

CHAPTER 7
TIRUMURAI 11
12 SAINTS
(DEVOTIONAL POEMS)

Nambiandar Nambi - Tirunaraiyur Temple



82 *Singing with Saivite Saints*
Karaikkal Ammaiyar - Karaikkal Temple



Singing with Saivite Saints 83
Nakkirar - Tiruparamkundram



84 Singing with Saivite Saints

THE ELEVENTH TIRUMURAI

The eleventh Tirumurai is an anthology of devotional poems by twelve Saints. It consists of 41 *Prabbandams* (garland of verses) set into 1391 verses. The authors of the eleventh Tirumurai are:

1. Tiruvallavayudaiyar
 2. Karaikkal Ammaiyar
 3. Ayyadigal
 4. Kadavarkon Nayanar
 5. Kazharirru Arivar Nayanar (Cheraman Perumal)
 6. Kallata Thevar
 7. Kapila Thevar
 8. Parana Thevar
 9. Ilam Peruman Adigal
 10. Adhira Adigal
 11. Pattinathu Pillaiyar
 12. Nambiandar Nambi
- Among these authors, Nambiandar Nambi, Ayyadigal

Kadavarkon Nayanar, Karaikkal Ammaiyar, Kazharirru Arivar and Nakkirar are well – known.

Nambiandar Nambi Nambiandar Nambi lived in the 11th Century in Tirunaraiyur in the Chola kingdom. His father was a priest doing service at the Pollappillaiyar temple. One day, his father who had to go to do some other works, asked his son Nambi to host the shrine. Nambi did as his father requested. He did

1. Tirunaraiyur is 20 kms from Chidambaram on the way to Kaattu Mannargudi.

Singing with Saivite Saints 85 the puja, offered fruits as well as sweet dishes to Pollappillaiyar and prayed to Pillaiyar to eat the *Naivedyam* (offerings). On seeing that Pillaiyar did not partake the offering, Nambi felt sore and started knocking his head against a stone. Pollappillaiyar appeared and accepted the offerings in front of Nambi. Pollappillaiyar named him as Nambiandar Nambi at this moment.

Nambi thus composed his first poem *Tiruvirattaimani Malai* on Pollappillaiyar after learning the Vedas and Sastras from Him. The Chola King Abayakulasekara Rajaraja who was ruling Tiruvarur at that time, heard about the miracles of Nambiandar Nambi. The Chola King was very pleased with Nambi and paid due respects to him. He requested Nambi to bring to light the Tevaram hymns of the Saiva Saints. Nambi went to Pollappillaiyar and asked for blessings to conduct the task. Pillaiyar told Nambi “There is at the back of the Golden Temple at Chidambaram, a room bearing the palm imprints of the three great apostles and there the Tevaram hymns are preserved”.

Both Nambi and the Chola King went to Chidambaram, took a bath in the Sivaganga and went to worship Lord Nataraja. Nambi composed the poem ‘*Koyirriuppanniyar Viruttam*’ there at the feet of Siva Peruman. The Chola King intimated the Andhanars of Tillai, called the Dikshitaras of Chidambaram temple about the purpose of his visit to Chidambaram. The priests told the King that if he could bring the three Saints, the room could be opened. Thereupon, the King conducted a big festival in honour of Lord Nataraja and took the ‘*Utsava Murtis*’ of the three *Samaya Acharyas* in procession and brought them back to the room containing the Tevaram hymns. The priests were pleased with the effort of the King and opened the door. It was a most heart-rending sight to see the palm leaves on which the hymns were written, all covered with white ants and earth. The palm leaves were carefully taken and cleaned with oil. King Abayakulasekara wept at seeing the destruction of a

86 *Singing with Saivite Saints* very large amount of palm leaves. It was at this moment that a voice from Sivaloka said “Only those hymns which are fit for this Age still remain”.

The King requested Nambi to compile the Tevaram hymns and other sacred utterances. Accordingly, Nambiandar Nambi compiled the hymns into eleven sacred books and thus composed the *Tiruvandhati* on the lives of the Saivite Saints, having as his original the *Tiru Thondathogai* retold by Pollappillaiyar. Furthermore Nambi composed another *Tiruvandhati*, *Tiruvulamalai*, and the *Tirukkalambagam*. He also composed the *Tirutthogai* in praise of Saint Tiru Gnana Sambandar and *Tiruvedgadhama malai* on Saint Tiru Navukkarasar. At the request of the Chola King the ten Prabhandams of Nambiandar Nambi were also included in the eleventh book of the Tirumurai.

²The palm leaves were taken to the sthala in Tiru Erukattampuliyur for restoration. Tiru Erukattampuliyur was found in the Chola Kingdom and is popularly known as Rajendra Pattanam. This is the birthplace of Tiru Nilakanta Nayanar, the Yazhpanar expert in playing the Veena.

The King and Nambi worshipped Lord Siva and prayed that the tunes of those hymns be known. A voice was heard telling them to go to a girl who was born in a musician family. Her parents were descendant of Tirunilakanta. So they took her to the Golden Temple to fix the Tevaram tunes. This mandate was accordingly carried out. Chola King Rajaraja Kulasekara went back to Tiruvarur and engraved the eleven Tirumurais on copper plates, which were carefully preserved at the shrine of Thiagesar, also known as Tyagaraja.

Nambiandar Nambi proceeded to his native Tirunaraiyur and after spending his life serving Lord Siva attained salvation.

2. Tiru Erukattampuliyur is about 12 kms from Virudrachalam.

Singing with Saivite Saints 87 **Ayyadigal Kadavarkon Nayanar**

Another saint whose poems were classified under the '*Panniru Tirumurai*' was Ayyadigal Kadavarkon Nayanar. He belonged to the ancient Pallava dynasty and was the King who reigned in Kanchi Kingdom as stated in his poem (Stanza 7). He conquered all his enemies and was a great poet too. He was an ardent devotee of God Siva and soon he got disgusted with worldly life. He renounced the world after placing his son on the throne.

Ayyadigal Kadavarkon Nayanar undertook a pilgrimage to various Siva sthalas singing hymns in His praise. Lord Siva was highly pleased with his devotion and blessed him. Ayyadigal composed inspiring hymns in each shrine he worshipped. This collection of his verses is also classified under the eleventh Tirumurai.

Karaikkal Ammaiyar In the famous seaport town of Karaikkal, inhabited by

merchants noted for their virtue, veracity and wealth, there lived a merchant by the name of Danadathan. He was a wealthy merchant and a virtuous person. As a result of his great sadhana, he and his wife were blessed with a daughter whom they named Punitavathiar. Since her childhood, Danadathan's daughter developed instinctively a love for Lord Siva and His devotees.

Punitavathiar was married to Paramadathan at Karaikkal. One day Paramadathan sent two mangoes to his house.

Punitavathiar kept them safely so that she could serve her husband later at meal time. Before her husband arrived, a Yogi appeared and asked her for food. She worshipped the Yogi and as she had nothing else to offer she gave one of the two mangoes. Later Paramadathan came home and had his meal. After partaking the food, he asked for a mango. As it was

88 *Singing with Saivite Saints* tasty, he asked for the second one also. Punitavathiar was upset and appealed to Lord Siva for help. Mysteriously a mango fell in the palm of her hand. She gave it to her husband who ate it. Paramadathan realized that the taste was exceptionally sweet, and wondered whether it was the same mango he sent home. Punitavathiar told him the truth.

Paramadathan understood that his wife must be divine and decided to leave her. Eventually he left his wife and settled in the Pandian Kingdom. Punitavathiar went to meet her husband, but the latter on seeing her, prostrated at her feet. He revealed that he regarded her, not as his wife, but as a Goddess. Punitavathiar understood and prayed to Lord Siva to deprive her of her present physical charm and let her have a disgusting form. Her prayer was immediately granted and her charming body was transformed into a skeleton.

3 Punitavathiar was named Ammaiyyar while Lord Siva was telling of her greatness to Goddess Parvati. Karaikkal Ammaiyyar went on a pilgrimage to the holy Kailash. Lord Siva granted her a boon that she will be present at places where He will have His Tandavam. Lord Siva requested Karaikkal Ammaiyyar to proceed to Tiruvalangadu⁴ to witness His dance. There is also a temple for Karaikkal Ammaiyyar in Palaiyanur. Ammaiyyar went to Tiruvalangadu and witnessed Lord Siva's dance. She spent her life here, singing in praise of the Lord. She composed her first poem *Athpuda Tiruvandhati* which is a wonderful *Andhati* of 100 verses. Karaikkal Ammaiyyar attained moksha here in Tiruvalangadu.

3. Tiruvalangadu is 40 kms from Chennai, in the Tiruvallur district near Arakkonam.

The sthala is situated about 5 kms on the north eastern side of Alangadu.

4. Palaiyanur is 1 km from Tiruvalangadu.

Singing with Saivite Saints 89 **Kazharirru Arivar Nayanar(Cheraman Perumal)**

Cheraman Perumal Nayanar was born as Perumakkothayar in the Chera Kingdom, which is now the Trissur district in Kerala. Cheraman Nayanar was born in royal family. He had a great devotion for Lord Siva even as a child. His devotion increased as he grew. He did not want to be king or to rule the Kingdom. He renounced the world and went to Tiruvanchaikkalam. There the saint worshipped Lord Siva. It is interesting to note that Lord Siva named Cheraman as *Kazharirru Arivar* because he was blessed with intelligence and abilities of a King. He was also an adept at judging intuitively the people around him. He acquired the foresight to know when they could become his enemies.

After some time Cheraman was requested by the then ruler Sengol Porayar to come and ascend the throne as there was no heir. Cheraman prayed to the Lord and was blessed by God Siva. The new King did a lot of service to Lord Siva and his devotees. By his many acts of devotion and piety he earned the grace of Lord Siva.

One day, at the time of his daily prayer, Cheraman did not hear the usual divine sound. He was deeply afflicted and was thinking that he must have done a big mistake. At once he heard Siva's voice telling him, "My dear friend, Sundarar has come to Tillai and was singing sweet songs. I was completely absorbed in that and hence the delay in blessing you with the musical sound of My anklet".

Cheraman at once started for Tillai to worship Lord Nataraja and to meet Sundaramurti Nayanar, the composer of the seventh Tirumurai. Reaching the temple in Chidambaram, Cheraman sang the *Pon Vannathu Andhati* on Lord Nataraja. Cheraman could not meet Sundarar, as the latter already left for Tiruvarur. So, he proceeded to Tiruvarur where he met Sundarar.

5. Tiruvanchaikkalam is 8 kms from Irinjalakuda railway station in the Trissur district, and 32 kms from Trissur Town.

90 Singing with Saivite Saints There, Cheraman composed the famous, *Tiru Mummainikovai* on

Lord Tyagaraja of the Tiruvarur temple. Together with Sundarar, he went to Tirumaraikkatu where he sang his *Pomannat Andhati*. This sthala is now called Vedaranniyam and is situated in the Nagapattinam district.

At a later period, Sundarar visited Kodungallur, the capital of the Chera Kingdom in Trissur, Kerala, again. He worshipped Siva at Tiruvanchakkalam along with Kazharirru Arivar. Both of them attained moksha at this sthala.

Nakkira Thevar Nakkira Thevar, popularly known as Nakkirar, was a chief

poet of the Sangam period in Madurai, in the Pandian Kingdom. He was very proud of his knowledge and became arrogant. One day a poet came to the court of Madurai and recited an unusual poem. Even though the poem was perfect, Nakkirar found a fault in the meter of the poem. Both had a heated exchange of views and did not want to accept defeat. Finally Siva showed His actual form to Nakkirar. The ego of Nakkirar was so much that he told the court even if it is Lord Siva, the mistake remains.

After this incidence, Nakkirar became very miserable and realized his mistake. He begged pardon from Lord Siva. As a God of Love, Siva requested Nakkirar to go on a pilgrimage. As commanded by Siva, Nakkirar started on his pilgrimage. On his way, Nakkira Thevar was captured by an '*asura*' (evil spirit) and kept in a cage. The poet found that he was not alone as there were 99 persons who had also been caught. According to these people the asura intended to wait for the cage to be filled with 100 people to commit his act. Since Nakkirar was the hundredth one, all the others were distressed. Nakkirar begged the Lord, particularly Lord Muruga. It is here that the poet composed his *Tirumurugatruppada*, 'Guide to Lord Muruga', in praise of Lord Muruga. The *Tirumurugatruppada* is the most important work of

Singing with Saivite Saints 91 the Sangam literature. Immediately Lord Muruga appeared as a warrior, vanquished the 'asura' and released all the devotees. The poems in this book were composed towards the end and 6th

of the Sangam period, between the 5th and 6th centuries. The *Tirumurugatruppada*i is a collection of poems which from time onwards has been composed for the protection of the devotees. For this purpose it has become a daily liturgy. Besides the *Tirumurugatruppada*i, Nakkinnar composed like the *Kailaipadi Khaladipadi Andhathi Mummarikkovai*. These sets of poems form a part of the eleventh Tirumurai collection.

92 Singing with Saivite Saints

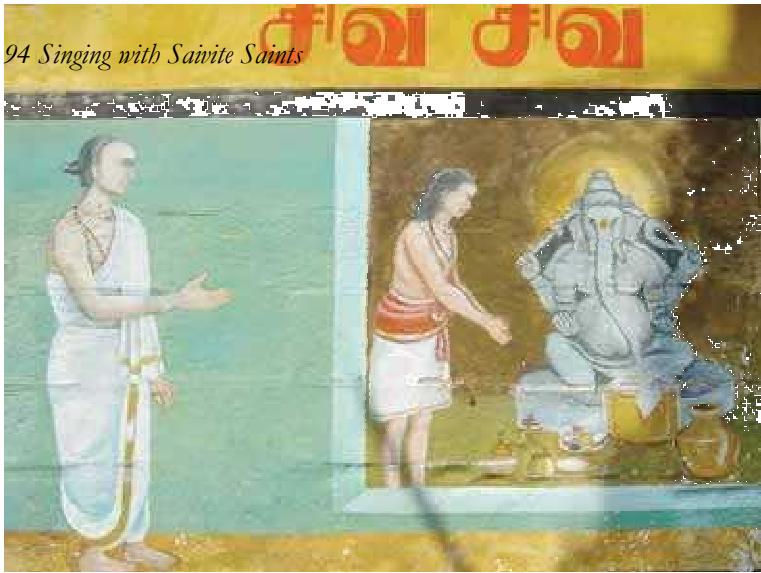
**NAMBIANDAR NAMBI
TIRUVIRATTAIMANI MALAI**

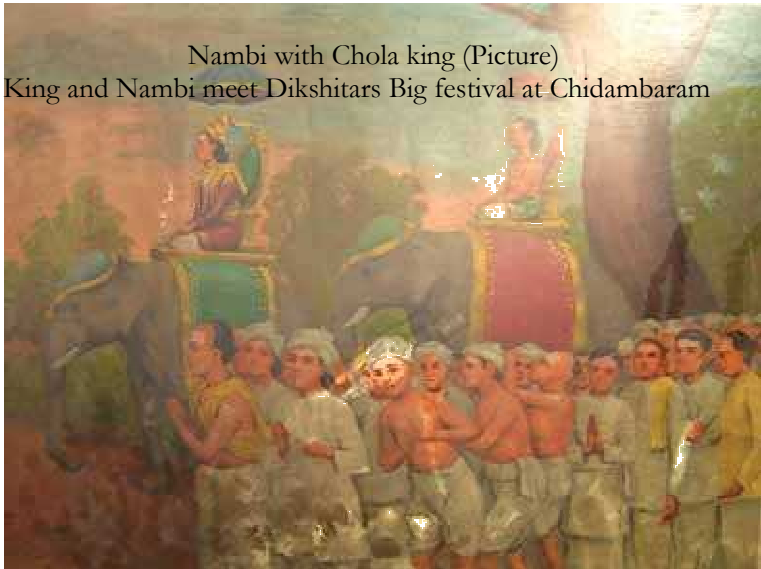
Venba ennai ninaindhadimai kondudan idarkedutthu
thannai ninaiyath tharugindraan – punnai virasumagizh
sohlai viyannarai yurmukkan arasumagizh atthimugat thaan
kattalaik kalitthurai mugatthaar kariyanyen draalum thanaiye
muyandravarkku migatthaan veliyanyen dreymeimmai unnum
virumpadiyar agatthaan thigazhthiru naaraiyur ammaan payandha
yemman ugatthaa navanthan udalam pilandha oru kombaney

Singing with Saivite Saints 93

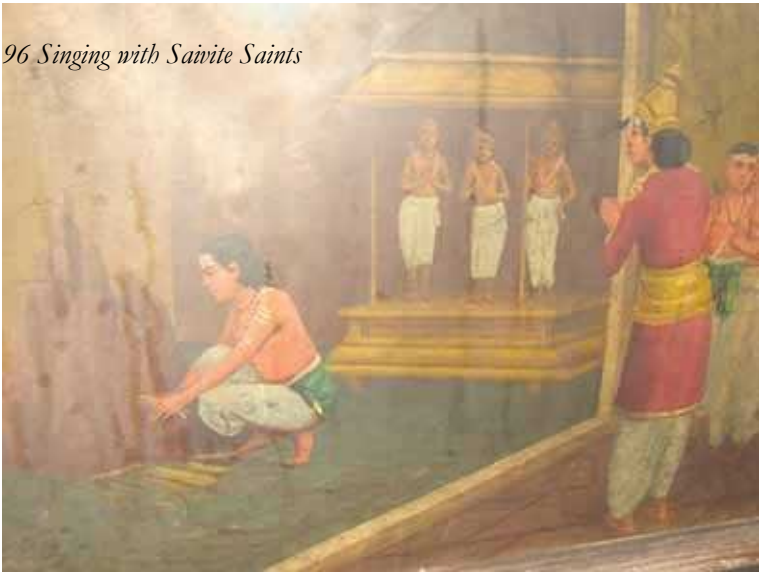
MEANING

In the *punnai* and *magizham* groves of Thirunaraiyur abides the Three-eyed Lord Siva, whose beloved Son Ganesha sits under the peepul tree. Even before I had the ability to think of Him, Ganesha with great compassion removed my sorrows and bestowed on me the grace of being able to unceasingly think of Him, who is God. Of elephant-face, He is easily accessible to all who seek Him and fills the hearts of those that believe in His simplicity. He is the Son of Siva, who lives in Thirunaraiyur. He is the Incomparable One with a single tusk, who tore the asura Gajamukhasura apart and killed him.





96 *Singing with Saivite Saints*



Heart-rending sight seeing the damaged Tirumurai palm leaf.
(Picture)
Tuning of the Tirumurai (Picture)

