

TRANSLATION

# Sonasaila Malai

## Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

*A selection of verses from this work were published in the Deepam 2006 edition of The Mountain Path. It is now planned to publish a translation of the whole work in a number of instalments, of which this is the first. Previously, in the July 2005 edition, an article featuring translations from Sivaprakasa Swamigal's Tamil version of Prabhulinga Leelai, itself a translation from the Kannada, was published. The introduction which follows is principally an amalgamation of material taken from the two aforementioned articles.*

**S**ivaprakasa Swamigal was an accomplished Virasaiva poet and scholar who lived in the 17th century. He had a strong connection with Tiruvannamalai. His father, Kumaraswami Desikar, used to come to Arunachala from Kanchipuram every year for the Deepam festival. It is said that his three sons, of whom Sivaprakasa Swamigal was the eldest, were all born by the grace of Arunachala. When Sivaprakasa

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Swamigal grew up, he had a Guru in Tiruvannamalai – also called Sivaprakasa – whom he visited regularly. Sivaprakasa wrote numerous works, one of the earliest being *Sonasaila Malai* – a song garland of 100 verses to the Red Mountain Arunachala, which he is said to have composed in a single *pradakshina* of the mountain. He possessed a vivid and daring poetic imagination that brings back echoes of the Sangam era, the golden age of Tamil literature, a gift which earned him during his lifetime the *sirappu peyar* (honorary title) of Treasure House of the Imagination.

Each verse falls into two parts, the first being a plea for Lord Siva's grace in the face of the author's self-avowed unworthiness, and the second, a daring image in which the nature and attributes of Lord Siva are compared and contrasted with those of the Mountain that is Lord Siva's earthly-manifested form. Much emphasis is placed throughout upon the fact that, unlike the Siva of the temple cult, Arunachala is available to all without restrictions of any kind, an attribute which would have appealed very deeply to Sivaprakasa, who, as a Virasaiva, would have rejected the elitism of the temples and their cult, although it should be made clear that Sivaprakasa did not entirely reject temple worship, a fact to which many of the verses bear testimony.

Sivaprakasa's erudition is apparent throughout with numerous references to the Puranic literature, the lives of the 63 Saiva Saints, and the flora and fauna, legends and even the folklore (see v.76) of Arunachala itself. In particular the various mountains that feature in the Puranic canon, Mount Meru, the fabulous mountain at the centre of the earth, Mount Mandara, which the Devas and Asuras used to churn to Ocean of Milk, Mount Pothiyam, abode of the sage Agastya, the father of Tamil, the Eastern and Western Mountains, behind which the sun is said to rise and set, and even Mount Kailash, the very home of Lord Siva, are found lacking when compared to the majesty of Sonasaila, the Red Mountain. How could any mountain in the physical realm, however glorious, begin to compare with one that, as the very embodiment of Lord Siva, stands beyond time and space in the non-dual realm of the Self? Each verse is driven home with a stirring refrain that never lets us forget that Arunachala and Siva, eternally, are one: *Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

*Sonasaila Malai* can of course stand on its own as a work of great charm and spiritual depth. However it can do no harm to mention

the fact that Bhagavan himself was one who appreciated its merits. The following is a quotation from *My Recollections of Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar.

One day Bhagavan quoted the following verse to me from the book called *Sona Saila Malai*. [Editor's note: the Tamil verse is quoted here, followed by the meaning of the second part of the verse.]

“Arunachala, Lord of Kailas! When Manickavachakar and others like him sang that they were wanting in Love for you and prayed for the same it was only their modesty and not the truth. But it is the base truth when I say I have no Love for you. Pray therefore grant me the same.”

The next day I wanted to copy down this stanza since Bhagavan had quoted it and nothing he did was without significance. I was going to the library to fetch the book when Bhagavan said to me: “You need not go and fetch it. Come here. I know the stanza.” So saying, he was pleased to take a sheet of paper and write out the stanza for me. It was not unusual for Bhagavan to do such things for some of his close followers. About a score of people may have such writings of Bhagavan in their possession.

It has often been surmised that Bhagavan must have had an eidetic memory, given his ability to memorise extensive passages from works in a number of languages with no apparent effort. Even so the fact that he was able to reproduce this verse from memory in its entirety is a testament to the high regard in which he held it.

Regarding the translation, the style of these verses, consisting entirely as they do of daring, imaginative, one might even say far-fetched in some cases, poetic conceits does not lend itself to a flat, uninflected prose translation. An attempt has therefore been made to render them in verse. On occasion extra words have been added to complete the sense or fill out the metre. Such added words have been generally enclosed in square brackets.

### **Invocation**

    Holding in my heart the One  
    whose feet ringing anklets adorn,

who as a tribute received an elephant herd,<sup>1</sup>  
and who is praised as He  
who receives the tribute of steeds<sup>2</sup>  
that are the minds of devotees  
whose words are sweet,  
I shall praise Sonasailan, wise and fair!

Those three great sages<sup>3</sup> of noble fame  
sang songs rare and ornate in your name,  
and now this song of mine, too, shall be yours.  
For even as your ears take in sweet sounds  
of those two<sup>4</sup> [who by you stand],  
yet do you not heed the call of the deer  
[you hold] within your hand?<sup>5</sup>

Just as Mount Meru in the northern land,  
raises up his cloud-capped head,  
so do you, waxing great, arise,  
as Sun and chilly Moon  
shine out on either side,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(1)

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<sup>1</sup> The reference is to Vināyakar's encounter with a foreign king called Mukilaṅ (a general term for Moghul), who was harassing the devotees in the environs of Aruṅācala. Vināyakar appeared to him in a dream and transformed him into an elephant, or at least, frightened him badly, according to another account. When Mukilaṅ awoke he realised his error and rounded up a herd of elephants as a tribute to Vināyakar. This incident is recounted in one of the Tamil biographies of the famous Aruṅācala saint, Guhainamaśivāyar, who invoked Lord Śiva's intervention against the king with a *venba* verse. In response Lord Śiva sent Vināyakar to scare the king.

<sup>2</sup> *Steeds* are a metaphor for the unruly mind.

<sup>3</sup> The *three* are Appar, Jñānasambandhar and Sundarar, who lived between the 6th and 8th centuries C.E. and whose works, collectively known as the *Tēvāram*, constitute the first seven books of the *Tirumuṟai*, the canon of devotional works in the Tamil language dedicated to Lord Śiva.

<sup>4</sup> The melodious *two* refers to *two* Gandharvas, celestial beings with superb musical skills.

<sup>5</sup> The idea is that Śiva takes note of the sounds made by the deer, in spite of the beautiful music going on around him. This gives the author courage to persevere, even knowing that his songs cannot match those of the three authors of the *Tēvāram*.

In Arur to be born is to gain knowledge  
 that lies beyond this worldly thrall;  
 the end of all suffering is to reach  
 and gaze on Tillai's holy Hall.<sup>6</sup>  
 In holy Kasi<sup>7</sup> men joyfully abiding,  
 await death's call.  
 But to the mere thought of your own city  
 can such as these compare at all?<sup>8</sup>

For those who journey on birth's ocean  
 bound for final liberation's fair shore,  
 you rise on high  
 to guide for them the ship of *tapas*  
 ending their confusion with a glance,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(2)

<sup>6</sup> The verse refers to Chidambaram simply as *maṅṅru* – the [golden] Hall [of Chidambaram]. The basic meaning of *maṅṅru* is *hall of assembly*. Due to its great renown the mere mention of the word *maṅṅru* is sufficient to indicate the Golden Hall of Chidambaram, where Lord Śiva, as Naṭaraja, performs his cosmic dance.

<sup>7</sup> Kāśi is referred to simply as *the unique abode*. Again the idea appears to be that Kāśi is so famous, in its power to grant salvation, that even to say its name is superfluous. Yet Aruṅācala is even more powerful. Verse 543 of the Tamil *Aruṅācala Purāṇam* particularly emphasises both the greatness of Kāśi, and to what extent that greatness is eclipsed by the greatness of Aruṅācala:

Even if food were given to ten million great *tapasvins* in one of the most eminent *sthalas*, it would not equal a single grain of boiled rice given in immortal Kāśi. (Similarly) if food was given in Kāśi to countless crores of great *tapasvins*, it could not compare to a single grain of boiled rice given in the land of Arunai, (embodiment of) the real.

<sup>8</sup> The first part of this verse echoes a sentiment which has its source in the following śloka which is reputed to be from the *Aruṅācala Māhātmyam*, which is itself a section of the *Māheśwara Kaṇṭam* of the *Skanda Mahāpurāṇam*.

darśanāt abhrasādasi jananāt kamalālaye  
 kāśyāntu maraṇāt muktiḥ smaraṇāt aruṅācale.

Liberation [will be assured] in Abhrasādasi (Chidambaram) through seeing it, in Kamalālaya (Tiru Ārūr) through birth there, in Kāśi through death there and at Aruṅācala through remembrance of it.

Caught up in the humours three,  
here I dwelt,  
afflicted by a suffering impossible to quell.  
Then did I conceive the desire that,  
before these three should cast me out,  
I'd grasp and come to dwell  
in your salvation's matchless state.  
Yet still, your divine will, I cannot tell.

To dispel the flaw<sup>9a</sup> the world decries, saying,  
'The waning<sup>9b</sup> moon aloft your bear!'  
with the full moon in your crown,  
you rise on high,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (3)

None will accuse you, saying why  
did you remove  
the multitude of painful births  
from a wicked one whose stony heart  
melted only for those pretty girls  
with coral lips,  
that red of scarlet gourd defy.  
Show me then your mercy!

As the Sun dispelling dewy cold  
above dawn's matchless Mountain rises up,  
like a mirror bright set on a stand,<sup>10</sup>  
waxing great, do you arise,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (4)

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<sup>9</sup> There is a play on the word *kuṛai* in this verse. On its initial occurrence its meaning is *deficiency, imperfection, fault, flaw* but in the phrase *kuṛai mati* it means *waning* as in *the waning moon*. Only in his embodiment as Aruṇācala does Lord Śiva appear each month crowned by the moon at the full!

<sup>10</sup> The idea is that that the Mountain of the dawn and the rising sun are offering themselves up as a sort of dressing table and mirror, in which Lord Sōṇasailaṅ can view his own reflection.

Will it ever come, the day my mind  
 that now in sadness and confusion lies,  
 yielding to those whose eyes are dark,  
 like tall spears with their shining blades,  
 will come to dwell  
 upon the lotuses of your dancing feet,  
 fade, forget itself and melt?

Like a [bright red] lotus bloom  
 with petals full expanded,  
 as a [silver] swan glides by,  
 the *Karttikai* beacon shines out  
 upon your lofty peak  
 as the moon herself draws night<sup>11</sup>  
 Thus waxing great, do you arise,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(5)

The sage of Vadavur,<sup>12</sup> whose hymns are rare,  
 and others too,  
 they said, 'We have no love for you!'  
 but all their weeping and beseeching was a lie.  
 But when I say 'I have no love, for you,'  
 my words are true.  
 Reveal to me your grace!<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The scene described is that which occurs only once a year, on the full moon day of *Karttikai Deepam*, when, as night falls, a great beacon is lit upon the summit of the mountain Aruṇācala, to symbolise the manner in which Lord Śiva appeared as an unfathomable column of fire before Viṣṇu and Brahmā, to end their quarrel over which of the two was the greater, and thus curb their egos. The sight of the bright disc of the moon sailing up into the sky as the red flame of the beacon flares up is a very impressive one, especially when viewed from a distance and from a high vantage point, from which the scene unfolds against the wide panorama of the mountain's impressive silhouette. Here the beacon is fancifully compared to a red lotus blossom and the moon, to a swan swimming by it.

<sup>12</sup> *Vātavūraṇ* – he of *Vātavūr* refers to the poet-saint Māṇikkavācakar, whose birthplace was Vātavūr. He lived in the 9th century C.E. and his poems, the *Tiruvācakam* and the *Tirukkōvaiyār*, are considered equal to, or even greater, than those of the three *Tēvāram* poets mentioned earlier.

The black clouds that the ocean drink  
and about you thickly cluster  
recall the garment that you made,  
from the hide of the elephant you flayed,  
its temples oozing, wet  
with dark juices of the must,  
its trunk like a palmyra [ridged and black],  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (6)

The Asuras in their cities, and Kama too,  
about whose flowery darts  
winged insects buzz and sing,  
once knew your white smile as you laughed,  
and the gaze that from your forehead flashed.  
Shall not this wretch's dark delusion  
come to know these too?<sup>14</sup>

Too subtle even for thought to reach,  
you are men say, but you,  
this reputation to allay,  
adopt this mighty material form,  
and stand for all the world to see,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (7)

That you ate as if 'twere ambrosia sweet  
the poison that with a roar  
the surging billows, curling back,  
cast up from the deep,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The poet is saying that it is inconceivable that the great saints of the past such as Māṇikkavācakar could actually have had no love for the Lord and that their saying so was simply a means of demonstrating the depth of their devotion to Him. 'However, in my case,' he cries, 'it is actually true and therefore my need for your grace is greater even than theirs.'

<sup>14</sup> Lord Śiva destroyed the three cities of the *asuras* with a smile when they stood against Him, and burned up Kāma with a glance from his third eye, when Kāma attempted to make him enamoured of Pārvati. 'If you are so keen to destroy evil,' the poet cries, 'why then do you not destroy the evil of the *āṇava malam* (the illusion that one possesses a separate self or ego) that afflicts me so?'

<sup>15</sup> The poison churned from the Ocean of Milk is here compared to the devotee's own *āṇava malam*, which Śiva has the power to eradicate by taking it and absorbing it



is your great glory, yours alone.  
 Will you not now, by your divine decree,  
 complete it now, and make  
 of this poor wretch  
 a devotee at your holy feet?

The flame of *Karttikai* your bear  
 upon your beauteous peak,  
 to drive the dark delusion out<sup>16</sup>  
 from hearts of all that look and see  
 you rising up and standing fast, to shine,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(8)

Before the Lord of Death,  
 a flower garland draped  
 across his mighty chest,  
 destroys my body's outward form,  
 will there be, for wretched me, a day  
 that your grace comes to wipe away  
 the ego self that lies within  
 so that, with every hindrance gone,  
 I and shining *jñāna*'s form  
 supreme are one?<sup>17</sup>

With an elephant's tusk  
 for a crescent moon,

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into his own self, just as He did with that poison. In strict *Saiva Siddhānta* terms *āṇava malam* is not the ego as such, but the principle of egoity that is supposed to inhere in all souls as a potential, even after union with Him, just as verdigris is ever potentially inherent in the metal copper. However this *iruḷ* or *āṇava malam*, the soul's darkness or delusion, is often regarded as synonymous with *ahamkāram* – the ego, the erroneous sense of 'I' and 'mine'.

<sup>16</sup> In this verse it is stressed that the *Kārttikai* beacon has the power to dispel the inner darkness of the soul, unlike other lights, which have the power only to dispel outer, physical darkness.

<sup>17</sup> A poetic formulation of Bhagavan's central teaching that, once the illusion of the ego self has departed, we shall come to dwell in the eternal bliss of the Self, 'shining *jñāna*', beyond birth and death.

and bright creepers,<sup>18</sup>  
spreading in profusion  
like untied tresses  
upon your slopes, you shine,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (9)

Will the day ever come when,  
fixing my thoughts upon the form  
that Goddess Uma shares with you,  
so that in my heart, that melts  
like ghee before a flame,  
I root out the delusion of female charms,  
as my eyes pour forth floods of tears?

You who bathe in the wat'ry libation  
that [Varuna], great Lord of the Flood,  
pours down on you,  
scooped up from the ocean's basin  
with a black cloud as a jewelled ladle,<sup>19</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (10)

Upon the flowery earth,  
that the ocean's fair gown girds about,  
quite fittingly you grant your grace  
to those who deem the body false.  
But to me, who take the body to be true,  
will you not deign to grant it too?<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The *cōṭiyam koḍi* – *bright creeper* is a creeping plant that, whilst appearing green by daylight, has a glowing radiance at night. The moonlight, catching an elephant's tusk, and the shining creepers, resembling unloosed braids of hair, thus offer to the imagination a striking image of Lord Śiva with the crescent moon in his untied locks.

<sup>19</sup> After Indra Varuṇa is the greatest of the gods of the *Rig Veda*, his role being the maintenance of the universal order. Varuṇa has a particular responsibility for aerial waters, pouring down the rains from the clouds' inverted cask. In this striking image, Varuṇa, knowing that his power is small compared to that of the One who is responsible for the very existence of the universe, is depicted as travelling south to perform *abiśeka* – *ritual bathing* of the lingam of Aruṇācala Śiva.

<sup>20</sup> The word *mey* in Tamil means *truth* and also *body*, which gives an ironic twist to the Tamil text. The poet says, 'Those who think that *mey* (*body*) is *poy* (*false*) are

Not wishing to dwell within a shrine,  
 hid from view, and visited  
 with proper observance of time,  
 you grant your presence abundantly,  
 standing fast, for all the world to see,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (11)

Are you not the shining Sun  
 that with compassion's surging fire  
 dries the mire of birth,  
 wherein I languish, sunk  
 through sensual desire,  
 and brings the lotus  
 of my heart to flower?

Mountain, where your palace stands,<sup>21</sup>  
 Mountain, you took as a bow,<sup>22</sup>  
 to confound the senses of your foe,  
 Mountain, father of your bride,<sup>23</sup>  
 within you all of these reside!  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (12)

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right, and I who think that *mey (body)* is *mey (true)* am wrong.' To those lacking in discrimination, there is nothing more true or real than the body. Only the wise know it to be false. The author, whilst admitting that he does not possess the attainment of the great ones who possess this realisation, makes the point that, as one who labours under this delusion, he is just as much, or more, in need of Śiva's grace, in order to dispel it. In the second half of the verse he reinforces his argument by pointing out that Aruṇācala, unlike other gods that remain hidden in temples and shrines, is accessible to all without restriction, regardless of their degree of spiritual attainment.

<sup>21</sup> Mount Kailash in Tibet, which is reputed to be Lord Śiva's home.

<sup>22</sup> Mount Meru, which Lord Śiva took as a bow when defeating the *asuras* in their aerial cities.

<sup>23</sup> The Himalaya Mountains, named after Himavat, the father of Lord Śiva's consort Pārvatī. As the all-embracing Self, free of all attributes, Aruṇācala subsumes all other mountains within himself.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Will there ever come a day  
when you grant your grace,  
so that I, poor wretch,  
sloughing off the senses' woes,  
and setting up within the temple  
of my mind your holy feet,  
with ankle-rings adorned,  
may join the great assembly  
of those holy ones who virtue seek?

Men in *pradakṣiṇā* walk around  
with cries that like the ocean's roar  
resound, as in their midst  
like holy Mandara you stand and shine  
the *tapas* of the world made manifest,<sup>24</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(13)

This mortal frame, that's bound to die,  
like a bubble that through water flies,  
is truly real, thus did I think.  
Whirled through births,  
in bliss's enduring ocean  
I knew not how to sink.  
Will there ever be salvation  
for one so ignorant as me?

With their tusks, the wild pigs root  
upon your mountain slopes,  
as if the Boar of former times  
digging down, still sought today  
your beautiful foot,<sup>25</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(14)

<sup>24</sup> In another powerful image the author compares Aruṅācala to Mount Mandara, which was used by the *devas* and *asuras* as the churning-stick to churn the Milk Ocean, and the press of fervent devotees performing *pradakṣiṇā* around it, to the serpent Vāsuki, who was employed as the churning rope. The idea is that just as the Puranic churning brought forth the ambrosia which confers immortality, the unbroken throng of devotees performing circuits of Aruṅācala calls forth the ambrosia of liberation from birth and death.

<sup>25</sup> When Lord Śiva appeared before Brahmā and Viṣṇu as an immeasurable column

Holding you within my thoughts  
 who are compassion's noble form,  
 the Letters Five upon my lips,  
 both hands above my head conjoined,  
 grant that I may daily make  
*pradakṣiṇā* of you!<sup>26</sup>

The moon that rises o'er that sacred peak  
 to adorn your holy locks you keep,  
 and black of mountain caves  
 for [the poison at] your throat you take,<sup>27</sup>  
*shining forth as Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (15)

Knowing that the insults of all the world,  
 are seen as praises by the Lord,

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of fire, Viṣṇu, as the legend goes, burrowed down in the form of a boar in order to reach its feet and thus prove his superiority over Brahmā, who flew up in the form of a swan in order to find its head. The poet imagines that one of the wild pigs that he sees rooting on the slopes of Aruṇācala is none less than Viṣṇu himself, still trying to complete his challenge.

<sup>26</sup> The first part of these verses eloquently expresses the necessity of worshipping Lord Śiva in thought, word and deed, the essential requirement for all who aspire to realisation of their true Self. The Five Letters refers to the five syllable mantra *śi-vā-ya-na-ma*; *śi* represents *śivam*; *vā* represents his *energy of grace* – *aruḥ śakti*; *ya* represents the *jīva*; *na* represents *māyā* or *tirōtam*, the energetic whirl of impurity in itself, and *ma* represents *āṇavam*, that impurity as operating within the *jīva*. The symbolism of the mantra is described in the *Siddhānta* text *Tiru Aruḥ Payaṇ – The Fruit of Divine Grace* by *Umāpati Śivācāriyār*, a guru in the lineage of *Meykaṇṭatēvar*:

See on one side, the dance of defilement, on the other the dance of true knowledge, and oneself (the soul) in the middle.

As 'ma' and 'na' unfold, uniting with the consciousness (of the *jīva*) they do not permit it to return (to the Lord). If its powerful deeds are cancelled out, it will succeed in returning.

<sup>27</sup> Again a parallel is drawn here between Śiva's iconic anthropomorphic form, as bearing the moon in his matted locks and displaying at his throat the black stain of the poison *halāhala*, which was churned from the Milk Ocean and which he swallowed for the salvation of all living beings. The poison is equated to the blackness of cave openings on the mountainside.

the sage of Arur, on his wedding day,  
spoke words of calumny, [they say].<sup>28</sup>  
So grant me now the grace  
to bow down to the holy feet  
of Him that daily [hears such words  
and] finds them meet.

Above the glorious enclosing walls  
of the universe's surrounding shell,  
as a Siva lingam you arise  
in the temple of the overarching skies.<sup>29</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(16)



(To be Continued)

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<sup>28</sup> Sundarar is one of the three authors of the *Tēvāram*. (See v. 1, note 3.) He is also known as Ārūraṅ in virtue of his association with the town of Ārūr in the Tañcavūr (Tanjore) district. His biography is told in the *Periya Purāṇam* by Cēkkiḷār, which recounts the lives of the 63 Tamil saints, the *Nāyaṅār* or *Nāyaṅmār*. When the time for his marriage came, Lord Śiva appeared in the guise of an old Brahmin and claimed that Sundarar was his slave according to the bond executed by Sundarar's grandfather and therefore he objected to the marriage. A close examination of this deed revealed that it was a real one. When the people wanted to know the residence of the old Brahmin, he entered the temple and disappeared, only to reappear as Śiva himself seated with his consort upon the bull. Because Sundarar had called him a madman when he first put forward his claim in the disguise of the old Brahmin, Śiva bade him compose a hymn addressing him as *pittāṅ – madman*. Thus did it come to pass that Sundarar composed the first of his decads, the one which begins with the words *pittā pīrai cūḍī – Madman! You who wear the crescent moon [in your locks]!* In this first part of the verse the author is saying, 'Since you are known to accept even the insults of your devotees as praise, then perhaps even I may dare to offer my hymns to you, however inferior and unworthy of you they may be.'

<sup>29</sup> In Hindu cosmology the universe was conceived as being contained in an egg-shaped shell. The idea here is that, if we were to conceive of *Sōṅasailaṅ* in terms of a lingam housed within a temple, then the only temple which might conceivably be worthy or capable of containing it would be the shell of the universe itself.

# Sonasaila Malai

## Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

The biographies of Sivaprakasa Swamigal relate that his father Kumaraswami's conversion to the Virasaiva movement had occurred through the intervention of Lord Siva himself, who had appeared to him in the guise of a Virasaiva sadhu as he sat in meditation. The sadhu instructed him to take *dhāraṇā dīkṣā*, the *initiation of investment with the liṅgam*, from a teacher called Gurudevar in Tiruvannamalai. Accordingly Sivaprakasa and his two brothers were brought up in the Virasaiva tradition. After Kumaraswami died Sivaprakasa and his brothers returned to Tiruvannamalai and, according to one account, continued their studies under the tutelage of one Gurudevar, who resided in a math in the western street of the town. It is not clear if this was the same Gurudevar who had formerly initiated their father. It was during this time that Sivaprakasa composed the work that is the subject of these articles, *Sonasaila Malai*, during a single *pradakshina* of the mountain Arunachala. At some point the

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brothers decided to undertake a pilgrimage to the south to further their studies of Tamil. Arriving in Turaimangalam they enjoyed the patronage of a local ruler called Annamalai Reddiyar for two and a half years. Then, determining to continue on their journey south, they took their leave of Annamalai Reddiyar and departed for Tirunelveli.

There, after taking *śaiva sannyāsa*, Sivaprakasa approached the head of Dharmapura Athinam Math, Velliyambala Tambiran, with a request to teach him Tamil grammar. He in turn, in order to gauge Sivaprakasa's literary prowess, requested him to compose a *venba* verse ending and beginning with the syllable 'ku' and containing the phrase 'ūruṭaiyāṇi.' In response Sivaprakasa composed the following verse:

kuṭakkōṭu vāneyiru koṇṭārku kēlal  
 muṭakkōṭu muṇṇamaṇi vārku — vaṭakkōṭu  
 tēruṭaiyāṇ tevvukkuṭ tillaitōl mērkollal  
 ūruṭaiyāṇ ennum ulaku.

*The world declares that,  
 for Him who broke the teeth of the Sun  
 who flees to the west,  
 for Him who once wore as an ornament  
 the curving tusk of a boar,  
 for the Enemy of Kāma, who flies north  
 on the chariot [of the southerly breeze],  
 Tillai is his home,  
 [tiger and elephant] hides are his attire  
 and a young bull is his mount.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> The most likely meaning for the words *ūr uṭaiyāṇ* is *the one who possesses, the master of a city, town or village*, just as indeed the words *tēr uṭaiyāṇ* in the previous line mean *possessor of a chariot*. But Sivaprakasa puts a very clever twist on them, taking them as three separate nouns *ūr* – *town*, *uṭai* – *attire* and *āṇ* – *bull* and employing them in a *poruḷ kōl* – *poetic device* called *niraṇṇirai* (*niral niraṇṇirai*) which means *arrangement in rows or ranks*. In this, elements of speech, in this case three subjects and their respective predicate nouns, are 'stacked' within the same sentence on either side of the same verb, here the verb *to be* understood. Hence the meaning of the words *tillai tōl mēl kollal ūr uṭai āṇ* is [The world declares that for Lord Śiva] *Tillai, hides [and his] mount [are] [his] home, [his] attire [and a] bull*.



Velliyambala Tambiran was deeply impressed and proceeded to instruct the three brothers in the five branches of Tamil grammar, consisting of letters, words, prosody, subject matter and rhetoric.

*(Biography to be continued in the next issue)*

Will there ever come a day  
that, freed from body,  
senses and faculties of mind,<sup>1</sup>  
with the veil of *anavam*'s  
dark illusion rent,  
I see you without seeing,  
within myself,  
I, a flower, and you the scent?

Flayer of elephant and lion  
you came [from Kailash's Mount],  
and now upon your slopes  
great herds of these you raise  
too numerous to count,  
their burning hatred to assuage,<sup>2</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(17)

For me who languishes in the heat  
of delusive charms  
of pretty girls whose heavy braids  
are decked with flower wreaths  
where swarms of humming insects feast,  
will there ever come a day

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<sup>1</sup> The faculties of mind, *karaṇam* are the intellectual faculties of which there are four *maṇam* – mind, *putti* – intellect, *cittam* – will, *volition*, and *ahamkāram* – egoity.

<sup>2</sup> Siva wears a tiger skin which belonged to the tiger that the rishis in the Daruka forest conjured up to destroy him, and also a blanket of elephant skin which belonged to the *asura* Gajāsura who attacked him in the form of an elephant. Seeing him come from Kailash dressed in this way, the tigers and elephants of Aruṇācala might understandably be somewhat aggrieved.

that you draw me in, me safe to keep  
in the cool shade of your holy feet?

Just as his shining locks do hide  
the holy Ganga's silvery tide  
that flows down from his jewelled head,  
white torrents roaring,  
tumble down your glittering sides,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (18)

Grant me now your holy grace  
to remove that poverty of mind  
whereby I idly waste my time  
in lauding those whose deeds are base,  
like Murugan who roaming goes  
from peak to peak  
or Kama with his cruel bow.<sup>3</sup>

Whilst great Mount Meru  
cannot even bear to think  
how he in days of yore  
below the shoulder  
of the Lord did, bending, shrink  
and daily bows his head in fame,<sup>4</sup>  
waxing great, do you arise,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (19)

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<sup>3</sup> The reference here appears to be to the pre-Vedic Murugan, who is the Lord of the *kuriñci tinai* – hilly tracts in the pre-Vedic Tamil culture, before he was adopted into the Hindu pantheon as the son of Śiva. Murugan and Kāma are here used to represent those who are drawn towards worldly pursuits by youth and beauty.

<sup>4</sup> When Śiva used Mount Meru as a bow to destroy the aerial cities of the *asuras*, its topmost summit would naturally have been drawn down to around the level of his shoulder. Verse 7 refers to a variant version of the story in which Lord Śiva does not even use his bow, but destroys the cities with a laugh.

Will that day come  
 that, through your grace,  
 you grant  
 to such a wicked one as I  
 the noble poverty that comes  
 from offering feasts  
 to sages great  
 who wear the holy ash,  
 and a body wasted  
 through exercise of holy fasts?<sup>5</sup>

The *kuvalai* flowers, where beetles suck,  
 that flourish on your spreading tanks  
 are not for any of the gods  
 but are for Canticuvarar<sup>6</sup> in joy to pluck,  
*Flowering Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (20)

<sup>5</sup> Service to the servants of the Lord is considered equal to, or even superior to, direct service to the Lord himself. Indeed a great number of the *nāyaṅmār*, whose histories are recounted in the *Periya Purāṇam* gained their status through just such indirect service. In his *Marital Garland of Letters*, v. 104, Sri Ramana goes even further and begs to be a servant of the servants of those servants:

ṅāmaṅkē! aṅpartam aṅparuk(ku)  
 aṅpaṅāy iṅavaru! aruṅācalā.

*Arunachala, grant through your grace that I may become a devotee of the devotees  
 of the devotees who hear your name with love.*

<sup>6</sup> Caṅṭēcuvarar is another of the 63 *Nāyaṅār*. He was born into a Brahmin family and given the name Vicāracarumar. His devotion to the Lord caused him to slay his own father. Accordingly Lord Śiva declared that henceforth he himself would be his father and made him the chief of his devotees saying, 'We confer upon you the rank of *Chaṅṭican*, such that all the vessels from which we have eaten, all our apparel and all our adornments are yours alone.' Since the water lilies that grow on the tanks of Aruṅācala qualify as *nirmālya*, that is to say offerings of food and flower garlands that have originally been offered to Śiva, Caṅṭēcuvarar is the only one who has the right to pick them. Caṅṭēcuvarar, or Caṅṭikēcuvarar as he is commonly known, has a unique place in south Indian temple worship. During the *Kartikai Deepam* festival in Tiruvannamalai it is he who, as the devotee-god, accompanies the main temple deities Śiva, Parvatī, Vināyakar and Murugan on each of their daily processions around the temple.

Like a kingfisher that spies its prey  
great Yama stands and waits the day  
to steal my very life away.  
Please grant to me your grace 'ere this,  
and drown me in your sea of bliss.

For those who see you [only]  
as a great and towering Mount,  
you bring forth trees,  
venkai,<sup>7</sup> asoka<sup>8</sup> and sandalwood,  
covered all in honeyed flowers.  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(21)

My worthless words have not the power  
that dispatched you as an emissary<sup>9</sup>  
to the maid whose words are pure and sweet,  
as the hosts of heaven rained down flowers,  
and holy sages weeping floods of tears,  
damped down the dust upon the street.  
So ranting on, I languish here.

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<sup>7</sup> The *venkai* is the Indian kino tree, *Pterocarpus marsupium*. It is a large deciduous tree which can grow up to 30-40 metres tall. It has yellow flowers that are worn as garlands and used in the worship of Murugan.

<sup>8</sup> The *acōka*, Skt. *aśoka*, *Saraca asoka* is prized for its beautiful foliage and fragrant flowers. It is a small, erect evergreen tree, with deep green leaves growing in dense clusters. The *asoka* flowers are bright orange-yellow in colour, turning red before wilting.

<sup>9</sup> The maid is Paravaiyār, one of the two celestial handmaidens, whom, in their human incarnations, Lord Śiva granted to Sundarar as wives. Previously Sundarar had been a devotee of Lord Śiva at his court on Mount Kailash. Therefore Śiva had decreed a human birth for him, in which he could satisfy his love for the two women in their human incarnations. In the *Periya Purāṇam* it is simply stated that the Lord instructed his devotees to conduct the marriage of the couple. There is no mention of the Lord going as an emissary to request Paravaiyār's hand or of gifts of horse and elephant as stated in v. 41 later. However the story of Lord Śiva going in disguise to plead on behalf of his devotee is prevalent, possibly stemming from a variant version of the *Periya Purāṇam*.

‘Though I came clad in a form  
of surpassing greatness  
that [all] might know me,  
those Two knew me only  
inasmuch as I did make them know,<sup>10</sup>  
thus declaring you rise on high,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash’s Lord!* (22)

Obeying slender maids  
whose words are sweet,  
I did not serve those who crave  
the lotuses of your holy feet,  
renouncing all desire,  
not squandering birth,  
like nectar poured  
on dry, cracked earth.

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash’s Lord,*  
where the *simbul* bird<sup>11</sup> in plumage rich  
swoops to snatch a lion which,  
gripping with its powerful claws,  
has leapt upon the head  
of an elephant drunk in the must,  
down whose temples juices pour,<sup>12</sup>  
and clutching it, prepares to skyward soar. (23)

<sup>10</sup> Although, as Aruṇācala, Lord Śiva is accessible to all, even the great gods Viṣṇu and Brahmā were unable to know him when they arrogantly assumed that they could know him by their own efforts. Only when they abandoned their arrogance and bowed down to Him did he graciously reveal his form to them

<sup>11</sup> The *cimpuḷ* is a fabulous eight-legged bird which figures in the Purāṇas and other scriptures. It is credited with being more powerful than the lion and elephant, and is often depicted as part lion and part bird. The name appears to be a combination of the Sanskrit word *simha* – lion and the Tamil word *puḷ* – bird. Its Sanskrit name is *śarabha*, *carapam* in Tamil. The beast has a strong connection with Śiva in that this was the form that he took to defeat Viṣṇu’s lion-man avatar, *Narasimha*.

<sup>12</sup> The elephant is held to live in fear of the lion, whilst the lion in turn is held to live in fear of the *cimpuḷ* bird. There is a Tamil proverb which says, ‘The elephant dreams

Shall I ever cease to lust for pretty girls  
whose tresses soft like dark clouds swirl,  
small of brow with wanton eyes,  
like Kama's flowery darts, dark  
with fine veins in the white,  
with tiny waists, and rounded breasts,  
whereon a flower garland rests?

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
who men applaud, saying,  
'Bright boar's tusks<sup>13</sup> and serpents  
as your matchless ornaments  
you liberally afford.  
Yours is the light  
that illuminates the world.'

(24)

To see you, Visnu did not think  
to sweetly sound with all his power  
the conch he carries in his hand,  
nor did Ayan deign to shower  
libations from his nine-jewelled pot<sup>14</sup>  
Thus trying to reach you, they could not.<sup>15</sup>

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of the lion, and the lion dreams of the *cimpul'*, the moral, presumably, being that however great someone is, there will always be someone greater for them to fear. However if one puts one's faith in Aruṇācala, the Self, there is no one to fear or to cause fear in someone else.

<sup>13</sup>Śiva is on occasion described as wearing a boar's tusk, possibly as a memento of his defeating Viṣṇu in his *varaha* – *boar incarnation*, or representing the tusk of the boar form abandoned by Viṣṇu after his doomed attempt to reach the Lord's feet. In the following verse 11 from chapter 59 of the *Tiruvilaiyāḍal Purāṇam*, the evening sky is compared to Śiva's body, the boar's tusk to the crescent moon and the necklace of Brahmā's skulls to the stars.

The heavens turned red, as if the most beauteous Lord had appeared in person to dispel the suffering that beset his devotee [Māṇikkvācakar]. The crescent moon resembled the white boar's tusk that hangs upon his chest, and the stars in the heavens were like the necklace of Brahma's skulls [that he wears around his neck].

You who, with mercy overflowing,  
 the mighty elephant to guard us gave  
 with five arms but a single tusk,  
 and the six-faced lion [Murugan],  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(25)

At that wedding feast I could not be,  
 in the marriage pavilion  
 of the Lord of Cīkālī,<sup>16</sup> over whom  
 his deeds had power none.  
 That time [alas] is now long gone.  
 So now to you I direct my plea:  
 to grant your holy feet in grace  
 and all my suffering efface.

Unlike great Mount Pothiyam,<sup>17</sup>  
 home of Tamil rich and sweet,

<sup>14</sup> Brahmā is depicted as having four arms, one of which holds a water pot, representing the primal waters from which he caused the universe to evolve. The *nine jewels* are given in the Madras Tamil Lexicon as *onyx, sapphire, coral, emerald, ruby, pearl, topaz, lapis-lazuli* and *diamond*.

<sup>15</sup> Brahmā and Viṣṇu became carried away by their own egos, believing that they could reach the head and feet of the Lord by their own efforts when all they needed to do was to use the implements they already held in their hands, the *nava maṇi nīr karakam* – *nine jewelled water pot* and the *nantu* – *conch*, to pay homage to him and thus gain *darshan* of him. The implication is that the same fate awaits all those who, employing the ego, attempt to gain realisation through their own mental efforts.

<sup>16</sup> *Pukali*, the name used in the verse, is another name for Cīkālī, is the birth-place of Jñānasambandhar. See v. 1, note 3. His poems constitute the first three volumes of the *Tirumuṟai*. At the time of his wedding the Lord caused a vast effulgent light to appear, with which the bride and groom merged and attained liberation. All those who witnessed his wedding are said to have merged with the light and attained *mukti* also. The poet bemoans the fact that no such ‘fast track’ to *mukti* is available to himself!

<sup>17</sup> Mount Pōthiyam is a mountain in the Pāṇṭiya country, abode of the sage Agastya. Agastya is said to have learned the Tamil language from Śiva himself and then to have settled on Mount Pōthiyam where he wrote a Tamil grammar and taught it to twelve pupils, thus founding the language and causing it to prosper.

you do not melt to music's tones,  
but only to the daughter  
[of the Himalayas'] dulcet speech,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (26)

'Ambrosia you are,  
a jewel amongst maids!  
thus flattering foolish girls  
I wandered, all to no avail.  
Yet you I did not praise,  
though I knew that those  
who string together words  
to call you even 'madman'<sup>18</sup>  
in harmonious verse,  
are granted your reward.

Though you concealed from our view  
your beauteous limbs, our eyes' delight,  
you did not hide your cooling hue  
that sheds a hundred thousand crores  
of shining [golden] rays of light.<sup>19</sup>  
Thus rising up, you tower on high,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (27)

To me, deluded by those maids  
with slender waists like threads,  
and flowery braids,

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<sup>18</sup>See note to v.16, in the previous article for the explanation of this reference to Sundarar, who did indeed refer to Lord Śiva as a *pittan* – *madman*, albeit at the Lord's own behest.

<sup>19</sup>This reference here appears to be to the golden form of Aruṇāchala, the form the mountain took after first manifesting as an immeasurable pillar of fire. The word *katir*, here translated as *rays*, could also mean *suns*.

In the first [*Krita*] yuga it was a Mountain of bright red flame, then, in the *Treta yuga*, of ruby. In the *Dvapara yuga* it shone with the lustre of pure gold, and in the *Kali yuga*, in which we now dwell, it is formed of stone. Its name is *Arunachala*, the Red Mountain.

— *Aruṇācala Purāṇam*, Ch.1. v. 52.



and wounded by the sting  
of Venus mounds  
like cobras' jewelled hoods,  
when will you vouchsafe  
the cool balm of your holy foot  
and end this madness  
with your grace?

In fair Cikazhi's noble town,  
seemly and of great renown  
you gave unto that Brahmin's son  
a booth, covered all in shining pearls<sup>20</sup>  
And now you dwell beneath  
a canopy of pearly stars on high  
that glitter in the vast and open sky,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(28)

Grant me now your grace, I pray,  
that I may pass my days away  
at the feet of true devotees,  
tending to their every need,  
studying the glorious Agamas' word,

<sup>20</sup>The story is told in the *Periya Purāṇam* of how Jñānasambandhar was given a palanquin and parasol encrusted with pearls. He was on pilgrimage and had just arrived at the *sthala* of Māraṅpāṭi. As they approached on foot, Jñānasambandhar was reciting the five syllabled mantra '*namaśivāya*' to ease the distress of his devotees who were suffering from the heat of the sun. Accordingly Lord Śiva ordained that a palanquin and parasol encrusted with pearls be provided to alleviate the suffering of his devotee.

The Lord who joyfully wears the enduring holy ash would graciously furnish him with a palanquin to ride in, a parasol to shade him and shining clarions to announce his approach, all set with flawless pearls.

Jñānasambandhar's destination the next day was the nearby *sthala* of Tirunelvāyil Aṟatturai. Lord Śiva therefore appeared to the Brahmins of that place in a dream, informed them that the aforementioned items had been placed in the temple's inner sanctum and told them that they should deliver them to the saint on the following day. Lord Śiva also apprised Sambandhar himself of what he had done. Thus the next day the precious items were duly delivered to him.

and bringing flowers, blooming new,  
to make puja in praise of you.

You upon whose mountain slopes  
maidens of the hunter clans<sup>21</sup>  
cast pearls and jewels  
from the cobra's hood<sup>22</sup>  
to scare the parrots from the land  
where swathes of ripened millet stand,  
*fair Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(29)



*(To be Continued)*

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<sup>21</sup> In the Sangam literature the words in this verse *eyiṅ maṭavār* apply more properly to the women of the hunter-robber clans of the *pālai tiṅai* – *desert tracts*. What are being described here are the womenfolk of the *kuṟavar*, the *hill tribes* of the *kuriñci tiṅai* – *hilly tracts*, who, in addition to hunting, cultivate crops of millet on the upper slopes. The theme of young girls being delegated to guard the ripened crops in this way with slings and rattles is common in the literature, often involving the intrigue of clandestine lovers' meetings.

<sup>22</sup> Hooded snakes were believed to carry a precious jewel in their hoods. As for pearls, they were said to be produced in a number of ways, other than in an oyster shell. These places include the snake, the bamboo and the tusks of elephant and boar, all of which would have been plentiful on the mountain as imagined by the author.

# Sonasaila Malai

## Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

*The biography of Sivaprakasa Swamigal continued.*

**I**n return for the instruction given to him by Velliyambala Tambiran, the head of Dharmapuram Athinam Math in Tirunelveli, Sivaprakasa offered to Tambiran as *guru dakshina* the 300 gold coins which Reddiyar had given them to finance their trip. Tambiran refused, requesting Sivaprakasa to go instead to Tirucendur and defeat in a contest of prosody a Tamil scholar with whom he was having a bitter feud and thus deflate that scholar's arrogance. Sivaprakasa accordingly proceeded to Tirucendur and met up with the scholar in question whilst circumambulating the temple there. Both agreed to undertake a contest in which each would compose verses which contained no consonants (p,m,v) or vowels (u, o), in which the lips are closed or rounded. Sivaprakasa accordingly composed the *nīrōṭṭaka yamaka antāti*, consisting of a *kāppu – dedication* and 31 verses in the *kaṭṭalai-k-kali-turai* metre. This verse form presents additional difficulties in that in each verse the first foot of every line must be

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identical in form but different in meaning and also, being an *antāti*, there must be a repetition of all or part of the final foot of each verse in the initial foot of the following one. The following is one of the verses from that composition.

kaṇakkāka nāykaṭiṇ kāya nilaiyeṇak kaṇṇiyēṇṇa  
 kaṇakkāka nāṇalain teyttē neḷiṇcentiṇ kantanerriṇ  
 kaṇakkāka nārtanta niṇṇaṇai yēyiṇik kātaliṇār  
 kaṇakkā kaṇānikart tēyaḷi yaṅkattiṇ kātalarṛē.

Thinking that the body, which is nought but food for hordes of crows and dogs, was real and enduring, to what end did I suffer and grow weary? Skanda, Lord of Tirucendur, may you, whom He fathered, whose body is clad in bones and who bears an eye in his forehead, vouchsafe me your protection, so that henceforth I may in devotion dwell upon you alone, freed from this love for the impermanent body, which is like a dream.<sup>1</sup>

His opponent, however, was unable to complete a single verse, admitted defeat and swore allegiance to Sivaprakasa, who in turn took him to pay homage to Tambiran. Subsequently Sivaprakasa, on the advice of Tambiran, went to Chidambaram and spent some time there.

*(The biography will be continued in Part Four)*

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In this world that the vast ocean girds,  
 where waves, white crested, surge,  
 I shall never forget you  
 serenely dwelling there, as true devotees  
 your noble form adorn  
 with choice fresh blooms a mountain high,  
 and thus to that old proverb give the lie.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> kāyam nilai eṇa kaṇṇi – *Thinking [to be] enduring the body*, kaṇa kāka nāykaṭiṇ – *[which] hordes of crows [and] dogs [are destined] to eat*, eṇṇa kaṇakkāka nāṇ alaintu eyttēṇ – *to what purpose, suffering, did I grow weary?* eḷiṇ centil kanta – *Fair Skanda of Tiru-c-centūr*, nerri kaṇ akku ākaṇār tanta – *whom He with an eye [in his] forehead [and] a body [clad in] bones fathered*, kā – *protect [me]*, niṇ taṇaiyē iṇi kātaliṇāl kaṇa – *so that henceforth I may in love dwell upon you alone*, aṅkattiṇ kātāl arṛē – *free of love for the body*, kaṇā nikartē aḷi – *[which is destined to] perish, resembling a dream*.

<sup>1</sup> According to both Tamil commentators the proverb being referred to here is *malai*

As your fair form,  
 with verdant creepers  
 encompassed all about,  
 casts forth its comely shadow  
 so that men proclaim,  
 ‘Upon the pure, white moon,  
 there lies a stain!’<sup>2</sup>  
 you gloriously stand and shine,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash’s Lord!*

(30)

Mounted on a prancing steed  
 of finest golden hue,  
 though you came  
 hurling well-honed missiles  
 with your delicate lotus hand,<sup>3</sup>  
 how is it then  
 that still the fearsome tiger  
 of this sensate world  
 for me you have not slain?

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*aḷavu cuvāmikku malai aḷavu mālaiyā* – Does a god a mountain high need a garland a mountain high also? The remark is probably aimed at those who overindulge in shows of piety. Another proverb in the same vein is *malai aḷavu cuvāmikku kaḍugu aḷavu kaṟpūram* – For a god a mile high a piece of camphor the size of a mustard seed will suffice. The idea expressed in the verse is that, in the case of *Sōṇasailan*, his devotees are so numerous and so devoted that they actually do fashion a garland as high as the mountain itself.

<sup>2</sup> The conceit is that *Sōṇasailan* is so high that the shadow of his peak will fall upon the moon. There are of course visible marks on the moon, which are traditionally recognised as being in the form of a hare, but these are hardly visible when the full moon is shining with its full brilliance. Thus for the purposes of this verse the moon’s face is taken to be clear and bright until notionally touched by the shadow of the mountain’s peak.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Śiva is here being described as a hunter, a role which he famously takes in the *Mahābhārata*, when he takes on the appearance of the hunter, Kirāta, and fights with Arjuna. There is also an instance in the Tamil *Aruṇācala Purāṇam* where Śiva appears to Brahmā in the company of Parvatī with the Four Vedas as his hounds. On that occasion his mission is to cure the infatuation of Brahmā with the beautiful *apsara* Tilottamā, whom he, Brahmā, has created to ensnare the other gods at the request of Indra, but with whom he himself accidentally becomes infatuated.

The shade cast by your trunk and feet  
reaches all the oceans seven,  
whilst the shadow of your mighty head,  
towering up into the heavens,  
runs, the outer ocean,  
wide and vast, to meet,<sup>4</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(31)<sup>5</sup>

Even if you do not inspire me to sing,  
feeding me with the milk  
of Unnamulai Uma's breast,  
She who is all that is,<sup>6</sup>  
or even if you torture me  
with gout and colic and all the rest,

---

<sup>4</sup> According to Puranic cosmography the entire cosmos is divided into seven concentric island continents (*sapta dvīpa vasumati*) separated by the seven encircling oceans, each double the size of the preceding one (going out from within). The seven continents of the Purāṇas are stated as *Jambūdvīpa*, *Plakṣadvīpa*, *Salmalidvīpa*, *Kuśadvīpa*, *Krauñcadvīpa*, *Śākadvīpa*, and *Puṣkaradvīpa*. The seven intermediate oceans consist of salt water, sugarcane juice, wine, ghee, curd, milk and water respectively.

<sup>5</sup> This verse echoes the sentiment of verse 2 of the author's composition *Nālvar nāṇ maṇi mālai – Jewel Garland upon the Four*; 'the Four' being the three *Tēvāram* authors and Māṇikkavācakar, who are traditionally referred to in this way as being the four greatest of the Tamil bhakti poet-saints.

King of poets, you who adorn [the Lord] with garlands of words that are the cause of liberation! What does it matter whether the mighty One who dances in Tillai's golden hall bestows upon one of you the ambrosia of true knowledge, but afflicts the other, as he once did you, with an intestinal colic never before seen in the land? In your hymns you and he both praise him in exactly the same way.

The reference of course is to Appar and Jñānasambandhar, who were willing to receive the Lord's grace in whatever way he chose to bestow it. See notes 6 and 7.

<sup>6</sup> The reference is to the famous incident in the life of Jñānasambandhar when Śiva and Parvatī appeared to him as a child when he was hungry and Śiva requested Parvatī to feed him with milk from her breast in a golden dish. When his father asked him who had given the milk, he pointed to the sky and sang the *patikam* which begins *tōḍu uḍaiya ceviyaṅ* – *He wears an ear-jewel in one ear*. This incident marks the conferring of the Lord's grace and divine wisdom upon the child, who

that I may, by your grace,  
sing your praise, is my one request.<sup>7</sup>

Herds of deer too numerous to count  
surround you, leaping all about,  
reflecting thus,  
'If he adopts his ancient form again  
he'll not want the deer he abandoned then,  
but will choose another amongst us,'<sup>8</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (32)

Grant me the great felicity  
of bowing at their holy feet,  
and offering my service  
to devotees of yours who're steeped  
in the highest form of bliss in which  
desire and aversion both have ceased.

The torrents of compassion,  
unceasing and impossible to stem,  
that down your mountain flow,  
are no different to them  
who do not truly know,  
than silvery streams that bubbling,

---

thereafter became known as Jñānasambandhar. It is this verse that begins the whole *Tirumuṟai* collection, being the first verse of the three books composed by Jñānasambandhar, which themselves come first in the collection.

<sup>7</sup> In stark contrast, Śiva's granting of grace to Appar took a very different form. Appar had abandoned the Saivite faith and joined the Jain religion. Śiva's response was to afflict him with severe intestinal colic, *cūlai* in Tamil, until he realised his error and returned to his former faith. This event is commemorated in the first *patikam* of the first of his three *Tēvāram* volumes, *Tirumuṟai* 4-6, which begins *kūrru āyiṇavāru vilakkakilīr – Will you not banish those things (stomach pains) that afflict me like death?*

<sup>8</sup> Lord Śiva is often portrayed in iconography holding a deer in his hand, indicating the controlling of the restive mind. The deer of Arunachala are fancifully imagined to be leaping about, eagerly vying for his attention, in the hope that, when he resumes his anthropomorphic form once more, he will choose to hold one of them, rather than the one he had held before assuming the form of a mountain.

down other mountains rushing go,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (33)

Since in this life you generously afford  
 wealth, and maidens chaste,  
 in whom virtue brightly shines  
 and beauty overflows,  
 whilst in the next, you to them accord  
 liberation's heavenly estate,  
 what praise of you will learned bards  
 be loath to make?

In your hilly fields  
 the doughty mountain folk<sup>9</sup>  
 build lookouts:<sup>10</sup>  
 chopping logs of sandalwood,  
 and planting them for legs,  
 whilst on the top  
 they make a floor  
 of elephant tusks<sup>11</sup> outspread,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (34)

Grant to me your grace that I,  
 your devotee, may make my way  
 into your holy presence where  
 gods embrace their lady wives  
 with eyes like baby mangoes sliced.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Hillsmen*, Tamil *kuṛavar*, are *hill dwelling tribes*, who live by hunting and hill farming. See v. 29, note 21.

<sup>10</sup> *Lookouts*, Tamil *paraṅ*, *itaṅam* are platforms, built in the branches of trees, on high rocks or, as here, raised up on legs from ground level by hill folk and used as lookouts from which they can watch out for incursions into their fields by elephants, parrots and so forth. They feature in a number of Sangam *Akam* poems of the *kuriñci tiṅai* – *the hilly tracts*.

<sup>11</sup> Sandalwood and ivory are of course very valuable commodities and would never be used for such a purpose. The idea here is that on *Sōṅasailaṅ* these things are so plentiful that there is no problem in so employing them.

<sup>12</sup> *poḷntiḍum vaḍu kaṅ* – *eyes [like] sliced green mangoes*. It is a poetic convention to refer to women's eyes in this way. A *vaḍu* is an *unripe, green mango* in the early



In reverence they shrink away,  
at a stroke from august Nandi's stave,<sup>13</sup>  
then all around you press again.

Like a mother, when her heart melts  
as her eyes upon her bonny infant rest  
and she pours forth milk  
in plenty from her breast,  
as devotees [around you] prostrating go,  
your streams [of grace] upon them flow,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(35)

Rama with his arrow true<sup>14</sup>  
went the evil rule to oppose  
that on Lanka's isle arose,  
then came with deep devotion  
those feet with sounding anklets  
to worship and adore.  
[Is it any wonder then that]  
such feet as these, I fear to implore?

That no parallel might e'er be drawn  
with any smaller mountain's form,  
you chose in your shape to suggest  
your consort Parvati's<sup>15</sup> ample breast.

---

stage of growth, shortly after the flower has fallen. This stage of growth is called the *piñcu*, in which the mango has a somewhat elongated, sinuous form, which resembles the eye, particularly when sliced lengthwise to expose the white flesh. Tamil distinguishes this from the *kāy*, which is used to describe the fruit when it is almost fully grown and the *paḷam*, the fully ripe, sweet fruit.

<sup>13</sup> Nandi, imagined in semi-human form, is Lord Śiva's gatekeeper on mount Kailash, here pictured wielding his staff to control the crowds of lesser deities who seek audience with the divine couple, Śiva and Parvatī.

<sup>14</sup> The person referred to here is of course Rāma of the Rāmāyaṇa who is said to have worshipped Śiva at Rameswaram on his return from Lanka after defeating the demon Rāvaṇa, although some claim that this incident is not recorded in the Valmiki Rāmāyaṇa itself but only in later traditions.

<sup>15</sup> Parvatī is referred to here as *malai māṇ* – the deer-like maiden of the mountain, as being the daughter of Himavat, the personification of the Himalaya mountain range.

Thus waxing great, on high you soar,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (36)

Thinking that the [other] gods,  
were really gods,  
unable as they were,  
to save themselves  
from whirling births,  
they did not the shelter seek  
of you who are ambrosia sweet.  
For those of true knowledge all devoid,  
can the ills of birth e'er be destroyed?

From your mountain caves,  
as a dark cloud passes by outside,  
lions, to pounce, rush swiftly out,  
thinking that an elephant is about,  
then hurry back, their shame to hide,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (37)

Whether my body stays  
whilst aeons of time pass away,  
or in the twinkling of any eye  
doth fail and die,  
'tis well with me,  
as long as I may stay, a devotee,  
at the lotus flowers of your feet.

As it climbs on high, the rising Sun  
recalls the infant Murugan,  
clambering up [his father's breast]  
babbling child's talk, sweet and dear  
as jewels glint  
on pointed spear,<sup>16</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (38)

---

<sup>16</sup> *pūṇ tayaṅgu ayil vēl* – with a sharp spear [on which] jewels shine. The sun rising up over the slopes of the mountain is compared to Siva's younger son, Murugan, as a young child, climbing up his father's chest, grasping his spear, holding which he is almost invariably portrayed. His *vēl* – spear, javelin is often golden in colour with a blade set with jewels.

Men beg of you to come,  
 mounted on your speedy bull,  
 to bring birth to an end.  
 So let them beg, but as for me,  
 poor wretch, what I request  
 is birth itself in which I may adorn  
 you with flowery garlands  
 replete with honeyed Tamil words.<sup>17</sup>

As Sun and Moon hang in the sky  
 above the Mountains East and West<sup>18</sup>  
 it's as if you laid an offering pole<sup>19</sup>  
 down upon the ground, adorned  
 with jewelled pots at either end,  
 and stood up tall between the two,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(39)

All the space within my heart  
 I gave to girls with tender breasts  
 adorned with jewellery of gold,  
 set with shining gems and pearls.  
 Yet for you, who are to devotees  
 the apple of their eye, offering  
 them in grace a never-ending feast,  
 no place at all for you to live  
 however small, could I give.

<sup>17</sup>A similar sentiment is expressed by Appar in the following *Tēvāram* verse: The curving eyebrows;/ the gentle smile upon lips red as the scarlet gourd;/ the sleek, matted locks;/ the body, coral red, smeared with milk-white ash;/ the raised foot delicately poised –/ he who has the good fortune to see these/ will welcome even human birth upon this wide earth. Appar, *Tēvāram*, 4:81:4

<sup>18</sup>*The Mountains East and West* are the mythical mountains in the East and West behind which the sun is said to rise and set. The scene is set in the evening on the full moon day, the only time at which the sun sets at roughly the same time as the moon rises.

<sup>19</sup>*kā*, also *kāvaḍi* means an offering pole. Winslow's dictionary gives the following definition: 'A pole carried on the shoulder with offerings for a temple, commonly with some parade; also the religious mendicant's pole which he takes from house to house to gather offerings, etc. for the service of an idol.'

As the *venkai* and *kondrai*,  
 with its blackened pods, shower down  
 upon the bamboo's pure white pearls  
 the medallions of their golden flowers,<sup>20</sup>  
 the serpents, [not to be outdone], upon you  
 scatter cool gems from their hoods,<sup>21</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (40)

To you, who to that great bard,  
 two matchless maids,  
 adorned with choicest gems  
 in holy marriage did grant  
 with gifts of horse and elephant,<sup>22</sup>  
 I gave no praise and wandered all bereft.<sup>23</sup>

As ripples shimmer on your wide tanks,  
 where lotus flowers stand in ranks,  
 like devotees waving *arti* lamps,<sup>24</sup>  
 you shine forth,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (41)

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<sup>20</sup> The *konrai* tree is the Indian Laburnum. Its long cascading bunches of yellow flowers are sacred to Lord Śiva, who is often described as wearing them. It produces thick clusters of long seed pods, which when ripe are dark in colour with black seeds. Here the blossoms are compared to gold coins, as if the trees were making their equivalent of a monetary offering. Here the golden flowers are referred to directly as *pon* – *gold coins*, an instance of *ākupeyar* – *metonymy*. See *Kuṟuntokai*, 233, which similarly compares their blossom to gold coins.

The little pits with gaping mouths, from which the yams have been rooted up, covered over with bright *konrai* blossoms, so that they look like the treasure chests of the rich, lids thrown open and filled with gold coins...

<sup>21</sup> Hooded snakes were believed to carry a precious jewel in their hoods. See previously v. 29 and note.

<sup>22</sup> The 'great bard' is Sundarar and the 'the two matchless maids' are Paravaiyār and Caṅkiliyār, the two celestial handmaidens, whom, in their human incarnations, Lord Śiva granted to him as wives. See v. 22, note 62.

<sup>23</sup> The poet avows his own folly in not praising a Lord who has a record of generously giving whatever is requested to deserving devotees.

<sup>24</sup> *ālatti* also *arati* is *the waving of lights*, usually ghee lamps or burning camphor

If you will only grasp the black  
 defilement of your devotee,  
 and place it at your sapphire throat<sup>25</sup>  
 with that the mighty gods  
 churned from the sea,  
 behold, your beauty by that blackness  
 magnified will grow, and even brighter be!

The bright effulgence that spreads  
 from the jewel upon Adishesha's<sup>26</sup> head  
 up through the shaft  
 that great and noble Boar carved out  
 recalls to us how young Murugan  
 sprang, a tiny spark, from our Lord's brow,<sup>27</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(42)

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placed on a platter, before an idol or person who is being honoured. The tanks of Aruṇācala are compared to *ālatti* platters, with lotuses as the flames from ghee lamps or burning camphor, being waved in veneration of the mountain. One might imagine that the rippling waters of the tanks and pools, gilded in the setting sun, might easily resemble shiny salvers of beaten brass or gold.

<sup>25</sup> *maṇi miḍiṛru* – [in your] sapphire throat. *maṇi* means *jewel, gem*, here standing for *nīla maṇi* – *sapphire*, to which the black poison in Śiva's throat is likened. Hence the name *nīlakaṇṭaṇ* – *the One with the sapphire throat*.

<sup>26</sup> *aṇantaṇ maṇi oḷi piḷampu* – *the mass of light [from] the jewels [on the head] of Aṇantaṇ*. *Aṇantaṇ* – *the Infinite One* is the serpent *Adiśeṣa*, who is said to support the world on his thousand heads. He is the king of the *nāgas* – *serpents*, who dwell in *Pātāla* – *the infernal regions* beneath the earth. Viṣṇu, when he burrowed down in the form of a boar, would have needed to travel that far and further if he were to reach the Lord's foot, thus allowing the spark from the jewels on the serpent's heads to travel up through the shaft thus created. *Adiśeṣa* is said to have 1000 jewels upon his 1000 heads, which illuminate all the regions.

<sup>27</sup> According to the account in the Tamil *Kanta Purāṇam*, the gods complained to Śiva of being harassed by the *asuras* and begged him to produce a child who could vanquish them. Accordingly Lord Śiva assumed his ancient six-faced form and produced six sparks from the third eye on each of those six heads. The gods Vāyu and Agni carried those sparks and deposited them in the river Ganges, which conveyed them to the Śaravaṇa lake in the Himalayas, where the six fiery sparks were transformed into six children. Later when Parvatī grasped them to take them home, they became a single child with six heads and twelve arms. The child was Lord Murugan, also known as Skanda, Kārttikeya, Aṛumukaṇ, Subrahmaṇya and other names.

Will that day come that in delight  
my eyes shall come to see  
the beauty of your holy face,  
your shoulders four like stony mounts,  
the coiled locks that lightning plays about,  
your eyes where grace abounds,  
and your two holy feet?

The streams that tumble down your sides,  
like music sweet of heavenly choirs<sup>28</sup>  
upon your slopes resound,  
as if, in love, your very form  
melted to that delightful sound,  
*Fair Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(43)

Their bodies covered thick with white  
of holy ash, your devotees I saw,  
and yet, like a cow that stands and dotes  
upon her baby calf,  
my mind refused to melt and flow  
and to worship you I did not go.

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
where streams rush down,  
as if in anger to drive away  
tigers fierce, lion and bear,  
deeming it unseemly that they  
upon your holy form  
with such disdain should stray.

(44)



(to be continued)

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<sup>28</sup> The words *heavenly choirs* translate the Tamil word *kimpuruṭar*, Sanskrit *kimpuruṣa*. 'A class of demigods, celestial lyrists, supposed to have the form of a horse and the head of a man.' (Tamil Lexicon)

# Sonasaila Malai

## Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

*The Biography of Sivaprakasa Swamigal continued.*

**H**aving remained in Chidambaram for some time, Sivaprakasa returned to Turaimangalam, residing in the *math* built by Annamalai Reddiyar and composing a number of works, including the *Veṅgai-k-kōvai*. When requested by Reddiyar to take a wife, Sivaprakasa expressed his determination not to do so in the following verse:

cēykoṇḍā ruṅkamalac cemmaluḍa ṇēyaravap  
pāykoṇḍā rumpaṇiyum paṭṭiccu rattāṇē  
nōykoṇḍā luṅkoḷalām nūruvaya dāmaḷavum  
pēykoṇḍā luṅkoḷalān peṅkoḷḷa lāgādē.

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has published a grammatical commentary on *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*. A translation of the biography of Māṅikkavācakar is now available at the ashram bookshop. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: <http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666>.

Lord of Paṭṭicuram, to whom Lord Brahmā, who dwells upon a bright red lotus blossom, and Lord Viṣṇu, who slumbers, resting upon a serpent as his couch, both make obeisance, if disease should afflict me, or I should be tormented by demons for a hundred years, let it be so. But let me be spared the taking of a wife!<sup>a</sup>

However when Reddiyar made the same proposal to his two younger brothers, both assented and Sivaprakasa arranged for their marriages to take place. Thereafter he returned to Chidambaram with Reddiyar where he composed a number of works including the *Nālvar nāṅ maṇi mālai – Jewel Garland upon the Four*, in praise of the three *Tēvāram* authors and Māṅikkavācakar, verse 2 of which is given in note 5 of the previous article.

*(The biography will be continued in Part Five)*

Please grant it, if you may,  
that the water that Unnamulai,  
of tiny, thread-like, swaying waist,  
used to cleanse  
the dish of shining gold  
with polished gems enchased,  
from which rich Pukali's king  
drank the milk that day,  
be poured out [now for me to taste].<sup>1</sup>

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
where a langur in his cave,

---

<sup>a</sup> paṭṭīcurattāṅṅē paṇiyum – *Lord of Paṭṭicuram, to whom makes obeisance*, arava pāy koṇḍ[u] ārum – *He (Lord Viṣṇu) who reclines, taking a serpent [as a] mat*, cēykoṇḍ[u] ārum kamala cemmāḷ uḍaṅṅē – *along with the Lord [Brahmā], who dwells upon a bright red lotus blossom*, nōy koṇḍālum koḷalām – *if disease should afflict me, let it afflict [me]*. pēy koṇḍālum koḷalām – *If demons should torment me, let them torment [me]*, nūru vayad[u] ām aḷavum – *even for as long as a hundred years*. peṅ koḷḷal āgādē – *[But] let there not be [for me] the taking of a wife*.

<sup>1</sup> See v. 32, note 6 in the April-June edition of the *Mountain Path* for the details of this incident in the life of Jñāṅsambandhar.



setting great bright gems for lamps  
and spreading *ashoka* leaves as a couch,  
sleeps there entwined with his spouse. (45)

People of this world  
seek only food  
to meet the body's needs,  
which arises as the fruit of deeds.  
But daily they do not you beseech,  
that they may gain the holy feet  
bedecked with flowers honey-sweet  
which lie beyond those actions' reach.<sup>2</sup>

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
where jewels cast,  
to drive the flocks of parrots  
from the millet crop,  
go flying into rocky caves,  
as though, knowing where  
the deepest darkness lies,  
to banish it they rushing go. (46)

The head of the bard of Navalur,  
where *kuyil* sing in mango groves,  
with lotus feet to crown You deigned,  
even though to wear them he declined.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To attempt to gain happiness by protecting the body is a fruitless task, since the actions that brought about its arising will equally bring about its demise. The wise course is to take refuge in the Lord, annihilating the ego and with it the attachment to the body that is the cause of all our troubles. Compare the second *Mangalam* verse of Sri Ramana Maharshi's *Uḷḷadu Naṟpadu*:

Those people who have a deep fear of death will, for their protection, take refuge at the holy feet of Lord Siva, he who is without both birth and death. In thus taking refuge [in Him], they suffered their own death. For them, in this deathless state, will the thought of death remain?

<sup>3</sup> The story is told in the *Taḍuttāṅkoṇḍa Purāṇam* of the *Periya Purāṇam* of how Sundarar, the bard of Nāvalūr, feeling that it was not fitting that he should enter

MOUNTAIN PATH

Yet notwithstanding all my pleas,  
You placed them not upon the head  
of me your faithful devotee.  
What reason for this could there be?

Waxing great you reach  
the heavens' lofty outer shell,  
yet in spite of that  
you ride in state  
mounted on a young bull's back,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(47)

Shall I that day ever see,  
when through your grace  
you grant to me  
right conduct and good qualities,  
a nature loving and benign,  
engaging speech and the bravery

---

Tiruvadigai, where Appar had formerly performed service to the Lord, went instead to the nearby *sthala* of Cittavaḍam. Lord Śiva, however, determined to bestow his blessing upon Sundarar, took the form of an aged Brahmin and entered the math where Sundarar and his entourage were spending the night. Lying down and pretending to be asleep, the old man placed his feet upon Sundarar's head. When Sundarar pointed this out to him, he apologised and blamed his poor sight. Sundarar moved his head away some distance and went back to sleep, only to find out later that the feet were back on his head again. The story continues in v. 233:

When once more he placed his feet  
upon the holy head  
of the Sire of verdant Navalur,  
girt by tanks where red carp leap,  
'Who are you, sir,' Aruran said,  
'who thus so oft' upon me tread?'  
To which the Lord who concealed  
Lady Ganga within his matted locks  
replied,  
'How is it that you knew me not?'  
and in a trice disappeared from view.

Filled with devotion for the Lord, Sundarar sang the *Tēvāram padigam* which begins *tammānai ariyāda cāḍiyār uḷarē* – *Is their any kinsman who does not know his Lord?*

to conquer the senses enmity,  
then banishing cruel birth,  
you take me as your devotee?

Upon your slopes  
the hillsmen bold  
fell *aquila* and sandal groves.  
Red gemstones, sifted  
from the earth,  
away they throw  
and then the crop of millet sow,<sup>4</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(48)

I rejoiced to see your form adorned  
with civet<sup>5</sup> in a jewelled hall,  
filled with incense's fragrant scent  
as throngs of gods and holy sages,  
crowding near with palms conjoined,  
offered up their ardent praises.

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
where the chill moon, as it passes by,  
meets a lofty *jyoti* tree,

<sup>4</sup> Here the *kuṛavar* – *hill tribesmen* are again featured, this time clearing the land of trees and removing stones from the ground in preparation for the planting of millet. Because this is the fabled *Sōṇasailaṅ* of the poet's imagination, the trees that are so carelessly discarded are precious sandalwood and eaglewood and the stones are rubies.

<sup>5</sup> The story is told in the final chapter of the *Aruṅācala Purāṇam* of the *asura* Pulaka, who terrorised the gods in the form of a civet cat. The gods complained to Lord Śiva, who explained that it was not easy to vanquish him because he had garnered great strength from the act of shedding his fragrant civet over the holy mountain. However Lord Śiva summoned him and offered him liberation in return for giving up his civet cat form. Pulaka agreed but further begged that in return the Lord adopt as one of his names *He whom civet adorns*.

Lord Śiva consented and granted Pulaka salvation, whereupon gods, rishis and citizens adorned the Lord's matted locks with civet. The Tamil commentary notes that the ritual of anointing Lord Anṅāmalai with civet endures to this day and is held to confer great benefits.

before a dark cave soaring high,  
looking like a ball of finest rice  
placed before your open mouth  
[ready] to be gulped down [in a trice]. (49)

Just as in the world,  
in a flower beset by clouds  
of humming bees,  
inner petals with outer ones  
combined we see,<sup>7</sup>  
so it is fitting on your part  
that you should number me  
amongst the band of devotees  
who from anger[’s taint]  
have freed their heart.

You whose body melted,  
[not your heart]  
when pressed by Uma’s  
sandal-painted breast<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The cave is compared to a mouth, the tree to an arm and the moon to a ball of rice. One might imagine that the branches of the tree look like fingers grasping it. The *jyoti* tree is a tree that is supposed to shine in the dark like the *jyoti* creeper mentioned earlier in v. 9.

<sup>7</sup> A flower has *alli* – inner petals and *pulli* – outer petals. In a lotus blossom, for example, the inner petals will be pristine and perfect, but the outer ones, in contact with the mud and water of the tank, are likely to be soiled or tattered, yet they are both part of the same flower. The poet suggests that in the same way he, a poor sinner, should be admitted into the company of the great ones who have mastered their emotions. He further implies that their glory would even be magnified by the comparison with his lowly self.

<sup>8</sup> The story is told in the *Arunācala Purāṇam* of how Parvatī, as part of her penance for playfully covering Lord Śiva’s eyes and thus causing universal chaos, built a *lingam* of sand on the banks of the Kampa river near Kāñci and performed puja to it. To test the strength of her *tapas* Lord Śiva unleashed the river Ganges.

In order to keep the sand *lingam* from being destroyed by that deathless river, Uma, daughter of the Himalaya, ruler of [all] the mountains, embraced it with her bangle clad arms, holding it ever tighter against her

and whose heart was touched,  
 [not your body], by stones  
 a certain devotee threw,<sup>9</sup>  
 prompted by his love for you.<sup>10</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(50)

If I should cleave not  
 to your holy feet  
 and sing instead  
 of elephants and prancing steeds,  
 of chariots and palanquins,  
 of gold piled up in heaps,  
 and gem encrusted jewels,

---

breasts as if She held a lover in a passionate embrace, and even as She did so, the chest of the Lord, perfumed with sandalwood paste, melted, becoming softer and softer. (273)

In preserving the sand *lingam* Parvatī left upon it the imprint of her nipples and bracelets:

Just then Lord Śiva appeared, mounted upon the bull, his body resplendent with holy ash; on his shoulders was the scar made by the Pandiyan King, who struck Him [with his golden cane]; on his feet were the marks made by the crowns of the gods, who worship Him morning, noon and night; and on his chest were the impressions made by the breasts and bracelets of Her whose hair is black as jet, when She embraced Him. (276)

<sup>9</sup> Cākkiya Nāyaṅār is one of the 63 saints of the *Periya Purāṇam*. On one occasion, seeing a Śiva *lingam*, he was filled with ecstasy and in his altered state flung a stone at it. Taking this as a sign that henceforth this should be the form of worship appropriate to himself, he adopted the daily practice of throwing stones at the Lord as if they were garlands of flowers.

<sup>10</sup>The conceit here is that Lord Śiva is being portrayed as reacting in an opposite manner to the people of the world in the two situations described above. The verb *kuḷai* is used twice, first in the meaning *to be soft, pulpy, squashed*, translated here as *melted*; and secondly in the meaning *to be tender, as the heart*, translated here as *was touched*. When his body (the *lingam*) was hit by the stones, it was not affected by them (i.e. crushed or squashed), but his heart was affected (it melted) due to Cākkiya Nāyaṅār's devotion. In the second instance, when Uma pressed her bosom against him, it was his body this time that melted not his heart, as would be the case with a human man, moved by the embrace of his wife. Thus the ways of the Lord are revealed to be quite other than those of mankind.

MOUNTAIN PATH

and of the wide earth and its rule,  
what worth in my songs  
could there be?

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
where mighty elephants, on whom  
the threefold juices<sup>11</sup> flow,  
feed on stands of tall bamboo.  
With their trunks they bend it low,  
then suddenly they let it go,  
whipping the horses of the Sun,<sup>12</sup>  
which startled,  
drag his chariot swiftly on.

(51)

Whether you destroy for me  
the fierce and cruel malady  
of close pursuing, painful births  
or not doing so,  
let them e'er more numerous be,  
not even in one forgetful moment  
shall I  
dwell on aught else but your lotus feet,  
not on those gods who're bound to die.

Rivulets of nectar sweet,  
flowing down your sides,  
with your silv'ry streams compete,  
one from hives that swarming bees,

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<sup>11</sup> The *threefold juices*—*mu madam* in Tamil, are the three types of secretion produced by an elephant in must. They are *kaṇṇa madam*, *kai madam* and *kōca madam*, secreted from the *eyes*, *trunk* and *genitals* respectively.

<sup>12</sup> The iconography of Sūrya, the sun god in Hinduism, varies with its texts. He is typically portrayed as a resplendent standing figure, holding lotus flowers in both his hands and riding a chariot pulled by one or more horses, typically seven. Here we are presented with the rather comical image of his horses bolting in panic, when accidentally struck by a branch which has been bent back and then released by a great elephant on Sōṇasailan's lofty peak.

on honey drunk, have split and crushed  
 and one from elephants [in the must],<sup>13</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (52)

Those who your holy name  
 invoke  
 will never grieve  
 in water or in fire,  
 from fatal onset of disease,  
 asuras, evil spirits,  
 wild beasts or thieves.

You who Lady Uma's eyes recall,  
 pervading all directions four,  
 with *mani* that are gemstones  
 and her pupils bright;  
 with *ari* that are roaming lions  
 and tiny red veins in the white,  
 and *mai* that are the clouds  
 that gathering above you come  
 and her fair black collyrium,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*<sup>14</sup> (53)

<sup>13</sup>The golden streams of honey from the beehives and the black streams of the secretions from the temples of elephants in must are imagined to be tumbling down the mountainside, clashing and mingling with the mountain's silvery streams as they go.

<sup>14</sup>This couplet employs a poetic device called *cilēḍai* in Tamil. It is a figure of speech in which a word or words admit of two or more interpretations, what we call in English *a play on words* or *a pun*, the technical term being *paronomasia*. Three aspects of the mountain are mentioned, which can be taken as referring instead to Umā's eye's when a second meaning to a word is taken. *mani*, when taken as meaning *jewel, gem*, refers to the mountain as being littered with gemstones from the hoods of cobras, but when taken as *pupil of the eye* it refers to the beautiful pupils of Umā's eyes. *ari*, when taken as meaning lion, refers to the widespread presence of prides of lions upon the mountain, but when taken as *thin red lines in the white of the eye* it refers to Umā's eyes, as being overspread with a network of fine red veins. *mai*, when taken as meaning cloud, refers to the dark clouds which gather over the mountain, but when taken as *collyrium, kohl*, black paint for eye

MOUNTAIN PATH

Grant your grace, that I  
no longer pine for girls  
with jewelled earrings bright,  
like lanterns lit on either side,  
their pretty face to light  
and breasts with trinkets overlaid,  
coming forth as if they might  
eclipse the glow of Fortune's Maid<sup>15</sup>  
like a lamp lit in daylight.

Unlike a household lamp  
with bowl and wick,  
and ghee and flame  
and someone to ignite,  
you rise up on high and shine  
the entire world to light,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(54)

*(To be Continued)*

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decoration, it refers to Umā's eyes as being beautifully made up with *collyrium* or *kohl*. The fourth aspect *nīlkai* – *width* can be taken as applying equally to both the mountain and Umā's gaze without the need to resort to a pun.

<sup>15</sup> Fortune's maid translates the Tamil *malarāḷ*, literally *she of the lotus flower*, a reference to Lakṣmi, in Tamil, *tirumagaḷ*, the goddess of wealth, fortune and prosperity. She is depicted sitting or standing on a lotus flower. The idea is that the radiance of those girls is so bright that even Lakṣmi's beauty would pale in comparison, just as a the flame of a lamp provides no perceptible illumination in broad daylight.



# Sonasaila Malai

## Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

*The Biography of Sivaprakasa Swamigal concluded.*

On one occasion, whilst on his way to Kanchipuram in the company of Annamalai Reddiyar, Sivaprakasa met up with Santhalinga Swamigal who was mentioned earlier. Sivaprakasa greeted him warmly and asked what his purpose was in leaving his home in Porur. He replied that he was on his way to pay homage to Siva ñana Balaya Swamigal in his math at Bommapuram. Sivaprakasa decided to accompany him and the two continued their journey together. In the course of their journey, Santhalinga Swami requested that, since both desired to have the darshan of Siva ñana Balaya Swamigal, Sivaprakasa might compose some occasional verses in praise of him. Sivaprakasa refused, retorting, *nām narar stuti paṇṇukiṇradē-y-illai – I do not sing the praises of men.* However, that night Lord Murugan, seated on his peacock mount, appeared to Sivaprakasa in a dream. Placing some loose flowers in a dish, he said, ‘You should weave these into a garland and adorn me with them,’ and disappeared from view.

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The next day, when he related the dream to Santhalinga, Santhalinga suggested that, since Siva ñana Balaya Swamigal possessed such a deep devotion to Lord Murugan,<sup>a</sup> this was simply the God's way of pointing out his worthiness. Accordingly Sivaprakasa relented and composed two hymns in praise of him, a *tālāṭṭu* and a *neñcu vidu tūdu*. The two duly appeared before Siva ñana Balaya Swamigal, who imparted *jñāna upadeśa* to them and requested Sivaprakasa to give his sister Gnanambikai in marriage to Santhalinga,<sup>b</sup> a request with which Sivaprakasa complied. Sivaprakasa remained there for some time, having instructed Annamalai Reddiyar to return to Turaimangalam.

Some time later Sivaprakasa took his leave and made his way to Kanchipuram. There he composed *Prabhulinga Leelai*, a translation of a Kannada work that chronicles the life and deeds of Allama Prabhu, a 12th century Virasaiva saint and teacher. He also made translations of two other Kannada works, under the names of *Vēdānta Cūḍāmaṇi* and *Siddhānta Cigāmaṇi*. He continued to travel widely, composing works as he went. Amongst these is a refutation of the Christian religion, *ēcumada nirākaraṇam*, composed in response to an attack by the celebrated Tamil scholar, Father Joseph Beschi, an Italian Jesuit priest and missionary who later adopted the Tamil name of Vīramāmuniyar. Only three verses of this work remain extant.

<sup>a</sup> The biography of Sivaprakasa includes the rather long and convoluted story of how Śiva ñana Balaya Swamigal, or desikar, as some versions have it, came to have such a deep connection with Lord Murugan. He was, as the story goes, one of the leaders of Lord Śiva's heavenly cohorts on Mount Kailash, called Caṅkukannaṅṅa, but as a result of a misdemeanour was cursed by Śiva to be born on earth as a man. When he begged to know when the curse might be lifted, Śiva replied that he should remain on earth, teaching the Vedas and Śiva Āgamas and reviving the Saivite faith until such time as he encountered his son, Subramanya, and fought with him. At that time the curse would be lifted and he would after some further time attain oneness with himself. Accordingly, Caṅkukannaṅṅa was born on earth as a boy *siddha*, Bālasiddha. Eventually events transpired as Śiva predicted. Bālasiddha's curse was lifted and Śiva decreed that he should dwell with his son Subramanya on the mountain of Mayūrācala for a further 500 years before attaining oneness with Himself. Sivaprakasa's appearance comes near the end of the prescribed 500 year period, during which time Bālasiddha had travelled widely preaching the Saivite creed and acquiring in the process the name Śiva ñana Balaya Swamigal.

<sup>b</sup> Santhalinga subsequently abandoned the world completely and sent his wife to live with her brother.

Sivaprakasa died at the age of 32, according to some accounts, shortly after hearing of the demise of his guru in Bommapuram, whose 500 year sojourn upon the earth had reached its end.

\*\*\*\*\*

Except for those who daily  
grant the body food<sup>1</sup>  
only that it may offer *puja*  
and perform holy service  
to You and to the sapphire Maid,<sup>2</sup>  
will the vanquishing of Death  
be easy to attain?

Your glory's such that when Vishnu,  
many *yojanas* away,  
bows down before Mount Kailash,  
his homage there to pay,  
it's as if a heap of pure white rice  
were being offered up by him to you,<sup>3</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(55)

As I flounder in the sea  
of ever arising births,  
buffeted by waves  
of disease and misery,  
may you now vouchsafe  
to me your holy feet

---

<sup>1</sup> The idea is that the body's sole purpose is to carry out service to Lord Śiva and his consort Umā and that the food we provide for the body should therefore be regarded simply as *kūli* – *daily wages* paid to that body for performing that service.

<sup>2</sup> *nīli* – *The Sapphire Maid* is a personal noun formed from the word *nīlam* – *blue, black-blue, purple, indigo, sapphire*. It refers to Umā-Parvatī as having that body colour, as in her ferocious aspect as Dūrgā-Kālī.

<sup>3</sup> The poet imagines that Sōṇasailaṅ is so massive that when Viṣṇu pays homage to snow-capped Mount Kailash, that mountain appears no greater than a small heap of white rice that Viṣṇu is offering up to Sōṇasailaṅ.

MOUNTAIN PATH

with ringing anklets girt,  
and bring me to [your farther] shore,  
before the crocodile of Death  
comes to swallow me.

Unlike some ordinary lamp,  
men praise you as the Light  
that, when we speak your name,  
be it just one single time,  
removes all darkness from the mind,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(56)

Tell me [Lord],  
though they dwell in caves,  
for food and drink  
take water and leaves,  
walk on their hands,  
feet in the air,  
for those who your true state  
do not know,  
will birth[']s thralldom] rare  
ever cease and go?

Upon your lofty crest  
the full moon comes to rest,  
as if he doth adorn you  
with a garland [woven]  
of jasmine blossoms  
from Indra's [heavenly] grove,<sup>4</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(57)

Should it upon my body fall,  
the dust stirred up

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<sup>4</sup> The heaven of Lord Indra, the king of the gods, is described as having heavenly gardens planted with luxuriant trees which have delicious fruits.

by noble feet of those  
 who piously around you walk,  
 with faces like flowers opened up  
 and hands closed together [like a bud],  
 my births too  
 will become mere dust.<sup>5</sup>

The Lord of Pugali<sup>6</sup>  
 with flowering groves  
 toured holy sites  
 in all the landscapes four.<sup>7</sup>  
 Yet all the hymns  
 with which he them adorned  
 are naught but homages to Thee,<sup>8</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (58)  
 Worse than any beast  
 that in the forest roams,

<sup>5</sup> Both the Tamil *Aruṇācala Purāṇam* and the Sanskrit *Aruṇācala Māhātmyam* extol the auspicious effects of the dust from the feet of those who have performed *pradakshina* of the holy mountain:

If the wind should carry a single speck of dust from the feet of those who have performed *pradakshina* of the Fire Mountain into any place, be it vile as hell itself, that place will attain the purity of Mount Kailash. Or, if a speck of dust from their feet should fall onto the body of any man, death will end for him, and close pursuing birth will disappear. How might I express in words the greatness of those who have performed *pradakshina*? — *Aruṇācala Purāṇam* v. 563.

*asya pādarajaḥsparśāt pūyate sakalā mahī, padam ekaṁ tu dhatte yaḥ śoṇādrīśa pradakṣiṇe.*

The entire earth will be blessed by contact with the dust of the feet of one who takes but a single step in *pradakṣiṇa* of Śoṇādrī.

— *Aruṇācala Māhātmyam Pūrvārdha*, Ch. 9, sl. 35.

<sup>6</sup> *The Lord of Pugali* – *pugalikku iraiyaṅ* is Jñānasambandhar. See the note to v. 26 in Part Two.

<sup>7</sup> *nāl nilam* – *the four [kinds of] land* are the four kinds of landscape which feature in the Agam love poetry of the Sangam era, each having its own emotional properties, flora and fauna, artefacts, gods and so on. They are *kuriñci tiṇai* – *hilly tracts*, *mullai tiṇai* – *woodland and pasture*, *marudam tiṇai* – *cultivated land* and *neydal tiṇai* – *the lands by the seashore*.

<sup>8</sup> The text says *padigam doruṁ pugaḷ* – *praise[d] in every padigam*. A *padigam* is

I did not learn the things I ought;  
 the senses' objects ruled my thoughts.  
 No shame before the wise I showed.  
 When, alas, shall I salvation know?

You who rise on high,  
 a refuge to afford  
 for those that gentle breeze afflicts  
 that wafts from Podiyam's<sup>9</sup> lofty peak,  
 which towers up the skies to reach,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(59)

The rule that says, 'Make haste  
 to keenly follow virtue's path  
 and so be saved!'  
 I regarded with distaste,  
 like an elephant fine and tall  
 who rejects the balls  
 of rice his keeper gave  
 and uproots bamboo in a rage.<sup>10</sup>  
 For such as me what end  
 to births can ever be?  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
 where gathering storm clouds

---

a poem consisting generally of ten verses, although Jñānasambandhar's *padigams* contain eleven, the final one being a *tiru-k-kaḍai-k-kāppu*. In Saiva tradition this mentions the benefits one would get from reciting the verses. The idea is that Sōṇasailan, in his true nature as the pure consciousness of the Self, free of all attributes, subsumes within himself all other representations of himself that are installed in the temples of the many *sthalas* visited by the saint.

<sup>9</sup> Mount Podiyam, is the abode of the sage Agastya, founder of the Tamil tongue. See v. 26, note 17 in Part Two. The wind referred to is *ten[d]ral*, the gentle southern breeze, which awakes passion in lovers and so on.

<sup>10</sup> *kaḷi culi yānai* literally *an elephant [which] gets angry at bamboo*. Elephants in must are unpredictable and often violent. Here the image is of such an elephant capriciously refusing the tasty food offered and rushing off in a rage into the jungle to tear up and eat bamboo.

rise on high  
 like palls of smoke  
 that mask the skies,  
 your fiery form's truth  
 to proclaim aloud.<sup>11</sup> (60)

As music's fanfare resonates  
 by turns upon an elephant,  
 and then upon a palanquin  
 they ride about in high estate.  
 Yet even these [one day] as beggars  
 will to others wheedling praises give.  
 Thus I've learned that only those  
 who serve you truly live.

As if the jewel-shedding clouds<sup>12</sup>  
 crowned you  
 with a weighty ornamental arch,<sup>13</sup>  
 sparkling with the choicest gems  
 a curving rainbow spans you[r head],  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (61)

Of noble issue they may be,  
 excelling in all good qualities,  
 in countless learned works full versed,  
 and to fulfil pious vows ever keen,  
 but if for your band of devotees  
 no love they show,  
 salvation they shall never know.

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<sup>11</sup> After first appearing as an unfathomable column or mass of fire, Aruṅācala remained in that form for an entire *yuga*, before becoming pure gold, ruby and finally stone in successive *yuga*-s. See the note to v.27 in Part Two. Here the poet imagines that the dark storm clouds are mimicking a pall of smoke to remind people of the mountain's fiery origins.

<sup>12</sup> *maṇi mēgam* – jewel [shedding] clouds, also known as *camvarttam*, Skt. *saṁvarta*, one of seven types of cloud under the control of Indra, each shedding a different substance.

<sup>13</sup> *vācīgai, tiruvācīgai* – an ornamental arch placed over an idol.

You who lend your might[y chest]  
 to bear up the perfumed  
 mountain [breast]s  
 that sit above the tiny waist  
 of the Maiden clad in jewels bright  
 whom the Himalaya sired<sup>14</sup> and raised,<sup>15</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(62)

When I, poor wretch, at your feet  
 a refuge sought,  
 to the darkness that my heart obscures  
 this solemn oath I swore,  
 'With Unnamulai's Lord as my aid  
 I'll drive you out this very day!'  
 In grace,  
 let this promise be not betrayed.

when a doomed [white] yak<sup>16</sup>  
 goes tumbling down your side  
 as a [great] black cloud

<sup>14</sup> *imayam īṅṅru eḍutta kaṅṅi* – the maiden whom the Himalaya mountains sired and raised is Śiva's consort, Parvatī. When referred to in their personified form, as Parvatī's father, the Himalaya mountains take the name Himavat.

<sup>15</sup> The latter part of the verse may be an indirect reference to the incident alluded to in v. 50 and note, in which Śiva's chest softened to take on the imprint of Parvatī's nipples and bangles. Here it seems that his chest becomes even stronger to support the weight of her breasts, which her tiny waist is scarcely able to support. From some angles, Ādi Aṅṅamalai temple, for example, the peak of the mountain is seen to sweep down gracefully to a second lower, smaller peak, which might be taken to represent Parvatī, a view which suggests that Sōṅasailaṅ has his arm around her, tenderly supporting her.

<sup>16</sup> *vīḍu uṅṅum kavari* – a yak which perishes. The verb *vīḍu* means *to perish, be destroyed*. The yak would not normally be found outside the Himalayan region. Domestic yaks can be white but not wild ones. The poet paints the picture of a white yak losing its footing on the mountain and falling at the same time as a black cloud sails upward towards the summit, an image which suggests the idea that Brahmā and Viṣṇu, having failed to locate, respectively, the head and foot of Lord Śiva and, perhaps in desperation at their failed attempts, are each now adopting the opposite strategy and seeking the foot and head instead.



sails up into the sky,  
 it seems the swan and boar [of yore]  
 have reversed their former roles  
 and now  
 seek instead your feet and crown,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (63)

Will this love for maidens  
 with waists vanishingly<sup>17</sup> svelte  
 [ever] by the lotus flowers  
 of your holy feet be felt,  
 and will this fondness  
 for the fragrant paste,<sup>18</sup>  
 upon their form applied,  
 [one day] upon the white  
 of holy ash be placed?

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
 where parrots green in flocks  
 alight on fields of millet  
 ready for the scythe,  
 and as the young girls chase them off  
 rise swirling in the skies  
 like toranam festoons<sup>19</sup> [strung across  
 your holy mountainside]. (64)  
 My heart learned not to melt,  
 like ghee set on a flame.

<sup>17</sup> *aiya nuṅ maruṅgaḷ* – literally, [with] slender, doubt [inducing] waists. Highly fanciful references to the slenderness of women's waists are frequent in Tamil poetry. Here the waists are imagined to be so slender that the observer cannot be certain whether there even is one. Compare for example the *Tiruvilaiyāḍal Purāṇam*, ch. 60, v.2, in which the women are referred to as *maruṅgu ilādavar*; literally *those [maidens] without any waist*: *maruṅgu ilādavar vandu edir maṅgalam ēnda* – with *[maidens] without waists coming forth, proffering the [eight] auspicious items*.

<sup>18</sup> *kalavai* – mixture here stands for *kalavai-c-cantaṇam*, 'Sandal paste prepared with the addition of many aromatic substances,' (Tamil Lexicon).

<sup>19</sup> *tōraṇam* are 'Festoons of leaves and flowers suspended across streets and entrances

MOUNTAIN PATH

With water and choice blossoms  
my hands no puja made.  
What recourse, pray tell,  
for me now remains?

Other mountains remedies  
for sundry painful ills afford,  
but these you put to shame, [we find]  
rising as the cure for birth  
for those who hold you in their mind,<sup>20</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(65)

*(to be continued)*



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on auspicious occasions,<sup>9</sup> (Tamil Lexicon). The poet paints an arresting image of the flocks of parrots rising up in swirling, bright green columns, resembling the plaited leaves of ceremonial festoons.

<sup>20</sup> *uṭkoḷvōr (uḷ koḷvōr) – those who hold [you] within or in their minds. uḷ can mean inside, that which is within or heart, mind, soul etc., as the inner aspect of man. The verb uṭkoḷ as a compound verb (uḷ + koḷ) means to take into the body, to eat. Hence there is a neat play on words with the sense those who consume the medicine of your grace, which consists of meditating upon you in the heart.*

# Sonasaila Malai

## Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

As if a golden temple,  
with gems fittingly inlaid,  
as a [murky] roost for bats I gave,  
within my barren heart  
no union with thee I craved,  
but there a home  
for base desire I made.  
One even such as I  
will you come to save?

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
where streams rush down  
scattering gold,

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flooding holes  
 that hillsmen made  
 to harvest tubers  
 that they crave,  
 and filling pits into which  
 elephants [unwary] slip.<sup>1</sup> (66)

I wandered rejoicing in the sight  
 of maids with fine dark skin  
 in perfumed gowns with jewels bright  
 but their inner truth I did not know,  
 just as a [silken] pouch  
 its sackcloth lining does not show.<sup>2</sup>  
 For me, a slave to worldly deeds,  
 what day will there salvation be?

Though your ruddy lotus feet  
 reach down below the [seven] hells  
 and your holy crown  
 beyond the heavens towering goes,<sup>3</sup>  
 yet still you can encompassed be  
 by sweet songs intoned by the Three,<sup>4</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (67)

<sup>1</sup> *vēlam vī kuḷikaḷum* – the pits [into which] elephants fall. The hunters dig pits and disguise them to trap unwary wild elephants.

<sup>2</sup> The idea is that the gross, repulsive nature of the fleshly body is hidden by the outer skin and fine clothing and ornaments, just as a beautiful silk bag reveals its rough hessian lining only if turned inside out. Compare *Nālaḍiyār* 42, which says of the body, *maṟṟu adaṇai pai maṟiyā pārkkā paḍum* – it should be looked upon as a bag turned inside out, and *Maṇimēgalai*, 4:121, *idaṇai puṟam maṟippu āṟāy* – look upon it as if the innards were on the outside.

<sup>3</sup> Compare *Tiruvācakam*, *Tiruvempāvai*, v. 10, l. 1-2:

Beneath the seven realms of hell his lotus feet  
 [reach down,] transcending speech and on his head  
 his crown with flowers intertwined, of all reality  
 Is the crown!

<sup>4</sup> *mūvar* – the Three are Appar, Jñānasambandhar and Sundarar. See the note to v. 1 in Part One.

Each time I dwell  
 on birth's torment,  
 or at death the mind's confusion  
 as the bonds that bind  
 the body's sinews loosen,  
 my heart's with terror filled  
 as I suffer  
 like sesame ground in a mill.

You echo to the rival cries  
 of worthy devotees  
 who *Harahara*<sup>5</sup> chant  
 and to the roar of lions  
 who, seeing dark clouds  
 massed on high surmise,  
 'This way comes an elephant!'  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(68)

Seeking refuge at your side,  
 'Merciful Lord,' I cried,  
 'you who [even] to a spider,  
 from his body spinning gauze,  
 did your holy grace afford,<sup>6</sup>  
 so that the pain of birth and death  
 tormented it no more.'  
 And yet your holy will remains  
 a secret to me still.

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
 when a powerful elephant  
 raises aloft his sturdy trunk,

<sup>5</sup> There is a play on words in this verse. *arakara*, Skt. *hara hara*, is an invocation to Lord Śiva, one of whose names is *Hara*, the *Destroyer*. Earlier in the same line the words *ari* – *lion* and *kari* – *elephant* are juxtaposed. These words, taken together, *arikari*, can also be interpreted as Skt. *hari hari*. an invocation to Viṣṇu, uttered by those of the Vaishnavaitic persuasion.

<sup>6</sup> There are stories telling how Śiva granted liberation to a spider who protected him with its web related to Śri Kalahasti in Andhra Pradesh and to Tiruvāṇaikā in Tamil Nadu.

to the Sun in his fine chariot  
it seems a black serpent<sup>7</sup>  
from your caves has sprung,  
and fearful in his heart  
he [from your holy peak] departs. (69)

Will it one day come to pass,  
that with the fire and whetted axe<sup>8</sup>  
in your fair hands clasped,  
you clear away the thickets  
of my intractable deeds,  
then, of undying love for you  
planting the seeds,  
of this devotee's mind  
you nurture<sup>9</sup> the fields?

---

<sup>7</sup> *pāmbu* means serpent and also is a name of Rāhu, a planet in Hindu astrology. The serpent Rāhu is a demon with a dragon's tail. When the gods churned the ocean for *amṛita*, he disguised himself as one of them and stole a portion, thus becoming immortal. The Sun and Moon revealed the fraud to Viṣṇu who cut off his head, but, being immortal, he has ever since wreaked vengeance by occasionally swallowing them, causing them to disappear temporarily. His tail is known as Ketu, and both are regarded as planets in Vedic astrology. In scientific terms they represent the ascending and descending nodes, the points where the moon's path in the sky crosses the ecliptic, the sun's path in the sky; these are the only points near which eclipses can occur, since at those points all three celestial bodies, the earth, the moon and the sun, are in the same plane. The conceit here is that when the Sun sees the elephant's trunk on the mountain, he thinks it is Rāhu exiting from a termite hill to come and swallow him and hurries away in fright.

<sup>8</sup> *kūrṇi kaṇal maḥuvāl* – with the intense fire and the sharp battle-axe. The word *kūr* can mean both *intense*, *excessive* and also *sharp*, and can therefore apply to both nouns, i.e. with *intense* fire and *sharp* battle-axe. Fire and the battle-axe are two of the numerous items Śiva is seen to be holding in his hands in his various iconographic representations.

<sup>9</sup> *maṇattiṇai tiruttum nāi uḷadō* – will there be a day when you will cultivate [the field off] my mind. The verb *tiruttu* has the general sense of *to correct*, *level*, *amend*, *adjust* and is used here in the twin senses of *to discipline the mind* and *to improve land*, levelling it, clearing it of trees and stones and so on, in preparation for cultivation. The word *fields* is added in the translation to convey this double sense.

As the ruddy glow of eventide  
 o'ertakes the dark blue sky,  
 it appears from your noble stance,  
 that you look upon the God of Love  
 and engulf him in your fiery glance,<sup>10</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(70)

When will you in grace  
 allow me at your feet a place  
 in the goodly band of those  
 who all five senses have restrained  
 and true wisdom fully gained,  
 and grant that those  
 of nature harsh and base  
 shall leave and far from me remain?

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
 when [in your caverns] deadly serpents  
 spit out gems of lustre bright  
 tigers strong and proud in terror take flight  
 thinking in delusion that the cave's alight.

(71)

*Antari,<sup>11</sup> Kumari, Anjali, Gauri  
 Ambika, Manonmani, Matangi*

<sup>10</sup> *vēl purattu eri kaduviḍa* literally, *in order to grasp [with] the flame [of your third eye] the body of the God of Love*. The Puranic tale of how Kāma, one of whose names in Tamil is *Vēl*, was burned up by Śiva when he attempted to disturb his *tapas* was referenced previously in v. 7. Kāma is usually represented as having a dark green or greenish-blue body colour. It can often be observed that the lower area of the sky between the red hue of sunset and the deep blue of the upper heavens has a greenish-blue tinge.

<sup>11</sup> *antari* is a name of Parvatī derived from Skt. *antara* – *that which is inner, soul, heart, supreme soul*; *kumari*, Skt. *kumārī*, *means maid, virgin*; *añcali* can mean either *She who should be worshipped*, from Skt. *añjali* – *a gesture of reverence with the open hands placed side by side* or, deriving it from *añcal* – *do not fear!* it can mean *Granter of protection, freedom from fear*; *ambikai*, Skt. *ambikā* means *mother*; *maṇḍamaṇi* means *she who transcends the mind*; *madaṅgi*, Skt. *mātaṅgi* denotes a ferocious aspect of the goddess, a name of Durga; both Tamil commentators take it in the sense of *songstress, musician*, which is one of its Tamil meanings.

*Uma*,<sup>12</sup> *Unnamulai*,<sup>13</sup> *Sundari* –  
Pray grant your grace,  
And tell me by what names  
I may your holy consort praise.

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord*,  
where illustrious Tumpuru  
and Narada<sup>14</sup> too your praises sing,  
plucking the lute's sweet strings,  
as Vishnu coming to stand nigh  
intones the Vedas' holy hymns.

(72)

May you grant your grace  
and enrol me in the company  
of those faithful devotees  
who of the world's delusion are free,  
who in the highest wisdom ever abide,  
and whose love for your holy lotus feet  
ever foster in their minds.

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord*,  
where *kantal* blossoms' petals

---

<sup>12</sup> *umai*, Skt. *umā*, like *parvatī* references the goddess as daughter to Himavat, the Himalaya mountains.

<sup>13</sup> *uṇṇāmūlai* – [*she off*] *the unsuckled breasts* is the name of Śiva's consort in the *sthala* of Tiruvāṇṇāmalai. The *Aruṇācala Māhātmyam* gives an interesting explanation of how this name came about. It comes at the moment when Lord Śiva has just granted Parvatī the right of sharing his own form. Referring to the time when Parvatī left to perform *tapas* to atone for covering Śiva's eyes and causing universal chaos, leaving her infant Skanda unattended, he says to her:

stanyārthinaṃ guhaṃ hitvā yātāsi tapase yataḥ,  
tad apīstanaṃ nāmnā nivasa atra mama antike.

Since you abandoned Guha (Skanda) who yearned for your milk, and went away for the performance of *tapas*, dwell with me here with the name Apīstanaṃ (She of the unsuckled breasts). *Aruṇācala Māhātmyam*, Utt. Ch. 21, slokas 25b-26a.

<sup>14</sup> *nāradaḥ*, Skt. *Nārada* is a celebrated sage and son of Brahmā. He is portrayed as a musician and storyteller and as a messenger of the gods. *tumburu*, Skt. *tumpuru* is one of the Gandharvas, celestial musicians and is sometimes described as the best of singers. He leads the Gandharvas in their singing.



softly strike the honey-filled beehives  
 as a [hammer strikes an hour] gong<sup>15</sup>  
 each time the gentle summer breeze  
 caressing, comes along. (73)

The wonder of devotion<sup>16</sup>  
 in which we fearless remain,  
 as ‘Birth for us is ended!’  
 we in ecstasy proclaim –  
 of that, we have no notion.  
 To what purpose then  
 do we your devotees  
 our lifetimes idly spend?

The hosts of heaven praise you,  
 saying,  
 ‘When our unblinking sight  
 upon you falls  
 no sin in us remains at all.  
 But the penance, [alas],  
 in which we walk around  
 with both feet planted on the ground  
 for us can never come to pass,’<sup>17</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash’s Lord!* (74)

<sup>15</sup> The word *gong* translates the Tamil word *kannaḷ*. Tam. Lex. describes *kannaḷ* as ‘Perforated hour-glass that fills and sinks at the expiration of a nāḷikai.’ (A nāḷikai is an Indian hour of 24 minutes). Here it is used to indicate some other instrument for marking the hour, as a gong and hammer. *tuḍuppu* means *spatula*, *small ladle*. It is also the name given to the petals of the *kāntal*, *Gloriosa superba* as resembling a ladle. Here they are imagined to resemble the hammer of a gong. The open blossoms are often compared also to human hands with flexed fingers.

<sup>16</sup> *batti navam* – *the wonder of devotion*. *navam* (< Skt. *navam* – *new*) = Tamil *pudumai*, which, in addition to the meanings *newness*, *novelty* also has the sense of *wonder*, *miracle*. *batti* (< Skt. *bhakti*) – *devotion*, *love*, *piety* is described as a wonder because it has the power of bestowing liberation from birth and death.

<sup>17</sup> The point here is that the gods, although living in the blissful state of the heavenly worlds, are not immortal but are condemned eventually to die and be born again. The sight of Sōnasailan absolves them of all sins, but, as gods they cannot walk upon the earth and cannot therefore perform the penance of *pradakṣiṇa* that will help them

My eyes with love  
shall see you with delight;  
my hands in adulation  
shall be raised up above;  
my ears shall hear the hymns  
that your great glory fete,  
and around you my two feet  
*pradakshina* shall make.<sup>18</sup>

When [on your slopes]  
bears burrow into termite hills  
cool rays in streams flash out  
from gems that are unearthed,  
as if they had been lying in wait,  
the dark itself to rout,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(75)

Those who like young Murugan<sup>18</sup>  
with sharp and bloody spear,  
delight the jewelled maiden's eye,  
will wither like the tender bud  
that flowers, soon to fade and die.<sup>19</sup>  
This I've seen, and yet do I  
still glory in this sinful life.

---

(cont.) to gain the Lord's grace and with it absolute freedom from birth. It is for this reason that the gods themselves aspire to be born there in human, or any other, form. See the *Aruṇācala Purāṇam*, v. 73:

Those who dwell in matchless Svarga, feasting on ambrosia, and those who severally stand guard over that Garden of Pleasure and the other worlds, desire to be born there, believing birth in that city, even as a mere worm, to be the greater good. Except for those who have performed one hundred sacrifices, birth in that noble place is not attainable. Whilst it is easy for those who are recipients of the Lord's grace, it is difficult indeed for the other gods, and the most eminent even amongst men.

<sup>18</sup> The word *kālai*, used here means *a young man in his prime*. Here the reference is clearly to Murugan, because of the mention of a spear dripping with the blood and flesh of slain foes. See *Kuṇṭogai* 1: *koṅṇu avuṇar tēyṭta ceṇ kōl ambiṇ – having arrows red [with blood], with which he slew and annihilated demons*.

<sup>19</sup> *tiri taḷiriṇ*, literally *like a shoot [which] change[s]*. A leaf begins as a shoot, matures into a green leaf, changes colour, withers and dies, a metaphor here for the transitory nature of human existence.

Their anklets snared, a bridegroom  
 and his powdered bride<sup>20</sup> around you go,  
 and only at the time of parting,  
 will that shy pair their situation know,<sup>21</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (76)

Will it ever leave and go,  
 my futile praise of maids  
 with wide bright eyes  
 like sliced mango,  
 whose graceful hands  
 like *kantal* blossoms glow  
 and the beauty of whose feet  
 in jewelled anklets clad  
 the tender mango leaf defeats?

With no brightly spotted Vasuki,  
 employed by those who churned<sup>22</sup>  
 the majestic rollers of the [milky] sea,  
 you bestow the ambrosial medicine  
 that great *tapasvins*  
 from the fear of death doth free,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (77)  
 As my life ebbs away,

---

<sup>20</sup> *maṇam timir maḡaḡir* – a maiden smeared with fragrant substances. *maṇam* also means *marriage*, so the sense is of a newly married girl anointed with sandalwood paste and other fragrant substances.

<sup>21</sup> In earlier times, it was customary for a bride and groom, a few days after their marriage, to perform *pradakṣiṇa* of Aruṇācala, closely accompanied by both sets of relatives, who, in the press of bodies, would contrive to tie together their anklets without them realising it. At the end of the *pradakṣiṇa*, when the two sets of relatives departed for their various homes, the young couple would find to their embarrassment that they were unable to go their separate ways, symbolically affirming their marriage to each other.

<sup>22</sup> When the *devas* and *asuras* churned the Milk Ocean to extract the elixir of immortality they required Mount Mandara as a churning stick and the *nāga* king, Vāsuki, to use as a rope. In sharp contrast *Sōṇasailan* requires no such aids to produce the same result for his devotees.

MOUNTAIN PATH

and thoughts in turmoil stray;  
as darkness fills my eyes,  
my ears hear no sound  
and phlegm wells up inside,<sup>23</sup>  
may this boon in grace be granted  
that in my heart  
your holy form be firmly planted.

You who in your throat hold  
the black venom  
that Mount Mandara bestowed  
and at your left side place  
the ambrosial Maid  
the snowy Himalaya gave,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (78)

Daily offering worship meet  
with fresh blooms at thy holy feet  
remaining to thee ever near,  
so that Death himself,  
the soul's consumer,  
shakes with fear,  
will there ever be a day  
that I shall walk  
in liberation's supernal way?

For those whose fast intent  
is to best those mighty foes,  
the triumphant objects of sense,<sup>24</sup>  
and to rule the heavenly realm

---

<sup>23</sup> *ai mēl undu ida* – as phlegm wells up. *ai* is phlegm, mucus, a reference to the death rattle, sounds often produced by someone who is near death as a result of fluids such as saliva and mucus accumulating in the throat and upper chest.

<sup>24</sup> *vayam koḷum viḍaya perum pagai*, literally *the great enemy [consisting of] the objects of sense, which are victorious*. *vayam* can mean either *power, might or victory, conquest*. Here both meanings apply. Very few are those who can resist the attraction of the objects of the mind and senses and hence they are almost always victorious.

[of liberation] surely go,  
 thou art the fort<sup>25</sup> [secure]  
 that doth their victory ensure,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (79)

Will there ever come a day  
 when I a wicked, evil one,  
 shall to your royal presence come,  
 where gods unsleeping cower back  
 as the baton held in Nandi's hand  
 upon their head falls with a thwack,  
 only to surge forward, just as [when]  
 algae [scattered] by a stone  
 dropped [in a tank reforms again]?<sup>26</sup>

You who abide and shine  
 as [against your chest] the elephants  
 of the Mountain Maiden[']s  
 ample breasts] firmly press,  
 she whose warring eyes defeat  
 the long spear's shining blade,  
 wide, finely honed, shaped like a leaf,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (80)  
 Whether you guide me

---

<sup>25</sup> *araṇam* or *araṇ* means *fortress, castle or defence, fortification*, of which the dictionaries list four kinds, *walls, seas and rivers, mountains and forests*. The word *araṇam* brings to mind the second *mangalam* verse of Ramana Maharshi's *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*, previously quoted in relation to v. 46, which contains the lines:

Those people who have a deep fear of death will, for their protection, take as their refuge (*araṇ*) the feet of Lord Śiva, he who is without both birth and death.

<sup>26</sup> Nandi is again pictured in his semi-human form, controlling the crowds of lesser deities with his staff in Lord Śiva's court on Mount Kailash. See v. 35 and note. As in that verse, those deities are imagined to be ultimately undeterred by Nandi's blows, but, having at first shrunk back, crowd forward again, prepared to risk his wrath. In this they are compared to algae or pond scum on a pond or tank, which is dissipated when a stone is thrown in but soon regathers again on the surface.

onto salvation's true way  
 upon which those sages embark  
 who the god Desire have slain,  
 or saying, 'What a fool!'  
 consign me to the [hellish] dark,  
 what recourse remains to me  
 other than the lotuses of your feet?

Unlike other mountains in the world  
 where deer prance<sup>27</sup> 'midst summits high,  
 within you dwells the deer-like One  
 with unsuckled breasts like lotus buds  
 [who bears the name Unnamulai],<sup>28</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(81)



(to be continued)

---

(cont.) The image recalls v. 399 of the Sangam anthology, *Kuruntogai*, in which the heroine is telling her friend how she suffers in the absence of her lover:

Like the green scum/gathered/on the surface of a well/where the village/  
 draws its water,/this sickly pallor/recedes at his every touch,/only to return/  
 whenever he leaves.

<sup>27</sup> *vām marai* – deer that leaps, go by leaps. *marai* is more properly the sambur, Indian elk, one of the largest species in the deer family.

<sup>28</sup> *uṇāmulai ām tāmarai porundum māṇ*, literally *the maid who possesses the lotuses that are [her] unsuckled breasts*. *uṇāmulai*, which means *unsuckled breasts* is the name of Śiva's consort in the *sthala* of Tiruvaṇṇāmalai. See v. 72 and note. The word *māṇ* – deer also means woman and is often used of Śiva's consort. *tāmarai* – lotus is here used to designate *the closed bud of the lotus*, which resembles the female breast in its shape.

# Sonasaila Malai

## Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

My mind, trusting [in the truth]  
of the Letters Five,<sup>1</sup>  
praised by all those Agamas  
compiled [by the wise],  
of the Lord of Death I'll have no fear  
as astride a sturdy buffalo he appears,  
unlike those who,  
even with a weapon in their hand,  
trembling before their enemy stand.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Five Letters* refers to the five syllable mantra *śi-vā-ya-na-ma*; *śi* represents śivam; *vā* represents his energy of grace – *aruḷ śakti*; *ya* represents the *jīva*; *na* represents *māyā* or *tirōtam*, the energetic whirl of impurity in itself, and *ma* represents *āṇavam*, that impurity as operating within the *jīva*. See the note to verse 15 in the first article in this series.

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MOUNTAIN PATH

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
where stout-trunked elephants  
trumpet loud, as peacocks  
with long and arching tails  
wake from sleep, high in the tops  
of *venkai* trees with scented blossoms  
and fill the air with [plaintive] wails. (82)

This [foul] body I did not loathe,  
nor lovingly desired  
with holy ash to smear it whole;  
the immaculate, holy Letters Five  
I did not cherish in my mind.  
As I wander thus in confusion lost  
what fate fierce Death holds for me  
I, a hapless wretch, know not.

You who did yourself conceal  
as the Earth's Consumer<sup>2</sup>  
languished, unable to reveal  
the all-pervading ankleted feet  
that by the adoring Patanjali<sup>3</sup>  
in [Tillai's golden] Hall were seen,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (83)

Might it be an easy task  
to guide my mind

---

<sup>2</sup> *maṇ uṇi* – the *Consumer of the World* is a reference to Kalki, the 10th avatar of Viṣṇu, whose role is to appear mounted on a white horse and wielding a drawn sword to destroy the world at the end of the current *kali yuga* in preparation for the start of a new *satya yuga*.

<sup>3</sup> *aravam* – *snake*, serpent refers to Patañjali, 'A saint, author of the yōga sutras, *Mahābhāṣya* and a treatise on medicine in Sanskrit, considered an incarnation of Adīṣeṣa,' (Tam. Lex.). A number of stories tell of Patañjali's desire to witness Śiva's cosmic dance in the Golden Hall of Chidambaram and of how his wish came to be granted. The point here again is that Sōṇasailan will remain inaccessible even to the gods if they are devoid of devotion and driven by ego but will make himself easily accessible to true devotees, however humble.



on liberation's path  
 that lies through comely peaks  
 of maidens' ample breasts,  
 across the ocean  
 of their wanton eyes  
 and through the black night  
 of their tresses?

Mountains there are  
 Where at dawn and sunset  
 The ruddy sun may take its rest.<sup>4</sup>  
 This you know full well,  
 so in the fierce heat  
 you tower high  
 to give the midday sun  
 a place to dwell,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(84)

Prizing beads of *rudrasksha*  
 as the only jewels true,  
 smearing my body  
 with the holy ashes white,  
 drawing upon my brow  
 the three-barred Saiva sign,<sup>5</sup>  
 grant in grace that I  
 may perform puja to you.

Above your lofty head  
 where the *Kartikai* beacon  
 shines out like a lotus bright,  
 Ganga's chilly waves are spread

<sup>4</sup> The reference is to the *udayagiri* and the *attagiri*, the mountains in the east and west behind which the sun is supposed to rise and set. The eastern mountain is mentioned previously in v. 4: *udaya tani malai – the matchless Eastern Mount*.

<sup>5</sup> *puṇḍara kūrī* or simply *puṇḍaram* are lines or marks on the forehead, worn by religious devotees. That worn by Saivas consists of three horizontal lines and is known as *tiri puṇḍaram* and that worn by Vaishnavites, consisting of vertical lines in various configurations, is called *ūrttuva puṇḍaram*.

like a canopy all pearly white,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (85)

When will I be free from those  
 whose tongues do not  
 the Letters Five speak out  
 but other [lesser] mantras [spout],  
 from ignorant fools  
 who to base and mortal men  
 their plaudits raise  
 in all the forms of song,<sup>6</sup>  
 though you are there  
 for them to praise?

You who golden Meru chose  
 to be your flawless bow,<sup>7</sup>  
 and the Dark One who of yore  
 raised up a mountain<sup>8</sup>  
 his herd of cows to shield  
 to be your arrow<sup>9</sup> so decreed,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!* (86)

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<sup>6</sup> *pāviṇam* – classes of verse or more precisely types of verse and their derived subclasses. The four classes of verse are *veṅpā*, *āciriya-p-pā*, *kaḷi-p-pā* and *vañci-p-pā*, from each of which are derived three types of poem which partake of some of its properties; these are *tuṛai*, *tāḷicai* and *viruttam*. Thus we have *veṅtuṛai*, *veṅtāḷicai*, *veḷiviruttam* and so forth.

<sup>7</sup> See v. 19 and note in the first article in this series.

<sup>8</sup> This is a reference to the famous incident in the life of Kṛṣṇa, when, during a dispute with Indra, he lifted up the Govardhana Mountain to protect the animals and people of the region from the devastating flood that Indra poured down. Kṛṣṇa is referred to in the verse simply as *kuṅṅru* – mountain. It has been translated in the verse as the *Dark One* to avoid the repetition of the word mountain.

<sup>9</sup> Kṛṣṇa is an *avatar* of Viṣṇu, whom Śiva employed as his arrow when destroying the aerial cities of the *asuras*. On the same occasion he used Mount Meru as his bow, an incident referred to in v. 19, mentioned in the previous note.

Daylight and dark night,  
 sun, moon, noble soul,  
 five elements perceived<sup>9</sup> –  
 when shall my eyes  
 exult in the sight  
 of your form [supreme]  
 transcending all of these?

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
 whom flowery tanks surround,  
 where beetles that amidst petals  
 of the lotus blossom sojourn,  
 rise up like clouds of smoke  
 from bright flames of *kuṅḷiyam*  
 that in shining salvers burns.<sup>10</sup>

(87)

May you a single word vouchsafe,  
 so that I, poor wretch, may  
 of pure awareness' form partake,  
 wherein the fivefold elements,  
 sense organs with their senses,  
 and the faculties of mind  
 all subside and go,  
 and so entirely slay my foes,  
 these powerful deeds [that bind].<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The verse begins by listing the *aṣṭa mūrti*, Sanskrit *aṣṭa mūrti*, the eight forms of Śiva. Their Tamil names are as follows: *būmi* – earth, *nīr* – water, *tēyu* – fire, *vāyu* – air, *ākāyam* – ether, *iyamāṇaṅ* – the sacrificer, the soul, *sūriyaṅ* – the sun, *candiraṅ* – the moon. *iyamāṇaṅ* or *iyamāṅ* Skt. *yajamāna* means sacrificer from the root *yaj* – to sacrifice. In Tamil it has the secondary meaning of life, soul. Śiva is the source of all created things but, as the verse points out, transcends all of them.

<sup>10</sup> The lotus pads on the tanks of the mountain are compared to bright salvers set on stands, which are the stalks of the lotuses. The red flowers are compared to the flames of burning incense and the rising clouds of winged insects that feed on their nectar, to the smoke rising from it. *kuṅḷiyam* is a resinous gum of which there are a number of varieties, presumably used as, or as a base for, incense.

<sup>11</sup> The ego self, the *jīva*, arises through the *pori* – sense organs, *pulaṅ* – senses and the *kāraṅgaḷ* – the mental faculties and the organs of action engaging with the

MOUNTAIN PATH

You shine out  
like a comely tethering post  
where lady Uma daily ties up both  
The elephants of her ample breasts  
And the lion of her midriff svelte,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(88)

Like rubies set in finest gold  
your holy feet,  
unto the virtuous go  
their holy grace to bestow.  
What a wonder then  
that these bright jewels  
should thus be set  
within the iron of my soul!

Unlike other mountains  
that oceans of the world surround,

---

(cont.) world of the *būtam* – *the five elements* to create the illusion of an individual who is the doer, the one responsible for his own actions, in an apparently external world that is other than himself. The result is that the *jīva* becomes trapped in the cycle of cause and effect created by those *aru viṇai* – *deeds which are hard to escape*. Only the grace of the Lord, usually mediated by an enlightened guru like Sri Ramana, can end this vicious cycle of cause and effect and consequent suffering, often by *oru molī* – *a single or unique word*, a simple statement, such as *cummā iru* – *Just be!* The moment this bogus individual turns his attention inward to dwell purely on the simple sense of being, the house of cards, which is the illusive dichotomy of *jīva* and world, dissolves like a dream and he comes to dwell in the attribute-free nature which is *arivu* – *pure consciousness*. *arivu eṇa* = *arivu āgumpaḍi* – *so that [I] become pure / mere consciousness (jñāna)*. Thus realisation is simply the state of pure being, unobscured by the accretions imposed by the mind and senses:

The consciousness of the Self is the normal state; our present entanglement is the abnormal state. We imagine that we have to develop towards a perfect state – when we are in it now but have covered it with accretions of external things and thoughts. People talk of attaining the super-consciousness. This is wrong. This Self is our normal consciousness; we imagine we have to develop and attain it but we are in it all the time, only our attention is diverted away from it to intellect and objects. *Conscious Immortality*, p.168.

you within yourself, men proclaim,  
 hold the ocean vast of grace  
 that Himavat, the mountain gave.<sup>12</sup>  
*Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

(89)

Those feet so hard to know  
 for those of love for you bereft;  
 those feet that from tall Mal's heart  
 have never [for an instant] left;  
 those feet that rise and fall  
 in blazing light of Tillai's Hall,  
 may they dance their dance  
 within my thoughts.

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
 where hives built by honey bees  
 that burrow into blooms  
 in lofty crowns of tall bamboo  
 are like the fans of palm tree leaves<sup>13</sup>  
 borne by gatherings of devotees.

(90)

Everywhere grow grasses  
 green and fresh  
 and clear waters flow,  
 and in all those places,  
 when you're adored,  
 you come in love  
 your presence to afford.  
 Yet still does mankind

<sup>12</sup>After the self-immolation of his first consort, Satī, Śiva took as his second wife Parvatī, who was the daughter of Himavat, the personification of the Himalaya mountain range.

<sup>13</sup>*āla vattam* is a 'Circular fan made of cloths, fragrant roots or palm leaves, carried in procession before idols and great persons.' (Tam. Lex.) The poet imagines that the hives attached to the tops of long bamboo stems resemble circular fans on the ends of their long hafts.

MOUNTAIN PATH

vainly toil  
[dying and] being [re]born.

The term ‘Mountain of Compassion’  
is commonly but a metaphor,  
[by devotees] employed,  
but you this definition to avoid  
as an actual ‘Mountain of Compassion’<sup>14</sup>  
[on earth] abiding, skyward soar.  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash’s Lord!*

(91)

Grant in grace to me  
that with pure jnana’s eye  
I may truly see,  
so that I may meet and remain  
in the company of those  
who do false birth disdain,  
and freed from gross desire  
have for your holy form  
true love attained.

You who rising high,  
tower up like a column tall,  
so that other mountains  
over whose lofty peaks  
the skyborne moon doth crawl  
seem nothing more  
than tiny wisps of straw,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash’s Lord!*

(92)



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<sup>14</sup> *metaphor* translates the words *aṅ-moḷi-t-togai* literally *a compound with a missing word*. As for example *poṛroṭi* (*poṅ toṭi*) – [*a lady with*] *golden bangles*. Thus taken as such a compound *karuṇai malai* would refer to *the Lord as [One who possesses or is like] a mountain of compassion*. However taken as a simple *vēṛṛumai-t-togai* compound with omission of the case ending, the meaning is simply *mountain of compassion*, meaning it is the mountain itself which possesses the compassion, without the epithet being transferred to Lord Śiva.

# Sonasaila Malai

## Song Garland to the Red Mountain

SIVAPRAKASA SWAMIGAL  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER

May you grant to me  
eyes that you alone  
behold endlessly,  
a mind that dwells  
on you alone,  
and a tongue that your praise  
alone intones,  
and last of all by your grace  
at your holy feet a place.

‘To those who climb them, other mounts  
will show the world entire laid out.

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has published a grammatical commentary on *Uḷḷadu Nārpadu*. A translation of the biography of Māṅikkavācakar is now available at the ashram bookshop. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: <http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666>.

With such as these you disagree,  
since for those who thus approach you,  
it is their Self alone you make them see!<sup>1</sup>  
thus does [the world] proclaim.  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

93

The gleaming expanse of your chest;  
The ruddy forest of your locks<sup>1</sup>  
whose colour lightning sore covets;  
the lotus blossoms of your feet,  
where Indra, king of gods,  
prostrates himself in worship meet,  
when shall these within in my mind  
as their home come to abide?

[Men praise you] saying,  
'Mount Meru once  
A black crow's colour  
turned to gold.<sup>2</sup> So let it be.  
For you're the Mountain high

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<sup>1</sup> *ceñ caḍai aḍavium* – the forest of [your] ruddy tangled locks. *caḍai*, Skt. *jaṭā*, are the tangled or matted locks worn by Lord Śiva and his devotees in imitation of him.

<sup>2</sup> There is a Tamil proverb, quoted in Winslow's dictionary, which says *mēruvai cārnta kākkamum poṇṇīram* – Even a crow which resorts to Mount Meru [will become] gold coloured. Sri Ramana Maharshi expresses a similar sentiment in lines 311-314 of *Ramaṇa Purāṇam*:

Even the blackest of crows,  
when it alights upon beautiful golden Mount Meru,  
is transformed into the form of pure gold.  
In just the same way even those *jivas*  
who are entirely without distinction,  
upon joining the presence of divine consciousness,  
their own reality, will shine  
attaining through its glorious majesty  
the sublime form of the Self.



that changes all that cometh nigh  
 into the colour that is Thee,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

94

To aspire to serve your devotees,  
 the apple of my eye to me,  
 and at their service [ever] be,  
 is sweeter than a king's renown,  
 who rules the world  
 clad in a brightly jewelled crown.

*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord,*  
 where the glow from rubies  
 from cobras' jaws spat out,  
 upon the silv'ry moon doth cast its light.  
 like a [ruddy] morning sun that soars  
 up to the fair, wide heavens' heights.

95

For those who praise  
 the strength that as the *cimbul* bird  
 stole the powerful lion's might,<sup>3</sup>  
 the greatness that razed  
 three cities [in their flight]  
 and the force that one head  
 of Brahma on his lotus seat<sup>4</sup>  
 severed quite,  
 what suffering can there ever be?

You who rising up into the sky  
 as a column vast of fire bright,  
 into the heavens towered high,  
 as, leaping from your hand [in fright],  
 the deer in your fair hand

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<sup>3</sup> See v. 23 and note.

<sup>4</sup> *ambuya ataṇaṇ* – *He whose seat is the lotus*, i.e. Brahmā.

did on the heavens' fair moon alight,<sup>5</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

96

Bidding me, 'Do not fear,'  
 may you place me, wicked  
 and worthless as I may be,  
 in the company of your devotees.  
 For is there anyone who would dare  
 to scorn you fair throat saying,  
 'This throat is besmirched by  
 the swallowed poison that it bears?'<sup>6</sup>

You rise on high as if to proclaim  
 that if that argument ever arose again  
 between the artful Five Armed One<sup>7</sup>  
 and his younger brother, Murugan,  
 the task of circumambulating You<sup>8</sup>  
 would not be an easy thing to do,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

97

My mind that's firmly fixed  
 on jewels, on sandal paste,

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<sup>5</sup> The idea is that when Śiva rose up as an unfathomable mass of fire, the deer, which he customarily holds in his hand, was frightened by the heat and leapt onto the cool moon for safety.

<sup>6</sup> The poet is saying that, just as no one would ever blame the Lord for holding the deadly poison *halāhala*, churned from the Milk Ocean, in his throat, no one could blame Him for accepting himself as a devotee, in spite of the dark defilement of *āṇava malam* from which he is not yet free.

<sup>7</sup> *aīṅkaraṇ* – the five-armed One is Ganeṣa. He is most often depicted as having four arms, with his trunk making the fifth.

<sup>8</sup> *valam koḷ vādu* – the dispute about circumambulating. The reference is to the well-known story of the dispute between Ganeṣa and Murugan over the possession of a special mango. It was determined that the first one to circle the world three times and return would win it. Murugan set off at great speed on his peacock, whilst Ganeṣa simply walked around his parents three times and successfully claimed the mango. The poet says that such a feat would not be so easy now with Śiva bearing the form of a great mountain.

on cloth of shining silk  
 and ladies' sweet embrace,  
 will it ever clearly see  
 in Thee the one Reality?  
 Alas, I do not know, poor me!

You who, soaring high, abode,  
 so that all the pomp of Mal and Ayan  
 by many much adored,  
 though on high they rode  
 on flying creatures borne,  
 came to naught and was no more,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

98

Will there ever come a day  
 that my mind [flourishing],  
 like a lotus covered pool,  
 like the heavens lit by the moon,  
 like a comely form  
 with jewels adorned,  
 like a city where dwells a king  
 who long rules over the world,  
 shall unite with your holy feet  
 girt with warriors' anklets [meet]?

You who in your grace vouchsafe  
 sure liberation's lofty state  
 to those who on you meditate,  
 so that other mountains  
 stand abashed,  
 bearing only trees for men  
 to build a house that cannot last,<sup>9</sup>  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

99

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<sup>9</sup> *ōvu uṛum maṅai* – houses that will undergo destruction, i.e. perishable, material dwellings, which are provided by other mountains in the form of forests, are contrasted with *tāvu uṛum uyar viḍu* – strength possessing lofty liberation, conferred by Sōṅasailan. *viḍu* also means *house*, providing a neat, punning ending to the verse.

MOUNTAIN PATH

You it is that grant your grace  
To those who praise you,  
that they may gain learning  
and the noble ornament of fame,  
great wealth and children,  
that like a fine jewel adorn  
the householder and his mate,  
and finally liberation's high estate.

Through your great, supernal grace  
you show yourself to all the world,  
so that those who from the righteous path  
have strayed, forgetting you, may see  
and hold you in their thoughts,  
*Lord Sonasailan! Kailash's Lord!*

*(Concluded)*

100

