

Sri:
Srimathe Ramanujaya Nama:

Seerondru Thaniyan

There is a thaniyan dedicated to Vedanta Desikan:

slronRu thUppul thiruvEngkaDamuDaiyAn
pAronRach chonna pazhamozhiyuL - OronRu
thAnE amaiyAdhO thAraNiyil vAzhvArkku
vAnERap pOmaLavum vAzhvu

A beautiful and very appropriate thaniyan for Swami. The authorship and origin of this thaniyan however, has been mired in controversy.

Moovayirappadi Guru Parampara Prabhavam states that this thaniyan was authored in praise of Vedanta Desikan by Pillai Lokacharyar. And adds that he did so after listening to rahasya arthams from Desikan.

Let us examine this claim and see if it has any validity based on known facts.

To do that, first we have to understand what thaniyans are about, and who typically authors them.

A thaniyan is a verse of praise. On that basis, no one can object to such a verse on Desikan being authored by any person. He was a remarkable acharya, scholar, poet, and philosopher, and verses in his praise are common.

However, in our sampradhAyam, a thaniyan is not any general verse of praise.

It is characterized by:

1. It being dedicated to an Azhvar or Acharya, most commonly by a direct disciple or one who accepts themselves as a disciple.
2. The thaniyan can be given during the lifetime of the acharya or at a later time.
3. In some rare cases, a thaniyan is dedicated to a disciple, by that disciple's acharya himself.

So, if this thaniyan were to have been authored by Pillai Lokacharyar, we have to examine the relationship between him and Vedanta Desikan.

This is a part of history that is not clear. However, let us go by the popular version - that the two indeed lived together in Srirangam at the same time, prior to the mughal invasion of the temple city.

The question then becomes: Did Pillai Lokacharyar and Vedanta Desikan have an acharya-sishya relationship; that is, was Desikan a sishya to Pillai Lokacharyar, or was he an acharya to him?

The answer is that there is no evidence to make such a claim.

If anything, there is evidence in fact that the two had disagreements with each other, at least early on, in matters of philosophy and interpretations. Desikan, in fact, has written that there may be philosophical disagreements between the Lord's devotees but that it does not diminish the respect they

have for each other. It is said by many scholars that this statement was specifically targeted toward the disagreements he had with Pillai Lokacharyar in the beginning.

So, we can clearly state that the two did not share this kind of relationship.

Is the acharya-sishya relationship critical for a thainyan? That it is, is clear from the fact that those who do not accept the "srishailEsha dayApAtram" thaniyan to have been authored by Azhagiya Manavalan Himself, do so precisely because of the fact that it leads to the conclusion that Lord Ranganatha took Mamunigal as His acharya.

Next, let us examine whether Pillai Lokacharyar could have written the thaniyan not as a salute to his disciple or acharya, but as a general praise.

To answer that question, we have to look at the age difference between them.

It is generally accepted that Vedanta Desikan lived from 1268 to 1369 CE. Periya Thirumudi Adaivu states that Pillai Lokacharyar was born in the year 1205 CE. By some accounts, he lived for 108 years in this world, while others state that he lived for 120 years.

Going by this, there is an age difference of about 63 years between them. There are some accounts that claim that Pillai Lokacharyar was closer in age to Desikan. In general, though, we can accept that there was a considerable age difference between the two. We can discard certain modern accounts that place them at almost the same age, as there appears to be no factual reasons behind them.

Considering this, and the accounts that state that Pillai Lokacharyar was the established senior acharya at Srirangam by the time that Desikan arrived there, we can safely state that Pillai Lokacharyar had written many if not all the works of his ashtadasa rahasyams before Desikan arrived there. When we study them both, we see that there is no evidence to show that Pillai Lokacharyar ever accepted the positions of Desikan in the points of disagreement between the two.

Therefore, it is very hard to see why it would be said that 'Lokacharyar wrote this thaniyan after listening to rahasyArthas from Desikan'.

Finally, scholars have indicated that the name 'thUppul' itself was a derivation of the name 'thumbai vanam'. Thumbai vanam was an agrahAram established by Appaiya Deekshithar who came after the times of Pillai Lokacharyar and Desikan. On this basis, it is not possible that Pillai Lokacharyar would have used the word thUppul in a verse he authored.

In conclusion,

1. Pillai Lokacharyar and Vedanta Desikan did not share a acharya-sishya relationship.
2. Pillai Lokacharyar was senior to Vedanta Desikan by nearly 63 years.
3. Pillai Lokacharyar did not accept Vedanta Desikan's philosophy (his earlier philosophy when he was likely living in Srirangam with Pillai Lokacharyar).
4. There is no reason to believe that Pillai Lokacharyar listened to Desikan on rahasyarthas.
5. The name Thuppul itself was likely created at a later time.

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Based on this analysis, it is seen that it is highly unlikely that this thaniyan was authored by Pillai Lokacharyar. We can only reach the conclusion that a misplaced notion and zeal was the cause to introduce the claim that it was authored by him.

This does not take away anything from the beauty and aptness of the thaniyan. It can and should be recited by all without entering into this needless claim and the controversy following it.

adiyEn madhurakavi dAsan
TCA Venkatesan

Notes:

1. Based on Periya Thirumudi Adaivu, Pillai Lokacharyar was born in the year 1205.
2. The year of his leaving this world is not fully clear. It happened during a mughal invasion into Srirangam. But there were more than one such invasions. If we take it that he left Srirangam in the invasion of 1311, then his period is 108 years: 1205-1313 (Pillai Lokacharyar is believed to have attained acharyan thruvadi 2 years after he left Srirangam). Some believe that Namperumal and Pillai Lokacharyar exited Srirangam in 1323, during Uluq Khan's invasion. This would place his time period at 1205-1325 (120 years).
3. The most accepted time period of Vedanta Desikan is 1268-1369.