

# Kavi Yogi's *Silambu Selvam*

By Dr. J. Parthasarathi

## The Yogi and the Kavi

Shuddhananda Bharati was an embodied, unique soul come on earth to perfect himself with a life of continuous penance and unremitting activity, called yoga, leading to self-realisation and the attainment of the divinity of a god. He underwent long years of preparation as a multi-faceted yogi, absorbing the inspiration and teachings of great masters like V. V. S. Ayyar the Karma Yogi, Ramana Maharshi the Jnana Yogi and Sri Aurobindo the Integral Yogi. His lifetime of social service, yogic discipline, study and meditation and his internalisation of the essential core of mystic experience lying behind external observances in Islam and Christianity and other religions of the world, as part of his own personality, made him the seer and the prophet of Sama Yoga. This is the global vision of oneness which India, famed as the laboratory of the spirit, is destined to bring to the world, the divine event to which the whole creation moves. The story of the evolution of this global and cosmic harmony, the transformation of the earth by the awakening of the divine consciousness of humanity as a whole under *Bharata Shakti*, has received undying poetic form in his magnificent epic-poem of 50,000 lines, the *Bharata Shakti Mahakavyam*. This will ever be a kindly light, bringing

one and all under the spell of spiritual Sadhana and attainment of the higher consciousness in which human life gets transformed.

A yogi is a super-man of incessant activity and an expert performer and worker in the occupations in which he is placed by his birth and education. Shuddhananda was a Kavi, a poet and a singer primarily in his native Tamil language; he learnt many other languages and composed poems in English and French too but these do not take rank with his Tamil poetry to which he was born and in which he was schooled in his birth-place of Sivaganga in his boyhood's impressionable years. It is said that poets and lovers of poetry are born and not made; no amount of training can bring one the receptivity to the enchantment of poetry and song that Nature indows him with. Shuddhananda was a poet by Nature, helped by nurture, training in Tamil poesy has always involved an intensive study of its great masterpieces – its ancient and later classics, of which it has quite a number, like the *Ettuthokai*, *Pattuppattu*, *Thirukural*, *Silappadikaram*, *Manimekalai*, *Thevaram*, *Divya Prabhandham*, *Kamba Ramayana* and so on. This means that the great Tamil poet has to be by training a Tamil scholar of perceptive understanding and critical judgment, endowed with literary craftsmanship. Shuddhananda worked as a bee to learn in the traditional manner Tamil works of literature and philosophy, even as he studied English in the high school and later and took to the teaching profession.

The wave of Indian nationalism under Tilak and Gandhi was sweeping the country in the early twentieth century. A sense of pride in the heritage of Tamil civilisation and culture and a burning zeal to revive past glories while shaking off the foreign yoke was prominently evoked at the time, in the hearts of the Tamils, enhancing the love of their native Tamil and its inheritance ever present with them. Shuddhananda was a fiery Tamil nationalist, whose dreams for the Tamil people, to whom he belonged, soared high, as we see in his letters and other writings; like the Tamil national Subramania Bharathiyar, he went on, urging the Tamil people in his speeches and writings and organisational activities to hold their heads high, realising their own great past achievements, and work to win the respect of other nations with modern advances in all fields of activity, in line with past peaks of achievement. In pursuance of his zeal to recall to his generation the excellences of old Tamil works, he wrote over the years a number of expositions of these works, simplifying their content and pointing out their admirable aspects. Among these popularisations of old time classics the present *Silambu Selvam*, the treasure of the *Silappadikaram* takes an important place as his introduction to a major poetical work of the Tamil poetic genius.

The treasure of the *Silambu* epic

The title 'Selvam' which Shuddhananda has attached to *Silambu* suggests the pride that he takes in it as a precious wealth, a literary treasure of inestimable value possessed by his Tamil society. His senior contemporary, the famous Tamil nationalist, poet-singer Subramanya Bharathiyar, celebrates the praises of *Silappadikaram* as a precious necklace of gems, maniarams possessed by the Tamil land, taking away the reader's heart absolutely with its beauty; he again speaks of its author Ilango Adigal, along with Valluvar and Kamban, as poets the like of whom we have not seen anywhere else in world literature.

### The special excellences of the *Silambu Kapiyam*

We may ask: "What are the excellences of *Silappadikaram* which forever fascinate men of letters, making them sing its praises in high terms as 'a treasure' and a precious ornament of Tamil?" Shuddhananda has indicated these as a whole and in different contexts of the poem in this book, published in 1939. Since that time many further studies by scholars have focussed detailed attention on the several aspects that got to make it a source of lasting pride for the Tamil community. These deserve to be stated here thus:

- 1) It is the first long poem, called *Kapiyam (Kavya)* in Tamil, which had before its composition, only self-

contained shorter poems, later collected as anthologies. We also find that its structure is evolved from its own poetic traditions for its chapters are composed as self-contained units, assembled together as a whole. The story of the poem is not told in a regular sequence.

2) It is the first non-Puranic "Secular" long poem of 'epic' type dealing with a Tamil story of purely indigenous origin, of a merchant prince of vast riches meeting a tragic end by miscarriage of royal justice and his wife of exemplary devotion and fidelity to her husband wreaking vengeance and getting deified as a divinity.

3) It is pre-eminently an epic of Tamil nationalism, celebrating the praises of the three great kings – the three 'crowned rulers' of the Tamil land – the Cholas, the Pandyas and the Cheras - having an overarching sense of unity among them; they stand united as monarchs of the Tamil country, with identical cultural bonds as against Northern Aryan kings whose boasting provokes their Tamil heroic prowess.

4) The events of the poem begin in the Chola capital town of Puhar; they reach their climax in the Pandya capital town of Madurai; their sequel (or after-effect) works itself out in the Chera capital town of Vanji (now identified with modern Karur). There is thus full thematic coverage of the Tamil land from the centre to the south and to the west in consonance with the overall Tamil of the poem.

5) It is a literary as well as a historical 'treasure' of unparalleled value. It presents glowing pictures of Tamil civilisation in its heyday of trade with the Roman empire of the pre-Christian era. We see the capital cities of Puhar and Madurai and Vanji bustling with seaborne commerce and other activities, numerous gorgeous descriptions of palaces, temples and resorts of guardian spirits and streets with storeyed mansions where lovers engage in luxurious indulgences go with sights of lowly pastoral people and forest-dwellers looting wayfarers on highways and offering their booty to their goddess. One can exclaim: "Here is God's plenty, in the ancient Tamil country of the three crowned rulers."

6) It introduces us to the heroic exploits and the golden deeds and the politico-social organization, under the just rule of the great kings of the Tamil land round about the early Christian era, more than two millenia ago – Tiru Mavalavan, Nedunchezhiyan (Pandya king) and Senkuttuvan (Chera king) who (as Shuddhananda proudly points out) must be rated as equal in stature with the best rulers famed in ancient history.

7) Its uniqueness is enhanced as the example of a *Muthamizh Kappiya*, an epic poem of the threefold Tamil, combining in itself, as an integral whole, the three arts of poetry, music and dance (Iyal, Icai and Nattakam), which were one synthesized activity in the ancient Tamil land. This epic is the only surviving work of this genre found only in Tamil; offering a splendid pageantry of fascinating variety, it stands on the top of its genre,

totally enrapturing the heart, as Subramany Bharati has acclaimed it.

### The core story of the *Silambu*

Let us look at the bare outline of the story framework on which the poem hangs with all its enrichments of spectacular sights and doings. Kovalan, the son of a merchant of fabulous riches in Puhar, the Chola capital city, marries Kannaki, another merchant of equal riches of the same city. The couple live happily until Kovalan gets attracted to a professional dancer, Madhavi by name, making her debut before the king. He spends his time with her, forgetting his faithful wife, till a misunderstanding with the dancer arises and brings him back to his wife, pining with the sorrow of separation from her lord. Impoverished by his bountiful spending on Madhavi, he proposes to sell a precious anklet (*Silambu*) offered by his ever-loyal wife, and with the money realised begin a new life as a merchant in Madurai, the Pandyan capital. They then leave their city lay down and walk all the way to Madurai, encountering various situations in their travel. These events are based on Puhar in the first book of the poem, appropriately called *Puhar Kandam*.

The events of the second book, called *Madurai Kandam*, are located in and around Madurai, the Pandyan capital

city, where Kovalan gets killed by the working of a cruel fate. Going into the city with his wife's anklet, Kovalan meets the palace goldsmith with his train of followers and hands over the anklet to him for assessment and sale, which proves his undoing. The goldsmith, who has stolen the queen's anklet and has to answer for it, finds that this is a perfect substitute for the one he has stolen; he runs to his sovereign to announce that his dear queen's stolen anklet has been found and the thief caught red-handed. The Pandyan king, then in a fit of mad passion for his sulky queen, orders unthinkingly, on the spur of the moment, that the thief be killed and the jewel brought to him. The sword of one of the king's executioners suddenly cuts Kovalan's body asunder. Distressed and agonised, Kannaki turns a fierce goddess of retribution for the colossal wrong done to her by the Pandyan's injustice. She breaks open the anklet remaining with her and proves in public court to the king that her anklet is inlaid with gems as against the queen's, inlaid with pearls. The shocked king falls down dead from his lion-throne and his queen follows him and the wrongdoing city is destroyed by a fire breaking out, as prophesied by Kannaki.

The third book of the *Vanji Kandam* narrates events based on the Chera land and its capital town of Vanji, which arise as a sequel to the tragedy enacted in Madurai. Forlorn and engulfed in misery, Kannaki walks along the Vaigai riverbank for days together and enters the Chera land, on a hillock called Nedurvelkunram Kovalan,



accompanied by a heavenly being who descends to the earth to carry her away with him in his celestial car. The hill-men witnessing this divine event report it with song and dance to their king, Shekuttuvan. He takes up the task of honouring Kannaki as the Pattini Devi – the goddess of wifely chastity as a deity in a temple with a statue of stone brought from the holy Himalayas. He leads his conquering army into North India and gets the stone and the image of the goddess installed in the temple he builds. The poem concludes with worship in the temple of Kannadi and songs, prayers and exhortations on the occasion.

Shuddhananda's close prose version  
of the '*Silambu*' treasure

The skeleton summary of the '*Silambu*' given above should not be mistaken in any manner as conveying an idea of the end product of the epic poem in all its variety and colour. It is a superb poetic pageant spread out in 30 chapters divided into 3 books. As already explained, this 'treasure' of the Tamil language offers a never-failing feast of Muthamizh, poetry, music and dance to the votary of Tamil literary and allied arts; it is the golden key to "the wonder and the glory that was Tamizhakam (the Tamil land)" in days of old.

Shuddhananda has enjoyed and revelled in its many attractions and felt proud of it as a pinnacle of Tamil achievement. He has communicated to us all his enjoyment, appreciation and sense of pride in this close paraphrase of the poem he has made; he has done this in his additions to the text by way of enlarging its background and by his observations at various contexts of his retelling of the text.

The thirty chapters (called *katais*) in three books – Puhar; Madurai and Vanji Kandams – of the *Silappadikaram* have a total of 5,300 verse lines; the chapters have varying lengths, from the lowest of 53 to the highest of 268 lines. Shuddhananda's prose version faithfully follows, almost line by line, the text of the poem. But before beginning to do so, he enriches our knowledge about the greatness of Chola kings and the importance of their capital town and seaport – Puhar (also called Kavirip Puum Pattinam) by valuable information extracted from *Pattuppattu* (The ten poems), another great Tamil classic of the ancient period.

We get an engaging, full-length account of the life and exploits and constructive activities of the Chola king Tirumavalavam, mentioned by name only in the poem, drawn from other sources; the grandeur and the wisdom of his beneficent rule and his ability in war are shown to be of the highest order paralleled only by the record of memorable monarchs of history. We are also introduced to the busy activities of the port town of Puhar as a flourishing centre of commerce with foreign countries of the West; descriptions of merchandise of the export-

import trade, stacked and registered and assessed by officers of the king lying on the wharfs of the port, drawn from sources other than *Silappadikaram*, add to the liveliness of the picture of the main city and its bazaar and other streets given in the poem itself.

Shuddhananda's animated accounts preceding the commencement of his paraphrase of the epic convey to us the feel of the abounding prosperity of the rule of the king and his capital city in which the wedding of the son and daughter of two of the wealthiest merchants begins the story of the poem; the wedding festivity is beautifully set out in the first chapter, and has been summarised with evident appreciation in the prose version also.

As he goes on with his version, Shuddhananda stops at intervals to make clear to us many technical aspects of the arts of music and dance and the terms connected with them mentioned in the *Silappadikaram* in different contexts. The commentators (12<sup>th</sup> century AD) on this epic have given us explanations of the technicalities which guide us today in understanding them, but these need further clarification in our modern state of learning. Shuddhananda has elucidated for us the nature of the yazh (yal) the old Tamil musical instrument on the analogy of the now current veena instrument; the seven notes and the spans of Tamil music have been linked with similar features in current karnatic music.

We share with Shuddhananda his sense of pride in the glories of Tamil culture ever and anon. This sense is

refined by his yogic life. Following the *Silappadikaram*, he describes the bed scenes and the sensual pleasure indulged in by lovers in Puhar and Madurai. But he adds a note asking us not to imagine that the ancient Tamils were given only to sheer licentious abandon in their lives. He says that we should not forget that they disciplined themselves by yoga, and bhoga (enjoyment) was combined in their lives with yoga (discipline) as twofold guiding codes of behaviour.

Our Kavi Yogi, himself a poet of taste and refinement and a critic of perceptive judgment, has chosen to expose us, his readers, to the excitingly felicitous verse of the epic in many contexts; he gives extracts of the verse passages with paraphrases in prose. (These passages in Tamil have been given in roman transliteration with paraphrases in English in this English version of the Tamil book). Among these passages, the songs with appealing melodies interspersed in the poem take pride of place. They are: the songs by the seashore, sung by Kovalan and Madhavi, called kanalvare (pukkar kadam); the songs of Mararva – warriors living by highway robbery, and propitiating their Kotravai – goddess called Vetturva Vari; and the aichiyar kuravai dance-songs of cowherdesses in the cowherd colony of Madurai (Madurai Kadam); and the kunrak kuravai dance-songs of the hillmen who witnessed Kannaki's ascent of heaven (Vanji Kadam). These shimmer with the tender feelings of love's disappointments or the ardour of devotional feelings according to their content

of love (akam) or devotion (bhakti). These songs appear out the relevant places in this prose version.

There are several other examples of verse-passages memorable for their images, their dramatic turn out, their noble sentiments and their striking force of statement which Shuddhananda has brought to our attention with extracts from the Tamil original. Among these are: Kovalan's ecstatic praise of Kannaki's beauty (in I. 2) in terms of images enforcing her incomparable loveliness of form; in all detailed descriptions of places (seashore, pilgrim centres, pathways, countries) spread throughout the poem, remarkable for their picturesque evocations in verse lines of pleasing harmonies; dramatic scenes of Kannaki's stirring speech before the Pandyan king and her roaming over Madurai town as a friend goddess of revenge, putting people in terror (II. 19, 20); and speeches elaborating the necessity of living the good life by Kaveenti Adigal (II. 13, 15); and the brahmana Madalan's exhortation to Chera king Senkuttuvan to perform the Vedic sacrifice without delay as the allotted span of one's life may end at any time (III. 28). The poem's closing lines are done as exhortations by the author Ilango to his hearers (and readers) to walk the path of virtue (aram), eschew evil of all kinds like drink, lust, tale-bearing ingratitude, meat eating and causing sorrow and pain to others. He wishes that men of the earth should realise the instability of life and strive to embrace the great support (of the virtuous life) leading them to the land for which they are all bound. And Shuddhananda adds

significantly this own exhortation to the Tamils to realise what a great valuable treasure they possess in *Silappadikaram*.

## The excellence of this prose-version of *Silappadikaram*

We owe the first editions of *Silappadikaram* in print with exhaustive notes, critical introduction satisfying the requirements of modern scholarship to U. V. Swaminatha Iyer in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His unique services in bringing into print most well-known classics of Tamil enabled many other later researchers to write critical studies, historical accounts of early Tamil heroes and simplified summaries based on this epic. The earliest historical reconstruction of Chera king Senkuttuvan as a great Tamil monarch gleaned from Tamil literary sources was the monograph *Chera Senkuttuvan* (published in 1915) by M. Raghava Iyengar; this book contains a very useful running summary of the Vanji Kandam only. Many other summaries have appeared in later years, but there has been no attempt in them to follow closely the epic verse and expose a reader to its appeal.

This book providing a line-to-line paraphrase and background notes to the technical aspects of the epic scores over other summaries, fulfilling a real need of the learner; it enables him to master the text of the poem and

appreciate its many-sided beauties of contents, structure, expression and the wealth of learning of the poet who composed in this way. It deserves to be used more widely as the book introducing learners to this 'treasure' of the Tamil genius. Readers of Shakespeare are usually recommended to go to his dramas through their close text-based summaries mad by the famous essayist Charles Lamb in his book *Tales from Shakespeare*. Shuddhananda's *Silambu Selvam* is on the same footing to the *Silambu* epic as Lamb's *Tales* is to Shakespeare's dramas.

## Glossary (From the corrected Glossary)

**Aryan**, the term Aryan originates with the Indo-Iranian self-designation *arya*, attested in the ancient texts of Hinduism and Zoroastrianism, the *Rig Veda* and the *Avesta*. In the 18th century, the most ancient known Indo-European languages were those of the Indo-Iranians' ancestors. The word Aryan was adopted to refer not only to the Indo-Iranian people, but also to native Indo-European speakers as a whole, including the Albanians, Armenians, Greeks, Latins, and Germans. It was soon recognised that Balts, Celts, and Slavs also belonged to the same group. It was argued that all of these languages originated from a common root – now known as Proto-Indo-European – spoken by an ancient people who must have been the original ancestors of the European, Iranian, and Indo-Aryan peoples. The ethnic group composed of

the Proto-Indo-Europeans and their modern descendants was termed the Aryans.

**Adigal, Ilango, Elango (~200-300 AD)** was a Tamil poet, who was instrumental in the creation of *Silappathikaram*, one of the five great epics of Tamil literature. Prince Ilango Adigal was the brother of the Chera king, Chera Senkuttuvan (in modern day Kerala), in South India.

**Aurobindo, Ghose, Sri (1872-1950)**, mystic and Indian philosopher. Devoting a great part of his life to the Indian cause, he worked out doctrines in which yoga constitutes the centre of interest. Aurobindo conceives yoga as the way which makes it possible to recognize the truth of God in oneself.

**Bharata Shakti**, a major work (magnum opus) of Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati, describing his ideal in 50,000 verses: one humanity living in communion with one God in a world transformed! *Bharata Shakti* is a unique and monumental work. The yogi depicts the essence of all religions, all prophets and saints, all approaches of yoga and all cultures on an allegorical painting. It is a book for all ages that all spiritual seekers and all nations should read and meditate upon.

**Chera**, the Chera dynasty was one of the ancient Tamil dynasties that ruled southern India from ancient times until around the fifteenth century AD. The early Cheras ruled over the Coimbatore, Karur and Salem districts in South India, which now forms part of modern day Tamil Nadu (Kongu Nadu). The other two major Tamil dynasties were the Cholas on the eastern Coromandel



Coast and Pandyas on the south central peninsula. These dynasties began ruling before the Sangam era (300 BC–200 AD) during which Tamil language, arts and literature flourished.

**Chera prince** is Ilango Adigal.

**Cheran Senkuttuvan, king (125-180 AD)** is Ilango Adigal's brother.

**Chola**, the Chola dynasty was a Tamil dynasty that ruled primarily in southern India until the 13th century. The dynasty originated in the fertile valley of the Kaveri River. Karikala Chola was the most famous among the early Chola kings, while Aditya I, Parantaka I, Rajaraja Chola I, Rajendra Chola I, Rajadhiraja Chola, Virarajendra Chola, and Kulothunga Chola I were notable emperors of the medieval Cholas.

**Divya Prabandham**, the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham* is a collection of 4,000 verses (*Nalayira* in Tamil means four thousand) composed before 8th century AD, by the 12 Alvars, and was compiled in its present form by Nathamuni during the 9th–10th centuries. The work is the beginning of the canonization of the 12 Vaishnava poet saints, and these hymns are still sung extensively even today. The works were lost before they were collected and organized in the form of an anthology by Nathamuni. The *Prabandha* sings the praise of Narayana (or Vishnu) and his many forms. The Alvars sang these songs at various sacred shrines. These shrines are known as the *Divya Desams*. In South India, especially in Tamil Nadu, the *Divya Prabandham* is considered as equal to the

*Vedas*, hence the epithet *Dravida Veda*. In many temples, Srirangam for example, the chanting of the *Divya Prabandham* forms a major part of the daily service. Prominent among the 4,000 verses are the 1,100 verses known as the *Thiru Vaaymozhi* or *Tiruvoy-Mozhi*, composed by Nammalvar (Kaaril Maaran Sadagopan) of Thiruk Kurugoor.

**Ettuthogai, Ettuthokai**, the Eight Anthologies - Classical Tamil poetic work - form part of the *Pathinenmaelkanakku* anthology series of the Sangam literature. *Ettuthokai* and its companion anthology *Pattupattu* are some of the oldest available Tamil literature and dated to belong to between 200 BC and 200 AD.

**Gandhi, Gandhiji, Mohandas Karamchand (1869-1948)**, also known as Mahatma Gandhi, was a major political and spiritual leader of India and the Indian Independence Movement. He was the pioneer of Satyagraha – a philosophy that is largely concerned with truth and resistance to evil through active, non-violent resistance – which led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world. Gandhi is commonly known in India and across the world as the Mahatma (Great Soul - an epithet given by Tagore) and as Bapu (Father). In India, he is officially accorded the honour of Father of the Nation. 2nd October, his birthday, is commemorated each year as Gandhi Jayanti, a national holiday. On 15th June 2007, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution declaring 2nd October to be the

“International Day of Non-Violence.” India's Independence Day is celebrated on August 15th to commemorate its independence from British rule and its birth as a sovereign nation on that day in 1947. On January 30th, 1948, Gandhi was shot and killed while having his nightly public walk in the grounds of the Birla Bhavan (Birla House) in New Delhi.

**Jnana Yoga**, gives self-knowledge.

**Kamba Ramayanam**, see Kamban.

**Kamban, Kambar, Kamba**, Kamban flourished in the 12th century in Therazhundur, a village in the culturally rich Thanjavur district in the modern state of Tamil Nadu in South India. Kamban was a great scholar of India's two ancient and rich languages, Sanskrit and Tamil. The *Ramavataram* or *Kamba Ramayanam* of Kamban is an epic of over 10,000 verses, of 4 lines each. *Kamba Ramayanam* is not a translation of the Sanskrit epic by Valmiki, but an original retelling of the story of the god Rama. The poetic work is well known for its similes. It is therefore so great that one is amazed by the imagination which created it.

**Karikalan, Karikal Valavan (Karilan), Tirumavalavan**, was the Chola monarch ruling over Pumpukar, at the beginning of this story of *Silappadikaram*. His year of birth was variously estimated as 35 and 50 AD.

**Karma Yoga**, it seeks Divine Grace by devoted and submissive service.

**Madura, Madurai**, is a city and a municipal corporation situated on the banks of the River Vaigai in Madurai district in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The city is also

known as Madura (pronounced as Ma ju ra) and as Nan mada kudal (the original name). The city of Madurai, with a population of 922,913 according to the 2001 census, is the administrative capital of Madurai district. Madurai was the capital city of the Pandya kings of South India. Madurai's cultural heritage goes back 2500 years and the city has been an important commercial centre since as early as 550 AD.

**Manimegalai, Manimekalai**, one of the finest jewels of Tamil poetry, the epic poem *Manimekalai* by poet Sathanar, 2nd century AD, is unique for the deep spirituality and mysticism it unfolds against the historical and geographical background of South India and of adjacent Jaffna. Alain Danielou translated this poem – *Manimekhalai (The Dancer with the Magic Bowl)*. Manimekalai is also the beautiful daughter of Kovalan and Madhavi in the *Silappadikaram*.

**Pandya, Pandyan kingdom**, was an ancient Tamil state in South India of unknown antiquity. Pandya was one of the three ancient Tamil kingdoms (Chola and Chera being the other two) that ruled the Tamil country from pre-historic times until end of the 15th century.

**Pathupattu, Pattupattu**, *the Ten Idylls*, is an anthology of ten, mid length books and is one of the oldest surviving collections of Tamil poetry. This collection is considered part of the Sangam literature and dated approximately between 300 BC and 200 AD.

**Pumpukar, Pukar, Puhar, Kavirippumpattinam**, now Pondicherry.

**Purana**, meaning “belonging to ancient or olden times,” is the name of an ancient Indian genre (or a group of related genres) of Hindu or Jain literature (as distinct from oral tradition). They primarily are post-Vedic texts containing a narrative of the history of the universe, from creation to destruction, genealogies of the kings, heroes and demigods, and descriptions of Hindu cosmology, philosophy and geography. *Puranas* are called the Friendly Treatises or Suhrit-Sammitas, and are usually written in the form of stories related by one person to another. Vyasa Rishi is considered to be the compiler of the *Puranas*.

**Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950)**, born Venkataraman Iyer. He was a Tamil Hindu Jivanmukta (sage/jnani) who, after a spiritual awakening (moksha) at age 16, left home for Tiruvannamalai, and subsequently lived on the nearby sacred mountain Arunachala, in Tamil Nadu, South India.

**Sama Yoga**, it is a regrouping of the best of all the ancient ways in yoga. It tries to build a new collective life on Earth. Sama Yoga is the integral life of the Pure Spirit in matter. It is a synthesis of material science and spiritual Yoga. The founder of Sama Yoga is Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati.

**Shuddhanandam**, (Pure Bliss) one name given by Jnana Siddha to Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati.

**Silambu Selvam**, the literary treasure of *Silappadikaram* written by Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati.

**Silappadikaram**, the Tamil epic poem *Silappadikaram* is thought to have been written about 200 AD, and is attributed to Ilango Adigal, whose brother Shenguttuvan ruled the western coast of South India. It contains 3 chapters and a total of 5270 lines. Anyone who has read the original text of this epic cannot help marvel at its author, Ilango Adigal, who was able to maintain the tempo and passions associated with human interactions throughout the work. Story in brief: Kovalan, a prosperous grain merchant in the Chola capital of Pukar got married to the equally affluent Kannaki and the two lived happily for a while. When the beautiful Madhavi, belonging to an unchaste class, came to Pukar to give a dance recital in the Chola king Karikalan's court, Kovalan became infatuated with her beauty, glamour and artistic talents.

**Subramanya Bharathiyar (1882-1921)**, Mahakavi Subramaniya Bharathi in a relatively short life span of 39 years left an indelible mark as the poet of Tamil nationalism and Indian freedom.

**Thevaram, Devaram**, the word Dhevaram (Thevaram) in the Tamil language has evolved from the Tamil words Dhe + aram, Dhe for Dheyvam, meaning God, and aram meaning inisai padal i.e. sweet songs, together constituting *Thevaram (Dhevaram)* meaning sweet songs in praise of the divine Lord, in this context Lord Shiva. *Thevaram* songs utilise simple Tamil, the language of the common folk rather than Sanskrit the language of the elite, and in a form that is easily understood by the

common man to sum up and propagate the Shivaite philosophies. The works of the 63 Nayanmars (Shiva devotees) are collectively referred to as '*Thirumurai*'. There are 12 volumes containing about 18,000 songs in Tamil, of which the first 7 volumes constitute the *Thevaram*. The first three Nayanmars are Thiru Jnana Sambandar (aka Sambandar), Thiru Navuk Karasar (aka Appar) and Sundaramoorthy Nayanar (aka Sundarar).

**Thirukural, Thirukkural**, the Holy Kural of Saint Valluvar, translated in English couplets by Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati.

**Thiruvalluvar, Tiruvalluvar, Thiruvalluvar, Valluvar, saint, Tiruvalluvar**, the name Thiruvalluvar consists of Thiru (a polite Tamil word, similar to Mr, from Sanskrit: Shri and Valluvar (a polite name for Valluvan, according to Tamil tradition). Thiruvalluvar is a celebrated Tamil poet who wrote the *Thirukkural*, a well known ethical work in Tamil literature. He is claimed by both the Tamils who practise Hinduism and the Tamils who practise Jainism as their own. Nevertheless, some consider him as a Jain, showing internal textual evidence from *Thirukural*. A statue of Tiruvalluar is at Kanyakumari. Thiruvalluvar's period (based on the *Thirukkural* per se) is between the second century BC and the eighth century AD.

**Tilak, Bal Gangadhar, Lokamanya (1856-1920)**, was an Indian nationalist, social reformer and freedom fighter who was the first popular leader of the Indian

Independence Movement and is known as Father of the Indian Unrest. Tilak sparked the fire for complete independence in Indian consciousness, and is considered the father of Hindu nationalism as well.

“Self Rule is our birthright, and we shall have it!”

This famous quote of his is very popular and well-remembered in India even today. Reverently addressed as Lokmanya (meaning Beloved of the People or Revered by the World), Tilak was a scholar of Indian history, Sanskrit, Hinduism, mathematics and astronomy.

**Tirumavalavan, Thirumavalavan**, see Karikalan.

**V. V. S. Ayyar, Varahaneri Venkatesa Subramaniam Aiyar (1881-1925)**, also known as V. V. S. Iyer, was an Indian revolutionary from Tamil Nadu who fought against the British occupation of India. He went into exile in Pondicherry, then under French rule, when his militant activities attracted a warrant for his arrest from the British colonial government.

**Vaigai River** is a river in Tamil Nadu state of southern India. It originates in the Periyar Plateau of the Western Ghats range, and flows northeast through the Kambam Valley, which lies between the Palni Hills to the north and the Varushanad Hills to the south. As it rounds the eastern corner of the Varushanad Hills, the river turns southeast, running through the region of Pandya Nadu. Madurai, the largest city in the Pandya Nadu region and its ancient capital, lies on the Vaigai. The Vaigai River rarely floods; its chief tributaries are the Siruliar, Theniar,



Varaha Nadi, and Mangalar. Near Sholavandan, the river passes Madurai on its course to its mouth on Palk Strait. The Vaigai River separates the southeastern coast of India from Sri Lanka.

**Valluvar**, see Thiruvalluvar.

**Vanji**, this is now known as Karuvur (Karur) 45 miles west of Thiruchchi. Once, it was the capital of Cholas.

**Veena**, see vina.

**Vina, veena, Saraswati vina (Saraswathi veena)**, is the instrument associated with Saraswati, the goddess of learning and the arts. This instrument is common in South India and is an important instrument in carnatic sangeet. It is variously called simply vina, or veena, the "Saraswati" part being implied.

**Yal, Yazh**, the yazh is an ancient Dravidian instrument, equivalent to the harp. The yazh disappeared slowly after the 11th century. The vina in this time had not emerged from the harp stage.

Editor's Notes

## Silambu Selvam

We place this work at the feet of the goddess of Tamil, bowing to her with the prayer: "Lady ruling over us, grant us the strength to spread the light of the arts developed by you, all over the world." It has been our desire for long to get the poetic treasure of *Silappadikaram*

of Ilango Adigal rendered in its full form into lucid sensitive Tamil easily understandable by all; many good scholars of Tamil also enthusiastically urged us to do so. By the grace of Lord Shiva from whom Tamil was born, our desire has been fulfilled now by this work. It is a rare work of the literary art; which sets forth clearly the glories of the ancient civilisation of the Tamils. It will give a new sense of pride to all readers.

Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati has spent his life doing penance according to the pure Advaita path, having the welfare of the Tamils as his motivation. The Swami has written this book after having studied critically for two years past, 150 works and having understood the *Silappadikaram* thoroughly. These works include the Tamil Sangam classics, works in languages like English, Tamil, French and Sanskrit having a Tamil antiquarian interest and also works of a technical nature on the arts.

Tiru Desikavinayakam Pillai, the Tamil poet, has kindly gone through the manuscript of this book in Tamil line by line and rendered with his suggestions and interpretations – we express our sense of gratefulness to this great scholar-poet, old in years, we also pay our obeisance to him.

The mention of *Silappadikaram* brings to mind first of all the name of Mahamahopadhyaya Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer; to this great scholar who has researched painstakingly the veritable mine of Tamil Sangam works and brought out this 'golden anklet' of the Tamil

Goddess called *Silappadikaram*, we pay our grateful respects.

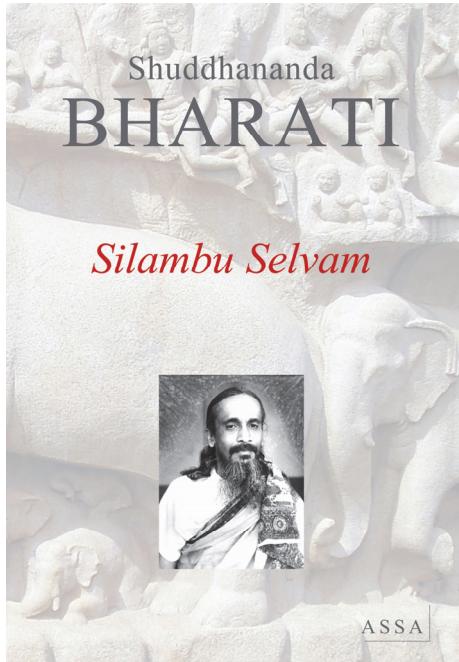
Our thankfulness goes to Vidvan T. P. Minakshisundaram Pillai, M.A.B.L., M.O.L, who has done valuable and great services in the field of Tamil and religion and has obliged us with his Preface to the Tamil work, *Chilambu Chelvam*.

Thank you to Dr. J. Parthasarathi M.A., Ph.D. for the English translation *Silambu Selvam* and to Dr. Shuddhananda Bharati for *Chilambu Chelvam*, the original Tamil version.

With the energy of *Aum Shuddha Shakti Aum!*

Possessing the gifts of  
Song and service to the Lord,  
We will be the servants of  
Only the Prince who bears up  
The umbrella of the sky.

Christian Piaget



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