

Chapter III The Delivery of the Horses

183

As it is the duty of a father
to relieve the suffering of his own son,
so did the Lord who is crowned with the crescent moon,
He whom Brahma and Vishnu sought in vain,
when He saw the piteous state
of the one whose love for Him was without limit,
conceive the notion of gathering all the wild jackals
and transforming them into spirited horses,
mounted by the gods themselves in the guise of warriors.

184

After the jackals came swarming in a great pack
and were transformed into spirited chargers,
the faultless celestials took on the appearance of warriors
to match their mounts.
Lord Siva himself, He who dwells in the immaculate Jewelled Hall,
joyously bestriding the holy Vedas as his mount,
exchanged His peerless form for that of an Aryan horse-trader.

185

Amid a cloud of dust, which seemed to obscure the earth entirely
and penetrate the heavenly realm itself,
with warriors crowding thickly at either side,
The Primal One, husband to the Goddess Uma,
rode, whip in hand, at the head of those fierce war-horses
and, to the rising clamour of horn and drum,
passed through the towering gateway
in the walls which surrounded the lofty city of Madurai.

186

Those who were standing nearby
rushed to the presence of the king
who wears a wreath of neem leaves,
and, making obeisance before him, spoke thus:
'King who sits in the shade of
a great umbrella, white like the moon!
This very day, spirited horses from the Aryan land have come.
To the sound of clarion calls,
they crowded through the gateway
of our strong, high city walls in a great herd,
raising a swirling cloud of dust
which billowed everywhere about them.'

187

On hearing that the herd of horses had arrived,
the king conceived a great affection once more
for that great one who dwelt in Vadavur,
and, summoning him to his presence,
gave him rich garments and other adornments.
'Come with me to view those beautiful, matchless steeds,' he said,
and, leaping to his feet, set off for the temple of the Lord
surrounded by an army fit to inspire fear in his enemies.

188

The Pandyan king, whose great broad shoulders
were draped in a flower-garland beset by hovering honey-bees,
seated himself upon his jewelled palanquin,
intent on witnessing the arrival of those horses
which the Lord, He who dwelt within the holy temple, had brought,
delighting the eyes of the citizens of ancient Madurai.
Making his way to the training arena,
he installed himself, surrounded by his army
upon a golden throne, set within a shady pavilion
which was decorated by the cool lustre of pearls
and beautifully festooned
with garlands of luxuriant red water-lilies,
dripping with droplets of dew and sweet nectar.

189

Adorned with the surpassing lustre of pearl-inlaid jewellery
he resembled the silvery moon in his radiance
as he rested upon his royal throne.
Poets, skilled in the three modes of the Tamil tongue surrounded him;
Brahmins, learned in the ancient Vedas
intoned auspicious litanies in fitting manner;
maidens on either side waved their yak-tail fans,
so that their jewels sparkled,
and the flashing bangles tinkled on their arms.
A choir of ladies sang
and the tender southern breeze
which had wandered among the clustering blooms of many flowers,
gently blew, diffusing their fragrant perfume.

190

As he beheld the sight of that herd of horses
sweeping forward in a dense mass
like the deep, wide surge of the ocean as it spreads over the land,
with conches, drums and trumpets sounding forth,
and swirling clouds of dust flying up to the heavens,
that son of the city of Vadavur,
whose broad walls tower up to touch the clouds,
was delighted in his eye and in his mind;
the name of his ancestral lunar clan was exalted,
and the everlasting glory
of the sacred ash and the holy Five Letters
were greatly magnified.

191

On the first day of the month of Avani
that herd of horses, brought by Lord Sankara himself,
entered the fair city of Madurai
so that the glory of the sacred ash
and of the holy Five Letters
was everywhere raised on high.

192

Let us now describe
the exalted nature and appearance of those traders,
as they came mounted on spirited chargers
which bounded through the thoroughfares of the city
like a troupe of performing dancers,
whilst the king, whose great crown glittered
with the brilliance of a multitude of flawless gems
drank in with his eyes this goodly sight.

193

They were armed with fine swords
and daggers were strapped to their side;
their foreheads were marked with a red dot
and their bodies gave off a golden effulgence;
their waists were wound with silk cloths,
and their broad chests shone with the lustre
of long necklaces of red coral beads.

194

They were clad in the skins of tigers
and adorned by soft, downy peacock plumes;
their hair hung down behind,
intertwined with flowers and fresh green leaves;
beautiful quivers were strung across their backs,
and in their hands they held a bow;
their gaze was piercing
and their voices loud and commanding.

195

They wore golden earrings and gold chains,
hung about their brawny shoulders;
their bodies were daubed with many-coloured paints
and their hair trailed in twisted plaits,
resembling the serpent Adisheshan¹
whose hood is set with a glittering jewel.

196

As they rode at his side,
with their sheathed daggers and glinting spears,
their swords, arrows, and their curving bows,
the noble Lord Siva could be discerned in their midst,
He who wears in His locks the crescent moon
and the flooding stream of the River Ganges.

197

In His belt, beautifully decorated
with the jewel from a cobra's hood,
a handsome scimitar was lodged,
and against the ruddy hue of His two muscular shoulders
lay a necklace of emeralds, deep-blue sapphires
and gems of many colours.

198

He wore a coat, fine beyond description,
and a gorgeous silken sash.
Beneath his head-dress
a bright radiance illumined His features
and in one hand He held a whip
whose beauty is hard to tell,
so that those who saw him exclaimed:
'Can there be another upon the earth like He?'

¹ A mythological thousand-headed serpent who supports the earth on his hood and on whom Vishnu reclines.

199

Tiny bells, tied to his sash and stirrups,
before, behind, and at either side,
gave out a sweet tinkling sound.
Cooling yak-tail whisks, eight in number,
were fitted to the bright, silk saddle
of the dazzling white steed upon which He rode.

200

Amidst the bright profusion of yak-tail fans
floating on the breeze,
shaded by the resplendent canopy of a beautiful umbrella
like a flawless nobleman from the Aryan land
He advanced in the company of His army
who rode upon those fierce battle-steeds.

201

The king himself, observing the august manner of His arrival,
beheld Him with wide, unblinking eyes, rejoicing in his heart,
and cried out in amazement;
'Who apart from Vishnu, Brahma, who rides upon the swan,
and Lord Siva Himself,
could be possessed of so great a beauty?'

202

When he espied, approaching on horseback
the Lord whose grace is the fruit
of penances which men perform,
he whose holy voice spoke the meritorious Tamil Vedas
marvelled inwardly, overcome with loving devotion
and remained standing there, thinking to himself,
'He has carried out the plan as He had envisaged it.'

203

The warriors who rode at the side of Lord Siva
raised a great hullabaloo,
brandishing their powerful swords
and twirling their many bright, flashing spears.
And, drawing themselves up in mock battle-lines,
they playfully made as if to wage war on each other.

204

The Pandyan monarch who ruled the earth,
maintaining Lord Siva's law, and the sacrament of the holy ash,
joyfully summoned to him that king amongst ascetics, Vadavurar,
and pleasantly commanded him as follows:
'Go and request that ineffable chieftain of the Aryan race,
to drive the horses along one of the streets nearby.'

205

He whose penances were arduous, and of enduring worth,
smiled agreeably in acquiescence
whilst inwardly he grieved, thinking:
'What a thing he is asking me to do!'
Then he approached the One
whose sweetness was like that of sugar-cane
and succulent, ripe fruits,
and stood before Him, worshipping Him in his heart,
whilst pearly tears coursed down his cheeks.

206

'You who stood as a pillar of fire
which Vishnu, and Brahma,
who dwells on the perfumed lotus flower,
could not find and know,
though they assumed different forms
and sought You from that day till this!
What great austerities might I have performed,
that You should come
exchanging the victorious bull
for a spirited thoroughbred steed,
and accept my humble obeisance?

207

'Except for my own soul which worships You here
in the guise You have now adopted,
who would have the power to recognise You in Your true form?
Yet seeing You in this manifestation,
the whole world has lovingly grasped You in its thoughts,
saying, "You have indeed made Yourself attainable to Your devotees.'"

208

Having thus paid Him many respectful compliments,
he then, by the Lord's gracious leave,
repeated the message of the victorious Pandyan.
The Lord whose locks are crowned with cassia flowers
acceded to the request,
and herded the fine horses in such a way
that the liberal King could view them, as his virtue warranted.

209

Having demonstrated all the equestrian disciplines
of running straight, in a circular pattern, and in close synchronisation,
he came towards the King, herding along at a disciplined gait
those prancing thoroughbred steeds,
who could gallop as fast as the mind can think.

210

With a toss of his head, and a twirl of his fingers
the Tamil king, delighted with that noble One
who rode upon a spirited steed,
threw Him as a gift a priceless silken cloth,
decorated with pure gold,
which our Lord caught on the end of his whip,
laughing as He did so.

211

The Pandyan king had expected that the Aryan warriors,
attracted by the beauty of that bright fabric,
would come running, swift as the wind
to snatch it eagerly from the end of their master's whip
and wrap it about their heads, prizing it most highly.
When not a single man came forward,
he grew angry in his heart,
confused by the disguise which masked the ash-besmear'd Lord.

212

Although he had clearly witnessed the arrival of the Lord,
rejoicing in his mind and heart,
the king of the land once ruled by the Virgin Princess²
had failed rightly to perceive Him
whose form is pure space, impossible to see.
For who among men would have the power
to know His true nature, unless He himself
who is the hidden substratum of the whole world,
had abolished their future births
and granted them true knowledge of reality?

213

The master of the excellent Tamil tongue, Vadavurar,
desiring to temper the fury
which welled up in the heart of great Madurai's Lord,
stood before him in supplication, and said:
'Sire, it is the usual custom among such nations
to accept on the end of their whips rich silks like these
which, out of their great affection
the kings of all the eight directions presented to you as gifts.'

214

On hearing that this was an honourable custom,
the king was quite mollified,
and turned to those who were expert
in the study of treatises on horsemanship,
saying: 'Examine these great horses
according to the rules laid down;
clearly decide amongst yourselves
as to their merits and defects,
then tell me your findings.'

215

Those who were conversant with the precepts
of those erudite works on horsemanship
assessed the good and bad qualities
of the powerful, spirited steeds,
and reported in the following terms to that King among kings,
who engraved the image of the warring carp
on the broad flanks of golden Mount Meru,³
and returned from there.

² Kanninadan, the Lord of Kanninadu, the Land of the Virgin. The Pandya country was, according to tradition, once ruled by a virgin princess, Tatataikai, who is identified with the goddess Minakshi.

³ To mark the northern boundary of his territory. The carp is the royal insignia of the Pandyan kings.

216

‘None had any of the following defects:
the Chandra curl, which brings ruin,
the Antavarttam curl,⁴ at the ankle,
the Kauvakam,⁵ on the flank,
the Kakavarttam, the Munvalai curl,
whose fame is widespread,
the Ketari, base and worthless,
a luxuriant curl at the foot,
the Kecavarttam⁶ and the Pattatai.
on the beautiful *kaccai*.⁷

217

‘They were beautiful like a work of art, like fire,
or like the fair Lakshmi who destroys the many worlds
and creates them again in their glory,
and their six goodly body parts⁸ bore none of the defects
which men of this good earth speak of:
their ears were neither horn-like nor uneven;
there were none with one dark and three white feet,
nor any with three dark and one white;
none with a silvery cast to the eye,
none that were underfed,
and none with a throat like that of the Lord
of the burning-ground where hot fires burn.⁹

218

‘None were lacking in the ten auspicious marks:
four on their graceful ears, two on their fine breasts,
two on the head, one on the forehead, and one on the mouth;
their neighing did not resemble the cry of the jackal,
the cat, the black crow, or the cockerel;
nor was it like that of a dog, a fattened pig, or an evil spirit;
the din of their hooves was like the sound of conches and drums,
the crash of thunder, the bellow of bulls,
and the pounding of breakers at the ocean’s edge.

⁴ A curl of hair at the base of the tail.

⁵ A curl of hair on one of the flanks.

⁶ A whorl or ring of hair on the leg, considered inauspicious.

⁷ The word **கச்சை**, used here, does not appear in the dictionaries as referring to a part of a horse’s body.

⁸ The face, tail and four feet.

⁹ I have not translated the last line, which does not make any sense to me. The whole verse is problematic.

219

‘Their colour is not that of the bear, the ass,
the wild dog or the fierce battling tiger;
nor is it that of the sleek cat, the jackal,
the black crow, or the smoke which billows from a fire;
they gallop with the blithe freedom of the wind,
and their bodies gleam with the rich lustre
of the moon at the full,
of sapphires, and pearls with their white effulgence,
of luxuriant, golden kaya flowers
of the filaments of the tender lotus blossom,
of red water-lilies and of beautiful green parrots.

220

‘They are broad of forehead, and high at the rump;
their teeth are dazzling white and evenly formed;
their dense luxuriant eye-lashes are tinged with red,
like the mocking tongues of the suda tree’s young shoots
whose heady fragrance is widely renowned;
their gaze is warlike and fierce;
their bodies are quite free of excess fat
and their noble faces are concave, and triangular in shape.

221

‘The hair of their head and mane was of the same shade;
their breast and throat resemble a cobra’s hood;
their powerful hooves were round, incurving, and well-hollowed
and sent forth a glorious sound, like that of the conch;
nowhere was the network of veins visible;
their legs betrayed no hint of bandiness
at their high, well-fleshed knees,
whilst their backs were well-curved,
their thighs bulged, their tails were long
and their bodies had a superb glossy colouring.

222

‘In them can be discerned the ancient lineage
of all the seven classes of horses
whose modes of generation were as follows;
upon the tongue of the great and noble Vedas;
from the tears of the lotus-dwelling Brahma;
from the heavenly guardians of the eight directions;
from the ambrosia which welled up out of the black ocean;
from fire;
from a fruitful womb;
and from the egg of the great owl.
Among them were some in which the brow
and all four legs were completely white;
and their speed was such as would carry them
through clear skies, and over bright waters.

223

‘They are indeed most excellent horses,
belonging to the fourteen different types:
with their many distinctive colourings.
Mangalan, Carangan, Ganganeelan, Mauvazhagan,
Kongalan, Cannacampan, Kunkumceran, Kariyan,
Neelacaran, Kulavumallan, Uruncivantan, Nallan,
Pollan and the noble black-footed Campan.’
Having thus explained those time-honoured qualities to the king,
they stood there, making obeisance to him.¹⁰

224

On hearing this report from men
who had a thorough knowledge of the attributes of fine steeds,
the king was greatly pleased
and when he calculated the worth of
those heavenly spirited chargers,
delivered by the Lord who rides upon a great white bull
rivalling silver Mount Kailash in its splendour,
he was overjoyed to realise that their value
came to eight times that of all the splendid riches
he had given for them.
Then addressing the Supreme One, he said:
‘Hand over the lead-rope and transfer the horses to me.’

¹⁰ The material contained in verses 216-223 is taken from Acva Ilakkanam, the Study of Horses, and contains many technical terms. The Tamil Lexicon relies on a work calls Acuva Sattiram (Acva Sastra) by Nakulasakatevar, printed in Madras in 1911 for the majority of its citations. A few are attested from the present work. It would seem that a study of this would be required to make a full translation and explanation, not to mention a good knowledge of equine anatomy.

225

One of the most eminent leaders of that trade caravan
transferred the lead-rope
into the fair hands of the King's stewards,
thus handing over the horses
and delivering them into the stables of the just monarch
by the grace of whose watchful eye
the whole world was protected and preserved.

226

As the Southern King, who wields the powerful discus
and the master of the pure and noble Tamil tongue looked on,
the Lord whose throat is like a black cloud,
returning in the direction whence he had come,
and assuming once more his beautiful and ancient form,
entered the confines of his shining temple,
surrounded by a host of celestials
who humbled themselves before him.

227

The king who was learned in the fine Tamil works
examined [by Madurai's Academy]
dismissed the noble Prince of Vadavur,
and sent him to his mansion, saying,
'It is thanks to you that we have obtained these horses'.
Then, surrounded by his army
and his entourage of eminent courtiers,
he too retired to his palace,
his heart overflowing with happiness.

228

As the day ended and the evening drew on,
by the grace of the Eternal Lord
all the horses were transformed again into howling jackals,
which fought amongst themselves
and roamed boldly about, singly and in packs,
so that no wink of sleep was had
by the anxious citizens of ancient Madurai,
home of the pure Tamil tongue.

229

They rushed upon and attacked the keepers of the horses
who were stationed round about,
striking fear into their hearts.
Then, throwing themselves upon the tightly grouped horses,
they killed every last one
and stood there, baying horribly.

230

In the streets of the bazaar
and in the avenues adjoining the royal palace,
where halls and gopurams high as mountains
clustered thickly,
a blood-curdling howl rose up
from the throats of those baying jackals,
louder than the rattle and crash of any drum.

231

Through the miraculous operation
of the divine sport of the Lord
who performs his dance in the Sacred Hall,
praised by the chanting of the holy Vedas' inner essence,
that company of baying jackals
grew to ten million in number,
roaming triumphantly about
whilst all the citizens fled for cover.

232

When the massed armies of the noble Pandyan King,
bearing weapons capable of dealing out bitter death,
attacked those jackals which swarmed everywhere about,
they began to return the fight, like fierce lions.

233

In every gateway, men grouped themselves in battle array.
Some citizens cried out piteously in their terror
and ran away to hide,
seeking some place that would afford them shelter,
whilst others advanced to the attack.

234

Some prayed to the Lord, saying:
'You who wear the crescent moon in Your locks!
May You, in Your compassion save our precious souls!'
Others secured the beautiful temple doors,
and stood guard over them,
Whilst still others climbed up to the swaying,
cloud tipped pinnacles of the city walls.

235

'Has it become an unrighteous deed, to perform religious penance?
Has our great King's royal sceptre become a thing of evil?
Is there a meaning to all this?'
Thus did all the citizens of Madurai piteously lament.

236

Those who had been set to guard the strong unblemished steeds
arrived at the palace doors, raising a great hue and cry,
and reported to the King, saying:
'The fine horses that came here were mere phantoms;
they have all turned into jackals.'

237

The cries of men, the whinnying of stampeding horses,
and the howl of base, marauding jackals
beat upon the ears of the tall-crowned, carp-bannered king
like a hail of red-hot javelins.

238

When he heard this great clamour
the Pandyan king grew furious;
sparks of fire seemed to fly from his eyes,
and beads of sweat stood out on his body.
On observing this, Lord Siva dissolved
the phantom army of jackals He had brought.

239

The king whose chest shone with a beautiful glittering breastplate,
conferred upon him by the Lord of Paradise, Indra himself,
summoned to him his lieutenants, whose gaze was stern,
and who were like his own eyes in the execution of his command.

240

‘Bring before me that deceitful minister
who changed those packs of jackals into fine horses,’ he commanded,
and they, having paid obeisance to his royal feet,
made their way swiftly to him
who had suffered the sorrows of birth
and was never more to be reborn,
saying: ‘We bear a summons from the King.’

241

With a smile, that fully accomplished sage
and loving devotee of the all-powerful Lord Siva
adorned himself, not with rich unguents,
but with the pearly lustre of the holy ash,
and having bowed his head to the lotus feet
of the One who waits upon the command
of those who love Him well,
he went and stood before the king of the land
where the Tamiraparani river flows,
home of the threefold Tamil tongue.

242

Like a fire which is kindled and flares up high,
anger spread across the features of the King.
‘My minister, you observed, did you not,
the illusion perpetrated by that person
who gave away to mendicants all our accumulated wealth,
who turned every jackal in the land into a fine horse,
and paraded them before us here?’

243

‘Although, according to custom,
it is the prerogative of a mighty ruler
to inflict fitting punishment upon those
who are remiss in the performance of their duty,
it is not, however, permitted to us
to impose the severest of penalties
upon brahmin adepts of the sacred Vedas,
on ascetics, firmly established in a pure and lofty state,
and on women, old men and children.’

244

Turning to his steely-eyed guards
who meted out punishment on his behalf,
he commanded:
'Remove him from my sight with all speed
and make him stand in the prison yard
under the fierce fiery heat of the mid-day sun,
and try to extract from him in full
all the riches we entrusted to him.'

245

After those powerful attendants had taken him away
and left him standing inside the strong fortress,
the sage Vadavurar, whose goodness all the world praised,
fixed his thoughts upon the Worker of Miracles, Lord Siva,
who turned all the jackals into horses
and delivered them to the Southern King,
and addressed Him thus:

246

'Bright Effulgence, sought in days of yore
by Mal and Brahma both! What will become of me?
Heavenly Lord, who manifest Your presence
so that those who dwell in Tillai may sing Your praise!
What can I do? Have you spurned my humble surrender?
Is Your fund of compassionate grace quite exhausted?
Do You know, or do You not, the torment
that I, a poor abandoned wretch, am suffering?

247

'They are tormenting me because they have seen
that the horses in that herd were really jackals.
Will You not alleviate my suffering
since it is within Your power to do so?
The stories of how You wore
the deadly poison in Your throat,
and how in former times You burned up
the cities of your demon enemies,
can it be that these are false?'
Thus did that greatest among men
weep and lament repeatedly.

We shall now recount how the Lord
who affords ample grace to His devotees,
commanded the beautiful river of heaven,
the holy Ganges, to go and unite
with the waters of the Vaigai,
and how on that very day
He himself worked as a coolie for an old dame
and bore baskets of earth upon those matted locks,
amply adorned with kondrai flowers.