

SRI PERIYAZHWAR

Periyazhwar occupies a special place among Azhwars as he became the father-in-law of Sri Ranganatha when his daughter Andal married Him. His avathara took place in Srivilliputhur on Swathi Nakshatram of Tamil Aani month. He is believed to be the amsa of Garutman. Historically he is placed around the later part of 6th century A.D. He belonged to a family of devout vaishnava brahmins and was named "Vishnuchitta". True to his name, his mind dwelt constantly on the form and leelas of the Lord. He did not show much interest in learning scriptures and constantly enjoyed the Lord as little Krishna.

He wanted to perform some kankaryam of which the Lord was specially fond of. With this objective, he set up a beautiful garden with great variety of flowers and Tulasi leaves. He used to prepare specially decorated garlands and offering them to the Lord at the "Vatapathra Saayee" temple.

Once, the king of Madurai named Vallabha Deva came to Srivilliputhur in disguise and was going around the villages to know the welfare of his citizens. He saw a brahmin sleeping on the front porch of a house and stopped to enquire about him. The brahmin told the king that he was a pilgrim returning south after a tour of many temples in the gangetic plains. The king asked him to teach some slokas that will lead to his enlightenment. The pilgrim recited a sloka, the substance of which runs as follows:

"One has to gather everything necessary for the rainy season when the sun shines. One has to save for old age by working hard during the younger days. Similarly, one has to search for the ultimate reality in this birth to benefit in the next birth."

The king was greatly impressed by the sloka and honoured the brahmin. His mind dwelt on the futility of his past life and he constantly worried over what is the ultimate reality. He could not choose his faith from the various paths offered by different religions. He called his family preceptor named Selvanambi and asked him to call scholars and philosophers of various faiths to a contest which will determine the reality.

The king tied a big bag of gold coins to a long vertical pole and announced in the contest that the booty will go to the scholar who can bring it down with his faith. For many days, number of scholars tried in vain to do this with their scholarly works, eloquent speeches and heated debates. One night the Lord appeared in Vishnuchitta's dream and asked him to go to the king's court and win the contest. Vishnuchitta woke up in the morning and proceeded to the king's palace according to the Lord's directive. However he was well aware of his limitations, as he had never shown any interest in scriptural learning. He was confident that the Lord's will always prevails.

In the King's court, he proceeded to talk on 'Sriman Narayana' as the ultimate reality. The words started flowing as a torrent as he went on quoting the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Puranas. Selva Nambi, the king and the entire gathering were thrilled to the core by his conviction in his faith and were astounded to see the bag of coins fall on its own accord into Vishnuchitta's palms. The whole court acknowledged that Vishnuchitta had the special grace of the Lord. The king honoured him with the title "Bhattar Piran".

"பாண்டியன் கொண்டாடப் பட்டர்பிரான் வந்தானென்று

ஈண்டிய சங்கம் எடுத்தூத - வேண்டிய

வேதங்கள் ஒதி விரைந்து கிழியறுத்தான்

பாதங்கள் யாமுடைய பற்று "

The above pasura brings out the episode of how the Azhwar came to be called Bhattar Piran. That evening, the king took Vishnuchitta on a ceremonial parade around the city on his elephant. Sriman Narayana, delighted to see all these honours being showered on the Azhwar, appeared in the sky on His Garuda Vahanam with Sri Mahalakshmi. Vishnuchitta was dazed to see the splendour of the Lord and since he always enjoyed Krishna as a child, blessed the Lord with a long life imagining himself as the Lord's mother and sang his "Thiru Pallandu" pasuram. He came to be called "Periyazhwar" as he thought of himself as elder to the Lord Himself to bless Him.

From that day of his victory in the king's court, he started offering garlands of his verses along with floral garlands to the Lord. He has enjoyed Krishna Leelas as much as mother Yashoda would have done earlier. It is impossible to capture his anubhava in words other than his own. His "Pallandu" and "Neerattam" pasuras are part of Aaradhana Kramam and are recited without fail while performing Aaradhana and Thirumanjanam to the Lord. His pasuras (461 verses) in the Nalayiram are called "Periyazhwar Thirumozhi".

To Periyazhwar, the various avatharas of the Lord are not recollections of the past depicted by the puranas. They are dramas enacted right before his eyes and he bestows a benediction on the Lord for the feats that He performed as Nrisimha, Rama and Krishna.

"இலங்கை பாழாளாகப் படைபொருதானுக்கு பல்லாண்டு "

"அந்தியம் போதில் அரியிருவாகி அரியை அழித்தவனை பந்தனை தீர்ப் பல்லாண்டு "

"மாயப் பொரு படை வாணனை ஆயிரம் தோளும் பொழிகுருதி பாய

சுழற்றிய ஆழி வல்லானுக்கு பல்லாண்டு "

Once, while he was collecting flowers and tulasi from his garden, he saw a small baby girl under a tulasi plant. Periyazhwar carried this baby home to his wife Vraja. The couple who were till then childless were delighted to receive this divine grace of the Lord and showered their love on this child. They named her "Godha" meaning daughter of mother earth in Sanskrit. The child had the great fortune of growing up in this family of great bhaktas and turned out to be a great Krishna Premi whose experience is unparalleled in history. Even among the Azhwars, Godha's anubhavam surpasses that of all the others. The Jnana and bhakti came to her at a very young age.

"அஞ்ச குடிக்கு ஒரு சந்ததியாய் ஆழ்வார்கள்

தம் செயலை விஞ்சிநிற்கும் தன்மையளாய் - பிஞ்சாய்ப்

பழுத்தாளை ஆண்டாளைப் பத்தியுடன் நாளும்

வழுத்தாய் மனமே மகிழ்ந்து " (Upadesa Rattinamalai-24)

Godha pays homage to her father's influence by referring to herself as "Bhattar Piran's Godha" in all her verses. One can trace a lot of parallels between her verses and that of her father. It is said that Periyazhwar sang all his verses on the Lords of divya deshas at Godha's request as she wanted to choose and marry one among them. In his verses, Periyazhwar refers to his only daughter, her love for Krishna and her later marriage to the Lord.

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From

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ALWARS

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