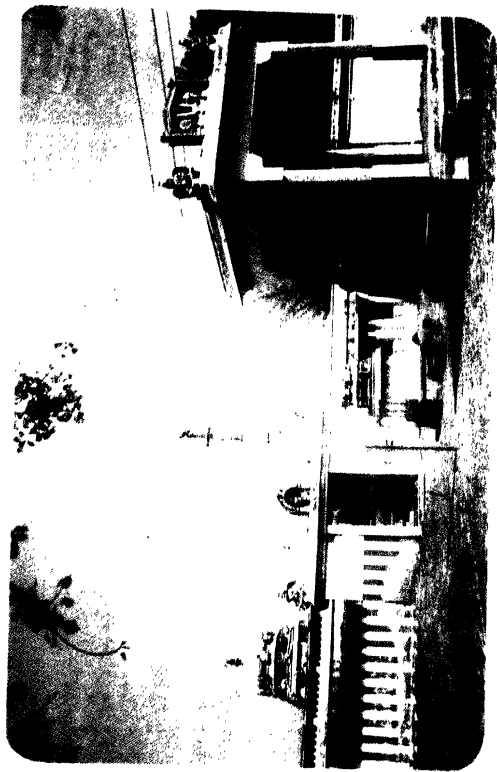
THIRU DEVANAR THOGAI - GOPURAM



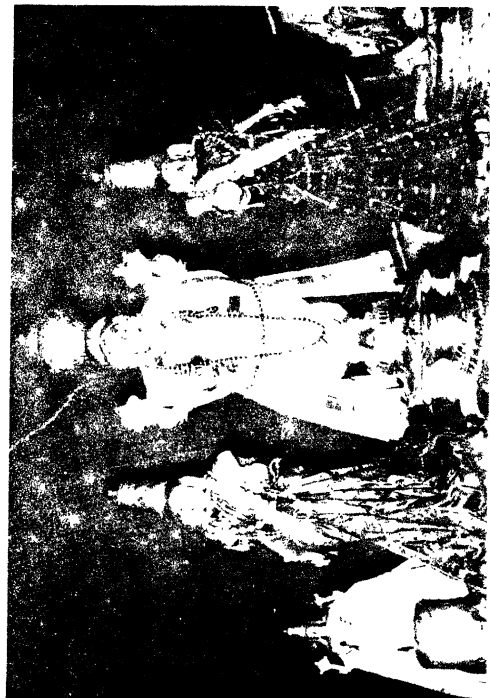
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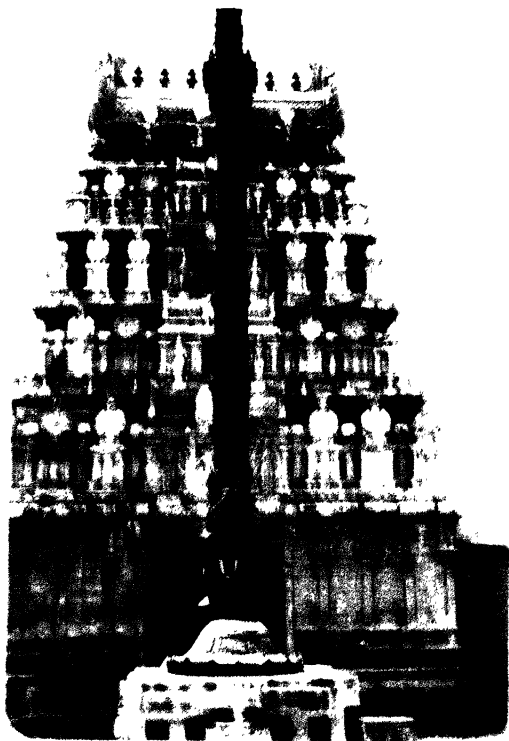
THIRU KAZHI SEERAMA VINNAGARAM - MOOLAVAR



THIRUVALLU - AN OVERALL VIEW OF THE TEMPLE



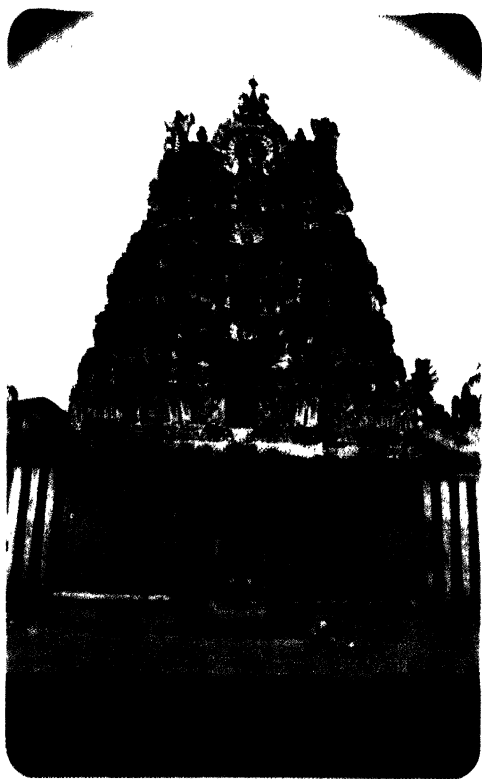
THIRUVALLI - THIRUNAGARI - UTSAVAMURTHIS



THIRU NAGARI - GOPURAM



THIRU INDALUR - UTSAVAMURTHI



THIRU KANDIYUR - RAJAGOPURAM



THIRU KANDIYUR - UTSAVAMURTHI

Oh you are the lovable elephant calf of Thirumalirunsolai;
You are bright like the glow of an eternal flame;
Oh you matchless one residing at Thirunaraiyur;
Oh you Lord who resides at Thiru Indalur;
You have not been kind to me your sincere devotee
Will you never be kind to me?
Pray bestow your grace on me.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyyengar poem (108 Tirupati Andadi)

நாடுதும் வா நெஞ்சமே நாராயணன் பதிகள்
கூடுதும் வா மெய்யடியார் கூட்டங்கள் . குடுதும் வா
வீதி இந்தளத்திலின் வீசு புகை வைச மெழும்
ஆதி இத்தனூரான் அடி

பூர்த்தி . திருப் . ஆந 22

Meaning:

Oh mind of mine,
Come, let us go and pray at the various devyade-
sams of Lord Narayana
Come, let us go and join the crowds of devotees;
Oh come with me
Let us go to Thiru Indalur whose streets have the
mild aroma of millions of lighted small lamps
Let us go and get the Perumal there to adorn our
heads by placing His didvine feet on our heads.

* * *

THIRUKANDIYUR

This kshetram is on the banks of the river Kaveri. It is four miles to the north of Thanjavur. There are three theerthams here viz. Kanda theertham, Kapala theertham and Gadha theertham. The holy tree (sthala viruksham) of this place is Asvattam, vilvam (i.e. banyan). God here is known as Harasapaharan and Balinathan. The vimanam is in the form of a lotus (Kamalakruti). The God is seen in a standing posture. By the side of this temple there is a temple for Kamalasanan i.e. Brahma. He is seen in a posture as if he is worshipping Lord Vishnu. Almost opposite is a temple for Siva. The face of the idol of Lord Siva reflects a sense of relief and happiness perhaps as this is the place where he was able to get rid of the curse of Lord Brahma. The Goddess is known as Kamalavalli Thayar. God here appeared before Brahma, Siva, Brighu and Agasthiar. This place is known as Mumurthi mukthi sthalam i.e. a divyadesam where all the three Lords viz. Trinity can be worshipped and blessings earned.

The Perumal here is known as Harasapaharan. The sthala puranam of this place is related in Brahmanda Puranam Uthara bagam II to V chapters. This is the place where Sriyahpathi Sarveswaran Lord Narayana showed to the world that He is the one who solves problems for all, including Lord Siva. This is one of the places which is held in high regard both by Saivites and Vaishnavites. Yet another unique feature of this place is that it is the only place where there is temple for each one of the Trimurthis. In the whole country, there are only three places where there are temples for Lord Brahma viz. at Pushkaram, at Badri

and Kandiyur. But only at Kandiyur are there temples for all the three Lords in the Trinity.

This place is severally known as Kandana kshetra, Bali kshetra. It is also known as Siddhi kshetra as sincere prayers of the devotees are answered here. it is known as Kandana kshetra because it is believed that even if one thinks of this kshetra and stands facing the direction of this place and bows down in reverence to the Lord there, all the sins will be wiped out. Hence it is known as Kandana kshetra i.e. Kandanam meaning destruction. Once upon a time, Bali chakravarthi is believed to have rennovated this temple. Hence it is also known as Bali kshetra. The Lord is also known as Bali Natha and the theertham is also known as bali theertha.

Sthala Puranam

Long ago, in Naimisaranya, the rishis were performing a yaga. Brighu maharishi was also there. Sounaka muni requested Brighu maharishi to tell them the stories connected with the divya desams. Amongst the stories related by Brighumaharishi is this one relating to the Kandana kshetra. Brighu maharishi said that when the pralaya ocured and the world was created afresh by Lord Narayana, Brahma arose from the navel of Lord Narayana. He was seated on a lotus having 14 petals. The 14 petals were said to represent the 14 worlds. At that time, Lord Brahma had five faces. May be he was given five faces by Lord Narayana so as to enable him to create this world filled with pancha bhoothams. The middle face of the Lord Brahma was very effulgent and beautiful having a lot of tejas, and sporting a beautific smile. It is said that Goddess Lakshmi saw this face and felt jealous and wondered whether this beautiful child of Narayana would replace Her so far as his love and affection was concerned. Once this doubt entered Her mind, she decided to get rid of this competitor. Some wonder whether this feel-

ing of envy is not something which is very unnatural in Sridevi, the divine mother who is the embodiment of compassion. May be this incident was woven in order to indicate to the people that the evil of ego (ahankaram) can affect everyone. The story goes that the Goddess with a sense of insecurity approached Rudra i.e. Lord Siva and instigated him by saying that He was having a serious competitor in Brahma who also had five faces. Lord Siva then decided to establish His superiority over Brahma by plucking out one of the five faces of Brahma. As soon as Lord Siva plucked out the middle face, Brahma was very annoyed at this unprovoked, undeserved attack. He cursed that Lord Siva should as a punishment loose his peace of mind and roam about in the world like a mad man. In addition, he cursed that the face which was plucked out stick to the fingers of Siva so that people out of disgust will turn away from even looking at Lord Siva. Lord Siva was very upset. He fell at the feet of Brahma and asked him to withdraw his curse. Brahma told him that having uttered the curse, He cannot recall the same. However, He advised him to approach Narayana for relief. Having said this, Brahma disappeared. As a result of the curse, the body of Siva became ugly. The sight of the plucked head sticking to the fingers of Lord Siva caused disgust and fear among the public. He prayed to Lord Narayana. Lord Narayana advised Siva to visit eight Vishnu kshetras viz. Badri, Naimisaranya, Pushkaram, Ahobilam, Srirangam, Siddhi kshetra, Thirukudanthaj and Thirukanduyur, have a bath in the holy tanks, worship the Lords there, repeat the Ashtakshara mantra. He also hinted that in every kshetra, he should have a bath, fill the kapala (skull) of Lord Brahma attached to his finger with holy water. He also added that in one of the theerthas, when the holy water is filled in the kapala, the kapala will be shaken out of the viscious grip it was having over the fingers of Lord Siva and fall into the tank. He advised Siva to worship the Lord of that particular kshetra and get relieved from the curse.

Siva accordingly visited one by one by those eight kshetras. In seven Divyadesams though he filled the kapala with the holy waters. Yet the skull would neither get filled up with the water nor was it being shaken. He was very sad. He at last reached Kandana kshetra. The moment he reached the place, Lord Siva felt that he had absolute peace of mind. He closed his eye and stood in meditation. Lord Narayana appeared before him. Lord Narayana then told him to go to Gadha theertha which he had created by throwing his mace in that place. He said that gadha theertha will get rid of all the sins and that Lord Siva will definitely be blessed in this place. He further said that on Chithira Pournami day, he should offer his prayers to the Lord at the kshetra and on that day he would regain his original beautiful form. He advised him to fill the kapala attached to his fingers with waters from that Gadha theertha. Lord Siva acted accordingly Lo an behold the kapala got disengaged and fell deep down into the water. At that time, there was divine music heard in the skies, the devas were all very happy, there was a shower of flowers. As a measure of thanks giving Lord Siva built a beautiful temple at that place for Brahma as also Lord Narayana. In accordance with the wishes of Lord Narayana (Harasapa haran) he also built a temple for himself. Thus, it is that all the Trimurthis have temples in this place and this has become a Trimurthi kshetra.

Same story is related in a slightly different manner in Siva Purana. There it is said that seeing Siva as also Brahma with five heads Goddess Parvati got a bit confused and that she therefore instigated Siva to pluck off one of the heads of Brahma. Thus, it was that Siva plucked off one head of Brahma, which angered Brahma and caused him to curse Siva. The rest of the story that it was Lord Narayana who redeemed Siva from the curse and that the kapala got disengaged

from the finger of Lord Siva after the bath at Gadha theertha and that Siva built the three temples for the Creator, the Protector, the Destroyer at this place is the same.

This kshetra is also known as Bali theertha, as Bali chakravarthi got rid of his sin by worshipping Lord Narayana here. Once upon a time, Bali chakravarthi stole the golden crown of Lord Narayana. That crown was studded with precious navarathanas and shining bright like Sun God. Bali stole this crown and kept it hidden amongst his treasures in Pathala. He thus committed the sin of swarna stheya mahapapam i.e. the sin of having stolen gold. As a result of this sin, Bali chakravarthi lost control over himself. He started behaving like a mad man and roamed about the world. He lost his peace of mind. He started feeling pangs of hunger and thirst. He lost all his glory, positions, he lost count of the days and of the places he was visiting. In the course of his roamings, he reached Kandana kshetra. As soon as he reached that place, due to his hunger and thirst and weariness, he fainted for a moment and fell on the ground. When he recovered consciousness, he found that he was having absolute peace of mind. He started worshipping Lord Narayana. He returned the crown by asking Garuda to fetch it from Pathala. Lord then advised him to have his bath in the pushkarini and then offer prayers. As Bali chakravarthi got rid of his sin after having his purificatory bath in the waters of this pushkarini the theertha is known as Balithertha. Bali as a thanks giving measure renovated the temples of the Holy Trinity in that place. Even today on the full moon day in the month of Vaikasi, Bali is supposed to visit the place and offer his prayers to Lord Harasapaharan.

Yet another story connected with this place is the manner which Brighu maharishi himself got rid of his curse by visiting this place. Long ago on the banks of river Saraswati, many of the rishis had assembled and

were performing a major yagna. They were debating as to whom, amongst the hloy trinity this yaga should be dedicated. As they could not come to an agreement they requested Brighu Maharishi to give his verdict which would be accepted by all the others. Brighu maharishi decided to visit the three Gods in their respective lokas. Brighu maharishi started on his journey. He first went to Satyaloka, offered his greetings to Lord Brahma and stood before him with folded hands. But as Lord Brahma did not even look at him or talk to him, Brighu maharishi felt that Lord Brahma was filled with his own importance and hence he would not be a fit person to whom the yaga could be dedicated. He then went to Kailash where Lord Siva resides. But Lord Siva and Parvathi did not even notice the arrival of Brighu maharishi. Brighu maharishi felt that Lord Siva was also not fit to receive the fruits of the yaga. He then went to Vaikunt where on the milky ocean, Lord Narayana was seen in a sleeping posture in his yogic sleep. Lord Narayana did not immediately recognise his presence. Brighu maharishi therefore lost his temper kicked the Lord on his chest. Immediately, Lord Vishnu caught hold of the foot which kicked him and asked Brighu maharishi whether his foot was hurt. Brighu maharishi then realised his folly and his own unpardonable sense of ego which craved for immediate recognition on arrival. He came back to the earth and related to the waiting rishis his shameful act. He told them that Lord Narayana was the person to whom this yaga should be dedicated. To get rid of his own sin, he visited all the divya kshetras and prayed to Lord Narayana. In course of time, he reached the banks of the river Kaveri and saw a temple which was almost dilapidated. He had his bath at the Padma theertha which was to the east of the temple. He also saw a Kathmba viruksha on the banks of the theertha. He offered his prayers and felt a sudden peace descend on him. He then met some of the rishis in the area and asked them about the significance of that area. At that time, a rishi by name Asithar told him that was the

place where Lord Siva as well as Mahabali were released from their sins by Lord Narayana. The muni then told him that the theertha i.e. holy tank was one which was created by the Lord himself who used the lotus flower in his hand to draw lines on the earth in the place. Brighu maharishi also therefore worshipped the Lord in that place and is said to have attained salvation.

Yet another story connected with this place is the manner in which Moon God got relief from his sin. Once upon a time, Moon God committed a sin and he was therefore cursed to suffer from a dreaded disease. Day by day he started waning. At the same time Brihaspathi also wanted to help Tara to get rid of her sin. Brihaspathi consulted the rishis while Lord Chandra consulted the other devas. Both of them agreed that Tara and Chandra should go to Kandana kshetra and have their purificatory bath in the theerthas there and pray to Harasapaharan and thereby get rid of their sins. Accordingly, Tara and Moon God repeated the Ashtakshara mantra and obtained instant relief from their sins.

The main story here enunciates the fact that Lord Narayana i.e. Hari, rid Lord Siva i.e. Hara of his curse and hence it is that the God here is known as Harasapaharan i.e. Hara (Siva) sapa (curse) Haran (one who got rid of that curse). But today the idols from the temple of Brahma are kept in the Perumal temple itself for safe custody.

Epigraphical Highlights :

There are not many inscriptions relating to this temple. However, one inscription on the southern wall of the mandapa in front of the central shrine in the Perumal temple, there is an inscription which is bilingual

viz. Tamil and Telugu. It records the gift of the mahamandapa by one Narayana Arasan.¹

Hymnology :

Tirumangai Alvar is the only Alvar who has sung in praise of the Lord here. He has also sung only one pasuram which is extracted below:

Tirunedunthangadam - 19th Pasuram

பிண்டியாக் மணடையேநதிப பிறர்மனை திரிதந்துணனும்
முண்டியான், சாபம் தீர்த்த ஒருவனார், உலகமேத்தும்
கண்டியூர் அரங்கம்மெய்யம் சுப்பேர் மல்லையென்று
மண்டினார் உயலலலால் மற்றையார்க்கு உய்யலாமே

(திருநெடுந்தாண்டகம் . 19)

Meaning :

Once Siva was cursed as he plucked the fifth head of Lord Brahma. At that time, a skull attached itself to the finger of Lord Siva and even Lord Siva had to go about begging for alms to atone for the sin. He prayed to Lord Narayana who released him from the curse.

That Lord Narayana resides among other places at Kandiyur, Srirangam, Thirumeyyam, Kanchipuram, Thirupaernagar and Thirukadalmallai.

Only those who place absolute unquestioned faith in the Lord residing at these divyadesams will be blessed. How can the others hope to be blessed ?

The poem written by Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar in the 108 Tirupathi Andaathi is given below:

பேசவரின் தென்னரங்கர் போரல்லாம் பேசுக வாய்
கேசவனைக் காண்க விழி கேட்க செவி . ஈனார்
உண்டி ஊர்தோறும் உழன்று இரவாமல் தவிர்த்தான்
கண்டியூர் கூப்புக என் கை

(நூற் . திரு . அந் 13)

¹ 232 App. B ARIE 1941-42

Meaning :

Whenever I speak, let me utter only the myriad names of Ranganatha

Let my eyes see none else but Kesava.

Let my ears hear nothing but adulation of the Lord;

Let me fold my hands in veneration to the Lord who redeemed Siva Himself of a curse and is now staying at Thirukandiyur.

The thought expressed in this poem is similar to that in the song from Silapathikaram made famous by the beautiful rendering of Smt. M.S. Subbulaxmi.

In that story Kannagi was left in an idayar colony by Kovalan when he wanted to go to Madurai to sell one anklet of Kannagi. The idayars sing the song where they say that the tongue which does not utter the name of Narayana is not worth anything, even as the eyes which do not see Narayana have not seen anything worth while even as the ears which do not hear the words Narayana have not heard anything. The lines in Silapadikaram Tamil run as follows:

சேவகன் சீர கேளாத செவியென்ன செவியே
திருமால் சீர் கேளாத செவியென்ன செவியே

சரியவனைக் காணாத சகல என்ன சண்ணே . சண இலமத்துக்
காணபார தம் சண் எனன சண்ணே

பஞ்சவர்க்குத் தூது
நடந்தானை ஏத்தாத நாவென்ன நாவே
நாராயணு எனனா நாவென்ன நாவே

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