

Chapter II Holy Perunturai

48

Lord Siva, He who performs His sacred dance as thronging brahmins,
fully versed in the ancient vedic lore, bow down in worship,
was graciously enthroned within a sumptuous golden hall on high Mount Kailash
that shines with the bright effulgence of pure silver, which men justly prize.
In His hands He held the deer and the axe
and close at His left side sat His joyful consort Uma.

49

Rishis, filling their hands with flowers rich in sweet nectar,
made obeisance to Him in due order,
affirming their steadfast devotion across the generations
and reciting with clear understanding their ancient vedic scriptures.
Seeing this, Hari and Brahma too arose and bestirred themselves, saying:
'Here is a fit occasion for us also to receive the supreme Lord's grace,'
and came to reverence those holy feet girt with anklets,
beseeching Him to maintain them in their exalted stations.

50

Devotees cried out: 'Hara Hara, Siva, Siva!' and wept,
their hearts swooning in ecstasy as they beheld
the holy forms of the Lord who wears as an ornament the serpent
in whose expanded hood glitter gems of noble fame,
and, cleaving to His side, the mountain's daughter
whose forehead, like the bright crescent moon
shimmers with a strand of pearls,
their twin forms bathed by turns in a dazzling brilliance,
like the sun and moon, alternating in celestial conjunction.

51

All the heavenly host, with Indra at their head,
spying their opportunity, joyfully prostrated themselves before Him,
scattering blossoms of the five flowering trees,
their full-blown petals redolent of sweet perfume.
They reflected to themselves thus in their hearts:
'Is this not a fitting occasion
for You to bestow upon us the glory of Your in-dwelling grace,
You who came to us in our suffering and averted our fall
as we hurtled towards the earth, like a tree severed at the roots?'

52

Guru Nandi, holding a rod and a short sword of surpassing strength
stood in close attendance, freely bestowing his grace.
The Goddess Earth, and She who dwells upon the lotus flower
and sweet heavenly maidens, unfading in their beauty
kept company with the royal consort Uma, mother to the world.

53

The commanders of the attendant hosts formed a numerous escort;
a celestial choir of Gandharvas
and horse-headed Kinnaras sang melodious songs
whilst the whole assembly was graced
by the bright fluttering of white yak-tail fans
like plumes of sweet water, cast up by the holy river
that surges in the Lord's glittering locks.

54

The Father who dwells eternally
amidst this great assembly's rich array,
so that the sufferings of mankind may be abolished,
He whose holy feet dance in the beautiful Golden Hall,
desired in His mercy to enslave as His devotee
that boundless ocean of compassion, the sage Vadavurar
through whom the ambrosial knowledge of Lord Siva
came to express itself in pure Tamil verse.

55

Therefore did He summon to Him
those devoted leaders of the hosts of attendants,
saying: 'Take up the bodily form of those that dwell on earth
which the dark sea girds, and follow me.'
Then, assuming the noble appearance of an enlightened teacher,
capable of conferring divine knowledge,
He descended from Mount Kailash's lofty peak.

56

Graciously placing upon the earth His beautiful lotus feet,
which Vishnu, assuming the form of a mighty boar, sought in vain,
He came to that place which is deeply imbued with the divine presence,
the abode of brahmins, skilled in the recitation of the vedic texts
and loving guardians of the sacred flame.

57

Since it is a safe haven where all who fall
into the cruel ocean of birth and death,
if they believe in the name of Lord Siva¹
and hold tightly to that sturdy raft,
can safely reach the shore of our Lord's salvation,
the name of that place, is Perunturai²
whose praise is spoken throughout this fair earth.

58

In the vicinity of that holy Perunturai, which no defect mars,
was a flowering woodland, with thick groves
of punnai and fragrant sandalwood trees,
champaca trees, spearing heavenward,
orange trees of great excellence,
and the serundi, where honey-seeking hordes buzz and swarm,
all blending harmoniously together.

59

There were great konku trees with their graceful canopies,
high-soaring trumpet-flower, and tall jack-fruit trees,
coconut palms and the verdant areca,
ranks of kuravu bushes, where humming bees thickly cluster,
macula, and the red-flowering suda trees,
and the luxuriant muruku with its spreading leaves,
all were there in profusion.

60

Everywhere there were beautiful peacocks with their dark-blue tails,
swans in their fine plumage, and black kuyil, calling sweetly.
High up in the trees, tribes of monkeys were swinging,
and at each leap, winged insects rose up in spreading clouds,
filling the air with a rising hum.

¹ The five-lettered mantra Na-Ma-Si-Va-Ya.

² Perunturai in Tamil means 'The Great Harbour'.

61

Dripping nectar fell in tear-like drops
and everywhere the drone of winged insects
was like an anthem of praise
as the trees, bowed down by the weight of their flowery offerings,
stood closely about like devotees in the Lord's holy presence,
experiencing with melting heart that greater life.

62

In the midst of this wood, so copiously endowed with nature's treasures,
grew a kuruntham tree, which resembled in its beauty
the state of the enlightened soul.
Its branches, crowding thickly all around, were austerities
whose praise is hard to tell.
Up above the young leaves of most excellent³ virtue grew luxuriant,
and the blossoms that flowered there
were the sublime knowledge of reality.

63

Like a decoy beast which, eagerly seeking its own kind,
lures them with its call into the waiting trap,
Lord Siva came walking in the guise of a man.
'We shall make our way to that grove of lofty trees
whose graceful ornament is a fine kuruntham tree.'
Thus did He nobly utter His divine decree.

64

The Lord who is without beginning and without end came on
surrounded by His company of pious devotees,
and rejoiced as He reached the foot of that kuruntham tree,
resplendent with clusters of blossoming flowers.
There He graciously seated himself
in readiness for the moment when He would sever the worldly bonds
of Him who was to sing those saintly Tamil hymns.

³ `றம் 'virtue'. Most excellent as it stands above பொருள் 'wealth' and இன்பம் 'pleasure' in the attaining of வீடு 'liberation'.

65

As He was seated there,
the Lord who wears the new moon in His matted locks,
the true light to which all ripe souls attain, wherever they may be,
like an ocean where the raging floods of many rivers fall and merge,
the brahmin adept of the arcane Vedas, destined to reach His feet,
chanced to come that way with his great retinue.

66

In his path bloomed flowers of the kaya tree,
dark like the worldly bonds which engender false illusion
to which the pure-minded Vadavurar could never more fall prey.
And where the kantal flowers blossomed,⁴
it was as if someone held up a warning hand,
to ward off birth henceforth from one free of all delusion's taint.

67

The tender dewy buds of the mullai⁵
were like the teeth of pious devotees,
standing near in pious supplication, saying:
'Without You, who else is there to dispel our sins,
which vex and harry us all in the cruel round of births,
and which are bosom friends of the God of Love,
who brandishes in his hand a bow of sugar-cane?
Therefore do we implore your grace.'

68

As that virtuous bard of the beautiful Tamil tongue approached,
to receive initiation from the gracious eye of the supreme Lord
who permeates all creation,
it seemed that the towering trees grieved, saying:
'What birth is this, to stand rooted here!'
and bemoaning their destiny
showered down copious tears from their flowery eyes.

⁴ The kantal blossom resembles an open hand with fingers crooked. See verse 1 of Kuruntogai at <http://murugan.net> where there is a picture of an open blossom.

⁵ The buds and thorns of plants are often used in Sangam poetry as a metaphor for a human smile, often a mocking one, see Kuruntogai 167.

69

He who was to impart in Tamil verse
the knowledge of Siva, so hard to grasp,
shunned the painful path of birth and death,
which passes through the great forest of former deeds,
where the five senses, like hunters, lie in wait to ambush and rob,
abandoning the way that leads through such parlous woods.

70

Like one who, after falling into the midst of the broad ocean,
flounders aimlessly there suffering and struggling,
and then comes safely to shore, filled with joy,
the great ascetic, Vadavurar, drew near to Perunturai,
through the operation of grace in accordance with his former deeds,
which had bound him suffering upon the wheel of rebirth.

71

As the author of the *Tiruvachakam* approaches
to cut away his worldly fetters and attain to the infinite Lord,
bearing through grace within his heart the conviction
that this world and the world of Lord Siva
are one and the same,
let us speak now of the glory of that Perunturai.

72

To behold that flower-filled grove,
it was as if the Gods themselves had come, singing paeans of praise
and assembled in the skies above,
scattering masses of blossoms thickly over the earth,
to honour the place where the first royal counsellor
was to be cured of the ills of powerful birth,
and where the world's Supreme Master would bestow His grace.

73

As he travelled the long road to Perunturai, weak with hunger,
and vowing to perform that penance and reap the final reward,
it was as if the wild pines, which lined his route in dense array,
stepped forward to offer him pleasing shade and sustenance,
like devotees adorned with the holy ash,
holding up offerings of boiled rice in their undying devotion.⁶

⁶ The trees' white fruits and pollen are compared to offerings of boiled rice and holy ash.

74

The lotus buds in their flowering resembled great ascetics,
who, on seeing how that Reality, which suffuses all the worlds,
manifested upon the earth, and sat in the shade of a kuruntham tree,
shed bright tears of nectar⁷ as their hearts rejoiced,
and with radiant countenance joined their hands in worship.

75

The thick stalks of sugar-cane recalled those wise souls
who appear to guard their sweetness within their hearts,
whilst others enjoy the world's rich rewards.
Stalks of the finest rice ripened and bowed their heads,
like ladies of good family who, in their great delicacy,
decline from modesty to look upon their husband's face.

76

Country girls in the fields,
secure in the mountain stronghold of their breasts,
and the deep forest lair of their dark flowing tresses,
darted the cruel arrows of their glances
from the deadly bow of their arching eyebrows,
capable of sorely wounding those
who fare on the long road [of spiritual discipline],
seeking out the enduring riches which lie along the way.

77

Thus did that king amongst men,
who was never more to return to the earth,
to endure the ills of the body,
draw near to Perunturai's rich city,
rejoicing at the sight of dense flourishing woodlands
and luxuriant fields of sugar-cane.

⁷ கண்ணீர் is a play on words and can represent either கண் (eye) + நீர் (water) = tears, or கள் (honey of a flower) + நீர் = honeyed water.

78

As he entered that place, to which holy ascetics flock,
from the nearby grove where the Lord dwelt
came the swelling strains of Saiva scriptures
chaunted by devotees,
hearing which, he commanded his attendants, saying:
'Go and discover what sound is this!'

79

When his messengers returned,
saying that in the shade cast by a kuruntham tree
surrounded by a host of Saivite devotees,
sat One who resembled that great mountain of virtue,
who wears kondrai flowers in His matted locks,
he for whom no further birth remained rejoiced in his heart.

80

On hearing the words of his attendants,
he was filled with an eager desire to come to the Lord's presence,
and sought out that grove, exulting in his heart and mind.
Descending from the jewelled palanquin which had borne him thither,
He rejoiced in his heart as he beheld that assembly,
which was infused with the divine essence of Lord Siva
whom the gods themselves praise.

81

The Lord who shares His form with Goddess Uma
whose arms are adorned with bright bangles,
was seated in the midst of nine hundred and ninety-nine disciples,
each devoted to His service.
They were reciting and closely studying the philosophy of those holy works
that treat of the true essence which transcends all the universe,
lapsing into samadhi as the full meaning dawned upon them.
Determined to speak out, and learn for himself
the true knowledge of Lord Siva,
the King's minister, stepping eagerly forward,
came and stood with dignity before this great assembly,
as one who pays obeisance, not with his body,
but with his love-filled heart.

82

In a transport of joy, he beheld the glorious form of the Vedas' Lord,
shining like burnished gold.
At His throat, on His beautiful crown, and in His hands,
at His lustrous ears, and over His refulgent breast,
He wore the good and holy rudraksha beads.
On His fair forehead, which dimmed and hid His third-eye's lustre,
was smeared the holy three-barred insignia of gleaming ash.
'Lord', he said, 'What is that worthy tome
which You hold in Your fair red hand?'
and the Lord replied, 'It is the Teaching of the True Knowledge of Sivam,
which bears no taint of falsehood.'

83

The King's minister replied:
'Lord, You who were seated that day in the shade of a banyan tree,⁸
if You impart to me the teaching here recorded,
which illuminates the meaning
of "true knowledge" and of "Sivam",
I too, unworthy as I am, shall become Your humble slave.'
Then the great teacher, who is beyond all compare, replied, saying:
'Let Us then examine and elucidate that teaching
concerning "true knowledge" which is the investigation and full comprehension
of that one true reality, which stands alone as "Sivam".'
At this the heart of Vadavur dissolved in bliss,
where he stood, begging to hear this pure and single truth.

84

On hearing these words from the lips of that Perfect Master,
Vadavurar rejoiced greatly,
for, as one whose soul was fully ripe for grace,
he conceived in his mind
that the wearer of this holy form
was the Lord Himself who dances in the Golden Hall,
come there to graciously enslave him.

⁸ Siva as Dakshinamurti.

85

'Lord of our souls,
I have no desire for any of the world's great wealth
which endures no longer than a lightening flash, and is gone.
Wretch that I am,
I crave only for the shelter of Your holy feet,
and for the cessation of birth and death.
May You receive me this day as Your humble slave.'
Thus, with tears bathing his cheeks,
did he stand in that holy presence, worshipping the Lord.

86

After he had finished speaking, and stood weeping before the Lord,
the most eminent among those disciples,
sensing in Vadavurar one of great spiritual fitness,
came and stood before his Guru
beseeching Him to release this supplicant
from the cruel burden of his deeds
and subject him to His gracious rule.

87

Since He was that gracious ocean of supreme bliss
who dwells in Tillai's Golden Hall,
where righteous brahmins sing hymns of praise,
He who bestows the favour of His divine glance
upon those whose fast intent is never more to enter the womb,
and who, raising His beauteous foot, deigns to place it upon their heads,
to still their mind's wandering –
since such was His nature, He gave His assent to this request.

88

The Great Teacher turned to Vadavurar
whose countenance shone like the water-born lotus flower,
unfolding before the rays of that rising sun
and these words fell like blossoms from His lips:
'Let not your heart be troubled.
It is on account of your former penances
that We have come to this place,
to receive this day your humble surrender.'

89

Though it was contrary to the established custom,
to confer His blessing there and then
upon those who would approach Him in great distress,
pressing rich gifts upon him and saying:
'I am a worthless wretch. Save me from this poverty!'
the Lord nonetheless resolved
to accept him as His disciple that very day.

90

Accordingly, that True One who displayed the perfected form of the Guru,
addressing him who stood first among all his pious disciples, spoke thus:
'Learned one, do you swiftly make ready what is needed for this rite,
that We may this very day, in conferring Our grace,
banish the afflictions of this worthy aspirant.'

91

'We shall exert ourselves to fulfil Our Master's decree,'
replied the one who most excelled in penances of enduring worth,
and then, wreathing the trees with garlands wrought of many flowers,
and silk cloths in profusion, embroidered with gold and studded with pearls,
he made of that lofty grove a beautiful and fitting temple.

92

Then, having placed a fine throne
within the beautiful temple he had fashioned,
the leader of those true disciples returned to his master saying:
'Dark-throated One, You who, to the eyes of the deceitful,
do not manifest Your presence, even in dream,
the shrine has been made ready in a most excellent manner.'

93

When the sun had sunk behind the western mountain,
and spreading darkness cloaked the earth,
at midnight when the fifteenth hour was past,
and all good and worthy souls had closed their eyes in sleep,
that indeed was a fitting hour
for the pure-hearted Vadavurar
to be freed from the veil of illusion.

94

Thinking to Himself: 'The time has come for this one's holy initiation,'
the Lord left that holy congregation,
and, coming to the ritual bathing place,
He made a paste of kumkum, musk and sandalwood.
Smearing this over His whole body,
He bathed in holy water from the Ganges,
mixed with sweet rosewater, exquisite in its perfume.

95

Drying the water from His body with a cloth,
the Lord who shares His form with Her
whose breasts are young and shapely,
girded Himself with priceless vestments
of pure silk, rich beyond compare,
and returned to that lofty temple.
There, turning His face to the south,
He took His place on that high seat,
adorning it with His presence.

96

Meanwhile that loving devotee whom even the Gods might praise,
scattering flowers before him,
bathed himself in sweet water, and dressed himself in a pure white cloth.
Then, his body gleaming with the lustre of the holy ash,
he returned to the assembly and joyfully drew near to the divine presence of the Lord,
who had come as a holy teacher to grant him final liberation,
graciously placing those flowery lotus feet upon his head.

97

He bathed the beautiful feet of the Lord of the heavenly host,
And performed puja before them;
he anointed His whole body with a paste of sandalwood,
mixed with cool, fragrant rosewater;
he bedecked Him finely with a garland
of red water-lilies,⁹ fresh and tender,
and, with gladness in his heart,
soothed his troubled eyes with that joyful sight.

⁹ According to the commentator, it is laid down in the Saiva Agamas that the Guru performing diksha (initiation) should wear red silk and red water lilies.

98

Upon a salver of bright gold
which rested upon a golden table,
he placed an ambrosial repast
of pulses and the rich scrapings of a ripe coconut,
mixed with sugar and cooked in milk.
Over this he sprinkled ghee and the three fruits.

99

Now, his heart overflowing with righteous elation,
he called upon the Slayer of the Lord of Death:
'Lord, you who in former times consumed the poison Halahala,
to ensure the survival of Mal, Ayan, Indra and the rest of the Gods!
I beg You to graciously partake of this holy food.'
Thereupon the Lord ate, then washed His flowery hands in water.

100

To the Lord who pervades all,
he offered betel leaves, and the ripe betel nut;
he made circular passes with a beautiful lamp,
whose bright flame gave off clouds of heady perfume,
and smeared His body with the splendour of the holy ash;
he held up before Him in fitting manner, a bright clear mirror,
causing it to shine with His reflection,
and raised up a gleaming umbrella to tower over His head.

101

Vadavurar, his arms filled with fresh-blooming flowers,
stood in the presence of the righteous Lord
who was seated upon the gilded throne
with adorning disciples crowding all around,
lovingly waving bushy white yak-tail whisks,
and ceremonial fans with hafts of ruddy gold.

102

The Lord lovingly turned His gracious glance
upon the one who was to be freed from his worldly bonds,
his consciousness uniting with that supreme Sivam,
which lies beyond the mere mind's compass,
and which absorbs and annihilates in itself
the sixfold stages of the soul's path to liberation:
mantra, words, letters, worlds,
the thirty-six real entities,¹⁰
and the five spheres of action of the divine will.¹¹

103

Then the Lord spoke sweet, holy words,
which fell upon the ears and entered the understanding
of him whose noble form bespoke great austerities,
the poet-saint of the fair Tamil tongue,
whose one desire was to impart
the meaning of the sacred Five Letters,
which awake in all men the true apprehension of Reality,
and who transformed that holy mantra,
so that it began with the syllables 'Si Va',¹²
which banish the evil works of birth and death.

104

Through the holy gaze of the Lord,
whose form is an amalgam of love distilled,
the fierce affliction of birth, so hard to escape,
was removed, as surely as a lamp dispels the dark
from him who was to speak the Vedas' gospel in holy Tamil hymns.
Praising and worshipping those tender feet,
he fell prostrate on the ground, filled with ecstasy.
Thereupon the Lord whose locks the moon and holy river adorn,
raised those two holy feet and placed them upon his head,
where he lay in loving submission.

¹⁰ The tattvas.

¹¹ In the Saiva system, there are six paths to liberation, called the adhvan அத்துவா, each of which, in initiation, is shown to be absorbed by the next one, till the last is absorbed by the Tirodhana Sakti (veiling power), and this in turn by Siva.

¹² In the mantra Si-va-ya-na-ma, Si and Va represent Siva and his divine energy, Sakti, Ya represents the soul, whilst Na and Ma represent Tirodha, the energy which veils the souls and provides worldly experiences for them, and Impurity, which is threefold, consisting of anava-malam, kanma-malam and maya-malam. It is considered essential for any devotee desiring liberation to utter the mantra beginning with the syllables Si-Va, and not with the syllables Na-Ma.

105

As the ego-bound faculties of his soul
which had been active until then,
fell into abeyance and died away,
and his previous false consciousness was dissolved
through the action of grace,
so that the deeply blissful attributes of Sivam
became manifest within him,
he experienced the pure awareness [of Siva jnana].
As this realisation dawned,
he fixed his eyes' true gaze upon those feet
whose gracious touch his head had known,
embracing them in his arms,
and clasping them to that heart
whose work was holy contemplation.
Then, in transports of great joy,
he arose, clad in the garment of true knowledge.

106

As Indra and the rest of the Gods,
who dwell in the heavenly realm,
showered down fragrant blossoms of every kind
which fell like a dense rain from on high
until they covered the entire earth;
as the attendants and their commanders
sang hymns of praise;
as worthy devotees on either side,
clad in the excellence of the qualities of virtue
waved yak-tail whisks, bunches of peacock feathers,
and bright ceremonial fans in their golden hands;
as a host of great rishis made obeisance at the Lord's holy feet,

107

Vadavurar, his heart filled with devotion,
approached the throne of that great and compassionate One,
and bowing down in worship,
his palms pressed together above his head,
addressed Him thus:

‘You whose holy feet and head
Vishnu, delving down through the earth,
and Brahma, flying up in the form of a swan,
could not reach and worship, strive as they might,
what a wonder is it that You have come in human form,
as one whose deeds are ever overflowing
with the excellence of supreme grace,
to deliver me from the grievous ills of birth.’
Having spoken, his mind was overcome, and he wept.

108

‘Great Father!
Supreme One, by whose gracious rule I am enslaved!
You who in anger killed the fierce Lord of Death,
and who hold in Your hands the deer and the beautiful axe!
Jewel of my two eyes!
Red-bodied One!
Praise be to Your holy feet!
My soul’s great treasure!
Praise be to Your holy feet!
Deceiver of those who deceive!
Praise be to Your holy feet!
Divine knowledge which informs all our souls!
Praise be to Your holy feet!’
Thus did he cry out through his tears.

109

When the hour of dawn had come,
dispelling that night’s darkness,
fearing that the gracious form of the supreme Guru
could no longer bear the weight of his flowery garlands,
heavy as they were with sandalwood and fragrant rose water,
the flawless Vadavurar removed those floral adornments
from the beautiful breast of the Lord
who holds in His hand a young fawn,
and, shedding there and then the burden of his suffering,
joined the shining ranks of the Lord’s disciples.

110

Even as the delusion of the lordly son of Vadavur was dispelled,
and the bright light of wisdom's lamp shone in its stead,
so did the darkness of the night disperse
as the sun rose up over the eastern ocean.
Then the Lord of the Vedas and teacher of virtue's path
conceived the notion to take aside
that true worshipper of His holy feet
and to seat Himself,
to expound to him the essence of the holy *Agamas*
which He himself had spoken forth
and whose meaning lay beyond the grasp of mind:

111

'As verdigris is inherent in the metal copper,
so does the penetrating darkness
of the soul's impurity cling to you.
Your nature is coloured by it,
just as a piece of glass takes on the colour of its background.
Due to your contact with that impurity,
you have been caught up in a whirlpool of countless births,
And as you wandered through the various richly-endowed worlds,
the fruits of the good and evil actions
which you performed in each of them,
were meted out to you by Myself,
in just and fitting measure.
Enjoying those fruits, thus did you sow the seeds
of your experiences in lives to come,
and wander helplessly, a victim of your mind's defilement.

112

'It is necessary that the deeds and their fruits
which are continually accruing to those who experience them
should not be wrongly assigned to others.
However, you yourself do not have the knowledge
to determine the consequences of each deed,
and the fruit accruing to those consequences;
nor do the deeds themselves, being insentient,
possess that power.
We, however, having a perfect understanding of yourself,
ignorant as you are of the noble path of salvation,
and of the rewards earned by your former deeds,
will destroy the dark unyielding impurity of your soul
and grant you the greater life of Our unfailing grace.
Reflect upon this.

113

‘To explain further, this impurity clings irremovably to all,
until the fruits¹³ of good and evil deeds,
the attachment to which gives rise to painful birth,
are equalised within the soul, like two weights in a pair of scales.
To those¹⁴ do we proffer our gracious foot,
to banish their suffering.
All others, until they reach this stage,
will fall struggling again and again
into the great ocean of birth and death,
ignorant both of their soul’s nature, and of Our own,
which provides for their eventual enlightenment.

114

‘If you ask: “When shall this time come?”¹⁵
you should know that it will come as the blessing
accruing from your worship of me in all the places where I dwell,
and from the meritorious acts of service performed in My name.
I who dwell in the Golden Hall shall now speak of My divine identity:
My flawless manifestations are three in number:
one is without form;
another is that pure light which is both with and without form.
and another, in which I bestow My grace, is with form.
This you should understand.

115

‘Of those three manifestations,
the first is this embodied form,
in which I impart to you,
in a manner suited to your understanding,
My message of abounding grace.
The next, both with and without form,
is that which grants My devotees’ every wish
and which all may easily approach and worship.¹⁶
The last is that formless form, free of all impurity,
which banishes like a rising sun
the obscuring darkness which binds the soul;
it is the life which lives within all creatures,
the unfathomable divine radiance,
without beginning and without end.

¹³ The ‘fruits’ are desire and aversion, pleasure and pain etc. Once the soul realises the mechanism whereby these follow upon each other in unending succession, it become ripe for liberation.

¹⁴ I.e. those whose soul have reached maturity.

¹⁵ I.e. the time of the soul’s maturity.

¹⁶ The Siva lingam, which represents the deity with and without form.

116

Chariya (Holy Service)

‘To cultivate with devotion
those flowering trees which We most favour,
to gather the flowers from those trees,
and to weave them in the prescribed manner
into many and varied flower garlands,
to speak out, extolling Our everlasting glory,
to lovingly sweep out the temples where We dwell,
and to cleanse them with cow-dung mixed with water,
to light fine lamps to shine out brightly,
and to perform holy service for Our devotees,
these are [the duties enjoined upon the estate] of *Chariya*,
and the reward of those who excel in their performance
shall be to dwell with Us in Our heavenly realm.

117

Kriya (Ritual Worship)

‘To furnish oneself with the sacrificial materials:
the aromatic substances, and incense with its pervasive fragrance,
a beautiful lamp, and holy water for the ritual bathing,
and clusters of fresh-blooming sweetly perfumed flowers,
along with all other necessary items,
to perform the fivefold acts of cleansing,
free of all the qualities which inhere in the delusive principle,
to make obeisance, both inwardly and outwardly,
and to carry out the offices of the sacred flame:
these are [the duties which lie
on] the most gracious and most worthy path of Kriya.
and to those who strive devotedly to follow it,
it shall be granted to dwell close by Us, in holy proximity.

Yoga (Divine Union)

‘To restrain the three cosmic essences, and with them the five senses,
 to arouse the vital airs at the base of the spine,
 securely closing up the left and right conduits,
 so that they travel up the opened central channel,¹⁷
 with a sound as of the tinkling anklets of the Lord of the Dance,
 to perceive how the Five Holy Letters coalesce
 into the supreme symbol, Om,
 and to enter and become immersed in that boundless space,
 which is filled with the Lord’s grace –
 to achieve this, is to attain to a divine likeness with Us,
 just as a tender worm,
 when taken up from the earth by a hornet,
 is transformed into that hornet’s form.

Jnana (Divine Knowledge)

‘To inquire into, and fully comprehend
 the vast and far-reaching domain of the arts and sciences,
 the various divisions of the Agamas,
 and the manifold treatises on religious topics,
 to understand and grasp, with full clarity of mind
 the real nature of the three fundamental entities,
 to transcend the accustomed workings of all mediate knowledge,
 and become one of those wise sages,
 in whose hearts the knowledge of Siva,
 displacing that mediate knowledge,
 appears and flourishes in its place,
 is to obtain the glorious and final state of absorption in Us.

¹⁷ This is a slight expansion of the text which actually refers simply to the ‘two channels’ and the ‘one channel’. The two channels are the ida and pingala nadis, and the one, the sushumna nadi. This channelling of energy or prana up through the central channel parallels on the physical level the mental process of controlling the mind, which is prevented from moving outwards into the world of duality, and remains concentrated upon God.

120

‘Be they of low birth, or deformed in body,
be they base in their conduct, and ever unloving towards Us,
those who look upon the true marks of the holy ash,
and Our holy dress with its sacred emblems,
and making no delay,
rush towards the wearers of those insignia,
and, paying obeisance before them,
offer them a fitting repast of rice,
and become their willing servants –
they shall be known as the devotees of Our devotees,
and will cut through the vain infatuation with “me and mine”.

121

‘When We lovingly bestowed upon you Our gracious glance,
the manifold seeds of future births were consumed and destroyed.¹⁸
The effects of the deeds performed in this present birth
will end when your body dies;¹⁹
Our grace, suffusing your consciousness,
will prevent the [accumulation of any] deeds
to be experienced in a future birth;²⁰
your possessions, your body, your life itself
which are the source of great sorrow,
shall be yours no longer. They shall belong to Us.
Therefore implant in your heart the image of the Guru,
who has come in the form, like your own, of a mortal man.
This is the final truth.’
Thus did the Lord speak.

¹⁸ This is sanchita karma – the accumulated actions of the soul in former births, the fruits of which are experienced in future births.

¹⁹ This prarabdha karma – the part of one’s current karma that is to be worked out in this life. Siva does not free him from this. He must work through it as long as the current incarnation lasts, but since the other two karmas are at an end, on the death of this body, there will be no more birth for him.

²⁰ This is agamiya karma – the actions in the present life which are the source of future births and the fruits to be experienced therein.

122

On hearing those infallible words of grace,
which fell like blossoms from the holy lips of the Great Father,
the pious Vadavurar rejoiced in his heart,
and cast himself down in worship at the feet of the Lord.
Then, rising up to face Him, he spoke thus:
'Lord of the matted locks!
You who deign to pity the erring ways
even of a madman such as I!
Deluded fool that I was,
yet did You show me the true path of liberation!'
Speaking these words, he was overcome with emotion,
and pressed his palms together above his head.

123

'Spotless One! By Your grace have I come to realise
that the material world,
my body, which has no lasting reality,
and my very self,
which formerly I thought of as my own possessions,
do in truth belong to You alone.'
He finished speaking, and stood in silence for many a while.
Then, bowing reverentially,
he placed at the Lord's feet
his fine clothes and precious jewellery,
and the vast wealth entrusted to him
by the Pandyan King of Madurai.
The Primal one, in whom virtue abides,
remained seated, a radiant smile illuminating His features.

124

The Lord who dwelt in Perunturai
turned to the most eminent of the disciples
who had assembled there out of their great love for Him,
and spoke thus:
'Make good use of all these riches
in the execution of pious works;
donate them to ascetics of high attainment,
and to the poor and destitute.'

125

After that deeply devoted disciple had fully disposed of the great treasure,
in accordance with the just command of his Great Master,
the pious Vadavurar, having consumed the medicine of true knowledge
that the transcendent Lord had given him,
which cured the painful affliction his worldly attachment,
attained at last to the state of final liberation.

126

He had come like a king, surrounded by a fine army,
above him a white umbrella, glorious symbol of victory,
and beneath him a beautiful jewelled palanquin.
Now he had become a holy mendicant, clad in a loin cloth,
his body covered and hidden by the sacred ash,
his single tuft of hair hanging loose over his shaven head,
and his eyes brimming with blessed tears.

127

He stood by, fixing his loving gaze upon the Lord;
he wept, and joined his hands in worship;
he threw himself to the ground, and rose up again filled with bliss,
he retired to the rear of the assembly,
and returned again, overcome by emotion;
looking upon the comely form of true knowledge,
he could no longer distinguish bright day from darkest night;
he became like restless spirit, a young child, or an incoherent madman.

128

All the commanders of the powerful army that had accompanied him
came and paid homage to their leader,
who had now attained to that higher state,
and stood there beseeching him piteously:
'It is indeed a sin to incur the fury of the Southern Lord
by abandoning completely our quest to purchase a herd of fine horses.'

129

And when they called upon him saying: 'Master, you must come with us!',
he whose body was adorned with sacred ash
turned to those valiant warriors and spoke these words:
'Greatly deluded as you are, each of you, in your understanding,
I forbid you to speak all these falsehoods,
which are based upon an erroneous perception of the world.
Go now and leave me alone.'

130

The warriors of his fine and numerous army
stood there in great consternation,
unable at first to grasp the import of their master's words.
Then, realising that he was deaf to their arguments,
and thinking that he no longer had any love for them,
they grieved inwardly and departed, saying:
'We must report this course of events to the Pandyan King.'

131

They travelled until they reached the august assembly
of the Lord of the lands where the Vaigai river flows,
and greeted him thus:
'Praise be to the all-powerful sovereign!
Praise be to the great King of royal Madurai!
Then, stricken in their hearts
by the sharp pangs of grief they all shared,
they recounted in detail the exploits of Vadavurar.

132

'Lord whose locks are crowned with bright gold!
How might we begin to describe the deeds of him
who received the honour of his title from yourself
and who pledged himself to execute your command?
After he had taken leave of you
he travelled on until he came to that rich city,
which is known as great Perunturai.

133

In a grove near that city
in the shade of a kuruntham tree
he saw someone clad in the dress of a great sage
nobly seated in the place of honour
and surrounded by a great crowd of holy ascetics,
all devotees of Lord Siva,
whereupon he was filled with a joy that knew no bounds.

134

'He exchanged some words with that great one,
then, joining his noble palms together above his head,
and crying out "Siva Sankara! Praise be to you!"
he fell at His feet, performing reverential prostrations to Him.
Finally, in transports of joy, he gave as a donation
his fine clothes, adorned with glittering gems
and all the royal treasure.

135

Casting aside his faultless garments
and wearing only a loin-cloth
his perfumed hair unbound
and his whole body lovingly smeared with holy ash,
he was like a depraved madman,
refusing to look us in the eye
as we remonstrated with him saying:
"These are indeed unrighteous deeds".
Thus it was, great King,
they said, saluting him with reverence.

136

On hearing this, the King of Madurai grew angry;
beads of sweat stood out over his whole body
as his fury swelled,
and his eyes glowed like fire.
'If such be the character of those who serve great Kings,
valiant wielders of the sword,
then kingdom, army, hoarded treasure, all are as nothing!'
he cried with a bitter laugh.

137

‘Through listening to the words of those
who seek, by their subversive reasoning,
to steal the great treasure,
intended for the purchase of death-dealing steeds
his mind has become deluded.
Therefore swift messengers must go to him,
deliver this scroll, containing many harsh words,
and return with him to us within one day’s compass.’
Thus was his command.

138

In accordance with those instructions,
the messengers came to the fair city of Perunturai;
on seeing the noble Vadavurar,
engaged in the loving worship of Lord Siva,
they saluted him with reverence, saying:
‘We beg you to peruse the royal missive
of that king among powerful kings,
he whose fearsome exploits
are as thunderbolts upon the heads of his enemies.’

139

Vadavurar, unwavering in his firmly held beliefs,
evinced no fondness for that letter,
having no desire to behold any sight,
other than the holy visage of Lord Siva.
‘This scroll means nothing to me,’ he said.
‘However, you may read it out.’
Thereupon one who was skilled in the art of reading aloud
gladly spoke out what was written there.

140

‘This document, written by the Pandyan King,
is addressed to our good minister,
whose title is “The Southern Lord’s Brahmin King”:
that you have gone off with our treasure
that you have abandoned the task of purchasing fine horses,
to go about clad in the loin-cloth of an ascetic,
that such is your interpretation of the duty
owed to a sovereign by his servant,
is indeed a source of great rejoicing to us.

141

‘We see that, from the study of many weighty tomes,
the certain knowledge you have derived
is that it is a far better thing
to go begging from door to door, wracked by hunger,
than to reign and prosper as king of the whole world;
that it is just and fitting to deceive a king
who has preserved you by his righteous rule,
and to act according to your own whim.

142

‘To live under the protection of a great king,
is like dwelling in the company of a venomous serpent.
If you realise this, you should,
immediately upon receiving
the letter we have sent to you,
return with our messengers to this city.
This letter is by the hand of the Pandyan King.’
He finished reading and stood waiting.

143

On hearing the content of the letter written by the Pandyan King,
Vadavurar considered the matter, thinking:
‘What is the meaning of this earthly ruler’s contention
that I am not the servant of those who serve
Him who loves the slender Uma,
but owe my allegiance to himself alone,
and, furthermore, that I have sinned in his regard?’

144

‘Due to the strength of our Master, Lord Siva,
the messengers of the Lord of Death,
bearing a death-warrant written in his own hand,
will not dare to approach us,
and since ours is the Lord who destroyed
the heavenly cities of the powerful Asuras,
so that they were reduced to ashes
and fell to earth in the twinkling of any eye,
is it fitting then that any one of his followers should be afraid?’
Thus did he reflect to himself.

145

Returning to the divine presence
and praising the holy feet of the Lord,
he who was without stain addressed his Guru thus:
'Paragon of all the virtues, praise be to You!
Lord who wears as a garland a thousand-headed snake,
Praise be to You!
Hear, I beg you, the content of this letter,
written by the King
who watches over the earth's exceeding vastness.'
Thereupon, he read out the message.

146

On hearing this, the Lord whose nature
is untouched by death and decay
showed His bright teeth in a smile,
and, to the delight of the divinely inspired one,
who was to sing his praises in Tamil song,
spoke these words:
'Let your mind not be dismayed,
as one who is weak and without defence.
We shall come bringing a herd of fine horses,
Such as will fill all this land with awe.

147

'Returning with them, we shall give them to the Southern King.
Meanwhile, you shall go back with these valiant ambassadors,
and say to him:
"In accordance with the letter you sent me,
I have come swiftly to appear before you.
As for the fine horses, they will reach here
on the first day of the month of Avani."

148

'Banish from your mind any fear
that the king of the ancient lunar race will cause you grief.'
With these words, the Lord adorned his forehead with holy ash,
and gave him fine clothes,
golden ornaments, set with precious gems,
and other rich trappings,
investing him with the quality of a royal minister,
such as would greatly delight the mind of the king.

149

Finally he gave over to him a beautiful ruby,
and sent him on his way, saying:
'Journey to the king who rules in the South,
and be sure to present him with this gem as a gift. Now go.'
Like a cow, newly parted from its young calf,
Vadavurar stood for a long time, worshipping his Master,
his heart melting with emotion,
as tears streamed down from both eyes.
'Lord! Can it be that you have forsaken me?'
he cried out in his grief.

150

Weeping copious tears, he took his leave of the celestial Lord,
abandoning the groves and tanks,
with their gently rippling waters, of holy Perunturai.
Reciting the five-lettered mantra of the bounteous Lord Siva,
to ease him on his journey,
he came at length, in the company of those praiseworthy ambassadors,
to the fair city of Madurai.

151

He who was deeply versed in learned scriptures
appeared before Madurai's king.
Greeting him with a respect that his heart did not feel,
he presented to him the great and beautiful jewel,
which he had received from Him
who wears in His locks the radiant moon,
and stood there before him.
The King, rejoicing greatly, asked him,
with customary politeness, to remain,
and Vadavurar remained in his presence.

152

The King whose hand grasps the bow
gazed long upon that priceless, precious gem,
examining it over and over again in his wonderment,
and experiencing in his heart great inward pleasure.
Then, turning to him in whose mind
the thought of Lord Siva was deeply rooted,
he requested him to give his own account of what he had done.

153

He who had conquered the implacable enemy of his soul's defilement
fixed his gaze upon the countenance of the King and spoke:
'Great King, whose glory shines throughout the land!
Taking the riches you entrusted to me,
I went and purchased that whole herd of thoroughbred horses.
None were deficient in the requisite qualities,
all were trained in the four equestrian paces,
and the price I paid was a fair one.

154

Next, I made inquiries according to brahmin lore
to determine which date would be auspicious
for the herd of valuable horse to come to the beautiful city of Madurai.
On hearing that the first day of the month of Avani would be suitable,
I remained there in Perunturai, awaiting that date.

155

Your royal guard of warriors, one and all
eager to return to this ancient city, swiftly came back here.
On hearing their unmitigated lies about me,
you wrote a letter, expressing your great displeasure,
in response to which, I returned.
As for the herd of fine horses,
they will come on the day I have stated.'

156

The king, reverting to the friendly tone of former days, said in reply:
'On account of those who sought by their words
to undermine our great and abiding affection
we wrote as if our love for you was at an end.
But now you must put aside any grief you feel on that account.'

157

Placing him at his side, in token of his keen affection,
the king conducted Vadavurar into his vast and lofty palace.
There he furnished him with fine robes
and gave him jewels and golden ornaments, saying:
'Dress yourself in all of these.'
Finally, having instructed him, as formerly, in all the affairs of state,
he sent him back to his own residence.

158

After the Lord's devotee had departed
to dwell in his noble mansion,
two days before the herd of fine horses was due to arrive,
one of the ministers of that king of the fair earth
which the broad ocean girds,
presented himself before his master,
choosing a moment when he was quite alone,
having departed from his escort of fine warriors.

159

Saluting him with reverence, he spoke:
'Praise be to the Lord of our great land! Praise be!
Sire, there is something I must say to you.
Your minister, whose great distinction it is
to bear a title of honour adorned by your own name,
journeyed into the lands of the Lord of Mount Neri,²¹
to purchase horses whose quality it is hard to describe in words.
Instead of that, however, he placed all your riches as a gift
into the hands of some devotees of the ash-besmeared Lord Siva.

160

'After your worthy messengers had gone to him
and shown him your letter
he thought up a scheme whereby he might allay your anger
and thereby save his life.
Approaching your two feet
as if he were your devoted servant, he said:
"The herd of fine horses is on its way.
I shall deliver them to you."

161

In short, his whole story is a tissue of lies,' he concluded.
The Lord of the land where the Vaigai river flows,
and the pure Tamil tongue flowers
turned upon his heralds with a look
that filled them with fear and trembling,
And said: 'Go to holy Perunturai,
home of those versed in the eternal Vedas' holy writ.
See if there are any high-mettled steeds there,
and report swiftly back to me.'

²¹ The Chola King, as the King who rules over Mount Neri.

162

Those brave heralds journeyed to Perunturai,
returning swiftly the very same day, greatly troubled.
Entering the royal presence, they paid homage to the king of kings,
and, standing there, spoke these words:
'Monarch who commands an army
of black elephants, great like mountains,
though we searched in Perunturai, and in the surrounding villages,
we could see no horses there.'

163

Cowering to one side, the heralds finished speaking.
Then that powerful King was seized by a great rage and cried out:
'Commander of the guard! Go and arrest that one
who promised, in our presence, to do our bidding,
and then treacherously betrayed us.
Inflict upon him some excruciating punishment,
and confiscate all the riches we gave him.'

164

'The mighty commander of the royal guard,
adopting a stern and wrathful demeanour,
shall approach that eminent son of the brahmin caste,
and address him as follows:
"The King, in his righteous anger,
has commanded us to recover all the treasure,
which, out of his great love, he entrusted to you that day,
for the purchase of those fine steeds."

165

'If you wish to know the reason for this,
know that, at the king's behest,
ambassadors, brave and victorious
journeyed swiftly to fair Perunturai
and returned again, having seen no sign
of the powerful high-mettled steeds.
The King has accordingly banished you from his affections,
forbidding you henceforth to rule the Kingdom of his behalf.'

166

So it happened that when the officers of the guard
went to him and angrily demanded:
'The treasure must be returned immediately,'
he whose speech was true remained silent.
Whereupon the guards,
intent upon the performance of that cruel punishment,
stripped Vadavurar of all the symbols of his ministerial office
and, leading him off under constraint to the king's dungeon,
imprisoned him there in solitary confinement.

167

As Vadavurar, all the while betraying no hint of consternation,
was being escorted by his captors
into the confines of that strong prison,
the sun in his great golden chariot
disappeared below the western horizon,
as if he could not for shame
look upon the distress of the worthy ascetic.

168

As the heavens took on a crimson hue
they resembled the fiery mouth of some demon,
conjured up by the bounteous Lord of the matted locks,
He who is adorned by a beautiful garland
of nectar-soaked cassia flowers.
Enraged at the conduct of the Pandyan king,
and baring the great white fangs
of the crescent moon in its gaping jaws,
it seemed to rush onward,
intent on swallowing him up completely.

169

The beautiful jasmine seemed to laugh²²
like those who witness the calamities
that befall the virtuous
who dwell upon this earth,
lapped by the ocean's waves,
and the lotus blossoms all drew in their petals,
as if they grieved in their hearts,
on hearing what had befallen
the noble Tamil bard of Vadavur.²³

²² The jasmine buds, unfolding at night, are taken to resemble the teeth of someone who is laughing.

170

When the maiden Night with her two dark hands
veiled the eyes of those who dwelt in Madurai's beautiful city,
it was as if she grieved in her heart
lest they suffer the deep shame
of seeing the god-like Vadavurar imprisoned
and held under guard at the king's command.

171

The inhabitants of Madurai
terrified that the chief minister was not there
to vanquish the enemies of the King,
found no sleep that night
and cried out: 'Alas, what will become of us!'
Their distress was like that of a young maiden
parted from her lover
when the flames leap up in her heart
and she sighs out aloud in pain and confusion.

172

As the dawn approached
cockerels with swelling red crests
spurred claws and fine plumage
began to crow in all the houses where they lived,
as if, being devotees of the six-faced son²⁴
of the five-faced Lord Siva,
they were moved to complain to Him
of the calamity that had befallen
the holy, pure-minded Vadavurar.

173

In the precincts of the temple
of the wondrous Lord of Madurai,
He whose weapon is the trident
and whose matted locks shine resplendent,
the call of conch-shells resounded all about.
It was as if they were unable to bear the suffering
of one who, realising within himself the supreme reality,
was to embody that knowledge in holy Tamil hymns,
and were seeking out the Lord to tell him of it.

²³ Base men are still able to laugh when they actually witness the distress of another. But noble men are saddened merely to hear tell of the afflictions of others.

²⁴ The six-faced Lord Murugan upon whose banner the cockerel is emblazoned.

174

Like the red spot on the forehead of the goddess Lakshmi,
She who dwells upon the red lotus flower,
peeping shyly to see if this was the day
on which our Lord would come, riding upon a horse,
the young sun, having passed the night beyond the Western Mount,
circled around golden Mount Meru,
and rose up over the jet black ocean.

175

The Pandyan king, whose just rule embraces the earth
had risen before the dawn,
bathing and cleansing his body with water from head to foot.
He had performed worship to the Lord
who bears an eye upon His forehead,
put on rich vestments
and a chain of pearls with their cool radiance.
Now he was enthroned at the gateway of his palace of pure gold,
which towered up to the heavens.

176

Then all the powerful guards [went to Vadavurar],
whose glory was both widespread and enduring,
and said to him:
'If you do not return the treasure
which you gave to those devotees of Lord Siva,
when you went to purchase a herd of swift-galloping steeds,
we shall inflict great suffering upon you.'
So saying, they bade him stand out in the blazing heat of the sun,
and Vadavurar did as they commanded.

177

As he stood there, his strength draining away,
he meditated upon the all-powerful Lord who ruled him
and cried out in a transport of grief:
'Do You not know the suffering that I,
poor wretch, am enduring here?
You whose earrings are white conch shells!
can it be that Your words were false,
when You promised me, saying:
"The delivery of those prancing steeds to the king
shall be My own responsibility?"

178

‘Spurning the fleshly appetites of bodily existence,
and professing my abject devotion
I came and took refuge in You.
I stood there, professing that, for me,
the whole wide world was Yourself alone,
and yet You bade me return to the king
whose banner is emblazoned with the carp.
Is it possible, then, that water,
once it has mingled with the broad ocean,
can return again to the river whence it came?’

179

You at whose side sits the alms-bestowing Parvati!
If you despise me, as one who has no love for You,
what other course remains
for a humble servant such as I?
Is it consonant with Your glorious name,
You who destroyed the three cities of your demon enemies,
that Your devotee should be left
to stand out in the sun’s blazing heat?

180

‘First among those who dwell in the heavenly realm!
How many would remain as Your devotees
if they came and were subjected to the torment
which I am enduring this day?
My words are those of a poor and destitute wretch,
not the pious petition of one
whose mind is free of thoughts of “me” and “mine”.
What hope is there then that they will ascend
and reach Your heart?’

181

All those words of Vadavurar entered the ear of the Lord,
who gives His love to true devotees, free of the taint of evil works;
who lovingly bestows His gracious glance,
to keep them from falling into the ocean of birth and death,
and who, taking on the form of a holy ascetic,
grants the initiation of His holy foot.

To vanquish the bonds of good and evil deeds,
we shall now tell how the three-eyed Lord,
He who shares his form with Her
whose arms surpass
the tender bamboo in their slenderness,
reflected upon the suffering of His devotee
and, desirous of ending his suffering,
delivered those victorious, galloping steeds
to the Southern King,
whose breast is adorned with a flower garland
redolent with sweet nectar.