



Glory of Bharath » Santh Darsan

Sambandar



In sacred Sirkali (which, according to a legend was the Noah's arc during a cosmic dissolution), there lived a pious Brahmin by name Sivapada Hridayar with his virtuous wife - Bhagavathiar. Both of them were ardent devotees of Lord Siva. They refused to embrace Jainism and give up Saivism, even though the forces of Jainism were so powerful and devastating at the time. Sivapada Hridayar prayed to Lord Siva for the boon of a worthy son to him who would reestablish the glory of Saivism. The Lord granted this boon and Bhagavathiar soon brought into this world a radiant male child. He was given the name Sambanhar. Sivapada Hridayar and Bhagavathiar brought up this child with great love and devotion, knowing fully well that it was a purposeful gift from the Lord. The child, too, would weep for his separation from his Divine parents (Lord Siva and Parvathi) - though ordinary people mistook it for a baby's crying habit.

One day Sivapada Hridayar and his wife took the child with them to the temple tank in which they wanted to bathe. Sambanhar had insisted on being taken with them. They left the child on the bank and went in to bathe. The child looked at the tower of the temple and began to cry for his parents. This outwardly appears to be a mere childish action, but the Lord knew its inner meaning. Lord Thoniappar (Siva) wanted to bless the child. So, He appeared with Mother Parvathi and asked her to feed the child with the milk of divine wisdom. To obtain Siva's grace and divine knowledge, the grace of the Mother is necessary. So, Mother Parvathi fondled with Sambanhar and suckled him with the milk of wisdom. From that moment, Sambanhar was known as Aludaiya Pillayar or one who enjoys the protection of the Lord - and also as Thiru-jnana-sambandar as he attained divine wisdom through the grace of Lord Siva and Parvathi. From the moment he drank the milk of wisdom, Thiru-jnana-sambandar began to sing soul-stirring songs in praise of Lord Siva. The collection of these songs is called Thevaaram.

After finishing their bath, the parents came to the child, and found a golden cup in his hands (the cup in which Parvathi gave him milk) and milk overflowing from his mouth. Sivapada Hridayar thought that somebody had given milk to the child. He did not like that his child should accept milk from all sorts of people. So, he brandished a cane before the child and asked him who gave the milk. The child, shedding profuse tears, pointed to the Lord who appeared in the sky along with Mother Parvathi. Thiru-jnana-sambandar also sang a song, in exquisite Tamil (at the tender age of 2!) in praise of the Lord. Sivapada Hridayar could not see the Lord, but guessed from the child's behaviour that his child must have had a vision of the Lord.



Sivapada Hridayar followed the child into the temple, as Sambanhar went towards it. Many devotees had also come to the temple. They had come to know of what had happened to Pillaiyar (Sambanhar) and glorified him. The parents were very happy. They took the child on their shoulders and went round the town in a procession. The people had decorated the town nicely and received Sambanhar with great devotion.

The next day Sambanhar went to Thirukkolkakka and sang a song, clapping his hands to keep time. Lord Siva, pleased with this, presented Sambanhar with a pair of golden cymbals. Sambanhar, then, began to sing with the help of the golden cymbals. Even Narada and the celestials were charmed by this. Sambanhar then went on pilgrimages.

Sambanhar returned to Sirkali, after visiting a number of shrines on the way, and singing pathigams in praise of the Lord everywhere. Sambanhar's (earthly) parents performed the sacred thread ceremony. The Brahmins then began to teach him the Vedas. But, even before hearing the Vedas from the teacher, Sambanhar could recite them, on account of Divine Grace. Then Sambanhar taught the brahmins the essence of the Panchakshara Mantra and also sang a pathigam. It was at this time that Thiru-navuk-arasar (Appar) Nayanar also met Sambanhar.



During the course of his pilgrimage, Sambanhar came to Thiru Pachilasramam. The daughter of the Malava King there, who was a great devotee of Lord Siva, was suffering from an incurable disease. The king, in despair, had taken her to the temple and placed her in front of the Lord. At the same time, Sambanhar had come into the temple. He saw the pitiable condition of the girl who was lying unconscious. He sang a

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Pathigam praying for Siva's grace to the girl. She at once got up to the surprise of all. All were amazed at this miracle.

At Senkunar, during his pilgrimage, Sambanthar found that the cold was very severe and that many people suffered on account of it. They entreated Sambanthar to alleviate their sufferings. Sambanthar sang a song, and immediately, they were relieved of their suffering.

After some more pilgrimages, Sambanthar came to Thiruvavaduthurai. His (earthly) father wanted to perform a big Yajna and thus, required a lot of money. For that, Sambanthar went to the temple and sang a pathigam (song). At once a Siva Gana appeared before him, handed a purse containing one thousand gold coins and said, "This purse has been given to you by Lord Siva." Sambanthar glorified the Lord's grace in another pathigam and then, handed over the purse to his father (who went away to Sirkali) with the assurance that it would give inexhaustible wealth.

Sambanthar went to Sattamangai where he was received by Thiru-Nilakantar Nayanar with great love and devotion. Sambanthar sang a Pathigam in which he glorified the Nayanar. At Thiru Keilvelur, similarly, he met Siruthondar and glorified him in a pathigam. Such is the nature of the truly great ones - they adore even devotees of the Lord as the Lord Himself and sing their glories, not regarding that as worship or adoration of a human being, but of manifest divinity.

During his stay at Thiru Keilvelur, Sambanthar would daily go to Thiru Marugal to worship the Lord. One day a merchant had come there with his wife. When they were asleep, a poisonous snake bit the man and he died. Doctors failed to revive him. The wife prayed to the Lord for His mercy. At that time Sambanthar entered the temple and heard the woman's wailing. Sambanthar consoled her, and she narrated to him her story and her pitiable condition. Sambanthar sang a song, and the merchant at once came back to life! All of them worshipped the saint's holy feet.

At the request of Siruthondar, Sambanthar wanted to have the Darshan of the Lord at Chenkattankudi. When he was taking leave of the Lord, Siva gave Sambanthar darshan in the form as He is in Chenkattankudi. On the way, Sambanthar stayed at Thiru Pukalur as the guest of Muruga Nayanar, and sang the nayanar's glories. At the suggestion of Appar Swamigal, Sambanthar visited Thiruvavaroor and had darshan of Lord Thiageesa. Then both the saints stayed with Muruga Nayanar for some time. They then went to Thiru Kadavur, met Kungiliya Kalayar Nayanar and sang this nayanar's glories. They then came to Thiruveelimilalai. During their stay there, the Brahmins of Sirkali met Sambanthar. They pleaded that Sambanthar should go to Sirkali and have the Darshan of Lord Thoniappar. The Lord Himself, however, did not want His child to undertake this tiresome journey. So, the next morning, when Sambanthar went to the local temple for worship - there he saw Lord Thoniappar seated in front of him. Sambanthar continued to sing Lord Siva's glories. Sambanthar informed the other Siva bhaktas of this miracle and sent them back to Sirkali.

Appar and Sambanthar stayed at Thiruveelimilalai for some more time. There was a severe famine there. Appar and Sambanthar were moved by the sufferings of the Siva bhaktas. They offered prayers to the Lord who promised to give them some gold coins daily, with the help of which they could serve the people. Both of them found a gold coin at different entrances to the temple. Appar was immediately able to get provisions for his gold coin, whereas Sambanthar could not. He had to exchange his coins for pure gold coins, before he could obtain the provisions. Sambanthar understood that it was because of Appar's sincere service to the Lord and sang a pathigam praising the Lord. The Lord then gave Sambanthar also pure gold coins and he had no difficulty in getting the foodstuffs. With this money and Siva's grace, both saints relieved the plight of the Siva bhaktas.

In Mylapore, there lived a merchant by name Sivanesar. He was a staunch Siva bhakta. He had all wealth but had no children. In answer to his sincere prayer, Lord Siva blessed him with a female child. They named her Poompavai. She was very beautiful. Sivanesar heard of Sambanthar's greatness and felt that Sambanthar was the only suitable match for his daughter. Mentally, he had offered her to Sambanthar. One day when Poompavai was gathering flowers in the garden, she was bitten by a poisonous snake and she died. Sivanesar even announced that he would give any amount of money to anyone who would revive her - but it was of no use. Then he recollected that he had mentally offered her to Sambanthar. This put great courage into Sivanesar. He at once cremated the body of the girl, collected the ashes, and preserved them in a pot. Daily he would decorate the pot with flowers, etc., and sit near it meditating on Sambanthar.

The news that Sambanthar was staying at Thiruvotriyur reached the merchant. At once he erected a big pandal from Mylapore to Thiruvotriyur. Followed by Siva bhaktas, Sivanesar began to proceed towards Thiruvotriyur to meet Sambanthar. Meanwhile, Sambanthar was coming towards Mylapore. Sivanesar and Sambanthar met each other on the way. Sambanthar had heard about Sivanesar and his worship of the pot, which contained the ashes of his daughter. He wanted to please Sivanesar by bringing the girl back to life. They reached Mylapore, worshipped the Lord, sang hymns and came out of the temple. Sambanthar then asked Sivanesar to bring forth the pot of ashes. Sambanthar addressed the pot, "Oh Poompavai, the very purpose of human birth in this world is to serve the Lord and His devotees, and to feast the eyes by seeing the festivals of Lord Siva. If this is true, arise in the presence of all. Are you going away without seeing the festival?"

Sambanthar then began singing a pathigam to Lord Siva describing Poompavai's tragedy. As soon as he finished the first stanza, Poompavai got her form! When he finished eight stanzas, she got her life and became a twelve year old girl. When he finished the tenth stanza, she came out of the pot (just like how Maha-Lakshmi comes out of a lotus flower). All were amazed at this miracle. Sivanesar and Poompavai worshipped Sambanthar's feet.

Sivanesar entreated Sambanthar to accept the girl as his wife. Sambanthar, however, explained that the original Poompavai whom Sivanesar had mentally offered to Sambanthar was dead and that the present girl had the relationship of daughter to Sambanthar. Sivanesar had to bow to the wishes of Sambanthar. Sivanesar built an Ashram for his daughter where she spent her days in worship of the Lord and attained Him.

After visiting a number of shrines, Sambanthar returned to Sirkali. He had reached his sixteenth year. His father wanted to get him married. Sambanthar argued that it was necessary for him to engage himself in the

performance of Vedic rites. Sivapada Hridayar selected the daughter of Nambandar Nambi of Nallur Perumanam, who welcomed the alliance. The wedding was to take place at Nallur Perumanam. On the appointed day, Sambanthar took leave of Thoniappar and reached Nallur Perumanam. Sambanthar went to the temple, worshipped the Lord and got His blessings. Then he went to a Mutt nearby. The bride's party came there to receive Sambanthar. Sambanthar, in his wedding dress, took his seat in the pearl palanquin. People accompanied him singing, "Long Live Sambanthar."

Sambanthar came to the place where the wedding was to take place.

Sambanthar holding his wife's hand, went round the sacrificial fire (the manifestation of the Lord). Accompanied by the other Siva devotees, the couple went into the temple and worshipped Siva with total self-surrender. Sambanthar sang a pathigam praying for liberation. The Lord granted his wish and said, "Oh Sambanthar, you, your wife, and all those who witnessed your marriage will merge in the Siva Jyoti and come to me."

At once, an effulgent light emerged from the Lord. Before merging in that Light, Sambanthar sang a pathigam known as the Panchakshara Pathigam. Then Sambandar and all those who were present, including Thiru-Nilakantar, Muruga Nayanar, and Thiru-Nilakantha Yalpannar Nayanar, merged in the Light of Siva.



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