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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The first edition of this rare treatise on Sixty-three Nayanar Saints from the prolific pen of the Himalayan Sage and Savant, Sri Swami Sivananda, was published by the Divine Life Society of South Africa in 1962. The invaluable services rendered by Sri Swami Ramananda of Sivanandashram, Rishikesh, in the preparation of the manuscript was duly acknowledged.

This precious book has been out of print for a long time. The fourth edition of 1,000 copies is now being published by the Divine Life Society, Malaysia Branch through the courtesy and generosity of two devout devotees: Guru Seva Ratna Sri V. Seenivasagam and Guru Bhakti Ratna Sri T. Saravanamuthu both of whom have had long connections with the Divine Life Society, Malaysia Branch.

The Saivites in Malaysia and the world at large, and the Hindus in general, will heartily welcome this publication as a great boon. Apart from the biographies of the Sixty-three nayanar Saints, this book contains an authoritative article on the Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy, the life of Saint Manicckavasagar, selections from the utterances of Nayanar saints, and articles on Glory of Lord Siva, and Puja and Ishta Devata, all by Sri Swami Sivananda, and an evaluation of the Nayanars' Message for us by Sri Swami Venkatesananda.

We express our indebtedness to the Divine Life Society Headquarters for granting permission to publish this edition in Malaysia.

- THE PUBLISHERS

THE SAIVA SIDDHANTA PHILOSOPHY

(Sri Swami Sivananda)

Introduction: In the books which treat of Saivism, there is a reference to four schools, viz., the Nakulisa-pasupata, the Saiva, the Pratyabhijna and the Rasesvara.

Saiva Siddhanta is the philosophy of southern Saivism. It owes its origin to no single author. It is midway between Sankara's Adwaita and Ramanuja's Visishtadwaita. Its literature consists chiefly of: (1) the twenty-eight Saivite Agamas, (2) the collection of Saivite hymns known as Tirumurai compiled by Nambi Andar Nambi, (it contains Tirumanthiram of Tirumular; the Thevaram of Appar, Sundarar, and Sambandar, and the Tiruvachagam of Manickavachagar), (3) the collection of the lives of Saivite saints, known as the Periyapuram, (4) Meykandar's Siva-jnanabodham, (5) Arulnandi's Sivajnanasiddhiar, and the works of Umapati. Tirumular's work Tirumanthiram is the foundation upon which the later structure of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy was built.

The central doctrine of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy is that Siva is the Supreme Reality, and that the Jiva or the individual soul is of the same essence as Siva, but not identical. Pati (God), Pasu (soul), and Pasa (the bonds) and the thirty-six Tattvas or principles which constitute the world, are all real.

The Saiva Siddhanta system is the distilled essence of Vedanta. It prevailed in Southern India even before the Christian era. Tirunelvely and Madura are the centres of the Saiva Siddhanta school. Even now, Saivism is a very popular creed in South India. It is a rival school of Vaishnavism.

Characteristics of the Supreme Reality: The Supreme Reality is called Siva. He is infinite consciousness. He is eternal, changeless, formless, independent, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, one without a second, beginningless, causeless, taintless, self-existent, ever free, ever pure, and perfect. He is not limited by time. He is infinite bliss and infinite intelligence. He is free from defects, the all-doer, the all-knower.

Lord Siva is the God of Love. His grace is infinite. His love is infinite. He is the saviour and Guru. He is engaged in freeing the souls from the thralldom of matter. He assumes the form of a Guru out of His intense love for mankind. He wishes that all should know Him and attain the blissful Siva-Padam (the state of Siva). He watches the activities of the individual souls, and helps them in their onward march. He liberates the individual souls from their fetters or bonds.

The Five Activities of the Lord: The five activities of the Lord are: Creation, Preservation, Destruction, Veiling and Grace. These, separately considered, are the activities of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshwara, and Sadasiva.

Siva, Shakti and Maya: Lord Siva pervades the whole world by His Shakti. He works through Shakti. Shakti is the conscious energy of the Lord Siva. She is the very body of Lord Siva. The potter is the first cause for the pot. The stick and the wheel are the instrumental causes. The clay

is the material cause of the pot. Similarly, Lord Siva is the first cause of the world. Shakti is the instrumental cause. Maya is the material cause.

Shakti is not the material cause of the universe, because She is of the nature of consciousness (Chaitanya). Siva is pure consciousness, but matter is pure unconsciousness. Shakti is the intermediate link between the two.

Shakti is the reflex of Siva. It has no independent existence. Siva assumes this form out of His great love for mankind. Siva wishes that all should know Him.

Evolution of the Tattvas from Suddha Maya: The world undergoes evolution for the benefit of the souls. The whole process of creation is for the sake of the salvation of the souls. The world is real and eternal. The world of matter and souls forms the body of the Lord.

The Saiva Siddhanta analyses the universe into 36 Tattvas or principles, as against the 25 of the Sankhya. The 36 Tattvas arise from Maya, the material cause of the world. Suddha Maya is Maya in its primal state. From it arise the five pure principles called Siva Tattva, Shakti Tattva, Sadasiva Tattva, Iswara Tattva, and Suddhavidya Tattva. Siva functions through these five pure principles.

Maya evolves into the subtle principles, and then into the gross. Siva Tattva is the basis of all consciousness and action. It is undifferentiated (Nishkala Suddha Maya). The Shakti of Siva starts her activity. Then Siva becomes the experiencer. Then He is called Sadasiva, known also by the name Sadakhya, Who is not really separate from Siva. The Suddha Maya becomes active. Then Siva, the experiencer, becomes the ruler. He is then Iswara, Who is not really separate from Sadasiva. Suddhavidya is the cause of true knowledge.

The bonds that bind the soul (Anava, Karma, Maya): Souls (Pasu) are by nature infinite, all-pervading, eternal, and all-knowing like Lord Siva (Pati). Yet they think that they are finite, limited and little-knowing, ignorant, and temporary. This is due to the bonds (Pasa), viz., Anava, Karma, and Maya, which are called the three Malas or impurities. Anava is the impurity which makes the all-pervading Jiva think itself to be atomic (Anu). It produces the erroneous notion of finiteness. The second impurity or bond is Karma. The soul acts in certain ways on account of its limitation, and does good and evil actions. Karma brings about the conjunction of the soul with its body. The results of the Karma have to be worked out in the world. There should be worlds and bodies, in order to experience the fruits of actions and acquire knowledge. These are provided by Maya, the third Mala or bond. Maya is the material cause of the world. The soul gets experience and limited knowledge through Maya.

The soul learns, by long experience, that this Samsara is full of pains and is transitory, and that he can attain eternal bliss and immortality only by attaining Sivatva or the nature of Siva or God-realisation. He develops Vairagya (dispassion), and Viveka (discrimination between the Real and the unreal, the Permanent and the impermanent).

Discipline and grace culminate in Jnana. Jnana is the supreme means of salvation or the attainment of the final beatitude. Karma and other means are only subsidiary to it. They are auxiliaries.

The attainment of Sivatva or Siva-nature does not mean complete merging of the soul in Siva. The liberated soul does not lose its individuality. It continues to exist as a soul in God. Sivatva is the realisation of an identity of essence in spite of difference. The soul attains the nature of Siva or God, but it is not itself Siva or God.

Three orders of Jivas: The Siddhantins divide Jivas or Patus into three orders, viz., Vijnanakalas, Pralayakalas and Sakalas. Vijnanakalas have only the Anava Mala (egoism). Maya and Karma have been resolved. Pralayakalas have been freed from Maya alone, in the stage of Pralaya. Sakalas have all the three Malas.

The Malas affect only the Jivas, and not Siva. Those who are freed from the Malas or impurities attain Sivatva or the nature of Siva. They are the Siddhas or perfected beings.

The way to the attainment of Sivatva or God-realisation: You must free yourself from the three bonds, if you want to attain salvation. You must annihilate Maya, which is the root of all sins. You must destroy all Karmas which produce rebirth. You must remove the erroneous notion of a finite self.

The three bonds can be removed only through rigorous Tapas and proper discipline, the help of a Guru, and, above all, the grace of Lord Siva. Charya (observance), Kriya (rites), and Yoga (Yama-Niyama) constitute the discipline. When the aspirant practises in right earnest Charya, Kriya and Yoga he obtains the grace of Lord Siva. Then the Lord instructs the soul, reveals Himself and illumines him. Then the soul realises its nature as Siva.

Guru Puja

It is customary to observe the day on which these saints attained the Lord's Feet, as a holy day. Given below are such days in respect of the Four Great Saivite teachers, with their respective holy days, according to the Tamil Calendar. Pray, fast and study their lives in these days.

Tirunavukkarasar Tiru-Jnanasambandar Manickavachagar Sundaramurthi Swamigal	Chitrai Sadayam Vaikhasi Moolam Ani Makham Adi Swathi
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THE NAYANARS' MESSAGE FOR US

How shall we evaluate this work by a saint on the lives of saints? A wise saying in Sanskrit echoes what we mean by 'Only a Shakespeare can understand Shakespeare.' Gurudev's secondless devotion to God is amply reflected in the inspiring presentation of these great lives, simple, lucid and touching. We could have had none better qualified for it. Gurudev's handling of it adds lustre to the illustrious lives.

There have been many 'intellectuals' even in India who have looked down upon the path of Bhakti (devotion) as something inferior to Jnana (wisdom). Their short-sightedness becomes at once apparent when we study the lives of the great Four Teachers (Appar, Sundarar, Manickavachagar and Sambandar) and realise that these great Jnanis, too, were great Bhaktas who loved to visit the temples and sing the glories of the Lord. Look at the humility of Appar who carried Sambandar's palanquin: this reminds us of Gurudev's own inimitable humility. It is not born of the weakness of the ignorant: but it is the culmination of true knowledge!

How shall we understand the wonderful spirit of renunciation that characterised the lives of many royal Nayanars, if we regard them as weaklings? They had understood the true nature of the world, and wanted only God. Can we not draw a parallel in our own divine Master who, similarly, renounced a royal life of a doctor in Malaya, in exchange for poverty and the begging bowl? Love of the Lord cuts at the very root of our attachment to this world, and snaps all worldly ties, to father, mother, son, wife or relatives. As the stories of the Nayanars illustrate, the devotee is ever ready to renounce *all*, in favour of devotion to Lord Siva. Chandesvara Nayanar, in his complete absorption in His worship, could inflict a mortal blow on his own father: but, that was because he saw not his father, but *an obstacle* to Siva Puja. When Arivattaya Nayanar found, for instance, that his weak body was getting unfit to carry on His worship, he was ready to cut his own throat. If Murkha Nayanar chose to gamble and even resort to violence to carry out his vow, Kannappa Nayanar would pull out his own eyes to serve the Lord! This great truth has been beautifully brought out again and again in these lives—love of God completely removes the devotee's attachment to his own body. Who could even approach Siruthondar's breath-taking devotion to the Lord and His devotees?

Let us also never forget that in the case of all the Nayanars devotion invariably meant expansion of the heart, and, therefore, service and charity.

It is essential that, in our study of these great lives, we take them *as a whole*: the sixty-three blending into one marvellous scripture on devotion. Else, it might lead to perversion. Perversion in spiritual path can be quite disastrous. Gurudev would often narrate, for example, the case of a wicked man who would catch fish in the Ganges, cut it and eat it, quoting (as a devil would) from the Gita: 'Weapon cannot cut the Atma, which is immortal.' The perverse intellect reads in the Gita, a sanction for the use of violence. Stories in which there is seeming use of violence by the Nayanars have to be read with this caution: we have to take them as allegories exhorting us to rout out the inner obstacles to our Sadhana, ruthlessly. The story of Eripatha Nayanar, for instance, should be taken as an exhortation for us to kill lust, anger and greed, the powerful impediments on our spiritual path which, in the twinkling of an eye wreck our worship of the Lord.

If we study the lives as a whole, we will not fail to note that Anaya Nayanar, and Pusalar Nayanar hold before us the ideal Para Bhakta, supreme exemplars of the highest form of devotion.

If we approach these saints with faith and devotion in our hearts, we shall grasp the message they have for us. We shall also understand why they gave such a great place to externals like the sacred ash, Rudraksha, etc. These symbols remind one constantly of God: and, when they are said to remove our sins, they remove our sinful tendencies, too, by constantly reminding us of God, and keeping evil out of our mind.

May we all walk the path of devotion and attain the Lord in this very birth is my humble prayer at the divine feet of our master. That is the only way in which we can repay the debt we owe him for what he has done for us.

Dust of Gurudev's Feet
Venkatesananda

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1. SUNDARAMURTHI NAYANAR

Sundaramurthi Nayanar flourished in the 8th century. He was a great devotee of Lord Siva. He is one of the Tamil Samaya Acharyas (four Tamil religious Teachers).

Sundaramurthi Nayanar sang the glories of Lord Siva at all the sacred places that he visited. These hymns are called Thevaram. They have been collected into a book-form. All devotees sing the Thevaram even today. The hymns sung by Sundarar, Appar or Tirunavakkarasu, and Tirujnana Sambandar are called Thevaram. The hymns of Manickavachagar are called Thiruvachagam.

Sundarar had the Sakhya Bhava or the attitude of a friend towards the Lord. He freely demanded of the Lord whatever he wanted. He did not do so with selfish desire, however. Whatever he asked for was for the sake of those who were dependent on him. He lived only eighteen years.

Sundaramurthi Nayanar was born in Thiru Navalur where the entire atmosphere was full of spiritual vibrations and Saivism was well established. In this place, there lived a pious, devout and respected Brahmin by name Sadaiyanar whose ancestors were all ardent devotees of Lord Siva. Isaiganiar was his dutiful wife. She gave birth to a divine child whom the parents named 'Nambi Arurar' after its grandfather.

In his previous incarnation Arurar was Alala Sundarar, who was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva. When the Milky Ocean was being churned by Devas and Asuras, a deadly poison began to spread on the surface of the ocean threatening the existence of all beings. Then Alala Sundarar collected that poison in his hand and gave it to Lord Siva Who drank it for the protection of the world. Hence, Sundarar got the word Alala (for Halahala, the poison) prefixed to his name.

Once when Alala Sundarar was living by the side of Lord Siva in the Mount Kailas, serving the Lord and bringing flowers from the garden for His worship, he cast a lustful look at Aninditi and Kamalini, the attendants of Goddess Parvathi who had also gone to the garden to collect flowers for the divine Mother's worship. They, too, fell in love with him. Lord Siva, through His divine vision, understood all that had happened in the garden. He called Alala Sundarar and said: 'Sundarar, since you fell in love with these girls, you and they, too, will go down to the earth and take a human birth. You will marry them and enjoy the pleasures of the world.' Sundarar wept bitterly, regretting his folly which had resulted in his separation from the Lord. He prayed to the Lord: 'Oh Lord! It is due to my evil thought that I have to undergo this separation from Thee. I am afraid lest I should be steeped in ignorance and forget Thee. Oh Lord of mercy! Let this not happen to me. Oh Lord of compassion! Dispel my ignorance soon and take me back to Your lotus feet.' Lord Siva granted this wish.

There was another cause for Sundarar's human birth. To an ordinary man it may appear that Sundarar was a victim to lust, even in the divine realm of Kailasa. It was not so. Sundarar was only an instrument in the hands of God. It was Lord Siva's wish that Sundarar should sing *Tiru Thonda Thogai* for the benefit of mankind. So, Lord Siva entered his mind and created a desire for these two girls. Also, the Lord wanted to teach mankind a great lesson. Lust is extremely powerful. It can delude even a great devotee of the Lord like Sundarar, if he is not ever vigilant. Maya's charms are powerful. Unless this evil quality is burnt, the Jiva cannot reach Siva. Yet another lesson. The

lustful eye was the cause of Sundarar's downfall. But, when it is used in the service of the Lord (for looking at the holy shrines, holy images of God, saints, and study of scriptures) the very same organ will help towards our emancipation.

Sundarar was, therefore, born as Arurar. The king of that place, Narasinga Munaiyar, happened to see the beautiful child. He liked him. He wanted to bring him up himself and asked for the parents' permission, Sadaiyanar, whose mind was full of dispassion and who was not attached to anything in this world, immediately complied with the king's wish. As we shall see later, he and his devout wife are also regarded as Nayanars.

The boy grew up under royal care. At the proper age, the parents wanted to get their son married. Sadaiyanar sought Sandakavi Sivachariar's consent to obtain his daughter's hand for his son, Arurar. Sivachariar gladly agreed. But, the wedding was not to take place.

Just when the ceremony was to begin, an old Brahmin, with sacred ashes on his body, Rudraksha around his neck and matted locks on his head appeared and said: 'This man, Arurar, is my bond-slave. I have a document to that effect executed by his grandfather. He cannot marry.' This put an end to the ceremony. Sundarar and the Brahmin left the place. The young bride fixed her mind on the holy feet of Sundarar, shed her mortal coil and attained the immortal abode of Lord Siva.

Sundarar and the old man had a heated argument. Sundarar asked him: 'Who are you and from where have you come?' To which the Brahmin replied: 'I belong to Tiruvennai Nellur.' Sundarar called him a liar and said: 'Come, let us go to Tiruvennai Nellur and get this dispute settled by the wise men there.'

At Tiruvennai Nellur, before an assembly of wise men the old Brahmin produced the document which read as follows:

I, Aruran, the Adi Saivite of Tirunavalur, execute this bond of slavery with heart and soul. I and my progeny for all time to come are bond-slaves to Pithan of Tiruvennai Nellur, and we are bound to serve him by all means.

Pithan means Lord Siva who delights to be called a 'mad man', to exemplify the state of the highest Yogi whose behaviour resembles that of a mad man but who teaches us that there is nothing in this world worth taking any notice of and the worldly 'wise men' are all mad people in truth.

After examining the witnesses cited in the document and verifying the grandfather's signature, the assembly confirmed the old man's claim. Sundarar had to accept it as God's will. Followed by all of them the Brahmin entered the temple of Tiru Arul Turai on the pretext of showing them his house, and promptly vanished. Arurar understood that it was the Lord Himself who had appeared as the old man to save him from the shackles of Samsara. He was afflicted very much at heart that he had not recognised Him earlier. He cried aloud. The Lord appeared before him and blessed him: 'Oh noble soul. You are already My Bhakta. You were in My Abode in Kailasa before this birth as a man. A wrong thought made you take this birth. Now I have Myself come to save you.'

Because Sundarar had quarrelled with Him, the Lord Himself called him *Vanthonan* (the devotee who used harsh words) and asked him to sing His glories. ‘My clear child, you called Me *Pithan* (madman) during your quarrel. So, begin with this word and compose a poem.’ Sundarar did so: the result was that inspiring poem *Pitha Pirai Soodi*. The Lord Himself came to be known as *Taduthatkonda Iswar* (the Lord prevented and saved him from Samsara).

Sundarar later visited a number of holy places and sang the praise of the Lord in all of them. He came to Adigai Virattanam, the sacred place where Appar served the Lord Viratteswarar and was blessed. Sundarar did not like to place his foot on the sacred ground and so stayed on the outskirts of the village.

That night when Sundarar was asleep, the Lord in the guise of an old man entered the Mutt. He lay down close to where Sundarar was sleeping and pretended to sleep. He then placed His feet on the head of Sundarar. When Sundarar objected to this, the old man apologised. Sundarar went over to another corner of the room. There, too, the old man repeated the same action. Sundarar did not lose his temper. He calmly asked him for his identity and explanation for the abnormal behaviour. ‘Oh friend, don’t you know me?’ asked the Lord and disappeared. Sundarar realised that it was again the Lord Himself. Since he had not gone into the place for His Darshan, the Lord Himself had come out to where the devotee was! Sundarar prayed: ‘Oh Lord! How kind and merciful You are! Even devotees who are well versed in Vedas and Agamas cannot touch Your feet. Out of love towards this poor creature, You left Your abode and came here to bless me with Your Holy Feet.’

Sundarar again continued his pilgrimage. At Tillai (Chidambaram), he went into a trance even as he saw the temple tower. In his ecstasy he rolled on the ground and shed profuse tears of love. He had the Darshan of Lord Nataraja. A heavenly voice commanded him to go to Tiruvarur.

He then visited many other shrines and came to Tiruvarur. The Lord appeared to the Brahmins of Tiruvarur and asked them to receive Sundarar with due honours. They did so. As Sundarar was worshipping the Lord in the temple, he heard a heavenly voice: ‘Sundarar! I have made you My friend. I prevented you from getting married. Hereafter you will appear for ever as a bridegroom and sport on earth.’ Immediately, Sundarar became a handsome bridegroom. People called him *Tambiran Thozhar* (friend of God).

In Tiruvarur, there was a chaste woman by name Paravayar who was none other than Kamalini, the attendant of Parvathi in Kailasa. Daily she would go to the temple and worship the Lord with faith and devotion and sing His glories. One day, she came to the temple, as usual, with her friends, to worship the Lord. At the same time, Sundarar, with his devotees entered the temple. Prompted by past Karma, Sundarar was attracted by Paravayar’s beauty. He wanted to marry her, and entered the shrine of the Lord with this thought. The Lord was his friend, and so, he expressed his desire to Him!

Paravayar who had seen Sundarar in the temple also fell in love with him and wanted to marry him.

The marriage was pre-ordained by Lord Siva Himself and it was now His duty to bring it about. He appeared to both of them in their dreams and told them that they would get married. He also commanded His devotees in dream to arrange for the wedding of Paravayar and Sundarar the very next day. This was done accordingly, to the joy of both Paravayar and Sundarar.

One day, Arurar went into the temple and found a number of devotees of the Lord there. He wanted to sing their glories. The Lord Himself sang the first line of the famous poem *Tiruthonda Thogai* and by His grace, Sundarar completed it.

During his stay at Tiruvarur, a Vellala by name Kundaiyur Kizhar who was very highly devoted to him, was regularly supplying Paravayar with enough grains and groceries for the maintenance of Sundarar and the devotees. Suddenly there was famine in the district and people suffered for want of food. Kundaiyur Kizhar was also affected. He was afflicted at heart because he could not supply the needs of Sundarar. Lord Siva appeared in his dream and promised enough grain! Kubera, the God of wealth, did the needful, as commanded by the Lord. The next morning, Kundaiyur Kizhar found huge heaps of grain. At the same time the Lord appeared before Sundarar and informed him of the incident. At once Sundarar left for Kundaiyur to meet Kizhar. They met half-way. Sundarar saw the heaps of grain at Kundaiyur and knew that it was His Lila. He went to a nearby Koili and sang the praise of the Lord, and entreated Him to have the grain removed to Tiruvarur. A celestial voice immediately assured him of this. Sundarar returned to Tiruvarur and informed Paravayar of all that happened. That night the Bhuta Ganas, the servants of Lord Siva, removed the heaps of grain and filled the entire town of Tiruvarur with it! Paravayar offered repeated prostrations to the Lord and sang His glory. She asked the people to take the grain to appease their hunger. Thus the famine came to an end. All the people glorified the Lord and Paravayar.

Kotpuli Nayanar of Tirunattiyattankudi, the Commander-in-chief of a Chola King, and an ardent devotee of Lord Siva came to Sundarar and entreated him to grace his house with his presence. Sundarar agreed to this and went. After worshipping Sundarar, Kotpuli Nayanar prostrated himself at Sundarar's feet along with his two daughters, Singadiyar and Vanappahaiyar, and pleaded that Sundarar should marry the two daughters. Sundarar, however, placed them on his lap and fondled them, treating them as his own daughters. Then Sundarar went to the temple and sang in praise of the Lord, a song in which he called himself *Singadiappan*, since he took Singadiyar as his daughter.

Sundarar then returned to Tiruvarur. It was Paravayar's custom to distribute plenty of money and other articles in charity on Panguni Uttaram, a festival day. Sundarar went to Tirupugalur and prayed to the Lord to give him gold for the sake of Paravayar. That night he slept there with a few bricks as his pillow. The next morning, he woke up to find that all the bricks had been converted into gold. Sundarar was surprised at this miracle of Lord Siva and sang His glory and returned to Tiruvarur. On the way he had a vision of the Lord at Tiru Panaiyur.

After visiting many holy places again and singing hymns in praise of the Lord, Sundarar came to Tiru Pachilasramam. There he worshipped the Lord and asked for a gold coin. He did not get it immediately. He sang a Padigam (song) and the Lord at once gave him a heap of gold. The Lord was so fond of hearing Sundarar sing.

Then, Sundarar left for Vridhachalam, visiting a number of holy places on the way. He had omitted Tiru Koodalaiyarrur. So, the Lord came to him as a Brahmin of whom Sundarar enquired the way to Vridhachalam. The Brahmin led the way up to a certain distance, and then suddenly disappeared. It was close to Tiru Koodalaiyarrur which Sundarar now visited and sang a song in praise of the Lord there.

Then Sundarar came to Vridhachalam. He worshipped the Lord, and sang a Padigam expressing his desire for gold coins. The Lord gave him 12,000 pieces of gold. Sundarar prayed to the Lord to remove these gold pieces to Tiruvarur. The Lord asked him to throw them into the river Manimukta and to receive them back at Tiruvarur. Sundarar did so, keeping a piece for identification. On return to Tiruvarur, Sundarar and Paravayar went to the tank to get back the gold pieces. Sundarar dived into the eastern side of the tank and searched for the gold, as though he had put them there. He could not find them. Sorely afflicted at heart, he sang a song. That was what the Lord wanted. Sundarar got the gold. All were amazed. But, on identification, it was found that the gold was inferior in value to the piece that Sundarar had kept back with him. He sang a song: and the Lord restored to them their original value. So fond was He of hearing Sundarar sing a song.

Sundarar went out on another pilgrimage again. On the way, he was afflicted with hunger and thirst. The Lord Who is the Indweller of our hearts, erected a water-shed and was waiting for Sundarar there in the guise of a Brahmin. Sundarar and the devotees entered the shed, singing the Panchakshara. The Brahmin offered him food and water and asked him to rest awhile. All of them appeased their hunger, but the quantity of the food remained the same. When they were resting, after food, the Lord disappeared. They knew that it was none other than the Lord Himself. Sundarar sang a song alluding to this incident.

On another occasion, soon after this, while on a visit to Tirukachur, Sundarar went to the temple, worshipped the Lord and was resting outside the temple, feeling hungry. The Lord understood it: and so, in the guise of a Brahmin came to Sundarar and said: 'It appears that you are hungry. Please wait here. I will give you food.' The Lord at once went out in the scorching sun, begged from each and every house, and offered the food so obtained, to Sundarar. As Sundarar and the devotees were eating, the Brahmin disappeared: and they understood that it was the Lord Himself. Sundarar sang a song alluding to this incident, revealing the Lord's supreme mercy.

Later on, he went to Tiruvotriyur and stayed there for some time, worshipping the Lord there. Aninditayar, the other maid-servant of Parvathi in Kailasa, who had also taken a human birth, was now Sangilyar in Jnayiru in Thondai Nadu. Her father was Jnayiru Kizhar, a Vellala by caste. He was also a staunch devotee of Lord Siva. Sangiliyar was devoted to Parvati from her very childhood. Once her parents mentioned that she should get married, but the very word 'marriage' made her faint. Later, a respectable Vellala wanted to marry her. He sent some people to approach the girl's father. Jnayiru Kizhar did not like even to speak to his daughter about it. He sent them away with an evasive reply. Soon after, the boy who wanted to marry Sangiliyar, and the party that went to negotiate,—all of them died. When Jnayiru Kizhar heard this, he understood the greatness of his daughter. He took her to Tiruvotriyur and built a small Ashram for her there.

It was part of Sangiliyar's Sadhana to make garlands for the Lord in the temple. She regularly visited the temple and worshipped the Lord. One day Sundarar and the devotees went to

the temple. After the worship, they came to the place where some devotees were making garlands for the Lord. Sangiliyar was also there. Sundarar was attracted by her beauty, due to past Samskaras. He wanted to marry her, and expressed this wish to the Lord. The Lord promised to fulfil his wish.

The Lord appeared in Sangiliyar's dream and said: 'Oh noble soul, I am highly pleased with your devotion. Now I tell this for your own good. Sundarar wants to marry you. He is My friend. He asked Me to arrange the marriage. So, marry him. You will be happy.' Sangiliyar prostrated before the Lord and said: 'Oh Lord, I will obey Your command and marry him. But, he may desert me since he is already married.' The Lord asked her to get a promise from Sundarar that he would not part from her under any circumstance.

Then the Lord appeared before Sundarar and said that Sangiliyar had agreed to marry him on condition that he would not part from her. Sundarar said: 'Oh Lord, how can I agree to this condition since I am constantly moving about visiting many holy shrines? But, if You so desire, then assure me that You will withdraw Your presence from the Lingam in the temple and will take Your abode in the nearby tree, when I take the oath before Your image.' The Lord granted him this wish and disappeared.

He again appeared before Sangiliyar and said: 'Oh noble soul, Sundarar has agreed to your condition. But, ask him to make this promise, not before the Lingam in the temple, but in front of the nearby tree.'

The next morning Sangiliyar came to the temple. Sundarar was waiting there for her. Sangiliyar's friends told him that she wished the promise to be given in front of the nearby tree. He was taken aback, but accepted the proposal. The promise was given. The marriage was immediately solemnised.

In Tiruvarur, Vasanta Utsavam was being celebrated on a grand scale. Sundarar remembered the festival and longed to go there. He also recollected that Paravayar would sing and dance there in front of the Lord. At the same time, he could not part from Sangiliyar. For a long time, he struggled between the two conflicting duties. Finally, he decided to leave.

When he crossed the border of Tiruvotriyur, he suddenly lost his eye-sight and fell down on the ground. The Lord is impartial. None can escape the operation of the Law of Divine Justice. Sundarar slowly regained his consciousness. Immediately he realised his fault and prayed to the Lord for forgiveness, asking for the grant of the eye-sight. 'Oh Lord, I take complete refuge in You. I always repeat Your Name. Even when I fell down losing my eye-sight, I remembered You only. Oh Lord of Mercy, even if I commit a crime, is it not Your duty to forgive me? Oh Lord of Compassion, save me.' In spite of the blindness, however, his thirst for the Darshan of the Lord at Tiruvarur did not abate. With the help of some people on the way he came to Tiru Mullaivayil. Here, again, he prayed to the Lord to give him eye-sight. At Tiruvembakkam he again prayed to the Lord in a similar strain. In the temple, he prayed and asked: 'Oh Lord Who accepted me into His fold, prostrations unto Thee. Oh Lord Who cleverly played a trick on me, are You inside the temple?' The Lord gave a stern reply: 'I am here; you can go.' and gave him a blind-man's stick. This attitude of indifference on the part of the Lord pained Sundarar and he pleaded for mercy. 'Oh

Lord of Mercy, have I not taken You as my sole refuge and support? I committed a mistake thinking that You will pardon me. You are even indifferent to public criticism. Will they not accuse You for turning a deaf ear to a devotee who is sincerely weeping at Your feet, accepting his fault and craving for pardon? Oh Lord, can You not understand suffering? Like a loving child that has been separated from its mother for a long time and wants to hug her, I have come to You: but, instead, You treat me like a stranger. Oh Lord, You deceived me, who asked You to remain for a while near the tree, by cleverly informing Sangiliyar of the same and asking her to get the promise from me near the tree. Oh Lord, You gave me Sangiliyar and all the pleasures. But, now You give me the blind-man's staff and say 'You can go'. Oh Lord, am I unfit to receive Your mercy? Pardon me and relieve me of my sufferings.'

Then, completely resigning himself to God, Sundarar came to Conjeevaram, after visiting many holy places on the way. He worshipped Mother Kamakshi and expressed his sufferings to her and pleaded to her to relieve him of his sufferings. Sundarar then worshipped Lord Ekambareswarar. Mother Who is seated on His left side, had already been moved by Sundarar's prayers and wanted to shower Her grace on him. Lord Siva understood this. He at once restored vision to Sundarar's left eye. In ecstasy he rolled on the ground, shedding profuse tears of love.

After spending some days there, singing the glories of the Lord, Sundarar proceeded to go to Tiruvarur. At Tiruvavaduthurai, he again prayed to the Lord to forgive him and restore sight to the other eye, too. Sundarar then came to Thiruthurithi. The Lord asked him to take a dip in the northern tank there. Sundarar did so, and came out of it. To the surprise of all, his body had become as bright as polished gold. People were amazed at this change. Sundarar went into the temple and prayed.

Sundarar reached the outskirts of Tiruvarur. He grieved that, due to his partial sight, he could not get a complete Darshan of the Lord. The very sight of the temple tower entranced him. Sundarar wanted to feast both his eyes on the beauty of the Lord and so prayed to Him to restore vision to his other eye also. Sundarar's supreme devotion and lamentation moved the Lord's heart. He at once cured the other eye also. Sundarar was extremely happy. He worshipped the Lord and remained completely absorbed in divine bliss.

In the mean time, people whom Paravayar had sent to greet Sundarar and inform him of her eagerness to meet him, found out that he had married Sangiliyar. They went back and told Paravayar about this. Paravayar was sunk in grief. She was annoyed, too. Paravayar's people refused to allow Sundarar's devotees to enter the house. When Sundarar heard of this, he was afflicted at heart. He sent some elderly devotees to Paravayar, to bring about a reunion. They failed. At midnight when all the devotees were asleep, he prayed to the Lord for His help in pacifying Paravayar. The Lord appeared before him and assured him of His help. The Lord disguised Himself as Sundarar's messenger, a Brahmin priest, and went to Paravayar's house. The Brahmin pleaded Sundarar's cause and asked her to accept him back. She refused, though she herself was grief-stricken at the separation from Sundarar. Her annoyance at his second marriage was so great! The Lord coolly returned to Sundarar, who was anxiously awaiting His return. When the Lord informed Sundarar of all that had happened, Sundarar fell down on the ground, in grief. 'If You do not help me, Oh Lord, I will give up my life.' The Lord seeing Sundarar's pitiable condition, assured him of help and again set out to go to Paravayar's house.

In the mean time, the devout Paravayar had understood that the Brahmin was no other than the Lord Himself and was suffering from terrible anguish for not recognising Him. The Lord again went to her house: and this time He appeared before her in His real form. Paravayar at once prostrated before Him. The Lord said: 'O Paravayar, I have again been sent by Sundarar to plead his case. Do not refuse this time. He is undergoing terrible agony on account of separation from you. Accept him and allow him to come to your house.' Paravayar prostrated to the Lord again, with folded palms and said: 'Oh Lord, first You came in the guise of a Brahmin but I did not recognise You. Again You have come and have shown me Your real form. Oh Lord, how kind You are! You have graced my hut and showered Your grace on me. You have taken so much trouble this midnight, for the sake of Your friend. How can I go against Your wish? I will accept and obey Your command.' The Lord was immensely pleased with her. He blessed her and returned to Sundarar. The Lord informed him that he had pacified Paravayar and that he could now return to her. He then disappeared. Sundarar was overwhelmed with joy and sang the Lord's glories.

In the mean time, Paravayar had decorated her house beautifully and was eagerly waiting for her Lord. Sundarar, with his devotees, entered the house. Paravayar fell at his feet. Thus they were re-united after a long separation.

Yet, this was not all. The news that Sundarar had sent Lord Siva Himself as his messenger, had reached the ears of Eyarkon Kalikama Nayanar of Tiru Perumangalam in Ponni Nadu. He was a great devotee of Lord Siva. He was terribly angry with Sundarar for treating the Lord as a messenger to settle a domestic quarrel. How, in a wonderful and mysterious manner Lord Siva brings about a reconciliation between the two Nayanars, both of them greatly devoted to Him, we shall see, when we describe the life of Kalikama Nayanar.

Equally interesting is the way in which the Lord unites in friendship Sundarar and Cheraman Perumal Nayanar, another royal devotee of the Lord. We shall describe it in detail when we come to the life of Cheraman Perumal Nayanar.

When, along with Cheraman Perumal, Sundarar was proceeding to Madurai, they arrived at Tirunagaikkoronam. Here Sundarar sang a song in which he asked the Lord to give him a pearl garland, precious stones, musk, spectacles, fragrance, clothes, jewelry, one-third of the wealth of Tiruvarur, horses which ran as fast as the wind, golden flowers, palanquin, etc. How wonderful is the relation between the devotee and the Lord! Sundarar regarded God as his friend, because God Himself had wanted it to be so. He adopted towards God the Sakhya Bhava (attitude of a dear friend).

In the company of Cheraman Perumal, Sundarar went on several pilgrimages, and met many of the kings of South India. Once, when they were at Tiru Kandiyur, they saw Tiruvaiyar on the opposite bank of the river. Cheraman desired to visit that place also. The river was in flood, and it was impossible to cross it. Sundarar sincerely prayed to the Lord to help them. He sang one of his songs which easily pleased the Lord. At once the river gave way, leaving a sandy tract through which they could walk across to the other bank. As soon as they reached the other bank, the river resumed its former form. They were delighted at this miracle of the Lord. Even the five elements are ever ready to serve the devotees of the Lord, at His command.

Cheraman then took Sundarar to his own place, with great honour and pomp. Sundarar stayed with Cheraman for some time. He suddenly remembered the Lord of Tiruvarur and wanted to go there. Cheraman could not accompany him and was therefore grief-stricken. Sundarar consoled him and asked him to stay behind and rule the country wisely and justly. Cheraman prostrated himself before him and gave him rich presents. He sent his own people to carry these presents, and to accompany Sundarar. It was the Lord's wish that Sundarar should receive gifts only from Him! How could *His* friend receive from others? Hence, He desired to deprive Sundarar of what Cheraman had given him. When Sundarar and his retinue were passing through Tirumuruganpondi, the Lord sent His Servants to rob Sundarar of all the riches that he had received from Cheraman. The Lord's Servants disguised themselves as hunters and attacked the party that was carrying the presents. The party dropped all and fled. They went to Sundarar and reported to him what had happened. Sundarar went to the local temple and sang a Padigam. He came out of the temple and to his surprise he saw there all that they had been robbed of. Now, it was a gift from the Lord Himself, and so Sundarar, God's friend, could have it. Wonderful are the Lilas of the Lord.

After some time, Sundarar again desired to see Cheraman Perumal. On the way to Kundakolur, he went to Tiru Pukkoliyur Avinasi. As he entered this place, he heard simultaneously auspicious as well wailing sounds emerging from different houses.

On enquiry, he learnt how two Brahmin boys of the same age, from these two houses went to tank for a bath; and how one of them was caught by a crocodile, and the other escaped, providentially. The latter was being invested with the sacred thread that day, and hence the auspicious sound from that house. The people in the deceased boy's house were bemoaning the loss of the boy, sore at the feeling that, had he been alive, he would also be celebrating the sacred thread ceremony that day. Sundarar wanted to console the bereaved family. As he stood in front of the house, the people stopped wailing and came out to receive Sundarar. They were eager for a long time to get his Darshan, and so, forgetting their sorrow, they came to welcome him. Their devotion moved Sundarar's heart. He was prompted by the Lord to bring the dead boy back to life. So, he went to the same tank and sang a song on the Lord of Avinasi to give the child back to the parents. The Creator, pleased with Sundarar, entered the stomach of the crocodile and re-constituted the body of the boy, though it had already been digested. Lord Yama, too, for his part, released from his custody, the life he had once removed and the crocodile vomitted the boy! To the wonder of all, the boy was much more handsome than when he met with the accident, and he showed signs of growth, appropriate to the lapse of time. All were amazed at this miracle of Sundarar. The parents of the boy were immensely pleased and embraced Sundarar's feet. Sundarar took the boy to the temple and worshipped Lord Avinasiappar. He himself performed the sacred thread ceremony for him.

At Kodunkolur, Cheraman, who had already come to know of the crocodile miracle, received Sundarar with still greater love and veneration than before. Sundarar stayed with the king for some time. One day Sundarar visited the temple alone and worshipped the Lord. The very sight of the Lord sent him into trance. He rolled on the ground shedding tears of God-love. The hairs on his body stood on end and his mind was filled with rapture. He regained consciousness after a long time. He was tired of worldly existence and so requested the Lord to take him back to Kailasa. He sang a Padigam.

The Lord, desiring to take Sundarar back to His Abode, commanded the celestials to bring him to Kailasa on a white elephant. He also informed Sundarar of this. Sundarar came out of the temple. The white elephant was waiting for him there. He mentally wished to take Cheraman Perumal also with him to Kailasa. Then he climbed the elephant and proceeded towards Kailasa.

In a Padigam he sang on this occasion, Sundarar himself reveals that this departure for Kailasa was not in his physical body, but in his spiritual body. The physical body was discarded here in this world itself, and the elements of which it was composed were returned to their sources.

Cheraman learnt by intuition of Sundarar's departure for Kailasa. At once, he mounted a horse and came to Tiru Anchaikalam. There he saw Sundarar going along the sky on the celestial elephant. At once Cheraman pronounced the Panchakshara in the ears of the horse. The horse flew up and reached Sundarar. Cheraman worshipped Sundarar there. Both of them went to Kailasa in their spiritual body.

At the Gate of Kailasa, Sundarar was allowed to enter, while Cheraman was not. Sundarar went into His presence and praised His mercy: 'Oh Ocean of Mercy, You have pardoned my sins and released me from the quagmire of Samsara. You have taken me back into Your fold, and bestowed on me the Immortal Bliss. How kind and merciful You are!' He then informed the Lord that Cheraman was outside the Gate. To please His friend, Lord Siva sent His Mount, Nandikesvarar to bring Cheraman also in. The Lord asked Cheraman how he could come to Kailasa without His permission. Cheraman replied that when he saw Sundarar proceeding to Kailasa, he could not bear separation from him and so accompanied him. Now, by the good offices of Sundarar which earned for him the Lord's grace he had been admitted into the Lord's Abode. In these words, Cheraman expressed a very great truth: that even if the devotee is undeserving, if he is devoted to a saint (the Guru), he will also gain a place in the kingdom of God, through the intercession of the Guru.

Sundarar, as before, engaged himself in His service with all his heart and soul. Paravayar and Sangiliyar, being purged of their Karmas, also reached Kailasa. They resumed their original duty as the servants of Mother Parvathi.

2. TIRU NEELAKANTA NAYANAR

In Chidambaram, there once lived an ardent devotee of Lord Siva. He was a potter by caste and profession. He had the highest regard for the devotees of Lord Siva, too. He was ever eager to serve them. He was leading an ideal household life. He made beautiful begging bowls of clay and offered them free to the devotees of Lord Siva, with great joy.

Siva, in His aspect of Neelakanta was his sole refuge and prop. Hence, he was called Tiru Neelakanta Nayanar. He would always tell others how, for the protection of the world the Lord drank the virulent poison, and he would assure his friends that they who took refuge under His feet would be purged of all sins and would finally be taken to His Abode.

In spite of his virtuous qualities, once he fell a victim to lust. One day, he visited the house of a prostitute. When he returned home, his dutiful and pious wife understood this. This irritated her,

though she did not show this and continued to serve him, as before. But, she had decided not to have any sexual relation with him. Nayanar could not understand the reason. One day, as he approached her with passion, she took an oath and said: 'In the name of Neelakanta, I ask you: do not touch us.' Though she only meant herself, she had used the word *us*. Since she took the Name of the Lord and since she had used the word *us*, Neelakanta Nayanar decided that from that day he would not touch any woman in the world. Such was his sincere devotion to the Lord. They continued to live together. They did not want to make a fuss over their own resolve. No one knew about it. Years rolled by and they had grown old.

Lord Siva wanted to reveal the greatness of His devotee and thus to immortalise his name. So, in the guise of a Siva Yogi (a Saivite mendicant) the Lord came to Tiru Neelakantar's house. Neelakantar welcomed him and worshipped him. The Yogi gave him a begging bowl and said: 'Oh noble soul, kindly keep this in your safe custody, till I come back for it. To me it is extremely precious. It has the wonderful property of purifying anything that comes into contact with it. So, please protect it with the greatest care.' Then the Siva Yogi left the place and Neelakantar kept the bowl in a very safe place in the house.

After a long time, Lord Siva came to the house of Neelakantar, as the same Siva Yogi and asked for the bowl. The Lord Himself, by the power of His Maya, caused it to disappear from the house! Neelakantar searched for it, but could not find it. It was a mystery to him. He was ashamed of himself. Trembling with fear, he fell at the Yogi's feet and said that he could not find it. At this, the Yogi got very angry and accused Neelakantar, calling him a thief and cheat. Neelakantar offered to replace the bowl with a costlier one; but the Yogi would not accept.

Again and again Neelakantar pleaded that he had not stolen the bowl and that by a divine mystery it was missing from the house. The Yogi demanded that if that was the truth, Neelakantar should say so on oath, holding his wife's hand. When Nayanar, who had resolved, in the name of the Lord, not to touch anyone, declined this, the Yogi attributed this unwillingness to the fact that Neelakantar had in fact been guilty of theft. They went to the court. The Brahmins heard the case. They asked Neelakantar to promise, as desired by the Yogi. Neelakantar got into the tank, along with his wife; they had a stick in their hand, and each of them was holding one end of it. The Yogi objected to this and wanted that Neelakantar should actually hold his wife's hand with his own. Neelakantar could not hide the secret relationship that existed between him and his wife any more, and so, related the whole story to the court. After this narration, Neelakantar and his wife caught hold of the two ends of the stick and took a dip in the tank. A miracle happened. As they emerged from the water, they shone with youth and beauty. The Siva Yogi disappeared from their midst and Lord Siva and Mother Parvathy appeared in the sky, blessing all of them. The Lord said: 'Due to the merit of having lived a life of self-control and devotion, you will live in My Eternal Abode, forever youthful.' The Lord thus revealed the glory of supreme devotion to Him (which alone made it possible for Neelakantar to refrain from lustful thoughts or actions, after his wife had sworn in the Name of the Lord) and a life of celibacy which bestows eternal youthfulness on you, and the unostentatiousness of a saint's virtue.

3. IYARPAHAI NAYANAR

‘Charity, free from the mean utterance *I have none* is found only among men of good birth’ says the Kural. Among such noble souls Iyarpahai Nayanar ranked high. Charity was ingrained in him. It was his practice to invite Siva Bhaktas to his house, worship them with faith and devotion and give them all they wanted. He had taken a vow never to say no to what a Siva Bhakta wanted.

Iyarpahaiar was a native of Kaveripoompattinam. He was a Vaisya by caste. To him Siva Bhaktas were the living manifestations of Lord Siva.

Lord Siva was pleased with His devotee. He wanted to reveal his true greatness to the world. So, the Lord, in the disguise of a Brahmin, with sacred ashes smeared all over his body, came to Nayanar’s house. He welcomed the Brahmin with great joy, as the very sight of the holy man thrilled the Nayanar. The Brahmin said: ‘Oh noble soul, you are far famed for your charitable nature. Learning that none returns empty-handed from your house, I have come to you for a gift. I shall disclose it to you, if you promise to give what I want.’ The Nayanar agreed readily ‘provided I have it with me.’ The Brahmin at once revealed what he wanted: ‘It is the gift of your wife.’ Nayanar had no difficulty at all in granting this! The supreme devotee of the Lord that he was, he did not stoop to doubt the credentials of the Brahmin who, though he appeared to be a Siva Bhakta, had such an undesirable desire: such is the unquestioning nature of devotion. Nor would Nayanar hesitate to fulfil the Bhakta’s wish, on the plea that it involved unrighteousness: for, to him worship of the guest (Guest is God) was greater Law than all the moral codes.

Nayanar went inside the house and informed his wife of all that had happened. She was shocked at first, but quickly regained her composure. To a chaste wife, the husband is God, and whatever he commands is Law and Dharma. She readily agreed to follow the Brahmin-guest as his wife. Nayanar came out with his wife and asked the Brahmin to accept the gift. The Brahmin, however, feared the wrath of the wife’s relatives and asked Nayanar to accompany them till they were safely out of the town and out of danger. Nayanar agreed to do so and armed himself to protect the Brahmin. They then proceeded to go.

In the meantime the relatives of Nayanar’s wife came to know of the whole story and were furious. They followed the Nayanar and party and threatened the Brahmin with death, unless he abandoned his impious desire. The Brahmin pretended to be scared. Nayanar’s wife, however, assured him that Nayanar was capable of defeating them all. Nayanar was ready to fight them. The relatives endeavoured to convince Nayanar of the unrighteousness of the whole thing, and, when they found that they could not, they preferred to die at his hands, than submit to the shame. Nayanar at once pounced upon them and chopped off their heads. All of them died and Nayanar, happy at the thought, that through the grace of Lord Siva, he had succeeded in keeping his vow of worshipping His devotee, proceeded further with the Brahmin and the wife. When they reached the temple of Tiruchaikadu, the Brahmin asked Nayanar to leave them and return. Nayanar prostrated to the Brahmin and turned his steps homeward.

As he had hardly proceeded a few yards on his homeward journey, the Brahmin again called Nayanar aloud. Thinking that there might have been another attack on the party, Nayanar hastened to where the Brahmin was: but, to his amazement, found that he had disappeared and that his wife

was standing alone there. He searched here and there for the Brahmin, and was worried when he could not be found. Lo and behold, Lord Siva and Mother Parvathy appeared in the sky and blessed Nayanar and his wife: 'Oh noble souls, I am immensely pleased with your devotion to My Bhaktas. Both of you will very soon reach My Abode.'

With these words, the Lord disappeared. The Nayanar and his wife reached His Abode and rejoiced there. Nayanar's relatives who died at his hands also attained the lotus feet of the Lord.

Thus had the Lord proved the nature of supreme devotion, which does not question. And, the Lord also revealed the truth that such unquestioning devotion does not result in the violation of the Dharma. All glory to the Lord and His devotees.

4. ILAYANKUDI MARA NAYANAR

Ilayankudi Mara Nayanar was a farmer. Maranar was his name: he lived in a village called Ilayankudi. He was a great devotee of Lord Siva and His devotees. He took the greatest pleasure in serving them. This Sadhana was known as Maaheswara Puja (or worship of the devotees of Maheswara or Lord Siva). It is described as follows:

'On seeing a devotee of Lord Siva, with the external marks of Vibhuti, Rudraksham, etc., taking him as Lord Siva Himself, welcoming him, prostrating before him, washing his hands and feet, drinking that water (Charanamrit), giving him a seat, worshipping him with flowers, Doopa, Deepa, and Naivedya, pleasing him with sweet words, thanking the Lord for the opportunity, and accompanying the guest for some distance while sending him away—these constitute Maaheswara Puja. This is also included in Chariyai (one of the main Saivite disciplines).'

Offering food to the Lord's devotees had purified his heart and made him a fit receptacle for the grace of God. As Tiruvalluvar has said in the Kural:

*Fortune dwells with a delighted heart in
the house of the man who honours his
guest with a pleasant countenance.*

Nayanar had been blessed with all the wealth of the world. But, he considered that the wealth belonged to the Lord, to be utilised for the benefit of His devotees.

Lord Siva was highly pleased with the Nayanar's devotion. He wanted to show to the world that His devotee would be undaunted by the worst calamity and would remain unshaken in his virtue. Nayanar's wealth melted away. His wealth had left him, but not his virtue. On the contrary, his devotion to the Lord and His devotees grew more and more intense. Nayanar sold all his property and had to sell even himself in order to be able to serve the devotees of the Lord.

One day it was raining heavily. Nayanar and his wife were starving. No one came forward to help them. Finally, he bolted the door and was about to fall asleep. Just then he heard a knock at the door, and, on opening it, found a Siva Bhakta standing in front of the house, drenched with rain. Nayanar at once took the guest inside, dried his body and gave him fresh clothes to wear. 'Rest

awhile, Swami, while we prepare some food for you to appease your hunger,' said Nayanar and told his wife of his predicament: there was nothing to offer the devotee of the Lord. But, the devout wife suggested that Nayanar could go into the backyard and collect the grain-seeds that they had just sown that very day. Nayanar accepted the suggestion. On account of the heavy rain, the grains were floating and it was easy to collect them in a basket. As soon as he brought the grains, the wife fried and crushed them, and with the help of some greens that grew in their own backyard, cooked a nice dinner for the guest.

Nayanar was supremely happy. And, as he went to awaken the guest, he discovered that he had disappeared. At the same time, Nayanar saw in sky, Lord Siva Who had come in the form of the devotee and Mother Parvathy showering Their blessing on him and his wife. The Lord said: 'Oh noble souls, I am highly pleased with your devotion. You will soon attain My Abode and live there for ever.'

5. MAIPORUL NAYANAR

Maiporul Nayanar was a pious king. He ruled over the hill tribes of Sethi. He was chivalrous and brave. He fought many battles and was always victorious. There was peace and plenty in his kingdom. People worshipped him as the living God.

He was well versed in the Agamas. He was an ardent devotee of the Lord. To him Siva and His devotees, adorned with matted locks, Rudraksham and sacred ashes represented the only truth, Absolute Truth: and all the rest of the world was straw. He saw everything as Sivamayam. Siva Bhaktas enjoyed absolute freedom in his country: they were honoured by the king and the people alike. Though he ruled the kingdom as the king, his mind was always at the Lord's Feet. Daily, special prayers and festivals were conducted in the temples in his realm.

Nayanar's fame soon spread far and wide. This evoked the jealousy of Muthanathan, the king of the neighbouring state. He collected a big army and attacked Nayanar several times; but he was repeatedly defeated. So, Muthanathan resorted to foul-play. One day, he disguised himself as a Siva Yogi (for he knew that Nayanar had supreme devotion to Siva Bhaktas) and entered the palace at night. The gate-keepers did not question him, but allowed him to proceed. Dathan, the faithful and intelligent servant of Nayanar, was guarding the bedroom in which the king was sleeping. When the Siva Yogi approached the bedroom, Dathan tried to dissuade him from disturbing the king's sleep; but the Yogi refused to listen, saying: 'I have some secret Shastra to teach the king. I cannot wait.' So, Dathan had to allow the Yogi to enter the bedroom of the king, though he was a little suspicious. Nayanar's wife got up and, finding a Siva Yogi in the room, quickly awakened her husband. The Siva Yogi told the king that the Shastra was a great secret, revealed by the Lord Himself, and that only the king was entitled to hear it. At once the king sent even the queen away and prostrated before the Yogi, ready to receive the secret. At that moment, the Siva Yogi, who was none else than the jealous king Muthanathan, quickly stabbed Nayanar on his back, with a knife he had kept hidden. At that time, the shrewd Dathan, as he entered the room, found the king on the floor in a pool of blood and Muthanathan with a knife in his hand. He was ready to strike down Muthanathan, when the dying Nayanar said: 'Datha, he is our man. He has the appearance of a Siva Yogi and so must be honoured as one. Do not harm him. Kindly escort him to the borders of our kingdom, and see that he is unharmed.' Dathan obeyed the commands of his master. As he was

escorting Muthanathan, the people who had heard what happened went to attack Muthanathan, but, as soon as Dathan told them of the king's commands, they withdrew, admiring the supreme devotion of their king. Thus, Muthanathan was safely escorted out of the kingdom. And, Dathan hastened back to the palace to convey this news to the dying king who was eagerly waiting for it.

As soon as Dathan conveyed the news to the king, the Nayanar called all his Ministers and relatives to his bedside, and spoke to them as follows: 'It is our duty to serve the Bhaktas. They must be honoured and worshipped at all times and under all circumstances. Let our people walk in the footsteps of the Siva Bhaktas. Let the country be flooded with Siva Bhaktas. By their blessings, let peace and prosperity reign in our land.' With these words, he closed his eyes and meditated on Lord Siva.

Lord Siva at once appeared before him and blessed him as follows: 'I am immensely pleased with your devotion to My Bhaktas. I am immensely pleased with your cosmic love and your unquestioning devotion to My devotees. Even in a murderer you saw Me. You are, therefore, fit to reach the Highest Abode which even the Devas cannot hope to reach. You will soon come to My Abode.' With these words the Lord disappeared: and Maiporul Nayanar (whose very name meant 'one for whom God was the sole reality') also attained His Abode.

6. VIRALMINDA NAYANAR

Viralmindanda Nayanar was born in Sengunru, a hilly place. He was a Vellala by caste.

He was a staunch devotee of Lord Siva. Through His grace, he was free from 'I'-ness and 'mine'-ness. He had equal vision. He served His devotees and attained purity of mind. To him worship of Siva Bhaktas was equal, if not even superior to the worship of Lord Siva Himself. He felt that no one could get Siva's grace without first worshipping Siva Bhaktas, and that he who worships even the Siva Lingam with all faith and devotion, would not attain salvation if he insults Siva Bhaktas. Daily he used to visit the temple. Before worshipping the Lord, he used to worship the Siva Bhaktas who might be found there.

He left Sengunru on a pilgrimage and came to Tiruvarur. One day when he was worshipping the Lord, Sundaramurthi Nayanar came to the temple. Sundarar by-passed the Bhaktas who were in temple and went into the *sanctum sanctorum* to worship the Lord. This upset Viralmindar, who was observing this. He could not tolerate this insult to His Bhaktas. He said to Sundarar: 'You have insulted the Siva Bhaktas. By this act you have rendered yourself unfit to remain in the holy circle of Siva Bhaktas. Hence, you are excommunicated from this circle.' He added further: 'And, Siva, for having so thoughtlessly accepted such improper worship at your hands, He, too, shall be regarded as an outcaste from the divine fold.' So firm was he in his conviction that he could thus 'reprimand' God Himself! In fact, it was Siva Himself Who spoke through him to instruct His Bhaktas in the proper attitude they should have towards His Bhaktas.

Sundarar immediately understood Viralmindar's inner Bhav towards the Bhaktas as well as towards Lord Siva, and prostrated before him. He then sang a Padigam praising him. The Padigam melted Viralmindar's heart so much that he greeted Sundarar and said: 'Your mind is well established in the service of Siva Bhaktas. You have got sincere devotion to them.' Lord Siva was

greatly pleased with Viralmindar's great steadfastness in his devotion to Siva Bhaktas. Thus had the Lord revealed the great glory of the Bhakta. He was then elevated to the blessed plane of the Siva Ganas where the Lord made him leader of the Ganas. Glory to such Bhaktas!

7. AMARANEEDI NAYANAR

Amaraneedi Nayanar was a Vaisya by caste. He belonged to Pazhaiyaarai in the Chola Kingdom. Pazhaiyaarai was a very fertile place, surrounded on all sides by gardens and green fields. In those days this place was very famous.

Amaraneedi Nayanar was a trader in gold, diamonds, silks and cotton goods. He used to import these goods from foreign countries and was selling them at reasonable prices. He earned money honestly and became rich. Though he was engaged in worldly activities, his mind was fixed on Lord Siva. He was an ardent Siva Bhakta. He would invite Siva Bhaktas to his house and worship them. He would give the Kowpeenam, cloth, etc., and feed them nicely and send them away happy, with other gifts.

He used to visit the sacred temple of Tirunallur during festivals and worship Lord Siva with intense faith and repeat Panchakshara Mantra daily with Bhava. Not being satisfied with this visit during festivals only, he wanted to settle down there once for all, always enjoying the Lord's Darshan, and feeding Siva Bhaktas. So he left Pazhaiyaarai and migrated with his family and relatives, to Tirunallur. He built a beautiful Mutt there to accommodate Siva Bhaktas who visited the temple. Daily he used to invite Siva Bhaktas and offer Kowpeenam, etc.

Lord Siva was highly pleased with Amaraneedi Nayanar's Kowpeena charity and extreme kindness to Siva Bhaktas. He wanted to show to the world His Bhakta's greatness and also shower His blessings on him.

So, one day Lord Siva in the guise of a Brahmachari, with beautiful matted locks on his head, sacred ashes on his forehead, with a staff on his shoulder, appeared before Amaraneedi's Mutt. Two Kowpeenams and a small ash-bag were tied to one end of the staff. He had a charming face. His eyes were glittering. He walked gracefully into the Mutt. Amaraneedi, with extreme joy, welcomed him and worshipped him. The Brahmachari said: 'Oh friend, you are a noble soul. People are highly praising your Kowpeena charity. I have come to you for Darshan.' Amaraneedi begged of him to take Bhiksha. He readily agreed and said: 'I shall go to the river and return after finishing my bath and Nitya Karmas. Rain may drench my Kowpeenams. So, please keep this dry Kowpeenam safely with you, and I shall come back for it. The Kowpeenam is very precious, as you already know. So, please keep it safe.'

The Brahmachari went away, and Amaraneedi kept the Kowpeenam safely inside the house. But, the Lord willed that it should disappear! Soon after the Brahmachari came back after his bath, etc., and asked for the dry Kowpeenam as rain had drenched the Kowpeenam he had on the staff. Amaraneedi could not find it. He prayed hard to the Lord. Yet, he could not find it. He approached the Brahmachari, trembling, with another Kowpeenam, and explained his predicament to him. But, the Brahmachari was in no mood to take any explanation. Amaraneedi offered much wealth, etc., in compensation. But, the Brahmachari said: 'What have I to do with all this wealth?'

All these are of no use to me. I only need a Kowpeenam.’ And, in saying so, the Lord in the guise of the Brahmachari, uttered a very great truth. He continued: ‘I have got another Kowpeenam: you can give me another of the same weight.’ Amaraneediar was greatly relieved when he heard this. He brought a balance. He put the Kowpeenam on one side and another piece on the other. The Brahmachari’s scale went down. Whatever Amaraneediar put on his side, the Brahmachari’s scale was heavier. Amaraneediar was amazed: and he understood that it was God’s own Lila. All his wealth could not equal the Brahmachari’s Kowpeenam! How could it? Lord Siva’s Kowpeenam represents the Vedas. The fibres of His Kowpeenam represent the Shastras.

Amaraneediar was on the horns of a dilemma. He fell at the Brahmachari’s feet and asked him to allow himself, his wife, and his child to be weighed against the Brahmachari’s Kowpeenam. The Brahmachari agreed. Amaraneediar got on the scale with his wife and his child, saying: ‘If I have truly served the Siva Bhaktas, with faith and sincerity, let this scale be equal in weight to the other one.’ Immediately the two scales were equal. The merit of Amaraneediar’s selfless service of the Siva Bhaktas was equal to the merit of Lord Siva’s Kowpeenam. The people who witnessed this were wonderstruck. They prostrated before Amaraneediar and praised him. Devas from the heaven showered Parijatha flowers. The Brahmachari disappeared and Lord Parameswara and Mother Parvathi appeared on Their Rishabha before Amaraneediar, his wife and child. He blessed them: ‘I am immensely pleased with your whole-hearted and sincere service of My Bhaktas. I am immensely pleased with your Kowpeena charity. You three will come to My Abode and live there happily for ever.’ On account of the Lord’s grace, the balance itself turned into a celestial car in which Amaraneediar, his wife and his child attained Siva’s Abode.

8. ERIPATHA NAYANAR

Eripatha Nayanar was born in Karuvur, one of the main cities of the Chola Kingdom. It was a very sacred place, situated on the bank of the river Ambiravati. On both the banks of this river saints and sages were doing Tapas and were radiating spiritual vibrations. A famous temple was there, too, dedicated to Lord Pasupatheesvarar Who was showering His grace on the king and the people alike. They were all happy. Eripatha Nayanar was daily worshipping Lord Pasupatheesvarar with great faith and devotion. His one aim in life was to serve Siva Bhaktas and to offer them every kind of protection. He always carried a weapon, an axe, for this purpose. With the axe he would punish anyone trying to harm Siva Bhaktas. He was doing by this the Lord’s own work!

In that city, there lived a Siva Bhakta by name Sivakami Andar. He was very regular in his daily worship of Lord Siva. Early morning would find him in the garden after bath, collecting flowers, making garlands for taking to the temple and offering to the Lord. This was his routine.

On a Maha Navami day when all the people were jubilant, Sivakami Andar was rushing to the temple, as usual, with a basket of flowers. At the same time, the king’s pet elephant was returning from the river, after its bath. On its back were two Mahouts, and three others were escorting it. Suddenly, it went mad and was chasing the people. They were running here and there. It ran towards Sivakami Andar. It caught hold of him, wrenched the basket of flowers from him, threw it on the ground and ran away. The flowers were all scattered on the ground. Sivakami Andar was greatly upset. The elephant had destroyed the flowers he had kept for the worship of the Lord. He chased the elephant. He was very aged and soon fell down exhausted. He was weeping bitterly,

crying aloud: ‘Sivada, Sivada’ (a cry expressing agony). Eripatha Nayanar happened to pass that way. He heard Sivakami Andar’s pitiable cry and the cause of it. ‘Where is that elephant?’ asked Eripathar and began to run in the direction indicated by Sivakami Andar. Soon he overtook the elephant and hurled his powerful axe, killing it with one stroke. Then he pounced on the Mahouts and killed them, too.

The news of the elephant’s fate reached the king who immediately reached the spot on his horse, surrounded by his soldiers. He could not see who had killed the elephant, for, he could not associate the Siva Yogi Eripathar with such an act. He began to shout: ‘Who killed my elephant?’ When someone pointed to Eripathar, immediately the king’s wrath vanished, for he knew that if the Siva Yogi had done so, there should have been a very valid reason for it. ‘He must have killed it in self-defence,’ thought the king and felt happy that the elephant had done no harm to the Siva Yogi. He addressed Eripathar: ‘Oh Swamin, I did not know that you killed the elephant. Definitely, the elephant and the Mahouts must have done some harm to you and you rightly punished them.’ Eripathar narrated to the king all that had happened, and said: ‘Since the elephant and the Mahouts were guilty of *Siva-Aparadham*, I killed them.’ The moment the king heard the expression *Siva-Aparadhara* (sin against Lord Siva) he suffered terrible mental agony. He fell at the feet of Eripathar and said: ‘O Swamin, for what they have done, the punishment awarded by you is not enough. I have committed a great crime by keeping such an elephant and such Mahouts. Now, I do not deserve a death through your holy weapon, the axe. Here is my own sword. Please be gracious enough to cut off my head with it.’

Eripathar was stunned to hear these words. He himself was struck with remorse. ‘What a great pain have I inflicted on the king! What a noble king he is!’ he thought; and, lest the king should execute the punishment on himself, he took the sword from the king. Eripathar felt that he was the cause for the king’s affliction, and in self-punishment, he began to cut his own throat. The king was alarmed. He thought that he would now be guilty of another offence and at once gripped the sword and stopped Eripathar from cutting his own throat.

The Lord’s Lila was over. A voice was heard in the sky: ‘Oh noble souls! This is Lord Pasupatheesvarar’s Lila. It is His wish that His Bhakta’s sincere and faithful service to Him must be recognised by the world.’ Immediately, the elephants and the Mahouts got up, as from sleep. Sivakami Andar’s flower basket was full. All were amazed and began to sing Lord Pasupatheesvarar’s glory. Eripathar placed the sword at the king’s feet and prostrated to him. The king also fell at Eripathar’s feet. Both embraced each other and were in great joy. Eripathar wished that the king should mount his pet elephant. The king did so. Eripathar returned to his place. Sivakami Andar went to the temple with the flowers.

Eripathar continued to serve Siva Bhaktas. Finally he cast off his mortal coil and reached the Abode of Lord Siva.

9. ENADINATHA NAYANAR

Enadinatha Nayanar was a Shanar (toddy tapper). He was born in Eyinanur in Chola Kingdom. It was situated to the south-east of Kumbakonam on the bank of the river Arisol. It was very fertile and rich.

Enadinathar was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva. Like Maiporul Nayanar, however, he was devoted even to the external marks of Siva Bhakti. To Enadiar, the three white lines of Vibhuti or sacred ash on one's forehead were sufficient to evoke his own reverence.

It would not be out of place here to say a word about this mark on the forehead of devotees of Siva. Through this mark Lord Siva teaches silently that the spiritual aspirant should destroy the three types of impurities, viz., Anavam (I-ness), Karma (selfish activity), and Maya (illusion): the three desires or Eshanas, viz., desire for worldly goods, for son and for wife: the three Vasanas or subtle tendencies, viz., Lokavasana (worldliness), Dehavasana (attachment to the body) and Shastravasana (blind faith in the scriptures and polemics), and that he should transcend the three bodies (physical, astral and causal), and the three states, viz., waking, dreaming and deep sleep,—and eventually attain union with Lord. The Shastras assure us that the Bhasma or sacred ash is a divine healer. It cures all diseases, including the disease of birth and death, and bestows on the devotee who wears it, the highest wealth, viz., Moksha.

Such is the glory of the sacred ash: and, no wonder Enadiar worshipped whoever came to him with the ash on his forehead. Enadiar saw Lord Siva in him. He was ready to give even his own life at the feet of the devotee who wore the ash.

Enadinatha Nayanar was a very good swordsman. He was a tutor to the princes in fencing. He earned a good income from his profession. He spent all his income in the service of the Siva Bhaktas. He became very popular, too. This evoked the jealousy of another man belonging to the same profession, by name Atisuran. Contrary to his name (which means a great hero), he was not at all skilful and not strong either, because he was full of vices. Yet, he wanted to fight with Enadinathar and defeat him.

One day Atisuran marched towards Enadinathar's house, with all his relatives, fully armed: he hoped to defeat Enadinathar, with the help of his relatives. He stood in front of Enadinathar's house and challenged him to a fight—jackal coming to fight the lion. Enadinathar accepted the challenge and came forward to fight. Atisuran got frightened. He asked Enadinathar to come to the nearby grove to fight with him. The relatives of Atisuran were waiting in the grove. In the mean time, the friends of Enadinathar had also gathered around him. The two parties fell on each other, and in the terrible fight that ensued many lives were lost. Atisuran ran away from the grove. He wanted to kill Enadinathar, not in open fight (which was impossible), but by strategem.

The next day, he sent a message to Enadinathar: 'Let us fight again, but without any assistance this time: otherwise, many innocent people die on our account. Let us go to a lonely place, without anyone's knowledge and fight.' Enadinathar accepted it. The next morning, Enadinathar went away secretly and was awaiting Atisuran's arrival at the stipulated place. Atisuran, with the sacred ashes on his forehead (which was cleverly hidden by his shield) approached Enadinathar. Enadinathar pounced upon him, with a big roar. In a moment, Atisuran removed the shield, revealing the sacred ashes. Enadinathar quickly lowered his sword and thought: 'What a sin I was about to commit! He has become a Siva Bhakta now. I must not harm him. Let him achieve his object of killing me.' Enadinathar wanted to throw the sword away, but kept it in his hand, else he would be compelling his opponent (a Siva Bhakta!) to incur the sin of killing an unarmed person. As he was mutely standing thus, Atisuran killed him.

Lord Siva was highly pleased with this self-sacrificing devotion that Enadinathar had for the ashes. He appeared before Enadinathar as he fell, and took him to His Abode.

10. KANNAPPA NAYANAR

Nagan was the king of hunters at Uduppur in Pottapi Nadu. His wife was Tattai. They were great devotees of Lord Subramanya. By His grace, they had a child, after a long time. It was very heavy: so, they named him *Tinnanar*.

Tinnanar was Arjuna in the previous birth, according to Tiru Kalahasthi Puranam. When he went to worship Siva, to get Pasupatha Astra, and when the Lord came to him as a hunter, Arjuna did not recognise Him. So, he had to be born as a hunter again and adore the Lord, before attaining Final Liberation.

Tinnanar was educated according to the hunters' customs. He became a good archer. Even when he was young, his father retired, and crowned him king. Though he was a hunter and carried on hunting as his Dharma, Tinnanar was full of love and would not kill young ones, females, diseased animals, etc. Spiritually, he had already killed the animals within himself, viz., lust, anger, greed, vanity, etc.

One day, Tinnanar went out hunting. A pig escaped from its net and was running away. Tinnanar pursued it accompanied by two others, Nanan and Kadan. The pig was tired and stood near a tree. It was quickly killed by Tinnanar. They were tired, too, and thirsty. They proceeded towards the Ponmukali. Tinnanar wanted to climb the nearby mountain. Nanan, too, volunteered to follow him, saying that on that, the Kalahasthi hill, there was Lord Kudumithevar (God with a Tuft). Kadan was busy cooking the pork.

Even when he began to climb the hill, there was a definite change coming over Tinnanar, owing to past Samskaras. He felt that a great burden was being lifted off his shoulders. He was losing body-consciousness. As he saw the Lord there, he felt supreme love surging in his heart. He embraced the Lingam and kissed It. He began to shed tears of joy. He felt that the Lord was lonely there, and that he should thenceforth remain with Him. Again, he thought that the Lord might be hungry. Though he was reluctant to leave the Lord alone, he quickly came down the hill to fetch some food for the Lord. He took the best pieces of the pork, tasted them and ear-marked the very best for Him. In the mean time, he gathered from Nanan that the Lord was worshipped daily with water, flowers, etc, before the food was offered to Him. So, he began to collect the other articles of worship. He filled his own mouth with water from the river. Flowers, he gathered and wore them on his head! He took the pork, bow and arrow and went up the hill again, alone this time.

At the temple, Tinnanar poured from his mouth, the water that he had brought for His worship. That was his 'Abhishekam'. Then he decorated the Lingam with the flowers he had brought on his own head. This was his 'Archana'. He then placed the pork before the Lord. He went out and stood guard for Him, at the entrance, lest some wild animals should hurt Him. In the morning again he went out to hunt and bring fresh food for the Lord.

In the mean time, Nanan and Kadan worried about the change that had come over Tinnanar (which they thought to be madness). They went and reported the matter to Tinnanar's parents. They came and tried, in vain, to take him back. They, too, went away.

When Tinnanar left the temple in the morning to get food for the Lord, Sivagochariar, the temple priest, came there for the usual orthodox worship. He was horrified at the desecration that some unknown person had done in the temple. He was well versed in the Agamas (rituals of Siva-worship). He performed the necessary purificatory rites and took bath again and began his formal worship. He brought water in a holy pot, with a bandage around his own mouth, lest the breath of his mouth should pollute it. He brought fresh flowers in a holy basket. He brought fruits and sweets, newly made and unpolluted by anyone tasting it, before the Lord for being offered to Him. He went home after the worship.

Tinnanar returned with fresh meat. He removed the priest's decorations, and did the worship in his own way, and then as usual, stood guard at the entrance.

This went on for five days. The priest was greatly upset about the desecration of the holy place. He appealed to the Lord to stop it. Lord Siva wanted to show to Sivagochariar the nature of Tinnanar's supreme devotion. He commanded him in a dream, to hide himself behind the Lingam, when Tinnanar went to the temple the next day, and watch what took place.

On the sixth day, Tinnanar went out as usual for getting the Lord's food. While returning, he saw many ill omens, which made him feel that something had happened to the Lord: he was so unconscious of himself, that he did not think that something could happen to him. He ran towards the Lord. He was grieved to see blood issuing from the Lord's right eye. The articles he had brought for the worship dropped from his hand. He wept bitterly. He could not find who had done this to the Lord. He treated the eye with herbs he knew of. Still the bleeding did not stop. A simple idea occurred to him: 'flesh for flesh'. At once, with his own arrow, he took out his own right eye, and fixed it over the right eye of the Lord. The bleeding stopped. He was very happy. When he was dancing in ecstasy, he noticed that the Lord's left eye had begun to bleed. But, he had already found out the remedy. There was only one problem: how to locate the eye of the Lord, when his own eye had been pulled out. So, Tinnanar planted his foot at the place where the Lord's left eye was on the Lingam, and began to pull his left eye out, with his arrow.

At once, Lord Siva caught hold of his hand and said: 'My dear child, Kannappa! Stop plucking your eye.' The Lord repeated the word *Kannappa* thrice. Kannappar was thrice blessed. Tinnanar became Kannappar, because he gave his own eye to the Lord. Lord Siva took him with both Hands, and kept him on His right side. Kannappar regained his vision and lived as god himself. Sivagochariar understood the true nature of devotion.

This story has an esoteric meaning, too. Nayanar had conquered all other evils: but, Anava Malam or egoism had to be killed, too. The wild pig represents this. Supreme Bhakti dawned, the moment this was killed. In its chase, the seeker is accompanied by good and evil (the two hunters Nanan and Kadan). Nanan (good) described the glory of the Lord to him: Nanan represents good Samskaras. Kadan (the evil) had to be left behind. The aspirant with good Samskaras, goes to His Presence. But, when he has to attain God-realisation, even this has to be renounced. Hence,

Nayanar, when he went to worship Him, went alone. Nayanar's parents (the hidden good and evil tendencies and worldly desires) tried but failed to take him away from God. The Lord asked the priest to hide behind Him, while Tinnanar was in front: this means, true Bhakti is far superior to mere ritual. Tinnanar's readiness to pluck out his own eyes for His sake is total self-surrender or Atma-Nivedan, the highest peak of devotion which immediately reveals the Lord in all His glory.

11. KUNGILIYA KALAYA NAYANAR

Kungiliya Kalaya Nayanar was born in Tirukadavur in the Chola kingdom. The Lord of this place is called Amirda Ghateswarar. Once Devas and Asuras came to this place with nectar in a pot. They wanted to take bath. So, they left the pot on the ground and went to the river. When they came back to the place, they could not lift the pot. The pot itself had been transformed into a Lingam. Hence this Lingam is known as Amrita Lingam. Markandeya worshipped this Lingam and became an immortal boy of 16 years.

The Goddess in this place is called Abhirami Amman. Abhirami Pattar, a great devotee of Mother, sang beautiful songs in praise of Her: and the Mother Who was highly pleased with this, changed the new moon day into a full moon day, in order to save him from the king's wrath.

Kungiliya Kalaya Nayanar was a Brahmin by caste He got the name because he was always holding a pot (an incense pot) in his hand. He considered burning of incense before the Lord was the best service to Him. Lord Siva was highly pleased with the Nayanar's intense devotion and his wonderful service. He wanted to put it to test, so that the true glory of his supreme devotion to the Lord may be understood by all.

By the will of Lord Siva, Nayanar became poor suddenly. He sold all his property. His family was starving. Still, he continued to burn incense before the Lord. One day his dutiful wife thought: 'Everything has been sold. Only this *Mangalyam* (a sacred thread with a pendant, which every married woman must always have on her person, till the husband dies, when it is removed), is left. I will give it to my Lord: though it is inauspicious to do so. Let him sell it and obtain some rice, with which we could feed the children who may die of hunger otherwise.' She removed the *Mangalyam* and gave it to her husband, who gladly received it. As he was proceeding to the market to sell it, Lord Siva Himself appeared before him, in the guise of a hawker and said that he had very good incense. The word *incense* at once made Nayanar forget himself and the mission! He quickly bought incense for the price of the *Mangalyam*, and went to the temple to burn it before the Lord.

His wife patiently waited for his return, and, not finding him even after nightfall, put the children to bed and remained praying. The Lord was immensely pleased with this noble couple. The faithful wife was prepared to part with even the most sacred ornament for the service of her lord, her husband. The Kural says: '*Rain falls at the bidding of her who, on waking from sleep, worships no other God but her husband.*' That night Lord Siva appeared in her dream and blessed her with all wealth.

She woke up from her sleep and was amazed to find all types of wealth in the house. She sang His glories. Immediately she prepared a nice meal and was waiting for her lord's return.

After blessing the Nayanar's wife, thus, Lord Siva appeared before Nayanar in the temple and said: 'Oh noble soul, I am immensely pleased with your devotion. Your dutiful wife is anxiously waiting for you in the house with milk and food. Kindly go to your house.' It was only then that Nayanar became aware of this world! He returned to the house and found that it had been transformed into a heaven, by the grace of the Lord. Siva Bhaktas, too, had assembled in the house in large numbers. They all sang the glories of the Lord. The Nayanar treated the wealth that the Lord had bestowed upon him as the property of Siva Bhaktas and served them.

One day Nayanar wanted to visit the temple at Tiruppanandal. The Lord of this temple is Arunasatesar. Thatakai was the daughter of an Asura. For getting a son, she worshipped the Siva Lingam regularly. One day at the end of the worship, she wanted to garland the Lingam. As she lifted the garland with both her hands, her cloth began to slip from her waist. She held it with her elbows, and hence could not raise her hands (and the garland) high enough. To relieve her, the Lord leaned to one side and accepted the garland. Many people tried to pull the Lingam straight: but it could not be done. Nayanar heard that the king of the place was upset about it and wanted the Lingam to be straightened. Nayanar wanted to help the king. He tied the Lingam to his neck with a rope (the rope of God-love) and gently pulled it. The Lingam became upright! Devas rained flowers from heaven. All were amazed and recognised the glory of the Nayanar and his great devotion to the Lord.

After spending some more time in the service of Lord Siva and His Bhaktas, Nayanar reached His Abode.

12. MANAKANCHARA NAYANAR

Kancharur was a fertile place in the Chola kingdom. The people were all Siva Bhaktas. In this place there lived a staunch devotee of Lord Siva by name Manakancharanar. He was a Vellala by caste. He was a hereditary Senathipathi. People of the community had the highest regard for him. He was a contemporary of Sundaramurthi Nayanar. To him adoration of Siva Bhaktas was the highest form of worship of the Lord. He would read their minds from their look, and would serve them without their asking.

He had no children for a long time. He worshipped Siva with faith and devotion and obtained the boon of a daughter from Him. Nayanar celebrated the birth of this divine child, with a lot of charity. In due time, the girl attained the marriageable age. She was engaged to be married to Eyarkon Kalikamar who was also an earnest and sincere devotee of the Lord. The date of the wedding had been fixed and all arrangements made.

In the mean time, Lord Siva wanted to shower His supreme grace on the Nayanar. He took the form of a Maha-Vrathiar (man of great vow) who wears the sacred ash on his forehead, matted locks adorned with a garland of bones, and a sacred thread made of human hair on his chest. The Maha-Vrathiar appeared before Manakancharanar who received him with great delight. When the ascetic enquired about the cause of the festive appearance of the house, Nayanar explained that his daughter was to wed that day. He asked the girl to bow to the ascetic and receive his blessings. The ascetic saw her flowing hair, and said: 'Oh noble soul, I am delighted to see her hair. This can be conveniently made into a *Panchavati* (the thread that adorns my chest).' At once, Nayanar took a

knife and, without thinking for a moment, cut the hair on his daughter's head and handed it to the ascetic. In his extreme devotion to the Siva Yogi, he did not even consider the fact that he was disfiguring his only daughter, and that the bridegroom might refuse to accept her. The Lord in the form of the ascetic immediately disappeared. He gave Nayanar and his family Darshanam along with Mother Parvathy and blessed them.

Eyarkon Kalikamar, the bridegroom, and his party arrived there soon after, and came to know of all that had happened. He was sorry that he had not come earlier and had the Lord's Darshan. When he saw the disfigured bride and hesitated to accept her, Lord Siva, the Indweller, understood the cause, and restored the hair to her head. Nayanar and his family were very happy and proceeded with the wedding.

13. ARIVATTAYA NAYANAR

There once lived in Kannamangalam in the Chola kingdom a rich Vellala by name Thayanar. He was leading the life of an ideal Grihastha (householder) of whom the saint Tiruvalluvar has sung:

He will be placed among the gods in heaven who in this world follows the law of the householder's life.

Thayanar was a great devotee of Lord Siva. His devotion took the form of a daily offering to the Lord of food prepared with red rice, a sauce made of red herb, and mango pickle. He considered this as an act of great devotion to the Lord. The Lord was highly pleased with Thayanar's devotion. He wanted to put it to the test, in order to manifest it to the world in all its glory. By His Will, poverty struck Thayanar. Thayanar got himself employed and earned his wages in kind (red rice). He himself would not eat this red rice, but lived on the inferior *khar* rice. The Lord tested him further. All the fields in the place grew only *red* rice. But, Thayanar would not touch it. His wife cooked for him some green leaves from their garden. Thayanar was content and was intent on his usual offering to the Lord. The Lord put His devotee through more severe tests. Even the green leaves withered away and there was nothing left. Thayanar was not at all perturbed. He happily lived on mere water: his mind was full of the bliss of the worship of the Lord and he felt neither hunger nor thirst. One day, Thayanar, now emaciated and weak, was taking his usual offering to the Lord, followed by his wife. He stumbled on the way and fell down. The offering he had, was spilt on the ground. Thayanar was greatly upset. He began to weep bitterly: 'Oh Lord, today the food intended for You has been spilt on the ground. What great sin have I committed to deserve this? Please forgive me. Have mercy on this poor creature. You are omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. If this is true, You must be present here also. Kindly come and accept the offering here. If You do not eat this, I will give up my life.' With these words, he began to cut his throat with an *Arival* (sickle). Hence, the name Arivattaya Nayanar.

Lord Siva was highly pleased with his devotion. His Lila was over. He at once stretched His hand and caught hold of Nayanar's, thus preventing him from cutting his own throat. Nayanar did not realise what was happening. At that time, he heard the sound of someone biting a mango pickle. He understood the Lord's Lila, sang His glories and danced. The Lord and Mother Parvathi

appeared before him and blessed him: ‘Oh noble soul, I am immensely pleased with your devotion. You and your chaste wife will soon come to My Abode and live happily there.’

14. ANAYA NAYANAR

Tirumangalam was an important place of pilgrimage in Mazhanad (Trichnopoly District). The Lord Who dwells in this place is called Samavedesvarar. It was He Who purified Parasurama of the sin of killing his mother and also gave him the axe.

In that enchanting place, there was a cowherd by name Anayar. Because he was tending cows, he was known by that name. He was a staunch devotee of the Lord. He was devoted to the Bhasma, and also to Siva Bhaktas, irrespective of their caste. His devotion to the Lord took the form of playing on his flute the holy Panchakshara Mantra of Siva. He aspired to realise the Lord, through this Mantra.

One day when he was playing the Mantra on his celestial instrument, under a *Konrai* tree (a favourite of Lord Siva), the music captivated all the cows and calves. Even the birds sat on trees and silently heard the enrapturing music of the flute. The peacocks danced in joy, keeping time with the music. Hearing the music, other animals stood motionless. The music captivated the hearts of the deer, snakes, lions, elephants, tigers, etc. The snake and the peacock, the lion and the elephant, shed their enmity and lived together happily. The rivers stopped in their course. The waves in the sea calmed, to hear the music of Ayanar. Even the celestials (Vidyadharas, Kinnaras and Devas,) came in their celestial cars to hear the music.

The Lord was immensely pleased with Ayanar’s sincere devotion. The sweetness of the music of the flute and the effect of the Panchakshara Mantra both melted His heart. He appeared before Nayanar, with Mother Parvathi, blessed him and took him to Kailas.

15. MURTHI NAYANAR

To adore Lord Siva with sandalwood paste, smearing it all over the Lingam is regarded as a great form of His worship. This kind of worship was done by Murthi Nayanar. He was born in Madura in Pandya kingdom. He was a Vaisya by caste. He was a great devotee of Lord Siva. Daily he used to offer sandalwood paste to the Lord.

At that time, the city was invaded by a Karnataka king. In the battle the Pandya king was defeated. The Karnataka ruler became the Pandya king. He was a follower of Jainism. He wanted to exterminate Saivism and to spread his religion. He began to persecute Saivas. ‘Murthi Nayanar also had to bear a lot of sufferings. But, he was undaunted. He continued his worship of the Lord, with sandalwood.

The king, with a view to convert Murthi Nayanar forcibly to Jainism, made it impossible for anyone in Madura to obtain sandalwood. This greatly upset the Nayanar. He prayed to the Lord: ‘Oh Ocean of Mercy, this country is ruled by a tyrant and he is bent upon exterminating Your devotees. When will we be fortunate enough to get a king who will be devoted to You?’ He knew

that the people would follow the king, out of fear and in an effort to win his favour. He, therefore, wanted a Saivite king!

He searched throughout the day for a little sandalwood to offer his worship. He could not get any. With a broken heart, he went to the temple: and he had a wonderful idea. He began to rub his own elbow (in the place of sandalwood!). The hand was bleeding profusely. Lord Siva was highly pleased with his devotion. A heavenly voice said: 'Oh noble soul, I am immensely pleased with your devotion. Kindly stop rubbing your elbow. All your grievances will be redressed. Kindly take up the reins of the kingdom. After ruling the country justly and wisely for a long time, you will come to My Abode.' Nayanar was amazed to hear this and to see that his elbow regained its original shape.

Murthi Nayanar did not aspire for kingship, but it was the Lord's will. That night the cruel king died. The next day, the Ministers sent the palace elephant to choose their king, in accordance with an ancient custom. The elephant proceeded towards the temple. Murthi Nayanar had come there for his worship. The elephant bowed to him and placed him on his back and returned to the palace.

The Ministers begged of Nayanar to become their king. Nayanar stipulated this condition: 'If I become king, I will not have any luxury bath, but will bathe only with the sacred ashes. My jewel will be only Rudraksham and my crown will only be matted locks. I shall strive to let the love of Lord Siva be enthroned in the hearts of all.' The Ministers accepted these conditions with great joy and satisfaction.

Nayanar ruled the country justly and wisely for a long time, and eventually attained Siva's Abode.

16. MURUGA NAYANAR

To do Archana with flowers mentioned in Siva Agamas, to offer flower garlands to the Lord, and to repeat the Panchakshara Mantra is the ideal form of worship. Panchakshara Mantra is considered a very great Mantra because it occurs in the centre of the Sri Rudradhyayi, which occurs in the middle of the middle Khanda of the Yajur Veda. He who does Japa of this Mantra is at once relieved from the disease of birth and death.

Muruga Nayanar excelled in this worship. He was born in Tirupukalur, made famous by many other Nayanars also. Daily he would wake up well before sunrise, take bath, wear the sacred ash on his forehead, do his Nitya Karmas, and go to the garden with a basket. Repeating the Panchakshara he would collect flowers, and as mentioned in the Siva Agamas, make colourful garlands and offer to the Lord.

One day the great Jnana Sambandar came to his place. Muruga Nayanar invited him and worshipped him and won his favour. Sambandar took him as his dearest friend. Muruga Nayanar got the great good fortune of attending Sambandar's wedding when he, the bride and all others (including Muruga Nayanar) got merged in the Divine Effulgence of the Lord. Hence, the Kural

says: *'Rarest of all rare things is to win the great to one's side by courting it.'* Muruga Nayanar's devotion won for him Sambandar's friendship, and, through that, God-realisation.

17. RUDRA PASUPATHI NAYANAR

There are seven Khandas in the Yajur Veda regarded as the Head of the Lord. Sri Rudram is in the centre of the middle Khanda of the Yajur Veda. Its recitation is a great purifier. It describes the Lord's wonderful manifestations. Standing in the river and reciting this sacred scripture is regarded as specially efficacious, and bestows Moksha on the devotee.

Rudra Pasupathi Nayanar was a great devotee of Lord Siva and he resorted to this Sadhana. He used to recite Sri Rudram standing in water, neck deep and was, therefore, blessed by the Lord with Moksha.

18. TIRU NALAI POVAR NAYANAR

Nandanar was a Paraiyah (untouchable) by caste. He was born in Adanoor in the Chola kingdom. He was an embodiment of humility and devotion. Lord Siva was his sole refuge. He would often visit the holy places of pilgrimage, and supply leather drums and such other musical instruments for the temples. When he went near the temples, he always remained outside and worshipped the Lord mentally.

Once he had a desire to have Darshan of the Lord at Tirupunkur. He was also eager to do some service to the Lord there. He went to Tirupunkur and stood in front of the temple. He was grieved because Nandi which is always right in front of the Lord was hiding Him. Nandanar prayed to the Lord fervently. The Lord was highly pleased with his devotion and asked Nandi to move a little so that Nandanar might have His Darshan. Even today, at Tirupunkur, Nandi is leaning to one side! Nandanar had a delightful Darshan of the Lord. After digging a tank near the temple he returned to Adanoor.

The desire now arose in him that he should go to Chidambaram and have Darshan of Lord Nataraja. The love of the Lord had grown so intense that he would shed tears of love and tell his companions: *'I will surely go to Chidambaram tomorrow.'* This expression earned for him the name Tiru Nalai Povar (one who would go tomorrow). One day he actually left his place and went to Chidambaram. He went round the village and, thinking of his low birth, did not want to enter it. He prayed: *'Oh Lord, I want to see your Cosmic Dance in Your Nritya Sabha. But, how can I? On account of my low birth they will not allow me to enter the temple.'* For days he went on praying like this. The Lord, pleased with his devotion, appeared in his dream and said: *'Oh noble soul, do not grieve. You will come to Me. Take a fire bath. Then come to My Kanaka Sabha along with the Brahmins.'* Nandanar woke up and was highly pleased. At the same time, the Lord appeared before the Brahmins of Tillai, in their dream, and said: *'O Brahmins, My dearest devotee, Tiru Nalai Povar, has come to Tillai. Prepare a sacred fire. Nandanar will take bath in it and then come to Me.'*

The next day, the Brahmins prepared the sacred fire. They went to Nandanar, prostrated before him and related their dream. Nandanar went round the fire, and with His Name on his lips and his mind fixed on the lotus feet of the Lord, he jumped into the fire. He emerged from the fire

with a new holy body, with sacred ashes smeared all over, the holy thread and matted locks. He was then taken inside the temple. In the Kanaka Sabha, he worshipped the Lord. He went into a divine ecstasy and was completely absorbed in the dance of the Lord. A dazzling light was seen in the room, and Nandanar had disappeared. He had become one with Lord Nataraja.

19. TIRU KURIPPU THONDA NAYANAR

Thondamandalam was a prosperous land. Its capital was Kanchipuram. Here, Parvathi worshipped the Lord, according to the Agamas. The Lord here is called Ekambaranathar.

Tiruthondar was born here. He was a washerman. He was a staunch devotee of Lord Siva. He served Siva Bhaktas, understanding their need by watching for the signs on their face, and hence he had earned the name Tiru Kurippu Thonda Nayanar. His service consisted mainly of washing the clothes of Siva Bhaktas. Lord Siva wanted to bless this devotee: and, as usual, it had to be preceded by a severe test.

The Lord disguised Himself as a poor man, with Rudraksham on his neck and sacred ashes over the body, and appeared before Tiruthondar wearing a dirty rag. The very sight of the Siva Bhakta put Nayanar in a trance. He worshipped him. Thondar then asked him: 'You have purified my house by your visit. How is it you are so emaciated? And, your rag needs washing. Kindly allow me to do this service for you.' The Siva Bhakta agreed to let him do so on one condition: the rag should be washed, dried and returned to him before sunset, otherwise his emaciated body would perish in the cold.

When Thondar accepted the work, there was brilliant sunlight. He had washed the rag and immediately, it began to rain heavily. It was nearing sunset time. There was no hope of getting the rag dried. Thondar was greatly upset. Instead of serving the Siva Bhakta, he was going to put him to great hardship. Thinking of this sin, Thondar, dashed his head, prayerfully, on the washing stone, and began to weep.

Lord Siva appeared before him, held his hand and said: 'Oh noble soul, I am highly pleased with your sincere devotion. You will soon come to My Abode and live happily there forever.'

Tiru Kurippu Thondar fell at the Lord's Feet and sang His glory.

20. CHANDESVARA NAYANAR

Vichara Sarman (who was later known as Chandesvara Nayanar) was born in Tiruchaijnallur, which was famous for Vedic recitations, Tapas, and Siva Bhakti. He was a prodigy. At the age of five he had learnt the Vedas, and all the Agamas, by himself, on account of previous Samskaras. After his Upanayanam (sacred thread ceremony), he learnt the Vedas, under a Guru: but the Gurus were wonder-struck at the intelligence of the disciple. He wanted to attain Final Emancipation in that birth.

One day Vichara Sarman, with his friends, was walking along a road. He noticed a cowherd severely beating a cow because it had slightly pushed him with its horn. Vichara Sarman could not

endure this. He was greatly moved and spoke to the cowherd: 'Oh ignorant man? Do you not know that the cow is worshipful and divine. All the Devas dwell in her. She is indispensable for all religious activities. It is our sacred duty to tend and protect the cows. Whoever harms the cow is hurled into the Naraka. Whoever worships the cow wins a place in heaven or in Siva's Abode. You have committed a great sin today. Hereafter, you need not tend to the cows: I will do that myself.' Vichara Sarman took the work upon himself from that day.

The cows grew healthier. They liked Vichara Sarman very much. The Brahmins who got more milk thereafter were able to fulfil their religious duties very well, and they were pleased with Vichara Sarman. There was so much of surplus milk now, that Vichara Sarman, who loved Lord Siva and His worship, decided to perform Abhishekam for Lord Siva. He used to sit under an Atti tree on the bank of the river, construct a temple from the mud, and also make a mud-image of Siva Lingam and offer the milk, to bathe the Lingam. Then he would perform Archana with the Atti flowers. The cows were giving plenty of milk both to Vichara Sarman and to the Brahmins.

One day, when Vichara Sarman was doing this Puja, a villager happened to pass by, and he watched all this. He reported the matter to the owners of the cows, and complained that Vichara Sarman was pouring precious milk on mud and river sand. These Brahmins summoned Vichara Sarman's father, Echhadattan, and passed the complaint on to him in rather strong terms. The father was naturally shocked. He came home, but did not speak to Vichara Sarman. He wanted to find out for himself. So, the next day, he followed Vichara Sarman at a distance without his knowledge. When Vichara Sarman began pouring milk on the improvised Siva Lingam, the father, without understanding the son's wonderful devotion, hit him with a stick. The boy was so much absorbed in his Puja that he did not even feel pain. Then, the father, getting still more angry, knocked the milk-pot down. It was then that Vichara Sarman realised that his father was interfering with his worship and had committed an unpardonable offence against Lord Siva (Siva Aparadham). He at once took a stick and hit his father's leg: by the will of the Lord, the stick was transformed into an axe. Again, by His will, it killed the father. It was to test the depth of Vichara Sarman's devotion. He was so engrossed in the worship, that he did not mind what had happened and continued the worship.

Lord Siva was immensely pleased with the intensity of Vichara Sarman's devotion and appeared before him, with Parvathi. Vichara Sarman prostrated before the Lord. The Lord embraced Vichara Sarman and fondled him. That very instant, Vichara Sarman attained the divine Form of Lord Siva. The Lord removed a garland from His own neck and put it around Vichara Sarman's. He had attained Saroopya Mukthi (liberation, with the attainment of the form of the Lord). The Lord said: 'My child, you cut your own father's leg for My sake. Now, I am Your Father. You will soon attain Chandikesvarar's Abode. You worshipped Me with food, clothes and flower garlands. In the same manner, you will also be worshipped.' The Lord disappeared. Vichara Sarman also went to the Abode of Chandesvarar. No sin attached to him, for having killed his own father, because of his supreme devotion to the Lord. His father, too, because he was killed by such a great devotee of the Lord, was purged of the sin of interfering with His worship, and reached the Abode of Lord Siva.

21. TIRU-NAVUKKARASAR NAYANAR

Appar or Tiru Navukkarasar flourished in the 7th century A. D. He is one of the four Saiva Samaya Acharyas (Saivite spiritual teachers). He was born in Tiruvamoor in Tirumunaipadi Nadu. Pukalanar was his father; Mathiniyar, his mother. Mathiniyar gave birth to a daughter whom they named Tilakavathi. After some years, Mathiniyar had a son whom they called Marulneekiar, the dispeller of darkness or ignorance. Early in life he mastered all the Shastras.

When Tilakavathiar reached her twelfth year, she was betrothed to Kalaipahayar, a military commander in the Pallava army. Before the wedding, however, he was sent by the king to fight another, and he died in battle.

Pukalanar fell seriously ill and died. Mathiniyar committed Sati (died on the husband's funeral pyre). As the children were recovering from this shock, the news of Kalipahayar's death reached Tilakavathiar: and as she, since her betrothal, had regarded him as her husband, she decided to commit Sati, too. But, Marulneekiar pleaded with her reminding her that now she was his mother, and also threatened to die if she would not change her mind and live. Tilakavathiar changed her mind for the young brother's sake. Even though she was young, she led the life of an ascetic. She was highly devoted to Lord Siva. Her glorious ascetic life has been sung by Sekizar, the author of *Tirumurai*. She was mother to Appar.

Marulneekiar, even while young, had realised the unreality of the world. He engaged himself in all kinds of charitable works. He was eager to find out the best religion and to follow it. He had heard much about Jainism and its wonderful practice of Ahimsa. He believed that Jainism would give him emancipation and so became a convert. He even went to Pataliputra (in South Arcot district) and joined the Jain school. He attained mastery over all their scriptures.

Tilakavathiar was heart-broken over this change in her brother. She abandoned her native place and settled in Tiruvadigai Virattanam, in a Mutt she built there. She prayed fervently to Lord Virattaneswarar to save her brother and shower His grace upon him. The Lord appeared in her dream one day and said: 'My child, your brother has already done severe Tapas in order to attain Me. I will surely turn his mind, by making him suffer from severe colic, and then take him to My fold.'

Marulneekiar fell a victim to severe colic. He could not bear the pain. The Jains tried their best but could not relieve the pain. He felt intuitively that it was an eye-opening experience. He lost faith in Jainism. He thought of his sister. He threw away the Jain garb and without informing anybody, returned to his sister. He fell at her feet and prayed to her to protect him. She understood it was His Lila, and said that by the grace of Lord Siva, he would be all right. She smeared the holy ashes on his forehead and repeated the Panchakshara Mantra. His ignorance vanished. She took him to the temple of Virattanesvarar. He worshipped the Lord and sang a hymn: 'Oh Lord, I have insulted You and Your religion. I have committed many evil acts. Once on the bank of Godavari, I argued with the saints and established the superiority of Jainism. For all this evil, Lord Yama himself has come to me in the form of this excruciating pain. Oh Lord, You are my sole prop and refuge. Save me. I will ever keep Your Lotus Feet in my heart.' When he concluded the song, the pain disappeared. A celestial voice said: 'From now on you will be known as *Tiru Navukkarasar*,

‘Lord of Speech’. Your glory will spread everywhere.’ Thus Lord Siva’s grace restored his faith in Saivism.

Tilakavathiar was immensely happy, too. Tirunavukkarasar became a staunch devotee of Lord Siva and lived in Him repeating the Panchakshara Mantra.

The Jains at Pataliputra were afraid that, if the king came to know that because of their inability to treat Tirunavukkarasar (to whom they had given the name Dharmasenar) he had left them and gone back to Saivism, he would take them to task. So they concocted a new story and showed Tirunavukkarasar as a traitor against the king and the royal religion, viz., Jainism. The king ordered his ministers to produce Tirunavukkarasar before him. They went to Tiruvathikai, with an army. When Tirunavukkarasar heard of the charge against him, he said: ‘Oh Ministers! I am no longer your king’s subject. I am the subject of Lord Siva, the protector of all beings, the destroyer of all sins, the Lord of all gods, the bestower of immortality and eternal bliss. Disobedience to the king may amount to treason in the case of other people, not mine, because I am under His protection. Fear cannot approach me, because I am under the protection of one who once kicked Lord Yama, to save His (Siva’s) Bhakta.’ The Ministers recognised his greatness: but were afraid to return without him. They, therefore, begged of him to come with them out of his supreme compassion, and to establish the glory of Saivism. Tirunavukkarasar went with them.

The very sight of Tirunavukkarasar enraged the king who asked the Jain heads to decide upon the proper punishment to be meted out to him. They suggested that he be thrown into a burning lime kiln. Accordingly, he was shut up in a kiln for seven days. He remained there, fixing his mind on the Lord and repeating His Name. By His grace, the heat of the kiln was transformed into a cool breeze. At the end of seven days, the Jains, to their surprise, found Tirunavukkarasar alive, and absorbed in deep meditation. They attributed this to the power acquired by him when he was a Jain: and advised the king to poison him. Again, by the grace of Lord Siva the poison was transformed into nectar. Again, the Jains attributed this to the efficacy of the Jain Mantras which Tirunavukkarasar had learnt from them, and advised the king to have him trampled by the elephant. Tirunavukkarasar, boldly facing the elephant sang a hymn in praise of the Lord. Tirunavukkarasar’s loving look transformed the elephant’s nature and it went round him and prostrated to him. The Mahouts goaded it: but it got wild and attacked the Mahouts and the Jains and killed some of them. Those who escaped ran to the king and fell at his feet. This was a great disgrace.

The king was greatly worried. The Jains finally advised the king to have Tirunavukkarasar tied to a stone and thrown into the sea. In accordance with the king’s orders, this was done. Tirunavukkarasar fixed his mind on Lord Siva and was continually repeating the Panchakshara. He sang hymns in praise of the Panchakshara. As soon as he finished the song the stone began to float. Tirunavukkarasar sat on the stone and was happily borne on the waves and safely taken to the shores of Tiruppapuliur. Thus did the Lord save His Bhakta.

At Tiruppapuliur, there was a huge congregation of Siva Bhaktas to welcome him. He worshipped the Lord and sang hymns in praise of the Lord. ‘Oh Lord, the unseen Protector: You are my guide and saviour. You are my father, mother, sister and everything. Oh Lord of Mercy, You saved me from all dangers. Due to Your grace and love alone I am alive.’ Addressing the mind, he says: ‘Oh mind, when you have totally surrendered yourself to Him, why do you fear any danger?’

None can harm you. Fear not.’ Again, turning to the Lord, he says: ‘Oh Lord of Mercy, I want no more birth. If I take birth at all, owing to past Karma, let me remember Your Name always. Even if I take birth as a worm, let me not forget Your Name. Let me find delight in uttering Your Name.’ Then Tirunavakkarasar returned to Tiruvathikai, after visiting many holy places on the way. When Pallava king who persecuted him came to know this, and when he recalled the many miracles he had witnessed, he was convinced of the superiority of Saivism. He went to Tiruvathikai, fell at Tirunavukkarasar’s feet, and begged his pardon. Tirunavukkarasar embraced the king with all love and affection, and the king embraced Saivism and built the magnificent temple of Siva called Gunabharaveechuram at Tiruvathikai.

Tirunavukkarasar then spent his days in worshipping and serving the Lord in various ways, to set an example even to saints that they should not relax their eternal spiritual vigilance, lest they should fall a prey to Maya and to exhort them to lead the ideal life of a humble devotee for the guidance of others. He also visited many sacred shrines, thus emphasising the glory of pilgrimage.

The thought that he had lived for some time with the Jains, eating their food and mixing with them made Tirunavukkarasar feel that his body was still impure, for the worship of Lord Siva. He prayed to Lord Siva: ‘I do not want to live any more in this impure body. Let me have the stamp of Your Trident and Nandi on my body, and then I shall regard it as fit for Your worship.’ At once a divine servant of Lord Siva approached Tirunavukkarasar and put the stamp of the Trident and Nandi (one of the Saivite rituals of initiation, according to the Agamas) on Tirunavakkarasar’s shoulders. He experienced supreme bliss immediately.

Tirunavukkarasar then went to Chidambaram. The very sight of the temple tower sent him into a trance. He sang thrilling hymns here and prayed: ‘Let me serve You. Your Bhaktas know no want nor fear. Even Lord Yama cannot dare to approach them. I have come to Your Abode where no sin can approach. I have surrendered myself to You. I have enshrined Your Lotus Feet in my heart.’

At Chidambaram, he heard of the glory of Tiru Jnanasambandar and how he was blessed by Parvathy. He was eager to meet the great saint who was at Shiyali. As Tirunavukkarasar was proceeding towards Shiyali, Sambandar also was happy and was eagerly looking forward to this meeting. When Tirunavukkarasar reached the outskirts of Shiyali, Sambandar went forward to receive him. They fell at each other’s feet, and set an example in saintly conduct. They went to the temple and worshipped the Lord. At Sambandar’s request, Tirunavukkarasar sang a hymn here: ‘When the whole world was submerged during Pralaya, Lord Thoniappar was seated with His Consort in the boat of Pranava (OM) surrounded on all sides by Devas in the form of birds.’ Even now the temple of Lord Thoniappar is in the form of a boat. They who cling to His feet are protected.

Along with Sambandar Tirunavukkarasar visited the temple at Tirukkolaka. He then took leave of Sambandar and left the latter’s Ashram and after visiting many shrines, reached Tiruvavaduthurai. He sang a hymn here expressing intense Vairagya: ‘Oh Lord, I am caught in the wheel of births and deaths. I am tired of this. Show me a way to get out of it.’

Then he came to Sattimutham. He prayed to the Lord: ‘Oh Lord, place Thy Lotus Feet on my head before I leave this body.’ The Lord said: ‘Come to Tirunallur. I will fulfil your wish.’ Tirunavukkarasar accordingly went to Tirunallur and worshipped the Lord Who placed His Feet on the head of Appar. He sang: ‘Oh Lord, Thy Holy Feet are adored by men on earth and the gods in heaven. Even great Tapaswins cannot touch Your Feet, if their devotion to You is tainted. But They are easily accessible to the real devotees who serve with faith and devotion. The sacredness of Your divine Feet cannot be understood by ordinary men. They are the bestowers of all prosperity and immortal bliss.’

After visiting some more places of pilgrimage, Tirunavukkarasar went to Tingalur, where he formed a miracle and brought saint Appudi Adigal’s son back to life—we shall read this in Appudi Adigal’s life.

At Tiruvarur, he was given a rousing welcome by the Siva Bhaktas. He had the Lord’s Darshan there. His heart was overflowing with love. He shed tears of love. He danced in joy. He was immersed in divine bliss. He sang hymns expressing regret for his mistake in joining Jainism. He felt that he would have been blessed with the Lord’s Darshan earlier had he remained a Saivite and carried on His worship, with devotion. He also sang a hymn praising the sincere devotion and greatness of Nami Nandi Adigal who lighted the lamp with water in this sacred shrine when he could not get oil anywhere.

Then Tirunavukkarasar went to Tirupukalur, after visiting other shrines on the way. Tiru Jnana Sambandar was there, too, and the two saints met each other for the second time. At Appar’s instance, Sambandar went to Tiruvarur and had the Lord’s Darshan there. Both the saints remained at Tirupukalur for some time: and many other saints took this golden opportunity of having the Darshan of these two great Acharyas (spiritual preceptors) together. Tiru Neelakantha Nayanar, Siruthondar, Muruga Nayanar and many others came to Tirupukalur, and the place was converted into a divine realm during the stay of the two Acharyas.

The two saints then moved on to Tiruveezhimalai. Famine raged there at that time. Appar (another name for Tirunavukkarasar) and Sambandar were greatly moved by the suffering of the people and prayed to the Lord for relief. The Lord promised to give them a golden coin each every day, with which they could feed the people. Lord Siva placed two coins, one at the western entrance and the other at the eastern entrance to the temple: the Nayanars collected the coins and relieved the suffering of the people. The famine soon came to an end. Both the saints praised the glory of the Lord and left.

Then they came to Tirumaraikadu or the present Vedranyam. Once upon a time, the Vedas themselves used to worship the Lord here. When people neglected the study of the Vedas, this was discontinued. From that time, the door by which the Vedas used to enter, remained closed. There was another door by which people would go in and worship. Appar and Sambandar heard of this when they came there. Sambandar desired to enter through the door which remained closed. He requested Appar to sing a song. The doors opened by themselves, by the Will of God. They went in and worshipped the Lord. When they returned to that entrance, Appar requested Sambandar to sing a song, so that the door could close again. Sambandar sang and the door closed again. At night one day, Lord Siva appeared and commanded Appar to come to Tiruvaimoore. The Lord appeared

before him and walked in front of him. Appar followed Him, but could not approach Him. Suddenly the Lord entered the local temple and disappeared. Appar went inside the temple but could not find the Lord. In the meantime, Sambandar, learning of Appar's departure, followed him and came to the temple. Appar entreated the Lord to bless Sambandar with His Darshan. The Lord fulfilled Appar's wish. Then, they went to Tiruvaimoore and from there returned to Tirumaraikadu.

Mangayarkarasiar and Kulachirai Nayanar, the queen and the minister of the Pandyan king, sent messengers from Madurai to Sambandar, reporting the evil influences of the Jains and urging for his immediate presence in Madurai. Sambandar wanted to go there immediately. Appar, in the meantime, told him of all that happened to him and tried to stop him from going. But, so great was Sambandar's eagerness to serve the Lord, that he went.

Tirunavukkarasar then visited Tiruvavaduthurai, and came to Pazhaiyari. Here he came to the Vadathalai temple and worshipped the Lord from outside. He came to know that the Jains had converted this into a Jain temple, and that they had removed the Siva Lingam to an unknown place. He prayed to the Lord: 'Oh Lord, I will not proceed an inch from here till I have the Darshan of Your image which has been removed by the Jains to an unknown place.' The Lord appeared before the king in his dream and said: 'Oh king, My Bhakta Tirunavukkarasar is fasting, to have My Darshan. Go at once and drive out the Jains, so that Tirunavukkarasar could enter the temple and have My Darshan.' He also told the king where the Lingam lay hidden.

The king woke up and immediately summoned his ministers. He went to the temple, drove away the Jains and fell at the feet of Tirunavukkarasar. The temple was immediately reconverted into a Siva temple and the Lingam installed once again. Tirunavukkarasar worshipped the Lord and was happy.

During another pilgrimage, Tirunavukkarasar felt the pangs of hunger as he was approaching Tirupainjeeli. Lord Siva wanted to appease his hunger and thirst. He created a tank and a garden on the way, so that Tirunavukkarasar could quench his thirst and rest in the garden. The Lord Himself waited there in the guise of a Brahmin, with food in hand and gave it to Tirunavukkarasar as soon as he arrived there. Appar took the food, drank the water and was resting when the Brahmin enquired where he was going.

He said that he was going to Tirupainjeeli. They both started to walk. When they were near the place, the Brahmin suddenly disappeared, and Appar understood that it was none other than the Lord Himself. He wept bitterly for not recognising Him earlier and rolled on the ground on account of His separation.

After visiting Tiruvannamalai, Kancheepuram, and Kalahasthi, where he sang the glories of Kannappar, Appar felt a desire to go to Kailasa. He went to Banaras, and worshipped Lord Viswanath. He turned northwards and crossed many thick forests infested by wild animals. By his mere look, the wild animals became tame! He walked night and day. His feet were sore. Then he crawled with his hands. His elbows began to bleed now. Then he used his chest and crawled on. His chest also began to bleed and the ribs began to break. Still, Appar, undaunted, continued his journey to Kailasa, rolling on the ground. Appar wanted to go to Kailasa: but the Lord wanted that he should live in the world for many more years singing His glories. The Lord created a tank nearby and

appeared before Appar in the form of a saint, with matted locks, Rudraksham and holy ashes. The saint found out from Appar that he was proceeding to Kailasa, and said: 'Oh friend, the Lord of Kailasa cannot be seen by human beings. So, turn back.' Appar said: 'So long as I have this body, I will not turn back, without going to Kailasa,' and turned towards the saint again after bowing to him: but the saint was not there. Appar understood it was the Lord Himself. The Lord afterwards kept Appar invisible company, giving him encouraging words now and then. Appar mentally prayed to the Lord: 'Oh Lord, give me a fresh body, so that I may continue the journey.' The Lord directed him to take bath in a near-by tank and said: 'You will see Me and My Abode, Kailasa in Tiruvayar.' Appar, repeating the Panchakshara, took a dip in the tank. He came out of the tank, and found himself in the tank at Tiruvayar, hundreds of miles away, to the south! He came outside and saw everywhere Siva and Sakti. He entered the temple and saw Mount Kailasa there. He saw Lord Siva seated with Mother Parvathy, surrounded by gods, and celestial servants praising His glory. He went into a trance and sang His glories and danced.

Then, Appar had a Mutt built for him at Tirupoonthurai and remained there. Sambandar had, in the meantime, defeated the Jains at Madurai and was coming to Tirupondurai. Appar went forward to receive him. Without Sambandar's knowledge, Appar quietly joined those who were carrying his palanquin. On reaching Tirupoonthurai, Sambandar cried out: 'Where is Appar?' and Appar, from below the palanquin coolly announced himself. At once Sambandar jumped out of the palanquin and fell at the feet of Appar who had, by his example, demonstrated the humility of a true saint. They embraced each other and shed tears of love. (Incidentally, it is interesting to note that Appar was advanced in age and Sambandar was only seven years old at the time.)

Then, Tirunavukkarasar wanted to see the state of Saivism in the Pandyan kingdom, for himself and left for Madurai. The king, Ninra Sheer Nedumara Nayanar, the queen Mangayarkarasiar, and the minister Kulachirai Nayanar welcomed him with devotion. Appar remained there for some days, worshipping the Lord. Then he went to Rameswaram and other sacred places before returning to Tirupukalur.

Lord Siva wanted to test him here. When Appar was doing his services in the temple, the Lord made the entire floor appear as though it was strewn with gold and diamonds. To Appar, gold and diamonds were worthless 'straw'. He collected all of them and threw them in a near-by tank. Again, the Lord made celestial damsels appear before him and tempt him with their charms. Appar remained undisturbed. His entire heart and soul was centred on the Lotus Feet of the Lord.

Appar spent the rest of his life there and at the age of 81 merged himself in Lord Siva.

22. KULACCHIRAI NAYANAR

In devotion to Siva Bhaktas, Kulacchirai Nayanar excelled. He was born in Manamerkudi, in the Pandyan kingdom. This place was frequently graced by Siva Bhaktas. Kulacchirai Nayanar was the leader as well as the supporter of the people. To him adoration of Siva Bhaktas was equal to adoration of Lord Siva Himself. He saw no difference between Siva Bhaktas and Siva.

He was the Prime Minister of the Pandyan king. Yet, he regarded himself as the slave of Siva Bhaktas. He was the richest man in the place: yet, to him wealth was only dust. Nothing

belonged to him: it was the property of Siva Bhaktas. Even Sambandar extolled his virtuous qualities in a song.

Nayanar was an able soldier and administrator. Yet, his mind was ever absorbed in the Lord. He helped the queen in stemming the tide of the evil influence of Jainism. Nayanar invited Sambandar to Madurai to fight this evil influence. The Jains set fire to Sambandar's camp. Sambandar sang a song. The fire was extinguished. The Pandyan king had high fever, which the Jains could not cure, but which was cured by the sacred ash which Sambandar applied on him. Sambandar argued with the Jains and defeated them. Kulacchirai sent the defeated Jains to the gallows. He served the Siva Bhaktas and finally attained Siva's Abode.

23. PERUMIZHALAI KURUMBA NAYANAR

Guru is God. The same Lord Who is never separate from us, Who is our sustainer and support appears to us as the visible form of the Guru. He who adores the Guru with faith and devotion will attain all Siddhis (psychic powers) and eternal bliss. Perumizhalai Kurumba Nayanar excelled in Guru Bhakti. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva and Siva Bhaktas, too. He heard of Sundaramurthi Nayanar's greatness and mentally accepted him as his Guru. To him, Sundarar was the sole refuge. He adored the Guru in thought, word and deed. By the Guru's grace, he attained all the Siddhis. He was immersed in Siva Bhakti and Guru Bhakti.

In the meantime, Sundarar came to Tiruvanchaikalam from where he was taken to the Lord's Abode. Kurumba Nayanar, through his Yogic powers, came to know that this would happen. He did not like to remain in this world after the Guru: and, therefore, through the method of Siva Yoga, Nayanar cast off his mortal coil and reached the Abode of Siva, a day before Sundarar's departure.

24. KARAIKAL AMMAIYAR

Punithavathiar as Karaikal Ammaiyar was called, was born in a Vaisya family. Her father was Danadathan. He was a wealthy merchant. He was very virtuous, too. He and his dutiful wife prayed to the Lord for a child, and the child the Lord blessed them with they called Punithavathy. From her childhood, Punithavathy had an intense love for Lord Siva and His Bhaktas. She was married to Paramadattan, a wealthy Vaisya. Both of them were leading an ideal householder's life.

One day Paramadattan sent two mangoes to his house. Punithavathy kept them safely so that she could serve her husband with them at meal-time. In the meantime, a Siva Yogi appeared before her. He was hungry and completely exhausted. Punithavathy worshipped him and offered him Bhiksha. She had nothing to give him, except the mangoes. She gave one to the guest. At midday Paramadattan came to the house. The wife served him with one mango. He liked it, and asked for the other. She was upset. She appealed to the Lord for help. When she finished her prayer, mysteriously a mango fell on the palm of her hand. She gave it her husband. He tasted it. It was exceptionally sweet. He asked her to tell him from where she got it, as he was quite sure it was not the mango he had sent. Punithavathy told him the whole truth. Paramadattan, however, would not believe this and challenged her to produce another. She prayed again to the Lord. Another mango appeared on her palm. She gave it to him. But, at once it disappeared from his hand. He was

astounded. He understood the greatness of his wife. He felt that it was a great sin to live with her as her husband. On the pretext of going to a foreign country for trade, he sailed with a ship load of goods. On return, he established himself in a big city in the Pandyan kingdom. He married a Vaisya girl and lived happily. He had a daughter by her and he named her Punithavathy, after his first wife.

Punithavathiyar's relatives came to know of her husband's whereabouts and took her also there in a palanquin. When Paramadattan heard that Punithavathy was coming to him, he, with his second wife and child, went forward, and fell at Punithavathy's feet. When the people demanded an explanation, he revealed that he regarded her, not as his wife, but as a Goddess. Punithavathy understood his mental condition, and prayed to the Lord: 'In that case, Oh Lord, deprive me of the present physical charm and let me have a demonical form.' Her prayer was immediately granted and her charming body was transformed into a skeleton.

Then she went on a pilgrimage to the holy Kailasa. Feeling that it would be a great sin to place her foot on those sacred grounds, she made the last part of the journey on her head. Mother Parvathy was surprised to see Punithavathy's strange form and her wonderful devotion. Lord Siva told her of Ammaiyar's greatness. When she went near Him, Lord Siva welcomed her with extreme love and granted a boon to her. She fell at His Feet, and prayed: 'Oh Lord of Mercy, give me sincere, pure, unalloyed, eternal and overflowing devotion unto You. I want no more birth. If, however, I have to take birth here, grant me that I should never forget You. Whenever You dance, I must be at Your feet singing Your praise. This is my only wish.' Lord Siva granted the boon and asked her to proceed to Tiruvalangadu to witness His dance. She went to that place and spent her life singing the praise of Lord Siva.

25. APPUDDI NAYANAR

In devotion to the Guru, Appudi Nayanar excelled. He was an ardent Siva Bhakta. He was leading the ideal householder's life. He belonged to a Brahmin family in Tingalur in the Chola kingdom.

Appudi had heard of the glories of Tirunavukkarasar or Appar. He had heard of how God's grace made the stone float and how Appar rode on it and floated on the sea and went to a place of safety. Even though he had not seen Appar, he had taken him as his Guru, and literally worshipped Appar. He knew that Lord Siva Himself, out of compassion for the spiritual aspirants, appeared as the Guru. He meditated on the lotus feet of the Guru. He had named all his children 'Tirunavukkarasu': and all the household articles had also been named after the Guru. He had erected a number of water-sheds, for the service of pilgrims, and had named all of them after the Guru. Thus had he ensured that he would constantly remember the Guru, and experience his grace.

Appar himself passed through Tingalur one day. He went into one of the water-sheds. He was surprised to see his own name everywhere. He found out from some other pilgrims that the shed had been erected by Appudi and went to meet him. Appudi received the Siva Bhakta (though he did not know who it was) with great devotion. Appar said: 'Oh noble soul, I have heard a lot about your greatness and glory. I wanted to pay my respects personally to you. Please tell me, why have you named the water-shed after somebody, and not yourself.' Appudi was upset at this casual reference to the blessed name of his Guru. He said: 'Oh friend, though you appear to be a Siva Bhakta, you do

not seem to know Tirunavukkarasu Swamigal, who through the grace of the Lord withstood successfully all the persecutions of the Pallava king and re-established Saivism. Have you not heard how the king tied him to a stone and threw him into the sea, and how he floated back to the shore? Who are you?’

Appar was very much moved by Appudi’s devotion and replied: ‘I am that humble soul who fell a victim to severe colic and then took shelter under the Lord’s Feet. I am that humble soul who, due to the grace of Lord Siva, got cured of that disease and returned to Saivism.’ Look at the difference between the two descriptions! Appudi remembers the glory of Appar: whereas Appar chooses to recall his own failing (to preserve his humility) and the Lord’s supreme saving grace.

As soon as he heard this, Appudi understood that the Siva Bhakta was none other than Appar and was overjoyed. He worshipped Appar, along with his wife and prayed to Appar to accept his Bhiksha (food). While their son had gone to the garden to bring a banana leaf, for Appar to use as his plate, the boy was bitten by a cobra. The son of a Nayanar: he was also a great devotee of the Lord! He ran to the mother eager to fulfil his duty. He handed the leaf to his mother and immediately fell down dead. Appudi did not want to let this disturb his worship of Appar Swamigal: and, therefore, hid the corpse. He invited Appar to have his meal. Appar sat down and blessed Appudi and his wife with Bhasma, and then called for their son. Appudi tactfully replied: ‘He is not in a position to come.’ Appar sensed that there was something wrong and asked Appudi to tell him the truth. Appudi informed him what had happened. Immediately Appar got up and asked Appudi to lay the corpse in front of the temple: and he himself sang a song. A miracle took place. The boy got up, as if from sleep. All were happy, except the parents of the boy. They regretted that this incident had caused some delay in Appar having his meals! Such is the nature of true devotion. Appar immediately took his meals and blessed the family.

Appar lived in Appudi Adigal’s house for some time. Appudi gained the grace of the Lord, by his wonderful devotion to his Guru, Appar Swamigal.

26. TIRUNEELANAKKA NAYANAR

Tirusattamangai was an important city in the Chola kingdom. It was a place full of spiritual vibrations and Siva Bhakti. The Brahmins were devoted to the study and recitation of the Vedas and worship of the Lord. And, the women were devoted to their lord (the husband) and served them as they would serve God Himself. It is situated seven miles east of Nannilam. There is a temple in this place called Ayavanthi. The Lord presiding over this is Ayavanthi-Nathar. His Consort is Malarkanni Ammai.

In this city there lived the glorious Brahmin, Tiruneelanakka Nayanar. He was well versed in the Agamas and was regular in his ritualistic worship of the Lord. On a Tiruvathirai day he was devoutly worshipping the Lord in the temple. His wife was also with him. A spider fell upon the Siva Lingam, when the worship was in progress. The saint’s wife, without a moment’s hesitation, blew it away, and spat on the spot where it had fallen, on the Siva Lingam—this is what they do when a spider falls on the body of a child or other human being. But, the husband was enraged at the wife’s sacrilegious action: she had spoilt the worship and polluted the temple by spitting on the Lingam. Without a second thought, he abandoned her and returned home.

The lady appealed to Lord Ayavanthinathar for his mercy. He appeared in the saint's dream that night and showed him His body—all the parts of His body except that on which his wife had spat, had been affected by the spider poison. He realised that Bhakti was superior to ritualistic worship. He recalled the glimpse of the Lord he had, in his dream and rejoiced, rolled on the ground, wept out of sheer joy and danced. The next morning he went to the temple and worshipped the Lord, and returned home with his wife, the noble devotee to whom the Siva Lingam was not a stone, but a Living Presence.

Once Tiru Jnana Sambandar visited his place with Tiruneelakanta Perumbanar and Virali. Tiruneelanakka Nayanar was very eager to meet the great saint Sambandar. He welcomed the saint with due honours. That night, Sambandar asked Tiruneelanakkar to give some accommodation to the other two who were with him. They were not of the 'high' (Brahmin) caste! Tiruneelanakka Nayanar hesitated to let them sleep inside the house. He asked them to sleep near the sacrificial pit. As soon as they went near the pit, the Nayanar was astounded to see that the sacrificial fire began to burn of its own accord. He understood that, through the fire of their devotion they had attained to a stage which was far higher than what mere ritual could lead to. The mist of caste distinction also vanished from the eyes of Nayanar. Next morning, Sambandar went to the temple and sang a song in which he glorified Tiruneelanakka Nayanar also. When Sambandar wanted to leave the place, Tiruneelanakkar also wanted to accompany him: but Sambandar instructed him to stay there itself and serve the Siva Bhaktas. He obeyed.

He was, however, longing to be always at the feet of Sambandar. Soon his wish was fulfilled. He heard of Sambandar's marriage, and went to Nallur Perumanam to witness it. When Sambandar got merged in the Light of Lord Siva, Tiruneelanakka Nayanar also got merged in it.

27. NAMI NANDI ADIGAL

In Emaperur in the Chola kingdom there lived a Brahmin called Nami Nandi Adigal. Daily he used to go to Tiruvarur and worship Lord Siva, his sole refuge. One day, he felt an intense desire to light many lamps in the temple, which is an act highly extolled in the Siva Agamas. So, Nandi Adigal went to a near-by house and asked for *ghee* to light the lamps with. It was a Jain's house: and the Jain said scornfully: 'I have no *ghee*: if you are so eager, you may as well use water, instead.' Nandi Adigal was filled with anguish to hear this. He went to the temple and prayed to the Lord. He heard a voice: 'Don't grieve. Bring water from the near-by tank and light the lamps with it.' With great joy Nandi Adigal did so. Through the supreme grace of the Lord, all the lamps burned brightly! All the Jains were amazed to witness this miracle. Nandi Adigal did so on several days continuously. By that time, people's faith in Jainism was lost through the miracles of Nandi Adigal of Tiruvarur. People embraced Saivism.

The Chola king, hearing of Nandi Adigal's greatness, appointed him as the head of the temple. He used to celebrate the Panguni Uttaram festival on a grand scale. The Lord would be taken to a place called Tirumanali where people of all castes would flock around and worship Him. On one such occasion, after finishing his duties, Nandi returned home. Feeling that the touch of people of all castes had polluted him, he did not enter the house and do the usual worship before he went to bed. He asked his wife to bring some water so that he could bathe and then enter the house. But, before the water came, he was overpowered by sleep. In a dream, Lord Siva said: 'Oh Nandi!

All those who are born in Tiruvarur are my *Ganas* (servants). They cannot be regarded as impure. You yourself will see this with your own eyes.' Nandi Adigal woke up from sleep and told all this to his wife. He repented for his wrong notion. He at once performed the worship. In the morning he went to Tiruvarur. There he saw that all the people who were born there had the same form as Lord Siva Himself. Nandi Adigal prostrated before them all. They resumed their original forms: Nandi Adigal understood it was the Lila of the Lord.

Then, Nandi Adigal settled down in Tiruvarur. He served the Lord and His Bhaktas so nicely that Appar praises him as '*Anipon*' (pure gold). Ultimately he attained the glorious realm of the Lord.

28. TIRU JNANA SAMBANDAR

In sacred Sirkali (which, according to a legend was the *Noah's Arc* during a cosmic dissolution) there lived a pious Brahmin by name Sivapada Hridayar with his virtuous wife Bhagavathiar. Both of them were ardent devotees of Lord Siva. They refused to embrace Jainism and give up Saivism, even though the forces of Jainism were powerful and devastating. Sivapada Hridayar prayed to the Lord for the boon of a worthy son to him who would reestablish the glory of Saivism. The Lord granted this boon, and Bhagavathiar soon brought into this world a radiant male child. They brought up this child with great love and devotion, knowing fully well that it was a purposeful gift from the Lord. The child, too, would weep for his separation from his divine parents Lord Siva and Parvathy, though ordinary people mistook it for a baby's crying habit.

One day Sivapada Hridayar and his wife took the child with them to the temple tank in which they wanted to bathe. The child had insisted on being taken with them. They left the child on the bank and went in to bathe. The child looked at the tower of the temple and began to cry for *his* parents. This outwardly appears to be a mere childish action, but the Lord knew its inner meaning. Lord Thoniappar wanted to bless the child. So, He appeared with Mother Parvathy and asked Her to feed the child with the milk of divine wisdom. To obtain His grace and divine knowledge, the grace of the Mother is necessary, Mother Parvathy fondled with the child and suckled him with the Milk of Wisdom. From that moment he was known as *Aludaiya Pillayar* or one who enjoys the protection of the Lord: and also as *Tiru Jnana Sambandar* as he attained divine wisdom through the grace of Lord Siva and Parvathy. From the moment he drank the Milk of Wisdom, he began to sing soul-stirring songs in praise of Lord Siva. The collection of these songs is called Thevaram.

After finishing their bath, the parents came to the child, and found a golden cup in his hands (the cup in which Parvathy gave him the milk) and milk overflowing from his mouth. Sivapada Hridayar thought that somebody had given milk to the child: he did not like that his child should accept milk from all sorts of people. So, he brandished a cane before the child and asked him who gave the milk. The child, shedding profuse tears, pointed to the Lord Who appeared in the sky along with Mother Parvathy. He also sang a song in praise of the Lord. Sivapada Hridayar could not see the Lord, but guessed from the child's behaviour that he must have had a vision of the Lord. He followed the child into the temple, as he went towards it. Many devotees had also come to the temple. They had come to know of what had happened to Pillaiyar and glorified him. The parents were very happy. They took the child on their shoulders and went round the town in a procession. The people had decorated the town nicely and received Sambandar with great devotion.

The next day Pillaiyar went to Tirukkolakka and sang a song, clapping his hands to keep time. Lord Siva, pleased with this, presented him with a pair of golden cymbals. Sambandar began to sing, with the help of the golden cymbals. Even Narada and the celestials were charmed by this.

Sambandar then went on pilgrimages. Once Tiru Neelakanta Yazhpanar, an ardent devotee of the Lord and an expert musician on the Yazh (Veena) met Sambandar. They all went to the temple. Sambandar requested Yazhpanar to play the Yazh. The music melted the heart of Sambandar. Yazhpanar wanted to be always with Sambandar, to play on his instrument the songs that Sambandar sang in praise of the Lord. Sambandar granted this wish.

Sambandar went on a pilgrimage to Chidambaran. The very sight of the Lord entranced him. He had heard about the greatness of the Brahmins of Tillai (Chidambaram). To him, they actually appeared as Siva Ganas (celestial servants of Lord Siva). He showed this to Yazhpanar and they were thrilled. The Brahmins fell at his feet. Before they did so, Sambandar had fallen at their feet!

After visiting the birth-place of Yazhpanar, Sambandar wanted to go to Tiru Arathurai. He would sometimes walk and at other times sit on his father's shoulders. In this manner they approached Maranpadi. They were all tired due to the heat of the sun and the arduousness of the journey. They rested at Maranpadi for the night.

The Lord wanted to alleviate His child's suffering by presenting him with a palanquin. He appeared in the dream of the Brahmins of Tiru Arathurai and told them that they would find a pearl palanquin and a pearl umbrella, and asked them to take them to Sambandar who was then proceeding towards Tiru Arathurai. At the same time, the Lord appeared in Sambandar's dream and informed him of the gift! The next morning, the Bhaktas handed over to Sambandar the Lord's gifts to him. Sambandar worshipped the gifts and ascended the palanquin.

Sambandar returned to Sirkali, after visiting a number of shrines on the way, and singing Padigams in praise of the Lord everywhere. His parents performed the sacred thread ceremony. The Brahmins then began to teach him the Vedas. But, even before hearing the Vedas from the teacher, Sambandar could recite them, on account of previous Samskaras and divine grace. Then Sambandar taught them the essence of the Panchakshara and also sang a Padigam. It was at this time that Tirunavukkarasar also met Sambandar.

During the course of his pilgrimage, Sambandar came to Tiru Pachilasramam. The daughter of the Mazhava King there, who was a great devotee of Lord Siva, was suffering from an incurable disease. The king had, in despair, taken her to the temple and placed her in front of the Lord. At the same time, Sambandar had come into the temple. He saw the pitiable condition of the girl, who was lying unconscious. He sang a Padigam praying for His grace upon the girl. She at once got up to the surprise of all. All were amazed at this miracle.

At Senkunrur, during his pilgrimage, Sambandar found that the cold was very severe and that many people suffered on account of it. They entreated him to alleviate their sufferings. Sambandar sang a song, and immediately, they were relieved of their suffering.

After some more pilgrimages, Sambandar came to Tiruvavaduthurai. His father wanted to perform a big Yajna. He wanted a lot of money for that. Sambandar went to the temple and sang a song. At once a Siva Gana appeared before him, handed him a purse containing one thousand gold coins and said. 'This purse has been given to you by Lord Siva.' Sambandar glorified the Lord's grace, handed over the purse to his father (who went away to Sirkali) with the assurance that it would give inexhaustible wealth.

At Dharmapuram, which was the home of the Yazhpanar's mother, the people glorified Yazhpanar for his proficiency in music. Yazhpanar felt that it was due to Sambandar's grace that he was allowed to accompany Sambandar and that he could really not reproduce on the Yazh the divine melody of the saint's Padigams. To prove this Sambandar sang a song in praise of Lord Ganesa which Yazhpanar was unable to play on his instrument. He tried to break the instrument in desperation. But, Sambandar prevented him from doing so, and asked him to be content with what he could achieve with it, assuring him that that was a lot.

Sambandar went to Sattamangai where he was received by Tiruneelakanta Nayanar with great love and devotion. Sambandar sang a Padigam in which he glorified the Nayanar. At Tiru Keizhvelur, similarly, he met Siruthondar and glorified him in a Padigam. Such is the nature of the truly great ones: they adore even devotees of the Lord as the Lord Himself and sing their glories, not regarding that as worship or adoration of a human being, but of manifest divinity.

During his stay there, Sambandar would daily go to Tiru Marugal to worship the Lord. One day a merchant had come there with his wife. When they were asleep, a poisonous snake bit the man and he died. Doctors failed to revive him. The wife prayed to the Lord for His mercy. At that time Sambandar entered the temple and heard the woman's wailing. Sambandar consoled her, and she narrated to him her story and her pitiable condition. Sambandar sang a song, and the merchant at once came back to life! All of them worshipped the saint's holy feet.

At the request of Siruthondar, Sambandar wanted to have the Darshan of the Lord at Chenkattankudi. When he was taking leave of the Lord, He gave him Darshan in the form as He is in Chenkattankudi. On the way, Sambandar stayed at Tiru Pukalur as the guest of Muruga Nayanar, and sang his glories.

At the suggestion of Appar Swamigal, Sambandar visited Tiruvarur and had Darshan of Lord Thiageesa. Then both the saints stayed with Muruga Nayanar for some time. They then went to Tiru Kadavur, met Kungiliya Kalaya Nayanar and sang his glories.

They then came to Tiruveezhimizhalai. During their stay there, the Brahmins of Sirkali met Sambandar there, and pleaded that he should go to Sirkali and have the Darshan of Lord Thoniappar. The Lord Himself, however, did not want His child to undertake this journey. The next morning, Sambandar went to the local temple for worship. There he saw Lord Thoniappar seated in front of him. He sang His glories. He informed the Bhaktas of this and sent them back to Sirkali.

Appar and Sambandar stayed at Tiruveezhimizhalai for some more time. There was a severe famine there. Appar and Sambandar were moved by the sufferings of the Bhaktas. They offered prayers to the Lord Who promised to give them some gold coins daily, with the help of

which they could serve the people. Both of them found a gold coin, at different entrances to the temple. Appar was immediately able to get provisions for his gold coin, whereas Sambandar could not. He had to exchange his coins for pure gold coins, before he could obtain the provisions. Sambandar understood that it was because of Appar's sincere service to the Lord, and sang a Padigam praising the Lord. The Lord then gave him also pure gold coins and he had no difficulty in getting the foodstuffs.

The miracle that they performed at Tirumaraikadu or Vedaranyam, has already been described, while dealing with the life of Appar Swamigal.

As has already been stated, Jain influence was growing in Madura, and even the king had succumbed to it. There were only two persons who were free from the influence, and they were the queen Mangayarkarasiar and the minister Kulacchirai Nayanar. They were Saivites by inner conviction, though they did not wear the external Saivite marks, for fear of the king's wrath. They had heard the glory of Sambandar. So, without the knowledge of the king they sent some wise men to Tirumaraikadu to persuade Sambandar to rescue Saivism from the Jain influence. Sambandar informed Appar of his desire to leave for Madura immediately. Appar, out of sheer love for the young Boy, pleaded that he should not go, but, realising his divine nature, let him go!

The Jains living all over the Pandyan kingdom saw many evil omens. They reported to the king. At the same time, Mangayarkarasiar and Kulacchirai saw many good omens and were happy.

By this time, the news of the arrival of Sambandar reached the queen who sent the minister to welcome him. She herself went to the temple and offered special prayers to the Lord. The minister who proceeded to the border, heard the sound of trumpets and chanting of Vedas. He went towards that direction. The very sight of the Bhaktas who were coming in advance, thrilled him. He fell at their feet and did not get up at all. The devotees carried this news to Sambandar. Sambandar got down from his palanquin and went to Kulacchirai. He lifted the minister up and embraced him. Sambandar worshipped the Lord the moment he beheld the temple tower from a great distance. He sang the glories of the minister and the queen. They went to the temple. The queen, standing on one side, offered mental prostrations to Sambandar. Then, she fell at his feet. Sambandar blessed her.

The news of Sambandar's arrival had reached the Jains. The holy vibrations of the Panchakshara pierced their ears. They decided to bring the wrath of the king on those who welcomed the saint. They told him that they had all been polluted by the sight of the Saivites who had entered the city, following the arrival of 'one young Brahmin alleged to have been blessed with Divine Knowledge by Lord Siva directly and who wants to defeat us in a religious debate'.

The king took counsel. The Jains sought his permission to burn Sambandar's camp with the help of black magic. He gave them permission. But, it did not succeed. In the meantime, seeing the king worried, the queen ascertained the cause, and suggested that both the rival parties should be invited to argue their case and prove the superiority of their own religion. The king agreed.

The Jains failed to set fire to Sambandar's camp. So, they set fire to the camp in which the devotees were lodged. They got up, ran to Sambandar and told him what had happened. He sang a Padigam expressing the wish that (in accordance of the law of Karma) the fire for which the king

was responsible should proceed towards him. Next morning, the news reached the queen and the minister. They were grieved. They wanted to put an end to their lives, but changed their mind when they heard that nothing had happened to Sambandar or the devotees. As soon as Sambandar sang the Padigam, the fire in the camp died out and proceeded towards the king, in the form of a dreadful disease. The king experienced burning sensation all over the body. All the endeavours of the doctors and the Jain priests to alleviate the king's suffering proved futile. The queen and the ministers understood the real cause of the king's ailment and were worried. They informed the king of their feeling and requested him to call Sambandar immediately so that his grace might relieve him of the distress. The king acceded to their request and decided to embrace Sambandar's faith, if he could cure the disease.

The queen at once went out, surrounded by her maid-servants, to invite Sambandar. Kulacchiraiar also went ahead of her. They reached the Mutt in which Sambandar was staying. They fell at his feet and informed him of the king's condition: 'The atrocity of the Jains had recoiled on the king who is suffering from intense agony which the Jains have failed to relieve. With folded palms we entreat you to relieve him of the distress, and then defeat the Jains in argument and convince the king of the superiority of Saivism.' Sambandar assured them that he would fulfil their wishes. He went to the temple to get the Lord's blessings for defeating the Jains in debate and establishing Saivism in the land.

Followed by the queen and the minister, Sambandar went to the palace. The king had him received with all the honours. The Jains were worried and suggested knavishly that, even if he was cured by Sambandar, he should give the credit to them only, for the preservation of Jainism! The king refused to be unjust and partial. Sambandar came into the king's apartments. The king had him seated on a nicely decorated throne, which greatly annoyed the Jains. They challenged him to a debate. The queen was afraid that they might behave in an unruly manner towards Sambandar who was but a boy in age. She suggested that the king's disease should first be cured. The king agreed to this. Sambandar also assured her that he was not afraid of anything.

The king asked the two parties to demonstrate their powers by curing his disease. The Jains volunteered to cure the disease on the left side, leaving the right to be dealt with by Sambandar. The king agreed. The Jains touched various parts of the king's body with peacock feathers, chanting their Mantras. The pain only increased! The king looked pleadingly at Sambandar. Sambandar sang a Padigam in praise of the sacred Ash (Bhasma) and with his own hand smeared the Ash on the right side of the king's body. At once the burning sensation stopped and the king experienced a cooling sensation. The king told the Jains that they had already been defeated and turned to Sambandar and entreated him to cure the disease on the left side also. Sambandar applied the holy Ash on the left side also and the disease vanished completely. The queen and the minister fell at Sambandar's feet. The king followed suit and praised him. The Jains, however, attributed the cure to Sambandar's poetical talents, and were quite sure that he could not defeat them in philosophical arguments. They began to think of some other means of defeating Sambandar. When Sambandar invited them to open the debate, they said that they preferred practical demonstration to theoretical discussions. They wanted to challenge Sambandar to a fire test. They said that both the parties should write the essence of their respective religions on palm leaves and put them into fire: that religion should be considered as the real one whose inscriptions survived this test. Sambandar agreed to the condition. The fire was lit. Sambandar, offering his prayers to the Lord, opened the bundle of palm leaves

which contained his soul-stirring hymns on Lord Siva and removed the Padigam which he had composed at Tiru Nallaru. To Sambandar, Lord Siva was the Absolute Truth, and so, the song sung in praise of Him, should also be eternal. With the firm conviction that no harm would come to the palm leaf, he put it into the fire. The Jains also put their writings into the fire. The latter was at once burnt: Sambandar's leaf was quite safe. The Jains, ashamed to face the king, dropped their gaze. The king declared that the Jains had been defeated a second time.

The Jains, however, would not agree, and wanted a third test. This time both the parties should throw their palm leaves in the river Vaigai and the palm leaf which swam against the current contained the Truth. Sambandar agreed to this, too. This time

Kulacchiraiyar intervened and asked: 'What should be the punishment to be meted out to the party that fails in this test?' The Jains, in their anger, said that the party which fails in the test should be hanged. The Jains threw their palm leaf into the river: the current was swift and the leaf was washed away. Sambandar threw his leaf which swam beautifully against the current, without sinking or getting lost. In the Padigam which won this test, Sambandar invoked the Lord's grace on the king. On account of this, the king's birth-deformity, viz., a hunchback was also cured. The leaf reached the place known as Tiruvedagam. The minister wanted to take possession of the leaf and followed it. Knowing this, Sambandar sang another song, which stopped the leaf. The minister took the leaf, went to the temple and worshipped the Lord. Sambandar, accompanied by the royal couple, went to the temple and worshipped the Lord. The king was convinced of the superiority of Saivism. The Jains, according to their own contract, were hanged. The people followed the example of the king and became Saivites. Thus was Saivism re-established in Madura.

In Sirkali, Sambandar's father was waiting for the illustrious son's arrival. One day, the desire was strong and Sivapada Hridayar came to Madura and was received by Sambandar with great reverence.

After staying at Madura for some time, Sambandar proceeded on a pilgrimage, accompanied by the royal couple and the minister. From Rameswaram, they offered mental prostrations at the Feet of the Lord of Tirukonamalai and Tiruketheesvaram (in Ceylon). They also visited the birthplace of the minister. Sambandar took leave of the Pandyan king and went into the Chola kingdom.

He came to Mullivaikarai. There the river was in flood. The boatmen had abandoned their boats and had left them tied to the tree on the bank. Sambandar wanted to cross the river and worship the Lord at Tiru Kollampoothur. Sambandar asked the devotees to unfasten the boat and get into it. He sang a Padigam. This itself proved to be the oar. They reached the other side safely and worshipped the Lord.

The party then reached the place called Bodhimangai. It was a Buddhist centre. Sambandar's devotees were blowing the trumpets and singing their Guru's glories as they entered the place. This annoyed the Buddhist who asked them to stop blowing their trumpets. The devotees informed Sambandar. A disciple of Sambandar, by name Samba Saranalayar, who used to record all of Sambandar's songs, himself sang a Padigam and said that a thunder should fall on the head of Buddhanandi, the leader of the Buddhists' group. Buddhanandi was at once destroyed by a thunder.

The others fled. But, soon they reappeared under the leadership of Sari Buddhan and challenged the Saivites to a debate. With the blessings of Sambandar, the disciple Samba Saranalayar himself defeated the Buddhists in debate. Sari Buddhan himself embraced Saivism and his followers followed suit. Sambandar blessed them all. Sambandar then went to Tirukadavur. When he heard that Appar Swamigal was at Tirupoonthurithi, Sambandar went forward to meet him. At the same time, Appar came half-way to welcome Sambandar. Quietly, he got mixed with the crowd and joined the group of devotees who were carrying Sambandar's palanquin, without anybody's knowledge. When Sambandar enquired about Appar, Appar responded from below: 'Here I am, carrying the palanquin, due to the virtuous deeds of many past lives.' Sambandar was surprised. He jumped down and embraced the great saint Appar.

After some more pilgrimage, Sambandar returned to Sirkali. Tiruneelakanta Yazhpanar and his wife took leave of Sambandar and returned home.

Sambandar wanted to visit Thondai Nadu. Taking leave of Lord Thoniappar, he left Sirkali, and after visiting many shrines on the way, reached Tiru Annamalai. The very sight of the hill sent him into a trance. He rolled on the ground and shed tears of God-love. Then he reached Thondai Nadu and came to Tiruvothur. During his stay there, a Bhakta came to him and said: 'I have planted many palmirah trees in my garden, but all of them are male trees and they do not yield any fruits. The Jains are mocking at me for this. Please protect me from their scorn.' Sambandar went to the temple and sang a song mentioning the devotee's plight: and the male trees were at once changed into female trees and they yielded good fruits. Due to this miracle, some more Jains embraced Saivism. Because Sambandar had specifically mentioned the palmirah trees, they, too, were helped in their evolution.

By stages, Sambandar reached Tiru Alankadu, the holy place where Karaikkal Ammayar 'walked' on her head, not wishing to pollute the place. He, too, did not enter the place, but had the Darshan of the Lord in his dream. Sambandar then went to Kalahasthi and had the vision of Kannappa Nayanar and also of Kailasa, Ketharam, Gokarnam, Tirupatham, Indraneela Parvatham, etc. Sambandar then came to Tiru-Votriyur.

In Mylapore there lived a merchant by name Sivanesar. He was a staunch Siva Bhakta. He had all wealth but had no children. In answer to his sincere prayer, Lord Siva blessed him with a female child. They named her Poompavai. She was very beautiful. Sivanesar heard of Sambandar's greatness and felt that he was the only suitable match for his daughter. Mentally, he had offered her to Sambandar.

One day when Poompavai was gathering flowers in the garden, she was bitten by a poisonous snake and she died. Sivanesar even announced that he would give any amount of money to anyone who would revive her: but it was of no use. Then he recollected that he had mentally offered her to Sambandar: this put great courage into him. He at once cremated the body of the girl, collected the ashes and preserved them in a pot. Daily he would decorate the pot with flowers, etc., and sit near it meditating on Sambandar. The news that Sambandar was staying at Tiruvotriyur reached the merchant. At once he erected a big *pandal* from Mylapore to Tiruvotriyur and followed by Bhaktas began to proceed towards Tiruvotriyur to meet Sambandar. The latter also was coming towards Mylapore. They met on the way. Sambandar had heard about Sivanesar and

his worship of the pot which contained the ashes of his daughter. He wanted to please Sivanesar by bringing the girl back to life. They reached Mylapore, worshipped the Lord, sang hymns and, coming out of the temple, asked Sivanesanar to bring the pot of ashes. Sambandar addressed the pot: 'Oh Poompavai, the very purpose of human birth in this world is to serve the Lord and His devotees, and to feast the eyes by seeing the festivals of Lord Siva. If this is true, arise in the presence of all. Are you going away without seeing the festival?' Then he sang a Padigam. When he finished the first stanza, Poompavai got her form. When he finished eight stanzas, she got her life and became a twelve year old girl. When he finished the tenth stanza, she came out of the pot, even as Lakshmi came out of the Lotus. All were amazed at this miracle. Sivanesanar and Poompavai worshipped Sambandar's feet. Sivanesanar entreated Sambandar to accept the girl as his wife. Sambandar, however, explained that the original Poompavai whom Sivanesanar had mentally offered to Sambandar was dead and that the present girl had the relationship of daughter to him. Sivanesanar had to bow to the wishes of Sambandar: he built an Ashram for his daughter where she spent her days in worship of the Lord and attained Him.

After visting a number of shrines, Sambandar returned to Sirkali. He had reached his sixteenth year. His father wanted to get him married. He argued that it was necessary for him to engage himself in the performance of Vedic rites. Sivapada Hridayar selected the daughter of Nambandar Nambi of Nallur Perumanam. He, too, welcomed the alliance. The wedding was to take place at Nallur Perumanam. On the appointed day, Sambandar took leave of Thoniappar and reached Nallur Perumanam. Sambandar went to the temple, worshipped the Lord and got His blessings. Then he went to a Mutt nearby. The bride's party came there to receive him. Sambandar, in his wedding dress, took his seat in the pearl palanquin. People accompanied him, singing 'Long Live Sambandar.' Sambandar came to the place where the wedding was to take place. Sambandar holding his wife's hand, went round the fire, the manifestation of the Lord. Accompanied by the devotees, the couple went into the temple and worshipped Him, with total self-surrender. Sambandar sang a Padigam praying for Liberation. The Lord granted his wish and said: 'Oh Sambandar, you, your wife, and all those who witnessed your marriage will merge in the Siva Jyoti and come to Me.' At once, an effulgent Light emerged from the Lord. Before merging in that Light, Sambandar sang a Padigam known as the Panchakshara Padigam. Then all those who were there merged in the Light of Siva. Tiruneelakanta Nayanar, Muruga Nayanar and Tiruneelakanta Yazhpanar were also there!

29. EYARKON KALIKAMA NAYANAR

In Tiruperumangalam in Ponni Nadu, there was a Vellala by name Eyarkon Kalikama Nayanar. He belonged to the family called 'Eyarkudi' which produced Commanders-in-Chief to Chola kings. He was a great devotee of Lord Siva.

The news that Sundaramurthi Nayanar had used Lord Siva Himself as a messenger to settle the domestic dispute between him and his wife Paravayar, so greatly annoyed devout Kalikamanar that he said to himself: 'Is this man who behaved like this a devotee? I am a great sinner, too, otherwise my life-breath would have departed on hearing the news.' Sundarar came to know of Kalikamar's attitude. He realised his own fault and entreated the Lord to appease Kalikamar's anger. The Lord caused Kalikamar to suffer from colic and told him in a dream that only Sundarar could cure it. Kalikamar preferred death to being cured by Sundarar! In the meantime, the Lord

appeared in Sundarar's dream and asked him to go to Kalikamar and cure him of the colic. Sundarar at once went to meet Kalikamar. As soon as he heard that Sundarar was coming to cure him, Kalikamar gave up his life by cutting his bowel open.

Sundarar was greeted by Kalikamar's wife. When he asked for Nayanar, she made her people say that there was nothing wrong with him and that he was asleep. After much persuasion, they showed him the Nayanar's body. In desperation, Sundarar also wanted to cut his throat. By the grace of Lord Siva, Kalikamar at once came back to life. They embraced each other. Kalikamar spent the rest of his life in the service of the Lord and His devotees and finally reached His Abode.

30. TIRU MULA NAYANAR

Tirumula Nayanar was a Saiva Siddha. He was one of the eight students of Tirunandi Devar Who showered His grace on them. They were all Yogis. He was called Tirumular because he entered into the mortal frame of Mulan.

Tirumular desired to see Agastya Rishi in Pothia hills. So he left Kailasa and went southwards. On the way, he visited many Saivite shrines. When he came to Tiruvavaduthurai, he took bath in the river Kaveri and went to the temple. He went round the temple twice and offered prayer to the Lord. When he was walking along the bank of Kaveri, he saw a herd of cows shedding tears. He found out the cause: the cow-herd lay dead. Tirumular wanted to pacify the cows. He entered the body of the cowherd after safely depositing his own body in the trunk of a tree. The cows rejoiced again. This cowherd was known as Mulan, a resident of Sattanur. In the evening, he drove the cows back into the village. Mulan's wife was eagerly expecting the return of her husband. But, when she approached him that day, he would not allow her to touch him, but said: 'Oh lady, I am not your husband. Adore Lord Siva and attain Liberation.' He left her and went away to a near-by Math.

The lady complained to the leaders of the place, about the conduct of her husband. They examined him and came to the conclusion that he had attained great spiritual evolution. So, they asked her to leave him alone. The next day, Tirumular followed the cows, but could not find his body where he had left it. It was the Lord's Lila. Lord Siva wanted Tirumular to write a book on Saiva Philosophy, containing the essence of all Siva Agamas, in Tamil. Tirumular understood His wish and returned to Tiruvavaduthurai. He worshipped the Lord and sat under the near-by peepul tree in deep meditation. He was in Samadhi for three thousand years. But, every year, he would come down from Samadhi and compose a stanza: thus, in three thousand years he wrote three thousand stanzas. This book is called Tirumandiram.

The Lord's mission had thus been fulfilled. Then, Tirumular went back to Kailasa.

31. DANDI ADIGAL NAYANAR

In Tiruvarur, in the Chola kingdom, there was a pious Bhakta by name Dandi Adigal. He was born blind. But, he always repeated the Panchaksharam and visualised the Lord with his inner eyes. He would daily go to the temple, do circumambulation, and worship the Lord.

There was a tank on the western side of the temple which was surrounded by Jain dwellings. Dandi Adigal wanted to extend the area of the tank. But, how could he, a man born blind, do it? But, with a determination and complete faith in the Lord, he decided to do it. He erected a post inside the tank where it was to be dug and tied a rope to it. The other end of the rope was tied to the other post which was fixed on the bank. Then guided by the rope he would go to where the digging had to be done. He would dig with a spade, collect the earth in a basket and again with the help of the rope, he would go to the bank and throw the earth away.

The Jains were watching the blind man's miracle. They were jealous of his achievement, too. So, they wanted to disturb his faith. They put forward a cunning argument. 'You are blind and you cannot see. While digging, you are killing many insects which is a great sin. So, give up this foolish act.' Nayanar explained to them the sacredness of the work, which was highly pleasing to the Lord, and also that by His grace, he was sure no insect would be injured. He went on with work. The Jains were insulting in their behaviour now. They said: 'You were born blind: but now you are deaf, too. Even though we are giving you good counsel, you are not listening.' Nayanar replied: 'Oh ignorant people, what do you know of the Lord's glories? To me He is the sole refuge. I live only to serve Him. Do not mock at His grace. By His grace, if I regained my eye-sight and you lost yours, what will you do?' This reply greatly annoyed them: they snatched the spade and the basket from his hands.

With a broken heart, Dandi Adigal went to the temple and expressed his grievances to the Lord. The Lord appeared in his dream that night and assured him of His help. He also appeared before the king in his dream and asked him to redress the grievances of Nayanar. The king summoned the Jains. Dandi Adigal was also there. The king addressed Dandi: 'Oh devotee, you said that by God's grace you could get your eye-sight back and the Jains would lose theirs. Prove this.' Dandi Adigal said: 'Lord Siva is the real God. He is my sole refuge and prop. I am only His slave. If this is true, let me regain my eye-sight and let the Jains lose theirs.' He then uttered the Panchaksharam and went into the tank. When he came out, his eye-sight had been restored and at the same time, the Jains lost their eye-sight. All were amazed at this. The king banished the Jains from his kingdom and restored people's faith in the Lord. Dandi Adigal attained God-realisation.

32. MURKHA NAYANAR

This saint was a Vellala by caste and he belonged to Tiruverkat in Thondai Nadu. He was a great devotee of Lord Siva and was doing Maahesvara Puja by regularly feeding His Bhaktas at any cost. He had spent all his wealth in such feeding.

So, he resorted to a strange way. He used to gamble and use the money for feeding Siva Bhaktas. He went away from his village in search of gamblers! He would not spare anybody: if someone refused to gamble with him, he would resort to violence! (So the name Murkha Nayanar which means wicked Nayanar!) But, he would never utilise the money for his own expenses. It was all for His Bhaktas. So, the Lord, the Indweller, showered His blessings on him.

This is an extraordinary illustration of the nature of supreme devotion or Para Bhakti. It is its own law. The devotee knows nothing but God and is actually oblivious of the world and its

manners. He lives in God, for God and he is of God. At such a stage, God Himself takes charge of him! The completeness of the surrender is severely tested before this.

It is the extreme difficulty of this path that made Sage Narada exclaim that even a saint should not violate the canons of morality. Hence, so long as you are aware of your own individuality, stick to the code of right conduct: do not foolishly imitate the sages who dwell in a plane of consciousness, to which you are a complete stranger.

33. SOMASIRA NAYANAR

Somasira Nayanar was a Brahmin by caste. He lived in Tiruvambur. He was a great devotee of the Lord and served His Bhaktas, irrespective of their caste. He did Yagas and worshipped the Lord, without expecting any reward. He went to Tiruvarur and lived with Sundaramurthi Nayanar to whom he had totally surrendered himself. Thus he got His grace.

Here is a simple life of saintliness. On the face of it there does not seem to be anything spectacular about this Nayanar. But, we have to bear in mind the conditions that prevailed in South India in the Nayanar's days. It was almost impossible for a Brahmin in those days to mix with people of other castes, however devoted they might be to God. For a Brahmin to *serve* them was unthinkable difficult. It required very great will power, determination and devotion to God and His Bhaktas.

Again, in those days no one would even think of performing a Yaga without expectation of a reward. Yagas were performed only with a specific selfish desire. That Nayanar performed them selflessly and desirelessly, shows that he had already reached a high stage of Jnana or spiritual insight. He was a true Jnani and Karma Yogi.

Over and above all these, he was highly devoted to the Guru, Sundaramurthi Nayanar. What cannot Guru Bhakti achieve? And, yet, foolish and arrogant man speaks lightly of it and ridicules Guru Bhakti!

34. SAKKIYA NAYANAR

This saint was a Vellala born in Tiruchangamangai. He was totally disgusted with worldly life and wanted to attain Liberation. He sought the best way to get this. Due to false propaganda, he fell a victim to Buddhistic influence. He became a Buddhist, but it did not satisfy him for long. He was immediately attracted to Saivism and was convinced that, whatever be the external appearance or conduct of one, if he had intense devotion to the Lord, he would attain Liberation. Though he did not give up his external appearance of a Buddhist, he adored Lord Siva.

One day, as he was sitting in an open Siva temple and meditating on the Lingam, completely absorbed in the divine bliss, he self-forgetfully threw a stone at the Lingam. On the next day, he went to the temple again and recollected the previous day's action. He felt that it was the Lord's Will, to reveal the profound truth that He would accept *anything* offered by His Bhakta in devotion. He threw a stone that day too. That was his daily worship, without which he would not take his food! One day, when he was about to take his meal, he remembered that he had not done his usual

Puja: and unmindful of the hunger, went to the temple and threw a stone with great devotion. The Lord appeared before him, blessed him and took him to Kailasa.

35. SIRAPPULI NAYANAR

Sirappuli Nayanar was a pious Brahmin. He lived in Tiruvakur in the Chola kingdom. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva and His Bhaktas. He used to worship them and serve them sincerely. He would repeat the Panchakshara Mantra, with Bhav and sincerity, throughout the day and night. He also performed the Vedic sacrifices in honour of Lord Siva. All these earned for him the supreme grace of Siva.

A special spiritual practice of this Nayanar seems to have been the ceaseless repetition of the Panchakshara Mantra (Om Namah Sivaya). This extremely simple practice is capable of bestowing incalculable benefit on man: and yet, ignorant man, full of delusion, refuses to resort to it. The continuous repetition of the Mantra will change the very mind-substance. It contains a divine vibration. Modern science has reached a stage when it no longer believes in mass and quantity. Even the gross and impure intellect of a scientist has come to recognise the superior power in the subtle atom or cell. Great indeed is the foolishness of man if he still refuses to believe that the sound-vibrations (even the subtler thought-vibrations) can bring about a radical change within himself and heal him physically, vitally, mentally, psychically and spiritually.

This is the highest Yoga: to remember God always and constantly to repeat His Name.

36. SIRUTHONDA NAYANAR

In Tiruchenkattangudi in the Chola kingdom, there lived a Siva Bhakta by name Paranjyoti. His was a family of army commanders. He himself was the Commander-in-Chief of the Chola king. He realised that devotion to the Feet of Lord Siva was the best means of obtaining Liberation from Samsara and so, he clung to Them.

Once, at the instance of his king, he waged war with a North Indian king, defeated him and returned with a big booty. The king was highly pleased. The minister informed the king that Paranjyotiar was able to achieve the victory because of his intense devotion to Lord Siva. This shocked the king, who was a Siva Bhakta himself: he regretted having compelled a Siva Bhakta to wage a bloody war. He called Paranjyotiar, apologised for having sent him, a Siva Bhakta to war, and, after giving him rich presents, sent him back to his village, with the request that he should henceforth engage himself in His Puja. Paranjyotiar returned to his village and from that time was engaged in the worship of the Lord and His Bhaktas. He would not eat without first feeding a Siva Bhakta. He regarded himself as the lowly servant of the Lord and His Bhaktas: hence the name Siruthondar (small servant).

Lord Siva wanted to bring out the glory of this noble saint. So, one day He appeared in front of Siruthondar's house, in the guise of a Vairavar (a special class of Siva Yogis). He enquired of Siruthondar's maid-servant, Sandana Nangaiyar, whether her master was at home. She said: 'No, he has gone in search of a Siva Bhakta, without feeding whom he would not take his food.' But, afraid lest this Siva Yogi should go away, she entreated him to come into the house. The mendicant

would not: 'I shall not enter the house in which a woman is alone.' Siruthondar's wife Tiruvengattu Nangaiyar heard these words and came out hurriedly and prayed to the Vairavar to stay in the house till the husband returned. The Vairavar repeated his objection and said: 'When he comes back tell him I am under the tree near the temple.' The Vairavar went away.

Immediately afterwards, Siruthondar returned. His wife told him all that had happened in his absence. Siruthondar was overjoyed because he was unable to find any other Bhakta that day. At once he ran to the temple and fell at the feet of the Vairavar and invited him to the house for Bhiksha. The Vairavar, however, hesitated and remarked: 'I doubt whether you will be able to fulfil the exacting conditions I shall demand for accepting your Bhiksha: so, better leave me alone.' Siruthondar was greatly grieved. He had thought that this mendicant had been specially sent by God to enable him to adhere to his vow and feed a Bhakta every day. He was prepared to meet any demand from the Bhakta, if only he agreed to take the Bhiksha. Now, the mendicant revealed his condition: 'Oh devotee, it is my habit to eat once in six months the fresh meat of a *Pasu*. That time has now come. I doubt whether you will satisfy me.' This word *Pasu* has two meanings: an animal and a human being. Siruthondar thought that the mendicant only meant animal meat: and readily agreed! To his surprise, however, the mendicant revealed that meant human flesh! He also added: 'Oh friend, it should be the meat of a child. The child should be five years of age. He must be healthy. He should be the only son of his parents. Such a boy must be held by the mother and cut into pieces by his father. This meat must be cooked nicely and offered to me.' Without the least hesitation, Siruthondar accepted conditions and took the mendicant home.

How to find a boy of the mendicant's description? Siruthondar thought of his own son who fitted the description. The noble wife agreed, too, and asked him to get the child from school. As soon as he came the mother held him on her lap. The innocent child was laughing when Siruthondar, with one stroke cut his throat. The head is generally unfit for cooking, and is not fit for being offered to the Lord. So, they gave it away to the maid-servant and began to cook, the rest of the meat. After worshipping the mendicant, Siruthondar was preparing to offer him Bhiksha. The mendicant ascertained the method adopted by them in cooking the meat and Nayanar explained everything (except the fact that it was their own son that they had sacrificed). The mendicant said he would eat the head, too. The maid-servant had anticipated this and had the head cooked and ready.

Once again, Siruthondar requested the Yogi to have his meal. Now, the Yogi wanted another Siva Bhakta to eat with him: and there was no one except the Nayanar himself. So, he sat with the Yogi, ready to eat the flesh of his son, to please the Yogi. Yet, one more condition had to be fulfilled! The Yogi said that unless the host's son ate with him, he would not eat! Nayanar tactfully explained that his son was not in the house and so could not join with them. But, the Yogi insisted: 'Go out and call for him: he will come.' Nayanar wanted to obey the Yogi and did as the Yogi had asked to do. Wonder of wonders: the young boy came running to the father as soon as the father had cried aloud: 'Siral, come here: the Yogi wants you to eat with him.' The parents were astonished to see their child, Siralan come back to life. They entered the kitchen, but could not find the Yogi there. The meat had also disappeared! As they were searching for the Yogi, the Lord appeared before them, blessed them and took them to His Abode.

37. CHERAMAN PERUMAL NAYANAR

Cheraman Perumal Nayanar was born in Kodunkolur. It was the capital city of Malai Nadu or the present Kerala. He was born in the royal family of Kothayars, otherwise known as the Uthiyan family. The name Cheraman was the common name for all Cheras. Perumal was the title adopted by him after his coronation. His original name was Perum-Ma-Kothayar. He was endowed with good Samskaras. He had great devotion to the Lord even as a child. As he grew, his devotion also grew. He had a remarkable degree of dispassion and discrimination. He did not like to rule the country: and so, when he came of age, he renounced the world and went to Tiru Anchaikalam and engaged himself in the worship of the Lord there. The country was ruled by Sengol Porayan. He, too, soon realised the evanescence of worldly life and renounced the world! He had no issues and the throne was vacant. They went to Tiru Anchaikalam and requested Perum-Ma-Kothayar to ascend the throne. Though he was reluctant, lest it should interfere with his daily worship, he bowed to the divine will. He went to the temple and offered a prayer. The Lord permitted him to accept the rulership. By the Lord's grace he ascended the throne and ruled the country justly and wisely. He could understand all languages, even the language of the birds. The Lord had bestowed upon him all the Aiswaryas, great strength, royal vehicles, etc.

After the *coronation*, he went to the temple and after worshipping the Lord he was returning to the palace. On the way, he saw a washerman whose body had been smeared with white sand and mud. The very sight enraptured Cheraman who saw in him the image of Lord Siva with the sacred ash smeared all over the body. He was raised to God-consciousness. He descended from the elephant and fell at the feet of the washerman, in spite of the latter's protest. All were wonderstruck to witness the supreme devotion of Cheraman.

By his many acts of devotion and piety, he earned the grace of Lord Siva. The Lord sent to him a renowned musician and devotee, Banapatirar, with a palm leaf on which was the Lord's own song in praise of Cheraman! It read: 'Oh king who honours great poets with rich presents, who rules his subjects with love! Glory to you! I am very highly pleased with your devotion and charitable nature. The bearer of this message is Banapatirar who is a great devotee like you. He is a great musician and always sings My glories on his favourite instrument, Yazh. He has come to see you. Welcome him with due respect and honour him with plenty of riches.' Cheraman welcomed the musician with great love and devotion. When he read the song of the Lord, he was overjoyed and rolled on the ground. He said to Banapatirar: 'Oh noble soul, kindly take possession of all these and accept my kingdom also.' Banapatirar was astounded to witness the king's devotion and said: 'Oh king, I am highly pleased with your Darshan. I shall accept only what is absolutely necessary for me, for that has been the command of the Lord.' He took what he needed and left Kodunkolur on an elephant. Cheraman escorted him up to the border.

Cheraman was greatly devoted to Lord Nataraja. He had surrendered his body, mind and soul to Him. He would daily worship the Lord: and, by His grace, at the time of his prayer, he would hear the musical sound produced by the Lord's anklets during His dance. One day, however, at the time of the prayer, he did not hear the usual divine sound. Cheraman was greatly afflicted at heart. He thought that he must have been guilty of a great crime and decided to end his life, with his sword. At once he heard the divine sound and a voice in the sky explained: 'Oh noble soul, My friend Nambi Arurar has come to Tillai and he was singing sweet Tamil songs. I was completely absorbed

in that and hence the delay in blessing you with the musical sound of My anklet.’ The Lord wanted to create a friendship between Sundarar and Cheraman and so spoke highly of Sundarar to Cheraman. Cheraman, desirous of worshipping Lord Nataraja and also of meeting Sundarar, at once started for Tillai. The very sight of the Lord in Tillai entranced him. He sang ‘Pon Vannathu Anthadi’ on Lord Nataraja. In appreciation, the Lord blessed him with the musical sound of His anklets. Cheraman was swimming in divine bliss.

Before Cheraman reached Tillai, Sundarar had already left the place. Cheraman proceeded to Tiruvarur where he met Sundarar. They embraced each other and fell at each other’s feet. They became fast friends. At Tiruvarur Cheraman composed the famous ‘Tiru Mummanikovai’ on Lord Thiagaraja.

Then they went to Vedaranyam. There Cheraman sang his ‘Tiru Anthati’ on the Lord. After visiting many shrines on the way they came to Madura. The Pandyan king welcomed them. The Chola prince who was staying with the Pandyan king also welcomed them. In their company the great saints visited many shrines. Taking leave of the kings, Cheraman and Sundarar returned to Tiruvarur. From there, at the request of Cheraman, Sundarar accompanied him to Kodunkolur. There Cheraman took Sundarar on an elephant and went round the city in procession.

When Sundarar returned to Tiruvarur, he had instructed Cheraman to rule the country justly and wisely. Cheraman obeyed the saint’s commands. On the next occasion when Sundarar visited Kodunkolur one day Sundarar suddenly left the place and went to the sacred shrine at Tiru Anchaikalam where he sought the Lord’s grace and attained Liberation. By intuition, Cheraman learnt of Sundarar’s release and he also attained the Lotus Feet of the Lord, as we have already seen, while dealing with Sundaramurthi Nayanar’s life. In Kailasa, Cheraman became the chief of Lord Siva’s Ganas (servants).

38. GANANATHA NAYANAR

Gananathar was a pious Brahmin of Sirkali. He was a great Bhakta of Lord Siva. People admired his virtue and devotion and came to him for advice. He invariably gave them some work connected with the temple, according to their ability. They would clean the temple, make garlands, work in the gardens, burn lamps in the temples, etc. Thus he infused devotion in them for the Lord and transformed them into Siva Bhaktas. He was greatly devoted to Jnana Sambandar. All these earned Siva’s grace for him.

Here is another great but simple spiritual practice. Talk to other people about God and the glory of devotion, etc. You will be building up a powerful spiritual fortress around you. You will be able to avoid people wasting your time: you will not indulge in nor allow others to lead you into, gossip which is the spiritual aspirant’s arch-enemy. People who may in the beginning, think that you are strange in your behaviour, will soon understand you and they will, of their own accord, avoid useless talk in your very presence. At the same time, you will be rendering a very great service to humanity, by directing everyone’s mind towards God and Dharma. Here is a wonderful Yoga which helps you and others, too, at the same time. Put it into practice and realise its miraculous effect.

39. KOOTRUVA NAYANAR

This saint was a chieftain of Kalandai. He was extremely devoted to Lord Siva. Daily he would repeat the Panchakshara Mantra, and serve the Bhaktas. The Lord made him more powerful, and bestowed on him all wealth and strength. Nayanar captured many places in the Chola and Pandyan kingdoms. He wanted that the three thousand Brahmins of Tillai should crown him king: they refused, because they owed allegiance to the Chola king. All of them even left Tillai fearing his wrath. Only one was left to do the Puja. Even he refused to accede to Nayanar's request. One day Nayanar prayed to the Lord: and, in answer, the Lord Himself appeared before him and crowned him by placing His Feet on his head. Nayanar continued to worship the Lord and finally attained Him.

The Lord, the Indweller of our hearts knew that, when the Nayanar asked the three thousand Brahmins to crown him, it was only to spiritualise the coronation and to enable him to feel that the crown was but a symbol of the Feet of the Lord. When the Brahmins feared political repercussions, the Lord Himself fulfilled the devotee's wish.

40. PUGAL CHOLA NAYANAR

Pugal Chola Nayanar was a king. He was living in Uraiyur in the Chola kingdom. He was greatly devoted to Lord Siva and His Bhaktas. He was an ideal king and people loved him and followed in his footsteps.

Once he went to Karur to collect tributes due to him from the kings of Kuda Nadu. All of them paid at once: but the ministers reported that a petty king named Adigan had not. He ordered his troops to invade Adigan's fort. In the meantime, the king's elephant was killed by Eripatha Nayanar for a Siva Aparadham (as we have already seen in Eripatha Nayanar's life). Ultimately, both Eripathar and the king had the Lord's Darshan. As this drama was being enacted, elsewhere, the king's troops had demolished Adigan's fort, killing many of his men, and Adigan himself had run away. Pugal Cholar's troops returned with a lot of wealth and the heads of men killed. They placed all these at the king's feet. Among the heads, the king noticed a head with the braid of hair on top—it belonged to a Siva Bhakta. Stricken with terrible remorse the king had a big fire made, went round it having the head on a golden plate in his hand and entered the fire chanting the Panchakshara Mantra. Thus he entered the Lord's Abode.

41. NARASINGA MUNIYARAIYAR

This saint was a petty chieftain. He lived in Tiru Munaipadi. He was highly devoted to Lord Siva. He was a champion of Saivism. On every Tiruvathirai day he would conduct special Puja, feed Siva Bhaktas in whatever form they appeared and offer the gift of a hundred gold coins to each. On one such occasion, one Bhakta came with sacred ashes on his stark naked body: this evoked disgust in the hearts of the other Bhaktas. Nayanar understood this and fell at the naked devotee's feet and welcomed him with more respect. He fed him nicely and gave him 200 gold coins. This earned the Lord's supreme grace for the Nayanar.

Here is an illustration of the subtle way in which saints manifest their cosmic vision, and also the subtle way in which they bring about the necessary change in the outlook of others. To the Nayanar, all the devotees are the manifestations of Lord Siva. The naked man does not evoke the least trace of disgust or contempt. When he finds this *unhealthy* attitude in others, he does not violently correct them. In his own subtle, mysterious but very effective way, he demonstrates the truth: and brings about a change in the attitude of the ignorant. Both these lessons are important.

42. ADIPATTHA NAYANAR

This saint was a fisherman born in Nulaipadi near Nagapattinam. It was his practice to let go one fish from his catch daily, as an offering unto the Lord. The Lord wanted to reveal his greatness to the world. Once it so happened that for many consecutive days he could catch only one fish. He let it go, in the name of Lord Siva, and went without food. One day he caught a golden fish, again only one for the day. And, he stuck to his vow and let it go, in the name of Lord Siva. The Lord appeared before him and blessed this illiterate, fisherman saint!

Not indeed by vast erudition, nor by breath-taking austerities, nor by hearing and talking a lot, but by unflinching devotion alone can God be realised. This humble, simple, fisherman saint has proved that beyond the least trace of doubt. But, look at his steadfastness, *Nishta*! It is not easy to acquire, unless you have living faith in God. Otherwise, the mind will bring up all sorts of reasons (lame excuses!) for breaking the vow. This supreme faith and devotion is itself the highest Jnana. Only an ignorant man studies books: what need is there for a great scholar to study an elementary book on grammar? What need is there for one to whom God is a living presence, to stuff himself with words? Intellect is a help, if it serves faith: it is a hindrance if it shakes it. Devotion is indispensable for attaining Him.

43. KALIKAMBA NAYANAR

This saint was a Vaisya by caste and he lived in Pennagadam in the Chola kingdom. He was doing some service in the temple. He was very devoted to Siva Bhaktas in whom he saw the Lord Himself. His wife, too, helped him in all this.

One day, his former servant came to his house in the guise of a Bhakta. Nayanar, as usual, welcomed him, washed his feet and worshipped him. But, his wife who recognised the former servant did not join. Nayanar understood her lack of devotion, cut off her hand and continued his worship of the Bhakta. Practising this form of Yoga Sadhana, he attained Him.

This saint has dramatically proved the great truth which Sage Narada has emphasised in his immortal work 'Bhakti Sutras': there is no distinction of caste, creed or status, among the devotees of God. *They* do not recognise such distinctions among themselves: and others, too, shall not entertain such distinctions. It is blasphemy against God. The great devotees have become one with Him. They are all manifest divinity. Whatever might have been their *past* life, caste or faith, they have *now* become divine and hence such distinctions have no meaning.

44. KALIA NAYANAR

Kalia Nayanar was an oil monger of Tiruvotriyur. His adoration of the Lord, to Whom he was highly devoted, took the form of lighting the temple lamps daily. He was rich. But, in order to reveal his greatness the Lord made him poor. His family people also refused help. He began to work as a labourer to earn the oil. Even this became impossible. He wanted to sell his wife: but no one would buy. At last, in despair, he wanted to cut his own throat and use the blood instead of oil, to burn the lamps. In that attempt, Lord Siva caught hold of his hand and blessed him.

What greatness, and what intensity of devotion is portrayed in this simple life! Self-forgetfulness is the key-note in devotion. Remembering God always, the devotee is so thoroughly absorbed in Him, that nothing but God and His worship matters to him. By all means His worship must go on: no obstacle *shall* stand in the way. The devotee's heart and mind are always positive, never letting a negative thought enter them. He sees opportunities in difficulties and is never beaten by any obstacles which serve him as steps to God!

45. SATTI NAYANAR

Satti Nayanar was a Vellala by caste. He was born in Varinjiyur in the Chola kingdom. He was a sincere devotee of Lord Siva and honoured His devotees. He could not tolerate anyone speaking ill of them. If anyone did so, he would cut off the slanderer's tongue. Lord Siva understood his pure inner Bhav and showered His grace on him.

Besides revealing the glory of the Nayanar's devotion, this simple life also holds for us a great object lesson—never speak ill of the saints or devotees of God. They have attained union with God: and, so, if you vilify them, you are vilifying God Himself. It is the greatest sin, the greatest, Himalayan blunder. You cannot judge them: they live on a different plane of consciousness from yours. Our scriptures contain numerous illustrations of the strange behaviour of saints, sages and Yogis. Sometimes they behave as little children: sometimes as mad-men; sometimes as fools. Mysterious is the nature of saints. Always worship and adore them: you will be benefited. Do not criticise them or speak ill of them or find fault with their conduct. Our scriptures say that he who blames the conduct of the sages, gets their bad Karma, and suffers doubly in consequence. Beware!

If anyone speaks ill of a saint or devotee of God, in your presence, leave that place at once. Otherwise, your own moral and spiritual structure will be dangerously undermined. Beware!

46. AIYADIGAL KADAVARKON NAYANAR

Aiyadigal Kadavarkon Nayanar was a Pallava king who ruled over Kanchi. He infused the spirit of Saivism into his people, too.

Soon he got disgusted with worldly life, renounced the world, after installing his son in his place, and undertook a continuous pilgrimage of the various shrines singing hymns in His praise, wherever he went. Lord Siva was highly pleased with his devotion and blessed him with His Darshan.

This king has set an example for all kings and social leaders to follow. Leaders should be the best example for their followers. They should encourage the masses to walk the path of virtue and Godlines. Otherwise, they live in vain: and, what is more, they take upon their shoulders a good part of the sins of their followers, for they are responsible for those sins.

This Nayanar lives in our hearts even today because he served his subjects both by precept and by his own personal example. He taught them; he encouraged them; and, finally, by his own life of renunciation and wholehearted devotion of the Lord, set a glorious example for them to emulate. Such is the life of an ideal leader.

47. KANAMPULLA NAYANAR

Kanampulla Nayanar was a wealthy man in Irukkuvelur. He was a great Siva Bhakta. He wanted to utilise all his wealth in His service only. So, with unswerving devotion he would light the lamps in Siva shrines and sing His praise. Lord Siva wanted to reveal his devotion. He withdrew his wealth. He went over to Chidambaran. There also he continued his service, with the money got by selling his possessions. There was nothing left in the house. He had to cut grass, sell it and purchase ghee with the money and burn the lamps. Because he cut grass known as Kanampul, he was known as Kanampulla Nayanar. One day he could not sell the grass. He did not want to swerve from his duty, however. He went to the temple and made a wick out of the grass and burnt it. The quantity of grass was not enough. So, he brought his own head near the lamp, spread his hair on the lamp, and began burning it. At once Lord Siva appeared before him, and blessed him.

48. KARI NAYANAR

This ardent devotee of Lord Siva was a native of Tirukadavur. He was a scholar in Tamil. He used to go to the three Tamil kings, and get money by singing Tamil *Kovais* (anthology). He earned a lot and built temples. Thus he spread the cause of Saivism. He also served Siva Bhaktas and earned His grace.

A true devotee of the Lord lives for His sake only. All that he has is offered to the Lord as the devotee's worship. God is your creator, your father and mother, friend and Guru. He has given you the various talents and skill. They belong to Him. He dwells in *all*, and expects you to utilise them in the service of all. This is the simple logic by which the saints arrive at the conclusion that they should see God in all, serve the Lord in all, and love Him in and through cosmic love, expressed as selfless service and charity.

By leading such a selfless and divine life, you will conquer your worst spiritual enemy, viz., egoism, and realise God in this very birth, nay, this very second.

49. NINRA SEER NEDUMARA NAYANAR AND 50. MANGAYARKARASIYAR

Koon Pandyan, the Pandyan king, was ruling in Madura. He was called Koon Pandyan because of his hunchback. He was himself a poet and he patronised the Tamil poets and established a Tamil Sangam. His wife was Mangayarkarasiyar. She was the daughter of a Chola king. She was

an ardent devotee of Lord Siva. Kulacchirai Nayanar was his minister: and he was also a staunch devotee of Lord Siva. Tiru Jnana Sambandar has sung Padigams in praise of both.

Koon Pandyan had fallen a victim to the influence of Jainism. The queen and the minister feared that unless something was done, Saivism would be wiped out. When Sambandar came to Madura and was staying outside the city, Kulacchirai Nayanar invited him into the city. The Jains tried in vain to destroy Sambandar. When Sambandar sang a song, the king's hunchback was cured, as also his burning pain. He came back to Saivism. Since then he was known as Ninra Seer Nadumara Nayanar, as his hunchback had disappeared and he stood erect and tall.

The Pandyan king then defeated the northern kings at Tirunelvely and spread Saivism there. Mangayarkarasiyar helped her husband a lot in this. Both the husband and the wife worshipped Sambandar with great faith and devotion. Their devotion to the Guru and love of Saivism earned His grace for them.

51. VAYILAR NAYANAR

He was a Vellala by caste. He belonged to Mylapore. He was a Siva Bhakta. He constructed temples mentally and did Manasic (mental) worship. He built the temple of non-forgetfulness, lit the shining lamp of Self-illumination, bathed the Lord in the waters of immortal Ananda (bliss) and worshipped Him with the elixir of supreme love. Thus he obtained salvation.

Here is the life of a Para Bhakta, a supreme devotee. He had transcended the stage of idol worship. He had attained great purity of heart and clarity of inner psychic vision so that, without the aid of a symbol and without the help of rituals, he could raise his mind to the sublime heights of the Abstract.

The inclusion of this wonderfully simple life of Vayilar Nayanar is to point out that devotion is of many types, to suit the taste and temperament of different individuals. Whatever be the path they choose, ultimately they reach the same goal, union with the Lord, Siva. The Hindu sages have always declared that the spiritual path is not a stereotyped one, the same drug for all diseases, the same food for all people at all ages (from infancy to old age!), but that the spiritual life is adapted (within broad limits) to the needs of each individual. Everyone pursues the path or the combination of paths suited to him, and ultimately reaches the same goal.

52. MUNAIYADUVAR NAYANAR

This saint was a Vellala by caste. He belonged to Tiru Nidur in the Chola kingdom. He was a great Bhakta of Lord Siva and His devotees. He was always the hope of the desperate, the weak and the vanquished. They would call upon him to turn their defeat into a victory. He would hire himself out as a professional fighter. He fixed a wage for this service and with that money he would feed the Siva Bhaktas and look after them. He earned money in this way and hence he was called 'Munaiyaduvar'. Lord Siva was highly pleased with him and blessed him.

Two vital lessons that this Nayanar's life hold should not be ignored. The first and foremost, even in the exercise of the God-given talent of fencing, the Nayanar took care to see, that it was used

to defend the weak, the oppressed and the downtrodden. Strength, too, is a manifestation of the Lord, according to Him: but it should be used in His service in a righteous way. The second one is that the fruits of such service were always dedicated to the Lord. This is the very core of the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita, and the teachings of all saints and sages. Righteousness rests on this pedestal of dedication to God and unselfishness. Selfishness is the root cause of all sins and consequent miseries.

53. KAZHARSINGA NAYANAR AND 54. SERUTHUNAI NAYANAR

Kazharsinga Nayanar was an ardent devotee of the Lord. He was a Pallava monarch, belonging to the family of Kadavar. Due to God's grace he defeated the kings of the northern country and established Saivism there. He went on many pilgrimages.

Once he came to Tiruvarur with his queen and visited the temple. The queen, coming round the temple, came to the place where flowers had been kept for Siva's worship, and she smelt a flower which had accidentally fallen on the floor. Seruthunai Nayanar, a pious Vellala of Tanjore, who was doing the service in the temple, was annoyed by her action. He at once cut off the nose of the queen that smelt the flower.

The king, hearing the pitiable cry of the queen, rushed to the spot. He was terribly angry with the man who was responsible for the brutal act. Seruthunai Nayanar explained to him the queen's action which was an insult to Lord Siva (Siva Aparadham). The king at once gave an additional punishment to her, by cutting off her hand which picked up the flower! Both the king and Seruthunai Nayanar were glorified by the people and the celestials rained flowers on them. Both of them attained the grace of Lord Siva.

55. IDANGAZHI NAYANAR

This saint was the king of Velas in Kodumbalur. He was a staunch devotee of Lord Siva. He had made arrangements with all the Siva temples to perform worship according to the Siva Agamas. There was another Siva Bhakta in the same locality doing Maaheshwara Puja. He became very poor and so he could not continue his Puja and feeding of Bhaktas. So, one day he entered Idangazhi Nayanar's granary at night and began to steal paddy. The watchman caught him red-handed and took him to the king. The king learnt on enquiry that the Siva Bhakta's motive for stealing was to feed the devotees of the Lord. The king let him go.

This incident opened the eyes of the king. He realised that nothing belonged to him and that the real owners of his property were Lord Siva and His Bhaktas. So, he gave permission to all Siva Bhaktas to enter his palace and granary and take whatever they wanted. Thus he displayed his zeal for the spread of Saivism. Thus he earned Lord Siva's grace, too.

56. PUGAZH TUNAI NAYANAR

This saint was a pious Adi Saiva of Seruviliputhur. He was an ardent Siva Bhakta. He was a Pujari (priest) in the temple. His daily duty was to bathe the image, uttering the Mantras and do the

Puja, according to the Siva Agamas. Once a famine swept over the land and he had no money to buy food. He loved the deity and his daily duty so much that he did not like to leave the place in spite of the starvation. He stuck to that place and continued the Puja. His body was emaciated. One day, in spite of his weakness, he fetched water for the Lord's Bath (Abhishekam) and, when he was pouring the water on the Lingam, the water-pot slipped from his hand and fell on Him. Nayanar forgot himself in sheer exhaustion and fainted away. The Lord appeared in his dream and said that He would leave one coin in the temple every day till the famine was over so that he could procure the necessary food with that money and appease his hunger. Nayanar woke up and found that the dream was true! The Lord thus enabled His Bhakta to get over the famine. He continued his daily Puja in the temple and finally reached the Lord's Abode.

57. KOTPULI NAYANAR

This saint was a Vellala by caste. He was the Commander-in-Chief of a Chola king. He was highly devoted to Lord Siva. He was very pious and virtuous. It was his practice to purchase paddy out of his income and give it to Siva temples for the Lord's food. He was doing this for a long time.

Once he had to go out on military duty. So, he stocked a sufficient quantity of paddy for the temple use, handed it over to his relatives, with clear instructions that it was meant only for the Lord and that they should not touch it for their own use. During his absence, there was a famine and his relatives had to suffer for want of food. So, they laid their hands on the paddy meant for the Lord and appeased their hunger. The Nayanar returned from his duty and heard of his relatives' action. He was annoyed with them. He called them to his house and killed them, including his parents, for this crime. His supreme love for the Lord had so completely overshadowed his love for his own near and dear ones! The Lord appeared at once before him and blessed him, and also all the relatives who had died at his hand, and took them all to His Abode.

58. PUSALAR NAYANAR

Pusalar was a Brahmin of Tiru Ninravur in Thondai Mandalam. He excelled in the mental worship of the Lord. Mental worship is thousands of times better than external ritualistic worship: mental worship soon leads to Samadhi (superconscious state) and Self-realisation. He strongly desired to build a temple for Lord Siva, but he did not have the money for it. So, mentally he gathered the necessary materials for the purpose. He laid the foundation stone on an auspicious day. He raised the temple and had even fixed an auspicious day for the installation of the deity in it.

The Kadava king who was also a great devotee of Lord Siva had built a magnificent temple in Conjeevaram. By chance he had also fixed the date which Pusalar had mentally chosen, for the installation of the Lord in his temple. The Lord wanted to show the king the superiority of Pusalar's great devotion. So, the Lord appeared in the king's dream and asked him to postpone the installation ceremony in his temple, as He would be going to the temple constructed by His devotee at Tiru Ninravur. The king woke up from sleep and was intensely eager to have the Darshan of the devotee mentioned by the Lord and also have a look at the great temple he had built, which he thought would be far superior to his temple.

The king came to Tiruninravur and searched all over the place for the temple: he could not find any. Then the king enquired about Pusalar. He found out Pusalar's house and approached him. Pusalar was stunned when he heard of the king's dream. Soon, he recovered and was filled with joy. He thought: 'How kind and merciful is the Lord. I am only a wretched creature and He has accepted my mental shrine as His Abode. I am really blessed.' He told the king that that temple was only in his mind. The king was greatly surprised to hear this. Admiring Pusalar's devotion, the king fell at his feet and worshipped him. Pusalar installed the Lord in his mental temple and continued to worship Him till he attained His Abode.

59. NESA NAYANAR

This saint was the native of Kampili. He was a weaver. He was highly devoted to the Lord and His Bhaktas. His mind was well fixed on the lotus feet of the Lord. His lips always uttered the Panchakshara Mantra. His hands were ever busy in the service of His Bhaktas. These three virtues gained the Lord's grace for him.

Here is another instance of the glory of the Name of God. We have already seen the glory of the Lord's Name (*Vide* page 51) while studying the life of Sirapulli Nayanar. Constant repetition of the Mantra enables you to remember Him always, throughout the day and even during sleep! The technique is this: as soon as you wake up in the morning, sit down for half an hour and mentally repeat the Mantra. And keep up the current during your work, too, by withdrawing yourself for a few moments every hour and mentally visualising the presence of the Lord in you and mentally repeating the Mantra. If you are established in this practice, very soon you will find that even when you are talking or are engaged in other activities—nay, even during sleep, the mind goes on repeating the Mantra. You will get God-realisation. In addition to this glorious Japa Yoga, Nesa Nayanar also practised the Yoga of Synthesis. He thought of God, he lived for God, he worked for God, he was highly devoted to God and loved Him.

60. KOCHENGAT CHOLA NAYANAR

In Chandra Tirtha in the Chola kingdom there was a thick grove. In that grove under a Jambul tree there was a Siva Lingam. A white elephant used to come there daily and prostrate before the Lingam. A spider which was also devoted to Him, noticed that dry leaves were falling on Him and to prevent this wove a web above the Lingam.

The next day when the elephant came to worship, he found the web, and, thinking that someone had polluted the place, tore the web, offered his worship and went away. The spider came upon the scene, felt sorry that his web had been destroyed, wove another web and went away. The next day, as the elephant was pulling the web away, the spider which was present there, gave him a sting: the elephant died of the poison on the spot. The spider, too, was caught in the elephant's trunk, and perished.

Due to His grace, this spider was born as the son of Suba Devan, the Chola king. He and his dutiful wife went to Chidambaram and eagerly prayed to the Lord Nataraja for a son. The Lord granted their wish. Soon Kamalavati conceived the child. The day of delivery arrived. Astrologers foretold that if the child could be delivered a few minutes later, it would rule the three worlds! The

queen asked that she should be tied to the roof of the room upside down, with a tight bandage around her waist. When the auspicious time came, she was released and the child was born. This was the spider reborn! The child had red eyes as he had remained in his mother's womb a little longer. The mother, looking into his eyes, said: 'Kochekannano' (the child with red eyes), and expired. Hence, he was named Kochengat Cholan. When he reached the proper age, his father enthroned him king, retired from the world and, after severe penance, reached the Lord's Abode.

Kochengat Cholan promoted Saivism. In Tiru Anai Ka he built a beautiful temple and installed the Siva Lingam under the same Jambul tree! In Chola Nadu he built many shrines and mansions for the use of the three thousand Brahmins of Tillai. He provided for regular worship at Chidambaran. Finally he reached the Lord's Abode. His glories were sung by the poet Poygayar in his 'Kalavazhi Narpathu'.

61. TIRU NEELAKANTA YAZHPANAR

In Tiru Erukattanpuliur, in the Chola kingdom, there lived an ardent devotee of Lord Siva by name Tiru Neelakanta Yazhpanar. He was an expert in playing the Yazh (Veena, a musical instrument). It was his habit to visit many sacred shrines and sing His glories on the Yazh. He once went to Madura. He was standing at the entrance and singing. The Lord wanted to hear him at close quarters and so asked the devotees in their dream, to bring Yazhpanar into the inner shrine the next day. When the Brahmins took him inside the shrine, Yazhpanar was surprised, but understood it was His Lila and that He wanted to hear him play on the Yazh. As he was singing, a voice was heard in the heaven: 'If the instrument rests on the wet floor, it will be spoilt: give him a golden seat to occupy.' At once a golden seat was offered to him. Yazhpanar prostrated to the Lord and sang of His supreme compassion, standing on the golden seat.

Yazhpanar then went to Tiruvarur and, here, too, he remained outside the shrine and sang. And here, too, the Lord wanted him to sing in His immediate presence. So, He created another opening on the northern side of the temple. Yazhpanar understood the Lord's will and entered through the gate and sang in His Presence. How he joined Sambandar and got Liberation, has been told in Sambandar's life.

62. SADAYA NAYANAR AND 63. ISAIJNANIYAR

In Tirunavalur in Tirumuraipadi there lived an Adi Saivite by name Sadayanar. All his ancestors were ardent devotees of Lord Siva. He was also pious and devoted. Isaijaniyar was his dutiful wife. She was also devoted to the Lord. Due to their virtuous deeds in their past life, a divine child was born to them. He was no other than Sundaramurthi Nayanar. Narasinga Munaiyar, the king, was attracted by the child's beauty and wanted to bring it up himself. The king approached the parents and they, without a moment's hesitation, handed the child over to him. By this action, they showed that they had no attachment at all to anything in this world.

They led the ideal Grihastha (household) life and finally attained His grace.

Worldly attachment is the only chain with which man binds himself to this Samsara. When there is attachment, there is Samsara or bondage: if you are completely detached, you are at once freed, you become a Jivanmukta. You enjoy the Bliss of Brahman here and now, this very moment. This is the unique glory of Hinduism: it promises immediate Liberation here in this world, while yet embodied! Immediately the entire world is transformed into a manifestation of Divine Light. All the paradoxes and mysteries of Creation are understood.

MANICKAVACHAGAR

In Tiruvadavur in the Pandya kingdom there lived a pious Brahmin. He and his dutiful wife, due to merit earned in past lives, got a worthy son whom they named Vadavurar, after the native place.

As the child grew, his wisdom increased as well. Soon he had mastered all the scriptures. He also shone as the embodiment of all virtues and won the love and esteem of all. Even learned Pundits and saints were attracted by his personality and wisdom. The king of Madura, Arimardana Pandyan, heard of Vadavurar's qualities and discovered that he was an all-rounder and was proficient in administration also. The king made him his Prime Minister. Even here Vadavurar shone with extraordinary brilliance and won the title of Tennavan Paramarayar.

As days passed, however, dispassion grew in Vadavurar's heart. He had realised the unreality of the world. To him everything was painful: birth, disease, death, rebirth, etc. He wanted to enjoy the eternal bliss of Sivanandam. Even while he was administering the affairs of the state, his mind was fixed on the Lotus Feet of the Lord. He would invite learned men and discuss with them the intricate points in the Vedas. Soon, he realised that a Guru was necessary for real spiritual progress. He longed to meet the real Guru. Whenever he went out on duty, he also searched for his Guru.

One day, while the king was holding his Court, the head of his cavalry entered and informed him that the cavalry needed immediate replenishment, as age, death and sickness had greatly depleted its strength. The king immediately ordered the purchase of good horses. The task of buying good horses from the right place was entrusted to Vadavurar. He was extremely happy, as he was sure that he would find his real Guru, during that tour. It was a God-sent opportunity for him. He offered sincere prayer to Lord Somasundarar in His temple and, besmearing His holy ash on his body and with His name on his lips, Vadavurar started on the errand of buying horses, with enough money. He reached Tiru Perunturai.

Lord Siva, Who is the Indweller of all hearts and so knew Vadavurar's mental condition, had decided to take him to the divine fold. In the guise of a Brahmin and with a copy of the book *Siva Jnana Bodam* in his hand, the Brahmin was seated under a *Kurunta* tree near the temple at Tiru Perunturai. He was surrounded by others (the celestial servants in disguise). Vadavurar entered the temple and stood motionless before the Lord, in intense prayer. He shed tears of God-love. Then he went round the temple. Near the tree he heard the holy vibrations of the Lord's Name (Hara, Hara) which melted his heart. The Brahmin's magnetic personality attracted him. With overflowing love and devotion, Vadavurar ran to the Brahmin, as a calf to its mother, after a long separation: and he fell at the Brahmin's feet.

By His grace, Vadavurar was able to recognise him as his real Guru. Holding his feet with his hands Vadavurar prayed: 'Oh Lord, kindly accept me as your slave and bless me.' The Lord was waiting for this! He cast a graceful glance on Vadavurar. This at once removed all his sins and purified his heart. Then the Lord initiated him into the divine mysteries of Siva Jnana. This very initiation entranced him. He tasted the divine bliss and was self-forgetfully absorbed in it. Then Vadavurar regained his consciousness and again fell at the Guru's feet. He prayed: 'Oh Lord, Who has come to initiate me into the divine mysteries! Oh Lord Who has captivated me by a mere look! Oh Lord Who has melted my mind! Oh Lord Who has made me surrender all wealth, body, mind and soul! Oh my Jewel! Oh Wealth Imperishable! Oh Ocean of Bliss! Oh Nectar of Immortality! Prostrations unto You!' Singing His glories thus, Vadavurar removed all his belongings and offered all at the Feet of the Guru. He had become a Sanyasi. Smearing his body with sacred ashes, fixing his mind on the lotus feet of the Guru, Vadavurar plunged into deep meditation. When he awoke from this meditation, he was filled with an eagerness to sing the glories of the Lord. With love as the string and his nectarine words as the gems, he made a garland and offered it at the Guru's feet. The Lord was highly pleased with it, and called him '*Manickavachagar*' since the hymns sung by him were like gems in wisdom. The Lord asked him to stay on at that place, and disappeared.

Separation from the Lord and Guru, made Manickavachakar suffer intense pain and anguish. Soon, he consoled himself and lived in the remembrance of the Lord and Guru. The king's servants who had accompanied Vadavurar thought that he had forgotten the mission, and, so, after waiting for a few days, gently reminded him. Manickavachagar sent them back to the king with the message that the horses would reach Madura within one month. When he heard of what had happened to Vadavurar, the king was angry: but, waited patiently for a month.

At Tiruperunturai, Manickavachagar was devoted to the Lord, forgetting the king and the mission: and he spent the money he had brought, in the construction of a temple. After waiting for a month, the king sent him an angry note reminding him that one should be as alert in dealing with the king as one would be when dealing with a cobra, and asking him to appear before the king at once. Manickavachagar was upset. He went to the temple. He prayed for the Lord's protection. Moved by his sincere prayer, the Lord appeared in his dream that night in the same form of the Guru who initiated him and said: 'Oh noble soul, fear not. I myself will bring the best horses to Madura. You can go in advance. Tell the king that the horses will arrive there on Avani Moolam.' The Lord disappeared after placing a very costly diamond in his hands.

The next morning, Manickavachagar took leave of the Lord of Perunturai and donning his ministerial robes started for Madura. He bowed before the king and gave him the diamond. He explained: 'Your Majesty, I have already purchased the horses for the entire money I had taken. I was waiting for an auspicious day on which to bring the horses here. Avani Moolam is an auspicious day. In the meantime, as commanded by Your Majesty, I have returned. The horses will reach here on the auspicious day.' The king apologised to him for the rash note he had sent. Manickavachagar built a big stable for the horses.

His relatives, apprehensive of the real state of Manickavachagar's mind, appealed to him to look after them and not to renounce the world. He laughed and said: 'Oh friends, the day the Lord initiated me. I have offered everything at His Feet. I have now no relatives except the Lord and His devotees. I have no connection with this body, even. My only attachment is with the Lord Who is

the remover of all our sins and bestower of Immortal Bliss. Birth is painful. Death is painful. Everything that is not connected with the Lord is painful. I do not worry about anything in the world now. I will beg happily with my palm as my begging bowl and appease my hunger with the food that is received by chance. When the earth is ready to give me shelter, why should I resort to a special dwelling place? The perfume I smear my body with is the sacred ash. My only belonging is the garland of Rudraksha which destroys the sins of many births. Oh friends, when I am under His protection, why should I fear anybody?’

With his thought fixed on the Lord, Manickavachagar was expecting the auspicious day. In the meantime, one of the ministers had told the king that in truth Manickavachagar had spent all the money in the construction of temples and that Manickavachagar’s statement was false. The king’s suspicion increased. He sent some messengers to Perunturai to see whether the horses were really there. They returned with a negative reply. Only two days remained now. The king did not get any information about the horses. So, he ordered his soldiers to torture Manickavachagar and get the money back. They informed Manickavachagar of all that had happened in the Court. He kept quiet. They tormented him, according to the king’s orders. He bore everything, fixing his mind on the Lord. The Lord Himself bore all the torture, and the Bhakta was relieved. The soldiers could not understand the secret of his endurance. They tortured him further! He prayed to the Lord. The Lord heard His Bhakta’s prayer and wanted to play His Lila. He willed that all the jackals of the place should assume the form of horses. He also sent His celestial servants to act as horsemen. He Himself assumed the form of a trader in horses. He reached Madura. The dust raised by the galloping horses filled the sky. The people were wonderstruck to see the fine horses. That day was Avani Moolam. The thought that he had unnecessarily tortured Manickavachagar pained the king’s heart. He at once released him and apologised to him. Both of them went to the place where the horses had been stationed. The king was happy to see the good quality of the horses. The merchant was also very handsome. Manickavachagar knew that it was the Lord Himself and so mentally prostrated to Him. The king’s servants led the horses to the stable.

Day passed into night. In accordance with the Lord’s will, the horses assumed their original form of jackals, broke the reins and fled from the stable, howling. Some of them injured even the real horses. A few old jackals remained in the stable. The next morning, the horsemen did not find any of the horses and there were only a few old jackals in the stable. They immediately reported the matter to the king. The king got terribly angry with Manickavachagar who, he thought, had deceived him by magic. The king’s soldiers again began to torture him and Manickavachagar prayed to the Lord for His help. At once the Lord caused a heavy flood in the river Vaigai. There was panic everywhere in the town. The people could not understand the cause of this untimely flood. The soldiers who were guarding Manickavachagar also fled. He went to the temple. He worshipped Lord Somasundarar and was completely absorbed in meditation. The king was puzzled. He wanted to save the city from destruction. So, he ordered everyone in the city to bring one basketful of mud and throw it on the bank of the river to stem the flood. Everyone, except an old woman by name Vandi, did so. She sold *Pittu* (a sweetmeat) and eked out her livelihood. She was so much devoted to Lord Somasundarar that she would daily offer it to Him first and then sell it. She was in distress.

She prayed to the Lord for help. Lord Siva, out of His compassion, appeared as a labourer before the old woman and offered his services in return for a handful of *Pittu*. With a dirty cloth

around his waist and a basket on his head, he would sing and dance and then put the mud on the bank of the river. He ate her kind offering and threw the mud with such force that it caused new breaches! For some time he would sit idle and again sing and dance. The king's servants found the breach not closed where the Lord was working and reported the matter to the king. The king who personally supervised the work, noticed the idleness of the labourer, and hit him with a stick. The Lord threw the mud on the breach and it was closed. The blow, however, was felt by all beings in the whole universe. The king at once understood that it was all the Lord's Lila. He recognised the greatness of Manickavachagar. At that time, he heard an invisible voice: 'Oh king, your entire wealth was spent on Me and My Bhaktas. By this act Manickavachagar earned for you great merit. Instead of being grateful to him, you have tortured him. The jackals turning into horses, and this sudden flood, were all Lilas performed by Me for the sake of My devotee. At least now open your eyes and learn a lesson for your future.'

In the meantime, Manickavachagar had reached the temple and was absorbed in meditation. He, too, felt the blow that the king gave the Lord. He got up from meditation. The king was in search of him. On the way he learnt that the old woman had been taken to the Lord's Abode in a celestial car. He came to the temple in Tiru Alavai and prostrated before Manickavachagar. He requested Manickavachagar to accept the rulership of the kingdom. The saint refused this offer but asked to be permitted to go to Perunturai. Both of them came to Madura and worshipped the Lord. Manickavachagar then left for Perunturai. The king also renounced everything soon after this and reached the Lord's Abode.

At Perunturai, Manickavachagar sang highly inspiring songs and prayed that he should see the Lord in the form of the Guru, as He appeared at first. The Lord fulfilled his wish. He asked him to go to Chidambaram. On the way he visited many shrines. In every shrine, unless the Lord appeared in the original form of the Guru, he would not be satisfied. At Tiru Uttarakosha Mangai, he wept bitterly when he did not see Him as the Guru. The Lord had to accede to his wish! By stages he reached Chidambaram and rolled on the holy ground. He stayed in a garden near the temple and sang the famous *Tiruvachagam*. The people of Tillai heard the songs and enjoyed its bliss.

In Ezha Nadu (Ceylon) there was an ascetic who was constantly repeating 'Long Live Ponnambalam'. The king of the place could not understand this, as he was a Buddhist, and had called the ascetic to him. The ascetic went to the palace and sat down in front of the king with the same words! Upon being asked by the king to explain the meaning, the ascetic said: 'Oh king, Ponnambalam is a sacred place in the Chola kingdom. This place is also called Chidambaram. Here the Formless God takes a Form, of Nataraja, the divine dancer, for the welfare of the world. The object of His dance is to free the souls from the fetters of Maya. Inside the temple there is a tank called Siva Jnana Ganga tank. In this tank Hiranyavarman, the son of Manu, took his bath and got his leprosy cured. Those who take a bath in this sacred tank and then worship Lord Nataraja are purified of all sins. For them there will be no more birth. They will attain Eternal Bliss.'

The Buddhist Guru who heard all this questioned: 'Oh king, how can there be a God other than Lord Buddha? I will myself go to Chidambaram and defeat the Saivite in argument and convert the temple into a Buddhist shrine.' So saying he left for Tillai. The king also accompanied him, with his dumb daughter.

The Saivites sent a message to the Chola king asking him to arrange a debate with the Buddhists when the latter had arrived at Chidambaram. The day prior to the appointed day, the Brahmins prayed to Lord Nataraja for success in the debate. That night the Lord appeared in their dream and said: ‘Approach Vadavurar and request him to oppose the Buddhist Guru in argument’. The next morning, the Brahmins approached Vadavurar who readily agreed. He went to the temple, worshipped the Lord, and entered the hall of the debate. He did not like to see the face of the Buddhists: so, he sat behind a curtain. The Buddhists opened the debate. Manickavachagar explained the principles of Saivism. The Buddhists could not offer counter-arguments. They went on repeating their arguments! Manickavachagar prayed to the Lord for help. At His instance, Devi Sarasvathi withdrew Her grace from the Buddhists, and they became dumb. The Buddhists were defeated in argument.

The Buddhist king understood Manickavachagar’s greatness. He said: ‘You have made my teacher and all his disciples dumb. If you can make my dumb daughter speak, I and my subjects will embrace Saivism.’ Manickavachagar asked him to bring his daughter. He prayed to the Lord for His help and then asked the girl to give proper answer to the questions put by the Buddhist Guru on Lord Siva. The dumb daughter not only began to speak but gave fitting answers to those questions. They were all wonder-struck at this miracle. The king and the Buddhists recognised the superiority of Saivism and embraced it. Manickavachagar restored speech to the Buddhists also.

One day Lord Siva desired to hear Tiruvachagam from the lips of Manickavachagar and bestow Moksha on him. He went to Manickavachagar in the disguise of a Brahmin. Manickavachagar welcomed the guest with respect and enquired of his needs. Lord Siva told Manickavachagar: ‘I want to hear Tiruvachagam from your own holy lips. I shall write it down, so that I can learn it and with its help free myself from the shackles of Samsara.’ Manickavachagar recited the Tiruvachagam. The Brahmin (Lord Siva) wrote it down on palm leaves. Then he suddenly disappeared! At once Manickavachagar knew that the Brahmin was the Lord Himself. He felt terrible anguish for not having recognised Him.

The Lord wanted to immortalise Manickavachagar and to spread his glory. So, He kept these songs on the step of Panchakshara of the Chit Sabha. The Brahmins of Tillai were surprised to see them lying there. They opened the leaves and read the contents. In the end it was written ‘Manickavachagar repeated this, Tiru Chitrambalam wrote this.’ The Brahmins wanted to know the meaning of these verses: so they showed this to Manickavachagar who took them to the temple, and, pointing out to the image of Lord Siva, said: ‘This Tillai Nataraja is the purport of these stanzas.’ He at once merged himself at the Feet of Lord Nataraja.

SELECTIONS FROM THE UTTERANCES OF NAYANAR SAINTS

Appar Or Tirunavukkarasar

The rare jewel of the Brahmins is the Veda with its six *angas* (parts). The rare jewel of the Saivite is the Panchakshara.

Everything is the manifestation of Lord Siva. Siva is Narayana, Brahma, the four Vedas, the Holiest, the most Ancient, the Perfect. Though Siva is all these, He is none of these. He is without name, without birth, death or disease. He is at once the transcendent and the immanent.

Love of Lord Siva must be felt and manifested. Sing. Pray. Worship. Weep. Dance. Lord Siva is the music or melody in the song, the sweetness in the fruit, the thought in the mind, the lustre in the eyes. He is neither male, nor female. He is without dimensions.

Subdue the senses. Practise regular meditation. Practise the four-fold Saivite discipline. Develop dispassion (Vairagya). Transcend the three bodies. Unite the individual soul with the supreme soul or Lord Siva. You will attain eternal bliss and immortality. You can behold Lord Siva if you look for Him with the light of wisdom issuing forth from the wick of life, fed with the *ghee* of meditation in the lamp of the mind within the house of your body.

Plough with truth. Plant the seeds of desire for Self-knowledge. Irrigate the mind with the water of patience. Supervise your work by looking within or introspecting. Build the fence of Yama, Niyama, or right conduct or right living. You will soon attain Sivanandam or eternal bliss of Siva.

Regard your body as the temple of Lord Siva, your mind as the worshipper, Truth as purity which is necessary for worship, the jewel of the mind as the Lingam, love as the ghee, milk, etc. Perform Puja to Lord Siva thus. Lord Siva cannot be obtained without making the mind one-pointed and meditating on the Panchakshara.

Tirumular

Tirumandiram deals with the practical and theoretical aspects of Saivite religion and philosophy. The treatment of Pathi (Lord Siva), Pasu (individual soul), and Pasam (attachment) in the old method is found in this book.

By the practice of the eight limbs of Raja Yoga, the Yogi obtains the blessing of Uma and attains Amarapadavi (Godhood) by the practice of Yama (self-restraint). He attains Siva Padam (the Abode of Siva) by the practice of Niyama (religious canons). He hears Nadam (mystic sound) by the practice of Asana (Yoga posture). He attains the stage, by the practice of Pranayama (restraint of breath) in which all the gods eulogise him. He attains the form of Siva by the practice of Pratyahara (abstraction of the senses) and the gods become confused as they cannot differentiate him from Siva. He can go anywhere including the worlds of Brahma and Vishnu by the practice of Dharana (concentration). He can walk into any place just as one can walk on earth. He attains the Abode of

Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra and Indra, by the practice of Dhyana (meditation). He frees himself from all the Upadhis (limiting adjuncts) or fetters and unites with Lord Siva by the practice of Samadhi (superconscious state).

God alone is the Guru or the spiritual teacher. He reveals Siva. Sat Guru is Ambalam or Chidakasa (the divine plane of Consciousness). You will have to search for the Guru in your own heart. Knowledge, devotion, purity, Siddhis (psychic powers) are obtained through the grace of the Guru. The grace descends on the virtuous aspirant who has purity, dispassion, etc.

The thirsting aspirants should get help from the Param Guru. He imparts spiritual instructions to the aspirants. Then Suddha Guru confers upon them divine grace. When the aspirant obtains the divine grace, he gets several powers: purity, the power to know the Mantra, higher psychic powers, etc. Then the Sad Guru reveals him in the Chidakasa (the seat of Consciousness in the ether of the heart), breaks the three bonds, viz., Anava (egoism), Karma (action) and Maya (illusion), and helps him to enter the illimitable domain of Moksha or supreme abode of eternal bliss. Siva Guru presents himself later on and manifests Sat (Reality), Asat (unreality) and Sat-asat (that which is indescribable as either). When the Jiva (individual soul) attains the final knowledge he becomes Sivam Himself. The Guru who presents himself in the earlier stages, too, is Siva Himself.

The devotee attains the grace of the Lord when he meditates on Him in the chambers of his heart; in the space between the two eye-brows and in the head. The holy Feet of the Lord are highly eulogised. The holy Feet of the Lord are Mantra, beauty and truth.

Jneya or that which is to be known is Siva Ananda which is a product of Siva and His grace, Shakti. The Jnata (knower) is the individual soul or Jiva. He knows Siva by abiding in Siva Ananda and obtains Jnanam or Knowledge.

Moksha is the attainment of Siva Ananda. He who attains Moksha will attain supreme knowledge of Siva. He who gets established in Siva Ananda will attain knowledge and Moksha (final emancipation).

The Jiva who knows Siva Ananda dwells for ever in it. He attains Siva and Shakti in Siva Ananda. He is endowed with true knowledge which is really union of Siva and Shakti. Lord Siva shows the path which leads to Moksha, to the aspirant who is endowed with dispassion, non-attachment, and renunciation, and who praises Him always and performs regular worship.

The devotee of Lord Siva gets strength to resist the temptations of the world and Indra, through his Tapas or austerity. He does not care at all for the celestial pleasures offered by Indra. He is quite contented with the Supreme Bliss attained through union with Lord Siva.

GLORY OF LORD SIVA

OM I bow with folded palms to Lord Siva Who is the Lord of the universe, World Teacher, Who is the Destroyer of Tripuras (three cities of lust, anger and egoism), Who is the Lord of Uma, Gauri, Ganga, Who is full of light, knowledge and bliss, Who is the Lord of Yogis, who is the storehouse of knowledge and Who is known by the various names as Mahadeva, Sankara, Hara, Sambhu, Sadashiva, Rudra, Soolapani, Bhairava, Uma-Maheshwara, Neelakantha, Trilochana, Tryambaka, Viswanatha, Chandrasekhara, Ardhanaareesvara, Maheshwara, Neelalohita, Parama Siva, Digambara, Dakshinamurthi, etc.

How merciful He is! How loving and kind He is! He even wears the skulls of His devotees as a garland around His neck. He is an embodiment of renunciation, mercy, love and wisdom. It is a mistake to say that He is the destroyer. Lord Siva in reality is the regenerator. Whenever one's physical body becomes unfit for further evolution in this birth, either by disease, old age or other causes, He at once removes this rotten physical sheath and gives a new, healthy, vigorous body for further quick evolution. He wants to take all His children to His Lotus Feet quickly. He desires to give them His glorious 'Siva-Padam'. It is easier to please Siva than to please Hari. A little Prem and devotion, a little chanting of His Panchakshara (the Mantra *OM NAMAH SIVAYA* which has five letters) is quite sufficient to infuse delight in Siva. He gives boons to His devotees quite readily. How large is His heart! He gave Pasupatha Astra (a weapon) to Arjuna, without any difficulty, for his little penance. He gave a precious boon to Bhasmasura. In Kalahasthi, near Tirupathi, He gave Darshan to Kannapa Nayanar, the devoted hunter. In Chidambaram, even the untouchable saint Nandan had the Darshan of Lord Siva. He ran with tremendous speed to make the boy Markandeya immortal, when he was in the clutches of the God of Death—Yama. Ravana of Lanka pleased Lord Siva, with his Sama-chantings (Sama is one of the three Vedas). He initiated the Four Divine Youths (Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanathana, Sanatkumara) into the mysteries of Jnana, in the form of Dakshinamurthy. In Madura He assumed the form of a boy and carried earth on His head for a devoted lady. Look at His unbounded mercy for His devotees! When Brahma and Vishnu went to find out the Head and Feet of Lord Siva, He assumed the form of an infinite, expansive blaze of light. They were baffled. How magnificent and self-effulgent He is! He lived for several years in the house of Pattinathu Swami of South India, as his adopted son, and disappeared, after giving him the small note: 'Even the broken needles will not follow you after death.' The reading of this note was the starting point for attainment of Jnana for the Swami. Why do you all not attempt this very second, with sincerity, to realise God?

Hatha Yogis awaken the Kundalini Shakti that is lying dormant in the Muladhara Chakra, by Asana, Pranayama, Kumbhaka, Mudra and Bandha, taking it up through different Chakras (centres of spiritual energy) viz., Swadhisthana, Manipura, Anahata, Vishuddha and Ajna, and join it with Lord Siva at the Sahasrara, the thousand-petalled lotus at the crown of the head. They drink the nectar of Immortality. This is termed Amrita-Srava. When the Shakti is united with Siva, full illumination comes to the Yogi.

Lord Siva represents the destructive aspect of Brahman. That portion of Brahman that is enveloped by Tamo-guna-pradhana-Maya is Lord Siva Who is the all-pervading Iswara, and Who also dwells in Kailasa. He is the storehouse of wisdom. Siva *minus* Parvathy is pure Infinite Being. With Maya, He becomes Saguna Brahman (personal God) for the purpose of pious devotion of His

devotees. Devotees of Lord Rama must worship Siva also. Rama Himself worshipped Lord Siva at the famous Rameshvaram. Lord Siva is the Lord of ascetics and Lord of Yogins robed in space (naked - Digambaras).

His Trisul (trident) that is held in His right hand represents the three Gunas—Satva, Rajas and Tamas. That is the emblem of sovereignty. He wields the world through these Gunas. The Damaru (drum) in His left hand represents the Sabda Brahman (OM) from which all languages have been formed. It is He Who formed the Sanskrit language out of the sound of the Damaru. The wearing of the crescent moon on His head indicates that He has controlled the mind perfectly. The flow of the Ganga represents the nectar of immortality. Elephant represents, symbolically, the Vritti (mental modification) of pride. Wearing the skin of an elephant denotes that He has controlled pride. The tiger represents lust and his sitting on the skin indicates that He has conquered lust. His holding a deer in one hand indicates that He has removed the tossing or wandering nature of the mind. Deer jumps from one object to another. His wearing of serpents around His neck denotes wisdom and eternity. Serpents live for a large number of years, and represent Time which glides away smoothly! He is Trilochana (Three-eyed), in the centre of whose forehead is the third eye, the eye of wisdom. Nandi, the bull that sits in front of the Siva Lingam represents Pranava (OM). The Lingam represents Adwaita (monism). It points out ‘I am one without a second’ just as a man raises his right hand above his head pointing out his right index finger only.

Kailas hills in Tibet are a huge range with a central, beautiful, naturally carved and decorated shining peak, eternally clad with silvery snow, 22,980 feet above sea-level. Some take the height to be 22,028 feet. This particular peak is in the form of a natural, huge Siva Lingam. This is worshipped as the form of Lord Siva from a distance. There is neither a temple nor a priest, nor daily worship here. I had the fortune to have Darshan of Kailas through the grace of Lord Siva on July 22nd, 1931. I even climbed with panting breath to the foot of Kailas peak where the river Indus takes its origin. It is a picturesque and soul-stirring scene. You will have to ascend from Didipha Guha, the first halting place in the Parikrama (circumambulation) of Kailas which covers 30 miles. It takes three days. On the way comes the famous and sacred Gauri Kund which is eternally covered with snow. You will have to break the snow when you take a bath.

The following are the twelve Jyotir Lingas of Lord Siva:

1. Somnath in Gujerat.
2. Mallikarjun in Sri Saila Parvat near Tirupati.
3. Mahakalam in Ujjain in Gwalior State.
4. Omkareshwar on the banks of the river Narmada in Amaleshwaram.
5. Bhairavnath near Gaya.
6. Naganath in Southern India.
7. Kedarnath in the Himalayas.
8. Tryambak, near the source of the Godavari, in the Nasik district, Bombay.
9. Rameswaram in South India.
10. Bhima Sankar, near Poona.
11. Viswanath in Banares.
12. Grineshwar (Gokarna) in Kharwar district.

Even if people remember these 12 places both morning and evening, the sins of seven births will be destroyed.

THE SIVA LINGAM

You will find in the Linga Purana:

Pradhanam Prakritir Yadahurlingamuttamam Gandhavarnarasairheenam sabda sparshaadi varjitam The foremost Lingam which is primary, and is devoid of smell, colour, taste, hearing, etc., is spoken of as Prakriti—Nature.

Linga means *mark* in Sanskrit. It is a symbol which points to an inference. When you see a big flood in a river, you infer that there should have been heavy rains the previous day. When you see smoke, you infer that there is fire. This world of countless forms is a Lingam of the Omnipotent Lord. The Siva Lingam is a symbol of Lord Siva. When you look at the Lingam, your mind is at once elevated and you begin to think of the Lord.

Lord Siva is really formless. He has no form of His own; and, yet, all forms are His forms. All forms are pervaded by Lord Siva. Every form is the form or Lingam of Lord Siva.

There is a mysterious power or indescribable Shakti in the Lingam, to induce concentration of the mind. Just as the mind is focussed easily in crystal gazing, the mind of a devotee is easily concentrated when he looks at the Lingam. That is the reason why the ancient Rishis of India and the seers have prescribed Lingam for being installed in the temples of Siva.

Siva Lingam speaks to you in the unmistakable language of silence: ‘I am one without a second. I am formless.’ Pure, pious souls only can understand this language. A curious, passionate, impure foreigner of little understanding or intelligence says: ‘Oh, the Hindus worship the phallus. They are ignorant people. They have no philosophy.’ When a foreigner tries to learn Tamil or Hindustani language, he first tries to pick up some vulgar words. This is his curiosity nature. Even so, the curious foreigner tries to find out some defects in the worship of the symbol. Lingam is only the outward symbol of the formless Being, Lord Siva, Who is the indivisible, all-pervading, eternal, auspicious, ever-pure, immortal essence of this vast universe, Who is the undying soul seated in the chambers of your heart, Who is your Indweller, innermost Self or Atman, one with Brahman.

Sphatikalingam is also a symbol of Lord Siva. This is prescribed for Aradhana or worship of Lord Siva. It is made of quartz. It has no colour of its own, but takes on the colour of the substance which comes in contact with it. It represents the Nirguna Brahman or the attributeless Supreme Self.

For a sincere devotee, the Lingam is not a block of stone. It is all radiant Tejas or Chaitanya (Light or Consciousness). The Lingam talks to him, makes him shed profuse tears, produces horripilation and melting of heart, raises him above body-consciousness, and helps him to commune with the Lord and attain Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Lord Rama worshipped the Siva Lingam at Rameshwaram. What a great mystic Shakti there should be in the Lingam!

PUJA AND ISHTA DEVATA

Puja is the common term for ritual worship, of which there are numerous synonyms such as Archana, Vandana, Bhajana, etc., though some of these stress certain aspects of it. The object of worship is the Ishta Devata or the guardian deity or the particular form of the Deity whom the devotee worships.

Whilst all things may be the objects of worship, choice is naturally made of those objects which, by reason of their effect on the mind, are more fitted for it. An image or one of the useful emblems is likely to raise in the mind of the worshipper the thought of God.

In Puja, an image or picture representing some divine form is used as the object of worship. The image is adored. A Lingam represents Siva. All forms are one. All are adoring the same Iswara. The differences are only differences of names due to difference in the temperament of the worshippers, but not in the object of adoration. It is only out of ignorance that different religionists and different sects fight and quarrel amongst themselves.

Regular worship, Puja or other modes of demonstrating our inner feeling of recognition of Divinity in the idol unveil the Divinity latent in it. This is truly a wonder and a miracle. The picture comes to life. The idol speaks. It will answer your questions and solve your problems. The God in you has the power to awaken the latent Divinity in the idol. It is like a powerful lens that focusses the sun's rays on to a bundle of cotton. The lens is not fire and the cotton is not fire either, nor can the sun's rays, by themselves, burn cotton. When the three are brought together in a particular manner, fire is generated and the cotton is burnt. Similar is the case with the idol, the power of the devotee's concentration and faith makes the idol shine with resplendence. God is then enshrined in the idol. From here, He will protect you in a special manner. The idol will perform miracles. The place where it is installed is at once transformed into a temple, nay, a Vaikuntha (abode of Lord Vishnu) or Kailasa (abode of Lord Siva). Those who live in such a place are freed from miseries, from diseases, from failures and from Samsara itself. The awakened Divinity in the idol acts as a guardian angel, blessing all, conferring the highest good on the devotees.

All the Nayanars attained God-realisation through the worship of the Lingam, the image of Lord Siva. A pseudo-Vedantin feels ashamed to bow down or prostrate before an idol. Appar, Sundarar, Sambandar etc., had the highest Adwaitic realisation. They saw Lord Siva everywhere and yet they visited all temples of Siva, prostrated before the idol and sang hymns which are on record now. The Nayanar saints practised Chariyai and Kriyai only and attained God-realisation. They swept the floor of the temple, collected flowers, made garlands for the Lord, and put on lights in the temple. They were illiterate, but attained the highest realisation. They were practical Yogis and their hearts were saturated with pure devotion. They were embodiments of Karma Yoga. All of them practised the Yoga of Synthesis. The idol in the temple was a mass of Consciousness for them.

Lord Krishna gives a description of worship to Uddhava in the eleventh chapter of Srimad Bhagavatam:

‘The sun, fire, earth, or clay, water, a Brahmin, any image of Mine in the concrete, clearly thought of as seated in the heart, may be worshipped in My Name sincerely with such articles as

could be obtained by him. The worship should be sincere and whole-hearted and the devotee should imagine Me as his preceptor. The devotee should begin My worship for obtaining My grace and not for any other desire. In ordinary images I should be invoked at every time of worship. I can be pictured in the mind. The worship of My image in the heart should be with accessories pictured in the mind.

‘The image should be washed or bathed, cleaned and adorned with ornaments and marks. The devotee should not rise in the midst of worship to get some articles. Once seated, he must finish it before he rises for anything. He should be seated on *Darbha* grass or other clean seat. He must put My image facing north or east or must himself sit facing north or east. He must sit facing Me or sideways. He should repeat the mantras for purifying himself. He should clean his body by control of breath. He should sit quiet and meditate on Me for some time.

‘He should fancy Me as in a lotus with eight petals, overflowing with fragrance and radiant with light. Sandal-wood, saffron, camphor, *Kumkum* and fragrance should be used. Purusha Sukta (a Vedic prayer) and other sacred literature should be recited. My devotee may adorn Me with cloth, gems, sacred thread, sandal, flowers, saffron, and ointments, etc. The devotee should offer water for washing the Feet, Achamanam (for sipping), sandal, words of greeting, invitation, and hospitality. He should also wave incense, light and camphor at My altar. He can sing aloud hymns in My praise. He can sing songs and dance in My altar reciting My various deeds and achievements. He should seek My grace, prostrating himself duly before Me. Putting his head on My Feet, he should ask for My grace to protect him and save him from the wheel of births and deaths.

‘He should adorn himself with the flowers and sandal used in such worship. The devotee may worship Me in any form in all objects or in himself in the manner that appeals most to his mind, and inclinations, as I am immanent in all things. My devotee, worshipping Me thus with rituals, Mantras or both, attains not only bliss and Self-realisation, but also all things he desires. By building temples, altars, etc. devotees attain power over all the worlds. By worship of Me they attain Brahma Loka. By all the acts, they attain My power and immanence.’

Bells are rung in the temples, and while doing Puja, to shut out the external sounds and to make the mind inward and concentrated.

Lights are waved before the Deity. This denotes that the Lord is supreme Light. The devotee says: ‘Oh Lord, Thou art self-effulgent, Light of the universe. Thou art the light in the sun, moon, and fire. Remove the darkness in me by bestowing your divine Light on me. May my intellect be illumined.’ This is the significance of waving lights.

Incense is burnt before the Deity. The smoke spreads through the whole room. It acts as a disinfectant. It denotes that the Lord is all-pervading and fills the whole universe by His living presence. The devotee prays: ‘Oh Lord, let the Vasanas and Samskaras dormant in me vanish like the smoke of this incense and become ashes. Let me become stainless.’

Burning of camphor denotes that the individual ego melts like the camphor and the Jiva becomes one with the Supreme Light of lights.

The pasting of sandal reminds the devotee that he should, in his difficulties, be as patient as the sandal. Sandal emanates sweet odour when it is ground. So also, the devotee should not murmur when difficulties arise, but, on the other hand, remain cheerful and happy and emanate sweetness and gentleness like the sandal. He should not hate even his enemy. This is another precept we learn from this. Though the sandalwood is crushed and ground, it silently wears itself out, emanating only very sweet odour. One should return good for evil.

It is the understanding of this inner meaning of Puja that brings in the higher form of devotion.

Bhakti is of two kinds, viz., higher Bhakti or Para Bhakti, and lower Bhakti or ritualistic Bhakti. Ritualistic Bhakti is formal Bhakti. The mind becomes purer and purer. The aspirant gradually develops love for God through ritualistic worship.

Hinduism leads the aspirants gradually from material images to mental images, and from the diverse mental images to the one Personal God, and from the Personal God to the Impersonal Absolute.

Do Japa of the Panchakshara—*Om Namah Sivaya*. You can even sing the Panchakshara nicely:

*Om Namah Sivaya, Om Namah Sivaya,
Om Namah Sivaya, Om Namah Sivaya.*

People used to dance, during my tours, whenever I sang the Siva Tandava Kirtan:

*Agad Bhum, Agad Bhum Baje Damaru,
Nache Sadasiva Jajad Guru
Nache Brahma, Nache Vishnu, Nache Mahadev
Kappar Lekey Kali Nache Nache Adidev.*

Do Puja regularly with faith and devotion. Always and at the end of your prayers, Puja, meditation or Japa, repeat the Mahamrityunjaya Mantra—

*Om Tryambakam Yajamahe Sugandhim
Pushativardhanam, Urvaarukamiva Bandhanaan-
Mrityor Muksheeya Maamritaat.*

for the health, long life, peace and happiness of all. This great Mantra in praise of Lord Siva works wonders, averts accidents, heals diseases and bestows long life. It will also liberate you from Samsara.

GLOSSARY

- Abhishekam* — Bathing the image of God.
Aiswarya — Wealth.
Agama — Scripture dealing with ritualistic worship.
Archana — Worshipping the image with flowers.
Bhasma — The holy ash.
Bhav — Attitude, faith.
Deva — Celestial being.
Jivanmukta — The sage, liberated while living here.
Jnana — Wisdom, relating to God.
Karma — Effect of past action (in past births).
Khanda — Similar to chapter, in the Vedas.
Kowpeenam — Loin cloth.
Mutt — A monastery.
Nitya Karmas — Daily obligatory duties.
Pralaya — Cosmic dissolution.
Rishabha — Bull, the vehicle of Lord Siva.
Rudraksham — A kind of bead used by devotees.
Samsara — Transmigration, round of birth-death.
Samskaras — Subtle mental impressions.
Tapas (Tapaswin) — Austerity (one who does).
Vairagya — Dispassion.
Vaisya — A businessman.
Yajna (Yaga) — Ceremonial sacrifice.

NOTE: In the case of some proper names, the Tamil tradition of using them in different forms has been adopted: viz., Enadinatha Nayanar is referred to as Enadinathar or Enadiar. These will be obvious. The names of some festivals, viz., Panguni Uttaram, Vasanta Utsavam, Maha Navami, have been retained. There are a number of other proper names, too, with which the reader will become familiar.