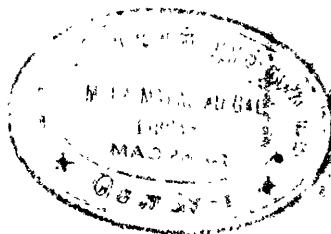


SAINT APPAR

OR

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THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE



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FOREWORD

This is the gift of a kind friend and I account it precious—so precious that I have published it for general benefit. My sincere thanks are due to him. This booklet represents the basic foundation of a film to come "Saint Appar or the Triumph of Love" of the Vel Pictures.

M. J. Rajen.



APPAR
THIRUPAVITARAMURAI

SAINT APPAR.

PARENTAGE

I

South India was at one time divided into belts, called *nadus*. Between Cuddalore on the sea coast and the outer reaches of the Kolli Hills in the present Salem District lay the Tirumunai-padi Nadu. It was a flourishing country. Vridhachalam was near by the centre of this land. The Kadiyar River marked the boundary on the north. The waters of the Vellar River coursed through it on the south. Hills and rivers adorned its natural scenery. Saints and temples have hallowed its memory.

Six miles away from Panruti, in the northern half of this land, lay Tiruvamoor, a sweet village favoured by Nature. It had a beautiful temple. Contented and pious, the villagers led a life of service and of love. It was free from inter-caste wrangles, for then caste to caste was a buttress and a strength; no rivalries split their quiet minds into wasting turmoils of discontent. Man was an aid and friend to man, instead of a competitor or a foe. The woman stood by man in keeping the nursery of domestic atmosphere in a fit condition to attract great and good souls to take birth in it, to grow into stalwart supermen of their own times.

Agriculture flourished. The heavenly waters that wooed the harvest out of the smiling verdure of the growing plant, blew the fragrance out of the coming buds. The whispering blossoms poured forth the honied treasures of their heart, as their last offerings to Him who shed on them the joy of life. To a contemplative Yogin, the village with its attractions was a Joyous expression of the love, the beauty, and the play of Divinity in

PARENTAGE

Nature. In this village lived Pugazhanar (the famed amongst men) and his wife Mathini (the sweetest of the fair). They were respected, loved and adored by the villagers. Each of them came out of a reputed stock of devotees of Lord Siva. They were Vellalars, the lords of the soil. They were Vel-Alars the great disciples of Lord Shanmugha ; whose courage in the fields of battle was drawn from the grace of the Vel—the invincible weapon of Lord Muruga. Of such happy parentage were born two children—Tilakavati (the brightest of the fair) and Marul-neeki (the light that dispels darkness)—who were destined to play a glorious part in the spiritual history of South India.

THE VILLAGE SHRINE. 33

II

The sun never dawned, and it never set, without this happy couple worshipping Ishwara in the village temple. One evening the father and the mother were starting to the shrine. Tilakavati ran to her father and said "I desire to worship the Lord with you, father! Yes, with you—I mean, with you only. May I go with you?"

Marulneeki.—and I too! (now looking at his sister), when our father and mother worship the Lord, He seems to listen and to respond—what a wonder! When others worship, no such thing happens. Let us go therefore with our father.

Tilakavati.—You are a clever dear! You seem to get to know what is in my mind, we shall always go together. Shall we?

Pugazhanar.—Come on—come on all of you. The Lord will speak to you also if you but worship with all your soul.

Mathini.—How can we be sufficiently grateful to the Lord for the kindest of all gifts—this girl and this boy? Devotion in children is simply enchanting. How I wish I could once more be a child to share their love of the Lord. Love becomes divine, when it is unmotived and unpurposed, as in these children.

Pugazhanar.—We will requite Him with both our lives! These cherubs will grow to be the very salt of the earth.

Math.—Good children! are not they the feast of the eye?

THE VILLAGE SHRINE

Pugazh.—Yes. They are the very sweetness of life. I see in them the very Lord of my heart and the Mother of the seven worlds.

Math.—That is what every parent says of his own children. —our feeling is none too strange.

Pugazh.—True in a sense. But I have seen parents grieving over the bad deeds of their children. But why think of such bad shadows?

The temple was reached. The happy family entered into the shrine. In sweet strains of soulful ecstasy, Pugazhanar sang of His Grace and prayed that the Love of the Lord might take flood in his heart and envelope the whole living creation. Love is of the Lord and the Lord is in Love. The Lord's voice was then heard by Pugazhanar. "Grieve not, you and your incomparable consort. Both of you will soon come to Us. The sister will become the protecting Mother to her brother, and the latter will strew the Tamil nadu with song and strain, and We will ever thereafter live in them, more than even in temples. Blessed thou art and so shall be all that are with thee."

Pugazhanar communicated this strange experience to his dear wife. With tears of joy, and thankfulness in their hearts, the devoted pair returned with the children to their home, revolving in their minds the strange experience at the shrine.

THE ORPHANS

III

Kalipagyar was a famous general in the army. A young man, hardly twenty-four, with crimson blood in his veins, he had distinguished himself for his bravery and daring in the wars of King Mahendravarma with his enemies. The Kalla chieftains were hard to be subdued. They carried on a guerrilla warfare, now in the view, now lost for the attack. But Kalipagyar was a terror to the King's enemies.

He had sought the hand of Tilakavati and had sent his messengers to her father of great renown. By family prestige, by traditional devotion to the Lord of Kailas and by the general agreement of temper and spirit, Tilakavati could not have had a better for her Lord. Pugazhanar settled the marriage. But Mathini felt some inexpressible, indefinite, but none the less, perceptible tremblings of some approaching disappointment which she could not bring to shape. She buried her apprehensions in her own heart. The betrothal had been gone through. The marriage had not been fixed to any definite date yet, when war broke out in the north. Kalipagyar and his army were ordered to the front.

In the meantime the call came from the Lord to Pugazhanar and Mathini. They were gathered to the Lord. No sooner had the parents of Tilakavati been called to His presence, news came that the brave Kalipagyar fell in battle, worthy of his fame. The enemies were routed; the battle was won; the country was safe. But poor Tilakavati seemed destined only to a life of celibacy. Parents dead, hopes of married life dashed to the ground even ere they were hatched, Tilakavati surrendered herself to the Divine will and thought of a life of renunciation

THE ORPHANS

and service as the fitting occupation of a soul waiting for its day of absorption into the Divine Light. The thought of the forlorn brother distressed her mind and she resolved to stay in her father's home till Marulneeki grew up to a proper age and thereafter to betake herself to Athihai Veerattanam there to render service to the Lord of Kailas. Marulneeki was stunned by the sudden losses he had sustained so early in his life, and spent a good part of his time reflecting on the evanescence of life and of what awaits in the beyond. He was drawn to his sister as a disciple to his guru. He learnt from her that Godly Love alone can make life endure and the lack of it was indeed a living death.

CONVERSION TO JAINISM 31

IV

Thus the two orphans were thrown on themselves by an inscrutable Providence. The sister was everything to the brother ; the brother was all the known treasure to the sister in this wide world. Fraternal love danced in the beaming faces of these children. Tilakavati would often be seen praying to the Lord " O Lord ! give unto me that largeness of heart to love all living creatures as I love my precious Marulneeki." The brother would pray in answering response as it were " O Lord ! how I wish you give unto me the mind to look upon every one as my sister, and give unto them the filial piety that knits me to my sister." For Tilakavati was all a mother for the little Marulneeki. Her sweet song melted his heart. Tears flowed down the rosy cheeks of the little lad as her sister lost herself in the sweet strains of devotion to the Lord. Her tenderness built for him a temperament of loveable kindness and fond solicitude to all living creatures. Tilakavati would now run into the garden feeding the ants, the disabled cattle, and the injured birds. Again she would rush out into the streets to help the suffering worker on the roadside, carrying food to the hungry. She would speed to solace the distressed. Marulneeki would also run behind her sister. They sang " The Lord is Life. To serve the Lord is to serve Life. Think of Life and let not the thought of the Lord slip from thy mind."

Marulneeki grew up into a well-built boy, the stalwart of his class, and became a precocious youth of great intellectual power. He was soon recognised as the foremost amongst the learned men of the land. His discourses attracted thousands, and his fame spread all over the land. The sincerity of his heart illuminated the sharpness of his intellect. A sympathetic

CONVERSION TO JAINISM

imagination developed for him a superior sense of proportion. His affable simplicity endeared him to the people, while the dizzy reaches of his brilliant intellect left him the victor in all literary and polemical combats.

Marulneeki's great tenderness to the living creatures slowly led him on to a high appreciation of the doctrine of Ahimsa of the Jains. Many Jain experts became his warm friends. Drawn by the great appeal which the doctrine of Ahimsa made to his heart, he thought that Jainism was more suited to his temperament than Saivism, into which he was born. He broached the idea to his sister. She exclaimed "What! is this the fruit of all your education and study? Are you going to seek in Jainism an ideal of Love which is not found in the faith of your birth? Brother, Sivam is Love and Love is Sivam; the two are not different but identical. While the great Seers of the past have declared this great truth, why should you pass over to regions which are outside of you, a scion of one of the renowned ancient Saivite families of this land? What you propose is not proper—Do desist from such improper thoughts!" Days and nights were spent on argument and feeling between brother and sister. At last Marulneeki took leave of his fainting sister, to seek the Lord in the Jain Philosophy of Ahimsa. Tilakavati left Tiruvamoor bidding adieu to her dear brother. "Adieu, dear soul!" she said "A step to the back often serves as a momentum to a great leap to the fore. Who knows the Lord's will? His—the further responsibility to save you, not mine. It had never been mine."

THE CALL BACK.

V

Marulneeki became one of the chiefs of the Jains. He was adorned with the title of "Dharmasena." He became an intimate friend of the King. There was no matter of any importance, in which Dharmasena was not consulted. His friendship with the King developed in such fast strides that he soon became the sole confidant of the King even on all great matters of State.

Thus a few years rolled by. Dharmasena felt pleased with his new surroundings, bearing the great honour of being the King's personal adviser and the chief expounder of the Jain religion. The religion of his birth seemed almost lost from his consciousness. It is often not realised that in forgetfulness are hatched the greatest of our dynamic thoughts. Dreams or visions have proved in many cases to be the rare minstrels of divine message. Even so, one night, Dharmasena had a strange vision. For the first time after his separation from his sister, he saw her robed in spotless white, her face radiating with the sacred ashes on the forehead, her fingers playing on the moving beads, her eyes steadfastly gazing at Siva in the Athihai temple. She stood praying to Him to vouchsafe His Grace to Marulneeki. The prayer was couched in song, pitched in sweet tenderness. It shook his whole frame to the core. The Lord (the idol) seemed to respond.

"In a few days more, Marulneeki will seek thee in this temple. Thou shalt stand the preceptor to him, and My grace will flow to him through thee. His affliction will then cease and only then. He will then become of My form and spirit. He will walk the wide earth with love and song and hallow My name in the hearts of My devotees. Thy work shall then be

THE CALL BACK

finished and thou will come back to Me!" The vision disappeared. Dharmasena was struck with this experience "Is this a day dream"? I—to become a Saivite once again? Impossible! Afflictions will then cease! What affliction? Let me see! If Siva is a true God, let me see if this vision comes true. My mind has brought up to the surface, the advice of my dear dear sister whom I have abandoned. What! have I been a sinner? Oh! Dear sister, did you pray as in the vision I saw you do? What love! What affection! My mind is torn by cross currents. The God of my forefathers! Lord Siva! Is He pursuing me? O! Jain fathers! where am I? where? affliction? Well, well. Let me wait and see."

REPENTANCE

VI

The next day, Dharmasena was a changed man. His mind was not easy. He often went into moods of reverie. His friends could not divine the cause. Hardly had a week elapsed when Dharmasena was afflicted with an attack of insufferable colic. Doctors could not help to relieve the suffering. He sent word secretly to his sister at Athihai. The reply came that she was awaiting Marulneeki at Athihai, in accordance with the Divine command, and that she dared not disobey it. Dharmasena was impressed by this message. "Has my sister been worshipping even as I saw her do, in my vision?" He said to himself "I am sure the Lord of Athihai awaits my return to Him. O Lord, O Sister! are you both awaiting the return of the prodigal son? What a sinner have I been? How shall I expiate this ingratitude? Here goes my learning, here the position, the power, here the wealth and here the friendships and attachments that have stood between me and my Lord! O Lord! I am no longer mine. I am Thine, O Lord, Thine, O Mother! O Guru! O Sister! pardon! pardon! pardon!"

So saying Dharmasena got from his bed and at midnight started vending the lonely way towards Athihai. Contrition bathed his body in remorseful tears and the afflicting colic all but rent his nerves asunder! Nothing daunted Dharmasena now in paradeshi garb soon found himself in front of the Athihai temple, a few hours before dawn.

Night is thickest before dawn. The prize of life is not gained till after the bitterness of it is worn away. The momentous point in the life of Dharmasena was at hand. But this Dharmasena knew not. He was anxious to repair his past

REPENTANCE

ingratitude by shedding his life at the feet of his dear sister and guru, in the thought *of the Lord*, the presiding deity of his family from generation to generation. The destiny of the greatest amongst us is not in his keeping. Self-surrender achieves more wonders in life than self-determination. The latter sets us not infrequently at cross purposes with the world but the former knits our will to His.



TIRUNAVUKKARASU

VII

The first rays of the rising sun had just illuminated the turret-tops of the village Shrine. The peacock played in front of the sacred bull. The devotees of both sexes were crowding in. All were eyes, looking on for the advent of somebody. Who? Dharmasena knew not. All of a sudden there was a flutter. A lady clad in milky white, with a brilliant shine about her face, moved in towards the entrance, her melting accents reverberating the Holy Word. The crowd made way for her with great respect. She stopped at the gate, looked around and said "Is he come?" Dharmasena advanced and recognised his sister. Overcome with grief, he fell at her feet "Sister, Sister, a mother art thou to me? wilt thou forgive me? If not, how will He?" "Forgive?" She said "There has been nothing to forgive. The Lord has ordained me to give you this Veebhuthi (holy ashes); wear it." "Sing, Sing of the sweet name of my Lord. Song will come to thee. His grace will be thine indeed." Dharmasena wore the holy ashes and sang.

"Forgive me, O Lord. It is all ignorance. Never shall I abandon thee. Thy greatness is large enough to put up with my short comings and make me as Thyself." A ray of light darted from the Lord and rested on Tilakavati's forehead, and moving on, it alighted on Dharmasena and disappeared in him.

A voice from above declared "I name thee THIRUNAVUKKARASU. So shalt thou be known from now. Thy sister's mission has been accomplished. But thou shalt move from place to place and sing what has never been heard before." It was all a wonder. Thirunavukkarasu became a saint. People flocked in thousands to see the brother and sister. The glory of the Lord of Kailas lies about his votaries on earth. Thirunavukkarasu began to sing in inimitable Tamil accents, the hymns that flowed from the ecstasy of his heart.

ROYAL DISFAVOUR

VIII

The sudden disappearance of Dharmasena from the royal presence created a consternation in the political circles. Enquiries were instituted. The king grew suspicious that Dharmasena had been won over by his enemies. The Chalukyas who had been forced back from the very walls of Kanchi had been always a menace in the north. The Cholas were seeking friendship with Pandyan Kings of the south. They had been defeated and pushed to the south to a narrow belt of country about Pudukottah. Their suppressed rage might burst forth at any time. The numerous Kalla chieftains who had been subdued, might prove to be a hornet's nest. The most trusted servant of the King, as Dharmasena was, had it in his power, then more than ever, to turn into a disastrous traitor. What had happened to Dharmasena? Reports were received by the king that Dharmasena had been purchased by his enemies. He had become a traitor. Strange people from the South and the North were seen going to Athihai seeing Dharmasena and departing away. They seemed religious but suspicion was that religion was a mask for the perpetration of heinous treacheries. The king summoned Dharmasena to his presence. As the messengers approached Dharmasena and threatened him to obey the king's call, Thirunavukkarasu disowned his allegiance to the king and said he knew of no king but one, the Lord of Athihai. This was duly reported to the king. Mahendravarma was very much exasperated and he called in his full Council.

THE COUNCIL

IX

The ministers were duly in attendance. The high priests of the Jains had also been requisitioned and were present. The king said that Dharmasena's conduct was causing him grave anxiety. He was his good friend. It was too much for him on the one side to believe that Dharmasena could have been moved by treacherous motives. If he was so far right, Dharmasena must have been afflicted by a touch of insanity. For that alone could explain his then conduct. But if he was not insane, no other conclusion than that he had turned treacherous was possible. Dharmasena was in the know of many vital confidences and schemes of the State, and it was not safe for the king that he should be at large, if he had not become insane. Officers of State had been deputed to report about Dharmasena's condition of mind. The large majority of State officers who interviewed Dharmasena reported that Dharmasena was quite healthy in body and mind, and that political treachery must have lain at the bottom of the seemingly religious deflection. A small minority attempted to persuade the Council into the belief that Dharmasena had run mad-God-mad. The Council came to the conclusion that Dharmasena had become a traitor to the throne, and an apostate to the religion of the State. It is the duty of the king to punish his subjects for the wrongs committed by them. Addressing the Jain high priests the king said "O! fathers of the State! It was indeed a serious wrong that Dharmasena should have deflected from the religion of the State. Did his mind change? I think not. His mind never changed. He was throughout what he is now. All the time he was with you, acting as the head of you, he was in fact cheating us all. Yet, all of us believed in his sincerity, and promoted him to the highest place. The worst folly was not yours but mine. I gave him a place of great confidence in my heart. And he now knows all political and military secrets. To be

THE COUNCIL

true to my subjects and to the State, I must undo the mischief that may befall the country by the treachery of Dharmasena. I desire to know what you, the respected religious heads, have to say on this matter. Speaking for myself, Dharmasena has lost his right to live within my kingdom. It is inviting great danger to allow him to get beyond our borders. What are your views ? Pray ”.

The chief of the Jain fathers stood up and spoke “ O King ! Before Dharmasena became a Jain, the great virtues of our religion had attracted abler minds and stouter hearts. Dharmasena went away even as he came. Jainism is greater than the best of its votaries. Ahimsa is our fortress. It is the real key to the final liberation. We shall not be true Jains if we encourage the idea that the State should punish Dharmasena for his deflection from Jainism. In the vigour of his great intellect, he disregarded the religion of his birth and embraced Jainism. Now in the weakness of his mind he has gone back. It is doubtful if he had not run mad. His mind must have been deranged. As a true friend, O King, find out what help you can render to him. We will all try to dispel the nightmare which must have taken him away from us. As for punishment, our Dharma is clear. We shall not be parties to a single hair on his head being hurt. Otherwise, the glory of Ahimsa will be lost to our great faith.” The king listened. There was a silence. After a few minutes, the chief minister asked the Jain fathers whether they would deny the freedom of action to the king to deal, as a king alone can, with political treachery, royal perfidy, and insolent sedition. The Jain fathers replied that it was beyond their province to advise the king on matters political. The king was the master of what was best to do for his subjects. Religion made no demand on him that the wrong perpetrated by Dharmasena should be avenged. The king bade farewell to the Jain fathers who duly retired from the royal presence.

THROWN INTO FIRE

X

The king then took counsel with his ministers and resolved that nothing short of the extreme penalty of the law could meet the situation. Dharmasena had repudiated his allegiance to Mahendravarma, no mean Oriental monarch. The reports had confirmed that he was in touch with the enemies of the king. The State was bigger than any man, and the king was bigger than even the State. Dharmasena was no better than a fanatic or a lunatic; if not he was a traitor and cheat. He ought not to be sent out of the kingdom as he might communicate to the king's enemies the State and military secrets. The king on the advice of his ministers issued forth his royal command that Dharmasena must be decoyed and secretly put to death—to be thrown into a lime-kiln of the State and nobody should know anything about him. The order was handed over to the officers for execution. Dharmasena was duly decoyed by the executioners of the State and thrown into a lime-kiln. For seven days Thirunavukkarasu was within the kiln. The Holy Feet of the Lord was on his head. All underneath was cool as the rays of the rising moon.

When the lime-kiln was opened, Thirunavukkarasu was found in the kiln, just as he was when he was thrown into it, singing the glory of the Lord's name. Why did not fire burn up Tirunavukkarasu? The Grace of the Lord descended on Tirunavukkarasu and made him of its own substance. Fire could not burn the Lord who gave it its burning quality. Even so Tirunavukkarasu had become of the Lord. He had ceased to be man. The divine link had released him from the bondage of the elements. Mahendravarma knew it not.

FURTHER ORDEALS

XI

News reached the king that Tirunavukkarasu was not even hurt, much less burnt in the kiln and was still alive. The king thought that Dharmasena had evidently bribed the king's officers and that he had never been thrown into the fire at all. He sent another set of officers to kill him by poisoning him. Tirunavukkarasu was willing to take the poisoned food, and he took it. But as the Lord who has poison in his throat dwelt inside Dharmasena's frame, the poison had no effect on him. An elephant was set to crush Dharmasena under foot. Tirunavukkarasu recognised the Lord within the elephant and sang in His praise. The elephant came round Tirunavukkarasu and made obeisance to him and departed. At the king's command, Tirunavukkarasu was thrown into the sea, weighted by a big granite stone. In the sea of Samsara the weight that pulls down man is sin. Tirunavukkarasu had no sin, as all his sins had been washed out by the grace of the Lord. The granite stone itself became as pure as holy ashes with his touch and as light as a catamaran. The Ocean wafted the treasure on the granite stone to the portals of Tirupathiripuliyur. The fisherman reported the strange sight to the people at large and the king also heard of it. Tirunavukkarasu was received by the populace and he was taken round the city. Tirunavukkarasu worshipped the Lord of Pathiripuliyur and repaired to Athihai, followed by the admiring crowd.

MAHENDRAVARMAN'S CONVERSION

XII

The king was a fervent and sincere soul. He realised that Tirunavukkarasu was a real saint. Fire, water, the element could not crush him. Poison could not affect him. Wild animals could not harm him. Balanced in devotion, with the feet of the Lord of Athihai on his head, Tirunavukkarasu was an impersonation of the Lord. The king discovered the saint to the world by the cruelties he sought to inflict. Mahendravarma realised his folly. He rushed to Athihai and fell at the feet of Tirunavukkarasu and prayed for pardon. Tirunavukkarasu blessed the king and said "My friend! Your trials were but the Lord's play. He is everywhere—The Lord of my heart. His devotees will never be hurt. Have the Lord's Blessing" So saying Tirunavukkarasu offered the holy ashes to the king. The king wore the ashes on his face and felt blessed and pardoned. The king himself became a great disciple of Tirunavukkarasu. The tribulations of the Lord's devotees serve only to enhance their merit and His Grace always triumphs in the end.

APPAR AND SAMBANDAR

XIII

The miracles that the Lord wrought to save His devotee Thirunavukkarasu took wind and spread all over the country. In obedience to the Divine command Thirunavukkarasu started on his religious tour. He attracted countless disciples. People flocked to catch a glimpse and to receive the blessings of the superman whom even fire would not and could not burn. Children were laid at his feet, that they may profit by his gracious looks. His touch was divine. Tirunavukkarasu moved from village to village and from temple to temple. This led to the spread of Saivism throughout the length and breadth of South India. Temples were built and renovated. God fulfils His purpose in many ways. Tirunavukkarasu with his disciples left for Pennagadam. There he was given the ensign of the trident and the bull. He then left for Chidambaram, and had dharsan of Sri Nataraja. There he heard of the story of Sambandar at Shiyali. That glorious child that was fed by the milk of Sri Parvathi must be no other than Her child, Shanmugha. So he thought. He hastened to that sacred place with all the zest of one who was going to see Lord Shanmugha who had come down to the earth in human form to bless the world.

At Shiyali the two great souls met. Sambandar accosted Tirunavukkarasu with the endearing term of "my Appar". Ever afterwards Tirunavukkarasu came to be known also as Appar Swami. The meeting looked like the meeting of Siva and Shanmugha. It was the good fortune of the devotees and disciples who lived and enjoyed this experience that had accounted for the contribution of this wonderful event to the spiritual history of south India. The child embracing the elderly soul, the spirits

APPAR AND SAMBANDAR

that rushed together coalesced. Thereafter the physical bodies separated and wandered where the love of the disciples attracted. But the soul, the spirit and the mind became one and never apart thereafter.

Appar then visited Sathimutham. There he prayed that the Lord should vouchsafe His feet to be placed on his head. Appar was directed to go to Nallur for realisation of this request. At Nallur, Appar had his desire accomplished, and he sang that the Lord's Feet rested on his head and made it wet with His Grace. Appar next hastened to Tingaloor, the residence of Appodhi, a devotee of rare merit. An austere orthodox Brahmin by faith and practice, he had heard of Appar's experiences and teachings. He was waiting to see Appar, to worship him, and be blessed. He was thankful to the Lord that his life had been cast at a time when Appar took life. He was looking forward to his meeting Appar as the one and only desire of his life to be accomplished. To him Appar was no other than Lord Siva Himself. Who is he, whom the elements could not destroy, to whom the wild animals themselves bore love? What is it that remains after the elements have been destroyed? That ultimate residuum was the Lord, the God, the Eternal Light, the Grace of the blessed,—the Immortality, the Eternal Joy. That had taken shape in Appar's form. He had established great charities and had named them after Tirunavukkarasu. He had children. The boys had been named Tirunavukkarasu the first, Tirunavukkarasu the second and so on. Having heard of this devotee of unique power and feeling, Appar slowly moved into Tingaloor to see him and to be blessed with him.

APPAR AND APPOODHI

XIV

Appar, alone and in all humility, set out to meet "Appoodhi." He was introduced to Appoodhi, only as a paradeshi on the way who was anxious to see him.

Appoodhi.—Lord Siva lives in his devotees. Please to come. The blessed Lord sends such good souls to me for my edification.

Appar.—I am a humble servant of the Lord. Having heard of your great devotion I have come here to share your blessedness in however small a measure. Holy Brahmin! accept my humble obeisance.

Appoodhi.—Your looks, holy ashes, sparkling spiritual expression of your countenance all disclose the living Lord in your heart. I feel indeed blessed to see and entertain devotees like you. The Brahminical rites that I have performed would incline without fail the Lord's mercy in my favour—so declare the sacred texts. Could there be greater proof of the same than this, that the Lord has inclined your mind to go here to this, my humble cottage?

Appar.—What are these signboards—declaring the charities of Tirunavukkarasu? Has Tirunavukkarasu established any charities in this holy place? What does this mean?

Appoodhi.—Have you not heard of Tirunavukkarasu, the saint walking the earth whom even fire could not burn? The whole country is full of it. Strange that you should not have known about him. I have named my charities, my home, even my children after him. To love God is good. To love His

APPAR AND APPOODHI

devotees is even better. The latter elevates man even more easily than the former.

Appar.—Would it not be better that your great name should be associated with your magnificent charities? Would not people be misled by somebody—else's name being put on the signboards? Is there any name more worthy than thine to declare these charities?

Appoodhi.—You seem to have hardly realised the greatness of Tirunavukkarasu. My ears cannot stand any disrespect to his great name. The name was what was given by the Lord of Athihai. Without knowledge of his greatness you seem to be profaning by comparing my name with his. What signboard I make for myself is my business. It is according to my mind. I regret you thought you were making a good suggestion. But the Lord will soon tell you who Tirunavukkarasu is and how he is deserving of my homage. If you disrespect him, you have no place here in my poor cottage. I shall have nothing further to do with you. By the way, who may you be?

Appar.—Born in the lineage of great devotees of the Lord of Kailas, I sinner, turned an apostate to my Lord. The Lord's grace pursued me and cured me of my apostacy. I am a poor devotee with no constancy of devotion such as is yours. I am that ungrateful being whom the Lord out of his grace has commanded back into His fold, that penitent soul seeking to expiate its past sins by the sight of noble devotees like you, and on whom the Lord was pleased to bestow the name of 'Tirunavukkarasu!'

Appoodhi.—O Lord! Forgive me. Forgive me the hard words I have used. Your humility is becoming your greatness. I have lived years of expectation to realise the joy of this day. Tirunavukkarasu! Is that you? You? Has my dream been ultimately realised? Has the Lord come to bless me through you?"

APPAR AND APPOODHI

Appoodhi shed tears of spiritual joy, summoned his wife and children and made them prostrate themselves at Appar's feet. They took him inside his house. Appoodhi and his family sat around Appar and heard again from Appar's lips the whole story of his life. They beseeched Appar that he should consent to be entertained by Appoodhi the next day. Appar could not put off a request so insistent and so kind. In fact, Appar was delighted, and believed that it would be a great purification to him to partake of the food offering of so great a devotee as Appoodhi.

THE MIRACLE AND THE FEAST

XV

The next day was a grand function. Appoodhi had invited the local devotees. The inhabitants of Tingaloor had all gathered to see Appar. After exchanging felicitations, Appar was taken into the house for the feast. Every preparation had been made by the wife of Appoodhi—a lady who was a fitting companion to her husband. The leaf was to be spread. The first two boys were wrangling, each of them saying that he alone would fetch the plantain leaf from the garden. Appoodhi observed this rivalry with a smile. He resolved it by directing that Thirunavukkarasu the elder should cut and bring the leaf from the garden and that the Tirunavukkarasu the younger should wash and spread it for the saint! This satisfied both the boys. Tirunavukkarasu, the elder, rushed to the garden with a knife, and plucked a fine leaf for Appar. While he was engaged in the act, a fierce serpent bit him. He felt his end was near. But he was anxious to complete the good act he had begun. He rushed to the mother and said "Here is the leaf for Appar, mother! A cobra bit me, a cobra-cob..." He fell down unconscious.

When trials overtake devotees, it is just the time to watch the play of the Divine mercy. Appoodhi learnt of what happened to the boy. His wife said. "Even as the boy fell down after finishing his last service to Appar, we shall finish the service we are on, before life departs from the boy. We must hasten."

Appoodhi.—"O Lord—what strange trials! The Lord thinks me unworthy of Appar's favour! Is it? I know not what to think. Even if the worst serpent should bite a man, the life will not be extinct until 3½ naligais thereafter. I have heard great men say so; we shall therefore hasten to finish the service that this boy had begun. Poor boy! is this all your desert? Your last service was to Appar. That will save you and many generations before and after.

THE MIRACLE AND THE FEAST

Appoodhi's wife.—My boy ! You are a worthy son—worthy of your parentage. We will finish the service you began to deserve you as our son. Lie here and we will go to you in a short while.” So saying, they removed his body to a room in the back part of the house and sprinkling holy ashes on him left him there in charge of a trusted servant.

The leaf was laid and food was served. Appoodhi and his wife both entreated Appar to sit for the feast. Appar could see all was not right. He said his mind was troubled. Unless his mind was eased, he could not take food. He asked what had happened. Unable to hide the gruesome news, the devoted couple took Appar to the room behind, and told him of the boy and of the snake bite.

Appar.—“ Oh, what a calamity ! O Lord ! Is this just ? You have saved me from poison. But are these people to be punished for harbouring this sinner ? I had a feeling that I was unworthy of this great devotee's respect and love. But then, O Lord ! I am the fit subject for punishment—not the poor lad ! Are you not, O Lord ! in the poison of the snake ? Let me see.” So saying Appar took Appoodhi and his wife with the snake-bitten boy and marched straight to the local temple. The snake-bitten boy was laid before the Lord and Appar sang a psalm of ten stanzas and sprinkled the holy ashes on the boy uttering the Holy Word. The boy immediately came back to life. The wondering crowd realised what a great devotee Appoodhi was and what a great saint Appar was. This demonstration of the Lord's mercy set them in an ecstasy. The feasting was done with great enthusiasm, and Appar left for Tirupazhanam with Appoodhi, and sang a *pathiham* there immortalising the name of Appoodhi by setting it in the last stanza. Appar thought that in the song in which the Lord alone can be sung, Appoodhi should have a place. Such love and devotion were rarely to be seen. Appar and Appoodhi thus spent many days in the joy of devotion.

INTO THE DIVINE LIGHT

XVI

Appar went to Thiruveezhimalai. A severe famine overran the country at the time, but every day the Lord gave Appar a gold coin to purchase rice to feed the disciples of Appar, and the hunger-stricken crowd that gathered around him. Appar travelled far and wide, visited Vedaranyam, Thirupaingili, Tiruvannamali, Conjeevaram, Kalahasthi and other places. At Murugayanar matam Appar met Sambandar again. At Vedaranyam the door of the shrine remained closed. A *pathiham* (a psalm of 10 stanzas) was sung by Appar to open the doors of the temple, and another was sung by Sambandar to close the doors as before. At Thirupaingili the Lord came in the form of a Brahmin and gave food to Appar when he was stricken with hunger. Appar desired to have a view of Kailas. So he ended his way northwards; he attempted to ascend the hill of Thirunodithan. The gradient was steep and the way was hard. The Lord came in the form of a wayfarer and advised Appar to turn back. But Appar said that the longing of the spirit could not be put aside for the weak affection for the flesh. Then the wayfarer disappeared, and from above a voice was heard directing Appar to bathe in the neighbouring pond; and he was told that when he rose from the pond he would find himself in Thiruvayyar, the modern Tiruvadi where he would have the sight of Kailas. Appar did as he was bidden and in a moment he found himself in the village of Thiruvayyar. The Lord vouchsafed to him a vision of Kailas, and Appar sang many songs about the Lord of Thiruvayyar. At Thiruppoonthuruthi, Appar again met Sambandar. He got into the crowd of the devotees of Sambandar and was bearing the palanquin along with other disciples, when Sambandar seated in it peeped out and enquired where Appar was. Appar replied that he was enjoying the

INTO THE DIVINE LIGHT

unique privilege of bearing the palanquin of Skanda. They spent together many days of devotion and pilgrimage. Parting Appar established a mutt at Tiruppoonthuruthi. Appar visited Madura, Rameswaram, Tinnevely and ultimately at the command of the Lord, came to Tirupugalur. Appar's work was finished. He had filled the Tamil-naḍu with song and strain. Desire stood banished from his heart and the light of heaven stood constant in his vision. The attractions of sex and gold stood powerless before him. He stood in meditation of the great Lord of Kailas, his disciples stood behind him. In that glorious silence emerged a light. Appar was soon found to be on the crest of it. It rested at the feet of the Lord of Tirupugalur. Light to light, all became light. The story of Appar's life, thus, is the story of the passing soul led on into the Light of Heaven. All who read Appar's inimitable songs, all who meditate on the great events of his life shall never be lost to the grace of the Infinite. The Lord, that took Appar by the hand will still be the Lord that will remain the constant friend of all the devotees of Appar.

Appar taught the simple truth that the joy of life is the prize of those who tread the triune path of love, dance and song. Sing of the joy of life, the song of Appar. May the heavenly light ever shine on you.

THE END.

