

Chapter VII
The Gaining of the Divine Feet

510

Like a single great lion vanquishing
a herd of massive elephants,
Vadavurar defeated those religions,
that attempt to sway those who listen
by presenting falsehood as if were truth.
We shall now tell how he,
who through the might of his penances
over many births, came to proclaim
the true knowledge of Lord Siva,
so hard to grasp,
finally attained to [the feet of the Lord].

511

After he had sung the victorious and beloved,
'Marshalling of the Sacred Host',¹
'The Sacred March',²
'The Wonder of Salvation',³
and 'The Pilgrim Song',⁴
he attained to the blissful greater life,
in which there is no seeking,
no alternation of fear and release from fear,
no wretched suffering or joyous exhilaration.

512

He who came to speak the holy Tiruvachakam,
wherein is expounded
the true knowledge of Lord Siva,
which dispels affliction,
so that the glory of the holy ash
and the sacred Five Letters
might shine out over the earth,
gazed upon, as if it were Siva loka itself,
the city of Chidambaram,
where the Lord resides within the Golden Hall,
as the tiger Vyagrapada
and the serpent Patanjali,
bow down meekly before Him
to obtain salvation.

¹ Hymn 49, The Marshalling of the Sacred Host.

² Hymn 46, The Sacred March.

³ Hymn 51, The Wonder of Salvation.

⁴ Hymn 45, The Pilgrim Song.

513

In the days that he dwelt there,
the Lord who dances within the Hall
took on, out of His compassion,
the form of a learned Brahmin.
Wearing across His breast
the pure three-stranded cord,
and holding in His hands a weighty tome,
He came walking,
causing pain to His tender, reddened feet,⁵
and stood before the sage.

514

With a sweet expression on his face,
the sage turned to the eminent Brahmin
who stood before him, and bade Him be seated.
After He who was deeply versed
in the mighty Vedas' arcane lore
had seated Himself,
Vadavurar questioned Him saying:
'Whence are You come?',
to which He replied:
'I am from the Pandyan land,
whose riches are great and enduring.'

515

Upon hearing the words 'Pandyan Land...',
Vadavurar, his words overflowing
with friendliness and affection, said:
'Please tell me the reason
why You have come to this place.'
'It is a mission undertaken at the behest
of the Lord who rules our souls,' He replied.
'Namely, to seek an audience with your very self.'
Then to make His meaning clear,
He continued thus:

⁵ His feet are red through having been stroked by Parvati.

516

‘The Pandyan Land is indeed blessed
by your greatness, which caused the Holy One,
who dances in the Hall of Dharma,
to appear to you, mounted upon a steed,
whilst in days of yore, even Vishnu,
who burrowed down through the earth
in the form of a boar,
and Brahma, who flew up to the highest heaven,
in the form of a swan,
could not see and know Him,
seek as they might.

517

‘Everyone was filled with a great joy
when they heard how you performed
holy service to the Lord
in southern Perunturai.
How, with untroubled heart,
you visited the tank-girt holy Eagle Mount,
and how, on reaching the glittering Hall of Gold,
you defeated the Buddhists in debate.

518

‘Foremost among brahmins!
I have come here at this time
to learn and recite the collection of Tamil hymns
that, out of your great devotion,
you sang in praise of the Primal One,
He who dances within the Golden Hall.
For thus will the torment of birth be dispelled.
I beg you here and now to speak them out
in a clear voice, so that I may write them down.’

519

On hearing these words from the Lord
whom even the gods in heaven praise,
the sage Vadavurar,
who, inspired by the great love
within his mind and heart,
had composed hymns in the Tamil tongue,
whose glory is hard to measure,
in praise of the Lord with the fair matted locks,
spoke forth joyfully, with melting heart,
those holy hymns that express
the true knowledge of reality.

520

The Lord who dances in the Golden Hall,
taking up a palm-leaf page in His fair hand,
faithfully recorded every word that he uttered.
Then He whose grace is overflowing
addressed Vadavurar saying:
'Now you must compose a kovai love poem⁶
concerning the Lord
who shares His form with the fair maid,
so that all may recite it
and be freed from the ills of birth.'

521

Joyfully assenting, Vadavurar, whose penances
over many incarnations were great indeed,
recited the holy Kovai,
as the Lord whose matted locks shine like gold,
sat before him, writing it down.
When it was finished, He hid the book from sight,
and vanished like a flash of lightening,
at which the wise bard fainted quite away.

522

Coming to his senses, Vadavurar
rushed everywhere looking for Him,
thinking to himself in his deep distress:
'What can be the meaning of this?'
Then, realizing that that Brahmin was none other
than the Primal One who dances in the Golden Hall,
he dissolved in floods of tears, crying out:
'Where have You gone?', and collapsed to the ground,
as the surging ocean of supreme bliss
engulfed him in its flood.

⁶ The poem referred to is the திருக் கொவை, (Tirukovai), the other work attributed to Manikkavachagar. A கோவை (kovai) is a love poem in which the setting is a forest glade, where the lover and the beloved pass through the various stages of love, from first sight to final union. Each situation occurring between the lover and the beloved, though not overtly allegorical, is interpreted as a stage on the soul's journey to union with Lord Siva.

523

Lord Siva, who excelled in His love
for the pure Tamil tongue,
repaired swiftly to His stately palace.
There, with a joyful expression,
fixing his gaze upon Vishnu, Brahma
and the hosts of the gods, he exclaimed:
'Listen to these good hymns
that one of Our devotees has composed
in My praise, out of the great devotion
he bears for Me.'
So saying He graciously read them out.

524

At the end of the Tirukovai ,
which has the power
to confer final liberation,
the Lord inscribed the words:
'This work, spoken aloud
by the true devotee Vadavurar,
is written in the hand of Him
who dances in the Golden Hall.'
Then, in His own hand, which resembled
a beautiful lotus blossom,
he embellished the manuscript
in a fitting manner.

525

Desiring that the whole world should know
of the great spiritual attainment
of His loving devotee Vadavurar,
the wise Lord, whose locks are crowned
with the crescent moon,
placed the true text of the Tiruvachakam
upon the holy steps,⁷
at the portals of the beautiful Hall
where revered ascetics,
and the gods themselves,
come to pay homage to Him.

⁷ The Panchatsara Pati, the five steps leading to the Chit Sabai in Chidambaram temple, are referred to here.

526

When, after it was placed there, a brahmin
who performed puja in the shrine,
came and saw the book, and realized
that the miracle of its appearance there
was a divine act,⁸ he stood motionless,
his mind dissolved in bliss.
Then he rushed out of the Hall,
thinking to himself:
'All the inhabitants of Chidambaram
must be informed at once of this occurrence.'

527

Entering the august presence of the elders
of the city of Chidambaram,
abode of the red-hued goddess Lakshmi,⁹
that brahmin informed them of this occurrence.
As soon as he had finished speaking,
they cried out: 'This is indeed a miracle,'
and came rushing to behold that book,
which the Lord had placed on the steps
of His own shrine.

528

Having debated the matter amongst themselves,
all agreed that, since even the gods were forbidden
to enter the Golden Hall where the Lord dwelt,
this occurrence must be the doing of Lord Siva Himself.
'Surely it is fitting,' they said, 'that we should look to see
whether this is a Saiva Agama,¹⁰
or a work in the common language of pure Tamil
which He has uttered out of His great love for us.

⁸ The time would have been early morning, when the shrine had been locked all night, such that no human hand could have placed the book there.

⁹ Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu is synonymous with wealth and prosperity, both mundane and spiritual. Hence the rich and holy city of Chidambaram would be a fitting abode for her.

¹⁰ The Agamas, the scriptures of the Saiva religion that deal mostly with ritual worship, and are written in Sanskrit. The scriptures written in the vernacular, Tamil, are called the Tirumurai, of which the Tirvachakam and Tirukovai are one.

529

In accordance with the words of all his companions,
who were deeply imbued with the Lord's love and grace,
one of their number stepped forward,
his arms laden with flowers,
and prostrated himself in worship.
Then, taking up the book deposited there
by the One whose locks are suffused
with the fragrance of kondrai flowers,
he broke the seal and recited
the first four holy hymns,
written in the metre called 'agaval'.¹¹

530

Next he recited
the remaining six hundred verses of the Tiruvachakam,
that ornament of the fair Tamil tongue,
beginning with the Sacred Cento,
followed by the glorious four hundred verses
of the holy Kovai,¹²
which is elaborated in the style of love poetry.
Coming to the end, he read out the final words:
'This book was written down from the dictation
of the noble Vadavurar,
by the hand of the Lord of the Sacred Hall.'

531

When they heard these words,
the hair on their heads stood on end,
and beads of perspiration stood out on their bodies.
They shed abundant tears,
and their hearts melted with bliss, as they cried out:
'Can there be any Saiva work
that more clearly points the path of liberation
than these Tamil hymns, composed by one
so rich in holy penances, accumulated [over many births]?'

¹¹ Whist this is true of hymns two, three and four, the first hymn, the Siva Puranam, is written in the kali venba metre.

¹² The total number of verses for the two works is 1,056: the Siva Puranam, the three Agavals (all written without a break, counting as one each), followed by the 652 verses of the remainder of the Tiruvachakam, followed by the 400 verses of the Tirukovai.

532

Thinking to themselves:
'From the lips of the great ascetic, Vadavurar,
he who praises the holy name of Him
whose ornament is the serpent,
we shall learn this very day the wondrous
inner meaning of this work.'
They left that noble hall and came to him,
who was deeply versed in the Vedas' lore,
and who vanquished in a great debate
the deluded Buddhists
who revere the shade of the bodhi tree.

533

When they all had come
to stand respectfully in his presence,
and place before him the holy scripture, saying:
'See, what a miracle the Lord of Heaven
has performed this day,'
that loving devotee wept, saying:
'What austerities can I have performed
in previous lives that that the Lord Himself
should joyfully deign to write down
my poor collection of hymns in His own hand!'

534

When he had finished weeping in this fashion,
those citizens of Chidambaram,
whose devotion is hard to measure,
joined their hands in joyful worship before him,
and entreated him saying:
'Pray tell us, what holy deeds our Lord,
appearing upon the earth, performed,
to inspire you to write these holy hymns,
so harmonious, and so deeply imbued
with the knowledge of Lord Siva?'

535

After he who was free of the sorrows of birth
had finished recounting all the exploits of the Lord,
the citizens of Chidambaram bowed down before him,
and cried out with joyous hearts:
'We beg you to expound to us
the deep and true inner meaning of this Tamil work,
which you dictated to our Lord in Tillai.'

536

Our great Master who dwells in holy Vadavurar,
of wide renown, exulted in his heart,
which overflowed with the knowledge of Lord Siva,
and said: 'This I shall reveal to you
after I have entered the beautiful Golden Hall.'
With these words he set off,
with those who had come to see him
following devotedly behind.

537

With the people of Chidambaram,
whose renown is ever unfailing,
crowding closely about him,
and filled with devotion,
he reached the Hall of pure gold,
wherein God's grace abides.
Saying: 'He it is who is the meaning
of this worthy Tamil garland,'
he went swiftly into the Hall,
and there, even as they all looked on,
he disappeared from view.

538

Pointing with his hand,
even as his body vanished,
and saying: 'He is the Reality,
the one who dwells in Tillai,
girt by rich fields,
and groves of areca trees,'
Vadavurar disappeared from view.
Thus it was that the Lord
who wears as an ornament
a great serpent with its expanded hood,
showed His true love for His devotee,
and took him to Himself,
even as water mixes with milk.

539

Those who are caught in the net of maya,
failing to realize that the body,
composed of loathsome skin, bones, sinews
and filthy pus, partakes in the reality
of the nature of Lord Siva,
and wander over the world in confusion,
seeking sustenance for this fleshly body,
shall descend into the deepest pit of Hell.

540

When the people of Chidambaram
observed that which befell him
who loved the Divine One, King of the Gods,
their hair stood on end,
and they stood there, trembling.
Tears coursed down as their hearts melted,
and sweat broke out over their whole body,
as, filled with joy,
they pressed their palms together in worship.

541

The bhutas started to dance,
as the heavenly hosts gathered round,
rejoicing greatly and singing praises.
Tumburu and Narada played melodies.¹³
The Vedas, accompanied by heavenly drums,
arose, raising their clamour on high.
The great rishis and Indra
[with the rest of the gods],
showed their veneration
as they poured down
a rain of beautiful blossoms
from the five flowering trees of heaven.

¹³ The bhutas were a warlike race of spirit-beings who frequently fought on Siva's behalf. Tumburu and Narada are devarishis and celestial musicians. Both of them witnessed the original dance of Siva in the Tarakam forest, before it was moved to Chidambaram. This whole scene is intended to evoke the original dance of Siva. The following lines are a description of the dance that appears elsewhere on this site, in the biography of Guru Namasivaya:

Supreme Godhead! Divine Lord of Chidambaram!
You who perform your divine dance in Tillai's Hall
as the multitude sing hymns of praise and adoration,
and Tumburu and Narada intone a heavenly melody,
as Vishnu slings a drum upon his hip
and raps out a thunderous rhythm,
and Gauri, Lady Ambika herself,
strikes her bright celestial cymbals
to mark the time in even measure!

542

Those whose hearts are the abode
of the holy name of Lord Sankara,
who performs the dance of true knowledge;
those who lovingly perform Siva puja
in silence, using fragrant essences,
and those who are exalted
by dwelling with flawless devotion
in the southern city of Chidambaram;
all enjoyed the blissful delights
of the Tiruvachakam,
which even the God in heaven praise.

543

Those who recite the holy history
wherein shines forth the divine truth
of the brahmin Vadavurar,
and those who listen to it,
taking it in with their good ears,
shall win great renown,
along with the blissful experience
conferred by the jnana which is true knowledge,
and when their births are finally exhausted,
they shall attain to the illustrious realm of *Sivaloka*
which is free of all taint.

544

Long live the Goddess Earth!
Long live the rains that pour down like gold!
Long live the Vedas and Agamas!
Long live the sovereign's just rule!
Long live the flawless Five Letters,
the holy ash, and the devotees of Lord Siva!
Long live those who read and those who hear
the Puranam of the exalted Lord of Vadavur!