


Koorathazhwan

Name	Koorathazhwan	
DOB	1009 A.D, Thai Masa	
Star	Hastam	
Village	'Kooram' near Kancheepuram	
Clan	Haritha	

Koorathazhwan was born as Kuresan in a small village 'Kooram' near Kancheepuram, in the year of 1009 A.D. He, belonged to the clan of 'Haritha', were popular landlords during those days. Koorathazhwan was the ruler of the kingdom of Kooram. On a nocturnal inspection, he heard cries from a house. As a girl had horoscological indication of instant death to her spouse on marriage, the family was thinking of permitting her to take suicidal action. Melting at this human sorrow, he summoned the parents of the girl to his court and offered himself for marrying her so-called daughter. As this would endanger the life of the Ruler, they hesitated. But Koorathazhwan comforted them by saying that nothing untoward would happen as he would not lead a conjugal life in the manner of the worldly men and that his marriage would end their sorrow as even as provide him with a partner in life for dharmanustana. As he wished, Andal and Koorathazhwan became man and wife- a divine couple with nothing of the earthly yearnings in them but as living exemplars of the sastric injunctions. Andal was equally, if not more, bestowed with jnana, vairagya and atma-gunas as, it used to be said that, whenever a doubt

arose in Koorathazhwan' s mind, she gave him the necessary light and clarification!

Kuresan was heavily influenced by the teachings of **Swami Ramanuja**, who was staying in Kanchipuram at that time. Kuresan quickly approached **Swami Ramanuja** and became his disciple. A bond was established between them and under the effective guidance of **Swami Ramanuja**, Kuresan was initiated into rigorous study of Vedic scriptures and other holy works. Their friendship came to a temporary end when Swami Ramanuja moved to Srirangam.

The extent of Koorathazhwan' s wealth was fabulous. He used his wealth for dharma-anusthana, sadhu-seva, and on myriad philanthropic channels. His palace bells resounded to several miles.

Lord Devaraja, the presiding deity of Kancheepuram, in his inimitable way wanted that Koorathazhwan should not be lost to the world by merely being a ruler of a small kingdom. Normally, the closing bells of Koorathazhwan used to chime only after night's Nityaradhana in the Varada-Raja temple. One day, owing to a festive delay, even before the close of the nitya-aradhana, he heard the resounding of the bells coming from the place of Koorathazhwan. The omniscient Lord VaradaRaja asked Kanchipurna as to where from those chimes. To this, the pious Kanchi-purna spoke "Lord, this not the door-bell sound of any temple, but the one coming from the palace of Koorathazhwan. " To this, the Lord exclaimed, "Oh! Is he so wealthy, as to dazzle even Us!". This conversation reached the ears of Koorathazhwan.

On hearing this news, rather than feeling happy, Kuresan was extremely saddened, as he thought that it was a sin on his part to disturb the Lord and his Consort at the night time, by 'renouncing' his charity activities. He now knew the thick screen of false wealth separating him from

Bhagavan, Bhagavat Kainkarya and Bhagavata Kainkarya. He yearned for the grace of Acharya.

This incident created a turning point in his life. He and his wife moved to Srirangam, where Ramanuja was staying. On reaching Srirangam, the couple were given a warm welcome and Ramanuja was very happy to have his old friend again. Kuresan became a disciple of Ramanuja and assisted him in all his works such as spiritual study, management of the temple, philosophical compositions and many others. Soon Koorathazhwan became the hand and eye of **Swami Ramanuja**.

Acceptance of Thiruvarangathu Amudhanar into the fold

In those days Tiruvarangathu Amruthanar was the chief of those employed in Sri Rangam temple. One day he came to Swami Ramanujar and requested him to order a holy man to educate him in sacred ways as he was immersed in sin. He sent word to Koorathazhwan and introduced him to Amruthanar, "He is the chief who looks after the day to day kainkaryam of Sri Ranganatha. Without caring for his failings and weaknesses bring him into our fold". Koorathazhwan closely moved with Amruthanar for six months and made him fit and took him to Sri Ramanuja. Sri Ramanuja made Amruthanar a disciple of Koorathazhwan. Amruthanar himself admits in a famous stanza (Ramanuja Nootranthathi) that having sought the holy feet of Koorathazhwan he was able to overcome three-fold sins.

Koorathazhwan taking food in Amruthanar's house on the eleventh day ceremony.

While Amruthanar was spending his time with Azhwan studying the holy books and so on, his mother passed away and the tenth day ceremony went off. Then Amruthanar requested Sri Ramanuja to ask somebody to be the

guest on the eleventh day ceremony. Sri Ramanuja asked Azhwan to accept. Without showing any disrespect to his Acharya, Azhwan accepted. Amruthanar was simply overtaken and fed Azhwan in the ceremony with all respect and humility. Since he felt what all he had was his Acharya's, he offered him plenty of money and requested him to accept it. Though Azhwan accepted them, he never cared for them but simply threw them away in the street; after taking bath in the Cauvery and dressing up properly he went and prostrated before Sri Ramanuja who asked where the gifts are given by Amruthanar. Azhwan replied that since the gifts were the source of sins, they had been discarded. Sri Ramanuja wondered if there could not be such an enlightened person.

The reason for sending Koorathazhwan to Amruthanar's house for the eleventh day ceremony and feeding

This is a trick which Sri Ramanuja played to gain the overall control of Sri Rangam Temple from Amruthanar which was under the control of Amruthanar. At the end of the ceremony, the swami who has been fed must say that he is satisfied. So, Sri Ramanuja has asked Azhwan not to express satisfaction unless the temple keys were handed over. Azhwan did so and got the keys.

Koorathazhwan getting the doubts cleared by Thirukkoshtiyur Nambi

In the great forum presided over by Sri Ramanuja, where great religious texts of both Sanskrit and Tamil were discussed it was pointed out that the Atma (Chetanam) is qualified for perennial happiness and he is the vassal of the Lord. Then the question arose what the salient proof was. Though Sri Ramanuja was omniscient, he wanted the answer to be provided by his Acharya. So, he asked Azhwan to go to Thirukkoshtiyur and seek the answer from the Nambigal there. Azhwan went there and waited for six months and as no answer was forthcoming, he prepared to return to

Sri Ramanuja. Then Nambigal quoted Nammalwar on answer namely, "Mayarvara...". Being pleased Azhwan took leave of Nambigal.

The reference quoted by Nambigal is the second song in the eighth decade of Thiruvoimozhi namely 'Kangal Sivanthu': 'Kangal Sivanthu' and 'Adiyen Ullan' both reflect the existence and glory of God. Azhwar out to have said that Paramathma is in the Athma or in me. Since he said 'Adiyenullan' it shows how substantiate is the Athma to God and his being the 'sesham' is more important than jnana.

Chola King

Later during Chola Kings reign, there was arguments going on between who is superior of all, Shiva or Vishnu. The King sent his courtiers to Ramanuja's mutt to bring him to his court. Knowing about the danger that Ramanuja might undergo, Azhwan decided to go to the king's courtiers in disguise wearing Kashayam cloth and carried tridandam. Along with Azhwan, Peria Nambi also went to the court.

The King instructed a written declaration which should read "Nothing higher than Shiva exists" and commanded them both to affix their signatures to it without protest.

Kuresan refused. He launched into a long and magnificent recital of authoritative texts and sources from the Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis and Puranas that proved that Narayana was the Supreme Principle, and none was higher than Vishnu and hence he was the only object fit for worship and contemplation.

The Chola King was incensed. Thrusting a writing-quill into Kuresan's hands he commanded Kuresan again to forthwith sign the declaration swearing allegiance to Shiva. "If you refuse, we shall have your eyes pulled out here and now!".

On hearing this Kuresan flew into a greater rage. He grabbed the quill from the King's hands and said, "But let me save you from the trouble, I shall pluck out my eyes by my own hand! These eyes that have set sights on a sinner such as thee have no further use for me!". So, saying Kuresan plunged the sharp writing-quill into his own eyes, and extracting ball from socket threw his eyes on the floor at the King's feet. The sudden and violent act of martyrdom of Kuresan struck terror into the hearts of all assembled there!

The cruel King remained unfazed! He turned next to Mahapurna and commanded him to sign the declaration of apostasy. The elderly Sire too flatly refused, upon which the vengeful King ordered his courtiers to overpower Mahapurna and gouge out the old 'AchAryA's' eyes too.

He underwent all the humiliations in the court of the Chola king. Then he went to the temple of Sri Ranganatha and standing near the Bali Peetam exhorted to the Lord why he should not accept him and take him to the celestial Abode as he did in the case of Peria Nambigal. Then he tried to enter the Sanctum Sanctorum when the servants of the Chola king blocked the passage saying none connected with Sri Ramanuja could enter. Some good people there said Azhwan was not like others and he was a holy man with great soul force and so he might be admitted. Azhwan bemoaned that where as the soul force of other made them acceptance to Sri Ramanuja in his case his soul force had only helped that connection. He said he cared only for the sacred feet of the Acharya and his blessing, that he never cared even Sri Ranganatha. Those who pleaded for Azhwan entry in to the Temple on the merit of his soul force made small of his relations with Sri Ramanuja nevertheless he did not enter. At the very moment he left Srirangam desiring to live at Thirumaliruncholai. He leaves srIrangam to go to thirumAlirunchOlai (after emperumAnAr leaves to thirunArAyaNapuram/mElkOte) where he stays for 12 years.

On his way, in order to forget the pains at heart he remembered of the divine qualities of the Lord and wrote two stotras, Sri Vaikunta Stavam and Athimanushya Stavam. Sri Vaikunta Stavam comprises of a hundred slokas and this is the first of the five sthavas. In the Athimanushya Stavam Azhwan exalts the divine qualities of the Lord enjoying the beauty of the Avatars. He sings sundhara bAhu sthavam (one of pancha sthavam sung by him) to kaLLazhagar (thirumAlirunchOlai emperumAn).

Return to Sri Rangam

Having heard that the Chola king had died of a cruel disease, taking leave of Azhagar, Azhwan returned to Sri Rangam.

Varadharaja Stavam and get his eyes back

Under the instructions of emperumAnAr, he sings varadharAja sthavam to dhEva perumAL, and in the end asks for mOksham to all his sambhandhis - especially nAlurAn (who was one of the main causes for him losing his eyes). Before he could conclude with his request, Sri Ramanuja went around the temple and Sri Varadaraja, happy at the Sthava, asked Azhwan to present his request. Instead of asking for the return of the eyes Azhwan preyed that whatever gifts he was offered must be given to 'Naluran' also. Why this? This Naluran was instrumental for the loss of Azhwan's eyes and the death of Peria Nambi in Cholan's court and for Sri Ramanuja's exile from the land. Such a great sinner Naluran was. But Azhwan wanted that Naluran, a Vaishnavite should not go to hell. Showing mercy even to the worst enemy is the greatest quality of Azhwan and infact very rare to come across.

Koorathazhwan takes to interpret the puranas

Koorathazhwan steeped in Bakthi illustrating that a day when he could not worship the Lord with flowers and other things was a fasting day and whatever he does, eat or drink and so on they are all nothing but the Lord . He continued to be deeply immersed in studying the Divya Prabandas and he skipped his food. When Lord Ranganatha was offered food that night accompanied by the ringing of the temple bell, Andal, wife of Azhwan thought when her lord was pining Ranganatha was enjoying. Ranganatha who heard this ordered the temple secretary Uthama Nambi through the Archaka to take the sweet food (Akkara adisil) to Azhwan with all temple honours. Azhwan was highly elated, took some of the food sent, and sent Uthama Nambi back. He praised the love (karunai) of the Lord, partook of the prasadam with his food. As a result, his wife conceived and gave birth to son's Sri Parasara Bhattar and Sri Vedavyasa Bhattar.

Koorathazhwan becomes the preceptor of Bhattar

By God's grace Azhwan had two sons born to him. Sri Ramanuja was very happy at the news he went to Azhwan's house on the eleventh day after the birth of these children. He ordered Embar to bring the children before him. Embar, accordingly brought the children to Sri Ramanuja and to ward of evil eyes, he recited the 'Dwaya' Mantra as talisman. Sri Ramanuja was overwhelmed with joy at the sight of these divine children and exclaimed; "Embar, what did you do to them that they smell of 'Dwaya'?" Embar narrated what he did. Since he (Embar) did what is good for the salvation of those children, Sri Ramanuja ordered Embar to be the spiritual father to them. Hence the lineage of Acharyas continue from Sri Ramanuja, Embar, Bhattar, Nanjeer and so on. Azhwan also got an entry in this lineage.

The word given by Azhwan to Pillaipillaiazhwan

Among the many disciples of Azhwan 'Pillaipillai Azhwan' was one. He came from an illustrious family and so was somewhat arrogant and was offending the good vaishnavas. Knowing that this would pull him down into the abyss to Hell and destroy all his observing Acharas, Azhwan wanted to put an end to this trend. One holy day Azhwan asked what offering he was going to make on such a day as others were offering land, gold, food, clothes and so on and wanted the gift to be made to him. Pillaipillai Azhwan replied very politely that what all he possessed, belonged to Azhwan. Azhwan was not satisfied and asked him to make a vow that he would never offend Sri Vaishnavas in any manner. Pillaipillai did so without demur. But it so happened that one day he offended a Vaishnava in his thoughts. Fearing something terrible would happen; he avoided meeting Azhwan and was hiding in his own house. Azhwan noticed his absence and went to his house to enquire, when Pillai, all in tears, said he found it impossible to be purely innocent. Azhwan appreciated the penitence on the part of Pillaipillai and said that Bhagavan will pardon the sins committed by the mind. People would not harm others physically because of the fear of the laws of the land. Azhwan pardoned him for all the sins committed by the mind and body, advised him to be careful in his speeches.

One day Azhwan was teaching his sons 'Thiruvoimozhi' and when he came to the line, "En perukannalathu nporul erila, vann pukazh naranam, thein kazhal serai". This explains the meaning 'Thirumantram' and it must be learnt through an Acharya. So Azhwan stopped and asked his sons to go to their Acharya and to get to know the meaning. They too started going to Embar when Azwan remembered the line. 'Minnin nilaiyila mannuyur akkaikal ' and realizing the fluctuating nature of life called his children back and asked them to remember the line 'En Perukkannalathu' as the meaning of Thirumanthram. Because one does not know the nature life and

hence the meaning must be learnt as early as possible. This way Azhwan became the Acharya to his sons.

The Lord Himself looked after the household affairs of Azhwan

Bhattar and Rama Pillai, sons of Azhwan studied all the Vedas and the six branches well and became very proficient and reached the age of marriage. Then, their mother Andal asked Azhwan if they should not be married. Sri Ramanuja suggested that if there were suitable girls in the family of Peria Nambigal, they could be thought of. When Azhwan approached them, though they agreed at first, they negatived and said they were not interested in new alliance.

After sometime, Andal again reminded Azhwan about the marriage of their sons. When Azhwan stood before Sri Ranganathan, He asked him if he had anything to say. Azhwan said that it was being proposed to get his sons to be married. Then the Lord said that He would look after the affair and see it was settled well. There He appeared in dream to the relative of PeriaNambigal and ordered them to get in to alliance with Azhwan's family Tmarriage of Bhattar and Sri Ramapillai went off and well.

During one such a day in Emberumanar's Sannadhi there was a discourse on Thiruvoimozhi, when the Thiruvoimozhi couplet "Soozhvisum Panimugil(Tv. 10-9-1)" was explained and when he touched upon "Mudiyudai Vanavar Murai Murai Ethir kolla", it conveyed the meaning that those who attained the feet of Lord earlier will welcome those who attain His feet. When Azhwan heard this he began to think that if he were to attain the feet of Lord after Sri Ramanuja, he will be welcomed by Sri Ramanuja, which he considered as a great 'apachara' (sin). He, therefore, desired that he should preceed Sri Ramanuja in attaining the Lord's Feet. He did not desire to make a request to the Lord before Emberumanar. He

went quietly near the Lord. Lord on seeing Azhwan asked him what brought him there. Azhwan rendered a couplet to the Lord, which was very much appreciated.

Azhwan requesting Nitya Vibudhi from Sriranganathar

The Lord out of great kindness said to Azhwan that he will grant whatever he requested and desired that he request Him about his wish. Azhwan said that the Lord had given everything for him but wanted one request to be fulfilled. The Lord compelled him to make known his request. Azhwan said that he should be granted a wish to leave this dirty body and be in Nitya Vibudhi(i.e. , salvation) Lord on hearing the request of Azhwan was very sad that He had to be away from Azhwan. The Lord granted the wish of Azhwan with all divine honours like Parivattam, offering and garland.

Ramanuja felt elated that he would by virtue of relations with Azhwan would also get the place in Nityavibudhi. Out of extreme joy, he appeared to have thrown up his ochre robes.

He gathered all his disciples and went to Azhwan and asked him why he decided to kill him by slow torture of separation from him. Azhwan explained the reason for requesting Lord to make him in Nityavibudhi before Sri Ramanuja. Emberumanar listened to the view of Azhwan and exclaimed "Na Sastram Naivacha Karma:'

He hugged Azhwan and amidst tears pleaded that how he could live without him and why he did not think of taking him along with him. He did not want to be an obstacle in his path. He, thereafter, administered the Dwaya manthra in his ear. The people present there asked Ramanuja "why at this stage carrying out the upadhesa of Dwayamanthra again"? Sri Ramanuja said that if camphor is not in Rajakumara's throat his tongue is

likely to go dry similarly for Azhwan there will be nothing pleasing than to hear Dwayam. So saying he affectionately patted the back of Azhwan and with respect he gave his acceptance to Azhwan and sent him.

Azhwan's journey to Thirunadu

Having got the permission of Emberumanar Azhwan felt like an uprooted tree at the feet of Emberumanar. He lifted Azhwar by both his hands. With his head on Pillai azhwaan's lap, lotus feet on Andal's lap (Azhwan's wife) and hand on Parasara Bhattar's lap, thinking about **Swami Ramanuja's** lotus feet, azhwaan attained Sri Vaikuntam.

Sri Vaikuntam which is believed to be by the year 1132

Conclusion

Ramanuja had many disciples chief among them was Koorathazhwan. His glory transcended the spoken word according to the poet of Praoanna Gayatri (Ramanuja Nootrandadi) .

All Acharyas were of one voice in declaring that Koorathazhwan even excelled the most excellent of all Acharyas - RAMANUJA- in qualities of head and heart.

In total he sings pancha sthavams - srI vaikuntha sthavam, athimAnusha sthavam, sundhara bAhu sthavam, varadaraja sthavam and srI sthavam - all of them contains the juice of vedantha meanings.