

Dr. Shuddhananda  
Bharati

The Grand Epic  
of  
Saivism

Periya Puranam



ASSA  
Editions

## Editor's Notes

*The Grand Epic of Saivism* is the rendering in English of the great work, popularly known as *Periya Puranam*. The name Peria Puranam, which was a hallowed name has lost, in the modern Tamil, its real meaning and it may suggest to the ordinary reader that it is a myth. But it is really an authentic record of the lives of sixty-three noble souls, of different ranks. Their common aim was to serve God and Godmen. A study of the epic will reveal the thrilling sacrifice and devotion of these Godmen. Sacrifice or socialism about which there is too much of talk today had reached its zenith during the periods which the epic depicts. God never let down his devotees whenever they were in distress.

This epic is not merely a religious work but deals with social ethics. The saints, besides their religious life, lived up to the social standard laid down in *Tirukkural*. The sacred *Kural* is being gradually accepted as a code of conduct, throughout the world. This epic, it is hoped, will attain the same status. We hope that the day will not be far off for the world to recognise its universal appeal. It was Sekkizhar, the minister of the country in the court of King Kulothunga Chola II (1133-1150), who undertook and completed successfully the task of collecting, compiling, collating and composing in 4253 verses the lives of the sixty-three Nayanmars, the poets of Shiva. It is his magnum opus.

Yogi Shuddhananda Bharati, multi-lingual scholar, versatile genius, great spiritualist, great poet and author of many books has done signal service in rendering this great work into English. Words do not suffice to thank him for this noble undertaking and wonderful achievement in his task. His role in the current renaissance of Saivism is considerably significant and we pray to the Almighty to bestow upon him a long and healthy life to continue

him to be an apostle of Saivism. He has also consented to be the Visiting Professor to any university to help and advise the researchers into *Periya Puranam*.

We also wish to express our sincere thanks to Dr. V. A. Devasenapathy, Professor of Philosophy, University of Madras, for his scholarly foreword. He had, in his foreword in 1970, distilled the essence of *Periya Puranam* in short, sweet and pithy words: “Completely rooting out all sense of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, they (devotees) considered themselves and all they had as the property of God and His saints. They were the possessed – He and His devotees their possessor.”

Last but not the least, our humble salutations are to Lord Shiva, the Cosmic Dancer, for making always our hearts move into this venture and making it a success.

Thiru N. R. Murugavel, M.A., M.O.L., had a glossary of important words. This glossary is completed by Christian Piaget.

Thank you to my spiritual guide Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati for his blessings and guidance.

It is a real pleasure for me to present *The Grand Epic of Saivism* to you. Thank you and respect to Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati for having transmitted *The Grand Epic of Saivism* to us. With the blessing of *Aum Shuddha Shakti Aum*.

Christiananda Bharati

Christian Nicolas Piaget

“The feeling of God’s presence is just wonderful; we can find it in *The Grand Epic of Saivism*.”

*Christiananda Bharati*

## Song of Unity

*Unite. Unite, Unite, Oh Souls  
Unite and play your roles  
Unite in mind, unite in heart  
Unite in whole, unite in part  
Like words and tunes and sense in song  
Let East and West unite and live long  
Trees are many; the grove is one  
Branches are many; tree is one  
Shores are many; sea is one  
Limbs are many; body is one  
Bodies are many; self is one  
Stars are many; sky is one  
Flowers are many; honey is one  
Pages are many; book is one  
Thoughts are many; thinker is one  
Tastes are many; taster is one  
Actors are many; the drama is one  
Nations are many; the world is one  
Religions are many; Truth is one  
The wise are many; Wisdom is one  
Beings are many; breath is one  
Classes are many; college is one  
Find out this One behind the many  
Then life shall enjoy peaceful harmony*

## Peace Anthem

*Peace for all, peace for all  
For all the countries peace  
Joy for all, joy for all  
For all the nations joy  
A rosy morning peace  
A smiling summer joy (Peace for all)*

*All for each and each for all  
This is the golden rule  
Life and Light and Love for all  
For all that live our love (Peace for all)*

*Work and food and clothes for all  
Equal status for all  
Health and home and school for all  
A happy world for all (Peace for all)*

*No idle rich, no more beggars  
All are equal workers  
No more tears, no more fears  
The heart is full of cheers (Peace for all)*

*No atom scare, no fat mammon  
No room for war demon  
Like leaves in trees, like rays in the sun  
We are one communion,  
One Divine communion (Peace for all)*

*The good in you is good for all  
Your life is life for all  
The God in you is God for all  
Your love is love for all (Peace for all)*

*For he or she or it or rest  
This collective life is best  
This Universal Life is best  
North or South, or East or West (Peace for all)*

*Peace for plants and birds and beasts  
For hills and streams and woods  
Peace in Home – land and air and sea  
Dynamic peace we see*

*Peace for all, peace for all  
Immortal Peace for All*

Courage!

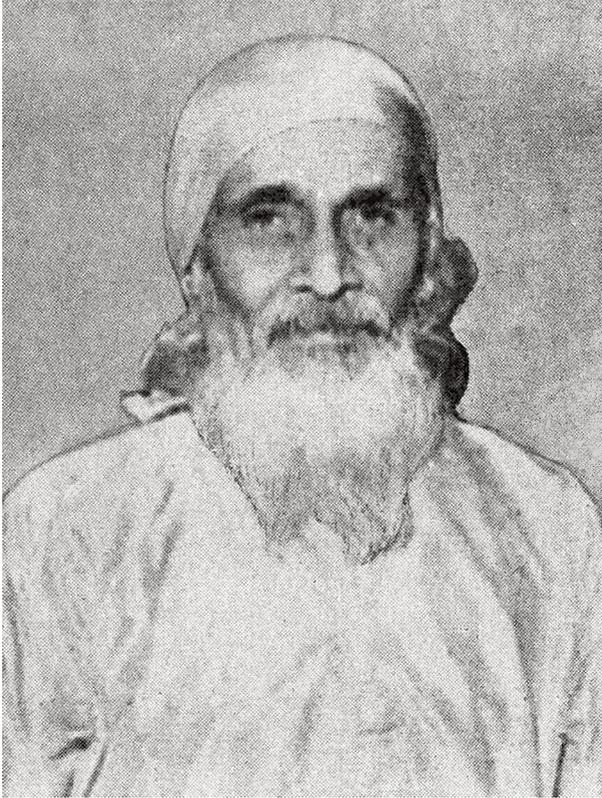
*The night is through,  
The chain of slavery  
It is already broken -  
I am full of courage!*

*Peace in the morning,  
A golden sun rises  
Like a lion superhuman  
To accomplish my dream.*

*A hopeful smile,  
Docile as a child  
Who plays in the infinite  
With a fiery star.*

*My journey is over;  
I enjoy time;  
The universe is my nest;  
Of eternal spring.*





Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati

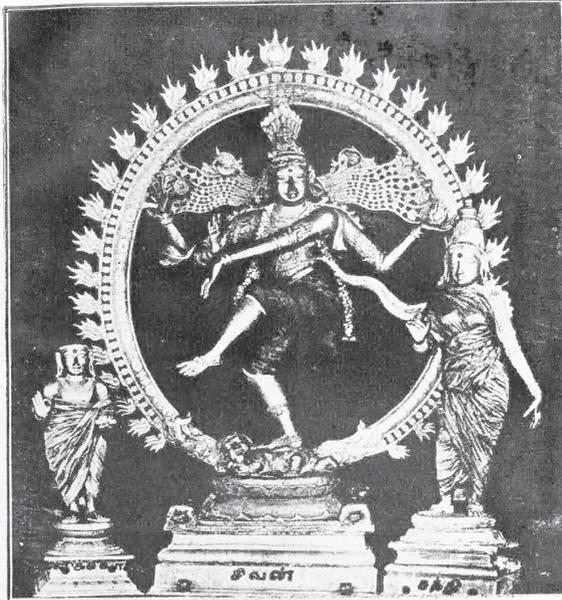
## Presentation of Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati

11<sup>th</sup> May 1897 – 7<sup>th</sup> March 1990

### The wise one to the cosmic age

Although more than 90 years old, in his school in the south of India, *Kavi Yogi Maharishi* (great divine visionary, wise poet), Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati worked like a young man of twenty. When he was asked his age, he answered: “My age is Courage!” The Yogi wrote several hundred works in English, French, Tamil, Hindi, Telugu and Sanskrit; five thousand songs, and fifteen hundred poems in French. The magnum opus of the man conscious of the presence of God in him, *Bharata Shakti*, (in 50,000 verses) described his ideal: only One Humanity living in communion with only One God in a transformed world! *Bharata Shakti* is a monumental and unique work. The Yogi depicts the essence of all the religions, of all the prophets and saints, all the approaches of yoga and all the cultures on an allegorical fabric. It is a book for any age which all spiritual researchers and all nations should read and meditate on. His commitment is summarized in his book celebrating his life, *Pilgrim Soul*. The three poems mentioned in the opening express perfectly his ideal. His mantra, *Aum Shuddha Shakti Aum*, nourishes our souls and guides our steps toward the inner joy *Ananda*. It means: The light of Grace and power of the pure supreme Almighty bless us of peace, happiness and prosperity! Let the beauty and greatness of soul of Dr. Bharati Shuddhananda bloom and scent the entire Earth of its divine message and his spiritual and unifying benefactor!

Editions ASSA



தோற்றந் துடியதளில் தோயுந் நிதியமைப்பில்  
சாற்றியேற அங்கியிலே சங்காரம்—ஊற்றமாய்  
ஊன்று மலர்ப்பதத்தே உற்றதீரோ தம்முத்தி  
நான்ற மலர்ப்பதத்தே நாடு.

(படைத்தல். காத்தல். அழித்தல். மறைத்தல். அருளல்.)

## Lord Shiva (The Cosmic Dancer)



Sekkizhar

Divine Poet

(Author of *Periya Puranam*)

## Foreword

The glory of the devotees of the Lord knows no limits. Their number knows no limits. Yet impelled by limitless desire, I shall speak of them, says Sekkizhar in an introductory verse to his *Tiruthondarpu-ranam*, popularly known as the *Periya Puranam*. The theme being a great one viz., the lives of the devotees, the readers will correspondingly understand its spirit. The deeper they enter into the spirit of it, the greater will be their understanding of its significance. With this expectation Sekkizhar proceeds with his narrative.

Who are the devotees? What are their characteristics? Sekkizhar gives a brief general sketch under the heading *Tirukkuttachchirappu* (The excellence of the Sacred Company). Called by the Lord to His service there were those whose body and mind were suffused with love and trembling, those who did manual labour (for the Lord and His devotees) and countless others besides. The sacred ashes they wore were white, reflecting the purity of their character. Even if the elements went contrary to their nature, these devotees never wavered in their adherence to the flowery feet of their Lord. They pursued the path of steadfast love to the Lord. They were persons of lofty, blameless character. Their wealth, being spiritual, was beyond the vicissitudes of gain and loss. They treated alike a piece of gold and a potsherd. Worshipping the Lord in love that welled forth in them, they had the spiritual strength not to care even for release. Their ornament was the sacred bead, their dress was a simple piece of cloth. Their concern was nothing other than service to their Lord. Their love was unquenchable. Wants they had none.

The devotees having these characteristics were of both sexes, of all castes and professions, of all age groups, of great learning or none at all. Yet what bound them together was their total devotion

to the Lord and His saints. They allowed nothing to come between them and their total devotion. Completely rooting out all sense of 'I' and 'mine', they considered themselves and all they had as the property of God and His saints. They were the possessed – He and His devotees their possessor. Actuated by such a spirit of dedication, they did mighty things for the Lord, as well as apparently trifling and commonplace things. Here again it was not *what* they did, but *how* they did that mattered. In plain narrative in prose, especially in translation into a foreign language, some of the accounts might appear crude and shocking. But such is not the impression if one goes through Sekkizhar's *Periapuranam*. He makes us feel the greatness of the devotees not only by his literary genius but also by his spiritual rapport with that glorious band. It is worthwhile recalling that there is specific mention of this glorious band as including others not mentioned in the narrative, 'the devotees beyond – who are at the feet of the Lord' – beyond the geographical limits of Tamilnadu and beyond the time span of the narrative – in brief, the devotees of all countries and of all times. There is thus a spiritual confederation with retrospective and prospective membership open to all devotees.

Anyone going through the *Periapuranam* is bound to feel a strong desire to make this treasure-trove available to non-Tamils. But who could muster courage to translate it, especially into a non-Indian language? There is such a thing as the genius of a language. The translator must be proficient in the language of the original and that into which it is rendered. Above all, in regard to a religious classic like the *Periapuranam*, the translator must be a person of spiritual attainments as well. In 1970, to the credit of Mr. V. Subbiah Pillai, he has been able to persuade Kavi Yogi Maharishi Sudhananda Bharati to give us an English version of the *Periapuranam*. Those who have enjoyed the writings of the Maharishi in

Tamil know that he is a poet of a high order, and that his compositions bear the stamp of his lifelong sadhana and attainments. He has sought to capture the spirit of the *Periapuranam* in his English version. May this work find an ever-widening circle of readers!

Professor of Philosophy, University of Madras, Madras

V. A. Devasenapathi

# The Author's Introduction

## A Universal Scripture

### 1. A vast question

Since the dawn of history, there is a mystery behind human life. There is an insight behind the eyesight. That ethereal vault above seems a vast question mark, demanding this fair earth below, "who am I and who are you?" Between 'That and This', between 'I and you' the truth of our being struggles for an expression.

The twinkling stellar beauty walks with the assemblage to the rhythm of a mystic Aum. Two million light years stand between one assemblage and the other and yet how they keep time to the mystic rhythm of their ages of arrayed march! Who has set on march these stars in the car of Time? The tossing billows play like laughing children bubbling with moon-kissed ecstasy. What is the secret of their delight? The sun from above paints the earth green and gold, with the touch of its colourful rays. The fair fertile world is a feast for the eye and the heart.

### 2. Human brain

But does man enjoy this poem of beauty and harmony in Nature? Does he taste the sweet fountain of Existence. No, like Tantalus in dark Tartarus, his eager hopes are disappointed. Like Thomson's *Hound of Heaven*, he is hounded by the eternal question of who, what, wherefore and why am I? The imperfect human brain caught in this conundrum builds mystic labelled creeds.

### 3. Philosophy develops

Man has developed round this question ontology to probe into the science of pure being, metaphysics to enquire into the ultimate

nature of beings, cosmology which explains what the universe is, epistemology which treats on the finale of things and teleology which tells us about the final cause of things. Man comes to the conclusion that the flux of things and beings begin from God and end in Him. There are, on the other hand, Hylozoistics who maintain that there is no God but matter and the universe. The Utilitarian philosophy tries to confer good for all. The Ionian and the Hebrew philosophies maintain that all things flow from the original Divine Fire. The Divine Fire that burst out before Moses voiced out a truth: "I am as I am – I am that I am." Jesus says: "He that has seen me has seen the Father. I am in the Father and the Father is in me".

But through all these ramified ideologies, man is yet to find a pivotal factor which accords unity of faiths and oneness of God in a broad spiritual integration.

#### 4. Saivism, the solution

Saint Tirumular comes to our rescue, maintaining "God is unique, mankind is one in Him." Tirumular maintains the truth. "He is the fire, the sky, the wind, the water, and the earth. He is everywhere, everything. He is the Life of lives, He is Shiva in the Jiva. He is in the heart that feels him. Like sweetness in honey, He is in the soul. Adore Him! Love Him, serve Him, in all – for all are moving temples of God." Saivism is thus the solution that solves cosmic riddles.

This ultimate realisation of sages and prophets is the heart of Saivism, which is the synthetic religion *par excellence*. It considers all souls as one in God. The God lover surrenders to Him, declaring 'Aum Nama Sivaya.' He meditates on Him in his heart with the mantra Sivoham (what is in I is Shiva). He sees Him everywhere with the mantra Sivamayam, everything is pervaded by Shiva. Saivism considers universe as His temple, the collective soul as His form, love as religion and service to fellow beings as worship. The joy of seeing all happy is the bliss of existence.

## 5. Socrates to Kant

Socrates started the fundamental question, “Who are you?” Plato probed into the question and found out the Divine Essence of life and declared: “To be as good as God is the summum bonum of life. God and the highest good are one.” The touchstone of western intellectualism is Kant’s thought of “The Thing That is.”

## 6. His will acts

Manicca Vachakar sat in silent seclusion and enquired within himself: “Who am I, what am I, what is this heart, what is wisdom, who cognises me?” He arrived at the great answer: “God is – everything is, for God is – God the Unique One unto Him I gave what I am and have. He has possessed me and His will acts in me.”

All contraries are reconciled in this absolute truth: “You, I and all are one in the Unique One – God.”

## 7. Four steps

Saivism prescribes four sadhanas or practices for the God-ward elan of the human soul caught in the meshes of mental modifications.

(1) *Charya* – moral purity (2) *Kirya* prayer, worship and holy service (3) *Yoga*, inner communion and meditation and (4) *Jnana* Self knowledge and identification.

These lead the soul step by step to the bliss of Shiva. The pure soul glows with the divine light, like a gem in the jewel, heat in the red-hot iron, salt in the ocean and scent in the flower.

The four steps are exemplified in Appar, Sambandar, Sundarar and Manicca Vachakar. The divine grace descended into these souls of spiritual fervour and enabled them to love God in the heart and serve humanity in the world.

## 8. Cosmic vision

Appar had the cosmic vision of Shiva and Shakti, God and His conscious energy, everywhere like fire in the wood, like ghee in the milk, like spark in the gem. Appar realised Shiva in the Jiva and the grace of Shiva acted through him for the good of humanity.

It is the grace that brought victory to the evangel of St. Sambandar. He sang: “Beings can live amicably in the world doing good. They can attain what they aspire for, only if they live like Shiva and Shakti united in the soul, only if they utter the mantra ‘Nama Sivaya’ with melting fervour and moving love.”

## 9. Surrender

Sundarar says: “To Thee I surrender; Thy will I follow. Even if I forget, my tongue is habituated to utter Thy mantra Nama Sivaya.” Manicca Vachakar says: “Tapas! Did I do anything of that sort? God made me mutter the mantra Sivaya Namaha. As I uttered this mantra with utter surrender, Shiva entered my heart and I feel Him there always and I am conscious of His grace that acts through my instrumentality.” This is the essence of Saivism exemplified by the sixty-three Nayanmars, whose history is a saga of sincere love and sacred sacrifice.

## 10. Dante’s Grace Light

Sekkizhar was the blessed sage who wove into a rich epic of Godmen, the life and sacrifice of these souls of Grace Light. Dante, who lived a century after Sekkizhar, breathed the same ideal when he addressed Beatrice, before the entrance of Paradise. “Through dark inferno and burning purgatory, I passed. The Divine Grace led me to the dawn of splendid Light, O, beatific smile of Grace Light. Gracious Light, lead me on; I follow thee. My pure heart sees thy immaculate beauty, o angel.” Grace Light is the guiding

force of the dedicated life of the sixty-three Nayanmars sung by the inspired muse of St. Sekkizhar.

## 11. Creative poet

Sekkizhar is a creative poet. Poetry is a great formative power, a vision of the inner reality embodied in a spontaneous flow of rhythmic expression. It is a garden of the beautiful breathing the aroma of the Supreme. It is a fountain of the Spirit flowing with the honey of divine bliss, cherishing the field of harmonised existence. Such is the poetic genius of St. Sekkizhar, a self revelatory rhythm of the real, high in emotion, deep in thought, far in vision, wide in movement and dynamic in effect.

Sekkizhar is not a mere composer. His lines are not mere array of words set to a metrical beat. It is not a Johnsonian jingle. It is a singer's harp, not a juggler's drum. Sekkizhar is a seer-poet, a messenger of Truth-Light, a mediator between soul and Shiva. His song falls from the soul's communion with Shiva, the Supreme. His poetic ecstasy opens human eyes to the wonderful vision of the divine in man.

## 12. Periapuranam

Sekkizhar's *Periapuranam*, sung between 1113 and 1150 AD, is the magnum opus of revelatory epics. He is a master hagiographer, and his *Periapuranam* is a masterpiece of the world's sacred literature. It is a world book of holy saints. It had the wonderful effect of checking alien inroads upon our pristine religion and giving an impetus to Saivism, which is a universal religion. It has the virtue of bringing together varieties of devoted souls on the same platform. Love of Shiva and service of His saints and devotees at any cost – these are the life-breath of sainthood, embalmed in Sekkizhar's epic of Saivism.

It brings before us the tragi-comic drama of human existence and shows how to edify and sublimise it by divine grace. Life begins with the Hamlet-like pessimism of “To be or not be” but ends with the halcyon optimism of how to be an eternal instrument of God’s grace, enjoying untrammelled peace and bliss. *Periapuranam* solves the riddle of existence and brings salvation by sincere egoless dedication of life to the love and service of God.

### 13. Shiva’s grace plays

The Infinite Shiva created this world for the play of His pure grace (Shuddha Shakti). The play of grace is promoted towards the liquidation of ignorance and impurities that hold the souls in bondage. Saivism calls humanity collectively to be conscious of the Divine dancing in every heart and live a life of faith and surrender to that omnipotent reality. The Divine Grace rescues faithful souls from the labyrinth of infernal miseries. It leads the evolution of the soul by a process of inner transformation to Shivahood.

### 14. Collective life in God

The transformed soul lives in a heaven of peace and bliss where woes of vital passions cease, where God alone is the king of beings, where beings are one body in God, where life is an afflorescence of divine grace, where spiritual socialism unites all in inner communion with the Unique One. It transcends the barriers and frontiers of caste, creed, race and nationality and unites in its ecstatic rhapsody, Nanda the Harijan, Kannappar the hunter, Paanar the lutist, Ayanar the flutist, Iyarpakai the merchant, Mara the agriculturist, Enathi the swordsman, Kurippu the washerman, Dandi the digger, Kaliyan the oil-man, Kotpuli the warrior, Adipatha the fisherman, Murkha the gambler, Sakya the pedlar, Nilkanta the potter, Nedumaran the king, Kulachirai the premier, Mangayarkarasi the queen, Siruthondar the hero-saint, Appar the Vellala, Sambandar the Andanar, Sundarar the

adi saiva, Cheraman the royal saint – all these devotees are held in equal respect and God is adored above all. Saivism does not build any personality cult, any religion round personalities and their miracles. The galaxy of Nayanmars consists of 4 adi saivas, 13 marayore, 6 kings, 5 chieftains, 5 merchants, 13 vellalas, 2 shepherds, 1 potter, 1 fisherman, 1 hunter, 1 nadar, 1 weaver, 1 oilman, 1 washerman, 1 Harijan, and 6 saints of unknown rank. Thirty among these adored Shiva Lingam, twelve adored the Guru, and nineteen served God-lovers. All are equal and all are honoured irrespective of their birth and pedigree.

## 15. Their times

These Nayanmars lived between AD 400 and 865 AD. 825 was the year when Cheraman Perumal left for Mt. Kailash along with St. Sundarar. Appar lived 81 years, Sambandar 16, (AD 640-656), Sundarar 18 years. Appar lived during the time of two Pallava kings – Mahendra Varman and Narasimha Varman.

Appar and Sambandar lived between AD 580-656. Appar sang in 128 temples and Sambandar in 219 temples. There were more than 300 Shiva temples during their time. It was their wonderful songs that lit the lamp of glory in those temples and kept them burning forever. Sundarar lived during the time of Nandi Varman (AD 840-865).

## 16. Heyday of Saivism

Appar and Sambandar did all the spade work and established Saivism on a strong foundation, quelling by the Divine Grace all the opposing forces. Saivism flourished with added momentum and Sundarar had a smooth way though the spiritual concord that prevailed in the land. The heyday of Saivism began with the victory of Jnanasambandar in Madurai. The Chera, Chola, Pandya, and Pallava

kingdoms patronised Saivism and beautiful temples were built in which were installed the images of Nayanmars. There was unity of consciousness. Nambiandar Nambi rose up 150 years after Sundarar, with his Andadi recounting the glorious deeds of the sixty-three Nayanmars adored by Sundarar in his famous song.

The spiritual fervour and service-ardour of the Nayanmars touched the heart of the nation and kindled flames of love and devotion. The Thevaram hymns were sung with moving fervour. Even the Saiva-Vaishnava dichotomy was cemented by the spiritual solidarity established by a sense of national heritage. Nataraja and Govindaraja were adored in the same temple.

### 17. Advent of Sekkizhar

The advent of Sekkizhar was a crowning victory to Saivism. It was a splendid fulfilment of the vision of the Nayanmars. The evolutionary steps of Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar reached a revolutionary consummation in awakening the spirit of the Nayanmars in the heart of Saivites. People wondered at the bold sacrifice of Nayanmars in the service of devotees.

### 18. Sacrifice, sacrifice!

O, what a sacrifice! Can anyone give his charming wife to a guest? St. Iyarpakai did that! Can sacrifice go beyond the terrible extent of slicing one's dear son to prepare a dish for a hungry monk for he demanded only the tender flesh of a child? Yes, it was Chirutondar who did it boldly and coolly. Can any host dare the dark raining midnight into fields, to gather the paddy just sown, to cook food for a hungry sage? Mara Nayanar did that. Can anyone give the beautiful ringlets of his dear daughter just before her wedding day to a sage who wanted it? Manakkan Chara Nayanar, an army commander, cut the hair of her fair daughter and gave it to the sage. Can anyone offer his eyes to a bleeding Lingam? The hunter-devotee

Kannappan did that. Can any saint undergo unscathed the terrible ordeals of being slaked in a lime kiln, poisoned and thrown into the sea tied to a stone? St. Thirunavukarasar met those ordeals and proved the protective power of Shiva's grace.

“He is father, mother, brother – He who has created the three worlds – He is the unseen protector behind my dedicated life – mine is to sing and serve. The rest depends upon His will,” sings Appar. But all these ordeals were only tests of their faith and God saved them for His service.

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