

History of Tamil Literatures for the Dissemination of Alvar Pasurams

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Abstract

Although Alvar Pasurams are original songs that have been chanted before the idols of the Lord Vishnu throughout Tamilnadu, there are at present many commentaries and allied writings relating to the Pasurams for promoting the songs in *Nalayira Divya Prabandam*. The historical datelines of the origin of such Vaishnava books have not been put in order so far. So, this paper attempts to trace the history of Tamil literatures that had appeared for the dissemination of Alvar Pasurams in South India.

Key Words: Tamil literatures, Alvar Pasurams, Vaisnava books, history.

Introduction

The Holy text of *Vaishnavas*, which is an anthology of 4000 *Pasurams* written by the twelve *Alvars* between the 675 AD and 835 AD, is popularly known as the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*. During the period of *Alvars*, in fact, the *Pasurams* were sung with devotion by the disciples of the *Alvars* who were habituated in and around the native place of respective *Alvars* and to some extent the *Pasurams* might have reached the hands of some *Vaishnava* scholars.¹ These pasurams were collected and made into a single manuscript in palm-leaf script by Nathamuni of *Kattumannar koil*, another name of *Vira Narayanapuram*.² As a scion of good Brahmin family, *Nathamuni* (823-918AD)³ was well known for his excellence in Sanskrit and Tamil literatures; he was in the Srirangam shrine and listened to Ramayana when Kambar had inaugurated opening ceremony for his Ramayana manuscript in the year 885 AD.⁴ Since there was a quarrel with the King *Kulothunga Chola*, Kambar had awaited to inaugurate his Ramayana in the royal court, but he couldn't have such opportunity; the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* might have inaugurated before the Ramayana and it could have motivated Kambar to inaugurate his poetry before the lord of Srirangam when the quarrels arose. In fact, there had hardly been any text in Tamil for *Vaishnavism* other than Alvar's *Pasurams* in the middle of 9th century, which might have motivated him to gather the Alvar's *Pasurams*. Therefore, it would have in all probability been taken in palm leaf transcript during 850-885 AD for the preservation as well as promotion of *Vaishnavism*. However, Tamil researchers are of the opinion that before Nathamuni had gathered the 4000 *Pasurams* many songs written by the *Alvars* might have faded away as they didn't get positive reception.

Tamil Literatures about Nalayira Divya Prabandham

The Holy Scripture *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* was for the first time printed and published as sacred text by *Koormachariyar* of Thiruputkuzhi in 1856 when there was no other printed version of the text available to the people; that text included all the *Pasurams* of *Alvars* except *Periya Tirumoli*, and was once again published in 1869.⁵ The first complete volume of this text was published, according to the pattern of recital, by Appavu Mudaliyar of *Mudichoor* near Thambaram in the year 1865; that text got much appreciation among the people as he included the lyrics of the songs.⁶ Following this, Arangachariyar of Triplicane published it in the year 1873, K. V. Thirukatchinambi Dasar published it in 1908, Krishnamachary of Sedaloor had printed and issued the text in 1917, T. C. Parthasarathi Aiyangar of Chennai had published it in 1939, and Madhava Dasan of Mylapore had brought out the text in 1943.⁷ Annankarachariyar of Kanchi had published *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* in 1927 and thereafter he had translated that text in Telugu and Hindi and published it 1942;⁸ with his painstaking effort this text reached throughout India to promote the *Bhakti* movement of *Alvars*. B. Rathina Nayakar has published it in his B. Rathina Nayakar & Sons publication in 1959, 1961, 1963, 1968, 1970, 1973 and 1982.⁹ In 1973, the Tamil scholar K. Venkatasami has published the original text, which was printed and issued to public by *Thiruvendakathan Tirumantram* of Chennai; its subsequent reprints appeared in 1976, 1980, 1981 and

1986.¹⁰ Srivathsan, on behalf of Little Flower & Co, published this text in 1984, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2009.¹¹ S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar of Puthoor *Agraharam* in Trichy had published this text in 1984 and 1989. Further, in 2011, R. V. Kamalakannan, on behalf of Varthamanan Pathipakam, written simple annotations to all the pasurams of Alvars and published them along with the original text.¹² A simple survey taken from the people around the *Divya Desams* conveys that many families of *Aiyangars* (64 / 100), *Agamudaiyans* (32 / 100), *Baliya* (58/ 100), *Nayakas* (34/ 100), *Chetti* (26/ 100), *Nadars* (9 / 100), *Vellalas* (21 / 100), *Kallan* (11/ 100), *Ambalakarans* (28/ 100), *Naidus* (11/ 100), *Mudaliars* (26/100), *Devangas* (35/100), *Idaiyans* (25/100), *Elavans* (17/100), *Kamamlas* (13/100), *Maravans* (9/100), *Pallans* (1/100), *Nairs* (2/100), *Oddes* (1/100), *Thiyan* (1/ 100), *Upparas* (3/100), *Vannans* (2/100) and *Navithans* (1/100) had own copies of *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* in their houses,¹³ which testifies to the fact that this sacred text is even now appreciated by people of different castes in Tamil Nadu. The other castes of people have hardly own the copies of this sacred text because most of them are *Saivites* and some do not have the habit of reading the pasurams; Muslim or Christian converts in no way admit the recitation of the Alvar *pasurams*.

In 1951, R. Kesava Aiyangar has published the first 1000 hymns of the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*.¹⁴ Following this, S. Vaiyapuri Pillai edited and published the first 1000 hymns in 1955 and then other hymns were released in 1956.¹⁵ Detailed comments to Nammalvar's *Tiruvoymoli* was given by *Thirukurigai Pillai, Nanjeeyar, Periyavacchan Pillai, Vadakutheruveethi Pillai, Mannavala Muni, C. Krishnamacharyar* and *V. K. Ramanujadasan*.¹⁶ Kokkalai Jerajan had written wonderful commentaries to the Thirumangai Alvar's *Periya Tirumoli* in seven volumes in 2003, *Periyalvar Tirumoli* in 1998, *Nacchiyar Tirumoli* in 1999, *Tiruppavai* in 2000, *Perumal Tirumoli* in 2000, *Thiruchandavirutham* in 2001, *Thirumalai* in 2001, *Thiruppallieluchi* in 2001, *Thirukkurunthandakam* in 2002, *Thiruneduthandakam* in 2002, *Periya Thirumadal* and *Siriya Thirumadal* in 2004, all which are brought to the world by Maharanni Pathipakam, Chennai.¹⁷ These are in fact complete works of the 4000 hymns of Alvars.

In addition to the above said complete books of Nalayiram Divya Prabandham, there are many books that include selective works of Alvars for dissemination of the pasurams. The books of this kind to motivate the people to recite Alvars' *pasurams* encompass C. R. Srinivasa Aiyangar's "*Alvargal Sarithiram*" (1922), P. Sree's "*Periyalvar*" (1947), K.R. Govindaraja Mudaliyar's "*Alvargal Varalaaru*" (1948), P. R. Purushotham Naidu's "*Eettin Thamilakkam*" (1951-1981), Sri Devanatha Achariyar's "*Tiruvaymoli Vasagamalai*" (1952), S. Muthurathina Muthliyar's "*Nammalvar Thiruthaalaattu*" (1955), Pinpazhgiya Jeer's "*Araaiyampadi Guru Paramparai*" (1955), P. Sree Acharya's "*Moovar Ettiya Thiruvizhakku*" (1956), M. Ramakrishnapillai's "*Tamilum Vaishnavamum*" (1956) and "*Paniru Alvargal*" (1995), P. Sree's "*Andal*" (1958), P. Sree Acharya's "*Bhagavanai Vazhartha Bhakthrgal*" (1958), Sami Sidhambaranar's "*Alvargal Arulmoli*" (1963), G. Ethiraju Naidu's "*Vaishnava Poongaa*" (1963), M. Ramakrishnapillai's "*Pirkaala Vaishnavam*" (1963), Annanankarachariyar's "*Sri Ramanujan*" (1969-1973), Varadacharya's "*Alvars of South India*" (1970), V.M. Gopalakrishna Aiyangar's "*Alvargal Charithram*" (1976), C. Nammalvar's "*Thirumangai Alvar*" (1978), S. Ramakrishnan's "*Samaya Vaalvil Vadakkum Terkkum*" (1979), M. Raghava Aiyangar's "*Alvargal Kalanilai*" (1981), M. Narayana Vellupillai's "*Alvargal Vaibavam*" (1982) and "*Prabandha Katchigal*" (1983), P. Sree's "*Andalum Meeravum*" (1982), Arunachala Kaundar's "*Tamil Pannpadiyal*" (1982), and "*Divyaprapandha Saram*" (1987), T. Janasundaram's "*Sanga Ilkiyathil Thirumal Neri*" (1984), T. S. Rajagopalan's "*Nacchiyar Tirumoli*" (1985), Vettiselvan's "*Tiruppavai*" (1985), Vadivazhagiyanambi Dasar's "*Alvargal Vaibavam*" (1987), S. Kulasekaran's "*Vaishnavathil Alvargalin Kalanilai*" (1988), K. A. Mannavalan's "*Andal*" (1990), Narayana Veluppillai's "*Alvargalum Prabanthangalum*" (1991), Indra Parthasarathi's "*Tamil Ilakiyantalil Vaishnavam*" (1992), A. Govindacharya's "*The holy Lives of Alvars or Dravida Saints*" (1992), V. Varadachari's "*Nammalvar*" (1994), M.P. Seenivasan's "*Vaishnava Ilakkiya Vagaigal – Divya Prabandha Aaivu*" (1994), T. Padmavathiammal's "*Periyalvar Pillaittamil*" (1994), Thirumalchariyar's "*Kadalmallai Karumpu*" (1996), Srinivasa Aiyangar's "*Periyavaachan Pillai*" (1998), N. Varadarajulu Naidu's "*Andal Pillaittamil*" (1998), Srinivasan's "*Periyalvar*" (1999), Pillai Lokaya Jeer's "*Ramanujar Divya Sarithai*" (2000), M. P. Seenivasan's "*Orunaal Oru Pasuram*" (2003), M. P. Seenivasan's "*Thirumangai Alvar Paadalgal*" (2003), T. Rama's "*Alvargalin Vazhipattu Marapu*" (2004), M.S. Rajajee's "*Mukundamala*" (2004), Kalayan Sampathu's "*Alvar Pasurangalil Uvamaigal*" (2006), M. P. Seenivasan's "*Muthalalvargal*" (2007), Prema Nadhakumar's "*Thirumazhisai Alvar*" (2009), S. S.

Mathrubootheswaran's "*108 Vaisnava Thiruthal Magimai*"(2011) and R. V. Kamala Kannan's "*Astaprabandham*" (2011). These books, though fail to give facets of all *pasurams* of individual *Prabandham*, highlight the essentiality of the pasurams by revealing the characteristics of selected pasurams and the twelve Alvars who were the masters in promoting the *Vaishnava Bhakti* among the people. In addition to this, they trigger off the people to accept the pasurams of *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* for the veneration of the lord Narayanan in temples and houses. Commentaries raised for the Pasurams facilitate the *Vaishnavites* and others to understand what do the pasurams really mean. These literatures on Alvars' *Pasurams* seemed to be a great boon not only in the linguistics point of view but also for the preservation and promotion of Alvar *pasurams* in the middle of the people.

Conclusion

There are about 90 Tamil books revealing different aspects of Alvar pasurams that were originally written by the twelve Alvars during the 675 - 835 AD and they have been published in the form of printed books since 1856. The first book of Alvar pasurams was *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* published by *Koormachariyar* of Thiruputkuzhi in 1856 while the last book published on this subject was published by Kamala Kannan in 2011. New Tamil books on Alvar pasurams has not been noted thereafter due to dissemination of their songs through internets and mobile phones for devotees.

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