

Chapter V The Divine Hall

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The lordly Vadavurar paid homage to his Master
who was seated there bestowing His gracious favour
and then enquired of Him:
‘Lord of the matted locks!
What can You mean when You say I should attain liberation
not in the city of Perunturai,
but in the Golden Hall of Chidambaram?’
To which Lord Siva replied:
‘You whose penances are without reproach!
Listen to My words:

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‘Upon this earth a grub is transformed
into the form of a hornet
not at the point where the hornet picks it up,
but at the place where it is deposited.
Even so did We impart to you here
out of Our love for you,
Our teaching of true knowledge,
whilst it is in Chidambaram
that you shall obtain final deliverance
which is the glorious realisation
of Lord Siva’s nature.

'Springing up as a bright radiance
at the base of the spine'¹
and rising up the central sushumna² channel
of the broad bodily frame,
so that the Five Holy Letters
combine with it and merge into one,
that vibrant sound³ travels upward in the long channel
till it reaches the point
where it is subdued and contained.
That place is the Golden Hall
where I eternally perform my cosmic dance.⁴

'Through the enduring conjunction of the five elements
which men greatly esteem, the three channels of the body,
and the three cosmic spheres,⁵
the body and the outer universe are intimately connected.
In both entities we may perceive
how the five deities, beginning with Brahma,
are installed in their established order.⁶

¹ The energy centre at the base of the spine, the muladhara chakra.

² Sushumna: (Sanskrit): the major nerve current which passes through the spinal column from the muladhara chakra at the base to the sahasrara at the crown of the head. It is the channel of kundalini. Through yoga, the kundalini energy lying dormant in the muladhara is awakened and made to rise up this channel through each chakra to the sahasrara chakra.

³ The sound referred to is nada: (Sanskrit) 'Sound; tone, vibration.' Metaphysically, the mystic sounds of the Eternal, of which the highest is the transcendent or Soundless Sound, Paranada, the first vibration from which creation emanates. Paranada is so pure and subtle that it cannot be identified to the denser regions of the mind. From Paranada comes Pranava, Aum, and further evolutes of nada. These are experienced by the meditator as the nadanadi shakti, 'the energy current of sound,' heard pulsing through the nerve system as a constant high-pitched hum, much like a tambura, an electrical transformer, a swarm of bees or a shruti box.

⁴ The myths and legends of Chidambaram state that though Siva started His cosmic dance in the Tarakam forest, He was compelled to continue it at Chidambaram because He could see that the original site could not sustain the powerful energies of the dance. Invoking a yogic parallel, He identified the snaking ida and pingala currents in the subtle body with geographical locations north and south of Chidambaram, and then said that the central channel (natuvinadi) passed directly through Tillai, Chidambaram, making it the centre of the world and the site of the original cosmic lingam.

It is through this analogy that Chidambaram, according to local tradition, became the centre of the cosmos, the axis mundi around which all the rest of the universe rotates. The dance is so powerful, only the true centre, the heart of the spiritual and material universe, can support and sustain it. According to this tradition, Chidambaram becomes the world centre on the physical plane; on the spiritual plane, the central shrine becomes the Heart-lotus, the still centre out of which emerges the primal dance of creation in the form of Siva's dance of bliss.

⁵ These are fire, the sun and the moon, which correspond respectively the lower abdomen, the stomach and heart, and the head and shoulders.

⁶ The Gods are installed in the energy centres (chakras) in the following order: Brahma in the svadhishthana (navel area), Vishnu in the manipura, (solar plexus), Rudra in the anahata, (heart), Mahesvara in the visuddha (throat) and Sadasiva in the ajna (between the eyes).

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'Thus when we seek out the flawless source
of this manifested universe,
the reality which is hard to know,
we find that it is the glorious form of the Siva lingam.
Above, in the transcendent sphere of the divine sound,
is the Golden Hall, whose nature is pure light.
Here I perform My cosmic dance
according to My divine will
as Sivagami lovingly looks on.

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'If you ask what is that cosmic dance,
it is the performance of the five divine operations;
it is identical with this embodied form
in which I sever men's worldly bonds,
and it takes place in holy Chidambaram
where all those who dwell in the world,
if they come to witness it,
may receive the gracious gift
of unfailing final liberation.

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'That ancient city of Tillai is worshipped and praised
by both Brahma and Vishnu,
who wields the indestructible conch and discus;
by the snake-saint Patanjali and the tiger-saint Vyaghrapada;
by the three demons who dwelt in the celestial cities;
by the three-thousand-strong tribe of saintly brahmins,
and by the hosts of gods and holy ascetics.

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These things should you clearly understand.' said Lord Siva.
Then, when Vadavurar, having prostrated himself in worship,
rose up and stood before Him,
the Lord smeared his forehead with holy ash,
bade him remain in that place, and departed.
But when He saw that His devotee,
instead of remaining where he was,
had followed after Him a short distance,
the Lord of the beautiful matted locks stopped,
bestowed upon him his gracious glance, and carried on.

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As that virtuous devotee stood there with joyful heart,
gazing upon his Master as He departed on his way,
the Lord of Chidambaram disappeared from view
before his very eyes.

Whereupon Vadavurar, overcome with a terrible grief,
raised his hands above his head in worship,
and hurried off to join those disciples
whose exalted company is hard to attain.

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They whose hearts and minds never strayed
from the practice of the most severe austerities,
the sage Vadavurar, and with him
that company of disciples,
set up a holy altar in the shade
of the blessed kuruntham tree,
bearing upon it the image
of those wish-bestowing holy feet,
like red lotus blossoms.

We shall now tell what happened
during the days they remained there,
worshipping at that shrine.

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It was here that Vadavurar,
praising the all-powerful feet of the Lord,
sang the holy ‘Siva Puranam’,
which embodies the true knowledge of reality.
It begins with the words:
‘Hail to the Five Sacred Letters,’⁷
which bear the renown of conferring
upon those who recite them,
even if they have no love in their hearts for the Lord,
the compassionate grace of that heavenly One,
whose tangled locks are surmounted
by the white crescent moon.

⁷ The first hymn of the Tiruvachakam, Siva Puranam.

It was during this time also
 that the pure effulgence of Lord Siva
 came and inspired him to sing:
 ‘Such wonder I cannot conceive!’,⁸
 ‘What a miracle we have seen!’,⁹
 ‘You whose locks diffuse a pure radiance,
 you have sorely bruised my heart!’,¹⁰
 and ‘My head rests upon the holy feet
 of the transcendent Lord!’,¹¹

‘Lord, I have yearned to have sight of You!’,¹²
 ‘I cannot live, I cannot prosper!’,¹³
 ‘I seek refuge at Your holy feet!’,¹⁴
 ‘I cannot die, and alas, I know not how to live!’,¹⁵
 ‘Deceiver of those who deceive,
 when shall I embrace Your golden foot?’¹⁶

And: ‘When I call out in desperate yearning,
 may You graciously allay my fears!’,¹⁷
 Having sung these various hymns,
 each inspired by true knowledge,
 he composed the ‘Sacred Word’,¹⁸
 which is praised in every land,
 and the ‘Sacred Venba’,¹⁹
 quite flawless in conception,
 with its eleven glorious stanzas.

⁸ Hymn 41, The Miracle Decad.

⁹ Hymn 26, The Decad of Wonder.

¹⁰ Hymn 33, The Decad of the Bruised Heart.

¹¹ Hymn 42, The Head Decad.

¹² Hymn 25, The Decad of Desire.

¹³ Hymn 28, No Joy in Life.

¹⁴ Hymn 24, The Refuge Decad.

¹⁵ Hymn 23, Weariness of Life.

¹⁶ Hymn 27, The Decad of Mystic Union.

¹⁷ Hymn 29, Cleansing from Delusion.

¹⁸ Hymn 48, The Ancient Mystic Word.

¹⁹ Hymn 47, The Sacred Venba.

Here too he wrote in the pure Tamil tongue
 the hymn of ‘Sacred Sadness’,²⁰
 and the hymn of ‘The Rousing from the Sacred Couch’,²¹
 to be recited in the morning
 according to prescribed rule;
 the worthy poem ‘My Soul is Consumed’,²²
 and the hymn called ‘The Supplication’;²³
 the ‘Song of Holy Pandi’,²⁴
 which tells of lofty Madurai,
 where justice reigns supreme
 and the hymn which begins:
 ‘Your flower-like feet,
 as bright as a lightening flash’,²⁵
 which is recited to dispel the mind’s affliction.

Several days passed as he dwelt thus
 in the company of those devotees.
 Then, as Lord Siva had predicted,
 he saw a great conflagration appear upon the tank,
 and as he looked on, all the loving disciples,
 filled with a great desire
 to enter the leaping flames
 and unite with their Lord,
 rushed forward and plunged into the fire,
 reciting out loud as they went the Holy Five Letters
 that were imprinted upon their hearts.

²⁰ Hymn 38, Sacred Sadness.

²¹ Hymn 20, The Rousing from the Sacred Couch.

²² Hymn 34, My Soul is Consumed.

²³ Hymn 32, The Supplication.

²⁴ Hymn 36, The Sacred Pandi.

²⁵ Hymn 50, The Garland of Rapture.

As they plunged into the flames,
 the Lord of Tillai appeared in the heavens,
 riding upon a bull, with Parvati at his side,
 and surrounded by a heavenly host,
 who worshipped Him
 and showered down a rain of blossoms.
 Whereupon all those devotees
 who had been swallowed up by the fire
 upon that deep tank
 were released from the suffering
 to which they had been subjected.
 Assuming once more the form
 of commanders of the divine retinue,
 they crowded ecstatically
 into the presence of the Lord,
 and made obeisance before Him.

He who dwelt in the state of absolute liberation
 turned His gaze upon the countenances of those
 who were worshipfully assembled before Him and said:
 ‘I shall now explain to you the reason why I left you behind,
 you who never leave my side, even for a second,
 and why I instructed you to plunge into the fire over that tank,
 whose rippling waves splash upon its margins,
 bearing the fragrant scent exhaled by red water-lilies.

‘I caused the great sage Vadavurar
 to remain upon the earth
 that he might go to Chidambaram
 the ancient City of the Tiger
 there to defeat the Buddhist in theological debate.
 However, knowing the suffering
 his mind would endure upon My departure,
 and the bitter sorrow he would feel,
 I commanded you not to come with Me,
 but to remain here with him
 in the worldly sphere for some days.

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'Though you came to the earth
bearing the human form of enlightened sages
free of the soul's triple defilement,
and though you remained there a few days only,
yet did I fear lest you become contaminated
by the contact of your senses with that defilement.
And therefore I caused to appear upon this tank,
fragrant with the scent of many flowers,
the fire of true knowledge
which is so hard to describe.
Burning up and annihilating completely
those gross bodies,
bound by space and time,
I have now restored you to your celestial forms.'

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The Lord who performs His glorious dance in Tillai's Hall
finished speaking, and disappeared into the heavens,
with His divine attendants crowding thickly about Him.
Thereupon the great sage Vadavurar,
who composed Tamil hymns extolling the Lord's name,
which is the essence of true knowledge,
went off alone and seated himself in the shade of a kondrai tree,
his shining form absorbed in the practice of Siva yoga.

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How those disciples entered into the fire,
how the Lord came, mounted upon a bull,
how he himself in days to come would worship
the fair feet of the Lord
who had appeared to him in the fitting form of the Guru,
and how he would, with love in his heart,
enter at last into the Golden Hall,
all this did he perceive in a single timeless vision
through his absorption in the blissful consciousness
of true reality, which is Siva yoga.

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Then he joined his hands in prayer, shedding copious tears,
and crying out in confusion:

‘My Father, having manifested Your presence here,
where have You now hidden Yourself?’

Making his way to the shore of the tank, he sobbed:

‘Can this be the holy site where He who bears

the holy Ganges in His locks

came mounted upon a bull for all to see?’,

and threw himself to the ground

where the Lord had appeared,

weeping uncontrollably and groaning aloud in pain.

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‘You who are like a mother to me, how is it
that Your disciples have abandoned me, and,
entering into the conflagration upon the tank,
have gained the shelter of Your golden feet?

You who are bright as a lightening flash,

why have You hidden yourself away,

granting me only the suffering born of my evil deeds,

which are incompatible with Your grace?’

Thus did he pour out his sorrow.

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Recovering his composure,
he left the banks of that tank,
and returned to the shade of the lofty kuruntham tree,
where he fell to the ground,
cleaving closely to those flowery feet
which even the ineffable Vedas could not see.
There, to destroy the enduring bonds of birth
which stem from the powerful deeds of those
who dwell upon the earth,
he sang the sweet grace-filled ‘Sacred Cento’,²⁶
which begins: ‘My body quivers like an open bud...’

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Having composed that hymn,
he remained there weeping and grieving,
until he remembered in his heart the course of conduct
prescribed for him that day by the Eternal One.
Performing obeisance to our Lord in that holy place,
he requested His great and gracious permission to depart,
and setting off, travelled until he entered
the city of Uttara-Kosa-Mangai.²⁷

²⁶ Hymn 5, Religious Enthusiasm. 100 verses in 10 decades, each in its own metre.

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Arriving at the temple of the Lord with the matted locks
and failing to see the form of the One who
formerly had enslaved him, he was filled with confusion,
and fell to the ground uttering anguished cries.
Then, as he sang the andadi hymn ‘Do not forsake me’,²⁸
The Lord appeared to him in the ancient form of the Guru.

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Having paid homage in that place to the Lord
who in his sweetness resembles sugar-cane and divine nectar,
Vadavur remained for some days in that city,
before continuing on his way in accordance
with the Lord’s gracious command.
Having worshipped his Master in many peerless holy sites,
leaving them behind, he entered the Chola land
and came to the city of Tiru-Vidai-Maruthur.

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After he had worshipped there,
with love in his heart he came to holy Arur,
and having praised those flowery feet
whose greatness is hard to tell,
he spoke forth the glorious ‘Sacred Lament’.²⁹
Then, praying to the Lord so that his fatigue
was quite dispelled, he went on his way,
faithfully performing worship
in all the places his Master had laid down,
until he reached the broad-walled city of Cirkazhi.

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Passing through the entrance-tower of that temple,
which rose up proudly like a great mountain,
and seeing that it rivalled silver Mount Kailash in its splendour,
he bowed down in worship before it.
Then, having firmly embraced those holy lotus feet
which dance in Tillai’s Golden Hall,
he stood in the presence of the Lord
whose glittering locks hang down behind,
and graciously sang the decad of the ‘Tenacious Grasp’.³⁰

²⁷ See verse 341, where Siva instruct the Saint to go here first to obtain supernatural powers (siddhis).

²⁸ Hymn 6, Forsake Me Not. In the andadi (literally end-beginning) the last foot of each stanza is identical or almost identical with the first foot of the next stanza.

²⁹ Hymn 39, The Sacred Lament.

³⁰ Hymn 37, The Decad of the Tenacious Grasp.

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Reflecting to himself:
‘All men, if they worship the Lord in this place
can conquer the implacable hostility of their former actions,’
Vadavurar joyfully remained there for several days.
Then, departing from that glorious shrine,
with love in his heart he acceded to the Lord’s command
to journey to noble Tiru-Kazhu-Gundram,
and, bowing reverentially in the direction of Chidambaram,
he went on his way.

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Leaving for the distant northern lands,
he worshipped the holy mountain Viruttasalam,
which is surrounded by a river
ever bright with the lustre of pearls.
And departing thence he came to holy Tiru-Venney-Nallur,
Abode of the true ascetics who deem it a blessed shrine
where the Lord’s supernal grace may be enjoyed.

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After worshipping at that shrine,
with love in his heart he departed,
following the righteous path,
passing through the middle lands,³¹
traversing tall forests and mountains,
where tigers and fearsome elephants dwelt,
until he drew near to enduring Aruna’s city.³²

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When he saw the palaces and gopurams,
the strong walls, decorated with jewels and pearls,
the great gateways festooned with banners,
towering up in the midst
of a cool densely wooded grove,
in a forest of tall areca trees,
He joyfully made obeisance,
experiencing great bliss.

³¹ The lands between the Chola and Tondai lands.

³² Tiruvannamalai.

378

'You who abide in the form of a mountain
which appeared on that day as a column of flame
for the two to seek!
Blissful life which fills our hearts!'
Thus did he worship the Supreme Mountain Lord,
receiving His grace, before proceeding forth
to enter Aruna's rich city.

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Leaving behind the groves, the city walls,
the streets decorated with many beautiful banners,
and the various shrines of the gods,
and taking the path which led to the holy presence,
he bowed down before the temple of the One
who wears in His locks a kondrai garland,
umattu flowers, the moon and the snake,
and then did he perceive the form of Him
who on that day had enslaved him.

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'Praise be to the dark-throated One
who swallowed the poison halahala
when Brahma, Vishnu and the rest of the gods,
crying out in distress, appealed to Him for protection!
Praise be to the Mountain of cool ambrosia,
mixed with milk of green-hued Unnamulai,
which men and Gods alike drink down
to cure the overpowering malady of their evil deeds!

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Praise be to the great ocean of grace of Him
who placed His feet upon my head,
the feet which tall Mal could not see,
though he burrowed deep into the earth
in the form of a powerful boar!
Praise be to the Mountain of burnished gold,
at whose side sits the slender
green-hued form of Unnamulai,
who is the earth's protectress!

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Praise be to Him who granted His grace
to the victorious Durga,
when She worshipped Him and begged Him
to absolve Her from the sin
of killing the powerful buffalo-headed demon!
Praise be to the beauteous Lord Annamalai,
who came to me on that day and held me in His sway!³³
Thus worshipping and praising the Lord
out of heart-felt love,
he dwelt there for some days.

383

It was the month of Margazhi,³³
when, in the ten days before the ardra asterism,³⁴
the beautiful maidens go from house to noble house
calling each other out in the early dawn
just as the darkness is dispersing
and, banding together, go to bathe in the holy tank.

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On observing their noble qualities
he sang the immortal hymn ‘Tiruvempavai’,³⁵
which is composed as if sung by the maidens themselves.
Later, seeing them dance and sing
as they played the pretty game ‘Ammanai’,³⁶
he composed the song ‘Ammanai’ in the same manner.

385

Leaving that exalted site,
the loving Vadavurar came to Kanchipuram
where with deep devotion he worshipped
the supreme Lord Ekambaranathar
before paying homage to the fair feet of His consort Kamakshi
whose nature is hard for men to know.
Then he set out for the great
and divinely-favoured Eagle Mount
to which even the gods direct their thoughts and prayers
to obtain the fulfilment of their wishes.

³³ The month of Margazhi corresponds to late December and early January in the western calendar.

³⁴ Asterisms / Nakshatras – Constellations, each spreading over $13^0 20'$ of the zodiac. Twenty-seven asterisms are identified, each with distinct attributes.

³⁵ Hymn 7, The Maidens’ Song of the Dawning.

³⁶ Hymn 8, The Holy Ammanai. A game, accompanied by a simple song, in which the women sit in a circle and toss little balls from one to the other with great swiftness and dexterity.

There he praised the holy feet of the Lord
 whose matted locks are entwined
 with strands of fragrant kondrai blossoms,
 those feet which resemble
 the garlands of red lotuses
 which adorn the heads
 of the devotees who seek His company.
 Then he sang the song whose import is:
 ‘My helpmate and companion,
 You have shown me Your ruddy form
 in this holy place called Eagle Mount
 so that my mind might be freed
 from confusion and perplexity.’³⁷
 Having remained there for several days
 he praised the Lord and went on his way.

Setting off from that place
 he passed on his way
 through many holy sites,
 leaving behind forests and rivers,
 dark-flanked mountain ranges,
 wooded groves and tanks,
 until he came within three leagues,
 according to report,
 of southern Tillai’s shrine,
 where dwells the Divine Magician
 who transformed horses into jackals
 and who dances with a fierce hooded cobra
 twined about his neck.

Thus did he follow the road to Chidambaram
 eschewing the way taken by the many:
 by those great fools who are enslaved by their infatuation
 with the slender shoulders
 and bright smiles of artless maidens,
 by those who do not care to see that others are fed
 before they themselves take their food,
 and by those who do not seek their salvation
 from the grace-bestowing hand of Lord Siva,
 out of which spring forth the flames of destruction.

³⁷ Hymn 30, The Song of the Eagle Mount (Tiru Kazhu Gundru).

389

The flowers of the brightly resplendent kondrai trees
lined his path on either side as he journeyed on
as if he were moving in the divinely radiant sphere of the gods.
The humming insects seemed to intone those wise Tamil hymns
which are hallowed by Lord Siva's name,
whilst the kantal blossoms were like the hands of dancers
figuring forth their meaning with skilful gestures.

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The murakku trees, displaying their bright flowers
resembled those who wear the garb of the ascetic
even though they are quite without the knowledge of Lord Siva
which bestows serenity of mind,
and the kaya blossoms, spreading their rich dark lustre
recalled the hearts of those inferior men
who habitually follow the path of the senses
like a torrent which spreads out over the low-lying terrain.

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Dotted everywhere about
those tall verdant groves
were blossom-laden punnai trees
where bees rose up in clouds
from their honey-laden hives
whenever the branches swayed
under the weight
of leaping, swarming tribes of monkeys.
Each hive was like the bright full moon
set against a dark leafy sky,
studded with flowery stars.

392

The areca trees which towered up
densely on either side
fanned him with their many boughs;
flocks of kuyil, which peck at
the young shoots of the mango trees,
serenaded him with their low sweet song;
and groves of champaca trees
showered down their brilliant yellow blossoms,
as if the leaders of the heavenly host
had banded together to pour down
a rain of golden flowers out
of their great love for him.

393

Leaving behind the unfailing luxuriance
of that flowering wood
through which his path lay,
the tall mango and orange trees,
the trumpet-flower bushes resounding
to the hum of thickly swarming insects,
the stands of coconut palms,
the makula, kongu and bread-fruit trees,
and the mandara weighed down
by its copious clusters of blossom,
he came within sight of the fair city of Chidambaram.

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As he looked about him
his gaze fell upon the glorious sight
of city walls rearing up to the heavens,
of rank upon rank of gopurams,
beautifully displaying the sculptor's art,
and of pilgrim hostelries, great in number,
surmounted by lofty gilded domes.
Raising his hands in worship,
that loving devotee
who was clad in the holy grace of the Lord
sang anthems of praise and rejoiced in his heart.

395

A great clamour like the roar of the ocean
rose up above that city of Chidambaram:
the murmur of vedic chanting,
and the sound of the celestial hosts
praising the Lord;
the strains of music,
and the rising crescendo of drums;
the singing of Tamil hymns
and the voices of enlightened sages,
reciting the Saiva Agamas
as they expounded their teaching.

396

Leaving behind the broad avenues lined with great mansions,
he who had espied the further shore of wisdom's ocean,
the Saiva Agamas, which expound
the exalted knowledge of Lord Siva,
passed through the ornate gateway of the lofty gopuram,
which towered up like a mountain,
and, casting his gaze towards the Golden Hall
was filled with deep devotion to the Lord.

397

When he saw that the virtuous Lord,
the Dancer within the Golden Hall
had once more adopted the form of that Great Teacher
who had placed two holy feet that day upon his head,
Vadavurar wept copious tears lovingly praising the Lord
and cried out over and over again:
'My king! My very life! Lord of the Golden Hall!
Grant me Your shelter! Grant me Your shelter!'

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With tears streaming down from his two unblinking eyes
he fell down to receive those blissful feet upon his head.
Then, rising up, he was suffused with unfailing divine grace,
the fruit of his great devotion to the Lord,
and sang out of the fullness of his heart
the fine hymn whose theme is:
'My eyes have seen this day in noble Tillai's shrine
The One who shares his form with Uma,
whose dark tresses are beset by honey bees.'³⁸

399

The radiance of Lord Siva's presence
in the form of the lingam
within the inner sanctuary
where grace is ever unfailing
and the bright effulgence of his joyful cosmic dance
in the ethereal expanse of the Golden Hall
united within him
in the realisation of divine consciousness.
The activities of his mind and body subsided
and he stood there quite immobile,
frozen like a painted image.

400

He was quite forgetful of the ritual worship
due to the Lord at whose side sits Uma,
she of the dark gleaming tresses.
His hands and feet betrayed not the slightest movement,
and his eyes remained fixed and unblinking.
'What can he be doing! We have no idea!
It must be some kind of madness!
Let us throw him out of the Golden Hall at once!'
Thus did the true guardians of that place
mutter amongst themselves.

³⁸ Hymn 31, My Eyes Have Seen.

401

Oblivious to the words of those
whose gracious task it was
to stand guard within the Golden Hall,
Vadavurar remained absorbed in that divine consciousness.
Observing the ancient cosmic dance of the Lord,
he was immersed in the bright effulgence
of the transcendent Godhead
which delighted his eyes in the final stage
of his soul's emancipation.
Thus did he stand for many a while
like a pillar of stone.

402

When the guards said: 'Come with us!',
he neither moved nor spoke.
Then, as they stood there,
anxious and fearful lest he be a madman,
like a dead man suddenly come to life,
he raised above his head his two clasped hands,
like an unopened lotus bud, filled with nectar,
and cried out: 'Siva, Siva! Praise be to You!'

403

Performing three ritual circuits of the primal
Lord's Hall of bright gold,
he made obeisance in the inner sanctum
to the peerless Lord Siva
before lovingly worshipping the feet
of the holy mother Ambikai.
Then he made his way to the shrine
of the tiger-footed sage,
situated to the west of that temple,
which glittered with the lustre of gold.

404

Having paid homage to the lotus foot of the Lord
who dwelt in that place to grant the wishes
of His devotees,
Vadavurar went to worship the holy feet of his Master
at the shrine of the serpent-sage Patanjali.
Leaving there and passing through the thoroughfares
around the sacred hall of Tillai,
where flawless Brahmins dwelt,
he sang out holy hymns of ambrosial sweetness.

405

It was here that he who was great in virtue
sang, out of his deep devotion,
the hymn which contains the refrain:
'I have attained to the King
who dances in glorious Tillai.',³⁹
along with the two 'Temple Songs',⁴⁰
so deserving of study,
and the three fair agavals⁴¹
which express the most profound truth in melodious Tamil.

406

In one place young maidens were pounding gold-dust,
and as they worked the bangles on their arms clinked together
and their anklets of pure gold tinkled;
their eyes flashed and darted like warring carp
as drops of perspiration sprang up over their bodies,
and the bees which hovered about their long dark tresses
swarmed together and sang out as if intoxicated.

407

Upon hearing the work-song of those maidens
whose beauty rivalled that of the Goddess Lakshmi
he composed in pure Tamil a hymn of great worth:
'The Sacred Gold Dust',⁴² written as if the maidens sang it.
Then, as he was walking in the cloud-capped groves
he saw groups of young girls
happily playing their childhood games.

408

On seeing this he cried:
'Forget these vain and meaningless rhymes
and sing only of our Lord Siva!'
Thereupon he composed the following songs
as if the girls were singing them to each other:
The estimable 'Tambour song',⁴³ the 'Holy Unthiyar',⁴⁴
the beautiful 'Tonakkam',⁴⁵ 'The Golden Swing',⁴⁶
and the harmonious 'Sacred Lily Flowers'.⁴⁷

³⁹ Hymn 40, The Decad of Glorious Tillai (Uninterrupted Joy).

⁴⁰ Hymns 20, 21, The Ancient Sacred Temple Song, and The Sacred Temple Lyric.

⁴¹ Hymns 2, 3 & 4, The Holy Agaval of Renown (the Sacred Acts of Lord Siva), The Nature and Development of the Universe and the Sacred Agaval of Praise.

⁴² Hymn 9, The Gold Dust.

⁴³ Hymn 11, The Tambour Song.

⁴⁴ Hymn 14, The Unthiyar.

⁴⁵ Hymn 15, The Tonokkam.

⁴⁶ Hymn 16, The Golden Swing.

⁴⁷ Hymn 13, The Sacred Lily Flowers.

409

Later the pure-hearted Vadavurar
composed in a broken rhythm
the ten verses of the worthy ‘Mother’s Song’,⁴⁸
in which a young girl addresses her dear mother,
and on hearing in one place
the whirring of a dragonfly’s wings
he sang the ‘Sacred Dragon Fly’,⁴⁹
exhorting it to love and praise
the flower-like feet of the Lord.

410

It was here also that he who is without equal among men
sang the hymn whose theme is:
‘Beautiful young kuyil, you who dwell amongst these groves!
Sweetly calling, may you summon hither our Lord’,⁵⁰
And here too, that, upon espying a parrot,
he composed the hymn called the ‘Ten Royal Insignia’,⁵¹
in which he speaks to the bird in sweet Tamil venba,
saying: ‘Sing praises to the holy foot of Him
in whose fair locks the crescent moon is entwined.’

411

Finally, he who was deeply endowed with true knowledge
sang that excellent and melodious hymn which proclaims:
‘Poor sinners that we are,
yet we do greatly dread the sight
of those who take for their Lord
some deity other than the One
who came upon the earth in human form to
subject us to His rule.’⁵²
Then, setting up a fine hut of palm leaves
just outside that fair city,
he seated himself within it.

⁴⁸ Hymn 17, The Mother Decad.

⁴⁹ Hymn 10, The Holy Dragon-fly.

⁵⁰ Hymn 18, The Kuyil Decad.

⁵¹ Hymn 19, The Ten Insignia.

⁵² Hymn 35, The Decad of Dread.

412

Wherever they foregathered in their assemblies
the citizens of the great and glorious city of Tillai
were filled with joy and wonder
as they recounted all the exploits of him
who, entering upon his final earthly incarnation,
free at last from the powerful bonds of birth,
had sung those beautiful Tamil hymns
whose subject is the Supreme Reality,
Lord Siva Himself.

413

And so, perceiving within himself that cosmic dance
which lies beyond the universe and all its constituents
Vadavurar dwelt in Tillai's hallowed precincts,
daily visiting the Golden Hall
to pay obeisance to the Immaculate Lord.
Now let us begin to recount the glorious tale
of how the Buddhist sage was defeated in scholarly debate.