

The Yoga of Siddha Avvai



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4. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF AVVAIYAR

Avvaiyār in this period was a staunch devotee of Muruga, the favorite god of the Tamils. Avvai was a great genius and also proud. In order to bring her to senses, the legend displays that Muruga in the form of a hunter boy, seated on a *jambu* tree (jaumoon-plum), waiting for the arrival of Avvai. She came on the way and was very thirsty and hungry. She entreated the young boy (Muruga) to offer her some jambu fruits. The clever youth asked her whether she needed a hot fruit or cold one. She could not comprehend what is meant by hot fruit and cold fruit. Nevertheless, she asked him to offer a hot fruit. The boy shook the bough and the fruits dropped on the sand below. She picked up the sandy fruits. Before eating she blew hard to remove the sand clinging with them. On seeing her act, the boy questioned her whether the fruits were too hot to eat. At this flash of wit, she came to her senses and her pride subdued.³⁷ She realized that the boy who conversed with her was not an ordinary human being and he should be the youthful Muruga. Consequently, Lord Muruga revealed His real form and blessed her. However, He liked her sweet Tamil and hence put forth some questions in order to expose her wit and wisdom to others. Her songs in reply convey lofty thoughts and noble sentiments. The substance of one such discourse indirectly helps us to fix her age also. Let us consider it.

It is said that Muruga questioned Avvai, as to which was the greatest thing in the world. The substance of her reply in the form of a lengthy poem is presented here below.

Oh Lord with the shining lance!
If you ask me which is great,
My reply follows:
The earth is great;
Since it is the creation of Nāṇmugaṇ (Brahmā),
He is greater than the earth;
For Brahma is the offspring of Tirumāl (Viṣṇu),
Tirumāl is greater than his son;
Since the milk of sea,
Which was the bed for Tirumāl,

Was consumed by Sage Agattiyar,
He is greater than Tirumāl;
The dwarf sage (Agattiyar) was born
In an earthen vessel,
Which is nothing but a tiny sand
In the entire mass of earth.
Hence, earth is greater than the sage;
Since the earth is supported by the serpent (Adiseṣa),
It is greater;
The serpent becomes a small ring
To Umādevi and hence she is greater;
Since she is absorbed in Śiva's body
He is greater;
Since Śiva abides in the hearts of devotees,
They are the greatest;
The greatness of devotees ever increases to expatiate.³⁸

The lengthy stanza of Avvaiyār as the devotee of Muruga indicates the time when she witnessed the legends of the Śaiva devotees. It may be taken as an indirect reference to *Peria-purāṇam*, indited by Cēkkiḷār who named it *Tiru-t-tonḍar Purāṇam*. The narrative is an excellent hagiology of sixty-three individual devotees and nine-fold group-devotees, all ardent votaries of Lord Śiva. Avvai's words, *tonḍar tam perumai collavum peridē* may be taken as a reference to *Peria-purāṇam*, presented before the learned gathering at the vast thousand pillar hall of Chidambaram in the presence of Kulōttuṅga Cōlā-II, the son of Vikrama Cōlā. If the passage under reference would be treated as an allusion to the hagiology of Śaiva Saints, penned by Cēkkiḷār, then there is little doubt to place Avvai-III in the 12th century A.D. The other anecdotes, enumerated already, strengthened this conclusion.

There are some more verses, in the form of reply to the queries of the hunter-boy (Muruga), which deserve special mention. He asked which was the most cruel affliction in life. The reply followed:

Oh Lord with the long and wrathful spear!
If you ask me which is hard,

Follows my response:
Poverty is hard and cruel;
Harder is the poverty in youth;
Incurable disease is harder still;
Kindless wives are harder than disease;
The hardest of all is to be fed by them.³⁹

Through this verse, Avvai communicates some realities of life gathered from her keen observations of the society. Money is essential for happy living. Health is also an important factor. Above all, kindness of the better half (wife) is very much essential for a happy and harmonious living.

The next question was with regard to the most pleasant and sweet. Avvai's enunciation is conveyed here below:

Solitude is sweet;
Sweeter is the worship of Supreme;
Still sweeter is the company of scholars;
The sweetest of all is to see them,
In dream and real life.⁴⁰

Finally, Avvai envisaged that the company of scholars (pandits, wise persons and jñānis) and their intimacy were essential for leading a perfect life.

One more question was there with regard to the most rarity in the world. After reflection, Avvai responded:

Oh Lord with sharp spear!
Rare is the human birth;
Rarer is the same without defect,
Such as hump, blind, deaf etc.;
Even if one gets defectless birth,
The attainment of wisdom and learning
Is still rarer;
Even if one attains them,

Rarest is to exercise charity and penance;
If one performs the two,
Heaven will certainly open its entrance.⁴¹

Avvaiyār reveals the significance of human birth that too without any defect. Wisdom and knowledge are the privileged possession only of human beings. Man should advance in his journey. Humanism requires to lend a helping hand to the destitute and poor. Avvaiyār stresses on the necessity of doing charity. Penance is meant for one's own spiritual perfection. All lessons for an ethical life are enunciated by her.

Many of her quatrains are collected in the later anthologies. Let us peep into a few of them to appreciate her wit and wisdom.

Good habits bring perfection. Good painting is the result of the routine exercise of one's hand. Due to constant reading, one masters classical Tamil. Memorizing is the root for education. The beauty of gait results out of daily walk. The sense of giving should be ingrained in man.⁴²

Avvaiyār also thought about excellence in every walk of life. One among the hundred lauds the assembly of scholars. One among the thousand becomes a scholar. One among the ten thousand becomes an orator. However one among the crore becomes a philanthropist.⁴³

Her conception of excellence reveals the social condition of the period. She was aware of the limitless and boundless nature of learning. The pundits of her times boasted that they had erudition in all branches of knowledge. In order to subdue their pride and put an end to their arrogance, she exhorted them in the following way:

Oh scholars! Don't call for sheer wager. You should know that an ant also has a body of eight inches by the measure of its own hand! Even the Goddess of all arts continues learning, thinking that what is learnt is the measure of handful sand, what is left out is the size of the earth.⁴⁴

The verse under reference is a proof for her valuable estimate of education and learning. In continuation, she argued that one was a specialist in a specific discipline, while others in other areas. Everybody was strong in his subject. So, one should not be arrogant and boast for himself. She produced some examples to support her view. The nest of a sparrow, the wax of termites, the hive of the bees and the net of the spider could not be created by anybody else. Every species in the nature possesses its own capacity and unique power. Therefore, one should not belittle the specialty of others.⁴⁵

Avvaiyār also was an adept to project some facts using the technique of contrast. She enlisted four points for one's reflection. The greatness of shadow would be understood if one stood under the scorching sun. The greatness of Śiva's grace was known at the removal of evil effect. The rarity of Tamil should be seen in *Tiru-k-kuraḷ* and *Nālaḍiyār*. The uniqueness of the gift of Cōmaṇ (a philanthropist) would be understood if one met the mean miser.⁴⁶ However, some scholars considered that in the original verse, instead of *Tiru-k-kuraḷ* and *Nālaḍiyār* there should have been a word denoting Sanskrit. Then only the technique of contrast would become complete. Then, the substance of the passage would be: The rarity of Tamil should be understood, if one studied Sanskrit.

Transformation of one thing into an entirely different thing is impossible. Nature could not alter its quality. Avvaiyār felt that the dullards could never be corrected. To emphasise this fact, she produces fresh similes worth mentioning. She puts them into the interrogative structure: Is it possible to convert a banyan tree into a jack tree? Would it be possible to straighten the tail of a cur? On seeing a parrot speaking, is there any body to make the crow speak? Certainly not. So also the imbeciles could not be perfected.⁴⁷

Avvaiyār studied the behaviours and attitudes of the individuals very well. On her personal experience with different strata of people she came to the conclusion that all the types of human kind could be conveniently classified into three divisions or groups. The most exemplary and exalted

type of people are those who act in the right way and who are liberal in their outlook and deed. These people perform meritorious deeds, even if they are not asked for. They are named the great (*periyar*). The second group of people perform virtuous acts only on the advice of the elders and seniors. They are named the little (*ciriyar*). The third and the last division of people do not perform any worthy deed, even if they are asked for. They are called the low (*kayavar*). To explicate these three types of people Avvaiyār produced three apt analogies from the flora.

There are three kinds of trees. One of them would not blossom, but yield fruits. For this variety, the jacktree stands a solid instance. Another type of tree blossoms and then yields fruits like the mango. The third variety blossoms but never yields any fruit. For this type, *pādiri* tree (yellow-flowered fragrant trumpet-flower tree, i.e., *Stereos permum chelonoides*) is cited a good example.

The triple category of people corresponded to the three-fold type of trees, as noted above. In the poems of Avvai, the tree analogy seems to be a common phenomenon, as we have noticed some of this sort already.⁴⁸

The concept of *puruṣārtha* is a pan-Indian thought, since it has been expressed by almost all Indian moralists and poets of all the prominent languages. Avvaiyār also dealt with the concept. Before elucidating her viewpoint, let us say a few words about *puruṣārtha* and its relation to human perfection. *Puruṣārtha* denotes the main objectives to be attained by the people in their earthly existence. It aims to the development of human values leading to perfection. According to the Indian tradition, an individual should live for the attainment of virtue (*dharma*, *aṛam*), wealth (*artha*, *poruḷ*), pleasure (*kāma*, *inbam*) and bliss (*mokṣa*, *vīḍu*). These four objects are essential for the four-fold perfections of human life. Among the four, wealth is the primary requisite to fulfill the physical needs such as food, dress, shelter, medicine and vehicle. For the physical perfection, wealth is considered to be the foremost *puruṣārtha*. Man is a rational animal, endowed with the rare faculty of discriminating between the

good and bad, right and wrong, virtue and vice. So, for the mental perfection the acquisition of ethical values (*dharmā*) is very essential. The human emotions are softened and sublimated by the cultivation of love. For the emotional perfection, the acquisition of love (*kāma*) is of paramount importance. Thus wealth, virtue and love constitute the *tri-varga* (*mu-p-pāl*), contributing to the excellence of earthly life. The fourth aspect viz., *mokṣa*, is considered to be the *parama-puruṣārtha*, since it culminates in the acquisition of spiritual perfection. All the four objectives are collectively called *catur-varga* (*nārṇpāl*).

It is pertinent to note that the concept of *catur-varga* has been exquisitely explicated by Avvaiyār in a quatrain. The substance of the verse is presented here:

Virtue (*aram*) mainly consisted in exercising charity. Wealth should be accumulated through righteous means, completely discarding the evil ways. Pleasure indicates the conjugal life of the couple with full understanding and harmonious blending. After the attainment of all the three ends of life, at one stage one should leave them completely in preference to the enduring thought of the Supreme, and this liberated state is deemed to be the supreme excellence. The concept of *catur-varga*, as instructed by Avvaiyār is very significant.⁴⁹

Such sayings and statements are many. She has also composed poems on some chieftains of medieval period, requiring a separate study. Her poetical works *Acadi-k-kōvai*, *Nannūl Kōvai*, *Pandan Andādi*, etc., have dwindled into oblivion.⁵⁰

To sum up: in the historical march of Tamil literature, a poetess named Avvai lived and wrote during the Saṅgam period (100 B.C.—100 A.D.), of secular affairs; during the 8th century A.D. as a Siddha and devotee of Vināyaka wrote about Kuṇḍalinī-Yoga and authored *Vināyakar Akaval* and *Avvai-k-kural*; and during the period of later Cōlā kings (1125—1200 A.D.), wrote manuals and epigrams of ethics and expressed her devotion to Muruga. Her works are cited by her fellow Yoga-Siddhas

and down to the present day by children and adults alike, indicating the great value which they have held for Tamil speaking people for more than 1,300 years.

TRANSLATION OF THE VINĀYAKAR AKAVAL

The Significance of the *Vināyakar Akaval*

The *Vināyakar Akaval* is the poetical expression of Avvaiyār's mystical experience. It is both a *stotra* (devotional poem) and śāstra (canonical text). It is a continuous poem of seventy-two metrical lines, saturated with devotional fervor and philosophical insight. The Śaivites recite the poem with ardent piety in their daily worship. They believe that the poem possesses māntric potency, bringing to the devotee the benign grace of Vināyaka.

In the tradition of the Siddhas, Vināyaka is regarded to be the personification of the sound of Aum, the Praṇava or *Aumkāra*, and the Lord of the mūlādhāra, where He resides. Bhadragiriyār longed for the day when he could surrender himself at the lotus feet of Gaṇapati (Vināyaka), residing at the end of the mūlādhāra (*Mey-jñāna-p-pulampal*, 66). Through self-surrender one wins the grace and the blessings of Vināyaka necessary for the sādhanika to evoke the primordial energy of this cakṛa, known as kuṇḍalinī-śakti, which then passes through the six-fold ādhāras, and finally uniting with the thousand-petalled lotus. When this occurs an *aṃṛta* or ambrosial nectar is secreted at the back of the throat, absorbing which one reaches immortality. Avvaiyār attained this rare experience, which is beautifully presented in the *Akaval*. *Vināyakar Akaval* is both the spiritual autobiography of Avvaiyār, and her mystical experience of samādhi as well.

In this poem, the opening portion is a delightful description of Vināyaka. Avvaiyār pleasantly projects the divine personality of Vināyaka,

as envisioned in her Yogic perception. Then follows the bestowal of grace by Vināyaka in the form of a divine mother. She has vividly portrayed Vināyaka manifesting Himself as a preceptor who initiated her into spiritual wisdom and the practice of Kuṇḍalinī-Yoga. The poem is an ecstatic narration of her spiritual progress culminating in complete liberation, while she was alive in her physical frame.

The Text with Transliteration

சீதக் களபச் செந்தா மரைம்பூம்
cīda-k-kaḷaba-c-centā marai-p-pūm

பாதச் சிலம்பு பலவிசை பாடம்
pāda-c-cilambu pala-v-icai pāda-p

பொன்னரை ஞாணும் பூந்துகில் ஆடைம்ம்
poṇ-ṇ-arai jñāṇum pū-n-tugil āḍaiyum

வன்ன மருங்கில் வளர்ந்த(து) அழ(கு) எறிம்பம்
vaṇṇa maruṅgil vaḷarnd(u) aḷag(u) eṛippa-p

பேழை வயிறும் பெரும்பார்க் கோடும்
pēlai vayirum peru-m-bāra-k-kōḍum

5

வேழ முகமும் விளங்குசிந் தூரமும்
vēḷa mugamum viḷaṅgucin dūramum

அஞ்சு கரமும் அங்குச பாசமும்
añcu karamum aṅguca pācamum

நெஞ்சில் குடிகொம்ட ம்ல மேனிம்ம்
neñcil kuḍikoṇḍa m̃la mēṇiyum

நான்ற வாம்ம் நாலிரு புயமும்
nāṇra vāyūm nāliru puyamum

மூன்று கம்ணும் மும்மதச் சுவடும்
mūṇru kaṇṇum mu-m-mada-c-cuvaḍum

10

இரம்டு செவிம்ம் இலங்குபொன் முடிம்ம்
iraṇḍu cevium ilaṅgupoṇ muḍiyum

திரம்டமும் புரிமில் திகழ்ஒளி மார்பும்
tiraṇḍamu-p-purinūl tigaḷoḷi mārbum

சொற்பதம் கடந்த தூரியமெய்ஞ் ஞான
corpadam kaḍanda turiyameyjn̄ jñāṇa

அற்புதம் நின்ற கற்பகக் களிறே!
arpudam ninra karpaga-k-kalirē!

மும்பழம் ம்கரும் மூடிக வாகன!
mu-p-palam nugarum mūḍiga vaḡana!

15

இம்பொழு(து) என்னை ஆட்கொள வேம்டித்
i-p-polud(u) ennai āṭkoḷa vēṇḍi-t

தாயாய் எனக்குத் தானெழுந்(து) அருளி
tāyāy enakku-t-tānelund(u) aruḷi

மாயாம் பிறவி மயக்கம் அறுத்துத்
māyā-p-piravi mayakkam aruttu-t

திருந்திய முதல்ஐந்(து) எழுத்தும் தெளிவாய்ம்
tirundiya mutalaind(u) eluttum telivāy-p

பொருந்தவே வந்(து)என் உளம்தனில் புகுந்து
porundavē vand(u)en uḷamtanil pugundu

20

குருவடி(வு) ஆகிக் குவலயம் தன்னில்
kuruvadiṽ(u) āgi-k-kuvalayam tannil

திருவடி வைத்துத் திறம்இது பொருள்ளன
tiru-v-adi vaittu-t-tiramidu porulēna

வாடா வகைதான் மகிழ்ந்(து) எனக்(கு) அருளிக்
vāḍā vagaidāṇ magilnd(u) enakk(u) aruḷi-k

கோடா ம்தத்தால் கொடுவினை களைந்தே
kōḍā yudattāl koḍuvinaṇai kaḷaindē

உவட்டா உபதேசம் புகட்டிஎன் செவியில்
uvaṭṭā ubadēcam pugattien̄ ceviiḷ

25

தெவிட்டாத ஞானத் தெளிவம்ம் காட்டி
teviṭṭāda jñāna-t-telivaiyum kāṭṭi

ஐம்புலன் தன்னை அடக்கும் உபாயம்
ai-m-pulaṇ tannai aḍakkum ubāyam

இன்புறு கருணையின் இனி(து) எனக்(கு) அருளி
inburu karuṇai-y-in inid(u) enakk(u) aruḷi

கருவிகள் ஒடுங்கும் கருத்தினை அறிவித்(து)
karuvigaḷ oḍuṅgum karuttiṇai arivitt(u)

இருவினை தன்னை அறுத்(து)இருள் கடிந்து
iruvinaṭ tannai arutt(u)iruḷ kaḍindu

30

தலம்ஒரு நான்கும் தந்(து)எனக்(கு) அருளி
talam oru nāṅgum tand(u) enakk(u) aruḷi

மலம் ஒரு மூன்றின் மயக்கம் அறுத்தே
malam oru mūṇriṇ mayakkam aruttē

ஒன்பது வாயில் ஒருமந் திரத்தால்
onpadu vāyil oruman dirattāl

ஐம்புலக் கதவை அடைம்பதும் காட்டி
ai-m-pula-k-kadavai aḍaippardum kāṭṭi

ஆ(று)ஆ தாரத்(து) அங்கிசை நிலைம்ம்
āṛ(u)ā dāratt(u) aṅgicai nilaiyum

35

பேறா நிறுத்தும் பேச்(சு)உரை அறுத்தே
pērā niruttu-p-pēcc(u) urai aruttē

இடைபிங் கலையின் எழுத்(து)அறி வித்துக்
Idaipiṇ galaṭiyiṇ elutt(u)ari vittu-k

கடையில் சுழுமுனைக் கபாலமும் காட்டி
kaḍaiyil culumunai-k-kabālamum kāṭṭi

மூன்றாமம் டலத்தின் முட்டிய தூணின்
mūṇrumaṇ ḍalattin muṭṭiya tūṇin

நான்(று)எழு பார்பின் நாவில் உணர்த்தி <i>nāṇr(u)eḷu pāmbiṇ nāvil uṇartti</i>	40
கும்டலி யதனில் கூடிய அசபை <i>kuṇṭali-y-adanil kūḍiya acabai</i>	
விம்டெழு மந்திரம் வெளிம்பட உரைத்து <i>viṇḍeḷu mandiram veli-p-paḍa uraittu</i>	
மூலா தாரத்தின் மும்(டு)எழு கனலைக் <i>mūlā dāratṭiṇ mūṇḍ(u)eḷu kaṇalai-k</i>	
காலால் எழும்பும் கருத்து)அறி வித்தே <i>kālāl eḷuppum karutt(u)aṛi vittē</i>	
அமுத நிலைமம் ஆதித்தன் இயக்கமும் <i>amuda nilaiyum ādittan iyakkamum</i>	45
குமுத சகாயன் குணத்தைமம் கூறி <i>kumuda caḡāyaṇ kuṇattaiyum kūri</i>	
இடைச்சக் கரத்தின் ஈரெட்டு நிலைமம் <i>Idai-c-cak karattin īreṭṭu nilaiyum</i>	
உடற்சக் கரத்தின் உறும்பைமம் காட்டிச் <i>uḍarcak karattin uruppaiyum kāṭṭi-c</i>	
சம்முக தூலமும் சதுர்முக சூக்கமும் <i>Caṇmuga tūlamum cadurmuga cūkkamum</i>	
எம்முக மாக இனி(து)எனக்(கு) அருளிம் <i>eṇmuga māga inid(u)eṇakk(u) aṛuḷi-p</i>	50
புரியட்ட காயம் புலம்பட எனக்குத் <i>puri-y-aṭṭa kāyam pula-p-paḍa eṇakku-t</i>	
தெரியெட்டு நிலைமம் தெரிசனம் படுத்திக் <i>teri-y-eṭṭu nilaiyum tericaṇa-p-paḍutti-k</i>	
கருத்தினில் கபால வாயில் காட்டி <i>karuttinil kabāla vāyil kāṭṭi</i>	

இருத்தி முத்தி இனி(து) எனக்(கு) அருளி
irutti mutti inid(u) enakk(u) aruḷi

என்னை அறிவித்(து) எனக்(கு) அருள் செய்து
ennai arivitt(u) enakk(u) aruḷ ceydu

55

முன்னை வினையின் முதலைக் களைந்து
munnai vinaiyin mudalai-k-kalaindu

வாக்கும் மனமும் இல்லா மனோலயம்
vākkum maṇamum illā maṇōlayam

தேக்கியே என்றன் சிந்தை தெளிவித்(து)
tēkkiyē enraṇ cindai telivitt(u)

இருள்வெளி இரம்டுக்(கு) ஒன்றுஇடம் என்ன
iruḷveli iraṇḍukk(u) onr(u)idam enna

அருள்தரும் ஆனந்தத்(து) அழுத்திஎன் செவியில்
aruḷtarum ānandatt(u) aluttien ceviiḷ

60

எல்லை இல்லா ஆனந் தம்அளித்(து)
ellai illā āṇan dam alitt(u)

அல்லல் களைந்தே அருள்வழி காட்டிச்
allal kalaindē aruḷvali kāṭṭi-c

சத்தத்தி னுள்ளே சதாசிவம் காட்டிச்
cattattin ullē cadācivam kāṭṭi-c

சித்தத்தி னுள்ளே சிவலிங்கம் காட்டி
cittattin ullē civaliṅgam kāṭṭi

அணுவிற்(கு) அணுவாய் அம்பாலுக்(கு) அம்பாலாய்க்
aṇuvir(u) aṇuvāy appālukk(u) appālāy-k

65

கணுமுற்றி நின்ற கரும்புள்ளே காட்டி
kaṇumurri ninra karumbullē kāṭṭi

வேடமும் ம்றும் விளங்க நிறுத்திக்
vēḍamum m̥ṛum viḷaṅga nirutti-k

கூடுமெய்த் தொம்டர் குழாத்துடன் கூட்டி
kūḍumey-t-tonḍar kulāttuḍan kūṭṭi

அஞ்சக் கரத்தின் அரும்பொருள் தன்னை
añcak karattiṇ arumporuḷ tannai

நெஞ்சக் கருத்தின் நிலையறி வித்துத்
neñca-k-karuttiṇ nilai-y-aṛi vittu-t

70

தத்துவ நிலையைத் தந்(து)ளனை ஆம்ட
tattuva nilaiyai-t-tand(u)eṇai āṇḍa

வித்தக விநாயக! விரைகழல் சரணே.
vittaga vināyaka! viraikāḷal caraṇē.

Translation of the Text

The anklet of red lotus like feet,
 Cool as sandal paste, sings melodies;
 Gold band and flowery cloth
 Around the waist emit radiance and beauty;
 Box like belly and big weighty tusk

5

Elephant face with shining *tilak*,
 Five-fold hands with goad and rope
 Bluish body enshrined in the heart;
 Hanging mouth and eight-fold arms
 Three eyes and three-fold gland's, imprints;

10

Two ears and glowing gold crown
 Twisted thread three in the shining chest;
 Oh the wondrous celestial tree like Elephant,
 Being the fourth state of true knowledge, beyond word and speech,
 Oh the consumer of triple fruits, mounted on the *mūñjūru!*

15

To enslave me at present
 As a mother you came and showered grace on me,
 Cut asunder the delusion of endless birth
 To grasp the sense of perfect syllables five
 Thou hast entered into my heart,

20

Assuming the form of preceptor on earth Placed thy sacred feet to my delight Graciously taught me the real substance; Wiped out my evil by thy tusk-weapon Instructed in my ears insatiable lesson	25
Showed me distilled knowledge with endless taste; Out of mercy taught me pleasantly The means of controlling five subtle elements And ways of subduing the instruments; Thou hast cut asunder the two-fold deeds, dispelling darkness,	30
Blessed me with experience of four-fold states, Severed the delusion of triple impurities; Thou taught me the unique spell To shut the doors of five-fold subtle elements Effecting the closure of nine-fold gates;	35
The sound of six-fold ādhāras Is stopped; speech and word are cut off; Instructed me the letters of left and right channels, Showed me the central channel, linked with skull; Taught me the triple regions of the pillar	40
Where at its end hangs serpent's tongue; Explicitly spoke of <i>ajapa</i> spell Associated with the coiled power; Informed me the technique of air To arouse the surging fire of the root center;	45
Told me the center of nectar, The movement of sun and quality of moon; Showed me the sixteen centers of left portion And the components of human body; Graciously taught me the concrete form	50

Of six centers and subtlety of four instruments;
 Revealed me the subtle body of eight components
 And also the eight-fold states;
 Showed in my thought the gate to skull,
 Pleasantly bestowed me release while alive, 55

Showered grace to know my real self
 Plucked out the root of my past deeds;
 Clarified my thought with mind's absorption,
 Transcending the limits of speech and mind;
 Darkness and light have the same source—Thou hast said,
 Pushed me in the flood of bliss, due to grace
 Gave me limitless bliss to my ears;
 Showed me the path of grace, removing my distress
 Revealed me Sadaśiva within the sound
 And Śiva-līṅga in my consciousness, 65

Besides Thy immanence as primal atom and juice in sugarcane
 And Thy transcendence—beyond the beyond!
 You caused me joining the true devotees
 With Śiva's garb and sacred ashes;
 Taught me the rare sense of five syllables 70
 And gave me complete knowledge of evolutes
 Take refuge unto Thy holy feet, Oh dexterous Vināyaka!

Verse 1

சீதக் களபச் செந்தா மரைம்பூம்
cīda-k-kaḷaba-c-centā marai-p-pūm

பாதச் சிலம்பு பலவிசை பாடம்
pāda-c-cilambu pala-v-icai pāḍa-p

Word by word meaning

cīdam – coolness; *kaḷabam* – sandal paste; *cem* – red; *tāmarai* – lotus; *pū* – flower; *pādam* – foot; *cilambu* – anklet; *pala* – many; *icai* – melody; *pāḍa* – sing.

Summary

The anklet, adorning the red lotus-like feet (of Vināyaka) which are as cool as sandal paste, sings many a melody.

Commentary

The Lord's feet, being the symbol of wisdom and grace are compared to the red lotus flowers. Not only the devotional hymnists, but also the secular poets made it a literary convention of comparing lotus blossoms to the sacred feet of the Almighty. In the invocatory verse on Muruga to the Saṅgam Anthology *Kuruntogai*, the poet Perundēvaṇār has sung *tāmarai puraiyum kāmar cēvaḍi*—the beautiful red feet of Muruga are like the lotus (flowers). Cēkḷār, the author of *Periya-purāṇam* opens his hagiology with a salutation to Śiva. In that verse, he has made a mention to the lotus feet of Śiva.

The lotus flower excels in beauty, color, fragrance and attraction. Since the Lord's feet radiate brilliance and divine beauty attracting the devotee's attention, Avvai compared them to the lotus flowers. In *Tirumandiram*, it is said that Śiva's fragrance blossoms within the *jīva* just like the fragrance in the flower. Keeping the tradition in mind and also based on her own experience, the poetess has created the simile aptly to reveal the goodness of the Lord. She has also stated that the feet of Vināyaka are as cool as sandal paste. For those who are wearied in the troublesome journey of life, the Lord's feet alone provide cool shade of grace. Saint Appar compares the shade of the Lord's feet to the immaculate music of harp, enchanting evening moon, blowing breeze, the pleasant spring and beetle humming reservoir. All the mystics agree in one point, i.e., the Lord's feet, representing his wisdom and grace, are very cool and possess a soothing effect on the troubled mind.

Avvai also relates to the melodies of the anklet, worn on Vināyaka's feet. Again, this kind of anklet music is also an experience for the devoted aspirants, engrossed in Yoga. Cēramāṇ Perumāl, a contemporary of Cundarar and also Avvai adopted the means of Yoga to win the grace of Śiva. Cēkḷār mentioned that Cēramāṇ made it a habit to partake food

in the morning, only after hearing the anklet-melody of Śiva during his daily worship. Thus, it becomes clear that the hearing of sound was a mark of fruition of yogic worship as evidenced by Cēramāṇ and Avvai. Tirumūlar also enlisted various sounds to be heard on the eve of contemplative meditation.

Verse 2

பொன்னரை ஞாணும் பூந்துகில் ஆடைம்ம்

poṇ-ṇ-arai jñāṇum pū-n-tugil āḍaiyum

வன்ன மருங்கில் வளர்ந்த(து) அழ(கு) எறிம்பம்

vaṇṇa maruṅgil vaḷarnd(u) aḷag(u) eṛippa-p

Word by word meaning

poṇ – gold; *arai* – waist; *jñāṇum* – band (and); *pū* – flower, *tugil* – cloth; *āḍaiyum* – dress; *vaṇṇam* – beauty; *maruṅgil* – sides; *vaḷarndu* – grown; *aḷagu* – beauty; *eṛippa* – blaze.

Summary

In His waist, gold band shines forth. On all sides of His beautiful body, flowery cloth and dress emit growing radiance and beauty.

Commentary

After describing the sacred feet and anklet-melody of Lord Vināyaka, Avvai envisions the waistband, made up of glittering gold. The Tamil word *arai* etymologically denotes half. Since the waist is half of the body, the word *arai* in its extension of meaning denoted it.

The waistband is normally a serpent encircling the waist, as in the case of Śiva. Since the awakened kuṇḍalinī-śakti will manifest luminously in the maṇipūra-cakra, associated with the region of waist, the ornament encircling it is symbolic and serves to direct the same to higher regions beyond the maṇipūra. In the process of kuṇḍalinī's onward march, the central portion of the body emits rays of brilliance, very beautiful and powerful. Avvai conveys this message through her description of the Lord's waist, adorned with gold band and radiant dress.

Avvai is considered to be one of the most influential sages among the Tamil speaking people of south India. Her poems and literary works, dating from the first millennium of the modern era are recited by millions of Tamil speaking school children in south Asia to this day. A huge statue of her stands along Marina Beach Drive, in Chennai, along the shore of the Indian Ocean. The values and wisdom which her poems convey, however, has a source. It is this source which the present volume, *The Yoga of Siddha Avvai*, sheds much new light upon with the inclusion of her text *Vinayakar Akaval*. The author takes us on a literary, historical and spiritual tour of ancient Indian culture, and in so doing, helps us to understand her origins and greatness.

Like her illustrious forebearer, the Siddha Tiruvalluvar, whose influence on Tamil culture and values, through his classic *Tirukkural*, is universally acknowledged, Avvai was also a Siddha Yogi. While Tiruvalluvar was a disciple of Agastya, and brother disciple of Babaji Nagaraj, the originator of Kriya Yoga, Avvai claims that her Guru was the sound of Aum, the Pranava itself, personified in the form of Ganesa, who taught her Kundalini-Yoga. Her poetry invokes the presence of the Guru, and then ignites within the reader the flame of spiritual consciousness.

It also points to the esoteric practice of Kundalini-Yoga as the path that leads to enlightenment and God realization. Her's is a wonderful example of *arrupadai*, the Siddha's ideal of showing the path to others. If the purpose of human knowledge is to alleviate human suffering, then that knowledge or wisdom which eliminates suffering completely is the most valuable. Like all of the Siddhas, she shared her wisdom with this purpose. Their teachings are universal, non-sectarian, and very much needed in today's suffering world.

Students of Kriya-Yoga, Kundalini-Yoga, Jnana, and Tantra as well as devotees of Ganesa (Vinayakar) and students of Tamil literature and culture will all find much insight and greater understanding of their path as a result of studying this volume. Readers familiar with Avvai's moral sayings may be surprised to learn of the origins of her wisdom, and be inspired to apply themselves to Yogic sadhana.

—from the Foreword by M. Govindan Satchidananda

ISBN 1-895383-28-5



Babaji's Kriya Yoga
and Publications

The Yoga Siddha Research Center Publication Series No. 4