

Tirumurai

Dr. R. Saraswati Sainath

Tirumurai meaning “Sacred Text” is the collection of Tamil hymns on Lord Siva composed by saints called Nayanars who lived from 5-12 CE in Tamil speaking South India. The Nayanars are 63, including three women. 27 of these Nayanars have composed hymns on various Siva temples. These hymns have been grouped into 11 books and the twelfth is the hagiography of these saints—called Periya Puranam or Tiruttondar Puranam—written by Sekkilar in the twelfth century. These twelve books are referred to as “Panniru Tirumurai”. These saints came from all sections of society and recitation of these hymns forms an integral part of Siva temple worship in Tamilnadu.

Of these saints Tirujnanasambandar, Tirunavukkarasar or Appar, Sundarar and Manikkavasagar are considered important and they are referred to as Nalvar while the former three are referred to as Muvar. The hymns of Tirujnanasambandar are called as Tirukkadaikkappu, hymns of Appar are called Tevaram and the hymns of Sundarar are called Tiruppattu. Yet, the hymns of these three saints are popularly referred to as Tevaram.

These hymns were popular among people but their manuscripts were not available. The Chola king Abhayakulasekaran (circa. 870-907 CE) also called Raja Raja Chola was interested in securing them and sought the help of Nambi Andar Nambi of high spiritual excellence. Nambi Andar Nambi had the fortune of speaking to Lord Ganesa and receiving instruction on all branches of knowledge from him. Nambi Andar Nambi submitted to Ganesa who was the presiding

deity of Tirunaraiyur the question of finding Tirumurai manuscripts. The Lord in turn revealed to Nambi that the manuscripts of Tevaram hymns of the three saints are kept locked in a room to the west of the Chitrabalam at the Nataraja temple at Chidambaram with the handprints of the Tevaram saints.

When the king approached the priests of the temple, they told him that the room can be unlocked only when all the three Tevaram saints—Tirujnanasambandar, Tirunavukkarasar, and Sundarar—come in person. The wise king then made the golden statues of these saints and having installed life force in those statues, worshipped them and took them in a procession to the temple and proclaimed that the saints have arrived in person. The priests had no choice but to give the key to the locked room to the king. When they entered the room, they found the manuscript bundles covered in ant-hills. Hot oil was poured over the bundles. A majority of the hymns were lost. Most of the hymns are decades containing ten or eleven verses. Sambandar had composed 16,000 hymns, Appar 4900 hymns, and Sundarar 3800 hymns. Of these 795 hymns were recovered. The total number of verses composed by the Muvar was 10, 46, 000. Out of these 8,256 were recovered. When the king was dejected seeing the huge number of hymns that were lost, a divine voice consoled everyone that only the hymns that are needed for this time had been made available. The king yielding to the wish of God entrusted Nambi Andar Nambi with the job of classifying these hymns.

The Tevaram saints sang their hymns in ragas called Pan in Tamil. The King and Nambi Andar Nambi wanted to set these hymns back according to Pan. Hence they prayed to the God at Tiruverukkattampuliyur - the birthplace of Tirunilakantha Yalpanar, who accompanied Tirujnanasambandar and played his hymns on his musical instrument Yal—to bless them with the knowledge of Tevaram Pans. A divine voice asked them to take the help of a poetess who was a descendant of Tirunilakantha Yalpanar. The king invited the poetess to Chidambaram and she helped Nambi Andar Nambi to set music to the Tevaram hymns. He arranged the hymns based on Pans. This is called Pan Murai.

These Pans are 23 in number. Their names with corresponding raga names are as follows: 1. Sevvali (Yadukulakambodi) 2. Takkaragam (Kambodi) 3. Puranirmai (Bhupalam) 4. Pancamam (Agiri) 5. Nattapadai (Gambhira Nattai) 6. Andalak Kurinji (Sama) 7. Gandaram (Navaroj) 8 Kolli (Navaroj) 9. Kollik Kauvanam (Navaroj) 10. Palampanjuram (Sankarabharanam) 11. Megaragak Kurunji (Nilambari) 12. Palantakkaragam (Suddhasaveri) 13. Kurunji (Harikambodi) 14. Nattaragam (Panduvarali) 15. Vilayakkurunji (Saurashtram) 16. Sendurutti (Madhyamavati) 17. Takkesi (Kambodi) 18. Indalam (Nadanamakriya) 19. Gandaram (Kedaragowlai) 20. Kausigam (Bhairvi) 21. Piyandaik Kandaram (Navaroj) 22. Sigamaram (Nadanamakriya) 23. Sadari (Panduvarali).

The Tevaram hymns address the lord in 276 temples. These temples are called Devara Padal Petra Sthalangal. Hence there is

another arrangement of the hymns on the basis of temples. This is called Tala Murai. This arrangement begins with hymns in praise of the Chidambaram temple. Some scholars have arranged these hymns in historical order as well. This is called Varaltru Murai. This type of arrangement is also called Periyapurana Murai. The arrangement of the Tevaram hymns of the Muvar in Pan Murai as a single text is called Adangan Murai.

Nambi Andar Nambi grouped these hymns into eleven books. Hymns of Tirujnanasambandar formed the first three books, the next three were the hymns of Tirunavukkarasar and the seventh book contained the hymns of Sundarar. The hymns of Manikkavasagar occupied the eighth book. Books Nine and Eleven belonged to multiple authors. Tirumular's philosophical text Tirumantira—consisting of 3000 verses—was the tenth book. Nambi added his own compositions on Thirunaraiyur Ganesa, Tirujnanasambandar and Tirunavukkarasar to the eleventh book. One of his important compositions is the Tirut Tondar Tiruvandadi. Lord Siva provided the list of 63 Nayanars to Sundarar which the latter documented in eleven verses in his Tirutondat Togai. Nambi Andar Nambi elaborated this list in eighty-nine verses in his Tirut Tondar Tiruvandadi. Later on, Sekkilar composed the hagiography of these saints—consisting of 4286 verses—called Periyapuranam or Tirutondar Puranam. This was added as the twelfth Tirumurai. The total number of hymns available today is 936 consisting of 18,497 verses. The contents of these twelve Tirumurai can be represented in the following table:

| NO. | NAME OF THE HYMN | CONTRIBUTORS |
|-------|------------------|------------------------------|
| 1,2,3 | Tirukkadaikappu | Tirujnanasambandar |
| 4,5,6 | Tevaram | Tirunavukkarasar alias Appar |
| 7 | Tiruppattu | Sundarar |

| NO. | NAME OF THE HYMN | CONTRIBUTORS |
|-----|---|---|
| 8 | Tiruvagasam Tirukkovaiyar | Manikkavasagar |
| 9 | Tiruvisaippa Tiruppallaandu | 1. Tirumaligai Devar 2. Sendanar 3. Karuvur Devar 4. Punturutti Nambikadanambi 5. Kandaraditta Devar 6. Venattadigal 7. Tiruvaliyamudanar 8. Purudottama Nambi 9. Sedirayar 10. Sendanar |
| 10 | Tirumandiram | Tirumular |
| 11 | 1. Tirumugappasuram | 1. Tiruvalavayudaiyar |
| | 2. Tiruvalankaattu Mutta Tiruppadigam 3. Tiri Irattai Manimalai 4. Arpuda Tiruvandadi | 2. Karaikkal Ammaiyyar |
| | 5. Ksettira Tiruvenba | 3. Aiyadigal Kadavar Kon |
| | 6. Ponvannattu Andadi 7. Tiruvarur Mummanikkovai 8. Tirukkayilaya Jnana Ula | 4. Seraman Perumal Nayanar |
| | 9. Kayilaipadi Kalattipadi Andadi 10. Tiruinkoimalai Elupadu 11. Tiruvalanculi Mummanikkovai 12. Tiru Elu Kurru Irukkai 13. Perundevara Pani 14. Kobap Prasadam 15. Kar Ettu 16. Porri Tirukkali Venpa 17. Tirumurukarrupadai | 5. Nakkira Devar |
| | 19. Tiru Kannappa Devar Tirumaram | 6. Kallata Devar |
| | 20. Mutta Nayanar Tiru Irattai Manimalai 21. Sivaperuman Tiru Irattai Manimalai 22. Sivaperuman Tiruvandadi | 7. Kapila Devar |

| NO. | NAME OF THE HYMN | CONTRIBUTORS |
|-----|--|--------------------------|
| | 23. Sivaperuman Tiruvandadi | 8. Paranadevar |
| | 24. Sivaperuman Tiru Mummanikkovai | 9. Ilamperuman Adigal |
| | 25. Muttapillaiyar Tiru Mummanikkovai | 10. Adiravaigal |
| | 26. Koyil Nanmani Malai 27. Tirukkalumala Mummanikkovai 28. Tiruvidaimarudur Mummanikkovai 29. Tiru Ekambam Udaiyar Tiruvandadi 30. Tiruvorriyur Orupa Orupadu | 11. Pattinattu Pillaiyar |
| | 31. Tirunaraiyur Tiru Irattai Manimalai 32. Koyil Tiruppanniyar Viruttam 33. Tiruttondar Tiruvandadi 34. Aludaip Pillaiyar Tiruvandadi 35. Aludaip Pillaiyar Tiruccanbai Viruttam 36. Aludaip Pillaiyar Tirumummanikkovai 37. Aludaip Pillaiyar Tiruvula Malai 38. Aludaip Pillaiyar Tirukkalambakam 39. Aludaip Pillaiyar Tiruttogai 40. Tirunavukkarasu Devar Tiru Ekadasa Malai | 12. Nambi Andar Nambi |
| 12 | Periyapuranam or Tiruttondar Puranam | Sekkizhar |

The Tirumurais are the outpouring of the bhakti of the Nayanars. Through the aid of music the Nayanars, especially the Muvar, spread Saivism to the masses. These hymns form an integral part of the daily worship of the Saivas. By chanting these hymns devotees have all their wishes and needs fulfilled, and thus attain all the four human goals of dharma, artha, kama and moksha. The Tirumurais not only reveal the greatness of Siva devotees and their bhakti towards Siva, but they also form the basis of the Tamil Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy, a philosophical school that has its basic texts in Tamil rather than in Sanskrit.

Thus the Tirumurais enrich the classical Tamil language by rendering music, bhakti, and philosophy. It may be pointed out that bhakti originated in Tamil-speaking South India and a study of Tirumurais is indispensable for the study of the history of Hindu Religion and Philosophy.

Reference

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