

Srirangam Vedupari Utsavam



“Vedupari” day when a divine play is enacted where Thirumangai Mannan Azhwar’s life and subsequent enlightenment is beautifully explained.

The story of ‘Thief’ Thirumangai Azhwar way laying Lord Namperumal and trying to steal his jewels was enacted on the eighth day of the Irapathu Utsavam at the Srirangam Ranganatha temple.

The last of the Azhvaars- Thirumangai Azhwar – made a significant contribution, visiting and singing praise of Lord Vishnu in over 85 temples (Divya Desams). While all other Azhvaars got things done by showing love and devotion to the Lord, Thirumangai Azhvaar alone was different.

The only Azhwar with a spear in his hand, he was forceful, even threatening in his interactions with the Lord, who sometimes had to come down a step to please Thirumangai and to get the Azhwar to sing praise of him- a couple of cases in point being Thiru Indhalur and Thiru Ninravur Divya Desams.

Born in Thiru Kuraiyulur, 2 km from the Thiruvali-Thirunagari Divya Desam near Sirkazhi, Thirumangai Mannan (King), who belonged to the Kallar Community, fell in love with the beautiful Kumudavalli of Annan Koil. She was keen to get him initiated into Vaishnavism and devoted to Lord Vishnu. To lead him into this path, she laid down 'wedding' conditions, one of which was to feed 1008 Vaishnavites every day. The story goes that Thirumangai Mannan, in this attempt, lost a lot of his wealth. To fulfil the conditions, he turned a thief and resorted to 'stealing'.

One night, Thirumangai saw a newly married couple, decked with jewelry, coming his way. It was Lord Ranganatha of Thirunagari taking along with him Amruthavalli Thayar of Thiruvali. In that darkness, in Vedarajapuram (the village between Thiruvali and Thirunagari), Thirumangai way laid the disguised Lord Ranganatha and threatened him by lashing out his spear. With all his might, he also tried to bite and remove the Perumal's ring.

Thirumangai Mannan during Vedupari picked up the jewelry and packed it into a sack, Thirumangai found the bag far too heavy. Despite repeated attempts, he could not lift the bag making him wonder if the person in front of him had a magic mantra. It was then that the disguised Lord Ranganatha initiated the 'Astachara Mandiram' by whispering into the ears of Thirumangai and displayed his true form and appeared before Thirumangai in a Kalyana

Kolam along with Amruthavalli Thayar. It was after this initiation that Thirumangai Mannan became Thirumangai Azhvaar.

Thirumangai Azhwar wanted the Margazhi Festival to be a Tamil Divya Prabhandham festival as against just the Vedic recital that existed before his time. The 10 day 'Irapathu' Utsavam called 'Thiruvoimozhi Thirunaal' was specially created for the Lord to listen to the beautiful Tamil composition of Namazhvaar.

At the Ranganatha temple in Srirangam, the story of 'Vedupari' is enacted every year as part of the eighth day celebrations of the Irapathu festival. This day is dedicated to Thirumangai in recognition of his contribution to the Nalayira Divya Prabhandam. Lord Namperumal had an early evening out on the Vedu Pari day coming out of the Santhana Mandapam at 4:30pm. Atop a Golden Horse Vahanam, the Pearl Pandyan Kondai adorned Namperumal was seen with a sword, javelin and arrows – his left hand holding the horse.

A speciality seen on this Vedupari evening was the performance of Kona Vaiyali inside the temple in the Manal Veli (Sand Bank) on the Eastern side of the temple. On other occasions, Kona Vaiyali is seen outside the temple during street processions.

Two fast up and down 'straight runs' of about 100meters was followed by a 20meter dash sideways, a circling of Lord Namperumal and another run sideways. This was repeated thrice. At the end of this acrobatic display, Namperumal seemed to be smiling and showering his blessings on the devotees who had gathered in several hundreds.

Having just witnessed the Kona Vaiyali and appreciated with a loud round of applause, the devotees were taken aback by a sudden commotion on the Northern side as they watched several young lads running onto the Manal Veli with long sticks.

It was the people from the 'Kallar' community, who currently reside on the banks of the Melur Road Theppakulam, who had come there to enact the Vedupari event – that of way

laying Lord Namperumal at the Manal Veli and trying to take away his possessions. At the end of this enactment, every member of the Kallar community was accorded special honours and darshan of Lord Namperumal.

Thirumangai, who earlier in the evening walked in as the king (Mannan) with a bow and arrow in hand, was seen in a completely different form at the end of the Vedupari, dressed as Azhwar, who had just received the initiation of the Ashtachar Mandhiram. Following the enactment of Vedupari, the entire list of jewels of Lord Namperumal was read out to confirm that all the jewels of the Lord were intact. It is an opportunity for the devotees to listen in to the different kinds of jewels worn by the Lord. This is the only day in the year when the list of jewels is read out.