

CHAPTER 9
COMPOSITIONS ON LORD SIVA
THE TAMIL MOOVAR
(MUMMOORTHIGAL) EARLY MUSIC
TRINITY

Muthu Thandavar
Marimuthu Pillai



THE TAMIL MOOVAR (EARLY MUSICAL TRINITY)

After the compositions on Lord Siva in the 'Panniru Tirumurai' between the 7 and the 11th Century, those by the Tamil Moovar were very popular. The Tamil Moovar were also known as the Adi Mummoorthigal (early Musical Trinity) were three great composers during the 16 and 18th century. Hence, they were about 200 years before the appearance of the modern Musical Trinity (Muthuswami Dikshitar, Tyagaraja and Syama Sastri). These three great musicians composed songs and were named as:

- i. Muthu Thandavar 1560 – 1640
 - ii. Arunachala Kavirayar 1711 – 1779
 - iii. Marimutha Pillai 1712 – 1787
- Muthu Thandavar and Marimutha Pillai have composed all

their songs in Praise of Lord Chidambaram Nataraja. Arunachala Kavirayar composed few but inspiring compositions on Lord Siva like the, *Sirkazhi Puranam*, *Sirkazhi Kovai*, *Sambandar Pillaittamizh*, and the *Tyagesar Varnam*.

Muthu Thandavar Muthu Thandavar was born in 1560 in Sirkazhi, near

Chidambaram in a family of musicians who served the temple. They were known as *Isai velalar*, those who cultivate music. The child was named Thandavan after the Lord at Chidambaram. During his young age, Thandavan was afflicted by an incurable disease and was not able to follow his family profession. He was also shunned by everybody and was neglected by his relatives.

Thandavan was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva. He used to go to the nearby temple and worshipped God Siva. Sometimes he visited the house of a priest, whose daughter named Sivabhagyam, used to sing the '*Sivanama Kirtana*' with great devotion.

110 Singing with Saivite Saints One day, Thandavan as usual went to the Sirkazhi Siva temple and prayed. Feeling very exhausted, he laid down beneath the ‘temple car’ and fell asleep. Without noticing Thandavan, the priests after the midnight puja locked the doors of the temple and went away. When Thandavan woke up, he realized his embarrassing situation. He went to the Lord’s shrine and began singing the Tevaram hymns he had heard and learnt. At this moment, Goddess Parvati appeared as a small girl and gave him food to appease his hunger. Goddess Parvati asked Thandavan to go to the Chidambaram temple and worship Lord Nataraja. Goddess Parvati also assured him that he would be able to sing in praise of Lord Siva despite his physical inability and that he would compose songs everyday from the first words he heard from the mouth of the devotees there.

Thandavan proceeded to Chidambaram and worshipped Lord Nataraja. The first words that he heard from a devotee were “*Bhoologa Kailagiri Chidambaram*”. Hence he composed his first song on Lord Siva in ragam Bhavapriya set to Misra Chapu talam. It was from that day onwards that Thandavan was called Muthu Thandavar.

Once day, Muthu Thandavar could not compose any song, as no words were coming from the devotees. He thus, composed a song without failing, titled “*Pesadhe Nenjame...*” meaning “Oh my heart, do not speak...” This kriti was composed in the ragam Suryakantam set to Misra Jhampa talam.

Once while Muthu Thandavar was on his way to Chidambaram he found the Kollidam River in flood and couldn’t proceed further. He sang the composition *Kanamal vinile Kamal Kuzhittane* telling Lord Siva that it was a waste of time without His darshan. This kriti is in ragam Dhanyasi set to Misra Chapu talam. Immediately the water got reduced and he was able to go to the other bank of the river. Thandavar expressed his joy in composing the song *Darisanam Seyvene* in Vasanta ragam set

Singing with Sainite Saints 111 to Adi talam meaning, “Certainly I will have the darshan of the Lord”. Reaching Tillai safely, he sang the composition “*Kandapin Kann Kulirndain*” in Malayamarutam ragam set to Rupaka talam.

Some days after, travelling to the Nataraja temple, Muthu Thandavar was bitten by a snake. Knowing that all is Lord Siva’s will and that there is no point of being afraid, he sang “*Arumarudoru Thani Marundidu Ambalatil Kandene*” in Kambhoji ragam set to Rupaka talam and the poison was cleared.

Muthu Thandavar was a pioneer in composing *Padam* sung during dance performance. “*Teruvil Vaarano*” in ragam Khamas is a classic padam, which delights even today’s musicians and audience alike. He is also called as the ‘father and the founder of the traditional Kirtanai and Kriti’ and has written all his songs according to strict rules of musical prosody. Very few of Muthu Thandavar’s compositions have survived the test of time. Sixty of them have been collected and twenty – five Padams are also available. Some of his compositions that are sung in music concerts are *Unai Nambinen Ayya* in Kiravani ragam, *Isanae Koti Surya Prakasane* in ragam Nalinakanthi, *Darisithalavil* in ragam Lathangi, *Sevikka Vendum Ayya* in ragam Andholika, *Innum Oru Taram* set to Simmendra Madyamam, *Ambara Chidambaram* and *Innum Oru Stalam* in ragam Suruti and *Adi Kondar* in Mayamalavagowlai ragam.

The last composition of Thandavar in Kokilapriya ragam set to Rupaka talam was *Manickkavasagar Pernakku Thavallayo Ariyen*. This song relates the desire of Thandavar to attain moksha in Chidambaram as Manickkavasagar, the composer of the *Tiruvagam*. His wish was actually granted in 1640.

The compositions of Muthu Thandavar, both padams and kirtanais, were preserved and propagated by the musician Kuppayya Pillai who was from the same family. Later, the Pillai family settled in Tiruppampuram and preserved the songs and tradition of the great composer. The compositions of Muthu

112 *Singing with Saivite Saints* Thandavar are very popular and widely sung during concerts.

His songs create *sivabhakti* both in the singer and the listener.

Marimutha Pillai

Marimutha Pillai, another great composer was born in 1712 AD, at Thillaividangam, near Chidambaram in a pious family of Siva devotees.

Marimutha Pillai was endowed with the ability to compose songs at an early age. After intense Sadhana, worshipping the Lord, he and his wife were blessed with three sons. According to information available, his eldest son was named after his grandfather Deivangal Pillai and his youngest son was called Kumaraswamy Pillai. There is no account of his second son. Pona Deivangal Pillai is said to have composed the Prabhandam '*Umaiyaval Malai*' at the age of twelve. Deivangal Pillai became seriously ill after he completed this Prabhandam. Marimutha Pillai got worried about the deterioration of his son's health and prayed to Lord Nataraja. One day Lord Siva appeared in Marimutha Pillai's dream and asked him to go and sing in praise of Chidambaram Nataraja and gave him the assurance that his son will be cured.

The next day Marimutha Pillai proceeded to Tillai and composed the famous Prabhandam '*Puliyur Venba*'. Puliyur is another name for Chidambaram. Soon after finishing the song, Deivangal Pillai was fully recovered from his illness.

Marimutha Pillai too, composed all his songs according to the strict rules of musical prosody. He has used many *Mudras* in his compositions relating to Chidambaram temple such as '*Tillai*', '*Then Kailasam*', '*Ponnambalam*', '*Bhoologa Kailasam*' and '*Puliyur*'. In his composition "*Orukal Siva Chidambaram*" in ragam Arabhi set to Aditalam, Marimutha Pillai stated confidently that in order to attain salvation, one has to utter the name 'Siva Chidambaram' once. He described the celestial Nandi and Narada playing the

Singing with Saivite Saints 113 Mridangam and Veena respectively in the piece “*Kalai Thookki Ninradum Deivame*” in Yadukula Kambhoji set to Adi talam. It is good to note that Narada has been the source of inspiration to many poets and composers. Narada the Veena and Yazh Maharishi, is a revered name in the history of Indian Music. The Veena that Narada performed upon is named as ‘*Mabati*’.

Just as with the compositions of Muthu Thandavar, some of Marimuthu Pillai’s compositions have been lost. Other famous works of the composer are: ‘*Chidambaresa Virali Vidu Thudu*’, ‘*Varunapuri Adimoolessar Kuravanji*’, ‘*Adimoolessar Nandi Natakam*’, ‘*Nagabandam*’, ‘*Puliyur Singaravela Padbigam*’, ‘*Rathabandam*’ ‘*Aneeth Natakam*’ and the fifty songs on Lord Nataraja. Today, only twenty-five kirtanais and padams are available.

Marimutha Pillai attained eternal bliss in 1787 AD. His contribution to Carnatic Music is indeed great. Though only a few of his compositions are available now, they are like precious gems.

114 Singing with Saivite Saints

MUTHU THANDAVAR COMPOSITION

“ Darisanam Seyvene”

Ragam : Vasanta

Talam : Adi

Pallavi :

darisanam seyvene mukti kodukkum
tiruvambalavananai

Anupallavi :

ariyayen iruvarum ariyada vimalanai kariyuri
potrtanan karunai kadhalai thedhi

Charanam :

chendadhai madi gangaiyum tirumugamum siranda pankaya
sengaiyum panjacharapadhiyum padattani silambum nenjarave
tudittu nindranadu kannara

Singing with Saivite Saints 115

MEANING

Pallavi

I will have the darshan of mukti-giving Tiruvambalavanan

Anupallavi

He who could not known by the Two
Seeking the Ocean of Compassion

Charanam

The Holy Face adorned by red locks, crescent moon and
Ganges

With palms the hue of a perfect, red lotus The steps with the
sacred letters fi ve and Feet adorned
with anklets With heart full of praise, my eyes behold Your Dance!

116 Singing with Saivite Saints

MARIMUTHA PILLAI COMPOSITION

Ragam : Aarabhi

Talam : Adi Pallavi

oru kaal siva chidambaram endru sonnaal

irukkaathuzh vinaiyey

Anupallavi karukaannavarkithu theriyum pothuvilona

kaalaith thooki nindra kohlatthai manathil vaitthu (oru kaal)

Char

ana

m

soolv

azhiy

udan

panc

hagin

i

idaini

ndru

sorubam

karivaane

yn –

manai

vaazhvai

verutthu

kani

kaayum

sarugum

thindru

maathava

m

purivaane

yn – pala

velvigal

seythanth
a
homakun
datthil
neyyai
veeviley
sorivaane
yn –
kaadhun
keylvi
illatha
muzhu
monigalaa
i thalaiyil
kilaithittu
sadaithana
i
valaitthitt
u
thirivaane
yn

veda manthiram solli aayiram thandan puvi meethinil vizhuvaaneyn –
iru paadham sivanthida thalangal thorrum thirintu pala dheiyvam
thozhuvaaneyn – kollan oothum thunatthi pohley vaayuvai
kumbithudal yogatthil ezhuvaaneyn – ainthu boothangalum kalanga
pradhakshinamaay purandu purandu mathi
marundezhunthiduvaaneyn

Singing with Saivite Saints 117

MEANING

Pallavi If once you said “Siva Chidambaram” All bad karma will cease to exist

Anupallavi Those that do not know deeper meaning, To visualize the stance of the Raised Leg would suffice

Charanam 1 Observing and interrupting the breath and control the five fires, why should Self be realized? Sacrificing family life and taking living on leaves and shrubs, why should great penance be performed? Constructing fire-altars and performing sacrifices, why should ghee be poured into them? Deaf to the world, in complete silence with matted locks, why roam?

Charanam 2 Chanting mantras from the vedas why fall a thousand times in prostration? With sore feet visiting many temples why worship so many deities? Like the bellows, exercising the breath why rise in yoga? Startling the five elements by rolling around why have the mind go into trance?

Lord Nataraja - Chidambaram

