

Sri VaishNaVa Sampradaya Saara Nidhi(in Tamil)

By Sri P.B.Annangarachariar Swamy

(The quintessence of of VaishNaVa Tradition)

English Translation

by Vengrai Parthasarathy

Many are the ‘Living Creatures’ created by Brahma, the Lord of Creation (who is himself a creation of Sri Narayana). To be born a *Human* is a special privilege. And, to be born as a Hindu, that too a Sri VaishNaVa is a matchless blessing, because it is the cumulative effect or fruit of generational virtuous deeds (*Karma*). At the same time this privileged position carries with it many an obligation. To enhance its value, a true VaishNaVa has to know what the tradition is about and follow certain daily duties (*dinacharya*) or guide-lines.

Lord Maha Vishnu, (known also as Narayana and Vasudeva among a thousand other names) manifested Himself in many Avatars on earth to animate house-holders who may have lost their spiritual moorings and to crush evil doers and protect the virtuous (*ParitharANaya SadhunAm, vinAashAya dushskruthAm*). *Archa-s* are consecrated idols in the Divya Desam-s (108) the most prominent of which are Tirumalai, Srirangam, KAnchipuram, and TirunArayanapuram (Melkote) shrines. To bring home these truths the Lord has deputed Azhvar-s and Acharyas in human form. VaishNavas are expected to follow sincerely the daily observances’ (*anushtAnam-s*). We shall now follow through the highlights, by citing important things that Sri VaishnavA-s should know and do..

The Bhakthi cult was propagated by the Azhvar-s and the shrines cited by them are known as DIVYA DESAMs. The word ‘Divya’ has been employed by our ancestors very elegantly. Of all the religious literature on the Supreme Being, Sriman Narayana, the most important are the Sastra-s (in Sanskrit) and –of equal importance--the **Tamil Veda** known as DIVYA PRABHANDHAM. The divinities who sang them are called DIVYA SURI-s. And the holy places that have been sung about by the Azhvar-s are known as DIVYA DESAMS. What an exquisite set up of appellations!

The Azhvar-s known as Divya suris are ten in number. They are:

Poigai Azhvar, Bhoothath Azhvar, Pey Azhvar (the premier three), followed by Thirumazhisai Azhvar, NammAzhvar, Kulasekhara Azhvar, Periya Azhvar, Thondaradipodi Azhvar, ThirupaNN Azhvar, and Thirumangai Azhvar.

NammAzhvar's disciple Mathura Kavi Azhvar and PeriyaAzhvar's daughter Sri Andal have been added to the list of Divya suri-s making a total of twelve. Mathurakavi Azhvar sang about his guru NammAzhvar and only obliquely about the Supreme being. Sri Andal is considered an incarnation of Sri Lakshmi (Bhoo Devi). Though a woman saint, (the only woman among the Azhvars) she has also been added because of the Ayonija birth and divine attributes attached to her. Here is the list of 12 Azhvar-s, their birth place, star and number of Pasurams (stanza-s) composed by them.

-
AZHVAR THANIAN
(Thanian--laudatory verse of dedication)

*Bhootham Sarascha Mahadāhvaya Bhaṭṭ anātha
Sri Bhakthisāra Kulasékhara Yogi vāhān
Bhakthāngri rēnu Parakāla Yathidra miṣrān
Srimad Parānkusa munim PraNathōsmi nithyam*

Bhootham	Bhoodath Alvar
Sarascha	Poikai Alvar
Mahath Ahvyaya	Pey Alvar
BhattanAtha	Periya Alvar
Sri Bhakthi sAra	Thirumazhisai Alvar
Kulasekhara	Kulasekhara Alvar
YogiVAhAn	ThiruppaN Alvar
BhakthAangri Renu	Thondar adi podi Alvar
ParakAla	Thiru mangai Alvar
Yathindra MishrAn	Sri RamAnuja (Acharya)
Srimath ParAnkusa Munim	NammAlvar

PranathOsmi nithyam I worship every day

The Order of birth of the AzhvArs

*Poikai yAr,Bhoothathar, PaeyAr, pugazh mazhisai
Aiyān AruLMaran,shaeralarkOan—thuuyabhatta-
nAthān anbar thAL thooLi narpANān nankaliyan
Eedhivar thOatra thadaivamingu*

Poikai yAr	Poikai AzhvAr, first
BhothathAr	BhoothathAr, second
PaeyAr	PaeyAzhvar. Third
Pugazhmazhisai Ayyan	Reputed Thirumazhisai, fourth
AruL Maran	Blessed NammAzhvar, fifth
ChOaLar kOan	Kulasekhara perumAl, sixth
Thuiya BhattanAthar	Immaculate PeiyaZhvAr, seventh
Anbar thAL thuLi	ThondaradipodiAzhvar. eighth
NalPANān	Great saint ThirupANAZhvAr,ninth
Nankaliyan	Enchanting Thirumangai AzhvAr, tenth

(This list is according to the sequence of the births of these ten AzhvArs))

THE AZHVARS

<u>NAME</u>	<u>BIRTH PLACE</u>	<u>ASTERISM</u>	<u>PASURAMS</u>
Poigai Azhvar	Thiruvehka (YathothkAri Sannidhi in Kanchipuram)	ThiruvoNam star	100
Bhoodath Azhvar T	Thirukadanmallai	Avittam	100
PeyAzhvar	Mylai	Sathayam	100
(The three premier Azhvars composed the three Thiruvandthathi-s)			
Thirumazhisai	Thirumazhisai	Thai-Makham	216
NammAzhvar	Thirukurugoor	Visakaha	1296
Mathurakavi Azhvar	ThirukoLoor	Chitra	11
Kulasekhara Azhvar	Thiruvanji kalam	Punarpoosam	105
Periya Azhvar	Srivilliputhur	Swathi	473
Andal (Soodi kodutha)	Srivilliputhoor	Adi-Pooram	173
Thondaradipodi	Mandangudi	Kettai	58
ThirupaNN Azhvar	Uraiyyur	Rohini	10
ThirumangaiAzhvar	Thirukuriyur	Karthikai	1253

NammAzhvar is traditionally given the exalted position as the Premier Azhvar, all other Azhvar-being deemed as aspects of NammAzhvar; like his Eyes, his Hair etc., Udayavar/Sri Ramanuja was an Acharya and he was revered as the ‘holy feet’ of NammAzhvar -- the reason why NammalavAr’s holy sandals are referred to as iRamanujan.

The Ramanuja Nootrandhathi of Thiruvarangath AmudhanAr has been treated as on par with the Divya Prabhandham pasurams of the Azhvars and added to the Divya Prabhandha collection--*NAIyiram* – Prapanna Gayathri. It is considered essential for Sri VaishNaVas to learn and recite it every day.

THE ACHARYAS

We shall now talk about the next level—The Acharya-s: Sri Nathamunigal, Sri AlavandhAr and Sri Ramanujar are treated as the Acharya-mentors of Sri.Vaishnavism.

Nathamunigal was born in KattumannAr kovil under Anusha asterism and is regarded as having had training in the Divya Prabhandham under Nammalvar whom he had seen while in *Yoga dasai*. In the Acharya hierarchy he is held to have the position next only to NammAzhvar. None of his grantha-s are however available,

Uyyakondar Chief of the disciples of Nathamunigal was born in *Karthigai* asterism. He was taught the nuanced meanings of all the texts by Nathamunigal in the hope that he will in turn instruct his grandson but he passed away much early.

MaNakkAl Nambi The leading disciples of Uyyakondar. He learned all the meanings from his guru and instructed Alavandhar (Yamunacharya) in turn.

Alavandhar: He was the grandson of Nathamunigal and Ramanuja’s preceptor’s preceptor—Born under Utharadam star in Kattu mannAr Koil, he had composed many

works of which the most important are *Agamapramanyam*, *Siddhithrayam*, *Gitartha sangraham*, and *Chathussloki*. He was a great learned preceptor and teacher. It was due to his blessings that Ramanujar became the “*Sidhartha Pravarthakar*” (Preceptor of the VaishNava Siddhantha). His other names are Yamunai thuraivar, and Yamunacharya

Periya Nambi: He was one of the disciples of AlavandhAr. As Acharya he had performed the Samashrayanam of Ramanujar and he was the one who named Sri Ramanuja to become Darshana Pravarthakar. In the *Guru ParamparA* he is referred to as Parankusa Dasar and Mahapurna. Many who belong to his dynasty hold important positions as sthala Acharyas in many Divya Desam-s.

RAmanuja: Hailed as JagadAchAriyar, he is known by other names such as Udayavar, EmperumanAnar, BhAshyakArar, Yathindrar and is revered as a re-incarnation of Adishesan, the multi-tasking snake-couch of Sri Narayana. He was born in Sriperumbudoor in Chithrai asterism. His Acharya-s were the disciples of AlavandhAr, viz., Periya Nambi, Thirumalai Nambi, Thirukoshtiyur Nambi. Thirumalai AndAn and ThiruvAranga perumAl arrayar, in different stages of his life. He was closely associated with Thirukachi Nambi. Ramanuja was himself Acharya to Mudaliandan, Embar, KoorathAlzhvAr, AruLalaperumal, AnanthAzhvar and others. His noteworthy disciples were known as 74 *Simahanadhipaathis* who were shining lights, spreading his message. Ramanuja composed the granthas known as *SribhAshyam*, *VedAntha Deepam*, *VedAntha saram*, *Gita bhAshyam*, *VedAntha sangraham*, *Nithyam*, *Gadhyathrayam*

The disciples of Sri Ramanuja have spread into many branches. The PoorvAcharya Paramparai are featured as two divisions.

UDAYAVAR

EmbAr	Thirukurugaipiran PiLLan
Bhattar	KidAmbiAchAn
Nanjiyar	EngaLAzhvan
Nambillai	NadAdoorammaL
Vadaku Thiruveedhi Pillai	KidAmbiya PuLLar
Pillai Lokacharyar	VedAntha Desikar
ThiruvAimozhi PiLLai	NayanAchariyar
ManavAla MA MunigaL	

Here are a few brief details about them:

EmbAr

Born in Mazhalai MangaLam---Udayavar’s aunt’s son-Ramanuja PadhachAya;—Punarvasu star

Bhattar : Full name ParAsara Bhattar. Son of KoorathAzhvan . He had listened to special meanings of the texts from his father and Sri EmbAar He is said to have been adopted as son by Sri RanganAtha and His NAchiyAr; expert in every art (*Sakalakala*)

he had thoroughly understood and interpreted the Divya Prabhandham-s and had authored many granthas including Sahasra nAma BhAshyam, Ashta sloki. Sri Ranganatha sthavam, Sri guna rathna Kosam.etc.,Born in VaikAsi, Anusham. His disciple was Pillai PerumAl aiyengar, great Tamil vidwan. He was born under Anusha asterism.

Nanjeeyar- he was an Advaitin who got converted by Bhattar; was earlier reputed as VedAnthigaL and MAdhavAchariar. After seeking Bhattar's feet he became *Uthamashrami* and got the name of Nanjeeyar. He had written the *OnbhidhAyirapadi* and other essays on on Divya Prabhandham.He had also authored *SriSuktha bhAshyam* (not the one published recently)--Born under *Panguni Utharam* asterism.

NampiLLai- He was the head of the disciples of Nanjeeyar . His name was Varadarajachariar and was honored later with the name of LokAchariar. His expertise in all sastras was a by-word. The special meanings of Divya Prabhandha-s were popularized through him only. Born in Karthikai under Karthikai asterism.

Vadakku veedhi Pillai – He was a disciple under Nampillai and had absorbed the meanings of texts along with PeriyavAchan Pillai. Commentary on ThiruvAimozhi he had authored the MuppathAyirapadi. His name was SriKrishnaPAdhar.

PillailokAchariar – Son of Vadakku Veedhi pillai- He was the elder brother of Azhagiya Manavala Perumal who had composed AchArya Hrudayam. Both were *Naishtika Brahmachari-s* . He is revered as re-incarnation of Perarulala perumAl of KAnchipuram. He was the author of Sri Vachana-bhooshaNam, Mumukshupadi and other works like Ashta dasa RahasyAdhipathi. He was honored with the name UlagaAsiriyar, same as Nampillai. If his Divya sookthi-s had not been written this world would have been a dark world indeed. His avatar is as reputable as the Ten AvatArs of Vishnu. He was born in the month of Aippasi under ThiruvONam asterism.

ThiruvAimozhi Pillai Chief adherent at PillailokAchariar's feet. Born in Kuntinagar in Vaikasi VisaAkham

Manavala Ma Muni

He was the chief disciple of ThiruvAimozhi PiLLai— born in Alvar Thirunagari in the month of aippasi under Moola asterism, and considered as re-birth of Sri Ramanuja. He had crystal clear wisdom in all the Sastra-s. His *Divya Sookthi-s* are peerless. He was learned in all the Sastra-s and had deep knowledge of them.He was Acharya to Sri Ranganatha in the Srirangam shrine. His adherents and proteges know that he is self-taught and peerless in the Divya suokthi-s. The Acharya parampara (dynasty) ends with him. He was the Achaarya who established the *AshtaDikGaja-s* to propagate Vaishnavism in continuation of Sri Ramanja's mission.

(He has a special place of honour in **Thenkalai** worship and rituals)

His THANIAN

Srisailesa dayāpāthram dheē bhkthyāgi guṇārṇavanA
Yatindra pravaṇam vandē ramya Jamatru munim

I offer my salutations to the captivating *Manavāla MāMuni*,
Receipient of the compassionate blessings of *Srisailesa*,*
An ocean of attributes (like wisdom, devotion, piety)
And who reveres *Sri Ramanuja*.

(**Thiruvaimozhii Pillai...ManavAla MA Muni's Acharya*.)

ANOTHER BRANCH OF RAMANUJA'S DISCIPLES

Thirukurugai piran Nambigal:

He did intensive research into TiruvAimozhi as instructed by Sri RAmanuja and wrote His thesis on ArAyirapadi.

KidAmbi Achan:

He was engaged in the sacred kitchen (Thiru madaipalli) of RAmanuja. He was well-versed in the Sastra-s and has been extolled by Sri Vedanta Desikar for his services to Sri RAmanuja.

EngaL AzhvAn

Named Vishnu chithArya, he has written commentary on Sri Vishnu PurANa. He was the principal player in a well-known litigation.

NadAdhoorAmmAL

He was the principal disciple under Engal AzhvAn; Original name was Varada guru. He was an un-matched Vidwan/preceptor of RAmanuja's Sri Bhashya.

IRamanuja piLLAn

Chief disciple of AmmAL. KidAmbiyapuLLAr is another name of his. Related to Swamy Desikar and is said to have written some grantha-s.

Sri Nigamantha Desikar:

Born in the month of Purattasi under the asterism of ThiruvOnam. He is revered as representing the Sacred Bell of Sri Thiruvēkatamudayan ruling deity of Thirumalai-Tirupathi. Born in Thuppur, he was honored with titles such as *Sarva-thanthra Swatanthrar*, *KavithArkika Simham* and *VedAnthachariar* for his erudition. He has composed many grantha-s in Sanskrit and Tamil.

(*He has a special place among the Vadakalai worshippers*).

His Thanian:

**"RAmAnuja-dayA-pAtraM j~nAna-vairAgya-bhUShaNAM |
shrImad-venkaTa-nAthAryaM vande vedAntadeshikaM ||"**

"I salute the great Venkata Natha, recipient of Sri Ramanua's benign blessings, blessed ornament and exemplar of Vedantha wisdom and sacrifice. I revere Sri Vedantha Desikar, a lion among Acharya-s."

NayanAchAriyAr

He was the son of Sri Desikar. Kumara VedaAnthachAriar is another name of his. "DeepAth uthpanna Pradeepam"-- "Brighter Lamp than the Lamp that lighted it" Is how he was compared with his renowned father. He had authored some grantha-s.

EPILOGUE

Sri AnnangarAchariar concludes by saying :

Due to birth of these Azhvar-s and Acharya-s this land of ours has been edified. Their names and divine deeds are worthy of being remembered every day. and brings good fortune to the VaishNaVa -s.

***Glory unto the sacred feet of the Azhvars
Glory unto the feet of EmperumAnAr
Glory unto the feet of revered Jeeyar***

-----00000-----