

= Nandanar =

Nandanar (also spelt as Nantanar) , also known as Tirunalaippovar (Thirunaalaippovar) and Tiru Nalai Povar Nayanar , was a Nayanar saint , who is venerated in the Hindu sect of Shaivism . He is the only Dalit (" untouchable ") saint in the Nayanars . He is generally counted as the eighteenth in the list of 63 Nayanars . Like the other Nayanars , he was a devout devotee of the god Shiva .

The tale of Nandanar is retold numerous times in folk tales , folk music , plays , films and literature in Tamil society . While Nandanar is included in Nayanar list since the 8th century CE , the 12th century CE Periya Puranam gives a full hagiographical account of his life . The tale focuses on two miracles attributed to him . In Sivalokanathar Temple , Tirupunkur ; his prayers are said to have moved a giant stone bull , which still appears in the moved position in the temple . Nandanar is said to have ritually purified himself by fire at Thillai Nataraja Temple , Chidambaram . Nandar 's tale features in temple lore and religious literature related to both these temples . Gopalakrishna Bharati 's 19th century retelling of the saint 's life remains the basis of many later retellings . It expands the original narrative adding elements of oppression of the Dalit saint by higher castes . While higher caste retellings of the tale focus on the saint 's observance of caste norms , Dalits emphasize his exploitation and superior religiosity .

Apart from collective worship Nandanar enjoys being part of the Nayanars in Shiva temples of Tamil Nadu , shrines depicted to Nandanar exist in both the sites of his miracles . The saint also became an icon of protest in Dalit rights movements .

= = Accounts of life = =

One of the most prominent Nayanars , Sundarar (8th century) is the first to name Nandanar (called Tirunalaipovar) in literature , however Tirunalaipovar (' he who will go tomorrow ') relates to the tale of Nandanar longing to visit Chidambaram ; no details of his life are revealed . In the eleventh century , Nambiyandar Nambi devotes a stanza to Nandanar in his Tiruttondar Tiruvandhadhi while recalling the lives of the Nayanars . Tirunalaipovar is described as a Pulayar (Pulaiya , Pulai) who lived in Adanur . He is said to have visited Thillai Nataraja Temple , Chidambaram of his patron god Shiva " by God 's grace " and " three thousand Brahmins (priests) of Chidambaram saluted him . "

The earliest full (and primary religious) account of Nandanar 's life is found in the Tamil Periya Puranam by Sekkizhar (12th century) , which is a hagiography of the 63 Nayanars , but it was the Nandanar Charitram by the Tamil poet Gopalakrishna Bharati (1810 ? 1896) brought Nandanar 's tale to public attention . The Nandanar Charitram (printed in 1861) , the magnum opus of Bharati , added new elements to Sekkizhar 's tale . Though it is unknown when he lived exactly , generally he is dated to 7th or 8th century CE .

= = = The Periya Puranam = = =

The Periya Puranam narrates that Nandanar belonged to Adanur (Adanoor) in the Chola kingdom . Presently , Adanur is located in Thanjavur district , in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu . He was born in the Pulaiya caste , who were regarded " untouchables " (see Dalits) . They were agricultural labourers and singers . Another description considers Nandanar from the Dalit caste of Paraiyar , who served as labourers and were drummers as per the caste code .

Nandanar was born in poverty , in Pulaippadi , the Pulai slums of Adanur . He was a staunch devotee of the god Shiva , the patron god of Shaivism . He was a leather maker , who crafted drums and other musical instruments . He also served as a village servant , a watchman , a labourer as well as the " town crier " , who used to beat the drums . In Nandanar 's times , Dalits were not allowed to enter Hindu temples . So , Nandanar would stand outside a Shiva temple and sing the praises of Shiva and dance . However , he harboured a strong urge to pay his respects to the icon of Shiva at Sivalokanathar Temple , Tirupunkur . He stood outside the temple , but a huge stone Nandi (the bull mount of Shiva , whose sculpture is generally seen in Shiva temples , facing Shiva

in the garbhagriha - sanctum sanatorium) blocked his path of vision . The compassionate Shiva ordered Nandi to move a little to side and the bull complied , allowing the Nayanar to see the central icon of Shiva , unobstructed . Nandanar cleaned up the surroundings of the temple and dug a pond (which serves as the temple tank) in honour of Shiva . He circumambulated the shrine and returned to Adanur .

Nandanar visited many temples of Shiva and served the god . Once , he longed to visit the Thillai Nataraja Temple of Chidambaram , which enshrines Shiva as Nataraja , the Lord of Dance . He used to say everyday that he will go the next day to Chidambaram , but never actually dared to step in the holy town , where he was prohibited entry . Thus , he came to be known as " Tiru @-@ Nalai @-@ povar " , ' he who will go tomorrow ' . Finally , Nandanar reached the boundary of Chidambaram , but feared to set foot in the town . He saw the smoke of fire sacrifices and heard the chants of the Vedic scriptures . Thinking about how he can see Nataraja 's dancing icon , the Nayanar circumambulated the town numerous times and finally succumbed to fatigue and slept . Shiva appeared in his dream and told Nandanar to enter the temple through a holy fire . The god also informed the Brahmin priests of Chidambaram to prepare a pyre . Next day , the Brahmins approached Nandanar as per the divine order .

Nandanar entered the holy fire chanting the name of Shiva and reappeared in a new purified form . He looked like a Brahmin sage , wearing matted hair (characteristic of a Shaiva) and the sacred thread worn by Brahmins across his chest . His body was smeared with sacred ash . The gods showered flowers on the Nayanar from heaven and the Brahmins cheered . With the Brahmins , Nandanar went in the garbhagriha and saw Nataraja . The Nayanar disappeared in the image of Nataraja and became one with Shiva .

The Periya Puranam version is interpreted as a Brahmanical narrative , where a particular Dalit is granted salvation by transforming into a Brahmin ; the superiority of the Brahmins is reinforced and the legitimacy of the ban of Dalits is not challenged .

P.Sampath , president of the Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front (TNUEF) and an office @-@ bearer politician from the Tamil Nadu unit of Communist Party of India (Marxist) (known as CPI (M)) , calls the Chidambaram fire @-@ trail as Brahmin propaganda to conceal the truth that Nandanar was burnt at the stake .

= = = The Nandanar Charitam = = =

Bharati was an ardent devotee of Shiva and wrote three operas in honour of various Nayanar saints . Though Bharati was himself an upper caste Brahmin , he was a crusader for the rights of the Dalits . While Sekkizhar exalts Nandanar 's devotion to Shiva , Bharati presents the grim reality of ostracization that the Nayanar suffered . Bharati 's Nandanar is " not a rebel , but only a protester " . The Nandanar Charitam focuses on the atrocities that Nandanar and Dalits as a whole had to suffer at the hands of upper castes . The opera Nandanar Charitam was embedded with the social message that Shiva grants emancipation irrespective of caste .

The play starts with the term " May I come " , a warning to higher @-@ caste people that Dalits had to cry out before entering any street , so as to not pollute the higher caste members . The Nayanar first clashes with his own Dalit brethren . They oppose his devotion for the Lord of Chidambaram , whom they call a Brahmin god . The Dalit elders ? headed by Pariyakilavan ? define his duties as a pariah and advise him to not confront caste rules . They tell him to worship the folk deities of the pariah , instead of Shiva , the god of Brahmanical Hinduism . The Dalits also feel that Nandanar needs to abide by the social norms and give up his taboo idea of entering a temple .

A villainous Brahmin landlord Vetiyar (Vedyar) appears in Bharati 's tale . He torments his bonded labourer Nandanar and chastises him repeatedly for trying to go beyond caste norms . Vetiyar sees Nandanar 's bhakti and desire to enter a temple " not only as undesirable and irreligious , but also as a serious threat to his social status . " Vetiyar refuses to grant him permission to Chidambaram and even resorts to violence . After much persuasion , the Brahmin relents on the condition that the saint do an impossible task of cultivating and harvesting the field in one night . Aided by Shiva 's attendant ganas , the saint completes the task . The Brahmin realizes the piety of the Nayanar ,

apologizes to him and lets him go .

Bharati retained the final confrontation with the Brahmins of Chidambaram and his ritual purification by fire . Bharati concludes in a poem saying that " it is said in the epics that the Lord worshipped by Gopalakrishna granted salvation even to Untouchables ! "

= = = Variants = = =

In stories of higher caste Hindus (especially Brahmins) , Nandanar is a Brahmin or God himself somehow trapped in the body of an untouchable and whose true form is revealed by the fire trial . Other tales focus on his strict adherence to caste norms , his obedience of his Brahmin master and his refusal to enter the holy temple as an untouchable .

The Dalits strongly believe in his piety and portray Brahmins as the root cause of all the misery of the Nayanar . Nandanar fits in the Dalit narrative that proves that their religiosity is on par or superior to the higher castes . They say that Nandanar was ' swallowed by God ' . The sashes round Nataraja 's waist are interpreted as the legs of the saint , who merged into the god .

The temple lore of Tirupunkur narrates that Shiva instructed his son Ganesha to aid Nandanar in digging the temple tank named Nandanar tirtha , after the saint . Another variant tells that Ganesha dug up the tank in the night so that Nandanar can bathe in its sacred waters before seeing Shiva in the temple .

In the early half of the 20th century , the novel Nandan , by A. Gopalasami Iyengar and G. Aravamudha Iyengar , includes reformist Brahmin characters that argue Nandan 's case against their peers . Nandan also echoes the reformist ideas of Hindu spiritual leaders like Ramanuja and Vivekananda , and progressive upper @-@ caste leaders .

The short story Puthiya Nandan by Pudhumaipithan (1906 @-@ 1948) places the classical tale of the Nayanar in a contemporary setting . While retelling Nandan 's ancient tale , it also alludes to the Dalit rights movements of Mahatma Gandhi and Periyar E. V. Ramasamy (see Self @-@ Respect Movement) .

Indira Parthasarathy 's Nandan Kathai (1978) builds the tale of Nandanar (referred in the work as Nandan) further , introducing two non @-@ Brahmin upper caste landholders , who are as ruthless as Bharati 's VEDIYAR . Nandanar is portrayed as a lover of art , rather than God . He wants to see the cosmic dance of Nataraja . A Devadasi called Abhirami also appears ; no significant female characters are found in earlier narratives . Indira is blunt in reprimanding the Dalits for not understanding Nandanar . Nandan Kathai is a quest for liberation of Dalits and women alike . Unlike earlier narratives , Indira 's tale is devoid of miracles and is a story of how Nandanar falls prey to a conspiracy . The VEDIYAR @-@ priest , the VEDIYAR @-@ landlord and the two non @-@ Brahmin upper caste landholders , hatch a plot to end Nandan . They make Nandanar believe that God harvested crop from the field , an allusion to the miracle of VEDIYAR 's impossible task in Bharati 's work . Then , they persuade him to organize a dance contest between Bharatnatyam , the high @-@ caste elites ' dance and the folk dance of the Dalits . Finally , in the climax , Nandanar agrees to undergo a fire @-@ trial , reassured by the earlier miracle , but he and Abhirami burn in the flames . The upper castes succeed in sending a warning to Dalits how trespassers of the caste code , longing for salvation , would be punished .

= = Celebration in Hindu religion = =

Nandanar is specially worshipped in the Tamil month of Purattasi , when the moon enters the Rohini nakshatra (lunar mansion) . He is depicted with a shaved head , folded hands (see Anjali mudra) with a kamandalu and a danda (staff) , like a seer . He receives collective worship as part of the 63 Nayanars . Their icons and brief accounts of his deeds are found in many Shiva temples in Tamil Nadu . Their images are taken out in procession in festivals .

A water tank in Chidambaram is considered sacred as it is believed to be the site of Nandanar 's fire @-@ purification . A " recently built " (as mentioned in the 1992 book) small shrine dedicated to the Nayanar , exists in south @-@ west part of the town , whose name means ' Nandanar has

become the temple ' . A sculpture of Nandanar as a singer is found in the Chidambaram temple , besides another in Airavatesvara Temple of Darasuram (12th century) depicting him in the trail by fire .

Sundarar venerates Nandanar in the Tiruthonda Thogai , a hymn to Nayanar saints , calling him " Nalaippovan " , the " holy pilgrim " who will go tomorrow . An earlier hymn to Shiva praises the god who is served by Nalaippovan . The devotional poet Tyagaraja (1767 ? 1847) also narrates the tale of Nandanar in his poems .

Devotional works dedicated to Nataraja of the Chidambaram temple narrate Nandanar 's tale . Umapathi Sivacharya 's Kunchitangristava (early fourteenth century) mentions Nandan 's legend . While another Sanskrit work Hemasabhanatha Mahatmya devotes its ninth chapter to the Nayanar . The Sthala Purana of the Nataraja temple called Chidambara Mahatmya praises the god as served by Nandan .

The Nandi in Sivalokanathar Temple , Tirupunkur is seen placed off centre as a testimony of Nandanar 's devotion and the miracle . A stone image of the saint is worshipped in the temple . The Dvarapalas (gate @-@ keeper sculptures) are depicted with his heads leaning downwards , said to be in honour of Nandanar . In 1959 , a shrine was created outside the Shiva temple , from where the stone image of Nandanar looks eternally at Shiva . Nandanar is depicted with his hands joined above his head , praying to Shiva . Scenes of Bharati 's opera and the local legend of Nandanar and Ganesha digging the temple tank are seen on the shrine .

= = Remembrance in society = =

Nandanar 's influence was and remains limited primarily to the Tamil @-@ speaking areas . The Christian missionary Rev. A. C. Clayton ? who was " sympathetic " to the Dalit cause ? used Nandanar 's narrative (retold as The Legend of Nandan) to suggest that bhakti (devotion) ? which saw no distinction of class or caste ? was the superior means to salvation than the jnana @-@ marga (salvation by knowledge) propagated by the Brahmins and also challenged the authority of the Brahmin orthodoxy .

Nandanar became " the hero of tales of caste protest " . The " Adi Dravida " (Dalit) leaders of the Self @-@ Respect Movement used Nandanar as an exemplar to prove that social superiority originates not from birth , but the qualities and deeds of people . In 2010 , Cadres of the Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front (TNUEF) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) under the leadership of P. Samath , protested to bring down the wall on the South Gate of the Chidambaram temple , which was ? as per a tale ? built as Nandanar entered from the gate . The walled gate was the symbol of the oppression of the Dalit caste and caste discrimination , as per the protesters who demanded its demolition . The state government ? which governs the temple currently ? contented that the veracity of Nandanar 's tale and its connection to the walled Gate , can not be ascertained and thus , refused the protesters ' demands . Nandanar " continues to inspire them (Dalits) as a symbol of resistance and a hope of a better future " . However , young Dalits identify with recent Dalit leaders like B. R. Ambedkar and are unaware or uninterested in the " obedient Nandanar " . Ambedkar , himself had dedicated his book The Untouchables , to three Dalit saints , including Nandanar .

In speech in Chidambaram , Mahatma Gandhi called Nandanar , a true practitioner of Satyagraha , a means of Nonviolent resistance . Gandhi said : " Nanda broke every barrier and won his way to freedom , not by brag , not by bluster , but by the purest form of self @-@ suffering ... he shamed them [his persecutors] into doing justice by his lofty prayer , by the purity of his character , ... he compelled God Himself to descend and made Him open the eyes of his persecutors " .

Nandanar 's tale is retold numerous times through folk tales , plays , literature and art forms like Villu Paatu and " musical discourses " . A number of Tamil films , all titled Nandanar , recall Nandanar 's tale following Bharati 's version . Besides a silent film in 1923 , another silent film Nandanar , subtitled The Elevation of the Downtrodden , directed by P. K. Raja Sandow , in 1930 . The first talkie film on Nandanar was made in 1931 . The 1935 film featured K. B. Sundarambal , who also performed on stage as the Nayanar numerous times . The 1942 film , starring Dandapani

Desikar in the lead , courted controversy for its overly Brahmin overtones and was banned in Kolar Gold Fields after protests by Dalits , however the ban was lifted after Desikar met and personally apologized to the Dalits for being part of the climax , which featured the fire @-@ purification . Another film on Nandanar was released in 1943 . Sundaram Balachander acted in the 1948 film . N. S. Krishnan presented the story as a " narrative art form " , while A. Padmanabhan released a small booklet on the saint 's life for children . C. T. Indra says that Nandanar was made immoral in legend and remembered over the years " as a strategy of public management of anxiety In the Essentialist way , Nandan 's devotion was cited down the ages to play down the social inequities and play up his spiritual qualifications . "