



Thiruvempavai

Translated in to free verse

By

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The ancient Tamil Nadu saw two important Bhakthi movements , which most probably preceded the philosophical movements of Adi Sankara and Saint Ramanuja. The sentinels(sages) of Bhakthi movement worshipping Lord Shiva were called Nayanmars and those worshipping Lord Vishnu were called Azhwars. History records the story of 63 Nayanmars and their story is chronicled in a book called “Periya puranam(Big epic)” written by Chekizhar who was an eminent poet of those times. Among those 63 sages , four Natyanmars were the most important and they were Appar, Thirugnana Sambandar, Thirunavukkarsar and Manika Vasagar.All of them were great poets and traveled through out Tamil Nadu visiting the shiva temples and composing poems on the deities in each Temple.The work of Manika Vasagar who was a Kshatriya by caste is called as Thiru vasagam (Holy script).”Thiru Vasagathukku urugar Evvasagathukku Urugar” meaning,” those who do not melt for Thiruvagasam will never melt for any other book”, is a famous Tamil Saying of those times.

Thiruvempavai is a part of Thiruvagasam and was composed in the temple town of Thiruvannamalai during the month of Margazhi(December-january) when the temple town was celebrating the Pavai Nolumbu. This is a penance observed by unmarried girls of those times to get good husbands. The maids all wake up early , wake each other up and with song and dance go to the ponds and streams for bathing and then worship Pavai

(woman goddess) and request her to bless them with suitable husbands. These songs are sung by them during the festival on 10 days preceding the Thiruadhirai Nolumbu. The fact that during the coronation of the Kings of Thailand these are sung shows the importance people of those times attached to this song. The Tamil used was the ancient Tamil and though many words used during those times are common even today, the meanings of these are not that obvious. Each verse translated is preceded by the first few words of the Thiruvempavai verse to help in easy identification.

Adhiyum andhamum illa aru perum

We sang of that glorious light,
Which has no beginning and no end,
Oh you the girl who has broad , bright eyes,
Are you still asleep,
Did you not hear,
The songs that we sang ,
Praising the holy feet wearing.
Hero's anklets of Madhava¹, our Lord?
It is echoing in all the street,
One lady hearing our song,
Sobbed and sobbed and cried,
And another fell from her
Flower bedecked bed to a swoon,
Is this your state my friend,
Is this your nature, our lady.

1

Pasam param jothikenbai eraa pagal Naam

“Oh,pretty damsel,
You used to tell all of us then, .
That your love is only to the God,
Who is the primeval light.
Has it now by any chance,
Shifted to the flower decked bed of yours?”
“Oh my well dressed friends,
Is it the time to make fun and play?”
“He whom even the great devas of heaven,
Are wary to approach,
He who is the Lord of Shiva Loka²,
And he who is the God of Chidambara³,
Has come in person and waits,
To give us his grace.

¹ He who did great penance

² The world of Lord Shiva

³ The famous temple town of Tamil Nadu

And we who do not know anything of him,
But have only love for him,
Are we capable of singing his praise, Oh lady”

2

Muthanna Ven nagyai , mun vandu edhir ezhunden

⁴“Hey lady, with pearl like teeth,
You used to wake before us,
And talk sweetly,
Deep from your mind,
That he is our father,
He is the source of our happiness,
And he is nectar in person,
But now you are sleeping,
With not even opening the door”
“ My dear friends devoted to god,
Is it very bad,
If you forgive me just once for now?”
“Do not try to cheat us , our dear,
What devotion and love you have,
Do we not know all,
Would not the ladies with beautiful mind,
Sing about our lord Shiva.
All this we should definitely hear and suffer, Oh dear lady”

3

Onnithila nagayai innam pularnthindro?

⁵Oh! lady with glittering smile ,
And with pearl like teeth,
Has not the new day begun?”
“Have all the ladies ,
Who have lisping voice like a parrot, come?”
“Count we will and tell you soon,
Don't spend your time sleeping till then.
Sing of Him who is the nectar of the heaven,
Who is the essence of Vedas,
And who is sweet to the eyes,
And melts your mind within.

⁴ This verse is in form of conversation between the girls and the lady whom they want to wake up.

⁵ The conversation continues in this verse

But if you wish to know their number soon,
You wake up and count them yourself,
And if the number is less, go to sleep again, Oh Lady”

4

Malariya Nanmuganum Kanaa Malayinai Nam

Hey deceiver, who has a milky honey speech,
You who bragged that we would,
See the mountain that neither the proud,
Vishnu and Brahma could not see⁶,
Be pleased to open the door.
We sing and praise,
Of the great Lord Shiva,
Whose form those who live on earth,
Heaven and other worlds,
Could not see,
And who has come in person to rule over us,
And to remove our blemishes.
But you know this not.
And have not woken up yet.
She who sleeps with plaited hair,
Decorated by paste of Henna,
Even if we loudly shout,
“Hey Shiva, Hey Shiva”.
How come you do not still wake up. Oh Lady.

5

Manee nee nennalai nalai vandungali

Oh deer like maiden,
Only yesterday did you tell,
That tomorrow morn,
It is you who will wake us up,
And where has the word,
Disappeared without shame.
Has not it dawned?
Be pleased to open your mouth,
For us who have come singing,
About him, whom those.
In heaven , earth and other places,
Do not know,
And who has come to be with us,
And who has great noble feet,
With jingling anklets,

⁶ Once Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma tried to see the foot and head of Lord Shiva in the form of swan and a boar in Thiruvannamalai and accepted defeat.

And sing with us,
Let your heart melt,
And let us all praise our king, Oh Lady.

6

Anne ivayum chilavo pala amarar

Little mother ours,
Is this the time for make believe?
When the signal sounds ,
Boom all around in the past,
Of the presence of great one with great fame,
Who can never be thought of,
By even devas, the gods of heaven.
You would open your mouth,
And keep calling “Shiva, Shiva”.
You would melt like wax then ,
Even before his name,
Thennava⁷ is complete.
Now we are telling before you,
“Our friend”, “Our king”.
“Our sweetest nectar”,
But are you still asleep?
You are lying like ,
The stone hearted ignorant ones,
What type of sleep , is this , our lady?

7

Kozhi chilabha chilambum kurukkengum

When the cock crows, all the birds twitter,
When the Veena is strummed, the holy conches boom.
Did you not hear when we sang,
Of the incomparable light of heaven,
The incomparable mercy of heaven,
And the one with incomparable fame?
Long live our dear, is this the way to sleep?
You never even open your mouth, dear,
Is this the way to love our God?
We will the all sing the fame,
Of him who alone is, after the deluge,
And of him who shares his body with his consort,
Please sing with us , our lady.

8

Munnai pazham porutkum munnai pazham porule

⁷ Lord of the South, one name of Lord Shiva

Oh our Lord who is older than the oldest,
Oh Lord who exists in the modern way,
In this the new ways of the world.,
We thine slaves , who have got you as our Lord,
Would bow before the holy feet of your devotees great,
Would become their friends for ever,
And would obey their orders with reverence and with out fail.
If our God , you bless us this way,
We will live all live, without any wants,
Is it not, our Lady?

9

Pathalam ezhinum keezh chor kazhivu pada malar

His flower like feet, which is beyond description,
Is below the seven worlds of Patala⁸,
His flower bedecked hair is above the end of all matter,
And he not only has he the lady in half of his body,
But he is beyond the whole hearted praise,
Of those adept in Vedas,
Of those gods in heaven,
And ordinary mortals like us,
And clearly seen as Hara⁹ in the minds of his devotees.
Hey ! lady devotees of his temples.
Which is his place?
Which is his name?
Who are his relations?
And who are his neighbors?
And certainly he cannot be limited by our songs,
Is it not our lady?

10

Moyyar thadam poygai pukku mugger ena

In the pretty pond, surrounded by bees,
We who are your devotees for several generations,
Used to play by making sounds in water,
And sing about you, our Lord,
Who is red like the raging fire,
And who is bathed by white ashes.
Lord of the maid with pretty eyes,
Applied with black collyrium,
Who has whisper thin hips.
Please take us within you,
In this play of life, only those who are fit win,

⁸ The nether worlds underneath

⁹ Name of Lord Shiva

And so help us not to get famished by this play,
Is it not our Lady.

11

Aartha piravi thuyar keda naam arthadum

He is the one who has the holy pure waters,
In which with happiness we bathe,
So that the big sorrow of birth vanishes.,
He is the one who dances in the holy temple of Thillai¹⁰,
With pot of fire in his left hand,
And he creates this and the world above,
Which he looks after and destroys .
Like playing a sport.
Let us sing his fame,
Let us take bath in his holy pond,
With the bangles making murmuring sound.,
With the golden belts with bells.,
Creating the holy sounds all around,
With bees surrounding our scented hair,
And praise his golden feet,
And then also play and bathe in the holy stream,
Is it not , Oh lady.

12

Painkuvalai kaar malaral chengamala paimpodal

With exuberant blue and red lotus abound.
With king fishers making lot of sound,
With people coming to wash away their dirt and sin,
The pond appears as a place of our Lord and our Goddess.
Let our bangles of conch and our anklets divine,
Join this din, And let us all,
Bathe with our busts raising,
And the water level going up,
Is it not our lady.

13

Kadaar kuzhai ada paimpoon kalan ada

With the ear studs worn in the ear shaking,
With all pretty gold ornaments waving,
With the pretty plait of ours,
Moving hither and thither,
With the bees surrounding the plait,
Moving with the plait,
We will all bathe and play ,

¹⁰ The holy temple of Chidambaram

In the cool holy waters of the stream,
And sing of the temple at Thillai,
Sing of the lord,
Who is the meaning of Vedas,
Sing of the meaning of holy light,
Sing of his Konrai¹¹ flowers adorning his hair,
Sing of Him who is the beginning and end,
Sing of him who shows us as different from this world,
And Pray the Goddess that we attain him,
Is it not our Lady.

14

Or orukal emperuman enrenre nam peruman

Once in a while tells she “My Lord”
Once in a while describes she,
Of the fame of our Lord without stop,
Once in a while because of ebbing happiness,
That his memory gives,
Sheds she copious tears without end,
Once in a while lies she on the ground in trance,
In his memory divine ,
And once in while becomes she a lunatic of Him,
Who is our great God,
And never salutes other gods great.
Who could have enchanted this lady thus?
Oh ladies with decorated breasts,
Lets us all bathe in the flower filled pond,
And sing of Him,
Is it not our lady.

15

Munni kadala churukki ezhum thudaiyal

Oh Cloud, even before the season of rains,
You drank this sea and decreased its level,
And you climbed the skies,
And got the holy blue colour of our Goddess.
Your becoming streaks of lightning,
Reminded us of her narrow hips,
Your roaring claps of thunder,
Reminded us of the sound from her anklets,
Worn on her holy feet,
And the rainbow you made in the sky.
Reminded us of her pretty eye brows.,

¹¹ Red iris flowers which the Lord loved

Please shower her rain of mercy ,
On the devotes of our Lord and on us,
Is it not our Lady.

16

Chenganavapal disai mungan pal devargal pal

Oh Lady with the naturally scented black hair,
He who can do things impossible,
He who is the God with charming eyes
He who is pure nectar to us , his devotees,
Graces us with happiness great,
Which neither the red eyed Vishnu,
Nor Lord Brahma with four heads,
Nor all the Gods in the heaven ,
Can ever give,
And makes us purer than heaven.
Comes He to each of our homes great,
And gives us his lotus like golden feet,
And so that we will sing his praise and bathe,
In the flower filled lotus pond,
Is it not our Lady.

17

Annamalaiyan adi kamalam chendru irainjum

The jewels in the crowns of the gods of heaven,
Who bow their head to Lord Annamalai¹² loses their glitter,
The most famous Sun loses his sharp lights of rays before the Lord,
And the stars in the sky at night loose their sparkle before Him,
But the Lord becomes male, female , eunuch and others,
That are none of these also,
And he also becomes the sky , earth and all others .
That are different from these,
Oh Lady , He is the nectar which can fill our eyes,
So let us all sing his praise and bathe in this flower filled pond,
Is it not our Lady.

18

Un kayil pillai unakke adaikalamenru

Oh lord, we are deeply afraid
Of renewing the saying of Old,
“The baby in your hand is only yours¹³”
For we feel that there is no use for that.
Oh Lord hear what we have to say,

¹² The God of the temple in the city of Thiruvannamalai meaning “Elder brother mountain”

¹³ Meaning “whatever is yours has to be protected by only you”

Let not our breasts join any ones shoulder,
Except thine holy devotee,
Let not our hands ever do work except which is thine,
Let not our eyes see in day or night,
Anything except thee.
If you grant us all these our wishes,
We will not be worried on whichever side the sun rises ever,
Is it not our Lady.

19

Pothi aruluga nin adhiyam padha malar

Oh , Lord, we praise thine lotus feet in the beginning.
Oh , Lord, we praise thine soft leaf bud like feet at the end,
Oh Lord, we praise thine feet from which all beings were born,
Oh Lord, we praise thine feet which gives pleasure to all beings,
Oh Lord, we praise thine feet which gives redemption to all beings,
Oh Lord , we praise thine lotus feet not even seen by Brahma and Vishnu,
Oh Lord , we praise thine golden feet which makes us your slaves,
Oh Lord, we praise the water of Margazhy ,
And Ladies let us all dance and bathe,
Is it not our Lady.

20