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Thirumalisai Alwar Vaibhavam

makAyAm makarE mAsE chakrAmsam bhArgavOtbhavam
maheesAra purAdheesam bhakthisAra maham bhajE

Thirumalisai Alwar was born after the Mudhal Alwars (Poigai alwar, Bhoodhatu alwar & Pei alwar). He lived like a mystic & travelled a lot. He learnt about all religions of his day and his works talk extensively about the Supremacy of Sriman Narayana. In his early stages, Alwar was also a Siddha Purush and was immensely powerful, but still he remained pious and very devoted to Sriman Narayana. Due to his immense Bhakthi, he was also known as Bhakthisaarar. Alwar's powerful words earned him the name Urayil Idadhavar, one who never keeps the sword (Alwar's tongue is compared to sword) in its cover. Alwar was born as a Hamsam of Sri Chakrathalwar. Alwar's journey from being Thirumalisayaar to Thirumalisai Alwar and then eventually to Thirumalisai Piraan is a wonderful story of utmost Bakthi and devotion.
A Magical Birth

869200 years had passed since the advent of Dwapara Yuga. Some Brahma Rishis including Athiri Rishi, Bhargava Rishi and Vashista Rishi were in search of an ideal place for their meditation. They sought Brahma's guidance who directed them to a place called Thirumalisai (a small town near Chennai). As told by Brahma, the rishis went to Thirumalisai, built small ashrams, performed yagnas and indulged in meditation. One among the rishis, Sri Bhargava Rishi, an ardent devotee of Sriman Narayana, indulged in severe penance. Indra as usual, mistook Bharagava Rishi to be meditating to get his throne and sent down Rambha, Urvasi & Thillothama to distract Bhargava Rishi. But none of them were able to influence Bhargava Rishi. Finally, another apsaras by name Kanakangi, with a lot of effort managed to distract Bharagava Rishi from his meditation.

On the day of Thai Magam, Bhargava Rishi & Kanakangi had a baby. But the baby was born in an incomplete form without hands or legs or any proper body parts. Bhargava Rishi realises his folly and goes back to meditation. Kanakangi threw the underdeveloped baby in a bamboo bush and returned to her loka. Then, Sri Jeganatha Perumal of Thirumalisai blessed the baby with beauty & wisdom and after which the baby developed all organs. A while later the baby started crying and a farmer by name Thiruvaalan, who passed by that route, took the baby to his home. He and his wife Pangaya Selvi, lovingly brought up the baby like their own.

The Search for the True God

Like Nammalwar, Thirumalisai Alwar grew up without any attachment to worldly issues. He hardly ate or drank, but remained healthy. As Alwar's fame spread, an elderly couple from a nearby village came to meet him. They lovingly offered him milk which they had brought from their place. Though Alwar hardly drank or ate anything, he was moved by the affection of the elderly couple and accepted their offering. Then on, the couple brought milk for alwar daily. Alwar wanted to offer something in return for their devotion. So, on one day, Alwar drank half the milk and asked the couple to have the remaining half. The couple did as directed by Alwar and turned young due to the greatness of Alwar. Also, the couple who until then had been childless were blessed with a child. They named the child Kanni Kannan, who grows up as a sishya of Alwar and accompanied him everywhere.

Until now Alwar had not embraced Sri Vaishnavam. In fact he was known by the name Thirumalisayaar before he became an alwar. He was leading the life of a mystic. He wanted to know about all religions in order to follow the one that was true & showed the path to real God and moksha. So, alwar went on a long journey and met many people and learnt the teachings of many religions. He met and spoke to people of different faiths including the atheists, people who accepted the primacy of the Vedas but never followed
them and people who strictly followed the Vedas. Finally, Alwar decided that Saivism was the greatest of all the faiths and becomes a Saivaite.

On directions from emperuman, PeiAlwar (one amongst the Mudhal Alwars) set out to initiate Thirumalisai Alwar into Sri Vaishnavam. PeiAlwar left his place and built a small ashram near Thirumalisisayar’s ashram. In order to get Thirumalisayyar’s attention and challenge him in a debate, Pei Alwar did something very interesting. He planted Thulasi saplings upside down and watered them with a broken pot. He repeated this action every day. Just as Alwar expected, Thirumalisaiyar was intrigued and asked Pei Alwar why he was doing such a foolish thing. Pei Alwar replied, “if my actions are foolish, yours are too”. Thirumalisaiyar was flabbergasted and asked the reason behind Pei Alwar saying so. Pei Alwar explained that, “inspite of being planted upside down, my saplings might grow, but you will never attain moksha in Saivism. The Vedas, Puranas, the epics Mahabharata & Ramayana, all clearly show that Sriman Narayana is the Supreme God and the only one capable of giving Moksha”. This lead to a lengthy, intense debate and Pei Alwar, pointing to references from the Vedas, proved his point and won over Thirumalisisayar. He also performed Pancha Samaskaram for Thirumalisisayar, who later came to be called Thirumalisai Alwar and taught him the principles of Sri Vaishnavam.

The Battle with Lord Shiva

After the initiation by PeiAlwar, Thirumalisai Alwar became a devout Sri Vaishnava and moved to Thirumalisisai to lead a spiritual life of Poojas, Kainkaryams and Meditation. Many amazing incidents that happened during this period reveal Alwar’s immense Siddhic powers.

Once Alwar was sitting in his Ashram and stitching a piece of cloth when Lord Shiva and his consort Parvathi were passing by him on their divine vehicle in the sky. Seeing a divine glow on Alwar face, Parvathi enquired about Alwar to Shiva. Shiva explained that the person was Thirumalisai Alwar who had once been his devotee but now is a devotee of Sriman Narayana. Hearing this, Parvathi became happy and expressed her desire to descend down to Alwar’s place and bless him with a boon. Lord Shiva accepted her request and they both appeared before Alwar. But Alwar, in-spite of having noticed them, remained indifferent to their presence. Lord Shiva then announced his arrival to Alwar and asked why he feigned indifference to their presence. Alwar accounted for his indifference by saying that he didn’t require anything from Him. Shiva insisted that Alwar ask for a boon. In response, Alwar asked Shiva to grant him Moksha. Lord Shiva replied that only Sriman Narayana is capable of granting Moksha. Shiva asked Alwar to ask for another boon in its place. Alwar requested him to bless him with a long life so that he can perform the penances, poojas and other prescriptions for attaining Moksha. Shiva explained that a person’s life time is determined based on his Karmas and that cannot be changed by him. When Shiva pressed further, Alwar asked for a boon, wherein the thread that he was using for stitching should follow the needle. Lord Shiva, enraged by Alwar’s reply, opened his third eye to incinerate Alwar. In response, Alwar opens an eye from his feet, which let out an even bigger and powerful fire that doused the fire emanating from Shiva’s eye.

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Seeing this, Sri Man Narayana ordered the clouds to rain, so that the fire can be doused. Immediately, clouds form and bring down heavy rain. Alwar then calmly begins to meditate upon Sri Man Narayana. Alwar’s immense devotion impresses Lord Shiva, who praises Alwar with a couple of Hymns and gives Alwar the name “Bhakthisaarar”. Then both Lord Shiva & Parvathi bless Alwar and leave the place.

Sometime later a Siddha Purush (one well versed with Yogic powers) named Sukthihaar, who had tamed a lion and made it his vehicle with his magic powers was going in the sky and suddenly at one point, he was not able to move forward. He came down to test Alwar’s powers. Seeing Alwar in very simple clothing he creates a cloth of Silk and asks Alwar to wear it. Alwar takes the tiger skin on which he was sitting, magically converts it to a robe with jewels & gems and asks the Siddha purush to wear it. The siddha purush is amazed and takes a beads chain and asks Alwar to use it as a jap mala. Alwar converts his simple Tulsi mala to a Navaratna mala and gives it to the Siddha Purush. The Siddha Purush is amazed and falls at Alwar’s feet. He then takes another route in his lion.

As days passed and Alwar’s fame spread, an alchemist (rasavaadhi in tamil) by name Kongana Siddhan came to meet Alwar and presented Alwar with a chemical that could convert any metal to Gold. Alwar gave some dust from his skin and says to the Rasavaadhi that this dust could convert even a stone to Gold. The rasavaadhi tested it and was flabbergasted to find stones turn into gold. He too fell at Alwar’s feet and left.

Thirumalisai Alwar was immensely powerful and was an expert in all the Siddhic & Yogic magic. But he was uninterested in such powers and considered them trivial. Alwar’s only interest was in Sri Man Narayana and in attaining Moksha.

Meeting the Mudhal Alwars

After being visited from Lord Siva, the Siddha Purush and the alchemist, Thirumalisai Alwar decided to move to a place where none would disturb him. He left Thirumalisai and after a lengthy search for an ideal place to meditate, finally found one in a cave in Thirumailai (present day Mylapore, Chennai). Alwar then lead a very spiritual and secluded life, undisturbed by anyone.

Meanwhile, the Mudhal Alwars who were on a Divyadesa Yatra too reach the cave. They instantly recognised Alwar’s greatness and decided to spend some days in Alwar’s company. During these days, the four Alwars spoke, sang and thought of only Sri Man Narayana. They had no worldly issues to worry about. After days of enjoying each others’ company, the Mudhal Alwars left the cave to continue their Divyadesa Yatra. Thirumalisai Alwar too returned to Thirumalisai.

At Thirumalisai, when Alwar searched for Thiruman in the usual place, he is unable to find it (In times of Alwar, Thiruman was not sold across shops. It is a natural stone found underground). Unable to wear the mark of the Lord, Alwar feels sad. Later in his dream, Lord Srinivasa of Tirumala relieved Alwar by telling

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that he can find Thirumaan in Kachi Vekka (Birthplace of Boodathu Alwar). Alwar immediately left for Kachi Vekka and found it at the very place Perumal had mentioned in the dream. Alwar happily wore the Thiruman he had so longed for. Alwar then came back to Thirumalisai and spent sometime in Bagavad Anubhavam.

The Lord is awaiting instructions

Alwar had always travelled extensively and once again Alwar set out to Thiru Vekka (near Kanchipuram) to serve the reclining Lord Yad hodkari (Sonna Vanam Seidha Perumal). He was joined by KanniKannan, his ardent disciple. Alwar & Kani Kannan spent their time in serving the beautiful Lord Yad hodkari. During this time an old woman who could barely stand upright served Alwar and Kani Kannan by sweeping and cleaning Alwar's Ashram. Moved by her pious service, Alwar asked the old lady to seek a boon from him. The old lady replied that she could not bear her old age, her wrinkled face, and so on. Alwar immediately changed her to a beautiful young woman. The woman gratefully thanked Alwar and felt very happy that she would be young and beautiful forever. Soon, the king of the province, Pallavarayan saw her and immediately fell for her beauty. He sent word through his guards to the woman, who was only happy to marry the king and accepted the proposal. They both marry and lived happily.

But as years passed by the king was intrigued by his woman's unchanged beauty which never seemed to age. Upon being asked, she revealed to the king about her being an old woman and how she became young again by the grace of Thirumalisai Alwar. She also added that Alwar's disciple Kanni Kannan visited their palace everyday to seek alms (Alwar & Kani Kannan would eat only by seeking alms, just like true sanyasins). The very day the king met Kanni Kannan and asked him to bring his acharya to the palace, so he too can get the boon of ageless beauty. Hearing this Kani Kannan was enraged and strongly replied that Alwar wouldn't come for the king's desires. The king then asked Kannan to take him to Alwar. For this, Kanni Kannan said that Alwar would not even see a person who had such materialistic desires in him. Finally the king asked Kani Kannan to sing a song in praise of him to which Kani Kannan replies that he or his acharya will never sing for any person in this world and would sing only on Sriman Narayana. Listening to this, the king got enraged and ordered Kanni Kannan to leave his kingdom.

Narrating the entire incident to Alwar, Kani Kannan sought permission from Alwar to leave him and the kingdom. Alwar said the he too will leave the kingdom and joins Kanni Kannan. As they both leave, Alwar went to the temple of Thiru Vekka and requested the Perumal too to leave the kingdom and join them. Without asking anything and the very moment, Perumal rolled his mat (adhi seshan), and like an innocent child followed Alwar & Kanni Kannan. To this day the Perumal is called Sonna Vanam Seidha Perumal (Yadhodkaari in North), since He unquestioningly listened to Alwar and followed him.

Meanwhile, without Alwar & Perumal, the entire kingdom is plunged into gloom and the people long for Perumal & Alwar to come back to their kingdom. Realising his folly and the king pleaded to the trio to
return to the Kingdom. Kanni Kannan is moved and requested Alwar to return, who in turn requested Perumal to return to the kingdom. The Trio then return to the kingdom, which again got back its lost happiness and peace. The place where Perumal, Alwar & Kanni Kannan rested for a night came to be known as “Oar-Iruv-Irukkai” and is now known as Orirukkai.

This single incident from the life of Alwar where the Supreme Lord Sriman Narayana unquestioningly follows Alwar & Kani Kannan like a child stands out wonderfully and beautifully shows the Sowlabhya Guna of Perumal. Sriman Narayana is waiting for instructions from his true devotees, just like a baby awaits its mother’s.

Alwar's Bhakthi

After the happenings at Thiruvekka, Alwar once again set out on a journey to another Divyadesam - Thirukudanthai. En route, at a small village called Perumpuliyur, alwar decided to rest for sometime and sat in a verandah (கோவில்கோட்டை) before a house. This house turned out to be a house of a Brahmin who had been chanting the Vedas with his peers. Seeing Alwar in simple clothes, they mistook Alwar to be of a lower caste and stopped chanting the Vedas. Alwar realised that the Brahmins in the house are uncomfortable chanting the Vedas with him nearby and began to leave the place. Seeing Alwar leave, the Brahmins too continued the chanting. Lord Sriman Narayana decided to teach a lesson to the Brahmins and show them the greatness of Alwar. He made the Brahmins forget the stanza where they had stopped chanting and left them clueless. Alwar, to help the Brahmins continue their Veda paarayanam (chanting), symbolically showed them a piece of broken grain (to indicate that the Brahmins had stopped at a word meaning broken grain). The Brahmins understood alwar's cue and also immediately realised the greatness of Alwar. Falling at Alwar's feet, they sought his forgiveness and blessings.

Alwar then reached the divyadesam of Thirukudanthai and as always lived on alms. As days went by, the Archakar of Thirkudanthai Perumal finds out an staggering phenomenon. The Perumal of the Divyadesam turned His head towards the direction in which Thirumalisai Alwar went to seek alms. Soon the news spread to the entire locality and Perumpuliyur Dikshitar, who had been doing a yagna invites Alwar to grace the occasion. At the ceremony, the dikshitar honoured Alwar with due respects. Seeing dikshitar giving great respect to alwar, people around began to question dikshitar's actions, who became very upset at people gauging Alwar just from his appearance and being ignorant of alwar's bhakthi & greatness. Seeing the dikshitar hurt by the people's action, alwar decided to show the people the greatness of Bhakthi. Alwar sang a Paasuram and requested Perumal to show the greatness of true bhakthi. At the very moment Perumal & Thayar appeared with a divine glow in Alwar's heart. Everyone who had questioned Alwar's greatness and the actions of the dikshitar become dumbfounded and fell at alwar's feet and apologised for their actions. The people also honour Alwar with a Brahmaratham ceremony.

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Becoming Thirumalisai Piraan

After some days, Alwar went to the overflowing banks of River Cauvery and threw hundreds of his works into the flood waters. Of all his works, *Naanmugan Thiruvandhadi* and *Thiru Chanda Viruththam* alone move against the tide and reach Alwar’s feet. He then realised that these 2 works alone are enough to enlighten the world out of misery and left these works for the mumukshus.

Finally Alwar went to Thirukudanthai to see the reclining Lord Aaravamudhan. Alwar is mesmerised by the beauty of the Lord and sang the verse “*Vaazhi Kesavan...*”. Alwar requested Perumal to speak to him, to which Perumal readily obliged and gets up (from His sleeping posture) to speak to Alwar. Suddenly, Alwar again requested perumal to be in the very posture of getting up, and to this day Thirukudanthai Perumal can be seen in this posture. From that day Perumal exchanged His name with Alwar and hence Alwar is known as *Thirumazhisai PirAn* and the Perumal of Thirukudanthai as *ArAvamudAzhvan*. This beautiful incident, where the Lord Himself took the name of his devotee, shows the immeasurable affection Sriman Narayana has towards his children.

After being in Yogic state for many years, Alwar finally attains Moksham.
**Additional Information**

**ThiruChanda Virutham** is a beautiful work of Alwar. In this prabhandam, Alwar gives a number of mathematical calculations (“punilAya iyindhumAi punarkan nindra nAngumAi…”). But that is no reason for us to ignore this prabhandam to be tough and beyond our knowledge. It has such divine meanings, which clarifies all our doubts. Not all paasurams are tough instead there are so many sweet and anubhavam filled paasurams in this prabhandam also (“kondai konda Kodhai meedhu…”).

Alwar’s **Naanmugan Thiruvandhadi** extensively tell about the Supremacy of Lord Sriman Narayana, where Alwar says the famous words “marandhum puram thozhA mAndhar”. Generally, prabhandams are either named after the azhvar who did it viz, periyAzhvar thirumozhi, nAchiyar thirumozhi etc or with some highlighting point in the prabhandam viz., Periya thiruvandhAdhi etc or with the starting letter of the prabhandam viz., nAnmugan thiruvandhAdhi, amalanAdhipiran, kanninun siruthAmbhu etc. So this prabhandam derives its name from its starting word.

Among the five states of Sriman Narayana, Thirumalisai Alwar wrote mostly about the Antharyami state of Perumal.

**The Five states of Perumal**

1. **Parathvam** represents the all-encompassing “Para-Vasudhevan” in Sri Vaikundam. Only the most privileged Jivatmans and Nithya Suris who have attained Moksham can enjoy this form of Shriman Narayana.

The **Mudhal Alwars** had a special place for the Parathvam form of Sriman Narayana. They had little interest in this world and always had a strong urge to attain Moksha and enjoy Sriman Narayana in Sri Vaikuntam.

2. **Vyugam** represents Shriman Narayana in Thiru Paarkadal. Demi-gods do not have the privilege of enjoying Shriman Narayana in “Shri Vaikundam” and hence can have the glimpse of the Lord only in Thiru Paarkadal.

3. **Vibhavam** represents Shriman Narayana in the form of Avathars like Rama, Krishna etc. Hence all the forms of Dasa-avatharam belongs to this category.

**Kulasekara Alwar** was an ardent devotee of Lord Sri Rama. Sri Rama was everything for Kulasekara Alwar. Similarly Lord Sri Krishna was everything for **Periyalwar**. Periyalwar’s “Periyalwar Thirumozhi” can be simply said off as the most beautiful verses on Sri Krishna ever written. **Sri Andal** was also an ardent devotee of Sri Krishna.
4. **Antharyami** represents the Shriman Naryana who lives in each and every being. Antharyami lives inside each and every Jivatman.

5. **Archai** represents Shriman Narayana in the form of Vigrahams. The Almighty in 108 Divya Desams belong to this category.

When it comes to Archai form of Sriman Narayana, it’s **Thirumangai Alwar** who enjoyed the most number of Perumals in Divyadesams. It is solely due to our Thirumangai Mannan that we are blessed 108 Divyadesams. **Thirupaan Alwar’s** Amalanaadhi Piraa is completely about Sri Rangam Periya Perumal. While all Alwars went to various Divyadesams to sing on the Perumals, for **Swami Nammalwar**, the Perumals themselves came one after the other to be sung by Nammalwar.

In contrast to all the Alwars, there was one Alwar who didn’t write on Sriman Narayana itself. **Swami Madhurakavi Alwar** wrote only on His Acharya, Swami Nammalwar and is revered for the very reason. This also shows the importance of Acharyas in Sri Vaishnavam.
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