

## Chapter IV The Navvy

249

The fair-eyed Lord reflected upon the suffering  
of one so amply endowed with divine grace,  
and sent forth the River Ganges, saying:  
'May you release him from his unbearable torment.'  
The holy river swept forward in a swelling tide,  
transforming the Vaigai river into a foaming torrent,  
which flooded out over the land like the great ocean itself.

250

The Vaigai river resembled a dancing girl as she dances,  
showing off her pearly-white, close-set teeth in a smile,  
tossing high her watery girdle,  
flinging about the kantal blossoms of her dainty pink hands,  
and displaying the young coconut fruits of her firm breasts,  
whilst the ceaseless surge of the waters  
about the young foliage of the mango trees  
was like the twirling of golden anklets at her feet.

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It was like a rutting elephant  
charging amid a cloud of buzzing insects,  
gouging away the rich embankments on either side  
with its great watery tusks,  
uprooting whole groves of trees,  
destroying all the rice crops,  
spewing forth great masses of foam from its trunk,  
and spraying a swathe of fine sand high into the air.

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It rolled out across all the fields,  
intent on uprooting and destroying the lotus,  
the fragrant blue water-lily, harbinger of suffering,  
and the tall even stands of bright-green sugar-cane,  
thinking that they were the weapons  
of the illustrious God Love,  
who caused pain to the Lord  
so that he would embrace the breast  
of the Mountain's Daughter,  
She of the dark, shining braids.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The River Ganges, which Lord Siva wears in his hair, is depicted as a jealous rival, angry at the god of love for wounding the Lord and causing him to fall in love with Parvati, and intent on destroying the

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The river rose higher and higher,  
until the deep surge of its waters  
washed back and forth  
over the beautiful, brightly coloured fruits  
which grew on the coconut palms along the banks,  
resembling in the fine effect it created  
a young woman's garment, as it slips quickly  
from her beautiful, ample, necklace-adorned breast.

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Like a fresh white gown,  
which the Goddess Earth draws around herself  
to temper the fierce, fiery rays  
hurled down from on high by the sun,  
the great flood spread far and wide,  
till none could tell where were open fields,  
and where were wooded groves,  
and came to lap against the flanks  
of ancient Madurai's city walls,  
home to the lotus-dwelling Lakshmi.

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As the great river engulfed all the surrounding countryside  
and drove and pounded against the broad walls  
with their banner-festooned, ornamented ramparts,  
as if it would reduce to ruins  
the fine and ancient city of Madurai,  
all the citizens were greatly distraught,  
despairing of any remedy to their plight.

256

The Pandyan king himself,  
who commands an army of fierce black elephants,  
came hurrying swiftly,  
bearing offerings of flower-bouquets,  
pearls and fine raiment, studded with gems,  
and stood offering up his pious prayer:  
'Mother! You who are praised  
as the very life of those who dwell  
on the great and bounteous earth,  
I beg you to contain Your fury!'

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love god's weapons, his sugar-can bow, and his flowery arrows, the lotus, water lily, jasmine and mango blossom.

257

When he saw that the waves,  
unmollified by his noble speech,  
rose like mountains to renew their assault again and again,  
the king of the fair Pandyan land,  
scion of the race of the Moon, with its many phases,  
thought to himself, 'What can be the cause of this!'  
and remained for a long time  
deeply immersed in internal enquiry.

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At length, he addressed his ministers, saying:  
'Tell me, my counsellors,  
can there be any shortcomings in the puja  
which we have performed from ancient times  
to our Heavenly Father, the Primal Lord,  
the spotless One who is enthroned in Madurai's temple,  
and who shares His form with the Goddess Uma!  
Have we committed any evil deeds upon this earth,  
such as might afflict the hearts of those dignified  
by great austerities which are virtue's source?'

259

'Sire, if you release from the prison  
where he languishes, that son of Vadavur,  
who greatly excels in devotion to the wise Lord,  
upon whose head the young crescent moon brightly shines,  
and thus earn for yourself his joyous gratitude,  
then shall the city be preserved from the rising flood.'  
Thus, having weighed the matter carefully,  
they voiced their conclusion and stood there,  
saluting him with reverence.

260

The king, having first bestowed  
a benign and happy glance upon them, said in reply:  
'Happily, your speech corresponds exactly  
with my own innermost thoughts!'  
Thereupon, he released from his dreadful prison  
that paragon of all the virtues, Vadavurar,  
and summoning him to his presence, spoke these words,  
his smiling countenance betraying his deep affection:

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'Although our previous wealth was given away  
to the devotees of the Supreme Lord,  
whose ruddy locks are adorned by a serpent,  
can the merit accruing from that gift  
belong to any other than ourselves!  
You whose breast is favoured  
by a garland of flowers dripping in nectar!  
It was a senseless act on my part  
to subject you to physical torture for what you did,  
and the punishment decreed was not justified.

262

'To regard that punishment as merited was indeed an error,  
resulting from my previously imperfect understanding,  
and the responsibility for that error,  
we take entirely upon our own head.  
As for the rest of what we have to say,  
we request you, who are the most eminent of all holy ascetics,  
to go and stem this flood and keep the Vaigai River  
from destroying our ancient city.'  
With this, the King finished speaking.

263

He who was free of the attachment  
which now caused the great and gracious Pandyan king  
to speak such affectionate words to him,  
and of the aversion,  
which formerly had caused his anger to blaze forth  
like an unquenchable fire,  
the true-hearted Vadavurar,  
meditated upon these holy feet which ruled his soul,  
so that the city might be saved  
from the Vaigai's copious flood.

264

As he concentrated upon the image of the Lord,  
riding upon a beautiful charger,  
and directed his devout prayer towards the heavens,  
the good river subsided and withdrew within its banks.  
Thereupon he who had suffered the bitter pain  
of crossing birth's venomous ocean,  
and had come finally to the shore of the Lord's grace,  
made his way down to the water's edge.

265

Turning to the King's agents,  
each of whom in turn made a respectful salutation to him,  
he said: 'You must go, beating your drums,  
and spread throughout our city the following announcement:  
"The deep flood-waters of the Vaigai river  
must be contained by an embankment.  
Therefore are all citizens commanded to come immediately."'

266

Those heralds hurried off and visited all the broad avenues  
where fine, gilded chariots ran,  
beating their sonorous drums.  
No sooner had Madurai's citizens heard the news,  
than they came and assembled on the river bank,  
equipped with their great spades and baskets for carrying earth.

267

The overseers hurried off, each to the individual area  
assigned to him by the vedic sage, Vadavurar,  
he whose body shone with the lustre of the sacred ash.  
There, with a measuring rod,  
they marked out a separate section for each person,  
and supervised the reinforcement  
of the great banks of the Vaigai river,  
urging on the workers with the canes  
that they flourished in their fair hands.

268

As the graceful waves of the flood washed up on the shore  
pearls from the bamboo with its segmented stem,  
pearls from the tusks of the rutting elephant,  
pearls from the white conch shell,  
and pearls from the excellent sugar-cane,  
piling them up in fittingly in mountainous heaps,  
the workers buried them in the water according to custom,  
and begin building up a high embankment on top of them.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The commentator states that it was customary to place gemstones in the foundation of such earthworks as an offering. Pearls are chosen because the Pandyan land is famed for its abundance of them.

269

'Set up the lifting beams! Roll up coils of plaited straw!  
The surging flood waters have risen higher!  
May the Gods protect us!'  
Such were the cries raised up by the citizens of Madurai  
as they stood packing together in an orderly fashion  
row upon row of aquila and sandalwood logs,  
raising up a bulwark along the high river bank.

270

While the pure, fresh waters of the Vaigai River  
were being stemmed in this fashion,  
a white-haired old woman was earning her living by selling rice cakes.  
She was a stout devotee of the Immaculate Lord,  
in whose matted locks sparkle the waters of the river Ganges.  
and the meaning of her name was:  
'She whose wealth is her pure heart.'<sup>3</sup>  
She was well advanced along the noble path of spiritual attainment.

271

When it became evident that all the breaches  
caused by the swelling flood tide of the Vaigai river  
had been dammed up,  
except for those in the section  
which had been allotted to this old dame,  
the wicked, hard-hearted overseers went up to her  
and began to upbraid her roughly.  
Whereupon she wept saying:  
'There is no strong person here to help me!'

272

For the lack of any helper,  
who would take rice-cakes for wages,  
and damn up the high river-bank,  
she betook herself to the temple of the Immaculate Lord,  
who wields a trident with prongs like long, pointed, leaves.  
There she shed copious tears over her withered old breasts  
and stood worshipping the holy feet of the Lord  
who combines eight forms in one,<sup>4</sup>  
beseeching him in the following terms:

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<sup>3</sup> The old dame's actual name was Vanti.

<sup>4</sup> The eight forms of Siva are, according to Swami Sivananda, Sarva, Bhava, Rudra, Ugra, Bhima, Pasupati, Isana and Mahadeva, rooted respectively in earth, water, fire, air, ether, Kshetrajna, sun and moon.

273

'You who wear a long snakeskin as a belt!  
You who closely embrace the blue-bodied Goddess Minakshi,  
so that your holy chest bears the imprint of her fully rounded breasts!  
You whose matted locks are bound in a top-knot!  
I am a poor woman who,  
by the grace of your watchful eye,  
has always earned her living by selling rice cakes.  
Is it right that even I should be so sorely persecuted?

274

'My Lord and Master!  
Glorious One!  
To whom might I turn for protection,  
if You do not afford me Your grace,  
to dam up the good waters of the Vaigai,  
and keep it from bursting its banks?  
Many men speak of Your renown,  
as the One who makes himself accessible  
to all who humble themselves at His holy feet.  
Can it be that these are empty words?

275

'I have no mother, no father,  
no family whatsoever; I am quite alone.  
Even if I stood in the company of ghosts,  
no one would be able to pick me out and recognise me,  
so terrible is my situation.  
If You do not deign to bestow Your grace,  
and release my mind from its torment  
I must abandon life altogether,  
What other choice remains to me!

276

'I can find no strong labourer,  
who will offer me his loyal service,  
in return for the rice-cakes I give him,  
and will shore up the great embankment with earth.  
Therefore my Lord, I direct my appeal to You.'  
The God of Gods, Lord Siva,  
conceived great affection  
for her who thus addressed Him  
and determined that He Himself  
would be the labourer she sought.

277

The Lord who was wont to transform Himself at will  
into any form He desired,  
came dressed in the tattered clothes of a day labourer  
with a basket on his head, and a mattock slung over his shoulder.  
As the distraught old dame looked on, faint with worry,  
He hurried up as one who suffers the pangs of extreme hunger.

278

When He came and stood in the temple gateway,  
and cried out in a light-hearted manner:  
'Is there anyone here who will take Me on as a labourer?',  
hearing those welcome words  
the old woman was freed from her anxious thoughts  
that were making her faint and dizzy,  
and went over to the meet Him.

279

With no heavenly courtiers standing at His side  
without His tiger-skin garment  
and the great venomous serpent  
which served as a writhing belt around it,  
His matted locks bereft of the crescent moon,  
bearing in His hands no axe and no deer,  
with no great bull as His mount,  
thus did she behold the Heavenly Lord,  
manifesting in this accessible form.

280

She said: 'Son, come now, and work for me!'  
And He said, 'First give me My wages and I will come!'  
To which she hurriedly replied:  
'In lieu of wages, I shall give You here and now  
my rice-cakes to eat, sweet as rarest heavenly ambrosia,  
or, if You prefer, I'll first sell my wares  
and pay You in the evening from the proceeds.'

281

When He replied, 'Mother, I am extremely hungry.  
If You give me your sweet cakes,  
I will build up the dam,  
and shore up the whole section assigned to you!',  
she handed Him the cakes, which were covered by a cloth,  
blackened on one side by smoke, and cried out in great joy:  
'Take them and enjoy them!'

282

He whose lotus feet slew the Lord of Death himself  
raised up a discoloured fold of His short wearing-cloth  
and stretched it out to receive the proffered cakes.  
Transforming it into rarest ambrosia He said:  
'Mother! You have sated a hunger, so hard to assuage!  
I shall go straight to the Vaigai river.  
and build up the dam along your stretch of the steep embankment.'

283

'Mother! These cakes are good! Very good!  
I beg you to kindly give Me more!'  
He said, extending His tattered cloth  
and taking it back, full to the brim.  
Then, eating one after another, He made his way  
to the rich banks where the Vaigai's flood waters surged,  
saying: 'You whose penances are lofty and enduring like mountains,  
let your part of the construction be completed!'

284

When that saintly mother, who stood high  
among those who perform holy austerities said:  
'My boy, please go quickly, and stop up this broad embankment,'  
the mighty Lord Siva,  
who is crowned with clusters of kondrai blossoms,  
the hooded cobra with its fiery gaping jaws,  
and the chilly, crescent moon,  
began to shore up the old dame's allotted section.

285

He dug out earth and loaded it into His basket.  
Then, placing a pad of cloth upon the locks,  
which the crescent moon was want to adorn,  
He lifted it onto His head,  
went to tip it into the unfinished earthwork,  
and returned for more, all the while perspiring  
like one who is greatly fatigued.  
The delicate flavour of the cakes He had eaten  
remained on His tongue,  
and His gracious loving gaze  
rested often upon that old woman.

286

‘These cakes are very good,’ He said,  
shaking his moon-crowned locks.  
‘They are even more pleasing to the Lord  
than the tender meat placed before Him  
by the huntsman Kannappa’.<sup>5</sup>  
Then, His mattock slung over His shoulder,  
and the upturned basket covering his head,  
He would stop and perform a lively dance,  
and having dug out and heaped up the earth,  
He would run swiftly and leap-frog playfully over it  
on His way back.

287

When she observed the behaviour  
of the supreme Lord who ruled her love-filled heart,  
she said nothing about her obligation to complete  
her own section of the dam  
but thought anxiously to herself:  
‘If the agents of the Pandyan king see this,  
they will surely cause me grief.  
What am I to do, beset as I am by conflicting fortunes?’

288

The victorious Lord who dances in the Silver Hall,  
discovering her troubled state said:  
‘Mother! I’ll heap a basket or two of earth onto the embankment  
and quickly finish off this stretch of the dam assigned to you.  
Do not worry yourself on that account.  
Now go along to your worthy home.’

289

Dismissed by the Immaculate One  
whose holy form is adorned by sacred ash,  
she in whose face the wrinkles were deeply etched  
retired to her ancient old house.  
Meanwhile, as Lord Siva built up the section of the dam  
assigned to her whose noble penances are hard to tell,  
the maidenly Vaigai, fearing him, and moderating her passion,  
joined her wavy hands together in worshipful greeting.

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<sup>5</sup> Kannappa, a hunter, was a devotee of Lord Siva. Even his offering of raw meat was most pleasing to Lord Siva on account of his deep devotion.

290

Using His noble earth basket as a pillow  
for His holy head with its matted locks,  
and taking for His bed the sand heaped high  
in the shade of a colourful, brightly blossoming kondrai tree,<sup>6</sup>  
the bounteous Lord, whose invisible presence  
pervades the whole world,  
lay down to sleep, as if He was fatigued and tired  
by the strenuous exertions of His work.

291

While He slept there, he who had fully attained  
to the greater life of the Lord's grace,  
the sage Vadavurar, turned to the assembled group  
of those who wielding the rod,  
supervised those imposing works and said:  
'Go and assess the qualities, good and bad,  
of the work performed in your allotted sectors.'  
With this, they set off for the broad river bank.

292

They were highly pleased to see that all  
had properly completed the repairs to the embankment,  
but when they came to the section of the broad, high, river bank  
over which Lord Sankara had charge,  
they questioned those who stood nearby saying:  
'When all the rest is built up high,  
this section alone remains low.  
to whom does it belong? Tell us at once.'  
To which the bystanders replied:

293

'It belongs to a stranger who came to this place alone  
and took work as a labourer for the old dame  
who makes her living selling rice cakes  
in the streets of this great and prosperous city, lofty Madurai.  
Digging up the rich earth, He'll pour it into his basket,  
and stand a while weeping loudly,  
then lifting it onto His head,  
He'll go off in the wrong direction,  
spilling its contents in random heaps.

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<sup>6</sup> The kondrai is the Indian laburnum, with long, bright-yellow strands of blossoms. Its flowers are traditionally associated with Siva and His worship.

294

'He sings and performs dances.  
He'll carry a basket of earth very slowly  
up onto the top of the strong high embankment,  
and then, pouring it away,  
He'll stand there for a long time without moving;  
He'll run away, and come rushing back again;  
He'll come with a single handful of earth,  
and sprinkle it on top of the dam.  
Tell Him to go and He'll come.  
Tell Him to come and He'll go.

295

'He eats rice-cakes, and clapping His hands together, cries out:  
"Yes sir, these are really good!"  
To look at his fair hands  
you would say He was the young son of a king.  
He goes for long naps in the shade of the kondrai tree  
with its long clusters of flowers,  
and takes not the slightest notice of our reprimands.  
Come and see for yourselves.'

296

In response to their words  
the powerful leaders of these overseers said:  
'Let him be brought here!',  
and one of their number hurried to where the Lord  
was sleeping the blissful sleep of absorption in His divine nature.  
Whereupon that Destroyer  
of the three rich cities of his demon enemies  
awoke, opened His eyes wide, and leapt up, as if startled.

297

His eyes, as they opened,  
fell upon the fearsome sight of the overseer,  
hurrying towards Him.  
When this officer, drawing near  
directed a stream of scathing abuse at Him,  
and ordered Him to come,  
Lord Siva hung back, trembling with fear and weeping.  
Seeing that, the cruel overseer angrily grasped  
the Lord's blameless fair hand  
and dragged Him along.

298

Pushing and shoving Him hurriedly along,  
that officer brought the Lord to the presence of his superior,  
whose cruelty was without bounds.  
Whereupon that depraved one, greatly angered,  
turned to one of his companions  
whose depravity equalled his own and said,  
'Beat Him until the warm, red blood flows'.

299

As that harsh-spoken, cruel-hearted overseer  
wrathfully grasped the rod in his hand  
all the Gods and all the rishis  
raised their fair hands in worship to the Lord,  
and when the blow fell, that faultless One,  
who gave just one half of Himself  
to His loving consort, the fair Goddess Uma,  
disappeared from view, to the consternation of all.

300

When the body of Lord Siva, the Destroyer, was struck,  
the blow was felt by the Pandyan king,  
over whose resplendent shoulders lay a garland of neem;  
by his lady wives and his ministers;  
by the army which carried the battle  
to all the King's enemies;  
by Brahma, Vishnu and all the rishis;  
by the moon, and by the fiery sun in his celestial chariot;  
by glorious Indra and the rest of the Gods;  
by the ocean, the land and the forests.

301

He was the Noble Lord whose head and feet  
the four-faced Brahma, and Vishnu,  
with his conch and discus, were unable to see and know,  
though they shed their true form and adopted another.  
Yet there He stood for all to see.  
When that blow landed on His body,  
the swelling cacophony of voices  
which issued forth from the inhabitants of all the worlds,  
as they cried out 'My body has been struck!'  
was like the terrible clamour of the ocean  
as it rises up with an angry roar at the aeon's end.

302

The Lord of Tillai came in the form of a labourer  
and carried earth upon His head,  
so that even the ignorant and unenlightened  
of this earthly realm might perceive His inner nature  
and praise the ruddy lotus feet of the One  
who is the life that lives and moves  
within each of the 84 million separate species,  
variously arising in the numberless universes  
which appear like bubbles  
on the surface of the great, dark ocean of illusion  
known as 'maya'.

303

When the sage Vadavurar in his turn  
felt upon his own body the blow meted out  
to Him whose holy throat contains the black venom,  
he fainted quite away,  
and when he came to himself  
he thought over and over again with pain in his heart:  
'Is it to preserve me, and subject me to His rule  
that the True Lord has been pleased  
to graciously manifest Himself  
as the hired labourer of one of our citizens?'

304

Thus did he who had banished the evils of birth and death  
grieve for his Lord and God,  
who greatness had thus gone unrecognised.  
His body shook as the tears ran down,  
and his mind was filled with anguish.  
Just then those overseers hurried into his presence,  
and recounted in detail  
the divine sports of the King of Heaven.

305

He whose heart melted with deep emotion  
out of the great love he felt for the Lord,  
the most wise sage Vadavurar,  
grew weak and faint as he listened to that report,  
and floods of tears coursed down from his eyes.  
Finally he said: 'Take me and show me  
the place where the noble Lord,  
whose locks shines with a bright effulgence,  
carried earth upon His head,' and with these words  
he set off hurriedly for that place  
in the company of those overseers.

306

The true devotee Vadavurar cried out:  
'Supreme One, You who graciously manifested in human form,  
to keep me, a simple supplicant at Your feet,  
from plunging into the lowest pit of Hell,  
whose depths none have plumbed,  
You are indeed everywhere! You are in all things!'  
Thus did he speak as he fell down,  
rolling upon the ground, bathed in tears  
his hands joined in supplication,  
and the hair of his trembling body standing on end.

307

'Immaculate One, whose golden body is smeared with sacred ash!  
You whose locks are crowned with the great River Ganges,  
and who make yourself accessible to Your followers!  
You who destroyed the three cities of the Asuras, when they opposed You!  
When the rod struck,  
was there not dismay in the heart of the slender Uma,  
She who shares Your form,  
and whose nature is 'Siva jnana' the knowledge of Yourself?

308

'The noble Uma, She whose breasts  
leave their impress upon Your fair chest,  
can She have entertained the thought of Her Lord  
carrying earth as a mere labourer?  
and how is it that the holy Ganges  
did not wash away that earth with her watery hands?  
Could she not recognise those serpent adorned locks,  
which the lotus dwelling Brahma,  
adopting the form of a swan, sought in vain?

309

'Lord, what did You use as a pad for Your head  
when You carried the earth?  
Was it the fragrant flowers that so often  
Mal and Ayan spread before You  
to free themselves from the toils of birth?  
Or was it the fresh, green leaves,  
which Your devotees bring as offerings?  
Was it the tangled coils of Your ruddy locks,  
or the fair new moon, or the manifold hoods  
of the striped serpent with its thousand mouths!

310

‘As my supreme Lord Siva performed His dance,  
exchanging His sacred hall for the banks of the Vaigai river,  
famed in bardic song,  
and accompanied, not by the sound of ethereal drums,  
but by the roar of the torrent’s cresting waves,  
were those who beheld that sight  
transformed in that moment  
into the forms of those two great sages,  
Patanjali, who wears a serpent’s form,  
and noble Vyaghrapada,<sup>7</sup> the man-tiger,  
whose foreswore his murderous ways?

311

‘Under the gaze of the Southern King,  
whose standard is emblazoned with the carp,  
I saw Him come on a swift-galloping steed  
to receive the gift of a silk cloth  
on the end of His beautiful whip.  
He raised baskets of earth upon His holy locks  
which are adorned with kondrai blossoms, rich in nectar.  
What pleasure, then, can I derive  
from having attained to the holy feet of my Lord Siva!

312

‘Supreme Lord! Vishnu Indra, Brahma , the ancient Vedas’ Lord,  
and all the Gods who dwell in heaven,  
though all of these in turn pay obeisance at Your feet,  
yet did You graciously deign to receive my humble homage also,  
working as a labourer for an old dame,  
damning up the beautiful Vaigai river,  
and suffering a beating for your trouble.

313

‘Sire! I did not have the joyous fulfilment  
of seeing and worshipping Your Divine Form,  
when, with a tattered cloth tied around Your waist  
in a place of a rich girdle,  
with a mattock slung over Your divine shoulders,  
and with an upturned basket covering Your knotted hair  
You followed behind that old dame,  
whose penances were great  
and who gave you rice cakes to eat.

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<sup>7</sup> Patanjali –The Serpent Devotee, and Vyaghrapada – The Tiger-footed One. Their legends are told in the Koyil Puranam, which narrates the legends of Chidambaram. On account of their great attainment, they are permitted to witness the Lord’s cosmic dance in Chidambaram, and are often thus depicted in pictures and statuary.

314

‘You who wear a flower garland in your matted locks,  
amongst those who did see You,  
tell us, who was the most highly accomplished in spiritual discipline,  
was it the Pandyan King in his resplendent crown of gold,  
or those who stood on the tall banks of the Vaigai river,  
famed for its flowing waters?  
Was it the citizens of the great city of Madurai?  
or the old dame who graciously gave her cakes of rice?’

315

‘The illustrious section of the dam,  
which the virtuous Lord ascended,  
bearing earth upon His head with Its golden braids,  
that great river, known as the cool Vaigai,  
and the ancient southern city of Madurai  
where a spirited steed was ridden  
by the Lord who vanquishes with his third eye of wisdom  
the hostile effects of men’s deeds –  
surely these three deserve the name  
of “Lord Siva’s heavenly abode!”’

316

Even as that love-filled devotee stood  
piteously beseeching the Lord in this manner,  
the great river with its close-pressing waves  
dried up and disappeared.  
The Southern King, realising that all this  
was the divine sport of Lord Siva,  
approached that king amongst men, Vadavurar,  
and greeting him with respect,  
addressed him thus:

317

‘Most accomplished sage,  
descending from the abode of the gods,  
you graciously came and took birth  
in the venerable caste of royal ministers.  
Poor wretch that I was,  
you joyfully granted me the sight of our Father,  
riding upon a spirited steed,  
and decreed by your divine will  
that the worldly fetters  
which bound me should fall away!’

318

‘Yet I failed to see that the Lord  
was displaying that holy form  
to allay the effects of my good and evil deeds,  
and when, through a trick of maya’s unfathomable illusion,  
He whom even divine Vishnu could not see and know  
came riding upon a charger,  
accompanied by the heavenly host.  
I gave the gift of a vile rag  
to Him whom even the Gods in heaven worship!  
Great One, what a sin have I committed!’

319

‘Not realising that you had caused Lord Siva,  
who bears the holy river in His ruddy locks,  
to come mounted upon a steed of rare worth,  
embodying the one true reality in human form,  
lowly creature that I was, I chose the course  
which leads only to suffering,  
and caused a deed to be performed  
whose wickedness is hard to describe.  
May you graciously forgive all my transgressions,  
that I may be spared the descent into the pit of Hell!’

320

‘That the Lord whose locks are adorned with the bright serpent  
should come mounted upon a noble steed, and moreover,  
that He should carry baskets of earth upon those locks  
which fragrant flowers are wont to adorn, surely this is glory enough!  
I beg you henceforth to resume dominion over this earth  
whilst I in return shall offer you daily my devout service.’

321

In response to the powerful king’s entreaty,  
Vadavurar turned to that just monarch  
who protects the southern realm and said:  
‘If the Lord whose glittering locks hang down behind  
commanded me this very day  
to return to His abode in Perunturai,  
then only would I consider that this earth  
had been placed in my dominion.’

322

The king who ruled in the South grieved in his heart,  
thinking: 'In a devotee of the Primal Lord,  
what desire can there be for this kingly life,'  
and prostrating himself at Vadavurar's tender feet,  
he said, 'Do then, that which you must do'.  
Then surrounded by his army  
he returned into the ancient city of Madurai.

323

After the king had departed, accompanied by his army,  
which was ever chivalrous in its conduct,  
he who greatly excelled in his love for Lord Siva,  
desiring to attain to the greater life  
of union with that divine effulgence,  
which only they attain who are without attachment,  
removed his royal apparel, thinking to himself,  
'To wear these is a grievous fault,'  
and dressed himself once more  
in the garb of a holy sage of great attainment.

324

Having prayed to the Supreme Father,  
the noble Lord who dwells within the temples portals,  
he departed from the fair city of Madurai  
whose woodland groves the clouds adorn.  
Overcome by a great and fitting desire  
to see and worship the holy form of the Guru,  
which the wise Lord had adopted to come and enslave him,  
he rushed off like a madman towards Perunturai.

325

As he walked along, hurrying towards the dwelling place  
of that wise teacher who had placed His holy feet upon his head,  
to dispel his soul's poverty, Vadavurar resembled the wind,  
or an agile mind in his movements.  
He was like a cow anxiously seeking her lost calf,  
or a stream which bursts through its containing dam.

326

Swiftly traversing cities,  
and forests impenetrable to the eye,  
he came to beautiful Perunturai,  
home of countless holy ascetics.  
There, falling down in humble obeisance  
at the golden feet of Heaven's King,  
who was seated as before,  
amidst the company of his pious devotees,  
he addressed Him thus:

327

'Praise be to You whose body bears  
the imprint of fair Uma's breasts,  
so hard for mortal man to touch,  
and of the overseer's rod,  
administered here on earth!  
Noble Lord, to You who,  
adopting Your chosen form,  
came riding on a spirited steed  
to bestow upon us that grace  
which enslaves us to Your will,  
Praise be! Praise be!

328

'To You who are beyond the reach  
of the gods themselves, praise be!  
To You who make Yourself accessible  
to Your devotees, praise be!  
To You who bore earth upon Your head,  
that the Pandyan land of the fair Tamil tongue  
might thrive, praise be!  
To You who showed me Your blissful form  
and placed Your holy lotus feet upon my head,  
to the Enlightened One,  
Praise be! Praise be!'

329

The Lord, placing His fair hand upon the head  
of him who thus sang anthems of praise,  
spoke sweet words to him and bade him arise.  
And when he had arisen,  
He adorned his devotee with sacred ash,  
and bestowed upon him  
a glance which perfected in him  
the true knowledge of reality.  
And so did the immaculate Lord remain,  
gloriously adorning the ranks of His disciples.

330

The Lord who is without beginning and without end  
turned to His devotees and said:  
'The task We came to perform has been fully completed.  
Meanwhile, those who dwell upon holy Mount Kailash  
are greatly desirous of seeing Our effulgent form,  
and are fixing their meditations upon Us.  
We must return with all speed  
and complete their happiness.'

331

When the Lord said:  
'Remain here and dwell in happiness. We shall depart,'  
His disciples, who were the embodiment of divine grace,  
surrounded Him and showered Him with praise.  
Bending low they prostrated themselves before Him crying out:  
'Master, to remain alone here upon the earth  
is too hard for us to bear.'  
Falling to the ground in a swoon, they lay there weeping:  
'Can it be that You are abandoning us?'  
they sighed in their grief.

332

Filled with a great affection for those devotees  
who wept out of their great love for Him,  
the great teacher addressed them saying:  
'Cease from your grieving.  
In the shade of this most fragrant kuruntham tree  
you shall build in splendid fashion  
an altar fit for the gods,  
on the top of which you shall venerate  
My holy feet, which even the unerring Vedas seek.

333

'Leaving behind your intolerable suffering,  
and realising that it is none other than my own Self,  
you should willingly perform daily obeisance before Me  
out of your unquenchable love.  
In this manner you should all remain in this place,  
your minds suffused with My grace.  
Then, on a certain day, a pure fire shall appear  
within this taint-free tank.

334

‘As the flames leap up, you should cast yourselves into the inferno  
and come thus into My presence,  
freeing yourself from your sorrowful existence.’  
Thus did the Lord speak.  
Then with His disciples, adepts in praiseworthy austerities,  
flocking behind him, Tillai’s Lord, departed walking softly,  
on his way to the fair mountain, holy Kailash.

335

When He said, ‘You devotees who are so hard to leave,  
come no further!’  
they bowed to him saying, ‘Shall we ever see You again?’  
Like children separated from their mother,  
their confusion was unbearable as they stood there  
worshipping His flowery feet,  
and watching the departure of the Master of Illusion.

336

While the rest stopped where they were,  
Vadavurar, who was greatly blessed with the Lord’s sweet grace,  
followed after his Master,  
who had come to ensure the prosperity of his lineage.  
The Lord who shares His form with Her  
whose breasts are young and shapely,  
was delighted to see His devotee coming after Him,  
and seated Himself in the shade of a kondrai tree,  
intent on dispelling his suffering.

337

When Lord Siva had seated Himself ,  
splendorously adorning that kondrai tree,  
which was like a great mountain,  
girt all about with leafy boughs,  
and festooned with bright garlands of golden flowers,  
Vadavurar, shedding copious tears,  
prostrated himself at His tender feet  
and, arising, stood in an attitude of worship before Him.  
Then his Master, out of His love for him,  
placed him at His side and spoke to him these words of grace:

338

‘The shade of that kuruntham tree is ever foremost  
amongst those holy sites where Our grace may be bestowed  
upon those who are free of all envy.  
Though, in all the worlds, Our presence is everywhere,  
yet do We always inhabit this place especially,  
desiring to banish the bitter effects  
of the deeds of those who come here  
and to subject them to our rule.

339

‘Since this is the place where sound is absorbed into myself  
and where I do not perform My cosmic dance  
as My consort Uma looks on,  
I am not worshipped here by the fine music  
of any instruments whatsoever,  
except by the auspicious conch,  
symbol of the sound which roars  
in the sushumna channel of the body  
when the radiant energy flashes upwards.

340

‘Having thus correctly perceived  
that nature of My manifestation in this place,  
you too should remain in the shade of this good kuruntham tree,  
devoting yourself to the worship of My holy feet  
in the company of My devotees who excel in holy austerities.  
Then, when you see the conflagration blaze up over the tank,  
you should not go with all the rest, plunging into that inferno.  
Rather should you depart swiftly from that place.

341

Go first to Our shrine in Uttara-Kosa-Mangai,  
and there obtain for yourself all the supernatural powers.  
Then, if you perform worship to Us in the holy places  
where our Divine Image is installed in the form of the lingam,  
you shall be granted in each of them  
the sight of this gracious bodily manifestation.

342

Having worshipped Me in all those cities  
you should, departing thence, pay obeisance to Me  
in the great shrine of lofty Karugundram  
before returning to the Golden Hall to defeat  
the Buddhists in scholarly debate.  
Finally, you shall attain to divine union with My holy feet.’

We shall now tell how he whose devotion was great and abiding  
paid homage to the Lord,  
whose locks are adorned with the serpent,  
at his many holy shrines;  
how he composed the divinely inspired Tiruvachakam;  
how he came to Chidambaram's Golden Hall  
and defeated the Buddhists in debate,  
and how at last he merged with the lotus feet  
of Lord Siva, so hard to reach.