

Chapter VI The Victory over the Buddhists in Debate

414

A great ascetic, one who was indissolubly bound
to the holy feet of the Lord with the long, trailing locks,
conceived in his mind the desire to survey the riches of
and ascertain the truth about the ocean-girt earth.
Accordingly, having visited the Chola kingdom
and worshipped in Tillai's shrine,
he arrived on his voyage of discovery in the flawless land of Ilam.¹

415

That most excellent of holy sages reached the royal seat
of the king who ruled over the richly endowed land of Ilam,
and there, out of the deep devotion which suffused his mind and heart,
he began wherever he went to proclaim the following message:
'May the Golden Hall of Tillai flourish throughout endless time.'

416

During those days when the sage was going about
proclaiming wherever he went the glory
of the noble Hall of purest gold,
some ignorant men, quite lacking in all good qualities,
came before the king of Ilam
and, prostrating themselves before him with great devotion,
gleefully addressed him as follows:
'Hear, our king, this news, which we have brought to you.'

417

One endowed with unswerving rectitude has come to this city.
Adorned with fine jewels and rudraksha beads,
he lives from day to day by begging for alms.
Whether he's standing or sitting or lying, he never ceases
to proclaim the greatness of the effulgent 'Hall of Gold'.
They finished speaking and stood there before the king.

¹ Sri Lanka, which was a Buddhist kingdom.

418

When the king commanded, 'Bring him before me this very day,'
they went to where he was and said to him:
'Great devotee, our powerful monarch has summoned you!
Please come with us.'
To which the sage replied:
'What business can your great king have with one who,
free of all blame and praise,
has no other thought in his mind
than to live from day to day, begging for alms?'

419

They in turn insisted, saying:
'It is the desire of every great king
to watch over the lives of all those
who dwell within his realm,
even of those who live by begging
and who have no further involvement
in the affairs of the world.
Therefore, you must come to our king
who wears a fragrant flower-garland.'
Thereupon that sage whom no evil marred went along
in the company of those heralds
with their brightly glinting spears.

420

The king whose shoulders were fine and strong
was seated on his royal throne, surrounded by his army,
and at his side stood a Buddhist sage
who was versed in the three great pitakas,²
was free of the four defects,
was endowed with the five ancient virtues,
possessed the ability to restrain the thirty paramitas,
and upheld the doctrine that liberation
consisted in the dissolution of the five skandhas.³

² Three Pitakas or baskets of the Southern Buddhist Canon. They have been estimated by English translators to be eleven times the size of the Christian Bible.

³ The five aggregates (skandhas) are the scheme the Buddha chose to describe the nature of the individual human existence. The five aggregates are: the material organism (rupa); sensation (vedana); conception (saijia); volition (samskara); and consciousness (vijjana).

421

Calling out an invocation to the Golden Hall,
the holy ascetic came and stood near to the king,
who trembled with fear
as he beheld his matchless white loin-cloth,
his staff and bright begging pouch,
the long cane decorated with bells that he held in his hand,
his holy countenance adorned with a vivid vermilion mark,
the matted locks piled up high,
which trembled as he moved,
and the hint of a smile that played about his lips.

422

Turning to the great sage who stood there before him,
that ruler whose dominion encompassed the earth enquired of him:
'What is the true meaning of the phrase
'Sacred Hall' which you repeat?'
To which he replied: 'In the land ruled by the illustrious Chola king,
who protects it with the abounding grace of his steadfast gaze,
there is a holy place which fosters righteousness,
and the name of it is "Chidambaram".

423

'Before it stands the sacred grove of Tillai.
It shines out as the foremost holy place in all the worlds
and it is known therefore as the primordial shrine.
It is accessible to all,
and bears the noble title of "Centre of the Earth".
Here it is that the Supreme Lord performs His cosmic dance
under the gaze of His consort, Uma,
whose breasts are smeared with a paste of sandalwood.

424

'In that place there is a blessed holy tank
which cured the leprosy of Singavanman,
that son of Manu whose strength is ever unailing,
and which endowed him with a form
like that of great golden Mount Meru.
Those who bathe there and then witness the holy dance
in which the Lord performs the five sacred operations,
even if they have never before upon this earth
performed a single act of devotion,
they shall be freed henceforth
from the worldly cycle of births.

425

‘This is the place where, to prove His mastery
over the highly esteemed gods of other faiths,
the Lord, wearing beautiful anklets of pure gold,
and displaying His standard emblazoned with the Bull,
triumphantly performs His cosmic dance
as His consort Uma looks on,
thereby freeing men’s souls from the pressing toils of birth
and bestowing upon them the good gift of final liberation.

426

‘Even those who are wicked in word and deed,
whose evil minds do not contemplate the two holy feet
of the Lord who bears the flooding Ganges in his matted locks,
if they call but once upon the Golden Hall,
it will be as if they had repeated 21,600 times
the sacred five-lettered mantra which bestows liberation.’
Thus spoke the one whose glory was without bounds.

427

‘King, you who know nothing of the sacred ash and the Five Holy Letters,
such is the import of the phrase ‘Holy Golden Hall’ which I am reciting,’
said he whose inner qualities were great and abiding like mountains.
At this the Buddhist sage, growing angry, cried out:
‘Can there be any god other than the supreme one
whose teaching is enshrined in the three pitakas?’

428

‘I myself shall depart and journey to the place called Tillai
and there, engaging in scholarly debate,
I shall destroy the power of the anklets
which adorn that God’s dancing feet,
and tear down His tall ensign, emblazoned with the Bull.
Proving for all the world to know that the Lord Buddha,
he who sits in the bodhi tree’s shade,
is the one true God,
I shall offer that same Golden Hall to him as his own abode.

429

‘This task I shall accomplish within three days,’
he said, rising to his feet and mounting his beautiful palanquin.
Then, surrounded by the host of his disciples
who worshipped his holy feet, he crossed the ocean
whose waves cast up abundant shells of the conch,
traversed forests and cities,
and came swiftly to the City of the Tiger,
goaded on by the distress that filled his mind.

430

The king, hoping to cure the dumbness of his daughter
who was dearer to him than all his wealth,
reflected to himself that it was fitting
that he too should journey to the Golden Hall.
Surrounded by his army,
he mounted his matchless great palanquin
and travelling into the Chola land,
entered the precincts of Chidambaram.

431

Meanwhile, even as he prepared to depart,
the Buddhist sage arrived
within the precincts of Tillai’s great city,
abode of Him whose ruddy hand grasps the cosmic flame.
There, alighting from his palanquin,
he entered the beautiful temple of the Lord of Chidambaram,
He who wears in his matted locks
the cool, swelling flood of the Ganges,
and came into a hall which was lavishly decorated
with ornaments of pure gold.

432

While he remained there, the king arrived,
prostrated himself before his guru
and praised him, his heart overflowing with joy.
Noticing their arrival,
all those who performed holy service in the temple
to the Lord in whose matted locks a nest of serpents writhe,
banded together and converged upon them.

433

Deeply wounded as they were, each of them, in mind and heart,
their anger flared forth like fire
and they spoke a few curt words
that filled the Buddhist throng with dread:
'Buddhist sage, go at once and leave the bounds of Tillai's city.
This we shall not tolerate!'

434

The Buddhist sage stood up before the Chola king,
who wears a garland of flowers, and taking up his religious tract,
affirmed: 'The Saiva faith which you uphold is worthless.
We shall not leave until we have proved conclusively,
here and now, that the exalted Lord Buddha is the one Supreme God.'

435

After hearing the Buddhist speak in this manner
those who were present departed swiftly, saying:
'We must inform everyone of this state of affairs.'
Going from house to house they conveyed the news
to those citizens of Chidambaram who were practised
in religious austerities,
to those who were pre-eminent in their knowledge of the Vedas,
and to those who were employed in the holy service of the Lord.

436

Upon hearing the report of that speech
which was like a spear probing a wound in their flesh,
they converged all together upon the temple of the Lord,
saying as they hurried along:
'We shall assemble in the beautiful jewelled Hall
and hear the arguments of this Buddhist who has arrived.'

437

Seeing as they approached that the Buddhist,
devoid as he was of true knowledge,
did not advance to greet them,
they rebuked him angrily, saying:
'You who are quite ignorant of the path of your own salvation!
How is it that you show no reverence,
but remain seated there in this disrespectful manner?'

438

‘On the authority of your Vedas with their subsidiary branches,
your Agamas and your Puranas,
you claim that yours alone is the one true God.
Likewise do I make the same claim for the God I worship.
Therefore state your beliefs before me.’
said the Buddhist guru.

439

Those brahmins, learned in the Vedas which all men praise,
grew angry saying: ‘We shall overwhelm you in debate,
and our learned scholars shall proclaim aloud your discomfiture.
Meanwhile, what would be the point of speaking further with you?
It would be like throwing a large stone into a muddy pond.

440

‘When an enraged dog is barking,
even great men who perform good deeds
are bound by duty to stop and calm its fury.
Similarly, even though we demean ourselves
through our contact with one so base as you,
yet we do not demur to refute
your empty claims in debate.

441

‘If the debate takes place before the assembled company
of all-powerful kings,
and those learned men whose judgement is true,
they will be able to decide which arguments are true,
and which false.
This is the course of action we should adopt,
since it would leave no room for any confusion.’

442

The wise men of Tillai whose penances were true
wrote a message to the king explaining the situation:
that the citizens of Chidambaram,
being unable to counter the Buddhist’s arguments,
would become angry and beat him,
thereby incurring the censure of the world.

443

Accordingly many letters were sent out containing joyous tidings
and inviting brahmins, holy ascetics and learned professors
to assemble in the Golden Hall on the next day for divine worship.
Meanwhile, the sun set and the moon rose up in its turn.

444

Like the spot on the bright forehead
of the maid who rules the lofty heavens,
like the bright mirror wherein the maiden Night
admires her reflection,
like the pearl-studded umbrella which shades
the Lord whose long ear-rings
are embellished with conch-shells,
the great Moon God appeared
gloriously adorning the entire earth.

445

‘Buddhist, remain here just one day more’, they told him,
and tomorrow we shall expose your baseness to the world.’
So saying, all those noble men departed for the night,
ate a good meal, and slept deeply inside their fine houses.

446

Meanwhile, before the sun rose up
the Lord who dances in the beautiful Hall
adopted the pleasing form of a holy ascetic,
staff in hand, His body smeared with sacred ash,
and His luxuriant matted locks piled high on His head.
In this guise He appeared to all those brahmins of Tillai,
and spoke to them thus in their dreams:

447

‘Do not be distressed, for on the outskirts of our city
the sage Vadavurar dwells,
seated in loving contemplation of the Lord.
As soon as he hears this message he will come,
and, employing appropriate works of doctrine,
will defeat the Buddhist in debate.
Therefore go immediately and summon him hither,
you who are dignified by your austere penances!’

448

After dreaming this dream they awoke
and realised upon careful consideration
that these were the words of the Lord of the Golden Hall,
He who shares His form with Her
whose arms are adorned with bright bangles.
Whereupon they were filled with joy,
and joining their fair hands above their heads,
they all came and gathered
in the assembly hall of the temple.

449

Whereas formerly they had been greatly distressed
by the claims of the ignorant Buddhist,
their features were now radiant with joy
at the words which the Lord, out of His infinite compassion
had come to impart to them in that momentous dream.
They were like lotus blossoms
tightly closed in night's powerful grip
subsequently unfolding themselves
to the rays of the rising sun.

450

They all spoke at once, telling each other how
under the spreading cloak of darkness
The Lord who performs His holy dance in the Sacred Hall
had appeared to them in a dream,
grasping the fair staff of a holy mendicant
with ruddy matted locks and ash-besmeared body,
and how to their great joy,
He had imparted to them a certain message.

451

As they spoke with wonderment of the Great Father,
the Lord who dances in the Sacred Hall,
devotion grew stronger in each one's heart,
and putting aside their former sadness,
they hurried off to that noble palm-leaf hut,
thinking to themselves,
'We must go quickly to the place
where the true ascetic Vadavur abides!'

452

Reaching this palm-leaf hut they lovingly sought out
that mountain of divine grace, Vadavurar,
and rejoiced as they beheld him
seated majestically in the lotus posture.
When he had arisen from his yogic contemplation
they repeated to him, marvelling,
everything that the Lord who dances
in the Sacred Hall had told them.

453

When the import of their words dawned on his understanding,
Vadavurar, mindful of the instructions
which he had formerly received from Tillai's Lord,
returned swiftly to the city,
accompanied by those who had come to summon him.
Having first worshipped the Lord of the Sacred Hall
and obtained His blessings,
he repaired to the jewelled Hall where sat the Buddhist
whose understanding was bewildered and confused.
Saying: 'Merely to look upon his evil face would be a sin,'
he ordered a curtain to be erected masking him from view
and finally seated himself upon a gorgeous throne,
facing his opponent.

454

The king of the fertile Chola land came hurrying,
surrounded by brahmins
versed in the scriptures' eternal lore, puranic experts,
and wise men learned in the exacting disciplines
of the arts and sciences.
Paying homage at the shrine of Tillai's Lord,
he departed from there and came to the Hall
adorned with glittering gems.
Having praised the blessed devotee Vadavurar,
and worshipped his holy feet,
he seated himself on a beautiful couch
close at his side,
resembling in his royal state the moon at the full,
when it displays all its sixteen phases.

455

The king of the rich land of Ilam arose and paid
homage to the Chola King,
presented to him the remainder of his tribute,
and stood there crying out,
'Great sovereign, long may your rule prosper!'
The noble Chola King, joyfully replied to him saying:
'These are indeed fine elephants.
And these jewels are truly beyond price!'
Then, when he had respectfully placed
the foreign king at his side,
and settled himself in the midst of that crowded assembly,
those whose task it was to deliver the important judgement
seated themselves in close attendance about him.

456

After the brahmins and holy ascetics of Chidambaram
were comfortably seated in fine array,
the celestials too foregathered in that great assembly
to witness the debate between the sage Vadavurar,
who was learned in the weighty texts of the Agamas,
and the Buddhist, in whom all virtuous qualities were lacking.
Vishnu, Rudra and Brahma, bestower of the ancient Vedas,
all were there, along with the seven rishis
and the guardian deities of the eight directions,
along with the heavenly choir, and the sun and moon,
who illuminate day and night with their rays.

457

Seated in the midst of his great army,
The king of the land where the cool, golden Kaviri river flows
made obeisance to the holy feet of him
whose home was in the land where southern Perunturai lies.
Then, standing before him, he addressed him thus:
'To defend the Saiva faith, and establish its true wisdom,
that shall be your task, whilst mine, afterwards,
will be to destroy the lives of those Buddhists in this very place!'

458

Upon hearing the words of the Chola king,
which struck terror into the hearts
of those treacherous Buddhist visitors,
Vadavur exultantly addressed their leader, saying:
'You whose words are full of deceit!
Explain the reason why you have come here!'
These words pierced the attentive ears
of the Buddhist like darts,
and he replied as follows:

459

‘Affirming that there is no God other our Eternal Lord,
we have come to this great shrine
with the intent of installing our Lord Buddha
within the Golden Hall for all to see.
It is for this purpose that I came here yesterday,
and I entertain no object other than that.’

460

In reply, our Lord Vadavurar smiled and said:
‘You who are without the merit of former penances!
Tell me, can a mouse suddenly turn into an elephant?
Very good then, but leaving that aside,
pray speak to us of your good and great God,
and the deeds which a man must do
to reach the shelter of his holy feet!’

461

The Buddhist replied angrily
to the words of the noble sage, saying:
‘Is it possible to show the light of the sun’s rays
to one who has no eyes to see?
To speak the great glory of our transcendent Lord
would require countless thousands of virtuous tongues!’
Then he continued as follows:

462

‘Our Lord is he who gave forth the
three glorious repositories of all moral truth.
Out of his love for all forms of life,
he took noble birth for their benefit in many a womb.
then, having purged himself of the taint of killing
and the other three cardinal sins,
he seated himself in meditation
in the shade of a splendid bodhi tree.

463

The suffering of birth stems
from the indestructible and manifold awareness
which continually arises and disappears.
This awareness itself arises
through the conjunction of the five skandhas
which are form, which each creature adopts in the womb,
sensation, volition, conception, and consciousness.
Just so, liberation consists
in the dissolution and annihilation of these.’

464

Vadavurar fixed his gracious, holy gaze
upon the flawless countenance of the Lord of the land
where the abundant waters of the Kaviri River flow,
and thought to himself:

‘What might I say to this foolish Buddhist
who, adopting these erroneous views,
speaks such arrant nonsense?’

At length, he replied with these words:

465

‘On the one hand, you claim that your
Lord and Master gave forth holy works
which proclaim the moral laws;
on the other, you assert
that the evolving consciousness continually arises
and disappears in the twinkling of an eye.
How then, can you affirm
that your Lord composed the dark, delusive pitakas,
when his very consciousness must necessarily subside
before he has time to promulgate his subject matter
and the manner of its expression, and speak it out?’

466

‘Thus it is established, that your faith
cannot possess any books of sacred law.
Furthermore, you claim that your God took birth
from many and varied wombs
for the benefit of living beings.
But how can the delusion of an evil doer be dispelled
by one who possesses the very same delusive awareness
which he came to eradicate!’

467

‘You affirmed that your king
would never contemplate the taking of life,
yet during the time that he took birth upon your earth
in so many successive incarnations
he must have taken the form of such creatures
as the fierce powerful tiger and the jackal,
and suffered the fierce pangs of hunger.
Did your great Lord of the bodhi tree confine himself
to a diet of grasses and green leaves then?’

468

'Unthinking fool! In your fraudulent scriptures,
you say that form is annihilated along with the five skandhas.
Where, then, is the form which your Lord possesses?
And how can he be said to pass from womb to womb,
assuming successive embodiments
out his desire to confer his grace upon living beings?

469

'Moreover, since soul and body,
which combine together as cause and effect,
are both in essence non-existent,
then the embodied form our your Lord,
who sits in the shade of a majestic bodhi tree,
is equally non-existent.
Fool, bereft of all wisdom!
Who was there, then, to compose
the text of your pitakas
which, through their absence of any true wisdom,
claim that liberation is merely total annihilation?

470

'You speak of Buddhas, twenty-one in number,
each of whom, as he was born,
tore open the body of his noble mother?
Can they really then be gods,
who commit the foul curse
of destroying the life of the parent who
lovingly bore them,
and who deserve to be cast
into the bottomless pit of Hell?

471

'In your falsehood-ridden works,
you say that in the embodied form there is
no soul principle existing separately from the
combination of the four delusive elements.
Senseless one! When a snake crawls across your face
in the middle of the night when you are sleeping,
will not the distinction became clear to you then?

472

'Your religion does not admit that consciousness
arises from the combination of spirit and material form.
But since it is admitted that,
upon the decay of the material form,
the life-force departs swiftly,
to combine with another form and undergo rebirth,
then you must frankly avow
the existence of form and spirit as separate entities.

473

'Quoting your sacred pitakas, you babble on,
saying that the fifth element, ether
does not exist,
and is therefore not the medium of sound.
The ether, you say, is a false postulate, not realising
that it provides the space necessary for the combination
of the elements earth, water, fire and air.
Pray explain the origin of the sounds you utter
which must necessarily be borne upon the ether!

474

'Whilst you deny the reality of the directions
which possess great extension in space,
it is you who perform obeisance to that bodhi tree
which is situated in the distant north.
If you repeated those arguments to an assembly
of the ignorant, insane and dishonest of this world,
then indeed your claims might find acceptance.

475

'You say that trees have no soul,
yet they are not different from us men,
whose bodies are compounded
out of the five eternal elements.
Taking, fresh water as their nourishment,
they grow up and spread their branches.
Without this food they are reduced to dried-out husks.
Therefore you will accept that the tree
is one of the forms of the diverse chain of births
through which our Lord decreed
that the precious souls of men
should be made to experience
the fruits of their former deeds.

476

‘Knowing that murder is a great and heinous sin,
yet you proclaim in your book of lies
that it is permissible upon this earth
to eat putrid flesh which has been slaughtered by others.
Is it acceptable then that those who tempt you
with offers of fresh meat,
severing the union of body and soul to satisfy your hunger,
should thus incur that sin on your behalf?’

477

‘Those who are versed in the holy Agamas,
handed down by Lord Siva himself,
whom the Vedas praise,
state that salvation consists in the destruction
not of the causal principle, the soul,
but of the manifest effect, the body.
You, however, demon-possessed as you are,
being unaware of these distinctions,
affirmed that liberation entailed the destruction
of the perfected soul along with the body.’

478

‘You claimed that liberation occurred
upon the annihilation of the five skandhas,
But if we inquire who they are
who have gained liberation in this fashion,
we see that, since their consciousness
arises along with these skandhas,
it must disappear along with them
upon their dissolution.
Thus there can be no liberation.’

479

The Buddhist, furious that the glorious lustre of his name
should be thus eclipsed, angrily cried:
‘Since you deny the existence of our God
and of our path to salvation,
pray tell us of your God
and your concept of final deliverance.’
Whereupon the Saiva sage replied,
out of his deep understanding
of the Lord, the abiding knowledge of Lord Siva:

480

'Can it be an easy matter to tell the great glory
of Him who silently taught the holy law,
seated in the shade of a beautiful banyan tree;
who shines within the Golden Hall,
as many devotees behold and worship His divine form;
whose body is besmeared with sacred ash;
who shares His form with the Goddess Uma,
and whose nature is suffused with divine grace?

481

'Are there any words which can convey
the measure of our King
who dwells in Tillai's beautiful hall,' said Vadavurar,
breaking off from the speech
which he graciously uttered,
and remaining silent, as in his mind
he considered many a verbal formula.
At this the contemptible Buddhist
bade him answer the question, saying:

482

'Previously you gave me to believe that your God
was one who dispersed the divine law
seated in the shade of a banyan tree.
Could it be that, as he counts off His holy beads,
He wonders whether there is not some superior deity
who is beyond the reach of His meditation?

483

'Again, you stated that this Lord of Tillai
performed His cosmic dance
as those who dwell upon this great earth look on in worship.
Is His dancing, then, for the benefit of a select company
of the wise of this world, or merely to satisfy His own whim!

484

'You stated that your Lord who dances in the Golden Hall
for the whole world's salvation, adorns His body with ashes.
Can it be that your ancient God does so
in the belief that even ashes
will look pure against the ruddy glow of His divine form?

485

‘You put forward as a reason for His greatness
the fact that your Lord shares His form with the Goddess Uma.
Has anyone ever heard of any creature upon this earth
which is half woman in its form!
And would it not be futile
to take up the life of renunciation
when half of the body of the God you worship
is female in form?’

486

In reply, He who had come upon the earth
that the devotees of the Lord of the Golden Hall
might attain to the higher life,
gave a deprecating smile and said:
‘As one who has performed no meritorious penances,
it is not fitting
that you should receive this worthy teaching.

487

‘However, you should know that the Lord seated Himself thus,
with a string of sacred beads in His hand,
so that the whole world might, through His example,
come to practise the highest religious disciplines.
That rosary might be compared to the hand-sword
with which a skilled master-at-arms
instructs his pupils in the art of hand-to-hand combat.

488

‘You accused our Lord of performing His dance
before fleshly eyes, like those vulgar performers
who have accumulated no store of spiritual discipline.
Rather should you reflect that, like the flame
which, in consuming firewood,
remains itself unchanged,
our Lord, as He dances, permeates the physical body,
and animates every soul.

489

‘As to why our Lord smears Himself with sacred ash,
you should reflect that He does so
in order to alleviate the suffering of men’s souls.
It is like a medicine which a nursing mother swallows
to ease the bitter pain that torments her new-born child.

490

'Buddhist! You whose lying words
are based upon your perverted understanding!
Stop and tell me if there is anyone else
who wears the sacred ash after the manner of our Lord.
The full truth concerning the good and holy ash
is expressed by the four Vedas.
Can it be an easy matter, then, for any man to explain it?

491

'To answer your claim that it was a great sin
for Goddess Parvati to be seated at our Lord's side,
He seated Himself thus in the company of His consort,
whose tresses are like clouds floating in the heavens,
in order that He might afford to men of the world
the necessary enjoyment of sensual pleasures.
The form of an accomplished ascetic,
He adopted for the benefit of the souls
most advanced in Siva yoga.

492

'Like a blind man whose awareness extends
no further than the staff which he grasps in his hand,
your understanding cannot penetrate beyond
the empty formulas you have learned to utter.
Blind as you are, you have failed to perceive
how the Lord who bestrides as His mount
a strong and beautiful Bull, pervades all creation
as perfume pervades a flower.

493

'He is the Primal One, the Yogic Adept
and the Universal Enjoyer;
He is the formless effulgence,
the wearer of manifold forms
and the ocean of bliss.
From His crown to His feet, who can say they know Him
save as the One who dwells within the Golden Hall,
where virtue reigns and sorrow never enters.'

494

He who was versed in all the profound and eternal
branches of knowledge then grew angry
with the eminent patroness of all the arts,
and cried out: 'Goddess Saraswati,
You who endow men and women with the gift of speech!
How can you allow to be spoken
such falsehoods as these?

495

'Patroness of all learning, who spoke forth
the entire collection of the Vedas!
Why do you now speak such untruths?
Have you forgotten now how Virabhadra
tore off your nose at Dakshan's sacrifice?⁴
Leave the tongue of this foolish Buddhist at once,
he who denies the existence of the gracious rule
of the Three-Eyed-One,
and submit yourself to the authority of Lord Siva!'
Hearing this, Goddess of Speech trembled with fear.

496

In fear at these words,
Saraswati departed from the tongues
of those deceitful Buddhists,
so that they were immediately struck dumb.
They cowered and trembled with fear,
as though they had swallowed poison.
Deeply troubled in his heart,
the king of Ilam, after due reflection,
fell in worship at the feet of him
who was possessed of
all the knowledge, without exception,
contained in the holy Saiva Agamas,
and coming to his feet, addressed him thus:

⁴ Saraswati, along with the other gods, attended Dakshan's sacrifice, even though he had not invited Siva and his consort Sati, who was Dakshan's daughter. Sati, however, decided to attend, was insulted by Dakshan and his wife, and in mortification threw herself into the flames and died. Siva dispatched the demon Virabhadra with an army of demons, to destroy the sacrifice. Saraswati's punishment was to have her nose cut off.

497

‘Those who could speak have been rendered dumb.
My daughter suffers from dumbness, and has never spoken.
Were that dumbness to disappear,
and the gift of clear speech to be granted her,
then should I become your own true devotee!
In reply the Lord Vadavurar said: ‘Bring her here without delay!’
Whereupon that young maiden
entered that just assembly,
where the truth had been upheld.

498

The virtuous sage turned to the young maiden,
who, approaching, stood there before him,
and having bestowed upon her his sweet glance of grace,
he called her forward and placed her before the assembly
saying: ‘Slender maiden, whose locks are cool and fragrant!
You shall deliver a clear refutation of all the arguments
put forward by those Buddhists who now stand by,
quaking inwardly with fear.’

499

Like a scholar of great learning and attainment,
that young maiden stood her ground and fully answered
all the points of debate raised by those Buddhists,
who had failed to grasp the nature of worldly attachment.
Greatly delighted by this, the true hearted Vadavurar,
taking this discourse as his subject matter,
composed the ‘Holy Caral’⁵ in which the verses are fitted
to a lively female game.

500

The king of Ilam himself,
after he had recited the five holy letters
and adorned himself with sacred ash,
placed himself reverentially before the sage
and became his devotee,
lacking none of the qualities
which befit a true disciple.
The Chola king, too cried out:
‘Praise be to the Golden Hall,
eternal abode of the Ancient One!’
and preceded to lavish praises
upon the glorious victor Vadavurar.

⁵ Hymn 12, The Tambour Song.

501

After he had stood before the eminent Saiva,
donned a necklace of rudraksha beads
and smeared his body with holy ash to become his devotee,
that noble monarch of the land of Ilam
humbly beseeched him to remove
the fearful affliction of dumbness from the Buddhist throng,
who, to their sorrow, clothed their bodies in ochre cloth,
dyed with the gall nut.

502

When the citizens of Chidambaram
and the king of the fertile land
encircled by the Kaviri river
lovingly paid homage to the sage, saying:
'Great Master! We beg you to comply
at once with this request,'
Vadavurar, whose glory was everlasting,
joyfully bestowed his gracious glance upon the Buddhists,
whereupon their dumbness was cured,
and, making obeisance before him,
they spoke as follows:

503

'You whose mind is unsullied by any taint!
Through the abiding evil of our deeds in former births,
we did not adorn ourselves with taint-free white ash,
nor did we recite the good Five Letters.
But we implore you now to bestow upon us,
robes of red-ochre, the holy ash,
with which to smear our bodies,
and rudraksha beads to place about our necks,
and to burn up these saffron robes!'
So saying they made numerous prostrations before him.

504

He who was unwavering in his rectitude
permitted himself a smile as he reflected:
'These are men who have accumulated a great store of
penances in former births!'
and proceeded to adorn them
with the dazzling lustre of sacred ash,
and to garland them with rudraksha beads
glorious instruments of spirited practice.
Then he took their saffron robes
and fed them there and then
into the tall billowing flames of a bonfire.

505

Accompanied by the citizens of Chidambaram,
and by the king of the land
where the pure waters of the Kaviri flow,
by the ruler of the land of Ilam
who had forsaken his erring ways,
and by those, who, putting off their former garments,
symbols of their delusion, had adorned their bodies
with the lustre of the sacred ash,
the lordly Vadavurar, dispenser of unalloyed divine grace,
went to pay homage to Lord Siva,
who dwells in the Golden Hall, set with beautiful gems.

506

Those Buddhists who, in their error and confusion
had formerly held that liberation was merely total annihilation,
now, casting their eyes upon the Golden Hall,
lovingly prostrated themselves in worship,
and were transformed into Saiva devotees of the highest attainment.
What need is there to explain the matter further?
Those who thus approached the hallowed precincts of Chidambaram,
were they not like the cool floods of many rivers,
that unite and merge together in the ocean?

507

When everyone had left the Golden Hall and departed,
that eminent son of Vadavur went to pay homage
to the noble feet of the Tiger-footed One,
and then seated himself in those hallowed precincts.
All the good citizens of Chidambaram beseeched him saying:
'Master, may you henceforth remain here always!'
before going off to their houses.

508

The king of the land where the Kaviri river flows,
the monarch who ruled over the land of Ilam,
and the converts who had paid homage to the Golden Hall,
adorning themselves with sacred ash
so that the lasting effects of their evil deeds,
accumulated in former births,
were completely eradicated –
all those bowed down in worship before the lordly Vadavurar,
in whom the true knowledge of Lord Siva was fully mature.
Then, departing from there, they joyfully returned
to their stately halls and palaces
that glittered with the lustre of precious gems.

Along with their king,
those who had put off their wretched Buddhist robes
and adorned themselves with holy ash,
paid homage first to the glorious feet
of the venerable sage Vadavurar
before going to worship the Lord of the Golden Hall,
where goodness and beauty reign.
As the violence of their evil tendencies subsided,
their hearts were suffused with joy,
and they dwelt there in the city of Chidambaram
as if it were their eternal home.