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LEGENDS OF THE NAYANMARS

- Smt. Sripada Divya Nishanth



Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams
Tirupati

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Smt. SRIPADA DIVYA NISHANTH

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PREFACE

In today's busy world, religious books help us stay in touch with ourselves and the founding philosophy of existence. This book goes back to the roots of Saivism and tells about the 63 pillars of Saiva Philosophy, the Nayanmar Saints.

This captivating book is a step towards the spread of Hindu literature and philosophy. I heartily appreciate the author for her effort to write such an eloquent work of Hindu Literature. This book is based on the legendary Saivite book, "Periya Puranam" by Chekkilar.

The significance of this work is manifold. When Chekkilar was praying to Lord Shiva for inspiration and blessing to start his work, Lord Shiva gave him the first word to start his book - "Ulagellam" (meaning - In all the world..). Feeling rejuvenated by this, Chekkilar completed his work describing so eloquently the lives of 63 Saiva Saints known as Nayanmars and 12 Shiva devotees.

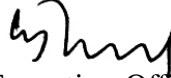
The Nayanmars ranged from being tribal to mighty Emperors. Some were highly intellectual while some were illiterate simpletons, some had great Yogic prowess while some didn't know how to even express their love. They led various lifestyles from being a Brahmacharyam, Gaarhyasatam and Sanyasam. Even couples such as Cheraman Perumal with his wife Mangaiyarkarasiyar and Sadaiya Nayanmar with his wife Isaijnaaniyar, who were the parents of the saint Sundaramurthi Nayanmar - were hailed as Nayanmar Saints due to their peerless devotion.

Their lives are a source of inspiration to the common man on how absolute devotion and complete surrender to Lord Shiva would relieve one of all the material burdens and help attain salvation from mortal life.

The simple objective of Chekizhar was to depict the lives of these saints who led such varied lifestyles and influence the common man to follow the virtuous path of Saivism. He considered it his life's mission to advocate Saivism to all. The varied lives of the Nayanmars helped in convincing the people that they are equal in the eyes of Lord Shiva. It helped people from different societies to relate to the Nayanmar saints.

Smt. Sripada Divya Nishanth has accomplished an excellent work of literature. She has written this book in simple yet poignant words. I am confident that many readers would have gained a broader perspective of the Saivite philosophy and they will find this book both interesting and invigorating.

In the Service of the Lord



Executive Officer

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams
Tirupati.

INTRODUCTION

Saivism is rich in its remarkable literary works composed by pious devotees. Of all the literary works of Saivism, the following three are portrayed to be the forerunners - "PeriyaPuranam", "ThiruvilaiyadalPuranam" and "SkandaPuranam". This book is a humble attempt to portray the lives of Saiva devotees and how their countless noble deeds glorified SaivaSidhantham. Their great lives and the enormous love they had for Lord Shiva is described exquisitely by Chekizhar in his epic book, "PeriyaPuranam".

“Periya Puranam” came into existence due to divine providence. The kingdom of Thondai Nadu was ruled by a generous King named KulothungaChola II. He had a loyal minister named Chekizhar who was an ardent Shiva devotee. He was worried about the religious philosophy followed by his beloved King. KulothungaChola II was a huge admirer of the Tamil epic, "SeevagaChinthamani", which advocates Jainism. To influence his King to follow Saivism, which was the righteous the path of pure love and moral wisdom, Chekizhar wrote the book "Thiru ThondarPuranam". This book was an adaptation of two of the most famousSaivite works, "Thiruthondathogai" by SundaramurthiNayanmar and "Thiru ThondarThiruvandaadhi" by NambiyaarurarNambi, both of whom were passionate Shiva devotees.

In due course, "Thiru ThondarPuranam" came to be known as "PeriyaPuranam". It is heartening to know that the great Nayanmar saints were common people leading simple lifestyles. Greatness is thrust upon them, due to their steadfast devotion and relentless Bhakti towards Lord Shiva. PeriyaPuranam did incredible service to the world of Saivism and reestablishing

its glory. It depicted Lord Shiva in a range of roles from a friend, a benefactor and a teacher to being a parent for a fervent devotee. The glory of Periya Puranam has permeated through the souls of innumerable Shiva devotees and exalted them through the years.

I am eternally grateful to the authorities of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, for giving me this wonderful opportunity. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my loving parents, for being my biggest inspiration. I would also like to thank my husband Sri. Nishanth, for his unconditional love and support, without which, I wouldn't have been able to accomplish any of this.

Smt. SRIPADA DIVYA NISHANTH

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1. THIRUNEELAKANTAR

Thiruneelakantar was a fervent Shiva devotee. He and his pious wife lived in the town of Chidambaram, one of the quintessential the centers of Saivism. Both of them faithfully served Lord Shiva by serving his devotees and considered this as their life's sole mission.

As all great men have some weakness, so did Thiruneelakantar and he succumbed to it. He desired another woman, who was not his wife and spent time with her. He hid this fact from his wife. But, his wife sensed the truth on seeing him. Even though she was devastated inside, she didn't reveal to him of her knowledge and continued serving him as a devoted wife.

Oblivious of all this, Thiruneelakantar continues his life. One day, he approached his wife with desire. This enraged his wife, and she told him angrily, "In the name of Lord Shiva, don't touch us!" Thiruneelakantar was shocked that she knew the truth; also since she had taken the name of his Lord Shiva and because she had used the plural "us", instead of "me", he vowed to never touch another woman in his life.

Years passed, the couple became old and this incident remained a secret between them. Lord Shiva was very impressed seeing the self-control of his devotee, just because his wife had used the Lord's name. He planned for the world to witness this depth of devotion.

He took form as an old Shiva devotee and approached Thiruneelakantar. Seeing the aged devotee Thiruneelakantar invited him into his home and treated him with due respect. The old man asked a favour from him, which he was very happy to oblige. The favour was to keep the devotee's alms bowl safely

with Thiruneelakantar, while he goes on a pilgrimage. The aged devotee stressed the importance of that bowl to him. Thiruneelakantar assured that the bowl will remain safe with him and told the elderly person to go on his trip with a peaceful mind. The old man left on his pilgrimage with a content heart.

Thiruneelakantar then kept the bowl in a safe place in his house. Days passed and finally, the old man returned and asked for his bowl. Thiruneelakantar went inside to fetch his bowl, after paying his respects. With divine providence, Lord Shiva made the bowl disappear. Thiruneelakantar searched for the bowl, but in vain. The bowl was not to be found anywhere.

He felt extreme morose, and asked the old devotee's forgiveness and reassured him that the bowl was indeed kept safely, but he was not sure how it had disappeared. The devotee failed to get convinced even though Thiruneelakantar offered to replace the bowl with another expensive one. He refused to believe that bowl was kept safely and had not been stolen by Thiruneelakantar. He asked Thiruneelakantar to take an oath on the holy name of Lord Shiva along with his wife. For this, he needs to hold the hand of his wife. Thiruneelakantar accepted, but held his wife's hands with a stick, instead of her hands. This is rebuffed by the old man, who admonished him to properly hold his wife's hands instead of the stick.

This was not accepted by Thiruneelakantar, due to his earlier vow to not touch his wife. This further infuriated the old man, whose belief that he is not telling the truth was further fortified. He took the case with the scholarly judges of Chidambaram. The court hearing is held and the old man stated his case, concluding that Thiruneelakantar had refused to take the holy oath properly, thus reinstating the fact that he must be guilty of stealing his bowl. The learned judges, agree with the

old man, saying that Thiruneelakantar should indeed hold his wife's hands and take the holy oath, else he will be punished for theft.

Finally, seeing no other means, Thiruneelakantar tells everyone present of his oath taken several years back, in his youth of not touching his wife. On hearing this, the judges are amazed by his self-control. They accepted his reason and ask him to take the oath using a stick and take a dip in the holy waters of the temple tank. When this is being done, the old man, who had accused Thiruneelakantar, disappears mysteriously.

As the old couple came out of the tank waters, everyone was shocked to see that they have become young and their frail bodies have become youthful! Lord Shiva then materialized and blessed the couple. Thus the devoutness of Thiruneelakantar became known to all. He and his wife, continued to serve the Lord, till the end of their lives.

Lord Shiva has thus showcased to everyone the faithfulness of his devotee.

2. IYARPAGAI NAYANAR

In the populous town of Poombuhar, there lived a wealthy businessman named Iyarpagaiyar. Though he was rich in all worldly possessions, he was a humble devotee of Lord Shiva. His wife was an epitome of wifely behavior, and emulated virtuous conduct. This couple was greatly respected and well known for the fact that they never said no to any Shiva devotee's requests for alms. They were renowned for their generosity and selflessness.

To test his devoutness, Lord Shiva took the form of a Shiva devotee and entered the abode of Iyarpagaiyar. The latter was

very happy to have a Shiva devotee to serve and made him comfortable and served him piously, and asked him if there is anything more that can be done for him. The devotee, said, there is one thing which he wanted from Iyarpagaiyar. On hearing this, the latter rejoiced that he can be of service to the fellow devotee and promised to fulfill his wishes, immediately and asked him of his desire.

The devotee, very calmly replied that he desired the beautiful wife of Iyarpagaiyar and wanted her. Iyarpagaiyar readily accepted and replied how happy he was to oblige the wishes of a Shiva devotee. He agreed to send his wife with him. His wife, being very virtuous, understood her husband's devotion to Shiva devotees, and accepted his wish and accepted to accompany the devotee anywhere.

Before long, news of this incident spread like wildfire in the town and the relatives of the couple were enraged by this. They concluded that Iyarpagaiyar had become mentally deranged and so, concluded that it was their duty to rescue the wife from the crazy devotee who made this unseemly request.

The devotee, knowing this asked Iyarpagaiyar to ensure that he left the town safely with the other's wife. Iyarpagaiyar agreed and assured that having given his word, it would be his solemn duty to escort him safely to the town's outskirts. On their way, they were stopped by the angry relatives who had come heavily armed. They warned the devotee to let go of the wife of Iyarpagaiyar.

Iyarpagaiyar intervened and tried to convince them that it was he who had willingly accepted to send his wife. This further incensed the relatives as it is extremely derogatory to their moral values. The efforts of Iyarpagaiyar to convince his relatives failed and his warning that he might harm them if they try to attack

the devotee was also ignored by the family members. When the devotee, who was actually Lord Shiva in disguise, pretended to be afraid, the chaste wife assured him not to worry and that her husband, Iyarpagaiyar would win against all, as he has Lord Shiva in his heart.

Finding no other means of protecting the devotee from his angry relatives, he attacked them instead and killed them all. He then accompanied the devotee till the town's outskirts and left his wife with the devotee and turned back.

After he had gone a few yards, he heard the devotee calling for him. Thinking that some more of his relatives might have come back to harm the devotee, he rushed back. On reaching there, he was baffled to find only his wife; the devotee had disappeared. When he was thus perplexed, Lord Shiva appeared in his true magnificent form accompanied by his consort Goddess Parvati Devi and praised the couple for their pure and selfless devotion. He blessed them and their relatives with the glorious boon of being with him in his heavenly abode.

3. ILAYANGUDIMARA NAYANMAR

In the tiny hamlet of Ilayangudi, there lived a wealthy farmer by the name of Ilayangudi Maranar. He and his wife were fervent devotees of Lord Shiva. Due to his hard work and his kind heart, he soon accumulated great wealth. He helped the devotees of Lord Shiva generously using this wealth.

Lord Shiva decided to test the earnestness of this couple's devotion. Gradually, he caused Ilayangudi Maranar to face losses in his crops and in due course, these successive failures, caused his wealth to decrease steadily. In spite of his near poverty, he continued his service to the devotees by first selling all his worldly belongings and eventually borrowing money from

others. Then, their situation worsened to the state where they were unable to afford even one meal a day. Still, they devoutly served the devotees to the best of their limited means.

Lord Shiva, to further test their sincerity, took the form of a Shiva devotee and approached the tiny hut of Ilayangudi Maranar one night when it was raining heavily. That day, both Ilayangudi Maranar and his wife didn't have anything to eat and every one of their neighbors had refused to lend them money. So, they went off to bed with empty stomachs. On hearing a knock on their door, in the night, Ilayangudi Maranar opened and found a Shiva devotee. He immediately invited him inside and gave whatever dry clothes they could find to make the devotee comfortable and requested him to take rest.

The next dilemma was how to feed their guest, when there was nothing at home, they couldn't borrow from anyone, nor could they go out, as it was raining heavily. Finally, finding no other means, they resorted to the unthinkable. For a farmer, the seeds to be harvested in the fields, are the most precious, as they bring the crops for next year. Ilayangudi Maranar went off in to the rainy night to his fields to get the seeds he had harvested earlier in the day. Only his pure devotion to Lord Shiva led him to the fields even though rain was pelting and there was no visibility in the night. He dug out the soil and got all the seeds he could find and hurried home.

His wife washed them, removed their outer husks and got the rice out from them. Next they required fire to cook the rice. Since, there wasn't any firewood left and no money to buy one, he pulled out a wooden beam that was holding his hut and fed the fire. They realized then to their dismay that they didn't have any side dish to serve along with the rice prepared. Ilayangudi Maranar again went off into the rainy night and plucked off

whatever spinach plants he could find and brought them home to his wife.

She washed them with great care and prepared simple dish she could with solemn devotion. Once the food was prepared and ready to be served, they approached the sleeping devotee and gently woke him up, so he can have his dinner. To their profound happiness, the devotee materialized in to the glorious form of Lord Shiva and blessed them by restoring their former wealth. Their steadfast devotion to Lord Shiva in spite of severe turmoil became known to all mankind.

4. MEYPPORUL NAYANAR

Meyporul Nayanar was the benevolent king of a prosperous country called Chethi Nadu. He was a brave King, celebrated for his kindness and generosity towards Shiva devotees and his bravery on the war front where his enemies were terrified of him.

His kingdom flourished under his benign rule. All Shiva devotees were highly respected and were allowed free entry into his palace. One of his rival kings was Muthanathan. Even after many tries, he was unable to defeat Meyporul Nayanar in the battlefield. Finally he resorted to stealthy means to kill Meyporul Nayanar so he can enjoy the riches of Chethi Nadu. After meticulous planning, he finally decided upon a devious plot.

He knew the importance and reverence with which Meyporul Nayanar treats Shiva devotees and so he decided to dress up as one to gain entrance into the palace and then kill him. Accordingly, he dressed up as a Shiva devotee, anointing himself with the sacred ashes on his arms and forehead, took the traditional alms bowl and also hid a knife inside a holy book. Thus disguised, he went to Chethi Nadu.

He chose the night time to enter the palace, so as not to be identified by others. The guards, on seeing a Shiva devotee, immediately let him inside after paying him due respects. Once inside, he asked for the King's quarters and walked towards them. Once in the entrance of the King's quarters, he was stopped by Meypporul Nayanar's loyal guard Thathan. When Muthanathan told that he is a Shiva devotee, Thathan paid him his respects, yet refused him entrance as the King was resting.

Muthanathan, insisted, telling that he had come from the Himalayas and must see the King immediately. Thathan, finding no other way to dissuade the devotee, politely led him to the King's inner chambers, where he was sleeping. On seeing the devotee enter, the queen woke up Meypporul Nayanar. After awakening abruptly from his slumber, he saw that a devotee had come and reverently invited him in and sat at the devotee's feet.

Muthanathan was feeling elated as his plan was progressing as expected. However, the Queen and the King's royal guard were still present. To send them away, he addressed the King telling that he had a message to be given to him and needed privacy to convey the holy message. King, unknowing of the evil intents of the fake devotee, sent the two away and bowed his head with the intent on hearing the holy sayings from the devotee.

Seizing this opportunity, Muthanathan pulled out the knife hidden in the book and plunged it into Meypporul Nayanar. Sensing that something amiss, the guard Thathan came inside and on seeing the injured King was enraged and got ready to attack the disguised Muthanathan. But, the injured King stopped his guard telling that though he had been stabbed, the infiltrator in the guise of Shiva devotee, hence should be revered and

ordered the guard to escort Muthanathan to the outskirts of the city safely.

The guard did as was instructed by his noble King. Only on hearing the assurance from his guard that the devotee is safe across the city limits did the King breathe his last. Such was the depth of his devotion to Lord Shiva.

5. VIRANMINDA NAYANAR

Viranmindar was born in an agricultural family in a tiny hamlet called Tiruchengode which belonged to the Chera Kingdom. He grew up to be a very zealous devotee of Lord Shiva and his life's mission was to visit the holy places of Lord Shiva and worship him. According to him, the devotees of Lord Shiva are to be as revered as the Lord himself.

With such idealistic principles, he journeyed all over the country, visiting the holy places, listening to the verses of other Shiva devotees and serving them as devoutly as if he is serving Lord Shiva himself. During the course of his journey, he reached a famous place named Thiruvarur. It was considered to be one of the most distinguished places of Saivism.

In this town was a hall called Devachiriyam, where Shiva devotees thronged and sang the praises of Lord Shiva. The place was electrified with the rhythmic chants of the Shiva devotees. Viranmindar was spellbound on seeing this place of supreme spirituality that he decided to extend his stay there. He continued his service to the Shiva devotees there.

One day, a great saint by the name of Sundaramurthi Nayanar came to this place. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva and prayed for the opportunity to serve Shiva devotees. When he entered the Devachiriyam, he was so enthralled to be in the holy place that instead of paying respects to the devotees

present, he directly went to the sanctum sanctorum of Lord Shiva and prayed.

This lack of respect for the devotees greatly enraged Viranmindar. He became so angry that he declared that henceforth, Sundaramurthi Nayanar would not be accepted as one amongst them. In this angry state of mind, he also declared that the Lord, who would bless such a person, would not be considered as one amongst them.

Everyone present where so shocked to see this terrible burst of temper from Viranmindar and waited to see how Lord Shiva would take this. However, to everyone's perplexity, Lord Shiva appeared, smiled serenely and blessed Viranmindar for his unparalleled depth of devotion and instructed Sundaramurthi Nayanar to sing a verse in praise of Viranmindar and his devoutness.

This incomparable devotion of Viranmindar inspired many devotees over the years and he was revered throughout the Saivite world.

6. AMARNITHI NAYANAR

In the great Chola Kingdom was situated a town Pazaiyarai which was the trading centre of the region. In this busy town there lived a wealthy business man named Amarnithiyar. His thoughts were filled with his love for Lord Shiva and equally filled was his heart with his selfless love for the devotees of Lord Shiva.

Every year, a grand festival is conducted for Lord Shiva in a place called Thirunallur. Amarnithiyar built a huge shelter for the devotees attending the festival. He and his family stayed in the shelter too, to serve food and offer comforts for the Shiva devotees. Amarnithiyar considered this opportunity to serve the

devotees as his greatest blessing. Lord Shiva on seeing such a devout person wanted the world to know of his virtue and zealous devotion.

During one of those festival days, a distinguished looking Shiva devotee approached the shelter. Amarnithiyar received him and provided all comforts with a joyful heart. The devotee wanted to take bath as he had travelled a long distance. As it was raining outside, he gave the robe he was wearing to Amarnithiyar to keep it safe and dry till he returned from his bath. Amarnithiyar accepted it and kept it in a safe place and went about busily serving other devotees.

After a while, the devotee returned from his bath and asked Amarnithiyar for his robe. To Amarnithiyar's utter dismay, they were not to be found anywhere. He was distressed by this incident and conveyed his heartfelt apologies to the devotee for losing his clothes and offered to compensate with a more expensive set of clothes.

The incensed devotee refused to accept this. He blamed Amarnithiyar for being dishonest. He proclaimed that a person who steals the cloth of a devotee can never be an honest man and labeled him as being deceitful. This greatly alarmed Amarnithiyar, who fell upon the feet of the devotee asking him to accept jewels and money instead of that missing cloth. But the devotee refused. He asked him to compensate only the weight of the cloth that he was wearing. He asked to use Amarnithiyar's cloth as reference and whatever equals that weight, he would accept that.

Readily agreeing to this, Amarnithiyar placed a weighing scale in the hall and placed the cloth he was wearing in one beam. In the other beam, he placed an expensive set of clothes. However, the balance remained tilted towards his cloth. He kept

on adding more clothes, still the balance remained tilted. He then asked the devotee's permission to add jewels and money. The devotee accepted. To everyone's bafflement, though Amarnithiyar kept adding gold coins and jewelry, the balance remained the same. Finally, with nothing left to keep on the balance, Amarnithiyar asked permission to place himself, his wife and son on the balance plate. This being accepted, he proclaimed that if his devotion to Lord Shiva is true then the beam should come to balance. He chanted the holy name of Lord Shiva and mounted on top of the huge pile of gold kept on the balance plate.

To the great astonishment of everyone, the beam containing Amarnithiyar came down and balanced with the other one. The devotee disappeared in his stead Lord Shiva appeared and blessed Amarnithiyar for his pure devotion.

7. ERIPATHA NAYANAR

In the mighty Chola Empire, was a city named Karuvur. It was famous for its renowned temple Anilai of Lord Pashupateswarar. In this city, there lived a Shiva devotee named Eripathanar. He was a young man, fierce in his love for Lord Shiva. He always carried an axe with him and saved fellow Shiva devotees from troubles. He was their savior and didn't hesitate to wield his axe to protect the devotees.

In the same city, there lived an old man named Sivakamiyandar. He was a pious devotee of Lord Pashupateswarar. His daily routine was to collect fragrant flowers from the garden, weave them into beautiful garlands for Lord Shiva. He would take them for the daily rituals to the temple. One day, when he was hurrying to the temple with his basket of garlands, the royal elephant crossed his path. It suddenly went berserk, threw down the basket and trampled on

the beautiful garlands. The old man, unable to chase back the elephant, fell down helplessly and cried his heart out piteously.

Eripathanar, who was passing by, heard the commotion. On enquiring, he found the distressed Sivakamiyandar crying. Seeing a troubled Shiva devotee greatly enraged Eripathanar. He went off in search of the Royal elephant. It was finally controlled and was being led back by the palace guards. Eripathanar, in his rage went and killed not only the elephant and also the palace guards who tried to stop him. News of this incident reached the Chola King Pugal Chola.

He was infuriated on hearing that a man would be bold enough to kill his prized royal elephant and his brave royal guards. He marched off to punish the offender. On reaching the place, he found only a Shiva devotee. He then came to know that the offence has been committed by a Shiva devotee. The Chola King, being a staunch Shiva devotee himself, claimed that no devotee of Lord Shiva could have done this without a good reason and learned the motive behind Eripathanar's killings.

He immediately prostrated on the feet of Eripathanar, claiming that the grave offence of the elephant was related to him, as he owned the elephant and hence, he should also be punished. He gave his sword to Eripathanar and asked Eripathanar to kill him. This devotion of the king to sacrifice his life for the fault that his elephant had committed made Eripathanar contrite. He regretted his deeds and for causing distress to such a devout king. He proceeded to take his own life for acting too hastily.

When Eripathanar and the king were thus arguing, Lord Shiva appeared and praised them both for their unparalleled devotion to him and blessed them both. Thus, Eripathanar's

name came into the annals of Saiva devotees, for his fierce devotion and his fight for justice for the harm done to Shiva devotees.

8. ENATHI NATHA NAYANAR

Enathinathar was a brave warrior of the Chola Empire. In the city of Eyinanur, he owned a school, where he trained students in the art of fighting. Though he was a warrior by profession, he was also a staunch devotee of Lord Shiva. His famous name and glories of his valor in the battle field got him many material pleasures. He used them all to serve selflessly the devotees of Lord Shiva.

In the same city, there lived another warrior named Adhisuran. He also owned a school that trained students in martial arts. However, his school lacked popularity and the students enrolled were also very less when compared to that of Enathinathar's school. This infuriated Adhisuran a lot. He led a group of his best students to Enathinathar's school and called for an open fight. He declared that whoever wins this would have the rights to run the school and the one who lost should close down his school.

Enathinathar accepted this and a great fight ensued. But Adhisuran and his students couldn't match Enathinathar's gallantry. They were defeated. This enraged Adhisuran and he thought of dishonest means to defeat Enathinathar. He finally stuck upon a plan. He approached Enathinathar and asked for a duel without anyone else involved. Enathinathar, innocent as he is of the devious plan set for him, accepted his condition of keeping this fight a secret from others.

Adhisuran came to the duel location, smeared with the holy ash on his forehead, indicating that he had become a devotee of

Lord Shiva. He knew how much Enathinathar reveres Shiva devotees. Enathinathar was shocked to see Adhisuran with holy ash on him. He immediately dropped his sword. He could never dream of harming a Shiva devotee. Seizing this opportunity, Adhisuran struck out his sword and killed Enathinathar. The latter welcomed death rather than harm a Shiva devotee.

This single minded devotion of Enathinathar elevated him to be one among the illustrious Nayanar saints.

9. KANNAPPA NAYANAR

The country of Pothapi Nadu was famous for its lush green forests and rich wildlife. In a small village called Uduppur nestled in the lush mountains were a hunter couple named Nagan and Thathai. They were fierce hunters and Nagan was the leader of his community. Their profession is to hunt the wildlife and sell them. Even after many years, this ideal couple had no children.

They prayed to their deity Lord Muruga very devoutly for a child to love in their aging lives. Due to Lord Muruga's blessings, Thathai soon gave birth to a healthy boy, whom they named as Thinnan. He was so heavy that even his father was unable to carry him. The little boy grew among his hunter folk, unaware of the outer world. Though illiterate and ignorant of the world's ways, he grew up brave and strong and learnt quickly all nuances of hunting. He knew nothing but hunting and in this, he excelled everyone.

Years went by and Nagan was too old to lead the hunting party. He appointed his son Thinnan to lead the folk in his stead. Thinnan accepted this and lead the next hunting expedition. There, they had a successful start and killed many wild animals. As they proceeded further in to the forest, they saw a wild boar

and Thinnan ran after it. He was accompanied by his friends Nanan and Kadan. As they chased the wild boar, they were led deeper in to the forest and the boar was finally killed by Thinnan.

He then realized that they had come in to the deepest areas of the forest and looked around. He saw a Shiva lingam there. He immediately felt an ethereal feeling of happiness and hugged the deity to show his affection. He butchered the boar and checked for the tastiest pieces and offered to his Lord. Illiterate and ignorant as he was, he didn't know any other way to express his profound love and devotion for Lord Shiva.

Meanwhile, there was an old Brahmin who visited this old shrine regularly every fortnight. He was appalled to see the bones of animals strewn over his beloved Lord. Every time, on seeing the bones, he would be distressed and clean the place and then start his rituals. The next time when Thinnan visited the Shiva Lingam, he noticed that dirt had accumulated and he wanted to clean the deity. Much to his dismay, he didn't have any vessels to bring water. He rushed to a nearby creek and brought water in his mouth. He poured water from his mouth on the deity and cleaned the Lingam.

The old Brahmin, on his next visit to the shrine, was horrified to see not only animal bones but also spittle on the Lord. He then concluded that this atrocity must be done by humans. He broke down completely and prayed to Lord Shiva. Showing pity on his distressed devotee, Lord Shiva explained to him that all this is done by a devotee, who loved him and all this was his display of pure affection. He asked the Brahmin to visit the shrine the next day to experience the depth of this devotee's affection.

The next day, when Thinnan approached the Shiva Lingam, he was shocked to see one of the Lord's eyes bleeding. Without

any second thought, he used his hunting knife to carve out one of his eyes and placed it on the bleeding eyes of the Shiva Lingam. The bleeding stopped immediately. However, the other eye in the Shiva Lingam started bleeding. Thinnan proceeded to cut off his remaining eye too and placed his leg on the Lingam's bleeding eye to mark the place. The Brahmin was dumbstruck on seeing this incredible display of devotion by Thinnan.

Lord Shiva then appeared and blessed Thinnan for his supreme devotion and gifted him his vision back and addressed him as Kannappan. Thus Thinnan became known as Kannappa Nayanmar.

10. KUNGILIYA KALAYA NAYANAR

The fertile little town of Kadavur, ideally placed in the banks of the river Kaveri was famous both for its residents who were devout Saivites and its prosperous lands. In this town there lived a pious Shiva devotee named Kalayar. Though he was poor, he constantly put away any little money he had to burn the holy "Kungiliya" (stick that gives out fragrant smoke) for Lord Shiva. He carried out this small ritual without fail and in all sincerity.

As days went by, he became poorer and he and his wife struggled to provide for their family by selling off whatever little they had. Slowly, their came a day, when they had nothing to sell except his wife's Mangalootram. This was considered to be extremely precious by married women. As there was no other means to sustain their family, with heavy heart his wife gave him her Mangalootram to sell. He left to town to sell and bring home food for their hungry kids.

On his way back with the money, he met a tradesman, selling “Kungiliya”. Kalayar was elated to see them and he brought several Kungiliya packets with all his money, to serve his Lord. His mind was so involved in his devotion that he forgot about his famished family. His only thought was to light these fragrant sticks before the Lord. Lord Shiva was deeply moved by this staunch devotion of Kalayar and decided to help him.

When he was thus deep in prayer in the temple, Lord Shiva filled Kalayar’s house with wealth. He then blessed Kalayar and asked him to end his fast and to go home. Kalayar went home and to his great surprise found instead a place filled with wealth. He and his family never faced poverty again and spent their lives in helping other Shiva devotees and spreading Saivism.

During that time, the Shiva Lingam in the temple of Thiruppanandal became famous. The reason being, the Shiva Lingam there was bent. So many years back, Lord Shiva residing there had bent forward to receive a garland from a devotee. The King of that place wanted to make the Shiva Lingam straight again. He tried by making strong people pull the Lingam, he even used elephants. But none of his efforts succeeded.

Kalayar too heard of this and in his humble way, travelled to Thiruppanandal to help his fellow devotees. He prayed fervently to Lord Shiva and tied a garland to his neck while the other end was draped over the Shiva Lingam and pulled gently so as not to hurt the Shiva Lingam. Much to the astonishment of everyone present, the Shiva Lingam moved and became straight again. Kalayar’s fame reached far and wide as a fervent Shiva devotee. The King was overjoyed and saluted Kalayar acknowledging him as a great Saivite. Kalayar returned to his

home town and spent his life serving Lord Shiva and his devotees.

11. MANAKANJARA NAYANAR

Manakanjarar was the chief of the King's armed forces. He lived in the town of Kanjarur. Though he was very wealthy, he lived a simple life praying to Lord Shiva and serving Shiva devotees.

He and his wife had no children for many years. They prayed to Lord Shiva and finally, his wife gave birth to a baby girl. She was raised luxuriously and was brought up with good values, virtue and Saiva devotion. She grew up to be a lovely maiden and attained marriageable age. All the family elders searched for a suitable groom and finally, to the great happiness of Manakanjarar, a staunch Shiva devotee named Eyarkona Kalikama Nayanar was selected to be the groom for his beloved daughter.

On the day of the grand wedding, everyone admired the beautiful bride who was bedecked beautifully with her long hair bejeweled and was wearing stunning ornaments. When the groom arrived and the wedding rituals were in progress, Lord Shiva, disguised as a devotee came to the Marriage. Manakanjarar was overjoyed on seeing a Shiva Yogi attend his daughter's wedding and immediately got his blessings. He called his daughter, the bride and asked her to get blessings from the Shiva devotee. When she did so, the Shiva devotee asked Manakanjarar his daughter's long hair, as it would be useful for his Panchavadi (used to decorate the chest of Shiva devotee).

Cutting off a woman's hair is considered highly inauspicious and doing this on the day of wedding is against traditional values. However, Manakanjarar did not care for any

of these. He only wanted to fulfill the devotee's request. He immediately took out his dagger and cut off his daughter's beautiful hair and gave to the devotee.

Lord Shiva then appeared in his true form and blessed the couple and the pious devotee Manakanjarar who put his devotion over everything else. Also, the bride was blessed with her former beautiful hair. The marriage took place with much rejoicing and the bride and the groom were blessed by all present. Manakanjarar entered the annals of Saivism for his single minded devotion.

12.ARIVATTAYA NAYANAR

Thayanar was a wealthy farmer in the village of Kana Mangalam, belonging to the Chola Kingdom. He and his wife, lead a devout life, dedicated to Lord Shiva. They used their wealth to serve Shiva devotees.

Every day, this couple prepared a tasty meal of Spinach curry and raw mango and served this delicacy to Lord Shiva as prasadam. Lord Shiva was very pleased with this pious couple and wanted their fame to spread. He made their wealth to decrease and their crops to fail successively. This caused them to become poor very soon. Still, they continued to give the prasadam to Lord Shiva in their meager means.

One day, they were left with nothing and having sold the last of their belongings, they were able to buy some rice and spinach. Thayanar's wife lovingly prepared the prasadam from this. Though they were both hungry and haven't had anything to eat, they started for the temple with hearts filled with devotion for Lord Shiva.

On their way, Thayanar's wife fell down due to exhaustion and with her fell down the vessels containing food for Lord

Shiva. This caused great distress to Thayanar. He neither had any money to buy rice and cook again nor the strength to go and seek work. He was overcome with deep remorse over his fallen fate and his inability to serve prasadam to his beloved Lord Shiva. In this miserable state, he decided to kill himself than lead the pitiable existence of not serving his Lord Shiva.

When he started to cut his throat with a dagger, he heard a divine voice telling him to stop. Lord Shiva appeared and blessed him for his deep devotion and cured the wounds caused by the dagger to his throat. Thus, Thayanar's devotion became known to all, his wealth restored and he continued his service to Lord Shiva.

13. ANAYA NAYANAR

In the kingdom of Melmala Nadu, there was a town called Mangalam, which was famous for its lush forests. In this town there lived a cow herd, Anayar. He lived a simple life, spent in herding the cattle to the forests for feeding and bringing them back to the villagers at sun set.

His mind was however occupied with thoughts of Lord Shiva. His only way of expressing his devotion and love for Lord Shiva was through music. He made a simple flute with some bamboo found in the forests. The music he created was so divine that all animals in the forests were enthralled by it. His music became his sole means of serving his Lord.

He spent his time on his flute, his tunes ever in praise of Lord Shiva. One day, while herding his cattle in the forests, he saw a bunch of Konrai flowers blooming. This glorious sight reminded him so much of his Lord Shiva that he commenced playing his flute. The music produced was so beautiful and delightful because of its purity of devotion expressed. His single

minded devotion pleased Lord Shiva, who blessed him and gave him the most coveted boon of being in his presence forever. Anayar thus attained salvation and reached the holy feet of Lord Shiva where his music continued to captivate his Lord forever.

14. MURTHIYAR NAYANAR

Murthiyar was a humble sandal merchant in the temple city of Madurai, the capital of the Pandya Kingdom. The great temple of Sundareswarar was an integral part of Madurai. Murthiyar's days were spent in grinding the best sandal he had and taking the sandal paste to the temple to be adorned for Lord Shiva. This he did with a fervent devotion and pure heart.

One day, the Pandya king was defeated in a battle and Madurai was captured by a Jain king. This new king hated Saivism and wanted to promote Jainism among the people. He prohibited worship of Lord Shiva and stopped all services in the temple. Murthiyar in spite of the prohibitions, continued to serve sandal paste to the temple. This irked the new King, who ordered all the ways by which Murthiyar could get the Sandal to be blocked.

Murthiyar was distressed as he was unable to get sandal to serve his Lord Shiva. Out of extreme devotion, he ground his own hands on the grind stone, so he could serve his blood instead of Sandal. Lord Shiva was pleased by this show of Murthiyar's intense devotion. He appeared in front of Murthiyar, blessed him and foretold that he would become the next Pandya King. Murthiyar's hands got healed miraculously.

The Jain king soon died and as the deceased Pandya King had no offspring to take up the Kingdom, the city's wise men decided to implement their age old custom of choosing their King. This custom involved blindfolding the temple elephant and making it walk around Madurai city. It will have a garland

on its trunk. Whoever the elephant garlands would be the next chosen King.

The elephant was blindfolded and left on its mission. It went straight to the temple pillar where Murthiyar was standing and garlanded him. He was declared as the next Pandya King. The new King, however, declared that he will not be wearing any royal ornaments but the holy Rudrakasham seed; he would anoint himself with holy ashes and have matted hair identical to Shiva devotees. During his reign, Saivism flourished and the country prospered. He later gave the Kingdom to his successor and spent his life spreading and promoting Saivism and continued to personally grind Sandal paste for Lord Shiva.

15. MURUGA NAYANMAR

Muruganar was born in an illustrious family of Vedic scholars, in the ancient city of Poombuhar. He grew up hearing the divine chanting of holy Vedas. His devotion for Lord Shiva also increased as days passed. He spent his days singing the sacred hymns while making garlands for Lord Shiva.

His pious existence was the epitome of single minded Shiva devotion. Every day, he would wake up before dawn, search the forests for the most beautiful and fragrant flowers. He would make lovely garlands of them, whilst chanting the divine verses of Saivism. His sincere prayers and service pleased Lord Shiva.

He became associated with great Nayanar saints such as the elderly saint Thirunavukkarasar, who stayed in Muruganar's house during his visit to Poombuhar. He felt blessed for having been associated with the formidable Shiva devotee. He also had the good fortune of having been friends with another great Nayanar saint, Thirugnaana Sambandar.

Muruganar attained salvation after spending his life in earnest service to Lord Shiva.

16. RUDRA PASHUPATHI NAYANAR

Pashupathiyar hailed from the village of Thiru Thalaiyur belonging to the Chola Kingdom. He was born in a family of Vedic scholars. From a young age, he became devoted to Lord Shiva and this devotion increased as he became older. For a Shiva devotee, the holiest of Vedic mantras is the Shri Rudram. Pashupathiyar spent his days chanting this sacred hymn with complete devotion to Lord Shiva.

Every day, before the day dawns, in the early morning mist, he would go to the temple pond. After praying to Lord Shiva, he would immerse himself neck deep into the pond's cold waters and chat the holy verses with hands folded over his head. He would be in this posture all day long, praying with complete sincerity.

This perpetual flow of devotion from Pashupathiyar pleased Lord Shiva. Pashupathiyar was blessed and he reached the Lord's heavenly abode. Since he reached the Lord by reciting the sacred Shri Rudraprasanna Mantram, he came to be known as Rudra Pashupathi Nayanar.

17. THIRUNALAIPOVAR NAYANAR

(NANDANAR)

Nandanar was born in the slums of the village Adhanur, situated in the banks of the river Kollidam. He became an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva from an early age. Since he belonged to a lower caste, he was barred from entering the temples.

He spent his days making musical instruments and praying to Lord Shiva with all sincerity. He used to stand outside the

Shiva temples. Once there, he used to pray, sing and dance completely oblivious to the world, with his mind totally immersed in thoughts of Lord Shiva. He had an immense desire to see Lord Shiva residing as Shivalokanathar in Thiruppunkur temple.

Unable to be let go of that thought, he went to Thiruppunkur and stood outside the temple, directly opposite the God's altar. However, he couldn't get even a glimpse of the Lord, as the statue of the holy bull, placed outside the front altar was obstructing his view. Lord Shiva sensing his beloved devotee's difficulty, made the statue move so that Nandanar could see him. Nandanar was ecstatic on getting the first glimpse of his Lord.

After witnessing the beautifully adorned Lord, he strove around the temple. He observed that the area around the temple was outgrown with weeds and went about cleaning them and dug out a large pond for the temple. He then went to many temples of Lord Shiva and did whatever service he could with a pious heart.

After returning to his home in the slums, he resumed his occupation. He had a burning desire to see the Lord in his Dancing posture. This divine temple was situated in a city called Chidambaram, considered to be a sacred place of Saivism. Nandanar was afraid that he couldn't go inside the city premises owing to the fact that he is from a low caste. So, he kept procrastinating that he would go the next day. Hence he got the name Nalaipovar (one who goes the next day). This continued for several days, when finally, he got the conviction to go to Chidambaram.

On reaching the city boundaries, he was mesmerized by the sanctity of the place. The holy Vedas being chanted by the people, the air of devotion in the place enamored him. But, he

was too intimidated to go into the city. He went around the holy town several times and finally, overcome by exhaustion, slept under a tree on the city outskirts. Lord Shiva, pleased by Nandanar's devotion, appeared in his dream and dictated him to walk through fire to reach his heavenly abode. He relayed the same message to the learned scholars who were reciting the holy Vedas, asking them to seek out the devotee on the city outskirts.

The next day, the priests of Chidambaram, went in search of Nandanar and found him praying under the tree. They conveyed him Lord Shiva's message. Nandanar was elated to be so blessed. Amidst the priests' chanting of holy Vedas and playing of divine music instruments, Nandanar walked the fire built for him. The priests and devotees gathered witnessed Nandanar reaching Lord Shiva's heavenly abode, where he attained complete bliss.

18. THIRUKKURIPPU THONDA NAYANAR

In the illustrious Kanchipuram city, belonging to the Pallava kingdom was born Thirukkurippu Thonda Nayanar. He was a washer man by profession and a fervent devotee of Lord Shiva. He served Shiva devotees by washing their clothes. His mind was always occupied by thoughts of serving Lord Shiva and his devotees. He had the ability to understand the needs of devotees by just observing their facial expressions. Hence, he got the name of Thirukkurippu Thondar.

Lord Shiva was pleased with the deep devotion of Thirukkurippu Thondar and wanted his fame to be known to all. He disguised himself as an old Shiva devotee, adorned with Rudrakasham, holy ash and dressed in old clothes. Thirukkurippu Thondar noticed the fragile old man and

approached him. He was overwhelmed to be service to a Shiva devotee and offered to wash his clothes.

The old man replied that this was the only pair of clothes he had and in their absence, he would suffer from the cold. Thirukkurippu Thondar assured him that he would return the clothes freshly washed by sun set. The old man left him with the clothes. Thirukkurippu Thondar washed them with a devoted heart. When he was about to put the clothes out to dry, thunderstorms started. There was no sign of the rains stopping and hence, the clothes remained wet and couldn't be dried by sun set.

Thirukkurippu Thondar was distressed by this. He felt he had betrayed the Shiva devotee's trust by breaking his promise. Overcome by this emotion, he started beating his head on the washing stone repeatedly and praying to Lord Shiva to forgive him. Lord Shiva was pleased by his show of devotion and blessed Thirukkurippu Thondar.

19. CHANDESWARA NAYANAR

In the Chola empire was a town named Thiru Seyanjalur, renowned for its Vedic scholars. Schools of Vedas filled the town. The whole town had a holy aura due to the chanting of the divine Vedas by the devotees. This town was one of the premium Saiva centers.

In this town lived Echadattan and his wife. Though Echadattan was an amicable man, he had his character flaws. His wife was a very pious woman of great virtue. She gave birth to a baby boy whom they named Vichara Sarma. At five years of age, he was inducted into the Vedic education. He learnt the holy Vedas with great fervor. He had a deep devotion for Lord Shiva even for someone that young.

One day, he saw a cowherd beating one of his cows. The young Vichara Sarma was enraged on seeing this cruelty against one of the holiest animals. He marched up to the cowherd and got the cows from him. From that day on, he herded the cows, while continuing his education. In his loving care, the cows became healthier and started to provide more milk. The cattle owners were pleased by this and he continued to care for the cows. The cows, instead of giving milk to their calves, came and gave him their milk instead. Such was their love for the little boy.

In his innocence, and out of love for Lord Shiva, he built a sand structure of Lord Shiva, decorated that with fresh flowers. He poured the milk given by the cows on the temple he had created, with all his love and devotion. This happened every day. He created the sand structure and prayed to Lord Shiva, later at sun set, he would collapse everything and take the cows to their owners. His devotion for Lord Shiva kept increasing.

One day, a passerby witnessed the young Vichara Sarma pouring milk on the sand structure. Unaware of the poignant devotion of the boy, he complained to the village elders that the boy was wasting milk. This infuriated the villagers who in turn complained to his father, Echadattan. He was angry with his son for humiliating him. The next day, he followed the unsuspecting Vichara Sarma, who did his daily ritual of building the sand structure, decorating it with flowers, all the while praying sincerely to Lord Shiva.

Echadattan, who was hiding and watching all this, became furious on seeing that what everyone said was indeed true. He started beating his son with a stick. Even after beating, his son didn't beg for forgiveness, as his mind was praying to Lord

Shiva. Irked by this, he kicked the pot of milk which is used to pour milk on the Lord's head.

This one act caused a manic anger in Vichara Sarma, who felt that this act had defamed Lord Shiva. He picked up an axe lying nearby and cut off the legs of his father for disrupting the worship. It didn't matter to him that it was his father who had committed the sinful act. His only thought was that Echadattan had insulted Lord Shiva. This displayed the pure devotion of Vichara Sarma.

Lord Shiva was pleased by the significance given to him over his own father. He appeared before the young boy and gave him the title of "Chandeshan". He blessed him and declared that whatever is offered by the devotees would belong to him after offering to Lord Shiva. Thus, Chandeswara Nayanar is worshipped and is given a special place in temples till date.

20. THIRUNAVUKKARASU NAYANAR

In the prosperous Kingdom of Thirumunaippadi, on the banks of the river Thenpennai was the deeply religious, Saivite town of Thiruvaamur. In this town lived a wealthy farmer Pugazhanaar. He and his wife led a pious life. They had two children, a daughter, Thilakavathiyar and a son MaruNeekiyar.

As years went by, the children grew and the girl, Thilakavathiyar reached marriageable age. Her parents arranged her marriage with a warrior named Kalippagaiyar. Before the wedding, the groom-to-be went off to a battle. When he was away, Pugazhanaar and his wife succumbed to an illness, leaving the children desolate. Just then, another tragedy struck them when they received news that the groom, Kalippagaiyar became a martyr in the battlefield. This greatly depressed Thilakavathiyar who wanted to end her life. However, her

brother MaruNeekiyar stopped her. She relinquished all material pleasures and started living a simple life. She dedicated her life to raise her brother.

All these early tragedies in his life shook MaruNeekiyar. He overcame his gloom by serving the poor and hungry. These incidents made him realize life's uncertainties and analyze the spiritual being. This search drew him towards Jainism. He travelled to Pataliputhra, which was a renowned place for Jain philosophy. He learnt their scriptures and quickly gained superiority amongst them. He was crowned as "Dharma Senar" by them.

Meanwhile, his sister led a life of austerity in the Shiva temple, Thiruvadikai. She prayed to Lord Shiva to guide her brother and not forsake him. Lord Shiva appeared in her dreams and reassured her. Lord Shiva, to make MaruNeekiyar realize the truth, gave him a terrible stomach pain. Dharma Senar unable to suffer the pain took all medicines given by the Jains but they didn't alleviate his agony. When everything applied by the Jains failed, he sent a convoy to his sister to help him. She replied that though she cared for him, she couldn't come to the Jain place. With no other way, MaruNeekiyar left all his Jain belongings and left for Thiruvadikai to his sister.

His sister received him with love and advised him to surrender himself to Lord Shiva and accept his greatness. She applied the holy ash on his body and took him for his first worship to the Thiruvadikai temple. The sanctity of the temple moved him and he was mesmerized by the holy atmosphere. He composed his first verse in praise of Lord Shiva, who pleased by MaruNeekiyar simple devotion, removed his pain. Lord Shiva then blessed him and addressed him as "Thirunavukkarasar", for singing the beautiful verses.

Thirunavukkarasar submitted himself entirely to Lord Shiva and dedicated his life to Shiva worship. The Jains became furious that a leading philosopher amongst them has now forsaken Jainism. They complained to the Pallava King who was a Jain that Thirunavukkarasar has blasphemed Jainism and so should be punished severely. The Pallava King, Mahendra Varma, hearing these complaints, ordered Thirunavukkarasar to come to him. Thirunavukkarasar however refused the orders and continued his prayers in the Thiruvadikai temple.

This infuriated the King, who ordered him to be put inside a burning kiln and closed the lid. After seven days, they opened the lid and much to their shock saw that Thirunavukkarasar was unharmed. They next poisoned him, which also had no effect on him. Then they released a mad elephant and directed it towards where he was tied. The elephant came in all fury destroying everything in its path. But, on reaching Thirunavukkarasar, it saluted him and turned back to attack the King's men. Finally, the King ordered that Thirunavukkarasar be dropped into the sea with a huge stone tied to him. However, the stone floated in the water. In all these travails, he constantly prayed to Lord Shiva and never lost his belief in him. Finally, the frustrated King released him.

Thirunavukkarasar reached the town of Thiruppadhiripuliyur, where he worshipped the Shiva temple there and proceeded for Thiruvadikai. By now, his fame had spread far and wide. Wherever he went, devotees thronged to seek his blessings and listen to his discourse on Lord Shiva. Mahendra Varma, realizing his mistakes, renounced Jainism and embraced Saivism. He begged for Thirunavukkarasar's forgiveness to atone his sins. The king then constructed a huge Shiva temple called Gunaparavichcharam.

Thirunavukkarasar undertook a massive pilgrimage, worshipping the various Shiva temples in places like Chidambaram and sang soul stirring verses on Lord Shiva. In his holy tour, he heard of a young boy, Thirugnaana Sambandar who had gained so much fame due to his deep devotion for Lord Shiva. Thirunavukkarasar went to meet this child devotee. Thirugnaana Sambandar on hearing the approach the aged saint immediately addressed him as “Appar” (Father). They formed a wonderful bond of friendship fortified with an unparalleled devotion for Lord Shiva.

They often encountered each other in various Shiva temples in course of their pilgrimages. During one such instance, they arrived together at the Thirumaraikaadu temple. The main door of this temple was sealed long back by the holy Vedic saints after their worship. Unable to reopen the door, the devotees used a side door to visit the main altar. A Shiva devotee named Chekizhar beseeched Thirunavukkarasar to open the door by his verses. Thirunavukkarasar sang the famous verses “Panniru Mozhiyal” and when he completed singing them, the main doors opened immediately, much to the incredulity of the throngs of devotees present.

Thirunavukkarasar reached Thingalur on his travels and there, he was invited to the home of Appudhi Adigalar, an ardent Shiva devotee. The pious Appudhi Adigalar and his wife prepared a grand feast in honor of the sage. When they were about to eat, the couple sent their young son to their back yard to cut banana leaves so they can serve the food. But, the young boy never returned. When the father went to investigate, he was shocked to find his son dead due to a snake bite. Not wanting to delay serving the great devotee who had come to their home, the grief stricken couple, put up a pleasant face and served Appar.

But, the great devotee, sensing something to be amiss, prayed to Lord Shiva and miraculously brought back the young child to life.

Thirunavukkarasar or Appar as he was often addressed continued his journey, visiting the holy shrines of Lord Shiva. He regaled in Lord Shiva's divinity and he proceeded north to Varanasi, worshipping the various Shiva temples en route. On his return, he continued his pilgrimage to many more places, performing many miracles and firmly establishing the Saiva philosophy. He reached the heavenly abode in his old age and attaining great fame as one of the greatest Saiva saints. His verses are still being chanted in the Saiva temples.

21. KULACHIRAI NAYANAR

From the tiny village of Manamerkudi of the mighty Pandya kingdom hailed a virtuous Shiva devotee named Kulachiraiyar. His acumen and astute attitude, coupled with his honesty, got the attention of the Pandya King Nedumaran. He appointed Kulachiraiyar as his Prime Minister.

Being an ardent Shiva devotee, he faced numerous challenges in establishing Saivism in his Kingdom. This was mainly due to the fact that the King Nedumaran practiced Jainism. Hence, he encouraged Jainism to flourish in his Kingdom. The Jains were a threat to the growth of Saivism.

Even in this state of affairs, Kulachiraiyar did everything he could to serve the Shiva devotees. However helpless his situation might be, Kulachiraiyar, still carried out whatever activities he could, to propagate Saivism. He had an ally in the Queen, Mangaiyarkarasiyar who was a devout Shiva devotee. He invited great Saivite Saints such as Thirugnaana Sambandar to discourse about Saivism. His relentless efforts finally bore

fruit when the King Nedumaran realized the greatness of Saivism and became a Shiva devotee. Under his guidance, the King carried out numerous projects to develop Saivism in the Pandya Kingdom.

This persistent hard work and unyielding faith on Lord Shiva, earned Kulachiraiyar great name and he became one of the famous Nayanar Saints.

22.PERUMIZHALAIK KURUMBA NAYANMAR

The fertile little town of Perumizhalai, belonging to the Mizhalai Kingdom, was famous for upholding Saivism. This was mainly due to the town's chief, Perumizhalaik Kurumbar. He was always deep in meditation on Lord Shiva. He led by example on how pious a Shiva devotee should be. He spent his vast wealth in selflessly serving the devotees of Lord Shiva.

Under his guidance, the town flourished and Shiva devotees were revered. Perumizhalaik Kurumbar became highly proficient in Yogic powers. With his extensive wisdom and knowledge, he understood the needs of Shiva devotees and served them with the best of what he had.

He later became acquainted with a famous Shiva devotee named Sundaramurthi Nayanmar. He became a huge follower of this great devotee. Once, Sundaramurthi Nayanar went to the Chola King Cheraman Perumal Nayanar of the Kodungolur Kingdom, to get white elephants for the great Shiva temple in Thirukkayilai. Perumizhalaik Kurumbar foresaw this event using his spiritual eye. He also learnt that Sundaramurthi Nayanar will soon be reaching the Lord's abode.

PerumizhalaikKurumbar was unable visualize his life in the material world when the great devotee Sundaramurthi Nayanar whom he revered would soon be attaining salvation.

So, he renounced the human world by his unique Yogic prowess and attained Lord Shiva's holy feet.

23. KARAIKKALAMMAIYAR

In the coastal town of Karaikkal in Tamilnadu, there was a wealthy trader named Danadattan. After some years of married life, his wife gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. They named her Punithavathiyar. She was raised in the lap of luxury. The girl grew up to be a staunch Shiva devotee and spent her time praying to Lord Shiva.

When she attained marriageable age, her father got an alliance from another trader named Nidhipathi for his son, Paramadattan. As both the parties liked each other, the wedding took place with great splendor. As Danadattanar couldn't bear to live far away from his dear child, he made arrangements for his son-in-law to set up a business in Karaikkal itself.

The newlyweds settled to a peaceful life in Karaikkal. Punithavathiyar, like a virtuous wife, looked after her husband's needs and kept her family happy. She also continued her daily worship of Lord Shiva and her pure devotion grew exponentially with passing days.

One day, Paramadattan, got a pair of mangoes as gift from a fellow trader. He sent them home through his servant, conveying the message to his wife that the mangoes are to be served in his lunch. Punithavathiyar received them and went about with her domestic duties. Later, a Shiva devotee approached her for alms. On seeing the Shiva devotee, she treated him with the greatest reverence and served him the lunch she had prepared and later gave one of the mangoes her husband had sent. The devotee ate his fill, blessed the young wife and left.

When noon arrived, her husband came home for lunch. She served her husband and later gave him the remaining mango. After eating the mango, the husband found it so delicious that he asked his wife for the other one too. She was too scared to confess that she had given the other mango to the Shiva devotee. So she went inside pretending to bring it.

In the kitchen she started praying to Lord Shiva to help her out of this ordeal. Immediately, a ripe mango appeared in her hand. She gave this mango to her husband, who was stunned after eating this second mango. The taste of this one was so divinely scrumptious that he immediately understood that this did not belong to the pair of the earlier mango. He confronted his wife, asking her as to from where she got this mango. Punithavathiyar, unable to lie to her husband, confessed that hearing her prayers, Lord Shiva gave them to her. Unwilling to believe that his wife had such power, he asked her to prove it by giving him another mango by praying. Punithavathiyar, incapable of disobeying her husband, prayed again for Lord Shiva to intervene and help her. Instantly, another mango appeared in her hands.

Paramadattan was alarmed on seeing his wife summon Lord Shiva's help and be offered too. He later left the house telling his wife that he has to trade in the neighboring Pandya Kingdom and would return after earning enough money. Punithavathiyar spent her days alone in Karaikkal, devoting herself solely to Lord Shiva and serving his devotees, while waiting for her husband to return. Years passed and her relatives came to know that Paramadattan had set up another family in the Pandya Kingdom and even has a girl child.

They took Punithavathiyar to him. On seeing his first wife, Paramadattan, immediately fell on her feet, along with his

current wife and daughter. Paramadattan told everyone present that he reveres her and that she has divine powers. He couldn't look at her as his wife, hence he left the place. In her remembrance, he had even named his daughter after her. Everyone present learnt of the miracle that she had performed and looked at her with renewed respect.

Punithavathiyar was stunned by this turn of events. She prayed to Lord Shiva to take away her beauty and youth and give her an old woman's body, as she had no use for them now. She was granted her wish and she instantly became an old woman. From that instant, she became Karaikkal Ammaiyar (Ammaiyar = Mother).

She sang numerous divine verses on Lord Shiva. She desired to go to Mount Kailash to see Lord Shiva. On reaching the mountain, she felt that she doesn't deserve to set her foot on the holy hills. Hence, she climbed the entire mountain on her head. Goddess Shakti, the divine consort and Lord Shiva were amazed to see this extent of devotion from an old woman. On seeing her, he addressed her as "Mother!" Lord Shiva asked what her wish was. She replied that she wanted to be liberated from the mortal rebirth and also wished to be under the Lord's feet when he performs the divine dance.

Lord Shiva granted her wishes and asked her to be present when he dances in the temple of Thiruvallangaadu. She reached the temple of Thiruvallangaadu and witnessed the divine dance. She sang the eternal verses "Mootha Naarpadhikam" and reached the blissful feet of Lord Shiva. She became one of the most venerated of the Nayanar Saints.

24. APPUDHI ADIGAL NAYANMAR

Appudhi Adigal was a pious man in the village of Thingalur. Not only him, but the entire family were staunch Shiva devotees.

Appudhi Adigalar heard of the great Shiva devotee Thirunavukkarasar and revered the great man, even though he hadn't met him.

He built many ponds, shelters and many other facilities for the devotees. However, he named the benefactoras Thirunavukkarasar. He and his family continued their fervent worship of Lord Shiva while serving his devotees. One day, the great Shiva devotee, Thirunavukkarasar reached the temple of Thirupazhanam, where he did the back breaking work of cleaning the weeds around the temple grounds and digging the ground to create ponds. Doing this in the scorching sun made him very thirsty. While searching for water, he reached a shelter with refreshing water.

While resting there, he was surprised to see his name written on the place. He asked the people there as to who wrote his name there. They told him of Appudhi Adigalar, who revered the great devotee. Thirunavukkarasar was amazed to hear that there was someone who would revere him so much and went in search of his home.

Appudhi Adigalar was informed that a Shiva devotee had come to his home. Immediately, he came out to welcome the Shiva devotee, who praised him for the good worked done, but enquired to him as to why he should do all this wonderful work, but name some other person for these good deeds. The devotee's address of his beloved Thirunavukkarasar as "some other person" enraged Adigalar, who got angry at the devotee and asked who he is to talk so irreverently.

The devotee serenely replied that it was his name that was written on the walls. Adigalar was immensely happy and he immediately called his family and friends to get the blessings of the great devotee. He invited him for a feast at his home.

Thirunavukkarasar was pleased to find such loving devotion and accepted to dine there.

A grand feast was prepared. Appudhi Adigalar, asked his eldest son to bring the banana leaves, so the feast can be served for the devotee. When he went to the backyard to cut the leaves, he was bit by a poisonous snake. On seeing the delay in his son's return, Adigalar went to the backyard and to his shock, found his son dead by snake bite. But unwilling to stop the feast; He and his wife covered their son with a mat and went to serve their esteemed guest.

Before the commencement of the feast, Thirunavukkarasar, asked everyone to come, so he can give the holy ashes. Everyone came but the eldest son. When enquired about him, Adigalar replied that he would be of no use now. Thirunavukkarasar sensed something was amiss and enquired. Unable to lie, Adigalar told the sad tale of his son's demise. Immediately, Thirunavukkarasar prayed for Lord Shiva and brought the dead son back to life.

This miracle was not only due to the divine power of Thirunavukkarasar's devotion, but also the pure devotion of Appudhi Adigalar and his family.

25. THIRU NILANAKKA NAYANMAR

From the town of Thiruchatha Mangai of Chola Kingdom, hailed a devout Saiva devotee named Nilanakkanar. He hailed from a family of Vedic scholars. Both he and his virtuous wife were ardent devotees of Lord Shiva and served the Shiva devotees by hosting scrumptious feasts for them.

One auspicious day, Nilanakkanar went to the temple of Lord Shiva accompanied by his wife. While he was doing the rituals, his wife noticed a spider on the Shiva lingam.

Instantaneously, she blew the spider off with her mouth. This enraged Nilanakkanar, as her act was derogatory and must be punishable. He left her at the temple and went off home angrily, without hearing her explanation. According to him, what she did was an unforgivable offence.

His wife, stayed in the temple as she didn't want to disobey her husband's orders. The sun set and night came. Meanwhile, Nilanakkanar went home and slept with a heavy heart. In his dreams, Lord Shiva appeared and showed him his arms where his wife had blown off the spider and they were alright, while his other arm was reddened by the spider bite. This shocked Nilanakkanar and he immediately went and fetched his wife home.

Thus, due to his immense devotion, Nilanakkanar's turbulent mind was put to rest by Lord Shiva himself. Nilanakkanar was a zealous follower of the great Shiva devotee Thirugnaana Sambandar. When he heard that Thirugnaana Sambandar was coming to his town along with many Shiva devotees, he worked very hard to decorate their pathway with flowers and welcomed the saint. Pleased by the service done and the devotion shown by Nilanakkanar, Thirugnaana Sambandar praised him in his verses.

Thus, due to his sincere devotion to Lord Shiva, he became a Nayanar Saint.

26. NAMINANDHI ADIGAL NAYANMAR

Naminandhi Adigal was a pious devotee of Lord Shiva from the picturesque town of Emapperur, on the banks of the river Kaveri. He was born in a family of Vedic scholars and was well versed in the Vedas. Every evening, unswervingly, he conducted the puja rituals for Lord Shiva in his home.

He had a great desire to worship Lord Shiva in Thiruvarur. He travelled to this place, worshipped Lord Shiva there and went on to another place, Araneri, which also had a famous Shiva temple. By the time he reached the place and completed his prayers, it became evening and dusk was fast approaching. He wanted to light oil lamps for the Lord. However, he didn't have money to buy oil. So, he approached the first house he saw and asked for some oil.

Much to his dismay, he had reached the house of Jains, who scorned Saivism. They ridiculed his request telling that if Lord Shiva was as powerful as he claimed, then why does he need oil to light lamps. This deeply hurt Naminandhi Adigal. He then heard a voice instructing him to light the lamps in pond water. Praising Lord Shiva, he filled up the lamps with pond water and lit them. To the great astonishment of all present, the lamps glowed majestically till dawn.

The news of this miracle spread and the humiliated Jains left the place. Saivism prospered in this Kingdom. Naminandhi Adigal returned home victoriously with thoughts of Lord Shiva. The temple of Thiruvarur celebrated the Panguni Uthiram festival in a grandiose manner. Devotees of Lord Shiva throng towards the place on the festival day, from all walks of life, irrespective of caste or creed.

Naminandhi Adigal participated in this festival and by the time he returned home, it became dark and was time for his evening prayers at home. Instead of starting his puja, he asked his wife to ready his bath as he felt impure because of being in close proximity with so many people who had come to the festival. When his wife went inside to do so, he slept immediately overcome with fatigue, in his dream, Lord Shiva came and

enlightened him of the fact that all Shiva devotees are the same and no one is impure.

It was dawn by the time he woke up from his dream and he was mortified to have had such prejudice and also to have missed performing his daily puja at home. He rushed to the Thiruarur temple to beg forgiveness from the Lord. On reaching the temple premises, He saw everybody take the form of Lord Shiva. Realization dawned on him and he rejoiced that Lord Shiva had come and made him aware of this great truth that all Shiva devotees are to be revered.

He spent his life serving the devotees of Lord Shiva and his earnest service made him one of the famed Nayanar Saints.

27. THIRUGNAANA SAMBANDAR NAYANMAR

Seergali was a prosperous little town in the mighty Chola Kingdom. In this town lived a pious man, well educated in the holy Vedas named Sivapaada Hrudayaar with his virtuous wife Bhagavathiyaa. Both were ardent devotees of Lord Shiva. They spent their days praying to Lord Shiva. Sivapaadanar was very much worried about the chaotic state of the world by the decline of Saivism and emergence of other religions.

The childless couple prayed to Lord Shiva to give a son who would restore the past glory of Saivism. By Lord Shiva's blessings, soon, Bhagavathiyaa gave birth to a baby boy. He was smeared with the sacred ash on his forehead symbolizing their devotion towards Lord Shiva. From the boy's young age, he was taught the principles of Saivism and he grew up with abundant love for Lord Shiva.

Sivapaadanar would start his day with a ritualistic bath in the Shiva temple's holy pond. One morning, while he started for the pond, his three years old son insisted on accompanying

him. Unable to say no, he took his son and instructed him to sit on the pond steps till he returned and went in the water for his bath. Minutes passed and the young boy became scared of sitting alone. He started crying “Amma!Appa!” while looking at the temple tower which had the beautiful figurines of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. The divine couple moved by the little boy’s tears, materialized in front of him in all their majestic glory. Lord Shiva asked Goddess Parvati to feed milk to the little boy to soothe him. The divine mother fed him her breast milk along with prodigious wisdom and they both disappeared.

After a few minutes, Sivapaadanar returned from his bath and was shocked to see his son smiling and with milk dripping from his lips. He enquired his son about it and got the unbelievable reply about the appearance of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. Enraged that his son could tell such a lie, he beat his son. Immediately, the young boy proceeded to sing an eloquent verse on Lord Shiva-“Thodudaiya Seviyan”. His father was shell shocked on hearing his son singing such a wonderful hymn that he believed in divine intervention. Thus, the Saivite world was gifted with the child prodigy Thirugnaana Sambandar.

The scholars nearby who heard the young boy’s hymns saluted the young saint. The entire town heard of the divine incident and devotees came flocking to his house to witness the young prodigy. His father carried him on his shoulders to go the temple, as the young boy can’t walk for long distances.

The next morning, Thirugnaana Sambandar went to the Thirukkolakka temple. He sang before Lord Shiva, clapping his tiny hands to keep tune with his song. Lord Shiva was delighted with his young devotee and gifted him with a pair of golden cymbals. Every one present felt blessed to have witnessed

this miracle. From then on, Thirugnaana Sambandar used his cymbals while singing.

His fame soon spread through the entire Saivite world. People from various places invited him to their towns and sing in their temples. Thirugnaana Sambandar accepted their requests and undertook various pilgrimages to visit the Shiva temples. His first pilgrimage covered the temples in Thiruvallampuram, Thiruvalluvar, Thirumullai Vaayil, etc. He sang heartrending songs of Lord Shiva in the temples, the power of which moved the devotees to tears of joy. He returned to his home town of Seergali soon after.

A pious Nayanar saint Thiruneelakanta Yalappanar, famous for his proficiency in playing the melodious “Yazh” instrument visited the town of Seergali with his wife. Thirugnaana Sambandar welcomed the couple and took them to the great Shiva temple in Seergali. In the temple, Thirugnaana Sambandar sang to the musical accompaniment of Yazh by Thiruneelakantar. Yalappanar greatly admired the young boy’s depth of devotion and requested to be allowed to be near him always. Thirugnaana Sambandar agreed to this and henceforth, he was always accompanied by the musician.

Thirugnaana Sambandar desired to visit Lord Shiva in the town of Chidambaram. His father and Yalappanar accompanied him to the holy town. The people of Chidambaram thronged to welcome the devotees. Thirugnaana Sambandar was enamored of the Lord’s exquisite dancing stance in the Chidambaram temple. He sang many hymns here. By the power of his devotion, he saw the priests of the temple as the attendants of Lord Shiva in Kailasam, his divine abode. He showed his friend Yalappanar this celestial sight. They fell at the feet of the holy men and got their blessings. They stayed in Chidambaram and enjoyed the

happiness of being in such a blessed place. Later they visited the nearby Shiva temples.

Soon after, Thirugnaana Sambandar wanted to visit the holy town of Thiru Arathurai. Part of the long journey, he sat on his father's shoulder and through the rest, he walked. The tired devotees reached the Maranpadi town after a strenuous journey and decided to stay the night there. Lord Shiva wanted to relieve his beloved devotee of such laborious journeys in future. He appeared in the dreams of the priests of Thiru Arathurai and asked them to give a Palanquin made of Pearl and a Pearl umbrella to the young devotee. The next morning when the young devotee reached Thiru Arathurai, he was gifted the pearl Palanquin and the umbrella. He gratefully accepted the gifts.

Thirugnaana Sambandar later returned to Seergali. His parents performed the holy thread ceremony as per their Brahmin customs. Vedic Scholars started imparting the knowledge of Vedas to Sambandar. However, the young devotee knew all the Vedas and even taught the amazed scholars the greatness of the Panchakshara Mantram.

Once, during his pilgrimage, Sambandar reached the town of Thiru Pachilasramam. Malava Kings ruled this place. The reigning King was distressed as his daughter was suffering from a mysterious ailment and no one was able to cure her. Failing to treat her, he placed her ailing body in front of Lord Shiva's shrine in the temple. When Sambandar came to the temple he was distraught on seeing the afflicted princess. He sang a hymn to Lord Shiva, asking for him to cure the girl. To everyone's surprise, the girl was cured immediately.

He performed many miracles on his pilgrimages. One instance, he was travelling via Senkunrur, which was a very cold region. The people there were suffering due to the cold

weather. To alleviate their suffering, Sambandar sang to Lord Shiva and immediately the chillness ceased and the people were relieved. Hrudayaar, desired to perform a huge ceremonial ritual (Yajna) for the glory of Lord Shiva. However, he lacked the funds to carry out such a ritual. Sambandar prayed for Lord Shiva's help and the next day, a devotee came and gave him a purse containing one thousand gold coins to help him perform the Yajna. Sambandar gratefully accepted the gift.

Once Sambandar visited Thiru Kelvelur and met Siruthondar, one of the Nayanmar Saints. He sang beautiful verses glorifying the saint and also on Yalappanar. He considered the devotees to be a divine manifestation of Lord Shiva. While in Thiru Kelvelur, he visited the Thiru Marugal temple. There, he saw a woman crying over her husband, who had died due to snake bite. She was crying for Lord Shiva's help. Sambandar pitying the woman, prayed to Lord Shiva for her and immediately, her husband came back to life. They thanked Sambandar profusely for the miracle.

During this time, Sambandar met the great Nayanar saint, Thirunavukkarasar, also known as Appar. They became bosom friends due to their mutual love and deep devotion for Lord Shiva. They met Muruga Nayanar at Thiru Pukalur and Sambandar sang the glories of this Nayanar Saint. Appar and Sambandar stayed with Muruga Nayanar and together, they went to worship Lord Tyagesa of Thiruvarur. They later went to Thiru Kadavur and met Kungiliya Kalaya Nayanmar.

Appar and Sambandar then visited the town of Thiruvelimilalai. During the time of their visit, there was a severe drought and people were suffering. Appar and Sambandar prayed to Lord Shiva to help the people. Lord Shiva gave them both gold coins each day by placing them in various places

around the temple. Both the devotees exchanged these coins for provisions and helped the towns people brave the famine.

While in Thirumaraikaadu, Sambandar was contacted by the Queen of Madurai, Mangaiyarkarasiyar and the royal minister, Kulachiraiyar, both devout Shiva devotees. They informed him of the sad plight of their Pandya Kingdom, which was degrading slowly due to the growing influence of Jains. Even the King has shown allegiance to Jainism. They requested his help in rescuing their King and show him the glory of Saivism.

Sambandar along with other Shiva devotees, travelled to Madurai. On reaching the town, he was given a warm welcome by the Queen and the minister. They sought his blessings and narrated the troubles to Saivism in the Pandya Kingdom. The Jains were enraged on seeing the arrival of Shiva devotees. They got the King's permission to set Sambandar's camp on fire. However, by the power of his devotion, his camp didn't catch fire. The Queen, told her King to allow for an intellectual debate between the two groups to see which religion is the most powerful one. The King agreed to this and called for both the parties to present their theories.

Meanwhile, the irate Jains set the camps of the Shiva devotees on fire. They reported this incident to Sambandar. He prayed to Lord Shiva that by his power, the fire that has been ordered by the King should be sent back to him. Immediately, the King was struck by a searing stomach pain. He writhed in pain and sought the help of his Jain counselors. However, all their treatments failed and they couldn't cure him. The King's suffering increased each passing day. Finally, when all the treatments referred by the Jains failed, the Queen asked him to seek the help of the saint, Sambandar.

By this time, the King became dejected that the Jain religion, which he had trusted, had failed to cure him. He accepted his wife's counsel and replied that he would embrace Saivism if Sambandar would cure him. Mangaiyarkarasiyar and the minister went and requested Sambandar to help cure their King. Sambandar arrived in the King's chambers after worshipping Lord Shiva in the temple.

The Jains, refusing to accept defeat, challenged that they would cure the pain on the left side and that Sambandar should try to cure on the right side. Whichever side was not cured, should accept the superiority of the other religion. Sambandar accepted to this challenge and asked the Jains to proceed first. They started using many tools and mantras, which further increased the King's suffering. Finally, The King beseeched Sambandar to help him. Sambandar came forward and sang a hymn on Lord Shiva and smeared holy ash on the King's right side. The King was miraculously cured immediately.

Still refusing to accept the superiority of Saivism, the Jains announced that they wanted to test the power of the religions through a fire test. They claimed that the holy scriptures of the religions should be kept in a giant fire. The scriptures of the religion which would survive this would then be declared superior. They asked Sambandar to go first. Sambandar, praying to Lord Shiva, kept the palm manuscripts containing his verses in the fire. To everyone's amazement, they were not burnt. However, the Jain scriptures were immediately burnt to ashes.

The King declared that the Jains had lost a second time. Still not accepting their defeat, they called for a third test. This time, they wanted to throw the scriptures on the waters of the river Vaigai flowing through Madurai. The religion, whose palm leaves float in the gushing river waters, would win. Accordingly,

both the Jains and Sambandar threw their holy scriptures in the river. The scriptures of the Jains sunk in the river waters, whereas the manuscripts of Sambandar floated majestically in the river.

The King finally pronounced the superiority of Saivism and banished all Jains from his kingdom. Thus, the lost glory of Saivism in Madurai was established. After staying in Madurai and visiting holy Shiva shrines such as Rameswaram, where he worshipped Lord of Thirukonamalai, Sambandar travelled to Chola Kingdom. There, he came to a place called Mullivakarai, en route to Thiru Kollampootthur. However, the river which he has to cross was flooded and the boats were abandoned on the banks. Sambandar prayed to Lord Shiva and he along with some devotees boarded the boats. By the power of his devotion, the boats steered by themselves to the opposite banks and they alighted safely.

After worshipping the Lord at Thiru Kollampootthur, Sambandar reached Bodhimangai, a Buddhist centre. While crossing the place, the Shiva devotees with Sambandar were blowing trumpets and singing Shiva Mantras. This infuriated the Buddhist monk, who reprimanded them. This enraged a Shiva devotee named Samba Saranalayar. He prayed that the monk be struck by lightning for demeaning Saivism. Immediately the monk was struck by lightning. The other monks, though intimidated, regrouped under another monk named Sari Budhan, who called for a debate. Samba Saranalayar represented Saivism and defeated the Buddhists. They finally realized the power of Shiva and embraced Saivism.

Sambandar wanted to meet Appar who was at Thirupoonthurithi. Appar, hearing of Sambandar's arrival proceeded to meet him. On the way, Appar saw the throng of devotees who were coming with Sundarar and merged in the

crowd. He approached the palanquin carrying Sambandar and carried it on his aged shoulders. When Sambandar, on reaching Thirupoonthurithi, asked for Appar, he replied from below that he had the good fortune to carry Sambandar's palanquin. Sambandar was moved to tears by the affectionate regards shown by the great saint.

Sambandar later returned to Seergali where Yalappanar and his wife took leave of the saint and went back to their native place. Sambandar spent few days in his home town, when the desire to go on a pilgrimage to Thondai Nadu struck him. En route, he was mesmerized by the beauty of the hill of Thiru Annamalai. On reaching Thondai Nadu, he was approached by a Shiva devotee, who requested his help in his garden. He had planted Palmira trees, which all turned out to be male trees and hence, are not yielding any fruits. This was mocked severely by the Jains nearby. Sambandar, by the power of his devotion, turned all the male Palmira trees into female trees, which immediately bore fruit. The devotee gratefully worshipped Sundarar and this miraculous incident helped many Jains to embrace Saivism.

Sambandar on his pilgrimage visited the temples in Sri Kalahasthi, Thiruvallangaadu and finally reached Thiruvotriyur. Sivanesar was a wealthy merchant living in Mylapore, who was also a fervent devotee of Lord Shiva. He had a beautiful daughter named Poompavai, whom he raised with loving care. She was also a pious devotee of Lord Shiva. While wanting to get her married, he decided that for a virtuous girl like his daughter, the only suitable groom would be the great saint, Thirugnaana Sambandar. In his mind, he visualized the offering of his daughter as a bride to Sambandar. Unfortunately, his daughter died of snake bite while she was gathering flowers in her garden.

Unable to bear this tragic news, he collected her ashes in a bowl and kept it near him while he meditated on Sambandar every day. On learning of the arrival of Sambandar in Thiruvotriyur, he raised an elaborate pavilion between Mylapore and Thiruvotriyur. He met Sambandar and told of his daughter. Sambandar, hearing the woes of this pious devotee, prayed to Lord Shiva to restore the life of the girl. He sang a hymn on Lord Shiva and on reaching the tenth stanza of the hymn the girl came back to her form and life! Everyone present rejoiced on seeing this miracle and praised Sambandar.

Sivanesar then offered his revived daughter to Sambandar. However, Sambandar refused his offer citing the reason that now he has a father- daughter relationship with Poompavai. Sivanesar consequently built an ashram for his daughter, where she spent her life meditating on Lord Shiva.

Sambandar later reached Seergali and by then, he had reached his sixteenth year. His father, Sivapaada Hrudayaar decided to marry him to the daughter of Nambandar Nambi of Nallur Perumanam. On the day of marriage, Sundarar and his family with other Shiva devotees travelled to Nallur Perumanam and the marriage took place with all gaiety and happiness. Many Nayanar Saints including Thiruneelakanta Yalappanar and Muruga Nayanar were present. After the marriage, the newly married couple went into the temple and worshipped Lord Shiva, completely surrendering their body and soul. Sambandar prayed to Lord Shiva seeking salvation and liberation from the mortal world. He sang the beautiful hymn, "Panchakshara Pathigam". Lord Shiva granted his wish and so, Sambandar, his wife and everyone who had witnessed this beautiful wedding reached the holy feet of Lord Shiva.

Thus, the rich legacy of Thirugnaana Sambandar stays to this day in his exquisite hymns and in the miracles he executed to establish Saivism.

28. EYARKON KALIKAMA NAYANAR

Kalikamar was a great general in the Chola army, born in the Saivite town of Thirupperum Mangalam. Even though he was excellent in the art of warfare, he was still humble and served the devotees of Lord Shiva with everything at his disposal. He donated several acres of land for the temple and for the service of the people. He and his wife worshipped Lord Shiva in the Thiruppunkur temple.

Sundaramurthi Nayanar was a famous Shiva devotee, whose fame spread far and wide. One day, Kalikamar heard the news that Sundaramurthi Nayanar sent Lord Shiva as his messenger when he fought with his wife, Paravaiyar. This news enraged Kalikamar, he was angry with the devotee who had commanded the master of the Universe to do his menial job. His respect for Sundaramurthi Nayanar was replaced with rage.

Lord Shiva planned to change Kalikkamar's opinion on what true devotion is. He made Kalikamar suffer from a severe stomach disease. In answer to Kalikkamar's prayers to alleviate this pain, Lord Shiva replied that no one but Sundaramurthi Nayanar had the power to cure him. The stubborn Kalikamar chose to suffer from the searing pain than to get the help of Sundaramurthi Nayanar. Sensing this, Lord Shiva bade the latter to go and help Kalikamar. Sundarar sent a message to Kalikamar of his arrival and proceeded to his place.

Hearing that Sundaramurthi Nayanar would arrive at his house in a few minutes agitated Kalikamar. He cut his stomach and gave up his life, rather than seeking the help of someone he

despised. Kalikkamar's wife, family and friends were grief stricken. Just then, they heard Sundaramurthi Nayanar arrive. Kalikkamar's wife ordered everyone to not reveal her husband's demise and upset the great Shiva devotee. She proceeded to welcome him.

Sundaramurthi Nayanmar, unsuspecting this tragedy, enquired about the sick person. Obeying the wife's orders, all those gathered, assured him that Kalikamar was doing well and is sleeping at the moment. But, the insistent Sundaramurthi Nayanar asked to see Kalikamar personally. Unable to refuse, they took him in. Finding the deceased Kalikamar, Sundaramurthi Nayanar was shocked. Sensing that the root cause was Kalikkamar's inability to accept his help, he proceeded to kill himself.

By Lord Shiva's divine intervention, Kalikamar sprang to life and saw what Sundarar was about to do and stopped him. Realizing the extent of his supreme sacrifice, he begged the great devotee's forgiveness. They both appreciated each other's devotion and love for Lord Shiva and became lasting friends. Sundaramurthi Nayanar sang many verses about the immeasurable devotion of Kalikamar.

Eyarkona Kalikamar spent his days with enlightened mind, serving Lord Shiva and his devotees selflessly.

29. THIRUMULA NAYANAR

In the mystical Kailash Mountain, there lived many sages who were the forerunners of Vedas. One among them had a desire to go to the southern mountain of Podhigai situated in Tamil Nadu and meet the great Agasthayar Sage.

He started his long journey, worshipping Lord Shiva in all the places en route. He worshipped Kedar, Lord

Pasupatheeshwar, reached the holy Ganges River, travelled to Srisailam, Kalahasthi, Thiruvadikai, Thillai (Chidambaram) and many more Saiva spiritual centers. In the last leg of his strenuous journey, he reached the banks of the river Kaveri.

On the beautiful banks of the river, he saw a strange sight. A herd of cows were crying. When he neared, he found that they had encircled their cow herd's lifeless body. They were licking his face, trying to wake him up. This show of affection from the cows, made the sage realize how lovingly the cow herd had reared them. Feeling pity for the sad cows, with his yogic powers, the sage transferred his soul from his body to that of the cowherd's. He left his sage-body near the banks.

The cow herd, Mulan woke up as Thirumular. The cows rejoiced to see their beloved master well and went on with their grazing. As dusk arrived, the cows started walking to their village and the sage in the body of the cowherd trailed them. Once they had safely reached their respective masters, he started to return to the river bank.

On his way, the cowherd's wife intercepted him and asked as to where he was going, instead of coming home. The cowherd replied that there was no relationship between them and went to a nearby shelter. This distressed his wife and she took this issue to the village elders. When they confronted the cowherd about this, they realized that it was actually the sage and not the cowherd. The sage then returned to where he had kept his body, but couldn't find it.

He comprehended the fact that the Lord wanted him to continue in the cowherd's body and started on his spiritual journey. He meditated in the shades of a holy tree and composed the divine "Thirumandiram", containing nearly 3000 verses, on how to leave the material world and reach the divine abode of

Lord Shiva. This great work describes the greatness of Yoga in detail. Due to his yogic powers, Thirumular lived many more years and finally reached the abode of Lord Shiva.

30. DHANDIYADIGAL NAYANAR

In the holy town of Thiruvarur, there lived a blind man named Dhandiyadigal. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva and devoted his life to the service of the Lord. He spent his days praying in the temple of Thiruvarur.

While he was once walking by feeling his way around the temple grounds, he observed that the temple pond in the western area smelled badly. This poor condition of the pond irked Dhandiyadigal a lot. He got a rope, tied one end of it to a pillar and the other end to his waist. Keeping this as his direction, he walked towards the pond, and began clearing it off debris. He collected them and then walked back to the pillar by holding the rope and deposited the waste there.

Seeing a blind man do this tough job enraged the Jains. They started blaspheming him and his devotion for Lord Shiva. In a moment of anger, Dhandiyadigal asked them about their reaction if by the same Lord Shiva's blessings, he gains eyesight and they lose it. This remark further infuriated them. They pulled away his rope, threw away his digging tools and shoved him away. Bruised, humiliated and hurt by all this, Dhandiyadigal stumbled back to his home. He cried out his plight to Lord Shiva, begging for his help. He slept off soon after, due to fatigue.

Lord Shiva appeared in his dream and instructed him to challenge the Jains the next day about his remark on their loss of eyesight. He also appeared in the King's dream, apprising him of the disturbances created by the Jains. The next day, a very happy Dhandiyadigal, went to the Thiruvarur temple,

prayed and made his way to the pond. He was met by the King, who asked him about the problems he faced. Dhandiyadigal proclaimed his challenge then. Jains gathered there accepted this and they stated that they would vacate the place provided Dhandiyadigal gets back his vision.

Hearing this, Dhandiyadigal, made his way to the pond, took a dip in the holy water and prayed to Lord Shiva. When he came out, he got the power of vision, while the Jains nearby started shouting about their lost eyesight. They became highly agitated and immediately left the place. Thus, Saivism was once again established in the divine city.

Dhandiyadigal continued his selfless service to Lord Shiva and with his fervent devotion became revered as a Nayanmar.

31. MUURKA NAYANAR

Muurka Nayanar was a wealthy farmer, hailing from Thiruverkadu, a small village in the illustrious town of Kanchipuram. Muurkar, from his childhood had an ever increasing love for Lord Shiva. He devoted his life to serving Shiva devotees.

He had the practice of preparing a sumptuous feast every day for the Shiva devotees. He ate only after all the devotees present were served to his satisfaction. This brought many devotees to his door step every day and Muurkar served them lovingly.

However, this affected his wealth, which soon dwindled. Eventually, he was left with nothing. This turn of fortunes depressed him as he couldn't get the resources to serve the devotees. His only talent was his mastery at gambling, which he had learnt in his early life. Left with nothing in his hometown, he moved to various holy places.

He finally settled in Thirukudandhai, where he would search for the gambling houses, win money and with that money, he would serve the Shiva devotees selflessly. He would neither use the money gained in an immoral way, nor would he cheat his competitors. However, if any one was found cheating, he would attack them with his knife.

He spent the rest of his life gambling and serving the devotees of Lord Shiva. This selfless service made him famous as a Nayanar Saint.

32. SOMASI MARA NAYANAR

Somasi Mara Nayanar was a humble priest, hailing from the holy town of Ambar. He was well versed in the Vedas. He was also a staunch devotee of Lord Shiva. He venerated any person, if that person was a devotee of Lord Shiva. According to him, the devotees of Lord Shiva are to be revered as Lord Shiva himself.

He spent his days praying to Lord Shiva and serving his devotees. He went to Thiruvarur, one of the holiest Saiva places and prayed to Lord Shiva residing there in all his magnificent form. There, he had the good fortune to meet Sundaramurthi Nayanmar, one of the greatest Nayanar Saints, who had a profound influence on him. Somasi Mara Nayanar worshipped this devotee of superlative knowledge.

Somasi Mara Nayanar spent his days in the service of the devotees of Lord Shiva. His ardent service brought him fame and he became the one of the revered Nayanar Saints.

33. CHAAKKIYA NAYANAR

Chaakkiyar was born in an agricultural family, in the village of Thiruchanga Mangai. From an early age, he exhibited a thirst

for philosophy, the mystery behind birth and death and the sole truth of the universe. To satiate his thirst, he travelled to Kanchipuram, which was the center for knowledge and renowned for its illustrious educational institutions.

Once in Kanchipuram, Chaakkiyar learnt philosophy and became affiliated with Buddhism. He understood the truth behind the mortal life cycle. However, he still felt incomplete and renewed his study of all religions. He chanced upon Saivism and was enamored by its simple yet powerful truth. The philosophy of Saivism centers on the importance of four entities “An act, its implemented, the consequence and the controlling factor”.

Irrespective of one’s nature, appearance and religion, submitting to Lord Shiva, would give salvation from the mortal life. This profound truth influenced Chaakkiyar to embrace Saivism.

One day, he came across a Shiva lingam. He was so overcome with ecstasy on seeing his beloved Lord, that not knowing how to show his profound love, he threw a stone at the Shiva Lingam. This became his daily ritual, to pray before Lord Shiva by throwing a stone at the Shiva Lingam. His devotion was very pure and true. One day, he went to have his meals, without worshipping Lord Shiva. Just when he was about to eat, he remembered his missed ritual and rushed to the Shiva Lingam and prayed in his usual way.

Lord Shiva was pleased by the depth of devotion exhibited by Chaakkiyar and he was elevated to the stature of the Nayanar Saints. He spent his life praying to Lord Shiva and spreading the Saiva Philosophy.

34. SIRAPPULI NAYANMAR

In the mighty Chola Kingdom, there was a town called Thiruvaakkur which was famous for its Saivism and the generosity of its residents. In this holy town was born Sirappuli Nayanar in a family of Vedic scholars.

He devoted his life to serving the Shiva devotees who were accorded a hearty welcome at his home. Sirappuli Nayanar revered them and fulfilled their needs. The devotees were served delicious meals and treated with utmost love and respect.

Sirappuli Nayanar thus spent his life selflessly serving the devotees of Lord Shiva and his generous nature was unparalleled.

35. SIRUTHONDA NAYANAR

Siruthonda Nayanar was born as a valiant warrior, Paranjothiyar. He was highly proficient in not only the art of warfare but also in the illustrious Sanskrit language. Among all his talents, the one which distinguished him from other noble warriors was his complete devotion to Lord Shiva. He fought in the Vadhapi war and won over the enemy effortlessly. When the King learnt that this warrior is a Shiva devotee, he felt a terrible guilt for sending him to war.

The generous King immediately sent Paranjothiyar to his hometown, gifting him substantial wealth, so he can continue his service to Lord Shiva unhindered. Paranjothiyar reached his town of Thiruchengattankudi and spent his time serving the Shiva devotees. He married a virtuous lady named Vengaatu Nangai, who was also an ardent Shiva devotee. Their blissful life became happier by the birth of a son, whom they named Siiraala Devar.

The pious couple brought up their only son with boundless love and affection. They continued their service to the devotees by serving them meals of their choice every day. Paranjothiyar ate his daily meals, only after personally serving a Shiva devotee. His humble service got him the name of Siruthondar from the Shiva devotees. Lord Shiva, impressed by their single minded devotion, wanted the world to know the depth of their religious fervor.

Lord Shiva took upon the role of a Shiva devotee and approached Paranjothiyar's home. His wife came out and on seeing the Shiva devotee at her door step was very happy to receive him.

However, the devotee refused to step in when she invited him inside, citing the reason that since her husband was not at home, it would be improper to come inside. He said that he would wait for her husband below a tree by the temple and left. Earlier that day, Paranjothiyar couldn't find any Shiva devotee to serve, so he went in search of one. When he couldn't find any one, he returned home with a heavy heart. He was met at the doorstep by his wife, who informed him about the Shiva devotee who was waiting beside the temple.

An ecstatic Paranjothiyar rushed to meet the Shiva devotee. He saluted him with reverence. After blessing him, the devotee told that he had come from afar and he would eat only a particular kind of food. Paranjothiyar replied that he would be very happy to serve any food of his choice, he only have to give him the specifics and it would be served with pleasure. The devotee then asked him to provide him the stew made from a young boy, not more than five years of age, must be an only child to his parents, without any physical impairments and also with the complete consent of the parents.

Paranjothiyar listened to this and informed his wife. They decided that their only son Siiraala would be the ideal choice and they got him from school, bathed him and then cooked him, all the while thinking of this as their service to Lord Shiva. After preparing, they invited the devotee in to eat his meals. Before he commenced to eat, he said that it was his custom to always have his meals in the company of a Shiva devotee and Paranjothiyar being a Shiva devotee, would suffice for him. He invited him to take his meals along with him. Unable to refuse a Shiva devotee, Paranjothiyar sat and his wife started serving them.

When they were about to eat, the devotee enquired about their son. He asked them to call him in. Unable to tell the truth and also powerless to refuse him, Paranjothiyar and his wife went out and called out to their son to appease the devotee. Much to their astonishment, their son came running towards them. When the shocked couple went inside, both the food, and the Shiva devotee had disappeared. The couple then realized the miracle of Lord Shiva and felt blessed that he should come to their abode.

This completely selfless act and the absolute devotion of Siruthondar brought him fame all over the Saiva world and he was revered as Siruthondar Nayanar thereafter. He and his family continued their service to Lord Shiva and his devotees all through their lives.

36. KALARITRARIVAAR NAYANMAR

Perumaakothaiyar was a Prince, born in the royal Chera family of Kodungolur. He was also known as Cheraman Perumal. From an early age, he displayed a deep devotion towards Lord Shiva and spent his time praying. Royal pleasures could not lure him away from his beloved Shiva.

This continued for some years. One day, the King of a nearby Kingdom, Chenkoo Poraiyan renounced his royal life for one of Sanyasam and he had no successor. Perumaakothaiyar was chosen as the most able King to lead this country, by the learned ministers. However, this did not please the loyal devotee. He went into the Lord's Sanctum sanctorum to know of his wish. Lord Shiva gave him his orders to govern the country and also bestowed on him the power to know others' thoughts. Hence, he got the name of Kalaritrarivaar.

He made a habit of regularly visiting Lord Shiva's holy shrine in Thiruvanichakkalam. On one such visit, while his procession was approaching the temple premises, he observed a washer man with the holy ash smeared all over his body walking by. He immediately got down and saluted the shocked washer man with folded hands telling him that he is his slave. This rare act of humility indicated to all present that his priority would always be the devotees of Lord Shiva. His ministers were astonished to witness this act of complete devotion.

Kalaritrarivaar had this ritual of waking up at dawn and immersing himself in the service of his Lord Shiva. He would fetch water, bathe the Lord, adorn him with beautiful garlands, light the incense sticks and meditate before him. Lord Shiva, extremely pleased by this, would signal his presence by the sound of his anklets.

Meanwhile, in the Pandya City of Madurai, there lived a poor poet named Bhathiranaar, who was an ardent Shiva devotee. Lord Shiva wanted to help this poor devotee. He wrote a poem that was addressed to Cheraman Perumal and asked the poet to take this poem to the King and get rewarded. The poet did according to the Lord's instructions. The King, on seeing the divine poem became ecstatic and ordered his ministers to

give all the precious jewels he had in his treasury to the poet. The grateful poet, however, took only the bare minimum, required to sustain his life style and went back to Madurai and spent his life composing verses on Lord Shiva.

The happiest moment of the King's day was when he would hear the Lord's anklets on the completion of his morning ritual. One day, as usual, he waited for the Lord to notify his presence, but was disappointed when he couldn't hear the anklets' sound after several moments passed since his puja completion. He became agitated that there had been an amiss in his ritual proceedings and assumed that Lord Shiva was displeased with him. He immediately took out his sword and proceeded to take his own life. Lord Shiva appeared that instant and assured him that the cause of the delay was not because of his faulty rituals, but that he was so immersed in the song of a devotee named Vaanrondaar of Thillai that he forgot about the King.

The relieved King, wanted to hear the heavenly music that had enthralled Lord Shiva himself and so, set off towards Thillai Nadu in search of Vaanrondaar. He reached the Chola town of Thillai and worshipped Lord Shiva. He was so enamored on seeing the Lord there that he composed a beautiful verse on Lord Shiva named "Ponvannathu Andhaadhi". He then decided to visit the holy Shrines of Lord Shiva situated in various places like Seergali, Thiruvarur and Naagai Kaaronam.

His sole purpose in visiting Thiruvarur is to get a glimpse of the great Nayanar saint Sundaramurthi Nayanar. This great saint welcomed the King with great pleasure and personally took him to the sanctum sanctorum of the Lord in the holy Thiruvarur temple. Kalaritrarivaar, captivated by the beauty of the Lord sang the poignant verse, "Thirumummani Kovai". Sundaramurthi Nayanar invited him to his home and was treated with utmost respect by his wife Paravaiyar.

Sundaramurthi Nayanar and Cheraman Perumal formed a rare bond of friendship, strengthened by their mutual love for Lord Shiva. Together, they decided to visit the great temple in Madurai. On their pilgrimage, they visited many holy Shiva shrines en route. They were received with great fanfare by the Pandya King on their arrival in Madurai. They worshipped Lord Shiva in all the holy shrines around Madurai and returned to Thiruvavarur. On the request of Cheraman Perumal, Sundaramurthi Nayanar and his wife accompanied him back to the Chera Kingdom.

The King and his beloved friend were received with great fanfare by the devotees of the Kingdom. Cheraman Perumal, felt very happy that such an esteemed person had visited him. He went to all lengths to make his visit comfortable. He seated him in the royal elephant and fanned him during his ride towards the palace. Once in the royal palace, the King requested the Saint to sit in the royal Throne and insisted on washing his feet and served him with complete devotion. Sundaramurthi Nayanar stayed for several days and later returned to Thiruvavarur.

After several months, Sundaramurthi Nayanar had the desire to meet his friend one more time. He visited the Chera Kingdom. The King, Kalaritrarivaarwas delighted to hear of his friend's arrival and ordered his courtiers to decorate the entire city in honor of the great devotee. The second meeting of the two great devotees of Lord Shiva was very poignant.

One morning, Sundaramurthi Nayanar went to visit Lord Shiva's shrine in Thiruvanchakkalam. Cheraman Perumal sent a majestic white elephant to escort him back to the palace. The great devotee, prayed fervently to Lord Shiva to liberate him from the mortal bondage and to help him reach salvation. As he was thus thinking and climbing the elephant to go back to the palace, divine providence intervened.

The elephant by the divine power of the devotee flew upwards. The King whose thoughts were on the devotee started on a horse towards the temple to meet his friend. En route, he saw his friend rising in the sky. With the power of his devotion, he felt that he should follow the footsteps of the great devotee. Instantaneously, his horse too flew and followed the great elephant. The two devotees reached the gates of Kailasam, the divine abode of Lord Shiva.

On reaching the gates, Sundaramurthi Nayanar was given immediate entrance, whereas Cheraman Perumal was asked to wait. Once inside, the great devotee informed Lord Shiva of the waiting devotee. He was welcomed inside by Lord Shiva. He requested Lord Shiva to grant him one last boon. He was graciously granted the boon, which was to recite the King's work, "Thirukayilaaya Gnana Ula".

Both the devotees were granted the elusive boon of being the premier attendants in the service of Lord Shiva. Thus, the fame of Cheraman Perumal, who by his single minded devotion entered the Lord's heavenly abode, lived forever.

37. GANA NATHA NAYANAR

Gana Nathar was born in the holy town of Seergali, which was also the birth place of the great Saiva saint Thirugnaana Sambandar. Gana Nathar was born in a family of Vedic scholars.

From an early age, Gana Nathar exhibited deep devotion for Lord Shiva. However, his mode of service was very different from other devotees. He served the Lord by organizing the devotees to do various services. His devotion was all encompassing. He involved all the devotees and made them feel like being a part of something much greater.

He motivated them to do various tasks like cleaning the temple pond, maintaining the temple garden, making beautiful garlands for the Lord, preserve neat temple premises, preparing meals for others, etc. This was well received by all, as this was superior to several devotees praying individually, without any purpose.

Under his tutelage, the mind set of devotees improved and the temple became the perfect epitome of the power of devotion. This enhanced the devotees' service and their hard work was appreciated by everyone.

He was an ardent follower of the teachings of the great Nayanar saint, Thirugnaana Sambandar. He was inspired by the latter's words of wisdom and led his life piously, serving the devotees and Lord Shiva while encouraging others to do the same. Hence he got his name Gana Natha Nayanar meaning "group's leader". Due to his selfless service, he became a Nayanar Saint.

38. KUURRUVA NAYANMAR

Kalandhaikkon Kuurruvar was a gallant warrior. He was well known for his mastery in all types of warfare. His bravery brought him great fame and wealth. Kuurruvar was also known for his profound devotion for Lord Shiva.

He had a deep desire to be crowned by the high priests of Thillai, who also perform puja in the Thillai temple of Lord Shiva. However, he was refused this due to the fact that the priests do the coronation only for Chola Kings. Since Kuurruvar was not a Chola, his coronation could not be conducted by them. Disheartened by their refusal, Kuurruvar left the country and went to the neighboring Chera Kingdom.

There, he served Lord Shiva piously, by selflessly serving the devotees using his great wealth. Lord Shiva was pleased by

the generosity and selfless character of Kuurruvar and blessed him. Lord Shiva appeared in Kuurruvar's dream and placed his holy feet on him. Kuurruvar was ecstatic on being blessed by Lord Shiva. This brought him greater pleasure than being crowned by the Thillai priests.

Kuurruvar continued to donate his wealth and serve the devotees. His peerless devotion made him a Nayanar Saints.

39. PUGAL CHOLA NAYANMAR

Pugal Cholar was a kind King who ruled the mighty Chola Empire from the city of Uraiyur. His mere name caused fear in his foes and praise in the hearts of Shiva devotees. Under his rule, the Empire prospered and the people were happy.

His mind and heart were forever immersed in thoughts of Lord Shiva. Once, while in his throne, he heard of someone who had killed his royal elephant. He immediately went to kill the person preposterous enough to commit such a crime. On reaching the place, he came to know that the elephant had strewn the flowers woven for Lord Shiva and hence, an enraged Shiva devotee named Eripathanar had killed the elephant. The king, hearing this truth, begged the forgiveness of Eripathanar and came forward to give up his life, as that would be fitting punishment for the crime committed by his elephant. Such was his humble devotion.

During one of his frequent trips to check on his deputy Kings who are governing under his rule, he learnt that one ruler of a small kingdom had refused to pay allegiance to him. Hence, he raised his mighty army in war against the erring ruler and ordered his army to behead every one of the enemy warriors.

When inspecting the slain heads of his enemies, he comes across a head smeared with holy ash and matted hair, indicating

that it belonged to a Shiva devotee. Shocked at the realization that he had given the orders that killed the devotee, he renounced his royal life. He ordered his ministers to raise his son as his successor. He placed the head of the slain devotee in a plate and walked into a ritual fire and sacrificed his life for Lord Shiva, to atone for his sin.

Due to this supreme act of devotion for Lord Shiva, he became revered as Pugal Chola Nayanar.

40. NARASINGA MUNAIYARAIYA NAYANMAR

Narasinga Munaiyaraia Nayanar was of royal descent. He ruled the prosperous state of Thirumunaippadi. He was deeply devoted to Saivism and Lord Shiva was the centre of his existence.

He was generous towards his subjects, especially to Shiva devotees. He provided all amenities to make them comfortable. Every year, he took great pride in conducting the Thiruvadhirai festival for Lord Shiva. He would personally welcome the Shiva devotees coming to attend the festival and provide a huge feast for them.

During one such festival, one Shiva devotee came to the festival with the signs of being involved in immoral deeds. Everyone present distanced themselves from such a sinful person. However, Narasinga Munaiyaraia did not discriminate this devotee. Instead, he personally went and welcomed him, provided him with fresh clothes and also invited him to partake in the feast.

This supreme act of accepting every devotee as an entity of Lord Shiva astonished everyone present. This exhibited his profound devotion towards Lord Shiva whom he continued to serve by serving the devotees. He attained salvation from the

mortal world through his pure devotion. Thus, he became a Nayanmar.

41. ADHIPATHA NAYANAR

Adhipathanar was a humble Shiva devotee born in the coastal town, Nagapattinam. His livelihood was fishing. His way of proclaiming his boundless devotion towards Lord Shiva is to throw back the first fish that he caught, as an offering to Lord Shiva.

He continued this every day, even when his boat overflowed with fishes and also when he would catch only one fish. He would throw back the only fish he would get in a day as an offering to Lord Shiva. He did that consistently, much to the bewilderment of the other fisher folk.

One day, he caught only one fish, even after hours of waiting. To his shock, the fish was made of precious gems which shined so bright that it almost blinded the wonder struck fishermen nearby. They were all jubilant as such a precious fish would bring unimaginable luxuries. But, to their utter dismay, Adhipathanar claimed that since this was his first catch of the day, it belonged to Lord Shiva and so he threw it back into the sea.

Lord Shiva was extremely pleased with the strength of his devotion even under such temptation and blessed him. Thus he became known as Adhipatha Nayanar.

42. KALIKAMBA NAYANAR

Kalikambar was a devout Shiva devotee born in a family of wealthy traders. He was born and brought up in the holy place of Pennadagam. From an early age, he had an overflowing love for Lord Shiva and as he grew, so did his Shiva devotion.

Every day, he welcomed Shiva devotees to his home, washed their feet, served them with scrumptious meals filled with ghee. This continued for several years. Once a Shiva devotee, who was incidentally his servant years ago visited him home. Kalikambar welcomed him graciously and asked his wife to bring water to wash the devotee's feet. But, his wife, refused to serve as the devotee was once their servant.

Kalikambar was enraged at his wife's narrow minded thought and her refusal to serve the Saiva devotee. In his rage, he cut off her hands. Then he personally went in, got the bowl of water, washed the devotee's feet and heartily welcomed him to partake of the feast.

This single minded devotion of Kalikambar pleased Lord Shiva and he became known as Kalikamba Nayanmar.

43. KALIYA NAYANAR

In the holy Saivite town of Thiruvotriyur, was born this Nayanar saint. He belonged to the oil making community. He was deeply devout and served Lord Shiva every day by lighting the lamps of the Thiruvotriyur temple. He carried out this task with complete love and devotion.

As days passed, his wealth diminished. He started working for other merchants to earn the money required to buy oil for anointing the temple lamps. In due time, even that work stopped and he got menial jobs in oil churning workshops and with his meager income brought oil. Eventually, he lost this job too. At last, with no money left and no property to sell, he decided to sell his wife. Much to his dismay, that attempt failed.

Finally, driven to the depths of desperation because of his inability to serve his beloved Lord, he approached the sanctum sanctorum of the Thiruvotriyur temple. He proceeded to cut his

throat, so he can light the lamps using his blood. Pleased with the pure devotion exhibited by Kaliyanar, Lord Shiva materialized in his majestic form and stopped Kaliyanar's hands and blessed him.

Kaliyanar's sincere love and devotion inspired many Shiva devotees and he became known as Kaliya Nayanar.

44. SATTI NAYANAR

In the Chola town of Varinchaiyur was born the famous Satti Nayanmar. He was a humble farmer by profession and a fierce and loyal Shiva devotee by heart. He spent his days praying to Lord Shiva. He would get angry if anyone offended Shiva devotees. He punished such people by slaying their tongues.

According to him, a bad word would cause more damage than a bad deed. He cut off the tongues of the people who maligned Shiva devotees with an instrument named Satti. Hence, he got the name of Satti Nayanar.

His fierce loyalty towards Shiva devotees was an inspiration to many and he was praised by all as Satti Nayanmar.

45. AIYADIGAL KADAVAR KON NAYANAR

Aiyadigal Perumanar was the ruling King of the mighty Pallavas. He ruled the prosperous Pallava Kingdom from Kanchi, which was credited as the center of wisdom. He was a devout Shiva devotee. His love for Lord Shiva overruled his desire to rule the Kingdom.

He decided that ruling a kingdom is obstructing him from serving his beloved Lord Shiva. Hence, he called his ministers and crowned his son as his successor and left for a pilgrimage.

He travelled to all the holy Shiva shrines and sang beautiful "Venbas" or songs in praise of Lord Shiva. These are still sung

in the Shiva temples. He travelled to the famed Chidambaram town where Lord Shiva is in the dancing pose and sung his famous Venbas. He stayed there for some days and continued his travels blissfully.

His pious heart, which gladly relinquished the royal luxuries for the eternal love of Lord Shiva, was venerated by all. He became known as Aiyadigal Kadavurkon Nayanar.

46. KANAMPULLA NAYANAR

Kanampulla Nayanar was born as a wealthy man in Irukku Velur, a celebrated Saiva place. He was extremely devout and found immense pleasure in serving Lord Shiva. His mind and thoughts were forever occupied on Shiva. He assumed the task of lighting the huge temple premises with ghee lamps. Performing this task gave him the greatest happiness.

Due to several reasons, his wealth started diminishing and eventually, he became penniless. Still, he continued his service for Lord Shiva by cutting the straws in the fields and got money from selling them. As this got him enough money to perform his service, he lived blissfully.

One day, he couldn't sell the grass he had cut and so, no money to buy ghee. He decided to light those straws directly, thus illuminating the temple. However, the grass got burned out soon and the temple was shrouded in darkness. Distressed, he took the ultimate decision to burn his hair instead.

Lord Shiva was pleased with the depth of his devotion and blessed him. Thus he got the name of Kanampulla Nayanmar, Kanampull being the name of the grass he had cut.

47. KAARI NAYANAR

Kaari Nayanar was a famous poet born in Thirukkadavur. His poetry brought him fame and fortune. He used to visit the

Kings of the great southern Kingdoms of Chera Nadu, Chola Nadu and Pandya Nadu and recite his poetry.

The Kings, who were great patrons of the arts, showered him with wealth. On returning to his hometown, Kaari Nayanmar, used the wealth he had thus obtained to build magnificent temples for Lord Shiva. He gave the money for the service of Shiva devotees. His relentless service to Saivism and his beautiful verses became eternal. He achieved the highest accolade of becoming one of the esteemed Nayanmars.

48. NINRASEER NEDUMARA NAYANAR

Ninraseer Nedumara Nayanar was a valiant King ruling the great Pandya Empire from the city of Madurai. He was born with a slight hunch in his back. Hence, he was called as Kun Pandyan. He was influenced by the Jain philosophy and he propagated Jainism in his Kingdom.

He disrespected Saivites and did not believe in Saiva Philosophy. Lord Shiva, however, enlightened his ignorant mind through a series of incidents. Kun Pandyan was one day afflicted by a severe heart disease. The pain became unbearable. He called upon his Jain philosophers to alleviate his pain. But, all their medicines failed to do so.

With the wise counsel of his virtuous wife, the Queen Mangayarkarasi, who was a devout Shiva devotee and his loyal minister Kulachiraiyar, who was also devoted to Lord Shiva, he decided to get the assistance of the great Saiva saint, Thirugnaana Sambandar. By his prayers and his treatment, the King was miraculously cured. His hunch back was also cured and he was able to stand tall. Hence he got his name "Nedumara" - standing straight.

The elated King realizing the truth embraced Saivism and became a staunch devotee of Lord Shiva. He promoted Saivism

and served Shiva devotees the rest of his life. He later became known as Ninraseer Nedumara Nayanar due to his fervent devotion.

49. VAAYILAR NAYANAR

Vaayilar was a Yogi, hailing from the town of Mylapore, belonging to the Pallava Kingdom. He was a fervent devotee of Lord Shiva. He built a temple for Lord Shiva in his mind and prayed zealously to him.

He meditated on Lord Shiva incessantly. His mind was so focused that he lost all contact with the material world. He finally attained the Lord's holy abode and got salvation. He reached the feet of Lord Shiva and enjoyed eternal bliss.

This yogi thus attained the status of a Nayanmar, due to his staunch devotion towards Lord Shiva.

50. MUNAIYADUVAR NAYANAR

In the fertile plains of Chola Kingdom, on the banks of the river Kaveri there was a town named Thirunidur. This town was famed for its prosperous fields. Born in this town was a wealthy farmer Munaiyaduvar.

He devoted his wealth to serving the devotees of Lord Shiva. He was known for his bravery and valor in the battlefield. Those who were defeated in fights, used to seek his refuge. If their cause was just, then he would fight on behalf of them and regain lost fortunes. The wealth he thus obtained increased substantially.

However, Munaiyaduvar, instead of enjoying the luxuries, spent all his wealth in serving the Shiva devotees. They were graciously welcomed at his home and sumptuous meals were served to them.

He continued this great work with single minded devotion and revered the devotees of Lord Shiva. He later became known as Munaiyaduvar Nayanar.

51. KALARSINGA NAYANAR

Kalarsingar was a valiant King who ruled the prosperous Pallava Kingdom. He was also an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva. His victories over his enemies brought him unlimited wealth and fame. He spent his time visiting the holy abodes of Lord Shiva seeking his blessings.

On one of those occasions, Kalarsingar visited the famous Shiva temple in Thiruvavur. He was accompanied by his Queen and courtiers. While the King was praying in the inner sanctum sanctorum, the Queen went around the temple premises admiring the architecture and the beauty of the flowers arranged. She saw a flower that had fallen from one of the tables where the Lord's garlands are intricately prepared. She picked up the flower and smelt its fragrance.

There was a devotee, Cheruthunai Nayanar who spent his life worshipping Lord Shiva in the temple. He was very particular about performing the services in the most austere manner possible. He witnessed the Queen's unholy act and was enraged. In his fury, he cut off the Queen's nose that had smelt the Lord's holy flower. The wounded Queen screamed out in pain.

The King rushed out on hearing the commotion. He became furious on seeing his beloved wife bleeding and crying in pain. He asked for an explanation. The fearless Cheruthunai Nayanar came forward and explained the situation. The King on hearing of his wife's deed told that the punishment meted out is insufficient. He drew his sword and cut off his wife's hands, which picked up the Lord's holy flower.

Thus, Kalarsingar's boundless love for Lord Shiva which surpassed his love for everything else was praised for eternity and he became known as Kalarsingar Nayanar.

52. IDANGALI NAYANAR

Idangaliyar was the mighty ruler of the coastal country of Konadu. He was a passionate ruler, famed for his impartial administrative skills and his zealous devotion towards Lord Shiva. He committed himself serve Lord Shiva's devotees. The country flourished under his rule and the through propagation of Saivite philosophy.

There was a daily wage worker in this country, who was a Shiva devotee. Every day, his purpose was to serve meals to Shiva devotees with his daily wage. One day, he couldn't get any work, hence was unable to serve meals to the devotees. Driven to desperation, he decided to steal from the royal warehouse, which had innumerable sacks of paddy available. He crept inside the storehouse, but was caught by the royal sentinels while he was in the act of stealing.

He was arrested and taken to the King. Idangaliyar was surprised on hearing the devotee's reason for stealing. He became enlightened with the wisdom that all his treasures were useless if they don't serve the devotees. He immediately issued a dictum to distribute the entire paddy in his royal treasury, to the devotees of Lord Shiva.

Thus, the King who spent his royal treasures for the welfare of Shiva's devotees gained the elevated status of Nayanmars and became known as Idangali Nayanar.

53. CHERUTHUNAI NAYANAR

Cheruthunaiyar was a humble farmer born in the town of Thanychaavur. He was a fierce devotee of Lord Shiva. He was

very particular about the procedures observed to serve the Lord. He dedicated his life towards the service of Lord Shiva. He spent his time doing various services in the great Thiruvavarur Temple.

One day, while he was in the temple, the mighty Pallava King Kalarsingar came to pray with his wife. While the King was praying in the temple's Sanctum Sanctorum, the Queen walked around enjoying the beauty of the Temple.

She saw a flower that had fallen from one of the tables where the Lord's garlands are intricately made. She picked up the flower and smelt its fragrance. Cheruthunaiyar, who witnessed this unholy act of the Queen, flew into a terrible rage. He cut off the Queen's nose that had smelt the Lord's holy flower. The Queen fell down, screaming in pain while blood spurted out from her injured nose.

Thus, the fearless devotee with his sole priority being Lord Shiva that even the power of mighty Kings failed to intimidate him, came to be known as Cheruthunai Nayanar.

54. PUGALTHUNAI NAYANAR

In the tiny village of Cheruvilliputtur there lived a humble Shiva devotee named Pugalthunaiyar. He dedicated his life to worshipping the Shiva Lingam in his village. He rose early every morning, washed the Shiva Lingam with water from a nearby stream and decorated the Lord with fragrant flowers.

He continued this ritual with the same passion and increasing devotion, irrespective of any hindrance he had. Suddenly drought and famine struck his village. Everyone from his village migrated to other villages in search of better food. But, Pugalthunaiyar was unable to leave behind his beloved Shiva.

He lived alone in the village, continuing his daily custom. Due to lack of food in the village, he became very weak. One day, while bringing water from the creek, he fell down due to weakness and slept off due to exhaustion. In his dream Lord Shiva appeared in his magnificent form and blessed him for his devotion.

He promised him a coin everyday till the village becomes prosperous again. Pugalthunaiyar woke up from this dream feeling rejuvenated and filled with energy. He found a coin near him. He was ecstatic, knowing his dream is actually true and that Lord Shiva had indeed blessed him.

He continued his service to Lord Shiva and used the coin every day to sustain himself. Due to his selfless devotion, he became known as Pugalthunai Nayanar.

55. KOTPULI NAYANAR

Kotpuli Nayanar was a brave chief in the mighty Chola army. He was also a fierce Shiva devotee. He spent the wealth he had earned through his victories, to serve his Lord. He hailed from the town of Nattiyathan Kudi.

One day, he was called for war duty, which would last several days. He brought large quantities of paddy sacks and assigned the responsibility of safeguarding this to his relatives. He warned them that the load of grains was for Lord Shiva and anyone using them for personal use would face his wrath. His relatives assured that his property would be safeguarded.

A few months since his departure, a grave famine struck his hometown. The suffering relatives, having had no other option, used the sacks of grains kept by Kotpuli Nayanar and survived the drought period. When Kotpuli Nayanar returned from his battle, he heard of what his relatives had done.

He invited them all to a feast in his home. As a punishment for breaking their promise and consuming the paddy grains kept for the use of Lord Shiva, Kotpuli Nayanar killed them all. He did not take into consideration that they were his relatives and also the fact that they were thrown into a desperate circumstance to use those paddy sacks.

All that mattered to him was the fact that the paddy kept for his Lord has been misused. Extremely pleased by this display of supreme devotion, Lord Shiva appeared before him and told him that his relatives would reach heaven and also took Kotpuli Nayanar into his holy abode.

56. PUSALAR NAYANAR

Pusalar Nayanar was a humble Vedic scholar hailing from Thirunindravur of Thondai Nadu. He had an extensive knowledge of the Vedas. He surrendered his mind, body and soul to Lord Shiva. He had a strong desire to build a magnificent temple for Lord Shiva. He started collecting money to fund such a huge project. But, however hard he tried, he couldn't get enough money. His funds failed to meet even a small percent of the amount needed.

Dejected, he decided instead to build a temple in his mind for Lord Shiva. He contemplated upon this wonderful idea every moment of his day. He visualized the temple plan, chose a scenic place for the grand temple, supervised the building of the giant pillars, designed the intricate temple art and he even dug a beautiful pond near the temple. Finally, he chose an auspicious date and planned to ritually install the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. This ritual is to make the temple ready for Lord Shiva to reside in. He was visualizing all this in his mind, as practically, it couldn't be executed.

Incidentally, the Pallava King was also a great Shiva devotee. He made huge arrangements, spent copious money and built a splendid temple for Lord Shiva. He fixed an auspicious day for the final rituals. He was very pleased for contributing in such an impressive manner for Saivism. A few days before the opening of the temple, Lord Shiva appeared in his dream. He asked the exhilarated King to change the date of his temple ritual, as he has to enter the beautiful temple built by Pusalar of Thirunindravur on that same day.

The King on waking up was both happy and curious. Happy for having had the good fortune in seeing Lord Shiva and very curious to know how grander would this other temple would be. He personally went in search of Pusalar. He reached Thirunindravur and enquired around for this Shiva temple. To his surprise, no one had any idea about this temple. They told him that a Shiva devotee named Pusalar was residing in the Vedic quarters, however, they haven't heard of any temple built by him.

The confused King went to meet Pusalar. He saw a humble man sitting under a tree, meditating on Shiva. The King approached him and told him of his dream and asked to see the temple he had built. Pusalar had tears of happiness on hearing that Lord Shiva had spoken of him. Then he explained to the King that it was certainly true that he had built a temple, though not in the material world, but in his mind.

The King was stunned on hearing this. He humbly bowed to Pusalar's devotion and returned to his capital. He changed the date of his temple's final rituals. Thus, Pusalar Nayanar became the embodiment of the universal truth that for Lord Shiva, the greatest temple is in the minds of his devotees.

57. MANGAIYARKARASIYAR

Mangaiyarkarasiyar was of royal heritage. She was born in the Chola family and married Nedumaran, the King of Pandyas. She grew up with abundant love and devotion towards Lord Shiva. She was a devout Saivite and was appalled when her husband, the King followed Jainism.

She had a kindred spirit in the minister, Kulachiraiyar, who was also a fervent devotee of Lord Shiva. Together they thought of several ways to introduce their beloved King into the enlightened world of Saivism. They worried about the state of their country, which was occupied by Jains. They prayed to Lord Shiva for a miracle that would change their King's mind and bring happiness to their Kingdom.

One day, the Queen heard that the great Saiva saint, Thirugnaana Sambandar had visited Thirumaraikaadu in their Kingdom. The queen, along with the minister went to pay their salutations to the great prodigy saint and sought his blessings. Together with the saint, they visited the great Madurai.

The Jains residing in Madurai were incensed about the visit of a Saiva Saint to their city. They lit fire to the place where the Saint and his followers were staying. Miraculously, the Saivites survived but the next day, the King was afflicted with a strange illness. He had acute stomach spasms. No medicine prescribed by his Jain counselors worked and the King's suffering increased with each passing moment. Finally, when all the options for cure given by the Jains failed, the Queen convinced her husband to invite the Saint Thirugnaana Sambandar and to get his help.

The King agreed to this and invited the prodigy saint. He immediately cured the King's illness by the power of Lord Shiva. The King was stunned by his miraculous recovery. He evicted

all Jains from his country and established Saivism as the order in his Kingdom. Pandya Kingdom soon flourished and the people were happier.

The Queen played a major role in the turnaround of her husband's mind and in establishing Saivism in their Kingdom. Her steadfast belief in Lord Shiva made her a Nayanmar Saint.

58. NESA NAYANAR

Nesa Nayanar was a humble weaver. He dedicated his life to serve the devotees of Lord Shiva. He was famous for the superior clothes that he wove. With the money he thus earned, he would weave garments free of charge for the devotees. His service continued selflessly. He considered it his life's mission to serve the devotees.

Thus, Nesa Nayanar devoted his life for serving Lord Shiva's devotees and by doing so, proved his selfless love for Lord Shiva. He reached the annals of Saivism by his consistent service.

59. KOCHENGA CHOLA NAYANAR

Kochenga Chola was a great ruler of the formidable Chola Empire. In his previous birth, he was born as a spider which was extremely devoted to Lord Shiva, residing near a Shiva Lingam. This Lingam was situated in the banks of the scenic river Chandra Thirtham. An elephant, which also had abundant love for Lord Shiva, washed the Shiva Lingam with the river water every day.

And, every day, the elephant noticed a spider web over the Shiva lingam. The spider not wanting the falling leaves to disturb the Shiva Lingam, relentlessly wove its web every day. The elephant, not knowing this, used to get angry every time it saw

the web over the Lingam. He would clean it with water every day. The spider would again weave its web. When the elephant washed out its web the third time too, the spider got enraged and went into the elephant's trunk and bit it. The intrusion into its trunk irritated the elephant and it struck its head on a rock and died. The spider struck inside the elephant's truck, died too. Lord Shiva was extremely pleased by the unparalleled devotion showcased by the spider and the elephant. He blessed the spider to be born as a great King in its next birth.

Thus, Kochenga Chola was born in the royal Chola family to the King Subadevan and his Queen Kamalavathi. They both were devout Shiva devotees. From an early age, Kochenga displayed his complete devotion towards Lord Shiva. Remembering his previous birth, he went to the place where the Shiva Lingam was and constructed a majestic temple. He spent his life in building numerous Shiva temples. His pure devotion and pious service made him a Nayanar Saint.

60. THIRUNEELAKANTA YALAPPANA NAYANAR

Thiruneelakantar was a great musician hailing from the town of Thiru Erukatham Puliyur. He was proficient in the famous music instrument, Yal. Hence he was called Thiruneelakanta Yalappanar.

He devoted his life to serving Lord Shiva and he played his Yal with complete devotion and love for Lord Shiva. He went to the famous Shiva shrines and played his instrument. People thronged to see the maestro playing.

On his travels, he reached Madurai, which was the centre of Saivism. While he was immersed in playing for his Lord in the majestic Shiva temple, Lord Shiva spoke to the devotees gathered. He asked them to arrange a bench for Yalappanar, so

he could place his instrument. In a similar incident, when he was enroute to visit the temple of Thiruvaalavaai, Lord Shiva came in the dreams of his devotees in that town and instructed them to accord a grand welcome to this musician. To the great surprise of Yalappanar, when he reached the town, he was given a magnificent reception and escorted to the temple. Such was the special affection that Lord Shiva had for Yalappanar.

He undertook many pilgrimages to Saiva places such as Thiruvarur, Seergali etc. In the latter place, he met the great Nayanar Saint, Thirugnaana Sambandar. Yalappanar was so inspired by the beautiful hymns and the depth of devotion of this child saint that from then on, he followed Thirugnaana Sambandar everywhere. Together, they visited several Shiva Shrines and Yalappanar played his instrument with complete devotion.

He became known as Thiruneelakanta Yalappa Nayanar in due course due to his zealous service to Lord Shiva with his passionate music.

61. SADAIYA NAYANAR

Sadaiyanar was a devout Shiva devotee. He spent his life serving the devotees of Lord Shiva. Incidentally, he was also the father of the great Nayanar saint, Sundaramurthi Nayanmar. From an early age, he preached his son the greatness of Lord Shiva and groomed him in the Saivite Philosophies. He became known as Sadaiya Nayanar through his unsurpassable devotion and his legacy continued through his son, Sundaramurthi Nayanar.

62. ISAIJNAANIYAR

Isaijnaaniyar was the pious mother of the great Nayanar saint Sundaramurthi Nayanar and the wife of the great Shiva

devotee Sadaiya Nayanmar. She taught her son, the splendor of Lord Shiva. She devoted her life to Saivism and found bliss in serving the devotees. She set a premier example for her son to follow in her footsteps and be a devout Saivite. She, along with her husband Sadaiya Nayanar became the only couple among the Nayanar Saints. They spent their life serving Lord Shiva.

63. SUNDARAMURTHI NAYANAR

Sundara Murthi Nayanar is one of the most famous, of all the Nayanar saints. In his previous birth, he was an attendant to Lord Shiva, named Alala Sundaran. His duty was to gather flowers from the gardens of Mount Kailash, which was the heavenly abode of Lord Shiva. One day, while he was performing his duty, there appeared in the beautiful garden, two gorgeous ladies, who were attendants to Goddess Parvati, the divine consort of Lord Shiva. Sundaran was attracted to the beauty of these women. Lord Shiva came to know of his thoughts. He ordered him to be born as a mortal on earth and live his life with these two women, who would also be born on earth. However, Sundaran begged forgiveness for his stray thoughts and requested Lord Shiva to rescue him soon. Lord Shiva acceded to his request.

He was very fortunate to have been born in Thirunaavalur to Sadaiyanar and Isaijnaaniyar, both illustrious Nayanar Saints. He was born in a family of Vedic Scholars as Nambiyaarurar. In his boyhood, he was very smart looking.

One day, the reigning King, Narasinga Munaiyaraiya was driving around the town and saw the young Nambiyaarurar playing. He was impressed by the young boy's intelligent look and asked his parents' permission to adopt him. The parents accepted the offer and let their son be brought up in the palace.

Years passed and Nambiyarurar grew up with all the scholarly knowledge of his ancestors and the luxuries of a royal born. He also had become a very devout Saivite. He spent his days praying to Lord Shiva and serving his devotees.

When he reached marriageable age his parents decided to get him married. Nambiyarurar accepted and the wedding preparations started with great flourish. Relatives and friends gathered and while the wedding rituals were underway, an elderly Shiva devotee interrupted the ceremony. He had matted hair and holy ashes smeared all over his body. To everyone's shock, he announced that the groom was his slave as per their agreement and should follow him immediately. Everyone present, called the devotee a "Pithan" (madman) for such outrageous claims.

Nambiyarurar not believing the devotee asked for evidence. The devotee then told about a deed in which Nambiyarurar's grandfather had pledged himself and his descendants to the devotee. Everyone suggested that they go to court to settle this. The old man said that he has the original document in his hometown of Thiruvannainallur. In his town, the judges listened to the old man's case and saw the document in which Nambiyarurar's grandfather had signed giving away himself and all his descendants as slaves to serve "Pithan" forever. The judges ruled in his favor on seeing the document. They ordered the devotee to show them his house and everyone, including Sundaramurthi Nayanar followed him.

The devotee walked towards the Shiva temple in Thiruvannainallur and went straight inside. The perplexed audience followed him and found that he had disappeared inside

the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. The startling truth then dawned upon all present that the old devotee was none other than Lord Shiva himself, who had appeared to rescue Nambihaarurar from marriage. Nambihaarurar was humbled that Lord Shiva had come for him and sang his praises. He travelled to various Shiva shrines and spread Saivism. His devotion towards Lord Shiva grew every day. He went on a pilgrimage to the Shiva temples in Thirunaavalur and later Thiruthuraiyur.

He desired to worship Lord Shiva in Thillai. En route, he reached Thiruvadikai, the holy place where one of the greatest Nayanar saints, Thirunavukkarasar resided. He felt undeserving to step on such holy ground. Hence, he stayed the night in a road side shelter on the outskirts of the town. In the shelter, an old man was sleeping next to him. In the middle of the night, the old man's feet were upon Nambihaarurar's head and so, Nambi woke the old man to move away his legs. The old man apologized and went back to sleep. After some time, his legs again were upon Nambi's head. This tested Nambi's patience and he shouted at the man to move away his legs. The old man then asked Nambi as to why he still hadn't recognized him and vanished. A shocked Nambi then realized that Lord Shiva had visited him again! He sang the ethereal verse "Thammanai Ariyadha", meaning "I didn't know you" on Lord Shiva.

While he was on his pilgrimage, he heard an inner voice calling him back to Thiruvarur. Heeding this voice, he travelled to Thiruvarur. Meanwhile, Lord Shiva appeared in the dreams of the devotees of Thiruvarur informing them of his arrival. The devotees started addressing him as "Thampiran Tholar", meaning "Lord's friend", from this incident onwards. When Nambi reached the town, he was given a grand reception by the

devotees. With all the devotees, he went to the great Thiruvavarur temple and worshipped Lord Shiva. There, Lord Shiva told Nambi to always dress up like the way he was when he was taken away from his wedding. Nambi acceded to the Lord's request and from then on dressed up like a bridegroom. Due to his beautiful form and handsomeness, everyone endearingly addressed him as Sundaramurthi.

One day, he saw a beautiful woman on his way back from the Thiruvavarur temple. On enquiring, he learnt that she was Paravaiyar, a pious Shiva devotee. With the blessings of Lord Shiva, they both got married and led a life serving the devotees. Once, he saw the great Devachiriyam hall, filled with several Shiva devotees. He was humbled on seeing so many eminent men and prayed to Lord Shiva that he might be given the good fortune to serve them. Lord Shiva appeared and asked him to sing in their praise, by providing him with the first lines "Thillai Vaalndhanaar thaam adiyarkum adiyen", meaning "I am the slave for the great men of Thillai". Nambi then composed and sang beautiful verses about the Shiva devotees. They form one of his great works "Thiruthondathogai".

Many devotees became great admirers of Nambi and served him as they would serve Lord Shiva. One among them was a farmer named Kundaiyur Kizhavar. He served Nambi by offering him rice grains and other lentils from his farm. One day, due to heavy rains, his crops were destroyed and he was unable to serve Nambi. He lamented his inability to serve Nambi to Lord Shiva. The next morning, his entire town was filled with sacks of rice grains. Astonished by this miracle, he told of this to Nambi and asked him to accept his service. Nambi and Paravaiyar gratefully

accepted and in turn gave away everything except the little that they needed to the people of their town.

The festival of Panguni Uthiram in Thiruvavarur was very famous and celebrated by Shiva devotees. Nambi wanted to donate money for the Lord's festival. But, he didn't have the funds. He travelled to Thirupakkalur to worship Lord Shiva there and slept in a nearby shelter, worn out in body and his mind full of worries on how to get money for the festival. The next morning when he woke up, he found that the tiles, on which he was sleeping, have been turned to gold! He gratefully thanked Lord Shiva and donated the gold for the temple festival.

Nambiyaarurar regularly went on pilgrimages visiting the great Shiva shrines and singing beautiful verses on Lord Shiva and meeting many devotees and serving them. While on one such pilgrimage, he visited the great Thiruvotriyur temple. In the temple premises, he was bewitched by a beautiful maiden named Changiliyaar. She had refused marriage out of her devotion towards Lord Shiva. She served in the Thiruvotriyur temple by making garlands for the Lord. She was convinced by Lord Shiva, to marry his humble devotee Sundarar. She accepted the proposal on the condition that Sundarar does not leave Thiruvotriyur. Nambi gave his word on that and they were both married with the blessings of Lord Shiva and the devotees present.

In the previous birth Paravaiyar and Changiliyaar were the two attendants of Goddess Parvati. Thus, Nambi married the two women whom he desired in his previous birth as Alala Sundarar.

Nambi stayed at Thiruvotriyur, worshipped his beloved Lord and led a peaceful life. However, as days passed, he started

missing his hometown of Thiruvarur and wanted to visit the great Thiruvarur temple. He started for his place. But, by doing so, he had violated his promise given to his wife. He lost his eyesight due to this. Praying for mercy and begging Lord's forgiveness, the great devotee travelled on with great difficulty. Lord Shiva forgave his favorite devotee and restored his eyesight. He also gave him a shaft to assist him on the way. After visiting many more holy Shrines of Lord Shiva on the way, Nambi finally reached Thiruvarur.

His first wife, Paravaiyar, became enraged when she was informed of his second marriage and refused him entry into the home. Unable to pacify her, Nambi and the devotees accompanying him stayed in a nearby shelter. That night, a very unhappy Nambi prayed to Lord Shiva to help resolve this conflict with his wife. Lord Shiva went disguised as an old devotee to Paravaiyar's home. Surprised to see a devotee at such late hours, she welcomed him and when he told of the purpose of his visit, she refused to forgive her husband and sent back the devotee.

Lord Shiva went back to Nambi and told of his wife's reply. Nambi was disappointed and asked Lord Shiva to try harder. It had to be observed here that, the relationship between this devotee and Lord Shiva is that of "friendship". This kind of bhakti is very rare and can be seen only in the life of Nambi. Lord Shiva again went back to Paravaiyar and revealed his true self. Paravaiyar was enthralled on witnessing the divine sight and immediately accepted Lord Shiva's wish and forgave her husband. A very happy Nambi returned home the next morning. So great was his power of devotion that Lord Shiva intervened on his behalf in his marital life!

News of this miraculous incident spread far and wide and was received with mixed reactions by the devotees of Lord Shiva. One great devotee, who was also a Nayanar saint, named Eyarkona Kalikama Nayanar was angry on Sundarar for having used Lord Shiva for such menial task. Lord Shiva wanted this devotee to know Nambi's devotion better. He gave him a stomach ailment. Kalikamar suffered a lot and was informed that only Nambi can cure his suffering. Lord Shiva informed Nambi about this devotee and asked him to cure him.

Sundarar immediately went to Eyarkon's place. However, Eyarkonar was enraged that he had to take the help of someone whom he did not like and cut his throat with his sword. Eyarkon's wife and relatives were shocked on seeing him dead. Sundarar appeared at their doorstep then and asked to see Eyarkonar so he can cure him. Eyarkon's wife, unable to tell the grave truth to the great devotee, told him that her husband had been cured. Sensing that something was wrong, he insisted on seeing Eyarkonar. Unable to refuse him, they sent him to Eyarkon's room. Sundarar was shocked to see Eyarkonar in a pool of blood and learned that it was because of him that had caused Eyarkonar to kill himself.

Distressed that he had been the cause of the death of a great devotee, Sundarar proceeded to kill himself. Just then, Eyarkonar rose as if from a slumber and stopped Sundarar from killing himself. He realized then the depth of Nambi's devotion and begged his forgiveness for his hasty conclusion. They both became great friends.

Sundarar also became close friends with Cheraman Perumal, another great Nayanar Saint, who came all the way

from the mighty Chera Kingdom to Thiruvarur to meet him. He was accorded a warm welcome by Nambi and Paravaiyar and they personally escorted him to the great Thiruvarur temple. Together, Nambi and Cheraman Perumal embarked on a pilgrimage and visited many Shiva shrines including the holy city of Madurai.

Cheraman Perumal reciprocated the hospitality by inviting Sundarar to his palace in Kodungoluur. Sundarar visited the great temple of Thiruvanichakkalam and worshipped Lord Shiva there. He later returned to Thiruvarur. After some time, he started missing the association of his dear friend Cheraman Perumal and again planned a visit to meet him.

On his way to the Chera Kingdom, he passed by a small hamlet Thiruppukoliyur, where he heard cries of woe from one of the huts. He enquired from passersby as to the reason for the suffering of the household. He was told that years back, the couple's young boy was eaten by a crocodile. Saddened by this tragic tale, he visited the house. On seeing a Shiva devotee enter their abode, the grief stricken couple hid their sorrow and welcomed him warmly. Sundarar on seeing their deep devotion, prayed to Lord Shiva to help alleviate their sorrow. Much to everyone's wonder, the young son who was eaten by the crocodile, came back to his parents. So powerful was his devotion to the Lord.

Sundarar finally reached Kodungoluur and met his friend. The King gave him a majestic white elephant to travel around the city. He spent his days in the temple of Thiruvanichakkalam. He fervently prayed to Lord Shiva to deliver him from his mortal life. While thus engrossed in his prayers, he mounted the

elephant to return to the palace. Lord Shiva's designated time for Sundarar to leave the mortal world had come.

By divine power, the elephant rose up and flew upwards. Through intuition, Sundarar's friend, Cheraman Perumal rode a horse to the temple to meet his friend. Just when he reached the temple entrance, he witnessed the divine sight of Sundarar flying in the sky on the elephant. Thinking only of being with his friend, he pushed his horse and by the power of his devotion, his horse also flew and he followed his friend. They both reached Kailasam, the heavenly abode of Lord Shiva. Thus, Sundarar attained the holy feet of his beloved Lord Shiva and resumed his life as Alala Sundarar.

OM NAMAH SHIVAYA!

