

CHAPTER 4
TIRUMURAI 8
MANICKKAVASAGAR
(TIRUVASAGAM)

Manickkavasagar - Chidambaram



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MANICKKAVASAGAR

Manickkavasagar was born in Tiruvadavur¹ in the Pandian kingdom to a couple who were great devotees of God Siva.

Madurai has a rich cultural heritage passed on from the great Tamil era for more than 2500 years old. Madurai was an important cultural and commercial center. It was the capital city of the Pandian kingdom.

¹In the Siva Puranam, Madurai was originally a forest known as Kadambavanam. One day a farmer, Dhananjayan saw Indra worshipping a Swayambhu Lingam under a tree. King Kulasekara Pandian was informed and a temple was built around the Lingam. The city of Madurai was planned with the temple as its center. Lord Siva is said to have appeared here and drops of nectar from His hair fell on the town. So, the place was name Madurai (Maduram meaning sweetness). The Nayaks who ruled Madurai from 16 to 18th Century left a majestic imprint of their rule in the Madurai Meenakshi Sundaeswara Temple.

²Manickkavasagar was named as Tiruvadavurar. He proved to be a prodigy and before he reached his 16 year, he mastered all branches of knowledge, then available. The King of Madurai, Arimardana Pandian heard about Manickkavasagar's reputation and invited him to his court. King Arimardana was so pleased by the personality and talents of the young man that he immediately appointed him as his Prime Minister with the title *Tennavan Paramayara*. Being a very good administrator, Manickkavasagar conducted the administration of the Pandian Kingdom diligently and prosperity flourished in the state.

However, Manickkavasagar was not happy with himself. As days passed, he discovered the unreality of the world. He wanted to attain eternal bliss of *Sivanandam*. Soon, Manickkavasagar realized the need of a Satguru to attain real spiritual progress.

1. Tiruvadavur is situated near the river Vaigai about 20 kms from Madurai.

Singing with Saivite Saints 59 He longed for a Satguru and everywhere he went on duties he prayed to the Lord for a Satguru. One day the Prime Minister Manickkavasagar, was requested by Pandian king to go to the western part of the kingdom to buy some horses, as the equestrian wing of the army needed to be replenished immediately.

Manickkavasagar took the blessing of Lord Somasundarar and left for his mission, with a vast retinue. They reached Tiruperunthurai. The sthala is now known as Avudaiyarkoil in Pudukkottai district.

Near the temple, Manickkavasagar felt a holy vibration and heard a mystical sound as if thousands of people were singing divine songs. Manickkavasagar went into the temple to enquire about this mysterious strain. There he found a rishi sitting under a tree with a book, – the *Siva Gnana Bodham* in his hand and surrounded by many priests. Knowing from the meaning of the title, the book would enlighten the soul, Manickkavasagar dropped all his official attire and prostrated at the feet of the rishi. The latter initiated Manickkavasagar into the mystic mantra and the doctrines of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy.

Manickkavasagar became charged with spiritual fervor and gems of words wreathed themselves into gorgeous garlands and rained forth from his silver tongue. It was at this moment that the Satguru named him, *Manickkavachaka* meaning ‘He of ruby words’ and blessed him.

Manickkavasagar detached himself from worldly duties from that moment. It is said that the Saint sang the Sivapuranam “*Namasivaya Vazhga...*” here.

Manickkavasagar sent his men to the Pandian Kingdom telling them to inform the King that the horses will reach

2. Tiruperunthurai, about 180 kms from Madurai and 15 kms from Arantangi railway station.

60 *Singing with Saivite Saints* Madurai in one month. Meanwhile, he spent all the funds the King had given for the purchase of the horses, to feed the devotees of Siva and repair the temple at Tiruperunthurai. Here, there is no Lingam in the sanctum; only the *avudaiyar* (base) is there. It is said that Lord Siva gave darshan to Manickkavasagar below the Kurandai tree.

Before going back to Madurai, Manickkavasagar prayed to Lord Siva who appeared before him and placed a diamond in his hand, reminding him that Siva devotees are Lion - hearted. On seeing his Prime Minister without the horses, the King was very upset and ordered that Mannickkavasagar be tortured. The latter assured him that he had purchased the horses and they would reach Madurai on the auspicious day of Aavani Moolam. Miraculously the horses did reach the stable on that day. The King heard a voice telling him “Manickkavasagar spent his money on Me and instead of being grateful to him, you tortured him!”

The King understood that these were the words of Lord Siva, and immediately realized the greatness of Manickkavasagar, whom he found in the temple of Tiru Alavai (Madurai Meenakshi temple), absorbed in meditation. The King fell at his feet and apologized for his misdeeds, offering the Saint the rulership of the Pandian Kingdom. Manickkavasagar declined the offer at once and continued his pilgrimage.

3He went to Perunthurai, where he met his Guru again and worshiped Lord Siva there. At Tirupperunthurai, Manickkavasagar was directed by the Satguru to visit some sacred shrines and then to go to Chidambaram. During his journey he came to Tiru Uttara Kosamangai where he rendered the song *Neettal Vinnappam* meaning “forsake me not” (6.16).

3. Tiru Uttara Kosamangai is 72 kms from Rameswaram in the Ramanathapuram district.

Singing with Saivite Saints 61 The Uttara Kosamangai sthala is an ancient Siva temple, where the presiding deity is carved in emerald. The saint proceeded to Tiruvidai Maruthur abode, which is between Kumbakonam and Mayiladuturai where he sang the *Tiru Vesaranu* (38.10) meaning “Have I indeed performed tapas?”. According to the Sthala Puranam, Siva appeared in the form of a jyoti (fl ame) from the heart of Ambal, who was performing tapas, before Agastyar and several other sages.

Manickkavasagar continued his pilgrimage to Tiruvarur, Tiruvannamalai, Sirkazhi and finally settled down in Chidambaram. Staying near the garden in Tillai, Saint Manickkavasagar rendered the famous *Tiruvagasam*.

One day an old priest hailing from Madurai reached Tillai and requested Manickkavasagar to repeat the whole *Tiruvagasam*. The Saint agreed to the request and wrote the *Tiruvagasam* which the old priest took down on palm leaves as fast as it was dictated. At the request of the priest, Manickkavasagar sang on the spot another spiritual work of 400 stanzas called the *Tirukkovaigar*. This is a spiritual classic written on the pattern of nuptial mysticism. After it was written down, the old man vanished.

The following early morning when the Dikshitar of Chidambaram went as usual to the temple, a bundle of palm leaves were found on the Panchakshara steps of the Ponnambalam shrine, another name for Tillai. It was found that the whole lot contained the *Tiruvagasam* and *Tirukkovaigar* with a message at the end saying “Written to the diction of Saint Manickkavasagar by Tiruchitrambalam Udayan.” The voice of Lord Nataraja was heard requesting the priests to go and meet Manickkavasagar, as he was the one who wrote these sacred poems. Manickkavasagar was invited to the temple where he was bestowed with all honors.

62 Singing with Saivite Saints The temple priests wanted to know the meaning of these verses from the saint. Manickkavasagar took them to the Chit Sabha and pointed with his forefinger to Lord Nataraja and said “This Chidambara Nataraja is the purpose of this”. Instantly, a glorious resplendent jyoti appeared in the sabha into which disappeared Saint Manickkavasagar.

The ‘*Tiruvagasam*’ has 51 cantos consisting of four *Agavals* or ‘Garlands of Praise to Siva’ and the 47 other cantos containing ten stanzas or *Padigams*. The *Tiruvagasam* is a collective name given to the works of Manickkavasagar namely the *Tiruvembavai*, *Tirupalliyezhuchi* and the *Kuyilpattu*. The 658 hymns of the *Tiruvagasam* together with the 400 hymns of *Tirukkovaigar* made up the eighth Tirumurai of the Saiva Siddhanta scripture. The contributions to Indian music and poetry that Manickkavasagar made through the *Tiruvagasam* and *Tirukkovaigar* is indeed immense.

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MANICKKAVASAGAR – TIRUVASAGAM

**Canto : 6.16 – ‘Neethal Vinnappam –
Forsake Me Not’ (Uttara kosamangai)**

porulai tamiyen pugalidame ninpugazh igazhvar verulai
yenaivithidhu tikandhai meimamai arvizhungum arulai
anipozhil uttarakosamangai arasai irulai veliye igapara maagiyil
irundavanai

MEANING

I wandered weary with none to say ‘Fear not’ ! Like lightning fl ash,
Behold! Supernal Thou too hast forsaken me! Thou Truth Great
Uttarakosamangai’s King! Incomparable one; My mother art Thou,
my father Thou, My soul’s most precious wealth.

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Bestowed with honors by Dikshitaras - Chidambaram (East Gopuram)

