

5. The re-integration of Bharatiya Vidya, which is the primary object of Bharatiya Shiksha, can only be attained through a study of forces, movements, motives, idas, forms and art of creative life-energy through which it has expressed itself in different ages as a single continuous process.

6. Bharatiya Shiksha must stimulate the student's power or expression, both written and oral, at every stage in accordance with the highest ideals attained by the great literary masters in the intellectual and moral spheres.

7. The technique of Bharatiya Shiksha must involve—

(a) the adoption by the teacher of the *Guru* attitude which consists in taking a personal interest in the student; inspiring and encouraging him to achieve distinction in his studies; entering into his life with a view to form ideals and remove psychological obstacles; and creating in him a spirit of consecration; and

(b) the adoption by the student of the *Shishya* attitude by the development of—

(i) respect for the teacher,

(ii) a spirit of inquiry,

(iii) a spirit of service towards the teacher, the institution, Bharat and Bharatiya Vidya.

8. The ultimate aim of Bharatiya Shiksha is to teach the younger generation to appreciate and live up to the permanent values of Bharatiya Vidya which flowing from the supreme art of creative life-energy as represented by Shri Ramachandra, Shri Krishna, Vyasa, Buddha and Mahavira have expressed themselves in modern times in the life of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi.

9. Bharatiya Shiksha while equipping the student with every kind of scientific and technical training must teach the student, not to sacrifice an ancient form or attitude to an unreasoning passion for change; not to retain a form or attitude which in the light of modern times can be replaced by another form or attitude which is a truer and more effective expression of the spirit of Bharatiya Vidya; and to capture the spirit afresh for each generation to present it to the world



आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, I-89-i

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

General Editors .

K. M. MUNSHI

R. R. DIWAKAR

86

TEN SAINTS OF INDIA

BY

T. M. P. MAHADEVAN

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BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

TEN SAINTS OF INDIA

By

T. M. P. MAHADEVAN



1965

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulsions of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2.50.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages: Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit:

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are

progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita*, by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing

a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, Queen Victoria Road,
New Delhi,
3rd October 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI

PREFACE

It is not easy to write about the saints. All good things are rare and difficult; but because of the rarity and difficulty one ought not to turn away from seeking the good. It is better to attempt something magnificent and fail than to accomplish inconsequential ends. Most of us, most of the time, are busy with trivialities, not knowing that they are so. It is only when we put these aside and strive to rise to the dimension of eternity which is that of the saints that we really begin to live. Meditation on the lives of the saints and on their teachings is a potent means to elevating our own lives and for gaining sublimity. The present book is a modest endeavour in this direction.

In the introduction the essentials of saintliness and sainthood are set forth. These should be regarded as indicative, rather than definitive, of the constitution of the saints which is remarkably the same in all ages and areas. Then follow the biographies of ten Indian saints. There is no reason why these should be included and not the others, except the considerations of space and the author's familiarity with them. All of them except one were born in South India. But none of them can be said to have had a native place; for each of them belongs to the whole of mankind. A brief account has also been given of the teachings of these saints as gathered from their writings and recorded sayings. It is hoped that this book will help to create in its readers a thirst for a closer study and a greater understanding of the spiritual geniuses of the human race—the saints.

This book was originally written for the Southern Languages Book Trust under its scheme for publication of books in the Southern languages. Translations of this book have already appeared in the four Southern languages: Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

I am thankful to Sri K. M. Munshi and the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for sponsoring the publication of the Original Text.

Madras
July 10, 1961.

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T. M. P. MAHADEVAN

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INTRODUCTION

Although sainthood is a universal phenomenon, India has had a major share of it right from the dawn of history, nay, even from the age of pre-history. One of the finds of the Indus-Valley civilization is a seal on which is carved a male figure in meditative pose, which is regarded as the prototype of Śiva. The composers of the Vedic *mantras* were seer-poets, vested with the power of intuiting the inner reality of things. The terms *ṛṣi* and *kavi* that are applied to them signify that they were seers of the eternal. In the Upaniṣads we come across many teachers of the highest truths, like Yājñavalkya and Uddālaka who must have all been saints. The epics and the Purāṇas have for their sole theme the triumph of saintliness over all that is unsaintly. According to the doctrine of *avatāra* (divine descent) as expounded by Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā*, God descends to the world and incarnates himself in order to protect the saints (*paritrāṇāya sādhanām*) and punish the evil-doers (*vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām*). As philosophy and religion are not divorced from each other in India, the great Indian philosophers have all been saints.

The first systematizers of the different schools of philosophy who are called the *sūtrakāras* were *ṛṣis*. Even the Logicians (*Naiyāyikas*) emphasized the need for developing the spiritual faculties of man. The classical thinkers like Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Madhva were both philosophers and saints. Even the non-theistic systems such as Buddhism and Jainism have each a long succession of saints. The *bhakti* movements that appeared in the various parts of the country after the classical age of the *Darśanas* (philosophical schools) were led by eminent saints who were great thinkers as well. The inspira-

tion for even social reform has often sprung from saintliness. Saints like Vidyāraṇya and Rāmadāsa served the country in the field of politics too. The saintliness of a great leader of modern India, as is well known, was not a little responsible for the liberation of our country from foreign yoke. India is unique in the history of the world in that it has an unbroken saintly tradition, and that in every walk of life.

Sainthood has no distinction of caste, creed, sex or social status. The saint is he who rises above all narrow considerations. In the most unexpected places and the lowliest of families saints have arisen. Even among the wealthy, which is probably a rarer and more difficult phenomenon, there have appeared saints. The freedom of women, in general, came under more and more of restriction during the middle ages. But no restriction could suppress saints emerging out of Indian womanhood. The women-saints have considered no sacrifice too great to follow the way of God. Saintliness imparts an uncommon strength even to those that are otherwise weak. When the spirit of God has taken possession of one, one does not very much care for the conventions of the world. "With a choking voice, a thrilled frame, and tears (filling their eyes), they converse with one another," says Nārada in his *Bhakti-sūtras*, speaking about the highest *bhaktas*, "they purify their families, and the earth too. They make holy places holy, render actions righteous and good, and lend authority to scriptures" (68-69). "There are not the distinctions among them caused by birth, learning, beauty, family, wealth, profession, etc." (72). One of the foremost of Śaiva saints, Tirunāvukkaraṣar says in a verse that he honours not wealth and power, but worships those that are devotees of God, whether they be afflicted with leprosy which eats away their flesh or those that are born low and eat cow's meat. In

fact, to the one who is gifted with the vision of God there is not the difference of high and low. As the *Bhagavadgītā* puts it, the wise ones (*pañḍitas*) look upon all as equal, be it a Brahmin full of learning and humility, a cow, an elephant, a dog or a dog-eater. The saints are truly citizens of the world; they belong to all mankind; they have no narrow attachments.

A distinction is sometimes made between *samaya-ācāryas* (religious teachers) and *santāna-ācāryas* (philosophical exponents). But this is only a distinction based on emphasis. To take Southern Śaivism, for instance, where this distinction is explicitly made, Tirujñānasarībandhar who is regarded as a *samaya-ācārya* did have a philosophy of life; and Meykaṇḍār who is the first of the *santāna-ācāryas* was also a great saint. Similar to the distinction just mentioned is the one between saints and sages. The saint's approach to reality is said to be more emotional, whereas that of the sage is regarded as more intellectual. But this again is a distinction which is not absolute. In India, the saints have been known for their sagely qualities and the sages for their saintly character. No one will deny, for instance, that the saint Rāmakṛṣṇa was also a sage and the sage Ramaṇa was a saint as well. The *bhakta* (devotee) and the *jñānī* (one with wisdom) are, it is true, distinguished by some people. But the devotion of the genuine *bhakta* is not purely an emotion, having nothing to do with knowledge, nor is the wisdom of the *jñānī* the result of intellection without emotional sublimation. In certain schools of philosophy, one or the other of the two paths, *bhakti* and *jñāna*, may find relatively greater stress. Nevertheless the need for both is recognized in all of them. Along with *jñānis* and *bhaktas* should be classed *rāja-yogīs* and *karma-yogīs* also. The *rāja-yogīs* are those who follow the path of classical *yoga*

as outlined in Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtra*. The aim of this *yoga* is to gain perfect control over the mind by concentration and meditation, and then empty it completely so that there may not be any false identification of the soul with it. *Kaivalya* or the soul's aloneness is the goal of Patañjali's *Yoga*. The *karma-yogīs* are those who adopt the way of disinterested action. They do their duty without desiring any personal advantage; both their action and the results are offered to God so that they are not bothered by what happens. Thus their ego gets attenuated and mind purified. They lead a dedicated and unselfish life. The term 'saint' will cover, then, all these types of spiritual genius: *jñānīs* like Śuka, *bhaktas* like Nārada, *rāja-yogīs* like Viśvāmitra, and *karma-yogīs* like Janaka. These, however, are not exclusive types; Śuka, the wise, was a devotee as well; Nārada, the devotee, possessed wisdom too; and the same is the case with Viśvāmitra and Janaka. All of them had wisdom, devotion, self-control and the spirit of service.

The popular mind associates miracles with sainthood. Before it would recognize a saint, it demands the manifestation of some supernormal power. It may be admitted that in the case of some saints such manifestations do occur. But the saints themselves without an exception do not set any value on supernormal powers. Thaumaturgy is not a sign of spirituality. The manifestation of *siddhis* or supernormal powers often serves as a hindrance to spiritual progress. All the great teachers warn the aspirant against being taken in by these powers. In an oft-quoted poem, Tāyumanavar says that it is not difficult to gain mastery over the wild beasts and poisonous reptiles, to practise alchemy, to move about unseen on earth, walk on water, sit on fire, or enter into another's body, to remain perpetually youthful, or to hold sway over

the Gods, but that it is hard indeed to control the mind and keep it unmoved and still. In a similar strain a Kashmiri woman-saint, Lallesvari, asks:

“Why cool the flames yogi? Stay the stream?
Why dost walk feet upward in the sky?
Why milk a bullock? Why magic dream?
Why these base feats of the juggler try?”

Another misconception about the saints is that they are super-individualists without a positive attitude of helpfulness towards society, that they are uncommon, cranky persons without any grasp over the hard realities of life. In fact, however, the saints are observed to be active in the service of their fellow-beings and to possess a robust common-sense. “What a man takes in by contemplation”, observes Eckhart, “he must pour out in love”. Compassion is the queen of all saintly virtues. The saints are liberal, almost to prodigality in the distribution of temporal goods. If any one should take their coat, they would give him their cloak also. Many a prayer is addressed by the saints to God for making them fit instruments for social service; for they know that God is not only in the sanctuary and the shrine, but that he is there also where the pathmaker is breaking the stones. According to Teresa of Avila, “God walks even among the pots and pipkins”. The compassion of the saint is not limited to the human species; it extends to all living beings. When a cow was beaten, marks of the beating appeared on the backs of Bahinābāi and Tukārām. Even inanimate things become alive and afire with God to the saint. The seer-poet, Bhārati, claims, in one of his songs, kinship not only with crows and other birds but also with the seas and the mountains.

It is not social service, in the conventional sense, that the saints do. It is service of God in his creatures or mani-

festations. It is service born of the conviction that the world is filled with God. God thus is the centre of the saint's life. The saint lives, moves and has his being in God. God is his one preoccupation. This is borne out in the life-story of every saint. Even those saints who do not believe in a personal deity do see the same divine reality in every being. It is the love of God or the universal vision of the supreme Spirit that moves the saint to spend himself in the service of man and the world. Godly love so occupies the whole of the saint's heart that there is no room in it for hatred. The Sufi saint, Rabia, was once asked, "Do you love God?" She unhesitatingly said, "Yes." Again she was asked, "Do you hate Satan?" Equally unhesitatingly she replied, "No, my love for God leaves no room for hating Satan. My love for God has so possessed me that no place remains for hating anyone save Him."

The saint's God-love is frequently mistaken for madness. Rāmakṛṣṇa's passionate love of the World-Mother, for instance, was so misconstrued. The elders of the family thought that marriage would cure him of this malady. But what happened was that his divine madness did not abate even a bit after marriage; it only increased and enveloped him completely. The unknowing scholar looks upon the saint as an abnormal person, as a psychotic. But to make the saint a subject for investigations in abnormal psychology is not to know the nature of sainthood and the limits of psychology. If to be a saint is to be mad, then one would prefer madness to sanity.

Insight into the plenary Truth and freedom from all narrow attachments are what characterize the saint. The Veda refers to these sages as "seers who are hearers of the Truth" (*kavayah satya-śrutah*). Their sphere is the home of Truth

(*sadanam ṛtasya*); what they see is the Truth, the Right, the Vast (*satyam ṛtam bṛhat*); what they have discovered is the path of Truth (*ṛtasya panthā*). From the Upaniṣads we learn that a saint is he who has been liberated from all the desires lodged in the heart, who has shaken off relative good and evil, and is stainless (*Munḍ.*, III, i, 3), and who has become immortal by attaining supreme identity with Brahman. Teaching the same doctrine negatively, a text says, "Not he who has not ceased from wickedness; nor he who is not tranquil; nor he who cannot concentrate his mind; nor even he whose mind is not composed can reach this (Self) through knowledge" (*Kaṭha*, ii, 24).

The *Bhagavadgītā* describes more than once the ideal state reached by the saint. The following expressions, among others, are used to signify the saint: *sthitaprajña* (one who is steady in wisdom), *guṇātīta* (one who has gone beyond the *guṇas* which are the constituents of material nature), *bhakta* (devotee), *yogī* (one who has perfect control over the mind) and *brahmabhūta* (one who has become Brahman).

The saint who is steady in wisdom (*sthitaprajña*) puts away all the desires that enter the mind, and finds complete satisfaction in the Self; he is not depressed by pain nor elated by pleasure, and he is free from passions such as love, hate and fear; he holds his senses and mind in check, and remains awake in the Self; he has no longings and is free from egotism. His is the Brahman-state, attaining which none is deluded (ii, 55). The saint is he who has gone beyond the three *guṇas* (*guṇātīta*); he does not hate the *guṇas* when they are in action, nor desire them when they cease; he stays calm, undisturbed by the *guṇas*, knowing fully well that it is they that function, and not he; he is, therefore, the same in pain and pleasure, and to him earth, stones and gold are equal,

there is no distinction between things dear and things not dear, and blame and praise are one; honour and dishonour are the same to him; similarly friend and foe; and he has not the conceit of agency; constantly devoted to God, he remains unaffected by the phenomena of change and mutation (xiv, 22, ff). The true devotee (*bhakta*) is he who has no hatred towards any being, and is friendly and compassionate towards all; he is without the thought of "I" or "mine", regards pain and pleasure as all one, and has fortitude and forbearance; he is ever content, with a controlled mind, self-restraint, and conviction firm; he leads a life dedicated to God; the world does not disturb him, nor does he disturb the world; he is free from joy, impatience, fear and agitation; he hopes for nothing, and is pure, ever awake, and impartial; he is free from trembling and he does not embark on any selfish undertaking; he is silent, content with any lot, homeless, of judgment sure; God is his only end (xii, 13 ff). The *yogī* is one whose mind has attained a state of equanimity. The *yogī* or *yoga-yukta* (one who is disciplined in yoga) has a refined nature, with mind and senses under control; as he has become the Self of all beings, although he works, yet he is not defiled (v. 7); he sees everywhere the same Spirit, he sees the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self (vi, 29); such a one attains Brahman (v, 6). The saint is he who has realized God or Brahman (*brahma-bhūta*).

The following description of the saints is put into the mouth of Śrī Rāma by Tulasīdās in his *Rāmacarita-mānasa*:—"Saints have no hankering for sense pleasures, and are embodiments of amiability and all other virtues. They grieve to see others in distress, and rejoice at the sight of others' joy. They are even-minded and look upon none as their enemy. Free from vanity and passion, they are conquerors of greed,

selfish joy, and fear. Tender of heart and compassionate to the troubled, they cherish full devotion to Me in thought, word and deed. Giving honour to all, they are modest themselves."

"Again, know him for all time a genuine saint whose heart is a home of noble qualities such as placidity, guilelessness, friendliness and devotion to divine ideals. Saints never swerve from the control of their mind and senses. Unfailing in their religious observances and correct in their behaviour, they never utter a harsh word. They who regard with equanimity both obloquy and praise and who claim My lotus feet as their only possession—such saintly souls are as dear to Me as life."

In the lives and teachings of the saints that are given in this book all the features of saintliness will be found. Although they may be separated physically from each other by time and space, they are witnesses to one and the same Spirit. The discovery of the spiritual unity of all beings is the grand achievement of all saintly traditions. It is this truth that all saints proclaim. In the words of William James, "there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to make a critic stop and think, and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native-land. Perpetually telling of the unity of man with God, their speech antedates languages, and they do not grow old."*

* The Varieties of Religious Experience, P. 419.



Tirujñāna Sambandhar.

TIRU-JÑĀNA SAMBANDHAR

EVEN among saints infant prodigies are rare. God-love and god-vision usually come to one when one is mature. Although God who is the ultimate spiritual value is eternal, it takes time to realize Him. And with most people it takes a long time because the method they adopt is that of trial-and-error and the path itself is difficult to tread. In some exceptional cases, however, there is a direct hit at the target—and that at one bound. We have an illustration of this rare event in the life of Tiru-jñāna-sambandhar (early seventh century A.D.) one of the four *samaya-ācāryas* (teachers of the Śaiva faith) of Southern Śaivism.

The canonical works (*Tiru-murai*) of Southern Saivism are twelve in number, as compiled and arranged by Nāmbi-āṇḍār-nāmbi, who lived in the reign of Rājārāja Cola I. The *Tevāram* hymns sung by Tiru-jñāna-sambandhar, Tiru-nāvukkarasu, and Sundarar constitute the first seven works. Of these seven, the first three are the composition of Tiru-jñāna-sambandhar. The twelfth *Tiru-murai* is the *Periya-purāṇam* whose author was Śekkilār, also known as Arul-moli-dēvar, prime minister to the Cola king, Anapāya (A.D. 1063-1112). Here the lives of the sixty-three Śaiva saints (Nāyanmārs or Aḍiyārs) are given; the story of Tiru-jñāna-sambandhar occurs in chapter six. Paying obeisance to the Śaiva saints in his *Tiruttonḍat-togai*, Sundarar refers to Tiru-jñāna-sambandhar as 'my lord Sambandhar'. A similar reference is to be found in Nāmbi-āṇḍār-nāmbi's *Tiruttonḍar-tiruvantādi* which is a work based on Sundarar's *Tiruttonḍat-togai*.

Tiru-jñāna-sambandhar was born in Śirkāli, also known as Brahmapura, not far from Kumbhakonam in the Tanjāvūr

District. His father, Śivapādahrdayar, and mother, Bhagavatiyār, were pious Śaiva Brahmins, devoted to the worship of Śiva and the service of the saints. It was after a long period of penance that Saṁbandhar was born to them. A miracle happened when the boy was but three years old; and with that his career as a saint commences. One day the father took his boy along with him, as he went for a bath in the temple-tank, Brahmatīrtha. Leaving the child on the steps, he entered the water and had a dip. Not seeing his sire, Saṁbandhar began to cry, gazing at the temple-tower. He called out 'O Father! O Mother!' In response to his call, Lord Śiva appeared with his consort Umā and asked her to feed the crying child with milk. Umā gave her breast-milk in a golden cup to the child. The child received it and drank it and became endowed with divine wisdom. Presently the father came out of the tank and saw the trickle of milk from his son's mouth. He thought that his son had become polluted by the feed of milk given by some unknown woman. Brandishing a rod, he was about to punish the child, when the child pointed out to the sky in the direction of the temple, and broke into song proclaiming that he had been saved by the Lord in his *Ardha-nārīśvara* form. The father could not have this vision; for he was not yet ripe for it. But he was convinced that his son had attained sainthood by the Lord's grace. He followed him into the temple. By this time the news had spread, and a crowd had gathered, which also accompanied the child-saint to the temple. The child continued to sing the praise of the Lord; the first decade of songs was completed in the temple. As the child came out, the father took him on his shoulders, and carried him home.

From now on begins a life of ceaseless spiritual ministrations for Tiru-jñāna-saṁbandhar. The name itself signifies

the spiritual illumination he had received as a boy of three. The meaning is 'the one who became related to divine wisdom.' Sāmbandhar also came to be called 'Āluḍaiya Pillaiyār', the son who had been saved. Accompanied by his father, the boy visited the sacred shrines of Śiva in Tamil-nāḍu, singing songs in praise of the Lord. Miracles happened wherever he went. These were regarded by him, not as manifestations of his powers, but as the signs of God's grace. Śiva bestowed upon the boy His blessings, and through him made the true faith take deep roots in the hearts of people.

The boy went about singing, and beating time with his tender hands. At Tirukkolakkā, the Lord sent him a pair of gold cymbals with the sacred *pañcākṣara* inscribed, so that with them he could keep time to his songs. Even before he started on his first round of visits to the shrines in the neighbouring towns, he was joined by a minstrel, Tiru-nīlakanṭha-yālpṇānar who volunteered to accompany him and play his songs on the lute. At Cidaṁbaram, the young saint saw a vision in which the 3,000 Dīkṣitars appeared as so many Śiva-gaṇas. These early journeys were performed by Sāmbandhar either by foot or as seated on his father's shoulders. At a place called Tirunel-vāyil-aṟaṭhurai, Śiva caused a pearl-palanquin to be presented to him, along with such regalia as the ceremonial umbrella and the conch-shells. This symbolized the ascension of the saint to the status of a spiritual teacher. From then on he travelled in state, continuing to proclaim the glory and the greatness of the Lord. Tiruccōyñālūr is the celebrated place where Caṇḍēśvara Nāyanār had lived. Visiting the shrine there, Sāmbandhar sang the praise of the Nāyanār and his acts of devotion and piety. After halting for short periods at other holy towns on the way, Sāmbandhar with his followers including his father

returned to Śīrkāli where he was received by the entire people of the town headed by his own mother.

At the appropriate time, Saṁbandhar was invested with the sacred thread. Of course, there was no need for him to be initiated into the sacred lore; for he had already obtained the knowledge that is to be found there. The scholars and priests that had come for the *Upanayana* ceremony were astonished at the precocity and wisdom possessed by the young saint. Instead of their instructing him, they received instructions from him in matters relating to the teachings of the sacred books.

One of the most moving events in the life of Saṁbandhar is his memorable meeting with Tiru-nāvukkaraśu, also known as Appar, another of the four *Samaya-ācāryas*. Tirunāvukkaraśu had heard about the boy-saint of Śīrkāli. Wanting to meet him, he went to that place. Hearing that the elder-saint was coming, Saṁbandhar hastened to receive him. They exchanged courtesies, and began to like each other immensely. Together they travelled several times to the holy shrines of Śiva. The pious folk at each of these places enjoyed their company and benefited greatly by their august presence.

Starting out on another round of pilgrimage, Saṁbandhar suggested to his father that he could stay at home. But the father would not consent to be left behind. The saint had to take him along. After visiting several shrines, the party arrived at Tiruppāccilāśramam, where an act of miraculous healing was performed by the saint. The daughter of the local chief, Kollimalavan, was afflicted with a mysterious disease which was not yielding to any treatment. Being a devotee of Śiva, he took his ailing daughter to the temple and laid her before the image. Presently, the news of Saṁbandhar's visit to the town reached him. He ran to the saint and implored him

to save his daughter. The saint entered the temple, saw the pitiable condition in which the girl lay, and sang a *padigam* (a decade of verses) in which he appealed to the Lord to come to the girl's succour. Lo! the miracle happened, and the patient was made whole.

The saint next proceeded to the Koṅgu region of the Kāverī. It was winter-time then, and a type of malignant fever was raging in that area. When the saint was informed of this, he sang a sacred hymn which begins thus: "Oh, ye who ever think in terms of Karma, is it not injurious to you not to seek to do that deed which will save you? Let us devote ourselves to worship of His Feet in humble ways. By His Blue Throat (then you can be sure) no deed can have the power to bind us". Thereupon the fever disappeared from that region. Turning south, the saint visited many a shrine, and when he reached Tiruppaṭṭisvaram it was hot summer time. Here as a protection against the sun a canopy of pearls arrived, miraculously sent by Śiva. The saint's attendants henceforth bore the canopy over him in order to afford him cool shade.

Śivapādaḥṛdayar, the saint's father who had been accompanying him so long, now felt that the time had come for him to go back to Śīrkālī and perform a Vedic sacrifice. But where was he to go for procuring the money that would be required to accomplish his desire? Sambandhar went to the temple and sang the song which begins thus:

'In trouble and in weakness, and when pain
Afflicts, I seek Thy Feet, and worship Thee'.

A heavenly messenger brought and presented to the saint a thousand pieces of gold which he gave to his father for the purpose of meeting the charges of the sacrifice.

Many more miracles followed. A young merchant who had died of snake-bite was brought back to life. There was a famine rampant in the Kāvēri delta area. At this time Appar also was with Saṁbandhar. The two saints were commanded by the Lord to go to the temple every day to find enough money to distribute to the famine-stricken people. This miracle went on till the rains came and there was plenty in the land again. At Tirumaṛaikkādu the main door of the Śiva temple had always remained closed. Requested by Saṁbandhar, Appar sang a hymn to make the door open. And as suggested by Appar, Saṁbandhar prayed in a hymn so that the door might close again.

About this time Saṁbandhar met a few other saints. At Tirunallāru he saw Tirunīlanakka Nāyanār and enjoyed his hospitality. At the invitation of Śiruttonḍa Nāyanār, he visited Tiruccengāttaṅguḍi and sang a hymn in the Ganapati-śvaram temple. At Tiruppugalūr, he was entertained by Muruga Nāyanār.

The most important event in the life of Saṁbandhar was his visit to Madurai, the capital of the Pāṇḍya kingdom. In fact, that completed his life-mission, which was to re-establish the Śaiva faith. In Madurai, at that time, the Jains were all powerful; they had converted the Pāṇḍya king, Kūn Pāṇḍya; and many of the people had followed the example of the king. The king's wife, Maṅgaiyarkaraśi, and prime minister, Kulacciraiyār, however, stuck to the Śaiva faith, and were praying for a reversal of the state of things in Madurai. The news of Saṁbandhar's teachings and acts reached them. They sent emissaries to Maraikkādu (Vedāraṇyam) where the saint was camping at the time along with Appar. The messengers conveyed to Saṁbandhar the request of the Pāṇḍya queen and of the prime minister that he should consent to visit

Madurai and help to re-establish Śaivism. He readily agreed. Appar said, out of his affection for the young saint, that he should not go to Madurai, as the Jainas might do him harm. When Saṁbandhar was firm in his decision, Appar said that the planets (grahas), etc., were not auspicious. But Saṁbandhar reminded Appar that while Śiva's grace was there nothing untoward could happen. It was on this occasion that he sang the well-known decade known as Koḷaṟu paḍigam which begins thus: "As the blue-throated Lord who wears the faultless Crescent and the Ganges on His Head and who plays on the Viṇā has entered my heart with His consort, the nine grahas will be auspicious to His devotees." Appar wanted to go to Madurai in advance. Saṁbandhar requested him to stay on in the Cōḷa territory, while he went to Madurai to fulfil his mission.

As Saṁbandhar with his entourage approached Madurai, the prime minister went to the outskirts of the city and received him, and conducted him to the Śiva temple where the queen was waiting. After offering a hymn to the Deity and words of consolation and good cheer to the queen, the saint with his followers retired to a monastery where arrangements had been made for his stay. The Jainas got scent of the arrival of the Śaiva saint; they reported to the king and warned him. They also informed him that by their magic power they were going to set fire to the building where the saint was staying. But try as they might, they could not accomplish their end by magic. So, they lighted a fire in the ordinary way; and the followers of the saint put out the fire and told the saint what had happened. Saṁbandhar sang a hymn in which he prayed 'Let the fire started by the Jainas slowly take hold of the king!' In answer to this prayer, the Pāṇḍya king became afflicted with a burning fever. The

queen and the prime minister hastened to his side. The physicians were called in. All possible remedies were tried. There was no abatement of the fever. The Jaina monks came and employed their arts. They stroked the king's body with peacock-feathers, and sprinkled holy water on him. The fever only increased. Unable to bear the agony, the king got angry and ordered them to get away.

At this moment of crisis the queen and the prime minister made the king consent to invite Saṃbandhar who alone, they were convinced, could effect a cure. Even as he heard the name of the saint uttered in his ear, the king felt a change for the better in his condition. The queen and the prime minister approached Saṃbandhar and invited him to the palace. The saint went to the temple first and invoked the Lord's grace. Then he repaired to the side of the ailing king. The Jaina monks too had arrived by then, and would not let Saṃbandhar's claim to cure the king go unchallenged. It was finally agreed, at the suggestion of the king that the Jainas and Saṃbandhar should effect the cure in the left and right sides respectively of the king's body. The former made their attempt first; the fever in the left side increased. Saṃbandhar then prayed to Śiva and smeared the right side of the king's body with the sacred ashes, singing the glory of the ashes in a hymn. The fever left that part of the body and migrated to the other part, where it became unbearable. The king declared that the Jainas had lost the contest, and turning to Saṃbandhar, entreated him to heal the left side of his body also. The saint applied the ashes to that side, uttering the name of the Lord; and the king recovered completely.

Then followed two more tests; and in each case it was the Jainas that laid down the conditions and rules. There was the test by fire. Saṃbandhar took out a palm leaf whereon

one of his hymns had been written, and consigned it into a burning fire. The Jainas wrote out their doctrines on a similar leaf and threw it into the same fire. The former remained fresh, while the latter was burnt out. Then came the water test, which was that the palm leaf whereon the true doctrine was inscribed would go against the current when thrown into flowing water. The Jainas cast a palm leaf into the waters of the Vaigai. Saṁbandhar wrote a hymn on a palm leaf and placed it in the same waters. The former went down the river, whereas the latter went up and was recovered when the saint stopped it at some distance, up-stream. The victory for Śaivism was now complete. The king became a Śaiva again, and along with him the people of the kingdom in large numbers went back to their original faith.

Before the saint left Madurai, his father arrived from Śīrkāli to witness and enjoy the triumphal progress of his son's mission. The saint with his followers went south as far as Rāmeśvaram. At one place during this journey, he made the entire party cross a swollen river in a pilotless boat. At another place he defeated the leader of the Bauddha monks in debate. On the outskirts of Tiruppūnturutti, Appar joined the party without announcing himself. Silently and unnoticed he got mixed with the palanquin bearers. When Saṁbandhar discovered this, he alighted and fell at the feet of the elder saint. Appar bowed to Saṁbandhar in turn and praised him for his Madurai victory. Saṁbandhar then returned to Śīrkāli, but not for a long stay.

The next tour was to Tonḍaimaṇḍalam. After visiting many holy places including Tiruvannāmalai, the saint arrived at a place called Tiruvōttūr where a miracle happened. A devotee of Śiva owned a palmyra grove where all the trees were sterile; the heretics of the place ridiculed him saying that

the God he worshipped was impotent. When this was brought to the notice of Saṁbandhar, he prayed to the Lord to make the trees fruitful; and the prayer was immediately answered. After halting at a few more towns, the saint was nearing Tiruvālaṅgādu. As he knew that this was the place where the woman-saint, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, had walked on her head, he went round it without entering; but he sang all the same in praise of the form of Śiva present there. Then he proceeded to Śrī-kāla-hasti and worshipped at the shrine of Saint Kaṇṇappar. From there he went eastward and reached Tiruvorīyūr, a suburb of Madras.

There was at Mayilāppūr at the time a merchant by name Śivanēśar. He had a daughter, Pūmpāvai. Hearing about the greatness of Saṁbandhar, he was profoundly attracted to the saint, and resolved to give his daughter in marriage to him. But unfortunately the girl was bitten by a snake, one day, as a result of which she died. Śivanēśar became disconsolate but did not lose all hope. He cremated the body of his dead daughter and collected and preserved the ashes and bones in a pot. Coming to know that Saṁbandhar was camping at Tiruvorīyūr, he went to him and invited him to Mayilāppūr. There was a grand reception to the saint. He was informed of what had happened to Pūmpāvai. After worshipping Kapālīśvarar at the Mayilāppūr temple, Saṁbandhar came out and caused the pot containing the relics to be brought. He sang a hymn, and there came out of the pot the girl Pūmpāvai restored to life. Śivanēśar entreated the saint to marry her. Saṁbandhar declined saying that as he was instrumental in making her live again, he was in the position of a father to her.

From Mayilāppūr, Saṁbandhar wended southward. When he had reached Cidambaram, Śivapādaḥṛdayar came

with a party from Śirkālī to escort him back. At the saint's home town arrangements were being made to get him married. At first Saṁbandhar rejected the proposal, but later on agreed to it. The bride was also selected. She was the daughter of Nambiāṇḍār Nambi of Tirunallūr. An auspicious day was fixed. The bridegroom's party arrived at Tirunallūr at the appointed time. At the conclusion of the marriage ceremonies, the saint took the bride and everyone present there into the Śiva temple. He sang a hymn and prayed to the Lord thus: 'O Mother-Father! the time has now come to reach Your Feet.' An effulgence lit the Shrine. The Lord responded. A path of light was blazoned, which led to *Śiva-jyotis*. The saint with all those who had the good fortune to be with him at the time circumambulated the *jyotis* and entered into it and disappeared—a glorious end to a glorious life.

In Śaiva-Siddhānta four courses of spiritual discipline are recognized: (1) *caryā* which consists of external acts of worship like cleaning the temples, gathering flowers for the Deity, etc., this is the path of the servant (*dāsa-mārga*), which leads to residence in the realm of God (*sāloka*); (2) *kriyā* which is characterized by acts of intimate service to God, such as those that a son may render to his sire; hence this is called the path of the son (*sat-putra-mārga*), whose goal is said to be attaining the nearness of God (*sāmūpya*); (3) *yoga* which stands for contemplation and internal worship; this is the path of the friend (*sakhā-mārga*), whose aim is gaining the form of God (*sārūpya*); and (4) *jñāna* which means knowledge or wisdom, the path of the supreme good (*saṁmārga*), whose fruit is the ultimate end which is the final union with God (*sāyujya*). Each of the four *samaya-ācāryas* is held to be an exemplar of one of these four disciplines. Of these, Saṁban-

dhara is said to represent the second path—viz., that of the good son.

We have already seen that of the twelve canonical works of Southern Śaivism, the first three contain the compositions of Saṁbandha. These consist of 383 hymns. In these hymns Saṁbandha sings of the temples he visited, of the presiding Deity, and of the graces of the country in general. The legends about Śiva are made use of, in order to praise the Lord's power to create, preserve and destroy all beings, to veil the truth, and to reveal it. There are also, in the compositions, appeals to God to come to the aid of men, as individuals and as groups, to work miracles so that the omnipotence and grace of Śiva could be made manifest, to preserve righteousness by putting down vice, and to grant the boon of spiritual perfection to the devotee. Saṁbandha sings of the Lord,—not as a penitent, or as from a distance, but with a sense of filial rights like those of a son in relation to his father.



Tirunāvukkaraṣu (Appar).

TIRUNĀVUKKARĀṢU

GENUINE conversion does not consist in a formal change from one religion to another, but in an inner transformation involving spiritual exaltation; in fact, it is that which effects a change over from unsaintly ways of life to saintliness. Not unoften is this occasioned by a serious crisis—even physical—in one's life. The belief is that God Himself intervenes in such cases, and makes His devotee-elect go through an extremely painful experience in order to save him. When God's mercy takes this form, it is called 'causing an impediment and then saving' (*taḍuttāṭkollal*). This was what happened in the case of Tirunāvukkaraṣu (seventh century A.D.) the senior contemporary of Tiruḷḷāna-saṁbandhar, and himself one of the four *samaya-ācāryas* of Southern Śaivism.

In our account of the life of Saṁbandhar, we have already had occasions to refer to Tirunāvukkaraṣu, and to the spiritual comradeship that grew between the two saints. The name *Appār* by which Tirunāvukkaraṣu is also known came into vogue from the time the boy-saint, Saṁbandhar, addressed him endearingly on their first meeting, as '*Appā*' (O, Father!). Of the first seven *Tirumūrais* that constitute the *Tevāram*, the first three, we saw, are the compositions of Saṁbandhar. Tirunāvukkaraṣu is the author of the next three (i.e. 4th, 5th and 6th) *Tirumūrais*. In the *Periya-purāṇam*, Śekkilār gives the biography of Tirunāvukkaraṣu in chapter five. Sundarar, in his *Tiruttonḍattogai*, pays obeisance to Tirunāvukkaraṣu, describing him as the one to whom spiritual weal was the only real weal. Nambi-āṇḍār-nāmbi in his *Tiruvantādi*, makes mention of some of the incidents in the life of Tirunāvukkaraṣu, and praises his Tamil as an ornament to the great Śaiva religion.

In a village called Tiruvāmūr in South Arcot district there lived a pious Vellāla couple, Puḡalanār and Mādiniyār. Of them was born a daughter, Tilakavatiyār, and then a son, Maruṇnikkiyār who was later to become Tirunāvukkaraśu. When Tilakavatiyār came of age, it was settled to give her in marriage to an army-commander who was at the same time a Śaiva-saint, Kalippagai Nāyanār by name. But he had to go on a long expedition to the North, and there unfortunately he died in battle. Meanwhile, at Tiruvāmūr Puḡalanār passed away, and his wife, Mādiniyār, followed him. Not being able to bear this triple tragedy, Tilakavatiyār wanted to put an end to her own life. But her brother, Maruṇnikkiyār, was so disconsolate and miserable, that it was evident that he would not live without his sister; and so, Tilakavatiyār decided to continue to live for the sake of her brother. This turned out to be quite necessary not only to make him live physically, but also in the interests of his spiritual life.

Those were the days in Tamiḷnādu when Jainism was popular, having gained royal patronage. Young Maruṇnikkiyār fell into the hands of the Jaina teachers, and embraced Jainism in his haste to find a shortcut to spirituality. He joined a Jaina monastery at Pāṭalīputra (the place now called Tiruppādirippuliyūr) took on the name 'Dharmasena', and engaged himself in an intensive study of the Jaina faith. He soon became a prominent protagonist of Jainism and a valiant fighter for its cause. Tilakavatiyār was not only greatly disappointed; her heart ached even to think of what had happened to her brother for whose sole sake she was living. She resorted to the sacred shrine at Tiruvadigai-vīraṭṭānam, lived there the life of a recluse, worshipping the Lord and actively taking part in the temple services. Her one prayer to Lord Śiva was that her brother should be reclaimed.

It was in response to Tilakavatiyār's appeal that the miracle happened. The Lord decided to intervene and save Dharmasena; and His mercy took, at first, the form of a physical affliction. The convert to Jainism began to suffer from an acute colic. Remedies—both physical and esoteric—were tried at the monastery, but to no avail. Dharmasena sent word of his ailment to his sister; and soon thereafter he himself went to her, writhing with pain, and confessing to a sense of utter defeat. Tilakavatiyār comforted her brother saying that good time had come back to him, uttered in his ear the *Śiva-ṣaṇcākṣara*, smeared his body with the sacred ash, and took him into the temple. As he went round the shrine and prostrated before the Lord, he received as a divine gift the ability to compose poems. The very first poem that flowed out of his heart breathes the fresh air of repentance. He asks for forgiveness of sins committed by him, refers to the colic and says that it is unbearable. When he finished singing his first decade of verses, the affliction disappeared, and the Voice of God was heard giving him a new name, Tirunāvukkaraśu, meaning 'the sovereign of divine speech.' Thenceforward Tirunāvukkaraśu led the life of a *Śiva-bhakta*, meditating on Śiva, singing His praise, and removing weeds from the precincts of the temples he visited with the hoe that he carried with him. Tilakavatiyār was glad that the miracle happened and her brother was saved.

The Jaina teachers of Pāṭaliputra were angry at the turn of events. They would not let Tirunāvukkaraśu go out of their fold so easily; for, his going out did not mean the going out of a single individual; the circumstances that brought it about would cause the ruin of the Jaina faith itself. So the Jaina teachers planned to make use of their political influence and bring the run-away to book. Accordingly, they went

to Kāñchīpuram and prevailed upon the Pallava king to send for Tirunāvukkaraśu in order to punish him. They lied to the king saying that it was under pressure from his sister that Tirunāvukkaraśu had deserted them, pretending to be suffering from a colic which naturally they could not cure. The king was taken in. He sent his emissaries to Tiruvadigai to fetch Tirunāvukkaraśu. When the emissaries conveyed to the saint the king's orders, the saint declared that he was no slave of the king and that he did not fear death. But fearing the king's wrath, the emissaries implored him to go with them. Taking pity on them, he went to Kāñcī and confronted the king. Acting on the promptings of the Jaina teachers, the Pallava king made several attempts to put an end to Tirunāvukkaraśu's life—attempts which were similar to those that were made by Hiranyakaśipu of yore to kill his own son, Prahlēda. Tirunāvukkaraśu was put in a lime-kiln. In a celebrated decade of verses the saint sang of the soothing and sweet shelter of God's feet which he likens unto the faultless harp, the evening moon, the fanning breeze from the South, spring time with its promise of the fruit season, and the pond that is besought by the honey-bees. The fumes of the kiln did no harm to the saint. When the Jaina priests and the king's men came they found him very much alive. He was then made to eat poison, which did nothing to him. What could poison do to the devotee of Śiva who, as the Purāṇas tell us, willingly drank the poison that emerged out of the milk-ocean, in order to save all beings from utter annihilation? When the Jainas saw that Tirunāvukkaraśu remained unharmed, they sent the royal elephant to trample him to death. The elephant that ran towards him, came to a halt on reaching him, paid obeisance to him, went round him, and, turning tail, made for the Jainas who fled helter-skelter before it. The Jaina teachers were at

their wit's end. As a last measure they suggested to the king that Tirunāvukkaraśu should be tied to a stone and thrown into the sea. When this was done, the stone, instead of sinking, became a float, and the ropes snapped. The saint sang a poem in which he says that though thrown into the sea, tied to a stone, the *mantra* 'namah śivāya' would be one's true succour. He was safely carried to port near Tiruppādirippuliyūr. The Śaiva-devotees of the place accorded him a joyous welcome. The trials were now over. The saint went into the temple and worshipped the Lord, pledging Him his unstinted loyalty and devotion. Then he proceeded to Tiruvadigai, the place at which he had been reclaimed. Thither came the Pallava king, Mahendra Vikrama, full of repentance and remorse. He fell at the saint's feet, and asked for the latter's pardon. The saint blessed the king who had at last realized his folly in deserting the faith of his fathers, Śaivism. The king became a Śaiva again, and made his contribution to the re-establishment of Śaivism in Tamiḷ-nādu.

Tirunāvukkaraśu spent the rest of his life in the service of the Lord and of his devotees. He went from temple to temple, singing hymns in praise of Śiva, and cleansing the holy environs with the hoe that he carried with him. Numerous miracles happened; but he knew that they were all God's workings. Even his life had been saved miraculously. The fact that he was moving about, spreading the glory of Śiva, was itself a miracle.

At a place called Tiruppenākāṭam, Tirunāvukkaraśu prayed to Śiva at the local temple that his arms should be impressed with the figures of the sacred trident and bull so that his body might become sanctified. In answer to this prayer, a divine messenger appeared and placed the desired marks on the saint's arms. Then, in the course of his pilgrim-

mage, he visited Cidāmbaram and expressed in soul-moving poems his vision of the Cosmic Dancer. From Cidāmbaram he went to Śīrkālī to meet the boy-saint Saṁbandhar. An account of this meeting has already been given.

Tirunāvukkaraśu, then, wished to go on a pilgrimage to the Śiva-shrines in the Coḷa territory. Saṁbandhar accompanied him up to Tirukkōlakkā. After seeing many a sacred place, Tirunāvukkaraśu arrived at Tiruccaṭṭimuṇṇam, where the desire came to him that Lord Śiva should bless him by placing His feet on his head. The Lord directed him to go to Nallūr. At the Nallūr temple, as the saint was rising after prostrating, Śiva placed His feet on his head and blessed him.

At a place called Tiṅgalūr, there was a devotee by name Appūdiyaḍigaḷ. Coming to know of Tirunāvukkaraśu's greatness, he was so fascinated by it that he gave the name 'Tirunāvukkaraśu' to his children, to the social service institutions which he had established—and, in fact, to everything with which he was connected. When Tirunāvukkaraśu went to Tiṅgalūr, he called on Appūdiyaḍigaḷ. The latter was overjoyed to meet his master and prepared a feast for him. To fetch plantain leaves, Appūdiyaḍigaḷ sent his son into the garden where he was bitten by a snake. The boy ran back into the house, gave the leaves to his mother, and died. The parents controlled their emotions, and did not break this sad news to their guest lest he should refuse to have his meal. Tirunāvukkaraśu saw what had happened through supernormal perception, and directed the dead body of the boy to be taken to the temple-entrance. There as he sang a decade of verses, the boy came to life again. Then he partook of the meal prepared for him, and dwelt for some days as Appūdiyaḍigaḷ's honoured guest. At the next place of halt which was Tiru-

ppalanappadi, the saint sang hymns in which he praises the great piety of Appūdiyaḍigal.

Tirunāvukkaraśu went back to Nallūr for a short while. There the desire came to him to visit Tiruvārūr. He proceeded to that sacred town, visiting other holy places on the way. During his stay at Tiruvārūr, he composed several poems. The Ārdrā festival which he saw there thrilled him. At Tiruppugalūr he met Saṁbandhar and gave him an account of his experiences at Tiruvārūr. Thereupon Saṁbandhar proceeded to Tiruvārūr, while Tirunāvukkaraśu tarried for a few days at Tiruppugalūr, worshipping and singing at the temple. By the time he finished a short tour of the nearby shrines and returned to Tiruppugalūr, Saṁbandhar arrived back after his visit to Tiruvārūr. Śruttonḍa-nāyanār and Tirunīlanakka-nāyanār joined them; and all of them stayed for a while at Muruganāyanār's monastery. Tirunāvukkaraśu and Saṁbandhar started out on a joint tour. At Tirukkaḍavūr they were the guests of Kuṅgiliyakkalaiya-nāyanār. It was during this tour that in the Kāverī delta there was famine, and the miracle of feeding the famine-stricken people, mentioned in the last chapter, happened. The other miracle of opening the main door of the temple at Tirumaraikkāḍu by Tirunāvukkaraśu and of shutting it by Saṁbandhar also happened during this period.

Here there was a difference between what happened in the two cases. Tirunāvukkaraśu had to pray to the Lord for a long time before the door opened. In the case of Saṁbandhar's praying for the closing of the door, there was no delay at all. Tirunāvukkaraśu meditated over the possible implication of this difference, and was rather depressed, when he had a vision of the Lord commanding him to follow Him to Tiruvāymūr. Tirunāvukkaraśu followed Him, but could not catch

up with Him. Having gone some distance, the Lord pointed out a temple and entered it. Tirunāvukkaraśu also entered the temple. By this time Saṁbandhar had arrived there; The elder saint pleaded with the Lord to reveal His form to his beloved son, Saṁbandhar, at least. Saṁbandhar saw the divine form and showed it to Tirunāvukkaraśu. Then the two saints proceeded to Tiruvāymūr, and after a short stay there returned to Tirumaraikkāḍu.

It was while they were camping at Tirumaraikkāḍu this time that the messengers from Madurai came and invited Saṁbandhar to visit the Pāṇḍya capital in order to re-convert the king and the people from Jainism. After the boy-saint left for Madurai, Tirunāvukkaraśu resumed his journeys again. At a place called Tiruppalaiyārai there was a temple by name Vaḍataḷi. The Jainas of the place had buried the Śiva-līṅga of the temple, so that no one could see it. Coming to know of this, Tirunāvukkaraśu went to the temple and took a vow not to move from that place, nor have any food, till the Līṅga was re-installed. Śiva appeared in a dream to the king of that region and ordered him to renovate the Vaḍataḷi temple and re-install the Līṅga. The king went there, offered his obeisance to Tirunāvukkaraśu, repenting for his past neglect of the temple, and saw to it that the Līṅga was re-installed and worshipped regularly.

Continuing his journey, Tirunāvukkaraśu visited several shrines, and when he was on his way to Tiruppaifūli a miracle happened. The saint was seized with an uncommon thirst and hunger. But unmindful of this affliction the saint was walking along. Lord Śiva, in the guise of a Brahmin wearing sacred ashes accosted him and offered him ready food. The saint partook of the divine food, drank water from the tank that had been miraculously created for the purpose, and like-

wise rested in the specially appointed grove. After this he resumed his journey to Tiruppaiññili. The Brahmin went with him, and on reaching the sacred place disappeared. The saint now realized that the Lord Himself had come to serve him, and sang his tribute to Him.

Then the saint wended north, halted at places such as Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, Mayilāppūr, and Tiruvorriyūr, and eventually reached Śrīkālahasti. Here, he worshipped at the temple, as was his wont, and paid his respects to the image of Saint Kaṇṇappar. Kālahasti is considered, in the Śaiva tradition, to be the southern Kailāsa. This place reminded the saint of the fact that the northern Kailāsa, the seat of Lord Śiva, was on the Himalayas; and he wished to go on a pilgrimage thereto. The journey was long and arduous. When he reached Kāśī, he left his companions there, and began to walk alone, progressively reducing his requirements of food, etc. When his legs became incapacitated through constant walking, he moved with the help of his hands; after some distance, he had to crawl, and then move on his chest. His limbs gave way, his bones broke, and there came a stage when he could move no more.

The Lord knew that the time had not come for Tirunāvu-kkaraśu to return to Kailāsa. He appeared to him in the form of a sage, and then revealed his identity. The saint was asked to rise; he rose and became whole. Pointing out to a tank nearby, the Lord asked him to enter it, and assured him that he would be granted a vision of Kailāsa at Tiruvaḷyāru. Tirunāvu-kkaraśu entered that wonder-tank, and emerged from a tank in Tiruvaḷyāru. He had a glorious vision there of Kailāsa, and was lost for a time in that bliss. He sang and danced out of ecstasy. The vision was then withdrawn by the Lord.

The saint was at first sorry, but soon found consolation when he realized that it was all a display of Śiva's grace.

Then followed a tour of some shrines. At Tiruppūntur-utti he founded a Maṭha, and was staying there. Saṁbandhar, who was returning after his Madurai mission, heard about Tirunāvukkaraṣu's stay at Tiruppūnturūtti and went there to meet him. It was then that the elder saint joined the palanquin-bearers and surprised Saṁbandhar by his utter humility and egolessness. After this meeting, Tirunāvukkaraṣu proceeded to Madurai, leaving Saṁbandhar to tour the sacred shrines in Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam. At Madurai, he met the Pāṇḍya king and queen, and the prime minister and complimented them on their service to Śaivism. Then he journeyed down South as far as Rāmeśvaram; and returning to Coḷa territory he arrived at Tiruppugalūr.

Here, the saint had to go through a test, by the will of the Lord; and he came out of it with flying colours. One day, as he was removing the weeds from the temple precincts, he found gold and rubies wherever his hoe touched the ground. But to the saint, it made no difference; stone and gold, rubbish and rubies, were the same to him. The *Gītā* (xiv, 24) describes the *jīvanmukta* as one who regards as same earth, stone, and gold (*sama-loṣṭāśmakāñcanaḥ*). Then came a more trying test. Heavenly damsels appeared before him; they sang and danced in order to entice him. But he stood unmoved with his thoughts fixed on God. Defeated in their purpose those damsels realized their folly, bowed to him and disappeared.

The end had come to the saint's earthly existence. He was past eighty now. He prayed to the Lord at Tiruppugalūr to take him back. On an auspicious day in the month of



Sundaramūrti.

Citrā, Tirunāvukkaraśu found his last prayer answered; the grand pilgrimage came to an end.

In the Śaiva-siddhānta tradition, Tirunāvukkaraśu is considered to be the exemplar of the path of the servant (dāsa-mārga). Service to Śiva—even physical service—was what mattered most to the saint. The hoe that he carried was the symbol of this service.

Tradition has it that Tirunāvukkaraśu sang 4,900 decades of verses. Of these, only 312 are extant at present. The saint is well known for his 'clear and emphatic utterances'. His songs reveal the experiences he had to pass through, the agonies he had to bear, as well as the success he was able to achieve through constant vigilance and endeavour. In his soul-moving hymns, Tirunāvukkaraśu sings of the greatness of Śiva, as the supreme lord of all beings, and exhorts all souls to turn towards Him as their sole refuge. Śiva is the goal of all faiths and philosophies, according to the saint; all divine-worship is Śiva-worship. Making use of the sacred legends relating to Śiva, Tirunāvukkaraśu impresses on all the need for complete surrender to the Lord, and assures them that Śiva is their unfailing saviour. At the end of each decade of verses, he mentions how Śiva bestowed His grace even on Rāvaṇa. Once you look up to Śiva, no matter what your antecedents were—this seems to be Tirunāvukkaraśu's theme—there is no more fear for you, there is every hope.

SUNDARAMŪRTI

COMPARATIVELY, it is easy to look upon God as father and master, adopting, respectively, the attitudes of the good son and the faithful servant. But to consider Him as friend and yet retain a sense of His supreme divinity is difficult, indeed. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, we see that, beholding the Cosmic Form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna feels repentant for his past intimacies with the Lord whom he has been regarding as his friend. In a plaintive voice he supplicates to Kṛṣṇa, "Thinking You were only a friend, and not knowing this greatness of Yours, the way I have importunately called out, O Kṛṣṇa! O Yādava! O Friend! either through intimacy or through thoughtlessness, and the way in which You have been slighted by me in jest, while at play, reposing, sitting, or at meal, either alone or in company—for all that, O Acyuta, I crave forgiveness from You, Who are infinite" (Gītā, xi, 41-42). Familiarity, even where it does not breed contempt, may give rise to a sense of commonplaceness. That is the danger that lurks in the path of friendship with God. An instance where this danger was reduced to the minimum, and where the devotee was never oblivious of the greatness of God, we have in the life of Sundaramūrti, (eighth century A.D.) one of the four great teachers of the Śaiva faith in South India. The intimacy with Śiva which Sundaramūrti claimed was so great that he made use of His services even for settling domestic quarrels. A contemporary saint actually got into a fury when he heard of this. But the truth was that Sundarar never forgot the unexcellable divinity of the Lord. Śiva was his friend, but at the same time his lord and liege.

The hymns that constitute the seventh *Tirumurai* are the

compositions of Sundarar. He was the first to sing the praise of the sixty-three Nāyanmārs, of whom he was himself one. These songs of praise are called the *Tiruttonḍattogai* and he subscribes himself therein as the servant of the servants of these saints. It was with the *Tiruttonḍattogai* as the basic text that Śēkḱilār wrote the *Periyapurāṇam*. This work begins with the story of Sundaramūrti, relates parts of it while narrating the biographies of other saints connected with his life, and ends with giving a description of his ascension to Kailāsa, seated on a white elephant.

The strip of land between the Coḷa territory and Toṇḍai-maṇḍalam used to be called Tirumunaippāḍi-nāḍu. Here, in a village by name Tiru-nāvalūr, Sundaramūrti was born in an Ādi Śaiva Brahmin family. His father was one Śaḍaiyanār, and mother Isai-jñāniyār. The name that was given to the child by his parents is Nambi-Ārūrar. The term 'Sundarar' came to denote him either because he was extra-ordinarily beautiful or because that was part of the name that he bore in Kailāsa before he took birth in this world. According to a legend, one of Śiva's attendants in Kailāsa, Hālāhala Sundara by name, once fell in love with two of Pārvati's maids, Kamalini and Anindita; consequently all the three had to be born as mortals, have their share of the love that perishes, before they were allowed to re-enter the kingdom of Heaven.

To resume our story of the human Sundarar: The child was playing with a toy-cart outside his home, one day. The royal chief of Tirumunaippāḍi-nāḍu chanced to go that way. Fascinated by the child, he wanted to adopt him as his son and bring him up as such in his palace. He had this desire of his fulfilled with the consent of the child's parents. The training that was appropriate for a Brahmin boy was given to Sundarar, although he grew up in a royal household. When

the time for his marriage came, his father, Śaḍaiyanār, fixed up as the bride the daughter of one Śaḍaṅkavi Śivācārya of Puttūr. All arrangements were made for the wedding. The bridegroom, riding a horse and accompanied by his people, left his native village, Nāvalūr, and arrived at the bride's house in Puttūr.

The Lord chose this moment for his intervention in order to save his devotee, Sundarar. Here is a pre-eminent case of what we described in the last chapter as "causing an impediment and then saving" (*taḍuttāṭhollal*). In fact, the first chapter of the *Periyapurāṇam* which narrates the main story of the life of Sundarar bears the title, *Taḍuttāṭhonda-purāṇam*. This is how the divine intervention took place: Sundarar was about to be married; the preliminary ceremonies were already afoot. At this crucial moment Śiva appeared in the guise of an old Brahmin and announced that he had a suit against the bridegroom. His claim was that Sundarar was His slave, according to a deed executed by the latter's grandfather. Sundarar disputed this claim, and rebuked the old Brahmin saying, 'Are you a mad man? Is it possible that one Brahmin should become the slave of another Brahmin?' Those who were then present at the marriage place expressed their view that Sundarar's argument was sound. Thereupon the old Brahmin produced a document purporting to be the deed executed by Sundarar's grandfather pledging himself and his descendants to serve the Brahmin as his absolute slaves. Sundarar alleged that it was a forged document, seized it from the old Brahmin's hands, and tore it to pieces. The old man would not leave the dispute at that; he persisted in asserting his rights. The people who were assembled there wanted to know his whereabouts. The strange old man declared that he was a native of the nearby Nallūr. Sundarar suggested that

all of them could go to Nallūr and have the case settled at a meeting of the council of the Brahmins of Nallūr. Accordingly, led by the old Brahmin, Sundarar and his men went to Nallūr. Before the assembled Brahmins, the old man repeated his case; he also said that the document destroyed by Sundarar was only a copy, and that he could produce the original to prove his case. He produced the original deed; it was read out to the assembly. A close examination of the deed revealed that it was a genuine one. There was no ground to doubt the genuineness of the signature of Sundarar's grandfather, and those of the witnesses. Sundarar lost his case. But before handing him over to the old man, the assembly wanted to know the latter's residence. He said he was a native of Nallūr; but the people of Nallūr did not seem to know him. The old Brahmin asked the assembly to follow him. He walked into the temple called Tiru-arutturai, and disappeared. Leaving the others behind, Sundarar entered the shrine, and saw in a vision there Śiva and Pārvati seated on the sacred Bull. Addressing His devotee, the Lord said: 'You have now been saved. Because you entered into a disputation with Me, you shall be called 'Van-tonḍar' (Tough Devotee). The best form of worshipping Me is to sing My praises. So, go forth and sing of Me!' 'How shall I sing? How shall I begin?' asked Sundarar. 'Begin your first composition with the words "O Mad one!", since you have already given Me that title', said the Lord. Immediately, the inspiration to sing came to Sundarar; he sang his first decade of verses commencing with the words 'O Mad One! O the One wearing the crescent moon!'

What happened to the marriage? It had to break. The bride would not think of any other man; she remained a virgin and died. Meanwhile, having become a saint, Sundarar

returned to Nāvalūr. There he engaged himself in the worship of the Lord. After some days, he went to Tirutturaiyūr. While sojourning there, the idea of going on to Cidambaram occurred to him. Accordingly, he set out on this great journey.

On the way was Tiruvadigai, the sacred place where Tirunāvukkaraśu was reconverted to Śaivism. Sundarar did not want to spoil the sanctity of Tiruvadigai by treading on its soil. So, as the evening came, he rested in a nearby monastery. As he was lying down, he felt the feet of some one pressing on his head. He woke to find an old Brahmin sleeping. When questioned, the old man said on account of old age he did not realize that his feet were resting on the young saint's head. Sundarar shifted himself to some distance, and lay down there. After some time he woke up to find the same feet touching his head. When the old man was questioned again, he replied 'Don't you know Me!' and disappeared. Sundarar at once knew that the old Brahmin was no other than Lord Śiva, who had now come to bless him, even unasked, by placing His Feet on his head.

At Cidambaram, the saint worshipped at the temple and sang his hymns in praise of the Dancing Deity. Here he heard the voice of the Divine directing him to go to Tiruvārūr. So, on to Tiruvārūr he went. *En route* he visited several sacred places. At the approach to Sirkāli he saw the Lord in a vision. As this was the birth-place of Sambandhar, he went round, without walking into it.

The citizens of Tiruvārūr accorded the saint a rousing reception. The name given to Sundarar by his parents, viz. Nambi-Ārūrar, it is to be noticed, is after the Lord of Tiru-Ārūr. Śiva of Tiruvārūr was the tutelary Deity of Sundarar's ancestors. Here, then, was to occur a great event in the life of

Sundarar. One of the two heavenly damsels, Kamalini, with whom Sundarar—before his birth in the world—had fallen in love in Kailāsa, had taken birth at Tiruvārūr. She bore the name Paravaiyār, and had reached the age of marriage. One day, she and Sundarar met in the temple. Sundarar prayed to the Lord to unite him with Paravaiyār in wedlock. Paravaiyār's thoughts were also constantly on the young saint whom she had seen in the temple. Śiva appeared in a dream to His devotees at Tiruvārūr, and directed them to arrange for the marriage of Sundarar with Paravaiyār. The marriage was accordingly performed, and the saint settled down to the routine of a domestic life.

One day, as usual Sundarar went to the Tiruvārūr temple. There in the temple, at the Dēvāśīriya-maṇḍapam, he saw groups of devotees. Seeing them, he prayed to the Lord to make him a fit servant of those devotees. Lord Śiva ordered him to compose a poem in honour of the devotees. Sundarar asked Him how he should begin. The Lord dictated to him the first line, meaning 'I am the servant of the servants of the Brahmins that reside in Tillai (Cidambaram)'. Sundarar took the cue and sang of the greatness of the sixty-three saints. It is this poem that is called the *Tiruttonḍat-togai*, which, we saw, was the source-book for Śekkiḷār's *Periappurāṇam*.

There was an ardent admirer of Sundarar in Kuṇḍaiyūr, a cultivator of land who used to supply to Sundarar's household rice and other articles of food. Owing to the failure of rains he found that there was not enough rice to supply. He was quite sad, and even refused to eat. Śiva appeared to him in a dream and said that He had arranged for an adequate provision of rice. The next morning everywhere in the village big heaps of rice were seen. The old peasant was extremely

happy. But how was he to transport all the rice to Tiruvārūr? He set out for Tiruvārūr, wanting to meet Sundarar and convey the news to him. Meanwhile Sundarar, being informed of the miracle by the Lord Himself, was on his way to Kuṇḍaiyūr. The peasant and the saint met; both of them went to Kuṇḍaiyūr and Sundarar saw there the huge rice-heaps. The saint was overwhelmed by feelings of devoted thankfulness. To whom, except Śiva, could he appeal to complete the miracle by transporting the grain to Tiruvārūr? Overnight the heavenly messengers of Śiva carried the grain to the holy city. Not only was the granary of Paravaiyār's house filled, but also that of every home in Tiruvārūr.

At Tirunāṭṭiyathān-kuḍi there was a Śaiva saint by name Koṭpuliyaṛ. He invited Sundarar to visit his place. When Sundarar went there, Koṭpuliyaṛ offered him his two daughters—Singaḍi and Vanappagai—in marriage. Sundarar expressed his refusal politely, by telling him that he regarded the two girls as his own daughters. In some of his hymns Sundarar styles himself as the father of Singaḍi and Vanappagai.

The time for the great festival at Tiruvārūr was nearing. Paravaiyār was in need of money for providing hospitality to the numerous devotees who would be taking part in the festival. Sundarar went to Tiruppugalūr to get the needed money. Into the temple directly he went; there he expressed his prayer to the Lord in a *padigam*. Thereafter, being tired, he stretched himself on the floor of a monastery nearby for a nap using bricks for pillow. When he woke up after a while, he saw all the bricks turned into gold. Taking this gold to Tiruvārūr he used it for entertaining the devotees that came for the festival.

After visiting many Śiva shrines, Sundarar was spending a night at Tiruvālampōlil. There Śiva appeared to him in a

vision and remarked 'Have you forgotten Maḷapāḍi?' There-upon Sundarar proceeded to that place, and dwelt there for some days, worshipping the Lord and singing His praise. At Tiruppāccilāśramam, he asked Śiva for gold. It was not immediately forthcoming. Then he sang a song and received the gold he had asked for. At Tiruppañṇī, he beheld the *Bhikṣāṇa* (Beggar) form of the Lord, and was lost in wonder as to what it all meant—the King of Kings in the guise of a mendicant-beggar! At Tiruppāṇḍikkoḍumuḍi, Sundarar composed a decade of verses about the *namaḥ-śivāya-mantra*. At Tiruppērūr he was blessed with a vision of the Dancing Lord of Tillai. Desiring to go to Cidambaram he travelled, stopping at several places on the way. He came to the neighbourhood of Tirukkūḍalaiyāṇṇūr, but without going to that place, he was proceeding to Tirumudukunṇu. He asked a Brahmin whom he came across as to which way he should go to reach Tirumudukunṇu. The Brahmin wantonly misled him to Tirukkūḍalaiyāṇṇūr, and disappeared. It was, verily, the Lord's wish that Sundarar should not miss visiting this holy place. After worshipping the Lord at Tirukkūḍalaiyāṇṇūr, Sundarar went to Tirumudukunṇu.

Sundarar prayed again for money, here, and was given 12,000 pieces of gold. He wanted these gold-pieces to be miraculously transported to Tiruvārūr. God directed him to throw them into the river Maṇimuttāru, and recover them from the tank in Tiruvārūr. Taking a small piece of gold with him for the purpose of testing the genuineness of the gold he would be receiving at Tiruvārūr, Sundarar threw the god-given gold into the river. Then he proceeded to Cidambaram, and thence to Tiruvārūr.

At Tiruvārūr, Sundarar informed his wife Paravaiyār about the Tirumudukunṇu miracle. She was not inclined to

believe that the gold thrown into the Maṇimuttāru river could be recovered from the Tiruvārūr tank. Sundarar took her to the tank. He went down the steps and looked out for the gold, but could not find it. Then he sang a hymn; and the gold appeared. He took out the gold-piece he had carried and compared with it the recovered gold. The latter seemed to be inferior in quality. Again, he sang, and now the original quality was restored to the gold.

After a few days' rest at Tiruvārūr, Sundarar started out again to visit Śaiva shrines. He worshipped and sang at several places including Tirukkōlakkā where Sambandhar had received a pair of cymbals from the Lord. Then he was on his way to Tirukkurugāvūr, when he and those who followed him were seized with hunger and thirst. The Lord appeared in the guise of a Brahmin, with refreshments ready for his devotee. The quantity of the food also miraculously increased to meet the demands of the entire party. After a sumptuous meal, Sundarar and his companions rested for a while. When he woke up, he found that the Brahmin had disappeared. He then knew that it was Śiva who had come to their succour, and expressed his gratitude in song.

A similar miracle happened again. This time it was at a place called Tirukkaccūr. Sundarar came out of the temple after worshipping the Lord. He was feeling hungry, but no provision had yet been made for cooking. Śiva appeared disguised as a Brahmin and offered to beg for alms on behalf of Sundarar. Playing the role of the *Bhikṣātāna*, He went from door to door, and brought enough food for the saint and his group. The Brahmin then disappeared, leaving Sundarar in a happy mood of devoted gratitude.

Among the places that Sundarar next visited were Kāñci and Kālahasti. From Kālahasti, he went to Tiruvorriyūr.

Here the other heavenly damsel, Anindita, who had incarnated herself by divine dispensation in a peasant family was living at the time. Śaṅgiliyār—for that was her name—had refused every offer of marriage, informing her parents that her aim was to serve a great Śaiva saint. At Tiruvoṟṟiyūr she had settled down, engaging herself in the service of the Lord at the temple. The particular form of service was to weave flower-garlands everyday for adorning the Lord's image. One day, while Sundarar was in the temple, he saw Śaṅgiliyār and immediately fell in love with her. It had by now become a habit with Sundarar to appeal to the Lord to grant him his desires. So, he prayed and asked Śiva to arrange for his marriage with Śaṅgiliyār. The Lord agreed; and He appeared to the lady in a dream, conveyed to her Sundarar's wish, and asked her to give her consent to the wedding. Śaṅgiliyār had no objection; but would not Sundarar go away to Tiruvārūr to live again with Paravaiyār? The Lord assured her that He would make Sundarar take a vow not to leave Tiruvoṟṟiyūr. When the Lord informed Sundarar of this condition, Sundarar said that he had no objection, provided the Lord would leave the shrine at the time the vow was being made there, and stay for a while under the sacred tree outside. Sundarar's intention evidently was that the vow should not be binding on him. What was God to do? He would not be party to his deceit. So, He instructed Śaṅgiliyār to ask Sundarar to take the vow beneath the sacred tree. The vow was taken; and the wedding took place. Sundarar dwelt happily for some time with Śaṅgiliyār at Tiruvoṟṟiyūr.

The spring came. This reminded the saint of the festival at Tiruvārūr. The memories of Paravaiyār's song and dance also came to him. He could not stay at Tiruvoṟṟiyūr any longer. Notwithstanding his promise, he left the place for

Tiruvārūr. As he left, he became totally blind. Undaunted, he walked on, receiving directions from the passers-by. At Tiruveṇṇākkam, the Lord gave him a walking-stick. At Kāñcīpuram, his left eye got back its vision. At Tirutturitti, he was cured of a malady that afflicted his body. At long last, he reached Tiruvārūr. He went to the temple and prayed for the restoration of sight to the other eye. God granted him this also.

The saint sent word to Paravaiyār that he had arrived back. But the lady, in her righteous anger, refused to receive him. What man cannot do, God must achieve. Sundarar implored the Lord to undertake the mission of appeasement. Śiva went to Paravaiyār's house in the guise of a priest and pleaded with her on behalf of Sundarar. She would not listen. Śiva went back, but returned revealing His true form this time. Paravaiyār fell at His feet, and asked for His pardon. Her anger was now gone, and she was looking forward to meeting her lord. Sundarar arrived at the house, and the two lived happily as before.

We referred above to a contemporary saint who got cross with Sundarar for employing the Lord as a mediator in his love-quarrels. That saint was one Ēyarkon Kalikkāmar. Kalikkāmar could not even bear to think of what had happened. Śiva wanted to remove the misunderstanding, and so caused a colic to afflict Kalikkāmar. He also informed him that the colic would go only through the good offices of Sundarar. The command was also given to Sundarar to go to Kalikkāmar and cure him of his disease. But Kalikkāmar did not like this; and so, before Sundarar arrived at his place, he committed suicide, cutting open his own bowels with a sword. The news of this was not disclosed to Sundarar when he reached there. On his insistence to be taken to Kalik-

kāmar, he was led into the room where the dead body lay. Sundarar was greatly moved; he took the sword that had killed Kalikkāmar, and was about to put an end to his own life with it. By God's grace Kalikkāmar rose again, and averted the tragedy. Thus was revealed to Kalikkāmar the genuineness of Sundarar's devotion.

Another saint with whom Sundarar got intimately acquainted was the chief of the Cēra territory, Cēramān Perumāl. The royal saint made a pilgrimage to Tiruvārūr in order to meet and pay homage to Sundarar. The two together made a tour of all the important shrines of Śiva. At Madurai the Pāṇḍya and Coḷa Kings received and honoured them. They travelled as far south as Rāmeśvaram; and on their return journey, they visited, among other places, Tirucculi and Tirukkānappērūr, and then returned to Tiruvārūr.

At the pressing invitation of Cēramān, Sundarar agreed to go with him to his capital city on the west coast. Leaving Tiruvārūr, they went to Tirukkaṇḍiyūr. On the other side of the Kāviri was Tiruvaiyāru. Cēramān wanted to visit that place. But the ferry service had stopped because of heavy floods. Sundarar sang a *padigam*; and the river parted to let the two saints and their followers cross safely to the other bank.

The two saints then journeyed through picturesque country to the west coast. There was a royal reception at Koḍunkōlūr, the Cēra capital. After offering worship at the Tiruvañcikkaḷam temple, Sundarar went to the palace in procession. The king's caparisoned elephant bore him gracefully, while the king himself stood behind the visiting saint fanning him with a *chowrie*. Sundarar enjoyed the hospitality of Cēramān and his subjects for a few days, and then started back on his homeward journey. The parting was

sad; Sundarar spoke to Cēramān words of consolation and took leave of him. Cēramān sent Sundarar loaded with costly presents. On the way these presents were seized by the messengers sent by Śiva disguised as woodsmen. This happened at a place called Tirumuruganpūṇḍi. Sundarar went into the temple and lodged a complaint with the Lord. The stolen property was miraculously returned to him.

After a brief stay at Tiruvārūr, Sundarar started on his second trip to the Cēra capital. He was passing through the streets of Tiruppukkoḷiyūr, a town in the Kongu region. There at one spot he heard wailings from one house and shouts of joy from the house opposite. He enquired as to what the reasons were, and was told that the house whose inmates were weeping had lost a boy to a crocodile in the local lake, while the other house was fortunate in that its boy who had accompanied the ill-fated youngster had been saved and was now being invested with the sacred thread. Sundarar went to the house that had suffered the loss of a son and met the parents; they were overjoyed at the unexpected visit of the saint. The saint, then, asked to be led to the lake, and going there sang a *paḍigam* praying to the Lord to restore the boy to his parents. The miracle happened. The crocodile gave the boy back.

The news of the miracle spread far and wide. The citizens of the Cēra capital, who had also heard of this, accorded a warm reception to Sundarar. Cēramān's happiness knew no bounds. This time he bore a white umbrella over Sundarar, and conducted him to his palace. One day, when Cēramān was having his bath, Sundarar went to the Tiruvañcaikkaḷam temple. He worshipped the Lord and implored Him to take him back. The Lord sent the gods and other heavenly messengers to lead Sundarar back to Kailāsa.

A white elephant arrived to carry him. Sundarar sat on it, and the aerial journey commenced. By this time Cēramān arrived at the scene. He jumped on to the horse that was near at hand and uttered the *Śivamantra* into its ears. The horse flew up, circumambulated the white elephant, and went ahead of it. The Cēra warriors committed suicide and accompanied their master with their subtle bodies. The two saints reached the gates of Kailāsa. Sundarar was admitted, while Cēramān was kept out. Sundarar was ushered into the sacred presence of Śiva. He appealed to the Lord to admit Cēramān also into His presence. The chief of Śiva's attendants, Nandi, was ordered to bring Cēramān. The two saints met again at the Feet of Lord Śiva; they sang the Lord's praise and dedicated themselves to His service. By Pārvatī's grace, the two consorts of Sundarar were also called back from the earth. Paravaiyār and Sangiliyār were transmorphosed into Kamalinī and Aninditā again.

It is the path of friendship (*sakhā-mārga*) that Sundarar exemplifies chiefly. His life illustrates the liberties that one normally takes with a friend. But since in his case, Śiva is the friend and he is ever conscious of this fact, the friendship is rooted in the recognition of the Lord's supremacy, and is not of the usual commonplace variety. The hymns composed by Sundarar reveal a sense of friendly familiarity, and at the same time they are inspired by a deep devotion.

Sundarar is said to have composed 38,000 hymns, but of them only a hundred *padigams* are now available. He refers in these hymns, to many of the incidents in his own life. He also speaks of the saints like Sambandhar and Tirunāvukkaraṣu who preceded him. He does not hesitate to ask of the Lord whatever he wants to enjoy in this world. It is his strong

conviction that just as *mokṣa* is the gift of God, *bhoga*, (pleasure) too is to be had through His grace.

Like his predecessors, Sundarar gives a glowing account of the glorious majesty of Śiva. Śiva is both immanent and transcendent; he pervades all beings, and is also above them. References to the four paths, *caryā*, *kriyā*, *yoga*, and *jñāna*, are found in Sundarar's songs. The saint is concerned not merely with his own salvation, but also with the redemption of all. Although he was elected by the Lord as His friend, he was quite humble and knew what his frailties were. He offered himself to the Lord with all his faults, and he was readily accepted.



Māṇikkavācakar.

MĀNIKKAVĀCAKAR

BRIDAL mysticism has its unique value as well as its peculiar dangers. The devotee who is an expert in this type of mysticism considers himself or herself to be the bride of God. This is an attitude which is adopted not only by women-saints but also by men-saints. In fact, according to the philosophy behind this attitude, God is the only Male, and all the souls are His consorts. This is what the allegory of Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs implies. Nārada in his *Bhakti-sūtra* commends the *bhakti* of the milkmaids of Brindāvan as the highest type of devotion. In the Hindu scriptures the bliss of divine communion is likened to conjugal happiness. The danger that lurks in all such imagery is literalness in understanding it. In some of the Hindu sects, the interpretation became so literal that it led to mal-practices. But bridal mysticism in its pure form is as lofty as loftiness can be. It stands for an undivided loyalty and exclusive devotion to the Lord, and an intense longing for union with Him. In Mānikkavācakar's life and utterances we have a beautiful expression of bridal mysticism. The possible dangers of the bridal attitude are usually offset by the devotee's acceptance of the Lord as the teacher as well. Mānikkavācakar was first blessed by Śiva as *guru*. Having been saved thus, the saint realized that he had no other obligations except to serve God and get lost in Him.

The hymns sung by Mānikkavācakar, viz., *Tiruvācakam* and *Tirukkōvaiyār*, constitute the eighth Śaiva canon (*Tirumurai*). There is a saying that those who do not melt to *Tiruvācakam* will melt to no words. The sentiments expressed by Mānikkavācakar and the way he expresses them have a rare moving quality. A nineteenth century saint of South

India, Rāmalingam, addresses the following panegyric in praise of Māṇikkavācakar's songs: 'Oh divine Māṇikkavācaka! when I sing your songs in tune with their spirit, the resulting experience is sweet like the sugar-cane juice in which are mixed honey, milk, the taste of mellow fruits, my entire self, body and soul. And yet it is a sweetness without satiety.'

Śekkiḷār's *Periyapurāṇam* does not give any account of Māṇikkavācakar's life. The work which gives a complete account of the saint's biography is the *Tiruvādavūr-aḍigal-purāṇam*. Certain incidents in Māṇikkavācakar's life are referred to in the two *Tiruvilaiyāḍal-purāṇams*, one by Perum-paṇṇapuliyyūr Nambi and the other by Parañjoti Munivar, in the *Tirupperunturaippurāṇam*, the *Tiru-uttarakośamaṅgaip-purāṇam*, and other works of a similar nature.

Māṇikkavācakar (between 3rd and 9th century A.D.) was born of Ādi-Śaiva Brahmin parents at a place called Tiruvādavūr in the neighbourhood of Madurai, capital of the Pāṇḍya kingdom. His father, Śambhupādāśritar, belonged to the Amātya clan from which usually the king's ministers were chosen. His mother's name was Śivajñānavatī. The name that was given to him by his parents is not known. He was called Tiruvādavūrar after his native place. He was put to school at the proper age, and by the time he was sixteen he had mastered all the sacred lore and secular arts. The news of the accomplishments of this youth reached the ears of the Pāṇḍya king. Thereupon the king sent for Tiruvādavūrar, realized that his expectations were more than fulfilled, and straightaway appointed the youth from Tiruvādavūr his chief minister, conferring upon him the title 'Tennavan Brahmarāyan.' Tiruvādavūrar proved to be quite an efficient administrator. But in his heart of hearts he was longing to retire

and spend his life in pursuit of spiritual perfection. His devotion to Lord Śiva grew, and he was constantly in search of a *guru*.

Tiruvāḍavūrar did not have to wait long for success in his efforts to meet his *guru*. One day as the king was holding court in his palace, a messenger brought the news that fine horses for sale had arrived at an eastern sea-port. The mission was so important that the king asked his chief minister himself to proceed with the necessary money to the sea-port to buy the horses. Tiruvāḍavūrar started on his mission with a large retinue following him, after offering worship at the temple of the Lord of Madurai, Cokkanātha (Śiva), inwardly wishing that he should find his *guru* while on this errand. After a long travel, as he approached Tirupperunturai, the sea-port town, he heard the sound of Vedic chant. He proceeded in the direction of the sound and came to a grove where he saw a teacher seated beneath a sacred tree, and surrounded by devotees. The Teacher was no other than Lord Śiva Himself who had assumed the human form in order to save Tiruvāḍavūrar. The chief minister recognized his *guru* at once, and surrendered himself unreservedly to Him, forgetting all about the king's commission. The gift of poesy came to him, and mellifluous verses of rare beauty and charm flowed from his lips in praise of the Lord. The Lord was greatly pleased and gave him the title "*Māṇikkavācaka*", 'he whose words are rubies'. Māṇikkavācakar adopted the mendicant's life, joining the group of Śiva's devotees, and spent all the money he had brought from the king's treasury in feeding the *Śiva-bhaktas* and in renovating the Śiva-temple at Tirupperunturai.

The officers of state who had accompanied the chief minister waited for a few days at Tirupperunturai; but their

chief showed no inclination to return to Madurai either with the horses or without them. So, they went back to the capital city and informed the king of what had happened to his chief minister. The king got into a fury and sent a stern note to Māṇikkavācakar commanding him to return with the horses or with the money. Māṇikkavācakar waited on the only Master he now had, his spiritual Lord, and asked Him as to what he should do. The master ordered him to go back to Madurai and inform the king that the horses would arrive on the day of *Āvaṇi Mūlam*. He also handed over to His devotee a rare ruby which he was to take as a present to the king.

Māṇikkavācakar went to Madurai, met the king, told him that the horses would reach the capital on the *Āvaṇi Mūlam* day, and gave him the present. The king was pleased, finding that there was no reason to doubt the *bona fides* of his chief minister. But this pleasure did not last long. As *Āvaṇi Mūlam* was approaching, the king's spies came and reported that there was no sign of the horses either at Tirupperunturai or anywhere *en route*. The king got angry and ordered his ex-minister to be put into prison and punished. The saint prayed to the Lord, invoking His grace. The Lord kept His word. On the *Āvaṇi Mūlam* day, at the appointed hour, the horses arrived at Madurai city. Strange-looking foreigners were leading the horses. The Lord came in the guise of their leader. When the king saw the fine horses, he became pleased again, and ordered that his ex-minister should be released at once. Māṇikkavācakar hastened to the king's court to have a look at his Lord who had come to keep His word. The king asked his ex-minister to identify the Horse-Dealer. When the saint pointed out the Lord Who had saved him, the king rose from his seat automatically and with folded hands offered Him obeisance. Immediately afterwards his ego re-asserted itself and he thought he had done

something improper. Than he put searching questions about the horses to the Horse-Dealer, and asked his own experts to satisfy themselves about the quality of the horses. When all the tests had turned out to be successful, the king received the horses and made a present of a silk-scarf to the Horse-Dealer which the latter received with His whip. The king was offended at this affront, but the saint explained to him that this was the custom prevalent in the lands from which the horse-men came. The strangers and their Leader then took their leave. The horses were sent to the stables. And, the saint went back to his place.

Night descended on the city. When it was midnight a miracle happened. The horses that had cost the king a fortune became metamorphosed into jackals. They ran out of the stables into the streets, created a pandemonium, wrought havoc, and disappeared. When the news of this was carried to the king, he got angry again. He was now convinced that his ex-minister had played a trick upon him. And so, he ordered his arrest and torture till the lost money was recovered. The saint was led to the sands of the river Vaigai under a scorching sun and was being tortured. In order to bring the king to his senses, the Lord made the waters of the river rise and flood the streets of the city. Realizing that this was the punishment for ill-treating the saint, the king went to him and pleaded for intercession. The flood-waters began to recede; and at the suggestion of Māṇikkavācakar arrangements were made to repair the embankment. The citizens were ordered to attend to this task forthwith; each was allotted a portion of the embankment.

There was an old lady by name Vanti who was earning her living by making and selling edibles. She was too old to do her part of the repair work. She was prepared to hire

labour, the hire being the edibles that broke during their preparation. But no able-bodied man was forthcoming to work on her terms. The old lady was an ardent devotee of Śiva. So, to Śiva she appealed for succour. In answer to her prayers, a young man presented himself before her offering to execute her portion of the repairs. This was no other than the Lord Himself come to perform one of His divine sports. In the guise of the young labourer He was disporting Himself on the banks of the Vaigai. The king came along on an inspection, noticed that the young man in Vanti's employ was not doing his work properly, and as punishment beat him on the back with the cane. And lo! a basketful of earth that the young labourer bore on his shoulders fell into the breach and the embankment became whole. And the stroke of the cane fell on the backs of all beings including that of the king. Vanti ascended to Heaven. The labourer vanished. A Voice from the sky was heard admonishing the king for the irreverence he had shown to Mānikkavācakar. The king realized his folly, went to the place where the saint was seated at the time lost in meditation, and entreated him to shoulder again the responsibility of ruling the Pāndya kingdom. But there was no question of a going back for the saint. He had left the world behind along with its worldliness. The Lord now commanded him to proceed to Cidambaram. And, he rose to walk in the direction of that holy place.

Mānikkavācakar first went to Tirupperunturai where God had appeared to him as his *guru*. There he saw again his Master seated surrounded by His devotees. After some time the Lord decided to go back to His heavenly abode. His devotees desired to follow Him. He told them that when the appointed day arrived there would appear a flame in the

tank of that place, and that by entering the flame they would join Him in His abode. Mānikkavācakar was to be an exception. He should visit the Śiva-shrines at Tiru-uttarakośamaṅgai, Tirukkalukkuṇṇam and other places, and finally go to Cidambaram, singing the glory of the Lord and instructing the people in His lore.

At Tiru-uttarakośamaṅgai Mānikkavācakar had again a vision of his Master. From there the saint went to several holy places. At Tiruvannāmalai the Lord appeared once more in the form of the *guru*. When Mānikkavācakar was staying here the month of Mārgaḷi came—the month that is most auspicious. During this month maidens rise up early everyday, go to the sacred tank as a group for bathing, and worship the Lord in the temple singing His praise in chorus. Mānikkavācakar composed the *Tiruvembāvai* to celebrate this group-worship by maidens. At Tirukkalukkuṇṇam, the saint was blessed again with a vision of the supreme *guru*.

Then came the last part of the journey-onward to Cidambaram. Reaching the holy place, passing through the streets, he entered the temple. In the presence of the Image of the Dancing Lord, he fell into a trance, forgetting the world. When he came out of the trance, he sang several hymns in praise of the Lord. He realized there the significance of the three-fold representation of Śiva—(1) with form, as the Image of Naṭarāja, (2) with and without form as the *Mūlasthāna-Liṅga* and (3) without form as the *Ākāśa* (ether) known as the *Cidambara-rahasya*. As Cidambaram was the place of his salvation, as indicated by the Lord, Mānikkavācakar took up residence on the outskirts of the city. Living there he practised *Śiva-yoga*, and feasted his eyes daily by going to the temple and looking at the Image of the Lord. Many of

the hymns constituting the *Tiruvācakam* were composed here by the saint.

One day the king of Ceylon with his daughter who was dumb, and with some Bauddha priests, arrived at Cidambaram. He and those who followed him had heard about the sanctity of this place from a visiting Śaiva ascetic. The king, although a Bauddha, had a vague hope that his daughter would gain the power of speech at that holy place. The Bauddha priests had come there for the purpose of meeting exponents of Śaivism and defeating them in debate. To the *dikṣitars* of Cidambaram the Lord appeared in a dream and asked them to go to Māṇikkavācakar and request him to agree to a debate with the Bauddha priests. The debate took place in the temple. There was a great gathering of people headed by the Cōla king who had come specially for the purpose of listening to the debate. The chief of Ceylon was also there with his retinue. The Bauddhas expounded their doctrines. Māṇikkavācakar dwelt on the greatness of Śiva. After exhausting their arguments, the Bauddhas began to abuse Śiva. The saint prayed to the Lord that the Goddess of Learning should be made to desert the tongues of the Bauddha debaters. The miracle happened. The Bauddhas were struck dumb. The king of Ceylon seized this opportunity and requested the saint to work the contrary miracle of making his dumb daughter speak. Māṇikkavācakar agreed, and made the mute girl reply to the debating points that the Bauddha priests had raised earlier. In the *Tiruvācakam* hymn called *Tiruccālal* Māṇikkavācakar has incorporated the replies given by the Ceylon princess. The king of Ceylon with his people embraced Śaivism. He entreated the saint to show mercy on the Bauddha priests and restore to them the power of speech. Regaining this

power, they too became Śaivas. His mission fulfilled, Māṇikkavācakar went back to his hermitage.

Assuming the form of a Brahmin the Lord called on Māṇikkavācakar at his abode, one day. The visitor expressed a desire to take down in writing the hymns that the saint had composed till then. The saint recited them, and the Lord played the role of the scribe. After the *Tiruvācakām* had thus been reduced to writing, the Lord asked the saint to sing a new composition (*Tirukkōvaiyār*) in praise of the Deity of Cidambaram. As Māṇikkavācakar sang these verses, the Lord wrote them down. He added the colophon: 'As recited by Vāḍavūran, it was recorded by Ambalavan (the Lord of Cidambaram)', and put his signature. This script was taken by the Lord to His own shrine, and was left by Him there on the holy steps. The priests who went to the shrine found the script which was in the Lord's own writing; and the news spread like wild fire. A huge crowd had gathered at Māṇikkavācakar's cottage. When the saint heard the news from its leaders, he praised the Lord for the unique grace that He had bestowed on him. When he was asked to explain the meaning of the hymns that he had written, he replied that he would do so at the temple. The whole gathering then followed the saint to the shrine of Naṭarāja. Pointing out to the Image of the Lord, Māṇikkavācakar declared "He is the meaning of my songs", and then going into the Holy of the holies he disappeared, becoming one with the Lord. The river had entered the sea. This was the glorious consummation of the saintly life of Māṇikkavācakar.

The *Tiruvācakam* consists of 656 verses grouped into 51 sections. The *Tirukkōvaiyār* has 400 verses. In these soul-moving hymns Māṇikkavācakar pours out his

heart in devotion to Lord Śiva. Of the four paths, it is *san-mārga* that is pre-eminently taught by Māṇikkavācakar. The following description of this path is found in the *Śivajñāna-siddhiyār*: *Sanmārga* consists in studying (first) all the arts, the Purāṇas, the Vedas (karma-kāṇḍa), and the literature of other faiths before arriving at the conclusion that these are all inferior. Then one has to study the texts that teach wisdom (*jñāna-śāstra*) setting forth the nature of the Lord (*pati*), the souls (*paśu*) and the bonds (*pāśa*) defined *per accidens*, and the nature of the Lord *per essence*: one has to hear the truth about these and reflect on that truth. One who has the knowledge which does not involve the distinction of knower, process of knowing, and object of knowledge—the knowledge of unity with the impartite, eternal, all-pervading, existent, intelligent and blissful Śiva—attains union with Him, which is the final release”. It is significant that Māṇikkavācakar was first blessed by God as his preceptor (*guru*), and that he learned the truth sitting at His feet. The path that he primarily followed was *jñāna* which is called *san-mārga*. It includes the knowledge of the three principles of Śaivism, viz., *pati*, *paśu*, and *pāśa*, and also the intuitive knowledge or direct experience where the ordinary distinctions of the cognitive situation disappear. It is the knowledge that liberates the soul from the bonds and unites it with the supreme Lord.

The *Tiruvācakam* consists of hymns sung by the saint on various occasions. In several of them there is reference to the fact that Lord Śiva appeared as his Teacher at *Tirupperuntuṭai* and saved him. There are references to the divine sports of Śiva such as transforming jackals into horses and carrying earth to repair the embankment of

the Vaigai river. Of the four *samaya-ācāryas*, it is Mānikkavācakar that dwells most on the doctrines of Śaivism. Expositions are to be found in his hymns of the nature of the three categories, *pati*, *paśu* and *pāśa*. *Pati* is the Lord of the entire creation, Śiva. He is said to be One and Supreme. He is with form, without form, and with and without form. He is the beginning, middle and end of all beings; but Himself has none of these. He performs the five cosmic functions of creation, preservation and destruction of the world, veiling the truth and revealing it by bestowing His grace on the souls. He is the one goal of all the faiths and philosophies. He takes different forms and appears before His devotees in order to save them. His essential nature is Love. The mystic syllable *Om* and the five-lettered *mantra* are the most sacred formulas of His essence. The soul is dependent on Śiva. During its estrangement from the Lord it goes through the cycle of births and deaths, is born in various forms such as plants, insects, birds, beasts, and humans. It finds itself constricted by the three bonds: *āṇava*, *māyā* and *karma*. In order to get rid of these impurities (*malas*) the soul should turn towards Śiva in a spirit of utter devotion and self-surrender. Mānikkavācakar often refers to himself as a dog, as one who is even lower than a dog. Unless Śiva's grace descends on the soul, it cannot become free and perfect. When the soul becomes mature and fit for receiving God's grace, it has done its part and is saved by the Supreme. In fact, it does not matter where the soul is, and in what condition. What is important is that its devotion to God must be constant and unwavering. Although it may not be possible for every one to emulate the example set by saints like

Kannappar and Caṇḍeśvarar, yet every one should keep them before oneself as sources of inspiration. It is by following the spiritual path of good works, devotion and knowledge that the soul gains oneness with Śiva, getting rid of its limiting adjuncts and sins.

The *Tirukkōvaiyār*, as we have already seen, was composed by Māṇikkavācakar at the behest of the Lord who became his scribe at Cidambaram. This is considered the composition *par excellence* of a type of literature called *Kovai* which is claimed as peculiar to Tamil. *Kovai* literally means that which has sections arranged in a sequence. In Tamil grammar *Kovai* (literature or composition) is treated as dealing with experiences not knowable to others besides those who have such experiences. Human love is such an experience. Bridal mysticism, the world over, uses the forms and symbols of human love to represent the intimate relation between God and soul. In the *Tirukkōvaiyār* we have such bridal mysticism since, though the ostensible theme is human love, the real theme is the intimacy between God and soul. We have here all the raptures of union and the pangs of separation set forth in felicitous poetry. An oft quoted verse about the *Tirukkōvaiyār* says: "The Brahmins call it the *Veda*. The yogins say it is the basis of the *Āgama*. The lovers say that it is a manual of love. The Logicians say it is a treatise on logic. The poets say it is a text of grammar and prosody."

Māṇikkavācakar was a seer-poet of the first magnitude. He sang of Śiva in exquisite language and wrought a spiritual revolution in the minds of those who came within his influence. His immortal poetry will continue to inspire souls and

turn them Godward. Concluding the Introduction to his English rendering of the *Tiruvācakam*, The Rev. G. U. Pope says: "South India needed a personal God, an assurance of immortality, and a call to prayer. These it found in Māṇik-kavācakar's compositions."

NAMMĀLVĀR

THE Ālvārs are to the Śrī Vaiṣṇavism of the South what the Nāyanmārs are to the Southern Śaivism. The name 'Ālvār' means 'one who dives into divinity, one who is immersed in God-love and God-bliss'. According to the Vaiṣṇava belief, the Ālvārs, twelve in number, were the incarnations of Lord Viṣṇu's attendants such as Ādi-śeṣa and Garuḍa, and accoutrements such as the conch (*Śaṅkha*) and the discus (*cakra*). There is a prophecy made in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata* (v, 38-40) that holy saints devoted to Śrīman-Nārāyaṇa would be born in the age of Kali mostly on the banks of the holy rivers of the Drāviḍa land such as Tāmraparṇī, Kṛtamālā (Vaigai), Payaśvinī (Pāpanāśini), and Kāvērī. In the Śrīmuṣṇa-māhātmya it is stated that these saints would take birth in all classes of society such as Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, etc., and that they would proclaim the highest truth by composing Drāviḍa hymns

The collection of hymns sung by the Ālvārs is called the *Divya-Prabandham* (The Divine Treatise). It is divided into four parts, each consisting of about a thousand stanzas. Hence it is called the *Nālāyira-Prabandham* (The Book of Four Thousand Stanzas). It is believed that what are known as the three *rahasyas* (secrets) constitute the teaching of the Four Thousand: the *rahasya* which is the *Tiru-mantra* is the content of the First and the Second Thousand; the *Carama-śloka* is the theme of the third; and the *Dvaya-mantra* is the subject of the Fourth. The *Tiru-mantra* is composed of three words: the first two words 'Om namah' are explained in the First Thousand, and the third 'nārāyaṇāya' in the Second. The *Carama-śloka* is the last verse uttered by the Lord in the



Nammāḷvār.

Bhagavadgītā; it enjoins self-surrender on the part of the individual soul. The *Dvaya-mantra* is a couplet setting forth the nature of the means, and that of the end, and also the fact that salvation is to be attained through the mediation of Lakṣmi (Śrī).

The greatest of the Ālvārs was Nammālvār. He is credited with the authorship of the Third Thousand known as *Tiruvāymoli*, and parts of the Fourth Thousand. Vedāntadeśika calls the *Tiruvāymoli* the *Draṁḍopaniṣad*. Rāmānuja and the Ācāryas who came after him have written or caused to be written commentaries on the *Tiruvāymoli* known as The Six Thousand, The Twelve Thousand, The Twentyfour Thousand, and The Thirtysix Thousand or *Īḍu*. Ācārya-*hṛdayam* is one of the later commentaries. Vedāntadeśika is known to have written an extensive *bhāṣya*.

For the life of Nammālvār as for the biographies of the other Ālvārs, the source-books are: *Divyasūri-caritram*, *Prapaṇnāmṛtam*, *Guru-paramparā-prabhāvam*, *Prabandha-sāram*, *Upadeśa-ratna-mālā*, *Palanaḍai-vilakkam*, etc. As is generally the case in regard to the lives of saints, it is very difficult to disentangle the historical from the legendary in the accounts given of the life of Nammālvār.

In the Vaiṣṇava tradition, Nammālvār is described as the soul, of which the first three Ālvārs, viz., Poygai, Bhūtarn, and Pēy, are the mind, and the other Ālvārs, the body. In the *Bhaviṣya-purāṇa* there is a prophecy that in the beginning of *Kali-yuga* Seneśa or Viṣvaksena, the chief of the attendants on Viṣṇu, would be born (as Nammālvār) in order to revive and strengthen the way of love to Viṣṇu. The *Brahmāṇḍa-purāṇa* specifies the place of Nammālvār's

birth as the town by name Śrī-nagarī (Tirunagari) situated on the banks of the river Tāmrapaṇī in the Pāṇḍya country.

In Tirunagari (now known as Ālvār-tirunagari after Nammālvār), or Tirukkurugūr as it is otherwise called, there was a ruling chief by name Kāriyār. He married one Uḍaiya-naṅgaiyār of Tiruvaṇ-pariśāram. Once on their way back from Tiruvaṇ-pariśāram to Tirukkurugūr, the couple visited the holy shrine at Tirukkurunguḍi, a place near the Mahendra hills of the Western Ghats, and prayed to the presiding Deity, Lord Viṣṇu under the name Nambi, for the gift of a son. The Lord blessed them through the priest, saying that He would Himself be born as their son. Uḍaiya-naṅgaiyār conceived and gave birth to a child at the proper time—the child that later on came to be known as Nammālvār (Our Saint). The birth took place, according to tradition, on the 43rd day of the present *Kali-yuga* (3102 B.C.). Some scholars who do not accept this tradition assign to Nammālvār a date between the seventh and the ninth century A.D.

Nammālvār (also called Parāṅkuṣa) is believed to be an incarnation combining the aspects of the Lord, the *Kaustubha*-ornament, and Seneśa. There is also the belief that eight aspects entered into the constitution of this incarnation, viz., those of the Lord, His five accoutrements, Ādiśeṣa, and Seneśa. All such beliefs only go to show the high status that Nammālvār occupies in Vaiṣṇava hagiology and the deep veneration that is accorded to him.

It was no ordinary child that was born to Kāriyār, and Uḍaiyanaṅgaiyār. In the case of ordinary children, it is stated, a vital air called *śāṭha* envelops them as soon as they are

born and obscures the true knowledge with which they were endowed while in the mother's womb. The child Nammālvār did not succumb to *saṭha*; on the contrary, he overpowered it and hence gained the name Śaṭhakopa. The parents were wonderstruck at their child who remained without any activity such as crying, suckling, kicking, etc. He remained silent and serene, radiant and sweet. The parents did not know what to do with such a child. On the twelfth day after his birth, they took him to the shrine of Viṣṇu in their town, Tirunagari, and after worshipping the Lord, named the child Māraṇ, because he was quite different from the usual children, and caused him to lie in a cradle made of gold and set with gems, beneath the sacred tamarind tree in the shrine. The tamarind tree which still flourishes there, it is believed, is an incarnation of Ādiśeṣa (Ananta).

For sixteen years Nammālvār remained under the tamarind tree without opening his eyes or mouth. The parents attributed this phenomenon to some unknown transgression of theirs against the Lord. They did not know that the Ālvār did not feel the need to see or speak because no one competent to understand the glory of God went to him. So, he preferred to remain in *samādhi*, immersed in God-love and God-wisdom. But there came at last a highly evolved soul who could understand the greatness of Nammālvār. This was Madhurakavi Ālvār.

Madhurakavi had been born earlier at Tirukkoḷūr near Tirukkurgūr of Brahmin parents. He is considered to be an incarnation of Kumuda-Gaṇeśa, a subordinate functionary under Seneśa. He studied the Vedas and other sacred texts, was gifted with the art of poesy, and hence was called 'Madhurakavi' (Sweet Poet). His devotion to Viṣṇu grew,

and he went on a pilgrimage to the holy shrines. He went up north, and reaching Ayodhyā, dwelt there for a while worshipping at the temple of Śrī Rāmachandra. One night he was looking in the direction of the South where his birthplace lay. He saw in that direction a brilliant flame of light. He started walking towards it, desiring to find out its source. Eventually he arrived at Tirukkurugūr and discovered that it emanated from beneath the tamarind tree where Nammālvār sat in *samādhi*. In order to know whether this seated figure was conscious or not, he let a stone fall before it. Lo! the figure opened its eyes, and Madhurakavi was assured that it was a living person. He then put a question to Nammālvār: "If of what is dead what is subtle in born, what will it eat and where will it lie?" (*śettadin vayirril śiriyadu piṇḍāl ettaittinṟu enge kiḍakkum*). Nammālvār opened his mouth for the first time and spoke: "Eating that, it will lie there" (*attaittinṟu enge kiḍakkum*). Madhurakavi became overwhelmed with devotion for Nammālvār, prostrated himself before him, and pleaded for being accepted as a disciple. Nammālvār showered his grace on Madhurakavi, gave his consent to being served by him, and instructed him in the secret doctrines of Vaiṣṇavism.

Nammālvār beheld in a vision the glorious form of the Lord mounted on Garuḍa and accompanied by Lakṣmī. The various representations of the Lord in the holy shrines were also revealed to our saint. He sang the praise of the Lord in hymns of nectarine sweetness. The celestials and the sages of heaven came to see the saint seated under the Tamarind tree. Madhurakavi set the hymns to music, and sang them to the edification of all people. He also composed a poem in honour of his master, viz. *Kaṇṇinun-ciruttāmbu*, which forms a part of the First Thousand.

Nammālvār continued his life of meditation under the tree, and departed this world when he was thirty-five years old.

As we have already stated, Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoli* constitutes the Third Thousand in *Nālāyira-Prabandham*. This is said to contain the essence of the *Sāma-veda*. His three other poems, viz. *Tiruviruttam*, *Tiruvāśiriyam*, and *Periya-tiruvantādi*, which are included in the Fourth Thousand, constitute respectively the essence of the *R̥g-veda*, the *Yajur-veda*, and the *Atharva-veda*.

Nammālvār expounds in his poems the "five matters" (*arthapañcaka*) that constitute the topics of Śrī-Vaiṣṇavism. The five matters are: (1) the Lord, (2) the individual soul, (3) the means, (4) the end, and (5) that which is opposed to the attainment of the end.

The Lord is Nārāyaṇa, the highest reality. He is the abode of all auspicious qualities, and is unsmitten by evil. The souls and the world of matter constitute His attributes (*viśeṣaṇa*). He creates, preserves, and dissolves the universe. These cosmic functions constitute His sport (*līlā*). Nārāyaṇa is the root of all existence, the source of the different grades of beings. He is worshipped by devotees in different forms and under different names. They may imagine that they are devoted to different Gods. But the truth is that it is Nārāyaṇa that is the object of all worship.

Absolute self-surrender (*prapatti*) is the pathway to release. The individual should unreservedly give himself up to God. Totally freed from egoity, he should constantly think of God and God alone, surrender himself completely to Him, and regard him as the sole End. Self-surrender is the easiest, the most efficacious and universal way to release.

When the individual surrenders himself to God, God bathes him in His grace, purifies him, removes all the obstacles that stand in the way, and gives him *mokṣa*.

Nammālvār sings the glory of the Lord, and loves to dwell on His compassion that made Him incarnate Himself time and again. He appeals to the people to desist from pursuing false ends and turn Godward. He pleads with the fellow-poets not to waste their talents in praising the wealthy for lucre, but to use their gift in the service of God.

The *Avatāra* that fascinates Nammālvār most is Kṛṣṇa; and the mode of approach that the saint frequently adopts is bridal mysticism. The soul is the bride of God. God is the soul's food, drink, and delight. The best exemplar of divine devotion are the *gopīs* of Bṛndāvana. The mystic who follows their method courts and gains the company of the Lord. He pines away in the dark night of separation from union with Him. The Lord too is possessed of soul-hunger and yearns for reunion with the soul which is but a limb of Him.

Nammālvār sings out of his deep mystic experience. He calls everyone to share in his delight. When the immortal bliss of Brahman (*ārāvamudu*) is there, the saint wonders, how could anyone run after the fleeting pleasures that inevitably end in pain. So, he exhorts, "Seek God, praise Him, surrender yourselves to Him, speak of His greatness. repeatedly utter His name; He will protect and save you."



Āṇḍāl.

ANĀḌAL

AMONG the Ālvārs, Āṇḍāl was the best exemplar of bridal mysticism, being a woman herself. The aesthetic approach to God is difficult but alluring. The Upaniṣads describe Brahman as the supreme Bliss (*parama-ānanda*) and as essential sweetness (*rasa*). The *bhakti-sāstras* speak of God as *Manmatha-Manmatha* (Cupid of Cupid) and *Bhuvana-Sundara* (the most Beautiful in all the worlds). Many of the mystics adopt the way of bridal love and look upon God as the Bridegroom. In their mystic life are enacted all the incidents of the love-play—courting, engagement, marriage, temporary separation with its attendant pangs, and re-union. Although in this love-game there is not the distinction of male and female among the devotees—for all are females in relation to the only Male, God—yet the women-devotees have a distinct advantage, as bridal mysticism is more natural to them. And, among the brides of God, Āṇḍāl is pre-eminent because she gave herself to God totally and unconditionally, right from her childhood, the age of innocence.

Śrīvilliputtūr is a township, about fifty miles south-west of Madurai. It was founded by two brothers who were hunter-chieftains, Villi and Kantan. According to a legend, they cleared the jungles and created the town of Śrīvilliputtūr (the new town of Villi) in obedience to a divine command. This became the birth-place of two vaiṣṇava saints, Viṣṇucitar who came to be known as Periyālvār, and his daughter Āṇḍāl.

Viṣṇucittar (one whose thoughts were centred in Viṣṇu), believed to be an incarnation of Garuḍa, was born in a Brahmin family whose members were dedicated to divine worship. Of the various incarnations of Viṣṇu, he preferred the *Kṛṣṇāvatāra*; and of the different attitudes (*bhāvas*) in *bhakti* he adopted mostly that of the mother towards her child (*vātsalya bhāva*). While he was thinking about the form his service to the Lord should take, he was struck by the incident in the life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa relating to His gracious acceptance of the flower garland offered by Mālākāra while he was on His way to meet King Kamsa in Mathurā. So, Viṣṇucittar decided to rear a flower garden with a predominance of basil plants (*tulasī*), dear to Viṣṇu, and offer garlands everyday to the Lord in the temple at Śrīvilliputtūr. He was not learned in the *Śāstras*. The Lord appeared in his dream, one day, and commanded him to go to Madurai and establish the supremacy of the Vaiṣṇava faith in an assembly of the learned convened by the Pāṇḍya king, Śrī Vallabha Deva. Viṣṇucittar did as he was ordered to, and was declared victor in the debate. The king honoured him with presents; everyone acclaimed him as the greatest teacher of the time. The Lord Himself appeared seated on His mount Garuḍa and accompanied by Lakṣmī and the Celestials and blessed Viṣṇucittar. The saint was overwhelmed at this grand and unique sight. But soon a fear overtook him. He became concerned about the Lord's safety. The parent in him made him feel that the Lord was running a risk in making his appearance in the world. This is by no means a safe world. Some injury might be done to the Lord's beauty, might, and glory. So, the saint blessed the Lord, even as a parent would his or her child. He sang the song of blessings called the *Tiruppallāṇḍu* in which he invited all men to join him in the Benedictory. As

Viṣṇucittar had the competence to bless the Lord, he received the appellation 'Periyālvār'.

After the Madurai victory, Periyālvār returned to Śrīvilliputtūr and resumed his services at the temple. As he was digging in his garden, one day, preparing the *tulasī* beds, his attention was drawn to the appearance of a mysterious child. It was a fair young girl, bigger than a baby, lying under a *tulasī* plant. She was a gift from Heaven to Periyālvār, even as Sītā was to King Janaka. The saint took the child to his childless home, named her Godā, and brought her up with tender care and loving devotion. It was Godā that came to be known as Āṇḍāl later on. The date of her birth, according to tradition, is the ninety-seventh year of the *Kali* age. Modern scholarship assigns her to the middle of the seventh century A.D.

Godā grew up to be a fine and accomplished girl. Being an incarnation of Bhū Devī, her love spontaneously flowed towards Viṣṇu, her Lord. Periyālvār contributed his own share to the flowering of Godā's devotion. He performed for her the purification ceremonies, initiated her into the secret doctrines of Vaiṣṇavism, and taught her to appreciate and value the greatness of Viṣṇu.

Even from her childhood Godā considered herself to be the bride designate of the Lord as he appears in Śrīraṅgam. As she grew, she had no other thought except to prepare herself in every way to become the consort of Śrī Ranganātha. Everyday she used to deck herself with the garlands her father made for the worship of the Viṣṇu Image of the temple at Śrīvilliputtūr, look at her own reflection in the mirror, and satisfy herself that she was equal in beauty to the Lord. Then she would remove the garlands and place them as before in the baskets. Periyālvār would take them to the temple, not knowing that they had been used by his daughter, and offer

them to the Lord. But one day he came to know of what appeared to him then to be an act of sacrilege on the part of his daughter, reprimanded her, and did not take the garlands to the temple. The Lord appeared to him in a vision and asked him why he had not brought the garlands that day. When the saint explained, the Lord told him that the garlands worn by Godā were extremely dear to Him, that to offer them to Him was no sacrilege, and that such an act was profoundly holy. Periyālvār conveyed the Lord's command to his daughter, and thenceforth he himself made her wear the garlands before taking them to the temple. Now that he knew the identity of Godā as the Divine Mother, he gave her the name 'Āṇḍāl' (the Redeemer of the world). As she wore the garlands and gave them to the Lord, she came to be called Śūḍikkoṭutta-nācciyār'.

As Āṇḍāl grew in age, her love of God also grew. Her wakeful hours were filled with thoughts of marrying the Lord. Her dreams were centred on enjoying His company. Her vivid imagination took her back to the times when Śrī Kṛṣṇa disported Himself with the *Gopīs* of Bṛndāvana on the banks of the Yamunā. She herself became a *Gopī*, rising up early in the morning, rousing her companions from sleep, bathing in the sacred river, and going to Nandagopa's house to pay homage to the Lord of her heart. In the month of Mārgaśīrṣa (Mārgali), she observed the *pāvai-nōnbu*, invoking the grace of Kātyāyini so that she might wed her chosen Lord. She sent her prayers to Kāma, the God of Love, to prepare her for God alone and to unite her with Him.

Anxiety took possession of Periyālvār when he saw his daughter's God-madness increasing. Marriage, he thought, would cure her disease. Gently he broached this subject to his daughter one day, and asked her whom she would like to wed. Sternly she replied that she would rather die than

consent to marry a mortal. She had resolved to wed the Lord, and nothing would make her relinquish that resolve. There are a hundred and eight temples dedicated to Viṣṇu; in each of these there is a special manifestation of the Lord. Of these, whom would Āṇḍāl wed? Periyālvār was explaining to her the nature and glory of each of the manifestations. As he was giving a description of Śrī Raṅganātha, Āṇḍāl's heart melted, tears of joy swelled from her eyes, a thrill passed through her body, she became enchanted. It was evident that her heart was set on Śrī Raṅganātha. But how could this marriage take place?

Lord Raṅganātha appeared in a vision to Periyālvār and allayed his fears saying that the miracle would happen, that He would Himself arrange for the marriage. To the temple priests of Śrīraṅgam there came the command from the Lord, asking them to go to Śrīvilliputtūr with all the temple honours and bring Āṇḍāl, the bride elect, to Him. Accompanied by devotees and priests and led by Periyālvār, Āṇḍāl was taken in a palanquin to the Śrīraṅgam temple. As she entered the *sanctum sanctorum* and beheld the entrancing Beauty of the Lord, she was irresistibly drawn towards Him. Walking up to the Deity reclining on the Śeṣa bed, and mounting up the bed itself, she stood by the side of the Lord. And lo! she disappeared into the Lord, getting absorbed in Him. Everyone present there was amazed. Periyālvār shed tears of joy and sorrow—joy at his daughter's union with the Lord, and sorrow at his own separation from her. The Voice of God was then heard, telling Periyālvār that he had now become God's father-in-law, and asking him to go back to Śrīvilliputtūr, instal the images of Śrī Raṅganātha and Āṇḍāl, and worship them with fervour and devotion, as also to continue his habitual mode of service at the shrine of Śrīvilliputtūr.

Tiruppāvai and *Nācciyār-tirumoli* are the *prabandhams* composed by Āṇḍāl. They form part of the First Thousand. Both of them are love lyrics portraying the varying moods of the lady in love, ranging from utter dejection and despondency to hilarious mirth and serene joy born of union with the beloved. Only, here, the Beloved is the Lord Himself.

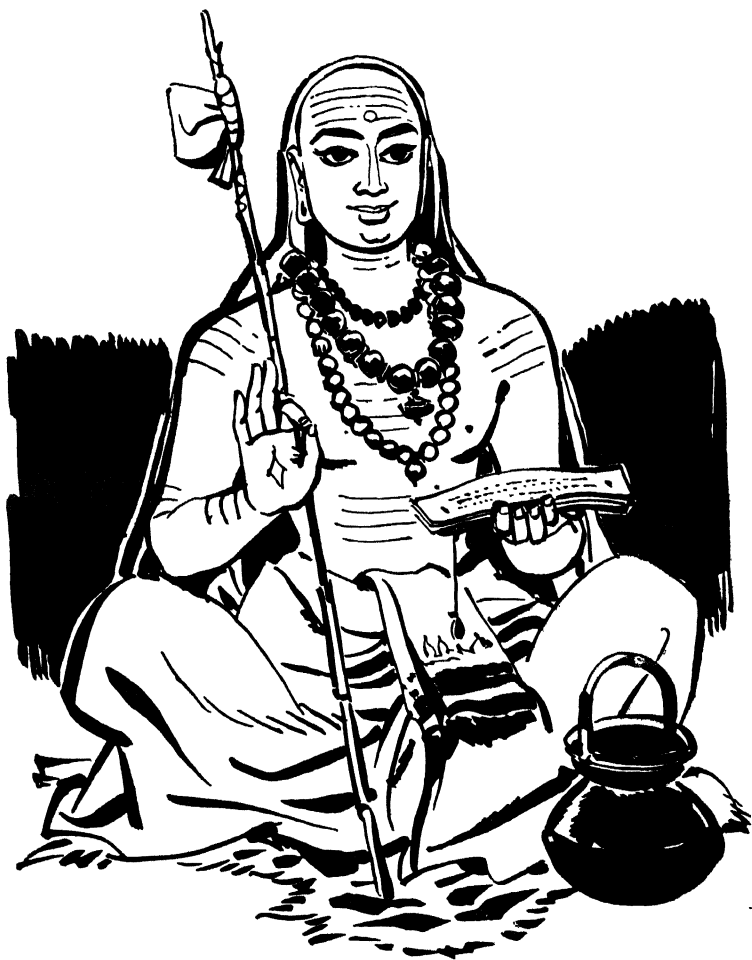
In the month of Mārgaśīrṣa, maidens observe a ritual called *Pāvai-nōnbu* which consists in the worship of Kātyāyini early in the morning everyday with a view to obtain proper bridegrooms by Her grace and to secure the welfare of all beings in the land. The *Gopīs* of Br̥ndāvana adopted this ritual in order to gain union with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. In the *Tiruppāvai*, Āṇḍāl employs this allegory and gives expression to the *gopīs'* devotion to and love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, identifying herself with one of them. She offers herself in this lyric as a self-gift to the Lord, resolves to become His slave and do His bidding, and asks for nothing more than to be accepted. In the thirty verses of this poem corresponding to the thirty days of the month, the sports of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, His boyhood pranks, and His deeds of valour are extolled; and the burden of every verse is that He should receive the love of the devotee-soul.

God-love is the theme of the *Tirumoli* also, which is a longer poem. Every word of this lyric bespeaks the boundless love of Āṇḍāl for the Lord whom she longs to wed. All that a love-lorn maiden would do, she does in order to gain union with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. She prays to the God of Love, Kāma, to intercede on her behalf and join her with her Lord. She sends love-messages to Śrī Kṛṣṇa through her companions, and even through birds and clouds. She complains to the elements that her Lord has turned a deaf ear to her appeals. She has pleasant dreams of marrying the Lord and living happily with him. After waking up, she shares her dream-experiences with

her friends. She implores them to take her to the place where her Lord is. She roams about without rest, asking all and sundry if they had seen her Lord. When they reply that they had seen Him in Bṛndāvana, she takes heart and continues her journey. Āṇḍāl's all-consuming love is picturesquely and tenderly expressed in this beautiful poem which gives us a grand insight into bridal mysticism.

ŚAṆKARA

THE age which saw the advent of Śaṅkara was not unlike our own. It was an age of unrest and strife, of spiritual bankruptcy and social discord. The land was without a lord and religion without a leader. In his *Commentary of the 'Brahma-sūtra*, Śaṅkara deplores the sorry state of things that existed in his time in these words: "He who maintains that the people of old were no more capable of conversing with the gods than people are at present might as well hold that because there is at present no prince who is the lord of the whole earth (*sārvabhauma*), there were no such sovereigns in former times; or he might argue that in former times the vocations and duties pertaining to the different classes and stations in life were as generally unsettled as they are now". India was, at Śaṅkara's time, politically divided and socially decadent. There were numerous principalities sharing little in common and contending with one another for supremacy. The social groups were clamouring for rights, instead of being devoted to their duties. Hate begot hatred; and peace was sacrificed at the altar of selfishness and greed. Anarchy reigned in all the spheres of life and thought. There were literalists and ritualists, on the one hand, who were blind to the sign of the times and were holding on to the letter of the scriptures, missing their spirit. There were nihilists and iconoclasts, on the other, who were out to tear and destroy all that was sacred and old. Besides chaos in the schools of philosophy, there was hostility among the different religious sects. The people forgot the ancient Vedic teaching that the Real is One; clinging to their narrow conceptions of the Godhead and swayed by fanaticism, they used religion as a weapon of aggression instead of finding in it the solace of life.



Sankara.

It was in such an age of total conflict and confusion that Śaṅkara was born. He spent his all too brief life on earth healing the wounds of the heart and the mind, and showing people the way to spiritual sanity and health. The 'expert physician of the soul that he was, he diagnosed the disease that was eating into the vitals of society as one which had its roots in disunity, and prescribed the only remedy that would effect a cure, viz. the saving knowledge of unity, the Upaniṣadic philosophy of the non-dual Spirit. This remedy, potent for all times, had a special efficacy for Śaṅkara's own age.

We have only legendary accounts, some of them mutually conflicting, of the life of Śaṅkara. These are to be found in the *Śaṅkara-vijayas* written by Mādhava, Ānandagiri, Cidvilāsa, and Sadānanda. There are references to incidents in the life of Śaṅkara in Patañjali-vijaya, Śivarahasya, Brahmāṇḍa-purāṇa and Skanda-purāṇa.

Kālāḍi is a quiet village on the banks of the Cūṛṇā river (also called Pūṛṇā and Periyāru) in Kerala, about six miles from Alwaye. Here was Śaṅkara born in a Nambūdīri family. The traditional date assigned to his birth is the fifth day of the bright half of the month of *Vaiśākha* in the year *Nandana* under the constellation *Punarvasu*. This is stated to have occurred in the 2593rd year of the Kali age (B.C. 509). The date that is acceptable to most scholars of the present day, however, is 788 A.D. It may be said with a fair measure of certainty that Śaṅkara came after Bhartṛhari (*circa* 600 A.D.) and before Vācaspati Miśra (841 A.D.).

In Kālāḍi there lived a pious Nambūdīri couple, Śivaguru and Āryāmbā. For a long time they were without a child. They went to Tiruccūr, where there is a famous Śiva shrine, and prayed to the Lord (Viṣṇuśaśvara) for being blessed with a son. It was in response to their prayer, it is said, that

the Lord Himself was born to them as Śaṅkara. He was quite a precocious child. He was invested with the sacred thread when he was five years old, and by the time he was eight, he had completed his formal education, both secular and sacred. About this time his father died. The responsibility of taking care of Śaṅkara and of providing for his future developed entirely on the mother. The mother probably noticed ascetic tendencies in her son. She did not want to lose him, as he was her only child. So, she was making arrangements for getting him married early. But the ways of the world had no attraction for the boy. He was born, not to lead an aimless life, to vegetate and wither away after a time; he came with the greatest mission one could have in life, namely, to lead mankind to the blessedness of unexcellable peace, dedicating himself dauntlessly and irrevocably to the quest of the Absolute and sharing his great discovery with all his fellow-beings. So, he desired to renounce the world—and that at an age when most children do not leave behind even their toys and trinkets. But the mother would not give her consent to this course of action—or rather withdrawal from action on the part of her son. Which mother would willingly lose her child? So, a miracle had to happen! One morning when mother and son went to the river for bathing, a crocodile caught hold of the latter. The boy cried out to his mother asking her permission for entering *saṃnyāsa āśrama*, now that he found himself *in extremis*. Formal renunciation when in extreme difficulty or while life is about to end (*āpat-saṃnyāsa*) is a recognized practice. The appeal of the boy Śaṅkara was irresistible. The mother gave her consent reluctantly. The crocodile released Śaṅkara and went away as mysteriously as it had come. The boy emerged from the river unharmed, and with a firm resolution to take to the life of the *saṃnyāsin*.

Before he left his native village, however, he assured his mother that he would be by her side in her last days and would even perform the funeral rites himself.

Leaving his house and village the young Śaṅkara, barely eight, proceeded northward in search of a *guru*. According to one of the traditions, the allotted span of life for Śaṅkara was only eight years. Sometime, before Śaṅkara left his village-home, a group of sages including Agastya and Nārada visited him and his mother, and pleased with the reception accorded to them, blessed Śaṅkara with the extension of his life-span by eight more years. Even with this extension there was no time to lose. Travelling northward, Śaṅkara came to the banks of the river Narmadā where he found his *guru*. Govinda Bhagavatpāda, disciple of Gauḍapāda, was living in a cave, attended by learned and wise men who had adopted him as their guide. Śaṅkara approached Govinda and requested him to initiate him into *saṁnyāsa*. The *guru* had no hesitation to accede to Śaṅkara's request. Which better and more deserving pupil could he expect? Śaṅkara went through the formalities prescribed for adopting the *saṁnyāsa āśrama*, and received instruction in *Vedānta*.

When Śaṅkara was dwelling in Govinda Bhagavatpāda's Āśrama a miracle happened. The river Narmadā swelled and overflowed, inundating the villages on either bank. The hamlets were about to be washed away; and the people became panic-stricken. By uttering the *jalākaraṣaṇa-maṅtra* and placing the *kamaṇḍalu* (water-pot) on the earth, the compassionate Śaṅkara made the river-water recede, and thus saved the neighbourhood and his preceptor's hermitage from destruction. It had been foretold by the sage Atri that he who was able to stop the floods of Narmadā and thus prevent the destruction of the area would be the proper person to write a commentary

on the *Brahma-sūtra*. Guru Govinda who knew this and was also otherwise convinced of the greatness of Śaṅkara commissioned him to go to Kāśī and expound the meaning of the *Brahma-sūtra* as well as that of the other two *prasthānas*, viz. the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavadgītā*.

Śaṅkara proceeded to Kāśī also known as Vārāṇasī (Banaras), the city celebrated all through India's history for learning and spirituality. It was here, at Kāśī, that Śaṅkara received his first disciple. The person that was thus favoured was a young man named Viṣṇuśarmā who had gone to Kāśī a little earlier from Cōḷa-deśa. The *Sannyāsa* name that was given to him by Śaṅkara was Sanandana. Soon other disciples joined the Master; and as it is but natural to human nature, there grew up jealousies among them. The other disciples thought that Sanandana did not deserve what they imagined to be Śaṅkara's partiality to him. The Master wanted to show them the worth of Sanandana as a great pupil. One day as he was bathing in the river Gangā along with those disciples, he saw Sanandana right across the river carrying his change of clothes and called out to him asking him to come. Sanandana without even taking a moment to think began to walk across the river; and at each step he placed on the waters a lotus emerged to support him. Hence he came to be called Padmapāda.

Mention may be made here of two others who became Śaṅkara's disciples. One Divākara brought his mute son to Śaṅkara in order that the boy might gain the power of speech by the Master's grace. When the Master put to the boy the question 'Who are you', the boy at once replied declaring that he was the self which was not to be confused with the factors constituting the psycho-physical organism. In a series of verses he made this declaration, and in each verse he made the affirmation:

'I am the Self which is of the nature of eternal consciousness' (*sa nityopalabdhisvarūpohamātmā*). The Master was greatly pleased; he admitted the boy to his fold, giving him *sannyāsa* and the name Hastāmālaka, which means 'one whose knowledge is as clear as a myrobalan fruit placed on one's palm'. The other person who became a disciple of Śaṅkara about this time was one Kaḷānātha. He approached Śaṅkara and requested to be received as a disciple. He sang a hymn in praise of Śaṅkara in the difficult but beautiful *toṭaka* metre. He was ordained a *sannyāsin* disciple by Śaṅkara, and was given the name Toṭakācārya.

Two incidents that occurred during Śaṅkara's stay in Kāśī may be recorded here. One morning, Śaṅkara was going to the temple of Lord Viśvanātha, accompanied by his disciples, after a bath in the sacred river. A *caṇḍāla* (untouchable) followed by dogs and with a pot of liquor in his hand came near him. Śaṅkara asked the *caṇḍāla* to get out of his way. The *caṇḍāla* enquired as to which should go away, the body or the self. As for the body, it is the same in composition in the case of every person. As for the self, it is one and all-pervading. Śaṅkara realized at once that this was no ordinary *caṇḍāla*. In fact, it was Lord Śiva Himself that had come in the guise of an untouchable. Śaṅkara prostrated before the Lord and sang a hymn in which he declares that the one who has realized non-duality is his master, be that one a brahmin or a *caṇḍāla*.

The other incident relates to Śaṅkara chastising a grammarian for his spiritual blindness. As the Master was walking along a particular street in Kāśī one day he heard a scholar getting a grammatical rule by rote. He rebuked the grammarian for wasting his time over a futile formula. To mark this occasion he composed a melodious song which bears the title 'Mohamudgara'. Its refrain runs as follows: 'Adore Govinda,

adore Govinda, adore Govinda, O fool! When your appointed time for departure arrives, the repetition of a grammatical rule will not save you'.

As directed by the Lord who had come in the guise of a *caṇḍāla* Śaṅkara went to Badarikāśrama on the Himalayas, met the sage Vyāsa and received his blessings. It was here that he saw Gaudapāda, his *parama-guru*, and was blessed by him also. Then he returned to Kāśī and composed his *bhāṣyas* as well as independent works. He wrote his works and expounded them to his disciples, it is said, in the *Mukti-maṇḍapa* at maṇikanikā-ghaṭṭa. According to one of the traditions, Śaṅkara wrote first his commentary on the *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma*, and then his *bhāṣyas* on the *Prasthāna-traya*, viz. the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad-gītā* and the *Brahma-sūtra*. Once when he was expounding the *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya*, Vyāsa appeared in the form of an old man and asked Śaṅkara to defend his exposition. The disputation between the two went on for a long time. Padmapāda at last prayed to Śaṅkara and the old man that they should stop their disputation; for, he said, there would be no peace if Śaṅkara an incarnation of Śiva, and Vyāsa who was Viṣṇu-incarnate quarrelled with each other. His identity having been revealed, Vyāsa blessed Śaṅkara, approved of his *bhāṣya*, and granted him an extension of his life-span from sixteen to thirty-two. He desired also that Śaṅkara should travel round India and spread the gospel of Vedānta among the people.

Leaving Kāśī, Śaṅkara went to Prayāga, the confluence of the Gaṅgā, the Yamunā, and the Sarasvatī (*Trivenī*). Hearing there that Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, the doughty champion of Mīmāṃsā, was about to immolate himself by getting burnt in a fire fed by paddy-husk, he hastened to him. One of the schools of thought whose deficiency Śaṅkara wanted to show

was Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā. A disputation with Kumārila Bhaṭṭa would be the best for this purpose. But Kumārila was not in a fit condition for debate. He was in the process of putting an end to his life as *prāyaścitta* for an earlier offence. The offence was that he simulated to be a Bauddha in order to learn the secrets of the religion from the Bauddha preceptors. This course he adopted in order to be able to criticize Buddhism effectively. As he was a strict believer in the ultimacy of *karma-kāṇḍa*, he was convinced that he should pay the prescribed penalty for his conscious misconduct; and the penalty in the case was death. Śaṅkara was sorry about this whole affair. He could not get an opportunity to show the inadequacy of Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā by engaging Kumārila in a debate. Kumārila, however, suggested to Śaṅkara that he could have a disputation with Maṇḍana Miśra at the city of Māhishmatī.

Maṇḍana was a hard-boiled Mīmāṃsaka, well-versed in the Veda as well as in the art of argument. When Śaṅkara reached his house, the doors were bolted and Maṇḍana was engaged in the performance of the *śrāddha* ceremony. Śaṅkara entered the house by exercising his yogic power, and asked for a debate with Maṇḍana. Śaṅkara-Maṇḍana-saṁvāda (the debate between Śaṅkara and Maṇḍana) is the most interesting episode in the story of Śaṅkara. The position of Mīmāṃsā is that *karma* or action is the purport of the Veda. The Vedānta, on the contrary, teaches that Brahman-Ātman is the central topic of Scripture. Śaṅkara whose mission it was to vindicate the Vedānta had to show the invalidity of the Mīmāṃsā argument. The debate with Maṇḍana, a great exponent of the *karma* philosophy, therefore, was a crucial event in the life of Śaṅkara.

The debate went on for a number of days. Maṇḍana's wife Bhāratī, who was a wise lady, was appointed arbiter in

this dispute. She put a flower-garland round the neck of each of the disputants and declared that the wearer of the garland that began to wither first should be regarded as the defeated person. The debate went on for several days. The garland which adorned Maṇḍana showed signs of decay. So, according to the test set up by his own wife, he admitted defeat and was ready to adopt the point of view sponsored by Śaṅkara and to become a *sannyāsin* disciple of his.

At this moment, Bhārati said that Śaṅkara's victory would not be complete until she too was defeated in argument. A great many debating points in the *Śāstras* were discussed, and in every instance Śaṅkara proved his superiority. An unnecessary interlude is introduced here by Śaṅkara's biographers. It seems that Bhārati wanted to vanquish Śaṅkara somehow. She chose a discipline for this purpose with which Śaṅkara was totally unacquainted, viz. the art of human love (*kāma-śāstra*), and put him questions relating thereto. Śaṅkara confessed his ignorance, but asked for time. Conveniently for Śaṅkara, so the biographers say, a king, Amaruka by name, died just then. By means of his yogic power Śaṅkara left his own body in charge of his disciples and entered Amaruka's corpse. The whole kingdom was overjoyed by the king's miraculous return from death. Śaṅkara in Amaruka's frame lived in the palace with the queens, and administered the state wisely and well. Those who moved with the king guessed that this must be some other person—probably the soul of a *yogī*. Messengers were secretly sent to seek out the dead body of the *yogī* and destroy it. They succeeded at last, and were cremating it. Meanwhile, Śaṅkara's disciples sought audience with the king and indirectly reminded him of his mission. Śaṅkara, regaining his old status, left the king's body and re-entered his own, and came out of the burning pyre unharmed by praying to Lord Nṛsimha.

Śaṅkara went back to Maṇḍana's house. The argument with Bhārati was resumed. Śaṅkara could not be discomfited now even in the knowledge of *kāma-śāstra*. The lady confessed defeat. The victory over Maṇḍana was now complete. The great householder requested Śaṅkara to initiate him into *sannyāsa* and accept him as a disciple of his. The *Guru* ordained him and gave him the name 'Sureśvara'. Bhārati followed the example of Maṇḍana and joined the entourage of Śaṅkara.

The stage was now set for a *dig-vijaya*, a spiritual conquest of India. But before pointing out its nature and significance, we must narrate an incident which shows how tender and pure Śaṅkara's affection for his mother was, and how he was prepared to break through rigid conventions for her sake. Śaṅkara came to know that his mother's end was near. Remembering his promise to her, he repaired to Kāladi. The mother was glad to see her son again. He became her *guru* now, instructing her in spirituality and preparing her to meet her end calmly and with confidence. The end came quietly and peacefully. The kinsmen of Śaṅkara objected to his performing his mother's funeral ceremonies. They had not forgiven him for entering the *sannyāsa āśrama* without becoming a householder and living in the world for a while. How could they now approve of a *sannyāsin* performing funeral rites? They non-cooperated completely. Śaṅkara made a pyre of plantain stems in a corner of the garden where his mother's house lay, cut up the corpse in order to be able to carry it bit by bit, and set fire to the pyre by his yogic power. A curse descended on his Nambūdiri kinsmen. Till it was lifted by a recent successor of Śaṅkara in the Śṛṅgeripīṭha, the Nambūdiris were cremating the corpses in their own gardens after mutilating them sufficiently.

Now, regarding Śaṅkara's whirl-wind campaign. He went round India more than once—probably thrice. Wherever he went, people felt uplifted. He had to overcome opposition also. But this he did through persuasion, sweet reasonableness, and above all on the strength of the plenary experience he had had. In the only oblique reference that he makes to himself in all his writings—and this occurs towards the end of the *Sūtra-bhāṣya* he observes, 'How can one deny the heart-felt experience of another as possessing Brahman-knowledge while being in a body?'

katham hy ekasya sva-hṛdaya-pratyayaṁ
brahma-vedanaṁ deha-dhāraṇaṁ ca
apareṇa pratikṣeptuṁ śakyate?

At a time when false doctrines were misguiding the generality of people, and orthodoxy had nothing better to offer to counteract the atheism of the heterodox than a barren and outmoded ritualism, Śaṅkara recaptured the heights of the Upaniṣadic philosophy and brought from there for the benefit of humanity the waters of eternal life.

Śaṅkara came not to destroy but to fulfil; and the philosophy that he taught, Advaita, is not to be regarded as a rival to the various systems of thought. Śaṅkara's grand-preceptor, Gauḍapāda, had already taught that there could be no conflict between Advaita and the dualistic philosophies. The higher does not contradict the lower, but conserves what is of value in it and sublimates it. As one does not quarrel with one's own limbs, so Advaita can have no dispute with the philosophical systems. Śaṅkara who re-discovered the spirit of unity and wholeness and revealed it to an age of tumult and discord, sought necessarily to close the rifts and restore the parts to their proper place in the whole. His mission was

to establish not only the non-duality of Brahman (*brahmā-dvaita*) but also the ultimate non-difference of systems (*darśanādvaita*). In this he but followed the fundamental teaching of the Veda which proclaims the supreme truth 'Reality is one,' and immediately adds in a spirit of compromise 'Those who know call it in various ways.'

A proof of Śaṅkara's eagerness for accommodation can be found even in the opening section of his *Sūtra-bhāṣya*. The topic is *adhyāsa* or superimposition which constitutes the corner-stone of Advaita. Śaṅkara gives the different definitions formulated by the schools orthodox as well as heterodox and says that all of them agree in holding that superimposition in a case of something appearing as if of a different nature. Nacre appears as if silver; the one moon appears as if having a second. No doubt, the other views are partial; but they are not without a measure of truth. And the Advaitin, who seeks the sameness in things that are seemingly different, the unity amidst apparent plurality, cannot but lay emphasis on the greatest common measure of agreement among the systems and show the way to their further development and complete fruition.

Orthodox and heterodox schools alike gained by Śaṅkara's helpful criticism. Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā from the former group and Buddhism from the latter received a large share of the Master's attention. The country was torn between blind formalism on the one hand and barren nihilism on the other. Though starting from opposite ends, the Mīmāṃsaka and the Buddha had become strange bed-fellows in their advocacy of atheistic doctrines. The saviour that Śaṅkara was, he had to steer clear of the scylla of ritualistic ethics and the charybdis of negativistic philosophy. Hence he had to correct the onesidedness of Mīmāṃsā and Buddhism. But neither suffered by Śaṅkara's

criticism. *Karma*, or ritual was put in its rightful place as an auxiliary to the path of knowledge. The great doctrine of *ahimsā* stressed by the Buddha, and not unknown to the Veda, was made an essential part of the Hindu philosophy of conduct; and the Buddha himself came to be regarded as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

Like philosophy, religion too profited by Śaṅkara's teachings. While he sought to remove the excrescences that had crept into the faith and their institutions—and for this he had to risk his life several times—he desired to conserve them in their purity as but various modes of approach to God. The conception of a personal Deity is not the highest, according to Śaṅkara. But God, for him, is 'neither an irrelevance nor a concession to the mob'. Devotion to *Īśvara* is a necessary step to Advaita-realization. From this point of view, then, it is not the name by which God is called that matters, but the sincerity and intensity of the worship that is offered. In the *Hymn to Hari*, Śaṅkara declares: 'I praise Hari, the destroyer of the darkness of *saṁsāra*, the one reality who, on account of the diversity of intellects, is spoken of in many ways, as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Agni, Sūrya, Candra, Indra, Vāyu, and Sacrifice'. The substance of religion is the same, though its expressions vary. Śaṅkara professed and practised true spiritual universalism. Without any sense of difference, he has paid obeisance in his hymns to God in His various forms. The cults of Hinduism, said to be six in number, were purified and consolidated by Śaṅkara.

From Badarī and Kedāra to Kanyā-kumārī and Rāmeśvaram, numberless temples and other religious institutions bespeak even today of the great service rendered by Śaṅkara to Hindu religion and philosophy. According to tradition Śaṅkara brought from Kailāsa five *Līngas* and consecrated them

at five holy places: *Mukti-līṅgā* at Kedāra, *Vara-līṅga* at Nilakaṇṭha-kṣetra in Nepal, *Mokṣa-līṅga* at Cidambaram, *Bhoga-līṅga* at Śṛṅgeri, and *Yoga-līṅga* at Kāñcī. What is known as the Pañcāyatana form of worship was organized by Śaṅkara. Here *Āditya*, *Ambikā*, *Viṣṇu*, *Gaṇanātha* and *Maheśvara* are together worshipped, the principal seat being offered to that one of the five that is the *iṣṭa-devatā* of the devotee. Above all, Śaṅkara established monastic-institutions and left them in charge of his chief disciples, institutions which have come down to this day and have been adorned by eminent philosopher-saints. The most outstanding monastic institutions are: the *Jyotir-maṭha* at Badarikāśrama, the *Kālikā-pīṭha* at Dvārakā, the *Govardhana-pīṭha* at Jagannātha-purī, the *Śārada-pīṭha* at Śṛṅgeri, and *Kāmakoti-pīṭha* at Kāñcī. His mission on earth completed, Śaṅkara left his body at the age of thirty-two. According to one version he is said to have disappeared entering into a cave in Kedāra. According to another, he is stated to have ascended the *sarvajña pīṭha* at Kāñcī and spent his last days there.

A number of works, commentatorial, expository and poetical, are attributed to Śaṅkara. Attempts have been made to determine which of them are genuine and which of them are wrongly ascribed to him. Even after excluding the compositions about whose authorship there may be a doubt, and taking into consideration only those that are undoubtedly Śaṅkara's, one cannot but marvel at the extent of the great teacher's writings. His commentaries on the principal *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Brahmasūtra*, manuals such as the *Upadeśasāhasrī* and *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, and devotional hymns like the *Sivānandalaharī* and the *Saundaryalaharī*, constitute a wealth of literature that belongs to all peoples and all time. An eminent philosopher describes Śaṅkara's

style of writing as *prasanna-gambhīra*, lucid and deep. Śaṅkara's works are characterized by penetrating insight and analytical skill. The metaphysic of the Absolute which he taught is, it is true, difficult to understand. Any attempt to expound it would necessarily involve expression of obscurity. But Śaṅkara's manner of exposition does not present us with the usual but unnecessary additional difficulty which is obscurity of expression. The stupendous works that he wrote, both in prose and verse, are marked by depth of thought and lucidity of language.

The quintessence of the philosophy of Śaṅkara is stated by himself in a half-verse thus: "The Absolute Spirit is the reality; the world of appearance is illusory; the so-called individual soul is the Absolute itself, and no other.

brahma satyaṁ jagan mithyā
jīvo brahmaiva nā'paraḥ.

The Upaniṣadic terms 'Brahman' and 'Ātman' indicate the highest reality which is non-dual. As the nature of the Absolute cannot be defined in terms of any category, the Upaniṣads refer to it as 'not this, not this' (*neti neti*). This does not mean, however, that the Absolute is a night of nothingness, a contentless void. It is the plenary being, the sole reality. In some texts of the Upaniṣads, positive expressions are also employed with reference to Brahman—terms like *satya*, *jñāna*, and *ānanda*, existence, consciousness, and bliss. But these too are designed for making us understand the Real by telling us what it is not, viz. that it is not non-being, not what is inert, and not that which is related to sorrow. To define a thing is to limit it, to finitize it. The infinite and the unlimited cannot be characterized in terms of finite categories. Brahman is *nirguṇa*, without characteristics. Even to say that it is one is not strictly true; for

the category of number is inapplicable to the Absolute. That is why Śaṅkara calls his philosophy 'Advaita' the doctrine of the not-two, or non-dualism.

It is true that there are in the Upaniṣads passages which characterize Brahman as the cause of the world, and as the home of all auspicious qualities. But how are we to reconcile the two views, the view of Brahman as the Absolute, without characteristics, and the view which characterizes it as the world-ground? For solving this problem, Śaṅkara postulates two standpoints: the absolute (*pāramārthika*) and the relative (*vyāvahārika*). The supreme truth is that Brahman is non-dual and relationless. It alone is; there is nothing real besides it. But from our standpoint, which is the empirical, relative standpoint, Brahman appears as God, the cause of the world. There is no real causation; the world is but an illusory appearance in Brahman, even as the snake is in the rope. This doctrine is known as *vivartavāda* (the theory of phenomenal appearance) which is to be distinguished from its rival, *pariṇāma-vāda* (the theory of transformation).

The principle that makes for the phenomenal appearance of the world is called *māyā*. *Māyā* has significance only from the relative standpoint, and not from the standpoint of the Absolute. The supreme truth is that *māyā* is that which (*yā*) is not (*mā*). But from our point of view, *māyā* appears as an inscrutable power of God that veils the true and projects the untrue. The power of veiling is termed *āvaraṇa*, and that of projecting *vikṣepa*. If one were to ask: is *māyā* real or not? the only answer is: it is neither real nor unreal. Because the world of plurality appears, *māyā* is not unreal; because *māyā* is sublated by the knowledge of the nondual self, it is not real. It cannot be both real and unreal. Therefore, it is indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*). Any inquiry into *māyā* is

not to make the concept intelligible, but to enable one to go beyond it. When one has gone beyond, there remains no problem to be solved.

Who is it that seeks to go beyond *māyā*? It is the *jīva*, the living soul. The soul is, in essence, the same as Brahman. On account of *avidyā* (nescience) which is the individual counterpart of *māyā*, it identifies itself with a psycho-physical organism and is caught up in the tract of *samsāra*. The sheaths of body, life, and mind, that cover the soul are products of *māyā*. These, in consequence, come to be mistaken for the self; their characteristics are wrongly imposed on the imperishable spirit. The soul, which has neither birth nor death, is supposed to be born and to die with the body. Action and enjoyment are believed to belong to it. All these notions are due to ignorance. The only cure for this malady is true wisdom.

The reason why *jñāna* or wisdom is taught in Advaita as the direct means to release is that release is not something which is to be newly achieved. Release (*mokṣa*) is the eternal nature of the self. Only, this supreme fact remains unrealized because of nescience. What is to be accomplished is the removal of nescience. And, that which can accomplish this is knowledge. The point that should be specially noted is that by knowledge or wisdom what is meant here is not mere intellectual understanding but intuitive and direct experience. When all the obstacles to knowledge have been removed through *karma-yoga* and *bhakti-yoga*, and when the path of self-inquiry has been successfully pursued, the knowledge of the non-dual spirit dawns, even as the sun rises at the termination of the night. Release through knowledge is attained the moment ignorance is dispelled. As release is the eternal nature of the self, one need not wait for

realizing it till death overtakes the physical body. Even while tenanted a body one is released at the onset of knowledge. Such a one is called a *jīvan-mukta*. From his standpoint, there is no body at all. He seems to live in a body only for the unreleased. After a time when the body dies, we say 'He becomes liberated from the body' (*videha-mukta*). But, the truth is that there is no difference in *mukti* (release). When release is attained, there is no more travail for the soul. It realizes its non-difference from the Absolute, which is called *advaita-anubhava* (experience of non-duality). 'When all the desires that the heart harbours are gone,' says the Upaniṣad 'then the mortal becomes immortal, and attains Brahman even here.'

To Śaṅkara goes the credit of consolidating Advaita and of making it clear beyond doubt that, according to this philosophy, there is no need for final despair, no ground for ultimate doubts. The sole Reality which Advaita teaches can never be denied, for it is the Self of even him who denies. In the *Upadeśasāhasrī*, Śaṅkara declares: 'The Self is not an object. There is neither change nor manyness in it. It can neither be received nor rejected either by itself or by anyone else. He who knows that he is the self which is within and without, which is beyond birth and death, decay and age—why should he have even the least fear?' Fear results from the erroneous cognition of plurality. Fearlessness is attained when the non-dual Absolute is realized. *Advaita* and *abhaya*, non-duality and fearlessness, are but two names for one and the same experience. By calling humanity to a realization of this truth, and by showing the way to that realization, Śaṅkara became the great benefactor of the world that his name signifies. A verse which celebrates his unique service to humanity reads thus:

śruti-smṛti-purāṇānām ālayam karuṇālayam
namāmi bhagavatpāda śaṅkaram lokaśaṅkaram.

“I salute Śaṅkara-bhagavatpāda, the bestower of blessedness on the world, the repository of all the wisdom that is contained in the sacred texts, and the incarnation of grace.”



Rāmānuja.

RAMĀNUJA

THERE have been saints in all the cult-traditions of Hinduism. Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism are the two major Hindu cults. Just as in Southern Śaivism a distinction is made between *samaya-ācāryas* (religious teachers) and *santāna-ācāryas* (philosophical expounders), so in the Vaiṣṇavism of the South a distinction is made between *Ālvārs* and *Ācāryas*. The *Ālvārs*, twelve in number, were primarily saints, divers into divinity. The *Ācāryas* were philosophers as well as saints. It is to this class of the defenders of the Vaiṣṇava faith that Rāmānuja belongs. Although there were Vaiṣṇava teachers before him, such as Nāthamuni and Ālavandār, the credit for consolidating and systematically expounding the philosophy of Southern Vaiṣṇavism known as *Viśiṣṭādvaita* goes to Rāmānuja.

We have interesting accounts of Rāmānuja's life—they are not, however, biographies—in two works written in his own time. Amudanār's *Nūṇṇantādi* is a poem of a hundred verses in Tamil, and has been included in the *Prabandha* literature. Vaḍuhanambi, an Āndhra disciple of Rāmānuja, describes the doings of his Master in the *Yatirāja-vaibhavam* which consists of a hundred and fourteen *ślokas*. Vedānta Deśika's *Yatirāja-saptati* and Maṇavāla Mahāmuniḡal's *Yatirāja-vimśati* are among the other sources of information for an account of Rāmānuja's life.

Rāmānuja was born in Śrīperumbūdūr, a neat little township lying on the road to Kāñcī from Madras, in the year 1017 A.D. His parents were Āsuri Keśava Somayājī and Kāntimaṭī, sister of Śrīsaila-pūrṇa, a grandson of Ālavan-

dār also known as Yāmunācārya. Śrīsaila-pūṇṇa was spending his life, with the consent of his grand-father, on the Tirupati Hill in the service of Lord Venkateśvara. It was he that gave his sister in marriage to Āsuri Keśava. And, when a son was born to this pair, it was he that gave to the new arrival the name Lakṣmaṇa (or Rāmānuja: in Tamil, Ilaya Perumāḷ).

Not much is known about Rāmānuja's childhood days. He seems to have lost his father quite early. He was put to school along with a cousin of his, Govinda Bhaṭṭar. When the two boys attained a certain measure of maturity in their studies, they were sent to Kāñcī to learn Vedānta from a reputed scholar, Yādavaprakāśa. The progress that Rāmānuja made in his education was rapid and sound at once. The news of his prowess reached his great-grand-father, Ālavandār, at Śrīraṅgam, who desired to have a look at Rāmānuja. He travelled all the way to Kāñcī *incognito*, and saw the boy in the Varadarāja shrine without announcing himself. He was satisfied with what he saw, and went back with the hope that Rāmānuja would succeed him as head of the pontifical seat at Śrīraṅgam. Rāmānuja continued with his studies for a while. But the relations between himself and his teacher, Yādavaprakāśa, became strained. With Yādavaprakāśa's interpretations of certain scriptural texts Rāmānuja could not agree. Yādavaprakāśa would seem to have been a monist of a sort. Some make out that he was a follower of Advaita. Another cause for trouble soon presented itself. The local ruler had a daughter who was possessed. Yādavaprakāśa was invited to exorcise the evil spirit. He tried, but failed. The spirit declared that it would leave the princess only at Rāmānuja's bidding. Rāmānuja was called, and he gladly asked the ghost to quit, and the ghost left the princess in peace. Yādavaprakāśa became jealous; and it is said that

he planned to put an end to his pupil's life by a ruse. He asked the party of his disciples to go on a trip to Kāśī. Rāmānuja and his cousin Govinda were also to be members of this party. The teacher's instruction to some of his disciples was that Rāmānuja should be drowned in the Gaṅgā, and that this incident should pass off as an accident. Govinda who knew this plot disclosed it to Rāmānuja. Rāmānuja escaped at dead of night and journeyed back to Kāñcī, with the help of a kind hunter and huntress who showed him the way. On reaching Kāñcī, the huntress asked for drinking water. Rāmānuja went to fetch water from a nearby well. But by the time he returned the hunter and huntress had disappeared; and the towers of the temple of Lord Varadarāja greeted his eyes. He knew then that the pair that had guided him back to Kāñcī were no other than the Lord and His Consort. From that day onwards Rāmānuja made it a point to carry a potful of water from that well for the daily worship at the temple.

In compliance with his mother's wish Rāmānuja settled down in Kāñcī as a householder. There was a saint, Tirukkacci Naṁbi, at the time engaged in the service of Lord Varadarāja. Rāmānuja came to be profoundly influenced by him, and following his example devoted his time in serving the Lord. In Śrīraṅgam Ālavandār was nearing his end. His disciples who knew his wish as to who should succeed him deputed the eldest among them, Periyanaṁbi, to go to Kāñcī and bring Rāmānuja. Periyanaṁbi travelled to Kāñcī, and learning that Rāmānuja was in the temple then, he went there and stood before the Image of the Lord reciting a hymn. Rāmānuja's attention being drawn to the recital, he asked the stranger who the composer of the hymn was. On being told that the composer was Ālavandār

he enquired whether he could see him. Periyanaṁbi said that he would gladly take Rāmānuja to Śrīraṅgam where Ālavandār was. Rāmānuja finished his morning service at the temple, took leave of the Lord, and accompanied Periyanaṁbi to Śrīraṅgam. But it was too late. Ālavandār in the meanwhile had passed away, and arrangements were being made for the funeral. Rāmānuja went near the dead body of the great preceptor to have a close look at it, and was surprised to find that three out of the five fingers of the right hand were in a folded condition. It was explained to him by Ālavandār's disciples that this phenomenon meant that the great teacher had three unfulfilled desires the chief of which was a lucid and easy-to-read commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*. When Rāmānuja promised to have these objectives fulfilled the fingers, it is said, straightened themselves. After the funeral ceremonies were over, Rāmānuja returned to Kāñcī and resumed his duties at the Varadarāja temple. One day, going into the temple, he wanted very much to know the will of the Lord in regard to his own future. He requested Tirukkacci Naṁbi to ascertain the divine will. The answer came in the form of the following verse:

*śrīmān param tattvam aham, mataṁ me
bhedaḥ, prapattir nirapāya-hetuḥ,
nāvaśyakī ca smṛter antakāle
mokṣo mahāpūrṇa ihāryavaryaḥ.*

'I am the supreme auspicious reality; My doctrine is that of difference; self-surrender is the unfailing cause of salvation; individual effort is not necessary; release comes in the end; the best of preceptors here (at present) is Periyanaṁbi (Mahāpūrṇa).' Following the Lord's direction,

Rāmānuja decided to meet Periyanaṁbi and get initiated into the mysteries of Vaiṣṇavism by him. Accordingly, he set out for Śrīraṅgam. When he reached Madurāntakam he saw Periyanaṁbi who was on his way to Kāñcī to meet him. The two exchanged greetings and discovered that the purpose of their respective journeys was the same. Entreated by Rāmānuja, Periyanaṁbi initiated him into the secrets of the Vaiṣṇava doctrine in the Rāma temple at Madurāntakam. Thereafter both of them went to Kāñcī and dwelt there for a while.

The domestic life of Rāmānuja was rather an unhappy one. His wife was not helpful in the path of spirituality he had chosen to tread, and she was even quarrelsome at times. Once she went to the extent of picking up a quarrel with Periyanaṁbi's wife. When Periyanaṁbi heard about this he quietly wound up his establishment in Kāñcī and went back to Śrīraṅgam. Rāmānuja came to know of the cause of his *guru's* departure, and was greatly pained at his wife's misbehaviour. Taking advantage of an invitation from his father-in-law, he sent his wife to her parental home; and a great obstacle being removed from off his way, he took *sannyāsa* and thus became a detached person. His sense of renunciation was so great that people began to call him Yatirāja, prince of ascetics.

The disciples of Ālavandār at Śrīraṅgam were eager to get Rāmānuja to live with them, and to make him occupy the pontifical seat of their late master. This time they sent as their emissary to Kāñcī Ālavandār's own son, Tiruvaraṅgapperumāl Araiyaṛ. Rāmānuja followed him to Śrīraṅgam and started equipping himself for his life-mission. He had already received formal initiation in the form of *pañca-saṁskāra* (five-fold purification) from Periyanaṁbi. He now approached another disciple of Ālavandār, Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Naṁbi (Goṣṭi-

pūrṇa), for initiation into the meaning of the *mantra* (the sacred formula). Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Nāmbi did not respond for a long time. At last, when he was satisfied about Rāmānuja's earnestness and competence, he initiated him after warning him that he should give the *mantra*, in his town, only to worthy disciples, and not to all and sundry. Then happened the most moving incident in the life of Rāmānuja. Although Rāmānuja had promised to his *guru* that he would not publicize the *mantra*, he found the *mantra* to be so efficacious that he could not contain himself; he called together all people and gave the *mantra* to them. Tirukkōṭṭiyūr Nāmbi was rather annoyed; he called his disciple and asked for an explanation. Rāmānuja invited his *guru* to prescribe the punishment. When told that the punishment was hell, he submitted that he was prepared to go to eternal perdition for the sake of the millions who would be saved by the *mantra*. The preceptor was pleased at this; and he blessed Rāmānuja saying that the Vaiṣṇava philosophy he would be teaching would bear his name, that it would be known as 'Rāmānuja-darśana'. Rāmānuja then studied the *Tiruvāymoḷi* under Tiruvaraṅgapperumāl Araiyaṇ and Tirumalaiyaṇḍān, and the *Rāmāyaṇa* under Tirumalai Nāmbi. Thus five of Ālavandār's disciples became Rāmānuja's preceptors to groom him for the great task that awaited him.

Rāmānuja's fame as a great teacher began to spread. Several disciples joined him; Kūreśa (Kūrattālvān or Śrīvatsāṅka Mīśra) was the chief among them. He had to meet in debate one Yajñamūrti, an Advaita scholar, and defeat him. As it usually happens in such cases, Yajñamūrti joined Rāmānuja's fold and became his disciple. Rāmānuja then started on a pilgrimage of India, from Rāmeśvaram to Badarī. He travelled up by the west coast and returned by the east coast. While at Śrīnagar, in Kashmir, he was able to procure a manu-

script copy of the *Bodhāyana-vṛtti*, a commentary on the *Brahmasūtra* by Bodhāyana. His faithful disciple, Kūreśa, was able to memorize it even at the first reading. Closely following the *Bodhāyana-vṛtti*, Rāmānuja wrote his own commentary which is known as the *Śrī-bhāṣya*. We are told that the Goddess of learning, Śarasvatī, herself gave her approval of the *bhāṣya* and conferred on Rāmānuja the title of 'Bhāṣyakāra'. Thus was fulfilled the main desire of Ālavandār—the writing of an authoritative and illuminating commentary on the *Brahma-sūtra*.

By the time Rāmānuja returned to Śrīraṅgam, the position of the Vaiṣṇavas had become difficult because of persecution by the Coḷa ruler, Kulōttuṅga I. Rāmānuja was advised to flee the country. He travelled along the banks of the Kāvērī and took refuge in Hoysala territory where Bitṭi Deva was carving out a kingdom for himself. A daughter of this king was possessed. Rāmānuja was invited to exorcise the evil spirit. When he succeeded in this, Bitṭi Deva who was a Jaina became a convert to Vaiṣṇavism. In several debates Rāmānuja had to vanquish the Jainas; and he thus made the land safe for the particular form of faith which it was his mission to propagate. With the help of the newly converted king who was given the name Viṣṇuvardhana-deva, Rāmānuja constructed a temple for Tirunārāyaṇapperumāl at Melukote (Yādavādri). It was here that Rāmānuja lived for about twelve years.

Meanwhile the old Coḷa ruler died and his successor was not ill-disposed towards the Vaiṣṇavas. When this news reached Rāmānuja, he resolved to return to Śrīraṅgam. Going back to Śrīraṅgam, he organized the temple ceremonies and trained his disciples for the various tasks they had to accomplish in the service of the Vaiṣṇava faith and philosophy. He

founded several temples and Maṭhas. He visited the sacred shrines of Viṣṇu all over the South and gave them their rightful place in the life of the community. He saw to it that, along with the Vedic chants, the *Prabandhas* were also recited in the temples. His disciples had three images of Rāmānuja made and entreated him to consecrate them which he did to please them. These were installed at Śrīraṅgam, Śrīperumbudūr, and Tirunārāyaṇapuram. Realizing that he was nearing his end, he nominated seventy four of his disciples for taking charge of his work in the different centres he had established. Having completed his mission, Rāmānuja departed this world in A.D. 1137 in his 120th year.

Rāmānuja's system of philosophy is known as Viśiṣṭādvaita. As its sources are both the Upaniṣads and the hymns composed by the Ālvars known as the *Nālāyira-Prabandham*, it is also called *Ubhaya-Vedānta*. The *Bhāgavata* tradition was also a source of inspiration for Viśiṣṭādvaita. Rāmānuja himself claims that his interpretation of the *Brahma-sūtra* follows the earlier *Vṛtti* of Bodhāyana. His commentary on the *Sūtra*, as we have seen, is known as the *Srī-bhāṣya*. Among his other works are, a commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, *Vedānta-dīpa*, *Vedānta-sāra*, *Vedārtha-saṅgraha* and *Gadya-traya*.

According to Viśiṣṭādvaita, there are three ultimate realities (tattva-traya): God (Īśvara), soul (cit) and matter (acit). Of these, God alone is independent reality; the other two are dependent on him. The relation between God on the one hand and the world of souls and matter on the other is analogous to that between soul (śarīrī) and body (śarīra). God is the soul of souls, and of nature. These latter are distinct from God, but not separable from him. It is not an external relation that governs them, but the internal relation

of inseparability (*apṛthak-siddhi*). The relation of *apṛthak-siddhi* is the pivot on which the Viśiṣṭādvaita philosophy turns. When it is said 'The cow is white', or 'Devadatta is a man', a mode (*prakāra*) or quality (*viśeṣaṇa*) is predicated in each case of a substance (*prakārin, viśeṣya*). The relation of substance—mode or qualified—qualification is an inseparable relation. God as qualified (*viśiṣṭa*) by the world of souls and matter is non-dual (*advaita*).

God, whom Viśiṣṭādvaita identifies with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, is the same as the Upaniṣadic *Brahman* endowed with the eternal attributes of truth, goodness, beauty and bliss. He is the support (*ādhāra*) of all beings, their controller (*niyantr*) the goal (*śeṣin*). Rāmānuja takes the following Bṛhadāraṇyaka passage as his basic text: 'He who dwells in the world, and is within it, whom the world does not know, whose body is the world, and who controls the world from within, is the self, the inner ruler, immortal.'¹ Although God is the whole and sole cause of the world, he is not affected by the changes of the latter. God in himself does not change; the entities that are comprehended in him, and of which he is the inspiring principle—it is they that change. God is immanent in the world as well as transcendent of it. He is the supreme moral governor and world-redeemer. He incarnates himself from time to time in order to recover the lost souls. He appears also in the form of idols (*arcā*) worshipped in sacred places.

The inconscient world, which is called *acīt*, is the dwelling place of soul, and, through them, of God also. *Prakṛti* or matter has three qualities, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, which appear at the time of world-creation. When there is dissolution, matter is not lost, but it exists in a subtle form. Nothing

¹ Bṛhadāraṇyaka, III, vii.

can come out of nothing. In the cause the effect is latent (*sat-kārya*). Causation means transformation (*pariṇāma*); it consists in making patent what is latent. Hence creation and dissolution are the appearance and disappearance, respectively, of matter, and not the absolute origination and destruction thereof. *Kāla* or time which is also *acit* is the form of all existence. As a co-ordinate of *prakṛti* it is comprised in *Brahman*. The temporal world equips the soul for its empirical career; it also serves as the means for making the soul progress towards its goal which is godliness.

The soul (*jīva*) is of the essence of spirit. It is and has knowledge. The soul as knowledge does not change; but as having knowledge it changes. Knowledge as an attribute is called *dharmabhūta-jñāna*; it characterizes both souls and God. As an attribute, it is inseparable from them. It is also a substance (*dravya*) in the sense that it is capable of contraction and expansion, and is the substrate of change. The soul's attributive knowledge expands to its fullest extent in the state of release; there is nothing then that the soul cannot know. In the state of bondage, however, the soul's attributive knowledge is more or less contracted. The soul, in this condition acquires the body that befits its past *karma*, and has to transmigrate from one life to another till it attains release. The souls are infinite in number, and are of three classes: (1) the eternal (*nitya*) *jīvas* which have never been in bondage, (2) the freed (*mukta*) souls which have already achieved their salvation, and (3) the bound (*baddha*) souls which are caught up in the vortex of *samsāra*. The third type of souls wander from life to life till they are released.

The way to *mokṣa* lies through *karma*, *jñāna*, and *bhakti*. The performance of duty without any selfish motive purifies the mind. This makes meditation of the *jīva* on itself possi-

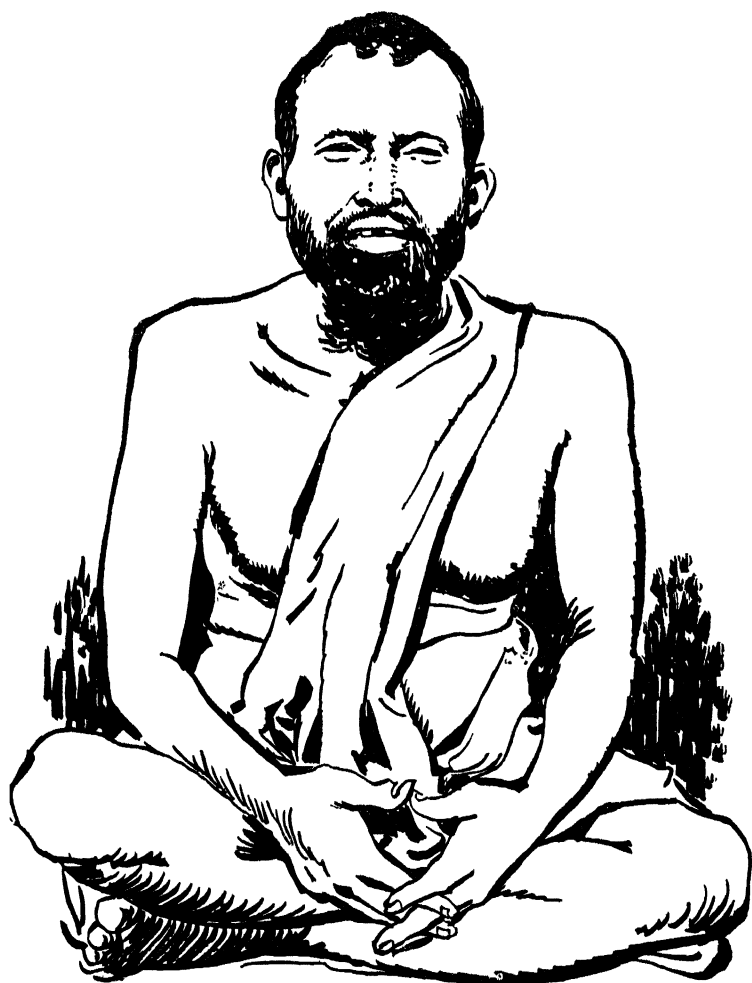
ble. Through such meditation the *jīva* acquires knowledge of itself as dependent on God. Then it begins to love God, and contemplate him. *Bhakti* involves meditation just as *jñāna* does. Only, in *bhakti* the meditation is characterized by the soul's feeling of love for and dependence on God. When *bhakti* matures and becomes complete, the soul has a vision of God. But it is finally released only when its physical body perishes. So, there is no *jīvan-mukti*, according to Viśiṣṭādvaita. Even after acquiring *jñāna* and *bhakti* one has to perform *karma* till the very end, not only the rites enjoined in the Veda, but also prayer and worship. *Karma*, however, is not the direct means to release; it is to be regarded as an auxiliary.

To follow the path of *bhakti*, qualifications based on birth, etc., are necessary. As an alternative path, Viśiṣṭādvaita teaches *prapatti*. *Prapatti* means utter self-surrender to God, resorting to him as the sole refuge. According to the *Bhāgavata* tradition, this is the most effective means to release. It is open to all, without any distinction. What one has to do is to resolve to follow the will of God, not to cross his purposes, to believe that he will save, to seek help from him and him alone and to yield up one's spirit to him and to be meek. *Prapatti* is so important that even the path of *jñāna-bhakti* is said to lead to it. Those who surrender themselves to God are saved by him. When their bodies fall, they go to the 'Highlands of the blest'—Vaikuṇṭha—and there enjoy constantly the presence of God.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

IN the nineteenth century, the intelligentsia of India had decided to follow the West. English education had been introduced, and along with it English manners and customs, and English ideas and modes of life. Those minds, which came to be educated in this new way, thought that India's progress consisted in completely forgetting her past. The *mānasaputras* of the English—to borrow a phrase from Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe)—excelled even Englishmen sometimes in condemning their own ancient culture. There was nothing in their *śāstras*, they were convinced, that was worth preserving. In the wake of their imperfect understanding of the sciences that came from the West, they had developed a distaste for what the ancients had to serve. Especially the cult-practices associated with the *Tāntrika* way of worship came to be looked upon—partly due, it must be admitted, to the wrong use made of them by some of the *Tāntrikas* themselves—as but 'lust, mummery, and black magic' replete with 'silly and vulgar superstition'. The English masters and their Indian *Chelas* honestly believed, therefore, that the sooner India destroyed her traditional soul and was reborn, wearing the pretty attire imported from abroad the better it would be for her future.

It was at such a critical time in the history of India that Sri Ramakrishna was born. He was born in typically rural surroundings, and grew up there till he was a youth. He was a child of the virgin spirit of India, unspoilt by the modern sophistications that were crowding in everyday. Destiny brought him from his obscure village to the vicinity of



Sri Rāmakrishṇa.

Calcutta which was then the metropolis of the British Empire; and it was there that he demonstrated to the new world of science that there was nothing wrong with the spiritual way of life taught by the seers and sages of India. Those very modes of worship which had become distorted and desecrated, he reinstated and purified, and proved how efficacious they were. He also showed the futility of inter-religious quarrel by making his life a luminous commentary on the Vedic text: "Truth is one: sages call it in various ways".

At Kāmārpūkūr, one of the typical villages of Bengal, on February 18, 1836, the child which later came to be known as Ramakrishna was born in a Brahmin family which was honoured in those environs for its rectitude and piety. The father of the child, Kshudiram Chattopadhyaya, had migrated to Kāmārpūkūr from his ancestral village, Derepur, because he had refused to bear false witness in a case put up at the behest of the local landlord. The mother, Chandrā Devī, was a gentle and devoted house-wife, kindly and open-hearted by nature. Kshudiram and Chandra spent much of their time in the worship of their family gods and in meditation. It was to this ideal couple that Ramakrishna was born. Both of them had seen visions of the coming of this divine child. Kshudiram was on a pilgrimage to Gaya. Gadādhara (a name of Vishnu), the lord of the temple at Gaya, appeared to him in a dream and said "I bless you and will be born as your son, and will receive your loving care". About the same time, Chandrā Devī had a vision at the Siva shrine at Kāmārpūkūr. She saw a divine light emanating from the holy image, filling the whole place, and engulfing her, whereupon she lost outer consciousness, and fell down. It was after this incident that she conceived the wonder-child. And, when he was born, the parents named him Gadādhara.

Gadādhara's childhood days were quite happy ones. He was the darling of the village and the hero of its children's society. Although to all outward appearances he was merry and jovial he was often observed to retire into solitude and take time for contemplation. The first occasion he experienced ecstasy was when he was about six years old. He was once walking along the fields with puffed rice in a fold of his garment. He lifted his eyes to the skies as he was munching the rice. He saw a great black cloud spread rapidly until it covered the heavens. Suddenly at the edge of the cloud a flight of snow-white cranes passed over his head. The contrast was so beautiful that his spirit wandered far away. He lost consciousness and fell down. From that time onwards the ecstatic mood came to him now and then. As his parents were spiritually attuned, they could understand the boy. When the boy was but seven, his father died. This only increased his longing for the inward life. He sought the company of holy men who came in good numbers to the village which lay on the road to Puri. He listened; he pondered over. A sense of serious purpose took possession of him. He could not bring himself to study in a school, because he found that scholastic study was designed only to serve as a means to earning a living. Life and nature became his teachers, and not books and closed walls. He derived instruction from itinerant monks and singing minstrels. He learned to mould images of gods and to enact divine parts in amateur plays. After investiture with the sacred thread when he was nine, he was initiated into the ways of worshipping the family deity, Raghuvir. His mode of worship, however, differed from the ordinary. The image that he worshipped appeared to him not as an inert idol but as the most intensely living Lord of the universe.

Ramkumar, Kshudiram's eldest son, on whom had devolved the obligations of the family after the latter's death, went to Calcutta in 1849, and started a Sanskrit school. He also undertook to perform priestly functions in Calcutta households. When Gadadhar attained the age of sixteen, he was summoned to Calcutta by his elder brother Ramkumar so that he might render assistance in his priestly duties. Subsequently when Ramkumar accepted the office of priest at the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, a suburb of Calcutta, newly built by Rani Rasmani, Gadadhar also went to Dakshineswar with his brother and helped him in the worship. Ramkumar lived only for about a year after the consecration of the temple. Rani Rasmani and her son-in-law Mathur Babu, who were greatly impressed by Gadadhar's inward life, requested him to succeed to his late brother's office.

It was at the Dakshineswar temple and the adjoining wooded piece of land where even now the *Panchavati* planted with his own hands stands, that Ramakrishna—we shall call Gadadhar by this name henceforth—went through his spiritual practices and fulfilled the mission for which he was born. As a youth of twenty, Ramakrishna began his priestly career quietly and with due ceremony. But he soon found himself caught in a spiritual storm which carried him to what may appear as strange lands of supernormal experience. To him the image of Kali was no mere statue in stone; it was a living force of the Divine, and he treated it as such. One of the accounts of his mode of worship tells us: "While he sat down to worship, a curtain of oblivion separated him from the outside world, and he was totally unconscious of the presence of the many bystanders who usually gather there to see the worship. Sometimes he would sit motionless for hours together and would hardly come to his own self even when

called by his nephew.¹ While uttering the various *mantras* he could distinctly see those phenomena before him which the ordinary priest has merely to imagine." The normal priest masters the ritual, but seldom gains the true end of worship. Ramakrishna had not much use for ritual; what he offered to the Mother was heart-worship. An intense longing to have a vision of the Mother seized him. Describing his inward state at the time and the first vision he had, he used to say to his disciples later: "There was then an intolerable anguish in my heart because I could not have Her vision. Just as a man wrings a towel forcibly to squeeze out all the water from it, so I felt as if somebody caught hold of my heart and mind and was doing so with them. Greatly afflicted with the thought that I might never have Mother's vision, I was dying of despair. Agonized, I thought, there was then no use in living this life. My eyes suddenly fell upon the sword that was there in the Mother's temple. I made up my mind to put an end to my life with it that very moment. Like one mad, I ran and caught hold of it, when suddenly I had the wonderful vision of the Mother and fell down unconscious. I did not know what happened then in the external world—how that day and the next slipped away. But, in my heart of hearts, there was flowing a current of intense bliss, never experienced before, and I had the immediate knowledge of the light, that was Mother".

From then on, he did not see the image in the temple, but the living Mother Herself. Let us hear what he says: "I put the palm of my hand near Her nostrils and felt that Mother was actually breathing. I observed very closely, but I could never see the shadow of the Mother's divine person on the temple wall in the light of the lamp at night. I heard from

¹ Hriday who was attending on Ramakrishna at this period.

my room that Mother, merry like a little girl, was going upstairs, her anklets making jingling sounds. I came up to test it and found that She, with Her hair dishevelled, was actually standing on the verandah of the first floor of the temple and was now viewing Calcutta, now the Ganga."

A wondering world that was watching the God-intoxicated Ramakrishna thought that he had gone mad. And when the news reached his village-home, his mother got alarmed and sent for him. On the advice of her relations and friends, she decided to get her son married. Surprisingly enough, instead of objecting, Ramakrishna not only gave his consent but also indicated the village and family where the bride was waiting for him. He was twenty-three then, and Sarada Devi to whom he was married was but six years old. When several years later she came to Dakshineswar to join her husband, she realized what a glorious thing it was to serve him, to become his first disciple, and share with him the divine felicity which comes only to a few.

So far as Ramakrishna was concerned, marriage made no difference to his spiritual experiments. After his return to Dakshineswar his practices became only more absorbing and covered all the aspects of the *Hindu-sādhana*. His hunger for God was so consuming that it required for its satisfaction a varied and abundant spiritual fare. All the major emotional attitudes towards the Deity, Ramakrishna adopted in turn, and his appetite only increased by what it fed on.

Of the spiritual paths, the *Tāntrika* disciplines are the most difficult and dangerous ones. Many succumb to the snares that lie on the way, because the drag of the senses is too much for them to resist, and their inner life is not adequately developed. The way of the *Tantras* is not the way of 'going forth'; it is the return-process. It is the way by means of

which even in the sordid things of life the beauty of God is to be discovered. One who is impure, if he should take to this path, sinks into sordidness and fails to see the beauty. Ramakrishna who was spotlessly pure went through the *Tāntrika-sādhana* without anything untoward happening. An adept in this discipline, a nun, who had no name of her own, but was simply called 'Bhairavi Brahmani', served as Ramakrishna's guide. Ramakrishna came out of the *sādhana* a hero, with his *vairāgya* (dispassion) reinforced. The supernatural powers that came to him as a result of the practice of *Tantra-yoga* he spurned completely. He did not relish even the golden radiance that was imparted to his physical body. "Take back thy outward beauty, Mother", he used to cry, "and give me instead thy inner beauty, the purity of the spirit". Outward glitter, even though it may wear the vesture of spirituality, is a source of great harm. Ramakrishna demonstrated to the world of spiritual aspirants that it is perfectly possible to achieve success in *Tantra sādhana* without falling a prey to outward ostentations.

The *Tāntrika* practices coupled with the *Vaiṣṇava* disciplines afforded a multi-sided experience of the *saguṇa-Brahman* or *Īśvara*, the personal God. Ramakrishna approached God in several ways, and succeeded in gaining Him. Transforming himself spiritually into Kausalya, he regarded Ramlala as his child. Adopting the attitude of Hanuman, he became the servant of Ramachandra. Becoming a Gopi of Brindavan, he realized communion with Kṛṣṇa, the beloved enchanter of all souls. Thus in a variety of ways did Ramakrishna enjoy the glory and grandeur of God.

There was one more ascent to make. The Great Mother had prepared the way for the final assault. Her child was now set for scaling the heights of the *nirguṇa Brahman*. And,

there appeared a trained mountaineer to take him along—Totapuri who, it is said, had attained *nirvikalpa samādhi* (transcendent experience) after years of strenuous *sādhana*. Accepting him as his guide, Ramakrishna tore the veil of name—and—form, and beheld his individuality dissolving in a limitless blaze of spiritual light. In the experience of the non-dual Reality there is no distinction—not even the distinction of experient and object experienced. Employing the language of duality, we say that Ramakrishna *had* this experience, that he *remained* therein for three days and that he *returned* to the relative plane of consciousness thereafter. Words, however, cannot describe the non-dual experience, nor mind measure it. It is from our point of view that the *Jivanmukta* (the one who has been liberated while yet living) continues to tenant a body. It is the saving power of *māyā* that makes the *mukta-mumukṣu* relation possible.

Having gained the transcendent experience of the supreme Spirit, Ramakrishna came down to the plane of relativity and turned to the practice of alien faiths such as Islam and Christianity. The Advaita-realization which he had, had enabled him to look upon all faiths as but different roads to the same destination. His universalism was not the result of a process of rationalization; it was a conviction born of experience. He followed the modes of discipline as advocated in religions like Islam and Christianity, and found that all of them led to God-realization. In his experience we have an authentic evidence of the supremacy and identity of the truth taught in all the faiths. “I have practised all religions, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity”, he declared, “and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. You must try all beliefs and traverse all the different ways once. Wherever I look I see

men quarrelling in the name of religion—Hindus, Mohammedans, Brahmins, Vaiṣṇavas and the rest, but they never reflect that He who is called Kṛṣṇa is also called Śiva, and bears the name of Primitive Energy, Jesus and Allah as well—the same Rāma with a thousand names. The tank has several *Ghaṭs*. At one Hindus draw water in pitchers, and call it *Jal*; at another Mussalmans draw water in leathern bottles and call it *Pani*; at a third Christians, and call it *Water*. Can we imagine that the water is not *Jal*, but only *Pani* or *Water*? How ridiculous! The substance is one under different names and everyone is seeking the same substance; nothing but climate, temperament and name vary. Let each man follow his own path. If he sincerely and ardently wishes to know God, peace be unto him! He will surely realize Him.”

With the realization of the non-dual Spirit, Ramakrishna's life had become full. The peace that was now his knew no disturbance because there was no duality in it. He had become a full blown flower, to use one of his similes, and the honey-bees came to drink the nectar. The last years of his life were spent in expounding his experience to all those who flocked to him, and in training a group of disciples, mostly young, who under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda were to found a Mission in his name and carry his message of universalism in spirituality to every part of the globe. Among those who became Ramakrishna's ardent devotees were Keshab Chandra Sen, the great Brāhmo leader, Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, Keshab's right-hand man, Mahendranath Gupta (known as “M”) who as a Headmaster was responsible for bringing many young and aspiring souls under the protecting wings of the Paramahansa (as Ramakrishna had now come to be known), Durgacharan Nag who was the ideal householder among the Master's lay disciples,

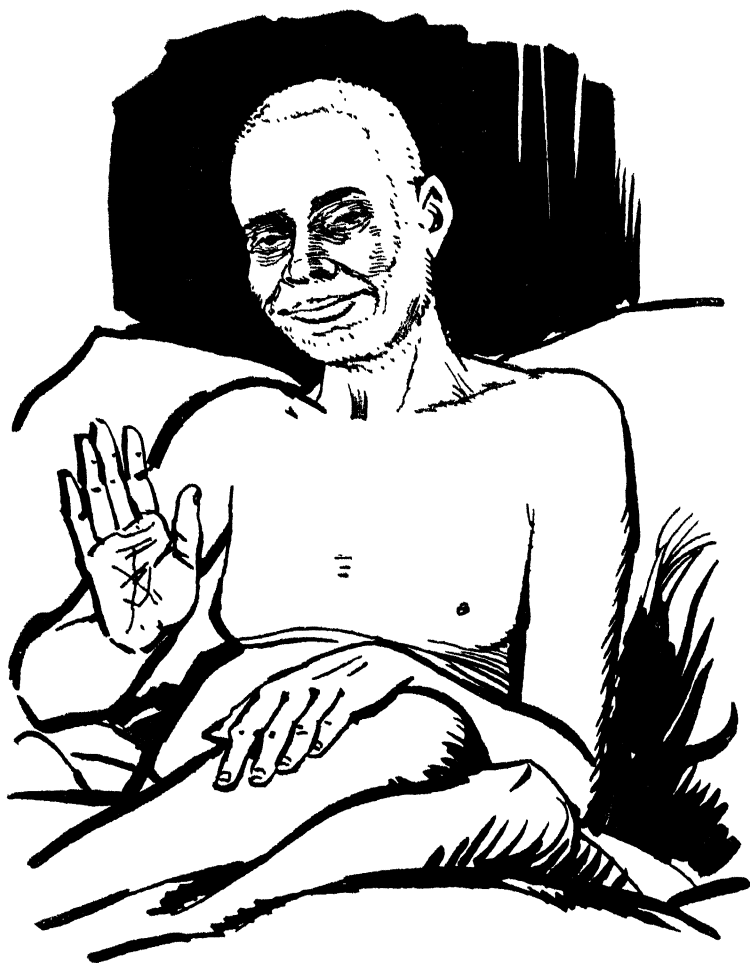
and Girishchandra Ghosh, the greatest Bengali dramatist of his time.

Many young persons were attracted to Ramakrishna, and when they came near him, they clung to him. It was these young people that later on, with Swami Vivekananda as their head, constituted themselves into the Ramakrishna Brotherhood, and started to work out the Mission of their Master. Ramakrishna devoted his last years to prepare these disciples for their future work. As his fame spread, there was an almost unceasing flow of visitors. He was so full of loving kindness for them that in spite of his failing health, he gave them instruction and consolation in their troubles. His throat became inflamed first. The illness was diagnosed as cancer. Sarada Devi the holy Mother nursed the Master with her utmost care and devotion. Narendra (as Swami Vivekananda was then known) and the other boys attended upon him constantly. At last the day came for Ramakrishna to relinquish his body. On August 15, 1886, he passed into *Mahāsamādhi*, after giving his last instructions to his disciples and taking the Name of the Divine Mother.

The story of Ramakrishna's life is, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "a story of religion in practice". Romain Rolland describes it as "the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people." Not only did the saint of Dakshineswar reveal to us anew the excellence of the Vedantic truth that God alone is real, and nothing else, but also he showed the way of realizing this truth through service to humanity. We cannot take a leap to the plenary wisdom without proper equipment. Disinterested service or karma-yoga is the best preparation for leading the soul to its goal. He who is callous or indifferent to the sufferings and needs of his fellow-beings cannot make even the

least progress towards the Spirit. The Self that is sought to be realized by the seeker after Truth is not the narrow self of the individual. It is the Self that is the same (sama) in all—the universal spirit in which there is no division. Hence egocentricism is a great enemy of spirituality. How can the ego be subdued if not by selfless service? Very often helping those that suffer takes the form of an ostentatious and officious condescension. This, however, blesses neither him that gives nor him that receives. It is God that should be worshipped in the distressed and the downtrodden. Swami Vivekananda proclaimed the faith which he had received from his Master thus: 'The only God in whom I believe is the sum total of all souls, and above all I believe in my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races.'

Sri Ramakrishna's identification with cosmic Being was so great that he used to say, 'Let me be condemned to be born over and over again, even in the form of a dog, if so I can be of help to a single soul.' And again, 'I will give up twenty thousand bodies to help one man. It is glorious to help even one man'! Such a sentiment is in total conformity with the teachings of the Upaniṣads and the other sacred books, which are meant for all. And, their meaning should be learnt with a view to translate it into life, from such sages like Ramakrishna who, to quote the words of his apostle, 'was a living commentary on the texts of the Upaniṣads, was in fact the spirit of the Upaniṣads in human form.....the harmony of all the diverse thought of India.'



Ramana Maharshi.

RAMAṆA MAHARSHI

THE Scriptures tell us that it is as difficult to trace the path a sage pursues as it is to draw a line marking the course a bird takes in the air while on its wings. Most humans have to be content with a slow and laborious journey towards the goal. But a few are born as adepts in flying non-stop to the common home of all beings—the supreme Self. The generality of mankind takes heart when such a sage appears. Though it is unable to keep pace with him, it feels uplifted in his presence and has a foretaste of the felicity compared to which the pleasures of the world pale into nothing. Countless people who went to Tiruvannāmalai during the life-time of Maharshi Śrī Ramaṇa had this experience. They saw in him a sage without the least touch of worldliness, a saint of matchless purity, a witness to the eternal truth of Vedānta. It is not often that a spiritual genius of the magnitude of Śrī Ramaṇa visits this earth. But when such an event occurs, the entire humanity gets benefited and a new era of hope opens before it.

About thirty miles south of Madurai there is a village Tiruccuḷi by name with an ancient Śiva-temple about which two of the great Tamil saints, Sundaramūrti and Māṇikkavācakar, have sung. In this sacred village there lived in the latter part of the nineteenth century an uncertified pleader, Sundaram Aiyar with his wife Aḷagammāl. Piety, devotion and charity characterized this ideal couple. Sundaram Aiyar was generous even beyond his measure. Aḷagammāl was an ideal Hindu wife. To them was born Venkatarāman—who later came to be known to the world as Ramaṇa Maharshi—on the 30th of December, 1879. It was an auspicious day for the Hindus—the *Ārdrā-darśanam* day.

On this day every year the image of the Dancing Śiva, Natarāja, is taken out of the temples in procession in order to celebrate the divine grace of the Lord that made Him appear before such saints as Gautama, Patañjali, Vyāghrapāda, and Mānikkavācaka. In the year 1879 on the Ārdra day the Natarāja Image of the temple at Tiruccuḷi was taken out with all the attendant ceremonies, and just as it was about to re-enter, Venkataraman was born. There was nothing markedly distinctive about Venkataraman's early years. He grew up just as an average boy. He was sent to an elementary school in Tiruccuḷi, and then for a year's education to a school in Dindigul. When he was twelve his father died. This necessitated his going to Madurai along with the family and living with his paternal uncle Subbaiyar. There he was sent to Scott's Middle School and then to the American Mission High School. He was an indifferent student, not at all serious about his studies. But he was a healthy and strong lad. His school mates and other companions were afraid of his strength. If some of them had any grievance against him at any time, they would dare play pranks with him only when he was asleep. In this he was rather unusual: he would not know of anything that happened to him during sleep. He would be carried away or even beaten without his waking in the process.

It was apparently by accident that Venkataraman heard about Aruṇācala when he was sixteen years of age. One day an elderly relative of his called on the family in Madurai. The boy asked him where he had come from. The relative replied "From Aruṇācala." The very name 'Aruṇācala' acted as a magic spell on Venkataraman, and with an evident excitement he put his next question to the elderly gentleman, "What! From Aruṇācala! Where is it?" And he got the reply that Tiruvannāmalai was Aruṇācala.

Referring to this incident the Sage says later on in one of his Hymns to Arunācala: "Oh, great wonder! As an insentient hill it stands. Its action is difficult for anyone to understand. From my childhood it appeared to my intelligence that Arunācala was something very great. But even when I came to know through another that it was the same as Tiruvannāmalai I did not understand its meaning. When, stilling my mind, it drew me up to it, and I came close, I found that it was the Immovable."

Quickly following the incident which attracted Venkataraman's attention on Arunācala, there was another happening which also contributed to the turning of the boy's mind to the deeper values of spirituality. He chanced to lay his hands on a copy of Śēkkiḷār's *Periyapurāṇam* which relates the lives of the Śaiva saints. He read the book and was enthralled by it. This was the first piece of religious literature that he read. The example of the saints fascinated him; and in the inner recesses of his heart he found something responding favourably. Without any apparent earlier preparation, a longing arose in him to emulate the spirit of renunciation and devotion that constitutes the essence of saintly life.

The spiritual experience that Venkataraman was now wishing devoutly to have, came to him soon, and quite unexpectedly. It was about the middle of the year 1896; Venkataraman was seventeen then. One day he was sitting up alone on the first floor of his uncle's house. He was in his usual health. There was nothing wrong with it. But a sudden and unmistakable fear of death took hold of him. He felt he was going to die. Why this feeling should have come to him he did not know. However, without allowing this feeling to unnerve him, he calmly thought about what he should do. He said to himself "Now, death has come. What does it mean? What

is it that is dying? This body dies." Immediately thereafter he lay down stretching his limbs out and holding them stiff as though *rigor mortis* had set in. He held his breath and kept his lips tightly closed, so that to all outward appearance his body resembled a corpse. Now, what would happen? This was what he thought: "Well, this body is now dead. It will be carried to the burning ground and there burnt and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body am I dead? Is the body I? This body is silent and inert. But I feel the full force of my personality and even the voice of the 'I' within me, apart from it. So I am Spirit transcending the body. The body dies but the Spirit that transcends it cannot be touched by death. That means I am the deathless Spirit". As Bhagavān Śrī Rāmāṇa narrated this experience later on for the benefit of his devotees it looked as though this was a process of reasoning. But he took care to explain that this was not so. The realization came to him in a flash. He perceived the truth directly. 'I' was something very real, the only real thing. Fear of death had vanished once and for all. From then on, 'I' continued like the fundamental *śruti* note that underlies and blends with all the other notes. Thus young Venkataraman found himself on the peak of spirituality without any arduous or prolonged *Sādhana*. The ego was lost in the flood of Self-awareness. All on a sudden the boy that used to be called Venkataraman had flowered into a sage and saint.

There was noticed a complete change in the young sage's life. The things that he had valued earlier now lost their value. The spiritual values which he had ignored till then became the only objects of attention. School-studies, friends, relations—none of these had now any significance for him. He grew utterly indifferent to his surroundings. Humility,

meekness, non-resistance and other virtues became his adornment. Avoiding company, he preferred to sit alone, all-absorbed in concentration on the Self. He went to the Minākṣi temple everyday and experienced an exaltation everytime he stood before the images of the gods and the saints. Tears flowed from his eyes profusely. The new vision was constantly with him. His was the transfigured life. .

Venkataraman's elder brother observed the great change that had come upon him. On several occasions he rebuked the boy for his indifferent and *yogi-like* behaviour. About six weeks after the great experience the crisis came. It was the 29th of August, 1896. Venkataraman's English teacher had asked him, as a punishment for indifference in studies, to copy out a lesson from Bain's grammar three times. The boy copied it out twice, but stopped there, realizing the utter futility of that task. Throwing aside the book and the papers, he sat up, closed his eyes, and turned inward in meditation. The elder brother who was watching Venkataraman's behaviour all the while went up to him and said: "What use is all this to one who is like this?" This was obviously meant as a rebuke for Venkataraman's unworldly ways including neglect of studies. Venkataraman did not give any reply. He admitted to himself that there was no use pretending to study and be his old self. He decided to leave his home; and he remembered that there was a place to go to, viz. Tiruvannāmalai. But if he expressed his intention to his elders, they would not let him go. So he had to use guile. He told his brother that he was going to school to attend a special class that noon. The brother thereupon asked him to take five rupees from the box below and pay it as his fee at the college where he was studying. Venkataraman went downstairs; his aunt served

him a meal and gave him the five rupees. He took out an atlas which was in the house and noted that the nearest railway station to Tiruvannāmalai mentioned there was Tindivanam. Actually, however, a branch line had been laid to Tiruvannāmalai itself. The atlas was an old one, and so this was not marked there. Calculating that three rupees would be enough for the journey, Venkataraman took that much and left the balance with a letter at a place in the house where his brother could easily find them, and made his departure for Tiruvannāmalai. This was what he wrote in that letter: "I have set out in quest of my Father in accordance with his command. This (meaning his person) has only embarked on a virtuous enterprise. Therefore no one need grieve over this act. And no money need be spent in search of this. Your college fee has not been paid. Herewith rupees two."

There was a curse on Venkataraman's family—in truth, it was a blessing—that one out of every generation should turn out to be a mendicant. This curse was administered by a wandering ascetic who, it is said, begged alms at the house of one of Venkataraman's forbears, and was refused. A paternal uncle of Sundaram Aiyar became a *sannyāsin*; so did Sundaram Aiyar's elder brother. Now, it was the turn of Venkataraman, although no one could have foreseen that the curse would work out in this manner. Dispassion found lodgement in Venkataraman's heart, and he became a *parivrājaka*.

It was an epic journey that Venkataraman made from Madurai to Tiruvannāmalai. About noon he left his uncle's house. He walked to the railway station which was half a mile away. The train was running fortunately late that day; otherwise he would have missed it. He looked up the table

of fares and came to know that the third-class fare to Tindivanam was two rupees and thirteen annas. He bought a ticket, and kept with him the balance of three annas. Had he known that there was a rail-track to Tiruvannāmalai itself, and had he consulted the table of fare, he would have found that the fare was exactly three rupees. When the train arrived, he boarded it quietly and took his seat. A Maulvi who was also travelling entered into a conversation with Venkataraman. From him Venkataraman learnt that there was train-service to Tiruvannāmalai and that one need not go to Tindivanam but could change trains at Viḷuppuram. This was a piece of useful information. It was dusk when the train reached Tiruccirāppalli. Venkataraman was hungry; he bought two country pears for half an anna; and strangely enough even with the first bite his hunger was appeased. About three o'clock in the morning the train arrived at Viḷuppuram. Venkataraman got off the train there with the intention of completing the rest of the journey to Tiruvannāmalai by walk.

At daybreak he went into the town, and was looking out for the sign-post to Tiruvannāmalai. He saw a sign-board reading 'Māmbalappattu' but did not know then that Māmbalappattu was a place *en route* to Tiruvannāmalai. Before making further efforts to find out which road he was to take, he wanted to refresh himself as he was tired and hungry. He went up to a hotel and asked for food. He had to wait till noon for the food to be ready. After eating his meal, he proffered two annas in payment. The hotel proprietor asked him how much money he had. When told by Venkataraman that he had only two and a half annas, he declined to accept payment. It was

from him that Venkataraman came to know that Māmbalappattu was a place on the way to Tiruvannāmalai. Venkataraman went back to Viḷuppuram station and bought a ticket to Māmbalappattu for which the money he had was just enough.

It was sometime in the afternoon when Venkataraman arrived at Māmbalappattu by train. From there he set out on foot for Tiruvannāmalai. About ten miles he walked, and it was late in the evening. There was the temple of Arayaṇi-nallūr nearby built on a large rock. He went there, waited for the doors to be opened, entered and sat down in the pillared hall. He had a vision there—a vision of brilliant light enveloping the entire place. It was no physical light. It shone for some time and then disappeared. Venkataraman continued sitting in a mood of deep meditation, till he was roused by the temple priests who were wanting to lock the doors and go to another temple three quarters of a mile away at Kīlūr for service. Venkataraman followed them, and while inside the temple he got lost in *samādhi* again. After finishing their duties the priests woke him up, but would not give him any food. The temple drummer who had been watching the rude behaviour of the priests implored them to hand over his share of the temple food to the strange youth. When Venkataraman asked for some drinking water, he was directed to a Sastri's house which was at some distance. While in that house he fainted and fell down. A few minutes later he rallied round and saw a small crowd looking at him curiously. He drank the water, ate some food, and lay down and slept.

Next morning he woke up. It was the 31st of August, 1896, the *Gōkulāṣṭami* day, the day of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's birth. Venkataraman resumed his journey and walked for quite a while. He

felt tired and hungry. So he wished for some food first, and then he would go to Tiruvannāmalai, by train if that was possible. The thought occurred to him that he could dispose of the pair of gold ear-rings he was wearing and raise the money that was required. But how was this to be accomplished? He went and stood outside a house which happened to belong to one Muthukrishna Bhagavatar. He asked the Bhagavatar for food and was directed to the housewife. The good lady was pleased to receive the young *sādhū* and feed him on the auspicious day of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's birth. After the meal, Venkataraman went to the Bhagavatar again and told him that he wanted to pledge his ear-rings for four rupees in order that he may complete his pilgrimage. The rings were worth about twenty rupees, but Venkataraman had no need for that much money. The Bhagavatar examined the ear-rings, gave Venkataraman the money he had asked for, took down the youth's address, wrote out his own on a piece of paper for him, and told him that he could redeem the rings at any time. Venkataraman had his lunch at the Bhagavatar's house. The pious lady gave him a packet of sweets that she had prepared for *Gokulāṣṭamī*.

Venkataraman took leave of the couple, tore up the address the Bhagavatar had given him—for he had no intention of redeeming the ear-rings—and went to the railway-station. As there was no train till next morning, he spent the night there. On the morning of the 1st September, 1896, he boarded the train to Tiruvannāmalai. The travel took only a short time. Alighting from the train, he hastened to the great temple of Aruṇācaleśvara. All the gates stood open—even the doors of the inner shrine. The temple was then empty of all people—even the priests. Venkataraman entered the *sanctum sanctorum*, and as he stood before his Father Aruṇācaleśvara

he experienced great ecstasy and unspeakable joy. The epic journey had ended. The ship had come safely to port.

The rest of what we regard as Ramanā's life—this is how we shall call him hereafter—was spent in Tiruvannāmalai. Ramanā was not formally initiated into *sannyāsa*. As he came out of the temple and was walking along the streets of the town someone called out and asked whether he wanted to have his tuft removed. He consented readily, and was conducted to the Ayyankuḷam tank where a barber shaved his head. Then he stood on the steps of the tank and threw away into the water his remaining money. He also discarded the packet of sweets given by the Bhagavatar's wife. The next to go was the sacred thread he was wearing. As he was returning to the temple he was just wondering why he should give his body the luxury of a bath, when there was a downpour which drenched him.

The first place of Ramanā's residence in Tiruvannāmalai was the great temple. For a few weeks he remained in the thousand-pillared hall. But he was troubled by urchins who pelted stones at him as he sat in meditation. He shifted himself to obscure corners, and even to an underground vault known as *Pātāla-līṅgam*. Undisturbed he used to spend several days in deep absorption. Without moving he sat in *samādhi*, not being aware of even the bites of vermin and pests. But the mischievous boys soon discovered the retreat and indulged in their pastime of throwing potsherds at the young *Svāmī*. There was at the time in Tiruvannāmalai a senior *Svāmī* by name Śeṣhādri. Those who did not know him took him for a mad man. He sometimes stood guard over the young *Svāmī*, and drove away the urchins. At long last Ramanā was removed from the pit by devotees without his being aware of it and deposited in the vicinity of a shrine of Subrahmaṇya. From then on there was some one or other

to take care of Ramaṇa. The seat of residence had to be changed frequently. Gardens, groves, shrines—these were chosen to keep the Svāmī in. The Svāmī himself never spoke. Not that he took any vow of silence; he had no inclination to talk. At times the texts like *Vāsiṣṭham* and *Kaivalya-navanī-tam* used to be read out to him.

A little less than six months after his arrival at Tiruvaṇṇāmalai Ramaṇa shifted his residence to a shrine called Gurumūrtam at the earnest request of its keeper, a Tambirān-svāmī. As days passed and as Ramaṇa's fame spread, increasing numbers of pilgrims and sight-seers came to visit him. After about a year's stay at Gurumūrtam, the Svāmī—locally he was known as Brāhmaṇa-svāmī—moved to a neighbouring mango orchard. It was here that one of his uncles, Nelliappa Aiyar traced him out. Nelliappa Aiyar was a second-grade pleader at Mānāmadurai. Having learnt from a friend that Venkataraman was then a revered *Sādhu* at Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, he went there to see him. He tried his best to take Ramaṇa along with him to Mānāmadurai. But the young sage would not respond. He did not show any sign of interest in the visitor. So, Nelliappa Aiyar went back disappointed to Mānāmadurai. However, he conveyed the news to Aḷagammāl, Ramaṇa's mother.

The mother went to Tiruvaṇṇāmalai accompanied by her eldest son. Ramaṇa was then living at Pavaḷakkunru, one of the eastern spurs of Aruṇācala. With tears in her eyes Aḷagammāl entreated Ramaṇa to go back with her. But, for the sage there was no going back. Nothing moved him—not even the wailings and weepings of his mother. He kept silent giving no reply. A devotee who had been observing the struggle of the mother for several days requested Ramaṇa to

write out at least what he had to say. The sage wrote on a piece of paper quite in an impersonal way thus:

"In accordance with the *Prārabdha* of each, the One whose function it is to ordain makes each to act. What will not happen will never happen, whatever effort one may put forth. And what will happen will not fail to happen, however much one may seek to prevent it. This is certain. The part of wisdom therefore is to stay quiet."

Disappointed and with a heavy heart, the mother went back to Mānāmadurai. Sometime after this event Ramaṇa went up the hill Aruṇācala, and started living in a cave called Virūpākṣa after a saint who had dwelt and was buried there. Here also the crowds came, and among them were a few earnest seekers. These latter used to put him questions regarding spiritual experience or bring sacred books for having some points explained. Ramaṇa sometimes wrote out his answers and explanations. One of the books that was brought to him during this period was Saṅkara's *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* which later on he rendered into Tamil prose. There were also some simple unlettered folk that came to him for solace and spiritual guidance. One of them was Echammal who having lost her husband, son, and daughter, was disconsolate till the Fates guided her to Ramaṇa's presence. She made it a point to visit the Svāmī every day and took upon herself the task of bringing food for him as well as for those who lived with him.

In 1903 there came to Tiruvannāmalai a great Sanskrit scholar and *savant*, Ganapati Sastri known also as Ganapati Muni because of the austerities he had been observing. He had the title *Kāvya-kaṇṭha* (one who had poetry at his throat), and his disciples addressed him as *nāyanā* (father.)

He was a specialist in the worship of the Divine as Mother. He visited Ramaṇa in the Virūpākṣa cave quite a few times. Once in 1907 he was assailed by doubts regarding his own spiritual practices. He went up the hill, saw Ramaṇa sitting alone in the cave, and expressed himself thus: "All that has to be read I have read; even *Vedānta-śāstra* I have fully understood; I have done *japa* to my heart's content; yet I have not up to this time understood what *tapas* is. Therefore I have sought refuge at your feet. Pray enlighten me as to the nature of *tapas*". Ramaṇa replied, now speaking, "If one watches whence the notion 'I' arises, the mind gets absorbed there, that is *tapas*. When a *mantra* is repeated, if one watches whence that *mantra*-sound arises, the mind gets absorbed there; that is *tapas*". To the scholar this came as a revelation; he felt the grace of the sage enveloping him. He it was that proclaimed Ramaṇa to be *Maharshi* and *Bhagavān*. He composed hymns in Sanskrit in praise of the sage, and also wrote the *Ramaṇa-gītā* explaining his teachings.

Ramaṇa's mother, Aḷagammāl, after her return to Mānāmadurai, lost her eldest son. Two years later, her youngest son, Nāgasundaram paid a brief visit to Tiruvannāmalai. She herself went there once on her return from a pilgrimage to Vārāṇasī, and again during a visit to Tirupati. On this occasion she fell ill and suffered for several weeks with symptoms of typhoid. Ramaṇa showed great solicitude in nursing her and restoring her to health. He even composed a hymn in Tamil beseeching Lord Aruṇācala to cure her of her disease. The first verse of the hymn runs as follows: "Oh Medicine in the form of a Hill that arose to cure the disease of all the births that come in succession like waves! Oh Lord! It is Thy duty to save my mother who regards Thy feet alone as her refuge, by curing her fever." He also prayed that his mother

should be granted the vision divine and be weaned from worldliness. It is needless to say that both the prayers were answered. Aḷagammāl recovered, and went back to Mānāmadurai. But not long after she returned to Tiruvannāmalai, a little later followed her youngest son, Nāgasundaram who had in the meanwhile lost his wife leaving a son. It was in the beginning of 1916 that the mother came, resolved to spend the rest of her life with Ramaṇa. Soon after his mother's arrival, Ramaṇa moved from Virūpākṣa to Skandāśramam, a little higher up the hill. The mother received training in intense spiritual life. She donned the ochre robe, and took charge of the Āśrama kitchen. Nāgasundaram too became a sannyāsin, assuming the name Nirañjanānanda. Among Ramaṇa's devotees he came to be popularly known as Chinna-svāmī (the younger Svāmī). In 1920 the mother grew weak in health and ailments incidental to old age came to her. Ramaṇa tended her with care and affection, and spent even sleepless nights sitting up with her. The end came on May 19, 1922, which was the *Bahula-navamī* day in the month of *Vaiśākha*. The mother's body was taken down the hill to be interred. The spot chosen was at the southernmost point, between Pālitīrtham Tank and the Dakṣiṇāmūrti Maṇṭapam. While the ceremonies were being performed, Ramaṇa himself stood silently looking on. Nirañjanānanda Svāmī took his residence near the tomb. Ramaṇa who continued to remain at Skandāśramam visited the tomb everyday. After about six months he came to stay there, as he said later on, not out of his own volition but in obedience to the Divine will. Thus was founded the Ramaṇāśramam. A temple was raised over the tomb and was consecrated in 1949. As the years rolled by the Āśramam grew steadily, and people not only from India but from every continent of the world came to see the sage and receive help from him in their spiritual pursuits.

Ramaṇa's first Western devotee was F. H. Humphrys. He came to India in 1911 to take up a post in the Police service at Vellore. Given to the practice of occultism, he was in search of a Mahātmā. He was introduced to Ganapat Sastri by his Telugu tutor; and Sastri took him to Ramaṇa. The Englishman was greatly impressed. Writing about his first visit to the sage in the *International Psychic Gazette*, he said: "On reaching the cave we sat before him, at his feet, and said nothing. We sat thus for a long time and I felt lifted out of myself. For half an hour I looked into the Maharshi's eyes, which never changed their expression of deep contemplation..... The Maharshi is a man beyond description in his expression of dignity, gentleness, self-control and calm strength of conviction." Humphrys' ideas of spirituality changed for the better as a result of the contact with Ramaṇa. He repeated his visits to the sage. He recorded his impressions in his letters to a friend in England which were published in the *Gazette* mentioned above. In one of them he wrote, "You can imagine nothing more beautiful than his smile." And again, "It is strange what a change it makes in one to have been in his presence!"

It was not all good people that went to the Āśrama. Sometimes bad ones turned up also—even bad *sādhus*. Twice in the year 1924 thieves broke into the Āśrama in quest of loot. On the second of these occasions they even beat the Maharshi, finding that there was very little for them to take. When one of the devotees sought the sage's permission to punish the thieves, the sage forbade him, saying: "They have their *dharma*, we have ours. It is for us to bear and forbear. Let us not interfere with them." When one of the thieves gave him a blow on the left thigh, he told him: "If you are not satisfied you can strike the other leg also". After the thieves had left, a devotee enquired about the beating. The

sage remarked, "I also have received some *pūjā*", punning on the word which means 'worship' but it also used to mean 'blows'.

The spirit of harmlessness that permeated the sage and his environs made even animals and birds make friends with him. He showed them the same consideration that he did to the humans that went to him. When he referred to any of them, he used the form 'he' or 'she' and not 'it'. Birds and squirrels built their nests around him. Cows, dogs and monkeys found asylum in the Āśrama. All of them behaved intelligently—especially the cow Lakshmi. He knew their ways quite intimately. He would see to it that they were fed properly and well. And, when any of them died, the body would be buried with due ceremony.

The life in the Āśrama flowed on smoothly. With the passage of time more and more of visitors came—some of them for a short stay and others for longer periods. The dimensions of the Āśrama increased, and new features and departments were added—a home for the cattle, a school for the study of the Vedas, a department for publication, and the Mother's temple with regular worship, etc. Ramaṇa sat most of the time in the hall that had been constructed for the purpose as the witness to all that happened around him. It was not that he was not active. He used to stitch leaf-plates, dress vegetables, read proofs received from the press, look into newspapers and books, suggest lines of reply to letters received, etc. Yet it was quite evident that he was apart from everything. There were numerous invitations for him to undertake tours. But he never moved out of Tiruvannāmalai, and in the later years out of the Āśrama. Most of the time, everyday, people sat before him. They sat mostly in silence. Sometimes some of them asked questions; and sometimes he answered them. It was a great experience to sit before him

and to look at his beaming eyes. Many did experience time coming to a stop and a stillness and peace beyond description.

The golden jubilee of Ramaṇa's coming to stay at Tiruvannāmalai was celebrated in 1946. In 1947 his health began to fail. He was not yet seventy, but looked much older. Towards the end of 1948 a small nodule appeared below the elbow of his left arm. As it grew in size, the doctor in charge of the Āśrama dispensary cut it out. But in a month's time it reappeared. Surgeons from Madras were called, and they operated. The wound did not heal, and the tumour came again. On further examination it was diagnosed that the affection was a case of sarcoma. The doctors suggested amputating the arm above the affected part. Ramaṇa replied with a smile: "There is no need for alarm. The body is itself a disease. Let it have its natural end. Why mutilate it? Simple dressing of the affected part will do". Two more operations had to be performed, but the tumour appeared again. Indigenous systems of medicine were tried; and homoeopathy too. The disease did not yield itself to treatment. The sage was quite unconcerned, and was supremely indifferent to suffering. He sat as a spectator watching the disease waste the body. But his eyes shone as bright as ever; and his grace flowed towards all beings. Crowds came in large numbers. Ramaṇa insisted that they should be allowed to have his *darśana*. Devotees profoundly wished that the sage should cure his body through an exercise of supernormal powers. Some of them imagined that they themselves had the benefit of these powers which they attributed to Ramaṇa. Ramaṇa had compassion for those who grieved over the suffering, and he sought to comfort them by reminding them of the truth that Bhagavān was not the body; "They take this body for Bhagavān and attribute suffering to him. What a

pity! They are despondent the Bhagavān is going to leave them and go away—where can he go, and how?"

The end came on the 14th of April, 1950. That evening the sage gave *darśana* to the devotees that came. All that were present in the Āśrama knew that the end was nearing. They sat singing Ramaṇa's hymn to Aruṇācala with the refrain *Aruṇācala-Siva*. The sage asked his attendants to make him sit up. He opened his luminous and gracious eyes for a brief while; there was a smile; a tear of bliss trickled down from the outer corner of his eyes; and at 8-47 the breathing stopped. There was no struggle, no spasm, none of the signs of death. At that very moment, a comet moved slowly across the sky, reached the summit of the holy hill, Aruṇācala, and disappeared behind it.

Ramaṇa Maharshi seldom wrote; and what little he did write in prose or verse was written to meet the specific demands of his devotees. He himself declared once: "Somehow, it never occurs to me to write a book or compose poems. All the poems I have made were on the request of someone or other in connection with some particular event." The most important of his works is '*The Forty Verses on Existence*'. In the *Upadeśasāraṃ* which is a poem the quintessence of Vedānta is set forth. The sage composed five hymns to Aruṇācala. Some of the works of Śaṅkara like *Vivekacūdāmaṇi* and *Ātma-bodha* were rendered into Tamil by him. Most of what he wrote is in Tamil. But he wrote also in Sanskrit, Telugu and Malayālam.

The philosophy of Sṛī Ramaṇa—which is the same as that of Advaita-Vedānta—has for its aim Self-realization. The central path taught in this philosophy is the inquiry into the nature of Self, the content of the notion 'I'. Ordinarily the sphere of the 'I' varies and covers a multiplicity of factors. But these factors are not really the 'I'. For instance, we speak

of the physical body as 'I'; we say, 'I am fat,' 'I am lean', etc. It will not take long to discover that this is a wrong usage. The body itself cannot say 'I' for it is inert. Even the most ignorant man understands the implication of the expression 'my body'. It is not easy, however, to resolve the mistaken identity of the 'I' with egoity (*ahankāra*). That is because the inquiring mind is the ego, and in order to remove the wrong identification it has to pass a sentence of death, as it were, on itself. This is by no means a simple thing. The offering of the ego in the fire of wisdom is the greatest form of sacrifice.

The discrimination of the Self from the ego, we said, is not easy. But it is not impossible. All of us can have this discrimination if we ponder over the implication of our sleep-experience. In sleep we are, though the ego has made its exit. The ego does not function there. Still there is the 'I' that witnesses the absence of the ego as well as of the objects. If the 'I' were not there, one would not recall on waking from one's sleep-experience, and say: 'I slept happily; I did not know anything.'

We have, then, two 'I's—the pseudo—'I' which is the ego and the true 'I' which is the Self. The identification of the 'I' with the ego is so strong that we seldom see the ego without its mask. Moreover, all our relative experience turns on the pivot of the ego. With the rise of the ego on waking from sleep, the entire world rises with it. The ego, therefore, looks so important and unassailable.

But this is really a fortress made of cards. Once the process of inquiry starts, it will be found to crumble and dissolve. For undertaking this inquiry, one must possess a sharp mind—much sharper than the one required for unravelling the mysteries of Matter. It is with the one-pointed intellect that the truth is to be seen (*drśyate tu agryayā buddhyā*). It

is true that even the intellect will have to get resolved before the final wisdom dawns. But upto that point it has to inquire—and inquire relentlessly. Wisdom, surely, is not for the indolent!

The inquiry 'Who am I?' is not to be regarded as a mental effort to understand the mind's nature. Its main purpose is 'to focus the entire mind at its source'. The source of the pseudo-'I' is the Self. What one does in Self-inquiry is to run against the mental current instead of running along with it, and finally transcend the sphere of mental modifications. When the pseudo-'I' is tracked down to its source, it vanishes. Then the Self shines in all its splendour—which shining is called realization and release.

The cessation or non-cessation of the body has nothing to do with release. The body may continue to exist and the world may continue to appear, as in the case of the Maharshi. That makes no difference at all to the Self that has been realized. In truth, there is neither the body nor the world for him; there is only the Self, the eternal Existence (*sat*), the Intelligence (*cit*) the unexcellable Bliss (*ānanda*). Such an experience is not entirely foreign to us. We have it in sleep where we are conscious neither of the external world of things nor of the inner world of dreams. But that experience lies under the cover of ignorance. So it is that we come back to the phantasies of dream and of the world of waking. Non-return to duality is possible only when nescience has been removed. To make this possible is the aim of Vedānta. To inspire even the lowliest of us with hope and help us out of the slough of despond, is the supreme significance of such illustrious exemplars as the Maharshi.

GLOSSARY

- Adhyāsa*: superimposition of the non-real on the real; and *vice versa*.
- Ahimsā*: non-injury; non-violence.
- Ākāśa*: ether.
- Ānava*: egoity; in Śaivism, one of the three impurities that afflict the soul.
- Anirvacanīya*: inexplicable, the character of the world and its material cause, *māyā* as definable neither as real nor as unreal, nor as both.
- Aprthak-siddhi*: the principle of inseparability by which the Viśiṣṭādvaitins conceive the relation of God to soul.
- Artha-pañcaka*: in Vaiṣṇavism, the five topics, *viz.* (1) the Lord (2) the individual soul (3) the means (4) the goal and (5) the impediments in the way.
- Āvaraṇa*: the capacity of *māyā* to conceal the truth; its other capacity being projective, i.e. *vikṣepa*.
- Avatāra*: in Hinduism, incarnation of God to redeem righteousness and to destroy evil.
- Avidyā*: nescience; same as *māyā* but used with reference to the individual soul; the cause of all distinction and plurality.
- Bhakti*: devotion to God.
- Bhakti-Yoga*: path of devotion; in Hinduism, one of the means recognized to attain union with God through selfless devotion.

Bhāṣya: commentary.

Caryā: conduct; external worship by doing service unto the Lord, like cleaning the temple-premises, gathering flowers for worship, etc; One of the four spiritual disciplines stated in the Śaiva Siddhānta practised by Appar; the path of the servant, *dāsa mārga* leading to residence in the Kingdom of God (*Sāloka*).

Darsana: lit. vision or sight; standpoint; philosophical school.

Dharma-bhūta-jñāna: attributive consciousness.

Dikṣitars: the priests initiated for the worship in the temple at Cidambaram; those of the Brahmins who have performed Vedic sacrifices.

Guṇas: the three constituents of *Prakṛti* or *Pradhāna* in the Sāṅkhya system, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.

Guru: preceptor.

Jīva: the individual soul.

Jīvanmukta: one who is liberated even while alive in the body.

Jñāna: knowledge; in Śaivism, it includes the knowledge of God, the soul and the bonds; the path of the supreme good, *sanmārga*, ending in the realization of the oneness with God (*sāyujya*) followed by *Māṇikkavācakar*.

Jñāna-yoga: the means of realization of God by knowledge of the supreme oneness of God.

Jñānī: the wise one; one who has realized the truth.

- Karma*: Deeds done either in the past or the present or to be done in the future, known as *sañcita*, *prārab-dha* and *āgāmī* (the accumulated, that which has commenced fructifying and that which is to be done in the future); in Śaivism, one of the three impurities that afflict the soul.
- Karma-Yoga*: path of activity or duty; the means of attaining union with God by disinterested service offering the fruits of action unto him.
- Kriyā*: action; intimate service to God as that of a son to his father; called the path of the dutiful son, (*satputra mārga*) leading to nearness of God (*sāmīpya*); said to have been followed by Jñāna-saṁbandha.
- Malas*: in Śaivism, three impurities *ānava*, *māyā* and *karma*.
- Mantras*: hymns.
- Māyā*: in Advaita the material cause of the world, said to be positive and indeterminable and illusory that which does not exist; has two powers of concealing the truth and projecting the false; in Śaivism one of the three impurities that afflict the soul.
- Mokṣa*: liberation from the cycle of birth and death.
- Nirguṇa-Brahman*: Reality as the unconditioned absolute and attributeless.
- Nirvikalpa-Samādhi*: a state of concentration when the soul becomes absorbed in the Absolute.
- Pañcākṣara*: the five sacred letters, viz. *namaḥ Śivāya*, meaning "prostration unto Lord Śiva".

Pañḍita: wise or learned one.

Pāramārthika: the absolutely real; Reality in Advaita.

Pariṇāmavāda: theory of transformation. See *Vivartavāda*.

Pāśa: attachment; in Śaivism the bonds that bind the soul to life in the world; they are *āṇava*, *māyā* and *karma*.

Paśu: *lit.* animal; living beings, the individual soul in Śaivism.

Paṭi: the Lord.

Prakṛti: Primal Nature of which all the things in the world are modifications. One of the two ultimate principles in Sāṅkhya, the other being *Puruṣa*.

Prapatti: In Vaiṣṇavism, complete self-surrender unto the Lord.

Prārabdha: One of the three kinds of actions, *karma*, which has begun to fructify, the other two being *sañcita* and *āgāmī*.

Prāyaścitta: atonement.

Rāja-yogī: One who follows the path of the classical *yoga* leading to oneness with Reality through concentration, control of mind and meditation.

Rajas: Activity; one of the three *guṇas* of *prakṛti*.

Rṣis: seers, sages.

Rta: truth; originally meant the physical world order, later came to mean moral order and truth.

Samaya-ācāryas: religious teachers like Appar, Sundarar, Sambandhar and Mānikkavācakar in Śaivism as

distinguished from *Santāna ācāryas* who are philosophical expounders.

Samsāra: transmigration; cycle of birth and death.

Santāna ācāryas: philosophical expounders like Meykaṇḍa-deva in Śaivism. See *samaya ācāryas*.

Siddhis: supernormal powers, eight in number, attained by yogic practices.

Sthitaprajña: one who is steady in wisdom; a *Jīvan mukta*.

Sūtrakāras: authors of the aphorisms setting forth the tenets of the various schools of philosophy.

Saguṇa-Brahman: God endowed with all auspicious qualities; in Advaita, *Brahman* associated with *māyā* with its *sāttvic* aspect predominant.

Śarīra: body; in Viśiṣṭādvaita, the world which is the body of the Lord who is the indwelling soul, *Śarīrīn*.

Śarīrī: *lit.* one who has body; in Viśiṣṭādvaita, the Lord who is the soul and whose body is the world.

Satkārya-vāda: the theory that the effect is latent in the cause.

Sattva: purity; one of the three *guṇas* of *prakṛti*.

Śrutis: scriptures; so called because they are revealed to sages or *heard* and not made, by them; contrasted with *smṛtis* which are traditional moral and social codes, remembered and codified by them, and so are man-made.

Taḍuttāṭhakoḷal: God, in Śaivism, is said to put impediments as tests in the life of the devotees and redeem

them by his grace; this is called causing impediments and saving the soul.

Tamas: darkness or inertia; one of the three *guṇas* of *prakṛti*.

Tattva-traya: the three ultimate principles in Vaiṣṇavism, viz., God, soul and matter.

Upanayana: Investiture of the sacred thread which is the mark of the initiation into the study of the Śāstras; one of the several *samśkāras* in Hinduism.

Vātsalya bhāva: the attitude of a mother to her child, which is adopted by some devotees towards the Lord.

Videhamukta: one who is liberated after the death of the body; contrasted from the *Jīvanmukta*.

Vikṣepa: The capacity of Māyā to project the illusory in the place of the real.

Vivartavāda: The theory in Advaita of phenomenal appearance by which the advaitins seek to explain the world on the analogy of the appearance of the serpent in the rope.

Vyāvahārika: The relative or the empirical; in Advaita, this stands for the world.

Yoga: union; contemplation and internal worship *sakhā-mārga* or the path of the friend leading to the acquisition of the form of the Lord; (*sārūpya*); Saint Sundarar practised this method of worship.

Yogī: one who has perfect control over mind; one whose mind is in constant union with God.

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