



## THIRUPPUGAZH –WORSHIP THROUGH CHANDAM-

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### **Abstract**

Hindu culture at its core is very much religious and spiritual. So the Hindu traditional music is also spiritual, in its own way. Playing classical music is like meditation: it is not only meant to entertain, but to take us to a higher domain of consciousness. The very structure of Indian classical music is spiritual. It lifts the spirit; it is for the soul. Indian music can also be a medium to self-realization. History of Tamil *Thevara Mum moorthikal* shows us the power of the worship through music. Pray the load by sung *Thevaara Thirumuraikal* got the spring of the divine blessings. Especially the *Thiruppugazh* hymns presented by *Arunagirinaathar* are that it is based entirely on a metrical pattern which varies from song to song. This pattern is called as 'Chandam' and *Arunagirinathar* came to be called as *the 'Chanda Paavala Peruman'*, the one well versed in candam poetry. The Hindu intellectuals gave a special place for the *Thiruppugazh* according to the specialty of musical aspects. *Thiruppugazh* is the best hymns for the worship through music. Hence, this article deals with the power of the musical worship and the special musical aspects of *Thiruppugazh*.

**Key words:** *Thiruppugazh, Arunagirinaathar , Carnatic Music, Chandam, Naama sangeerthana*

### **Introduction**

Music is an essential tool to enjoy the worship experience. Hindus believe that the music creates the senses and spiritual vibrations which enhance devotion. Repetition of spiritual words and chanting helps the society to connect with spiritual experience.



‘Sangeet’ in Indian music is considered to have mythological roots and is associated with the heavenly singers called as ‘*Gandharvas*’. The first recipient of this celestial art form was the ancient *Shri Narada*. The ancient musical texts such as *Sama Veda* which consist melodies for recitation of hymns during the ritual sacrifice. Music was considered as means of moral and spiritual redemption rather than mere entertainment from very early days. Indeed, the process of learning to play music closely resembles traditional spiritual disciplines. Today music is displayed as an evident in worship through Bhajan (hymns) and kirtan (the musical chanting of mantras).

The Saiva Siddantam deals about Lord Siva as the ultimate truth, the source of all beings and the ultimate end of liberation. Saint *Arunagirinathar* did not look lord Muruga from lord Siva separately. He sees Muruga in Siva. *Arunagirinathar* refers to Muruga as symbolizing Siva in many of his songs. In his song - ‘*Akalvinai*’, *Arunagirinathar* views Siva manifesting all over *Palani* (Sivamayamaai Nin Pazhani Thanil). In “*Velaikkaran Vakuppu*”, he refers Muruga as ‘*Mugamayakkaran*’, the magician who changes face. He was indicating that the five-faced Siva has taken the form of six-faced Muruga.

## **Thiruppugazh**

*Thiru-Pugazh* means divine praise. The term - *Thiruppugazh* is the name given to the songs composed by Saint *Arunagirinathar*. He was from *Thiruvannamalai* in 15<sup>th</sup> century and his child name was *Arunachala*, it’s around the 15th century. This is one of the *Pancalinga Kshetras* where the temple of the *Jyotir Linga* is situated. Many mystic Saints like *Seshadri Swamigal*, *Ramana Maharishi*, *Yogi Ramsurat Kumar* and many others attracted by this *Kshetra*.

*Arunagirinathar* is a fortunate person as he got the divine blessing from Muruga to compose the hymns. Even though very little documentary evidence is available about his early



life and details received were collected from hearsay. He missed his parents at an early age and was lived with his sister. He was an expert in Tamil and Sanskrit. One version says that, driven by an urge for carnal pleasures, he led a life of sin. He was decided to end his life by falling from the temple tower of *Thiruvannamalai*, after having realized his mistake. Suddenly someone had appeared and rescued him. “How can you end your life?, you have been assigned for an important job of God,” the rescuer said. “*Thiruppugazh*’, as your song will be known, will be the Mantra to save the lives of many people. Go and compose songs like pearls (*muththu*) of devotion and wisdom.” Arunagirinathar felt, he heard the divine command of Lord Muruga conveyed through this person. Suddenly he realised, changed his mind as a new person and composed his first song, “*Muththai tharu pathi thiru nagai...* ” The poet never stumbled. Songs flowed like a perennial river in full slate.

*Arunagirinathar* set out on his holy mission, after receiving the new direction. He travelled the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu, beginning from *Vayaloor*. He visited the six most sacred places of Lord *Muruga* - *Thirupparankundram*, *Thiruchendur*, *Palani*, *Swamimalai*, *Thiruththani* and *Pazhamudhir Cholai*. He visited more than 216 holy shrines of *Muruga*, *Siva* and other deities and started composing song on the significance of each. He was composed over 16,000 songs covering all aspects of life and the eternal reality as manifested in the Self. So far only 1,365 songs have been traced. The Lord of *Swamimalai* (*Gnana Pandithar*) who is the fountainhead of all knowledge, appeared to have showered his blessings on *Arunagirinathar* as he composed beautiful devotional verses of knowledge and devotion.

*Thiruppugazh* is a set of songs that stimulates the music of devotion in one’s heart and spiritual awakening in the heart. It is an invaluable treasure; a seeker of salvation can draw inspiration from. Apart from songs on *Muruga*, *Thiruppugazh* deals with 64 episodes of Lord



Siva (*Thiruvilayadalgal*) and the power of Sakthi (Parvathi). References have also been made on the *Ramayana* and the *Bhaagavatham*. While the first half of all songs deal with the various ills plaguing mankind, the second half speaks of the mercy of the Lord, begging him to provide the much needed healing touch. It is also believed that *Thiruppugazh* reflects the message of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. The song - “*Naveru Pamanatha*” says that by adhering to the 28 doctrines (*Aagamas*) contained in the four *Vedas*, one attains a stage where his identity as an individual merges with God. The eternal wisdom contained in the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* is expressed in an understandable and musical way in *Thiruppugazh*, so that everyone could reap the rich fruits of knowledge available from it.

Through *Kandhar Alangaaram*, the saint offered his favourite deity, not a garland of flowers (*Poomalai*), but a garland of songs (*Paamalai*). It describes the different manifestations of Muruga in each temple and how He showers mercy on the devotees. In *Kandhar Anuboothi*, which is a subjective narration, the author spells out his own divine experience of how the Lord extended his helping hand. *Vel*, the weapon of Muruga, represents the sharpness of intellect, known as *Gnana Vel*, it is believed to radiate the light of knowledge. Peacock is the vehicle (*Vahanam*) that adds lustre and colour to his overall appearance. *Kandhar Andhaathi* is a hymn consisting of 100 stanzas of four lines each, the first word of all four lines starting with the same word yet each carrying a different meaning. As *Arjuna* is known for his talent in archery, *Arunagirinathar* is known for his power of vocabulary (*Villukku Vijayan, Vakkukku Arunagiri*). The songs, formed in rhythm, are so composed that they can be set to music in different ‘raga’. As *Thiruppugazh* also lends itself to various talas, it is referred to as “*Thalamaligai*”.

### **Special features of Thiruppugazh**

The speciality of the *Thiruppugazh* hymns is that it is based entirely on a metrical pattern



which varies from song to song. This pattern is called as '*Chandakkuzhippu*' and *Arunagirinathar* came to be called as the '*Chanda Paavala Peruman*', the one well versed in *chandam* poetry. The *candakkuzhippu* for '*Muttaitaru*' is,

*'tat tat tana*

*tat tat tana tana tat*

*tat tana tat tat tana*

*tana tat tat tana tat*

*tat tana tana*

*Tanatāna.'*

Normally in our songs, we have extended vowel syllables, but here each *chanda* syllable has a corresponding letter. After a stanza we have what is called a "*Tongal*" known to be the *visranti pada*. This means – 'that which is hanging like a pendant in a chain'. The *tongal* has a separate existence in the *Thiruppugazh* and also has a different *chandam* varying from the main song.

There are many varieties of *Tongal* seen in the various hymns.

**Tana Taana – perumale;**

**tana tana taanaa – varu perumaale;**

**tanda taana tananaa – cendil mevu guhane;**

**Tanda taana - tambiraane,**

**Tana - vele,**

**Tanana Taana nana- ilayanayakane.**



Normally all the songs end with the *tongal* 'perumaale', which is said to be the *mudra* of *Arunagirinathar*. *Arunagirinathar*'s inspiration to compose such *chandam* hymns comes from Saint *Thirugnana Sambandar* who belongs to the 7<sup>th</sup> century AC. He reverentially called him as his *Aandavar* (Lord) and mentions himself to be his *Adimai* or *Slave*. *Arunagirinathar* prays to the Lord to enable him to sing like *Sambandar*.

There is an example of a song of *Sambandar* with almost the identical words, *Arunagirinathar* has composed a *Thiruppugazh*. *Sambandar*'s *Thevaaram* starts as

*nirāmaya parāpara*  
*purātana tanātana tanātana*  
*tanātana*

This has been fully expanded by *Arunagirinathar* with the *tongal* as *tanta*

*nirāmaya purātana parāpara*

*varāmrda*

*nirākula cirātika prapaiyāgi*

*nirāca śivarāja varājargal parāviya*

*nirāyuda purāriya - sudanvēda*

*surālaya darātala carācara prānigal*

*corūpa mivarādiyai - kuryāmē*

*durālpugazh parādina karāvula parāmuga*

*durōkarai darācaiur - adaivēnō*

But lyrical beauty and poetic elegance alone do not make *Arunagirinathar*'s compositions great. *Thiruppugazh* is a treatise on truthful and virtuous life. While the forms of composition are soul stirring, the contents are inspiring and worth contemplating upon. The song: "*Madhiyal*



*Vithagan Aki, Manadhal Uthaman Aki*” shows how one can shape himself or herself as a full-fledged personality combining the qualities of head and heart. Another song explains how one can steer his life to its correct destination (*Pakar Tharu Kuramagal Tharuvamai Vanithayum Irupudai Uravaru Perumale*). Some of his songs are addressed to the Lord with a prayer to provide solace and salvation, while some others are addressed to fellow beings to come out of their world of illusion and seek the way to real and lasting happiness.

The best path that leads to ultimate salvation and puts an end to this cycle of birth and death is one of knowledge - *Gnana Marga*. One who adopts this path is redeemed from this material world. At *Thiruaavinangudi*, the saint composed the song: “*Sivanar Manam Kulira, Upadesa Manthram Iru Sevi Meethilum pakar sei, Gurunatha*” (Oh! Muruga, let the knowledge you imparted to the pleased Lord Siva be given to my ears too). The song further seeks the bliss of knowledge that alone paves the way for liberation (“*Arul Gnana Inban Athu, Purivaye*”). *Arunagirinathar* believed that *Bhakti Marga*, the path of devotion, is fundamental and the path of *Jnana* (knowledge) is a corollary that follows the path of devotion. (*Bakthiyal Yam Unnai, Pala Kalum, Patriye Maa Thiruppugazh Paadi*.” “For long I have been singing your glory with devotion, Oh God, grant salvation to this life.” He stressed the importance of *Nama Sangeerthanam* in *Kandar Anupoothi* thus: “*Paadum Paniyei Paniyaa Arulvai*.” (Grant me a life by which I can devote my entire life for singing your praise).

There are prayers meant to fulfil the different aspirations of people. The song: “*Viral Maran Aindhu Malar Vali Sindha*” is ideal for removing the marriage obstacle, “*Jegamayai*” for the growth of baby and mother during pregnancy and “*Irumalum Roga*” for health. The song that will shower wealth and prosperity is “*Charana Kamalalayathai Arai Nimisha*”. The “*Ainkaranai Oththa Manam*” gives a happy and harmonious life, “*Sinathavar Mudikkum*” combats miseries



caused by foes and “*Antarpathi Kudiyera*” helps one to own a house. While the hymn “*Nal En Seiyum*” is a safeguard from adverse planetary influence, the song “*Iravaamal Piravaamal*” helps to get the blessings of guru or teacher. The list goes on endlessly. In short, the poet saw Lord *Muruga* in different roles, that of a handsome youth, an intellectual guide, a saviour, a physician and a friend.

Though *Arunagirinathar* lived at a time when the differences between *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism* were prevailing, he believed that all forms are manifestations of one Supreme Being. He found as much joy in singing the glory of *Vishnu* or *Narayana* as that of *Siva* or *Muruga*. He visualised *Muruga* as admiring young *Krishna*’s ‘mischiefs’ like stealing butter (“*Navaneethamum Thirudi*” from the song: “*Sivanar Manam Kulira*”). Besides, *Arunagirinathar* ended almost all his songs by addressing *Muruga* as “*Perumal*”, the word normally used by *Vaishnavites*. The songs of *Thiruppugazh*, so rich in content and so universal in concept, can rightly be acclaimed as great.

It was the learned *Vallimalai Sri Sachidhananda Swamigal* (1870-1950) who initiated the movement of popularising *Thiruppugazh*. In his task he received the blessings of *Sri Seshadri Swamigal*. He dedicated his entire life to his passion of compiling songs, setting them to music and conducting bhajans. Judge T. M. Krishnaswamy Iyer of Madras carried the *Thiruppugazh* message to greater heights by his bhajans. Guruji A. S. Raghavan started a movement for expounding the cause of *Thiruppugazh* through songs. He has been providing an able leadership to a group of devotees called “*Thiruppugazh Anbargal*” spread in different parts of the country. Having selected 475 songs and setting them to music with different “*Raga and Thaala*,” *Thiruppugazh Anbargal* has systematised a formal method of conducting the recital (*Isai Vazhipadu*). A *Thiruppugazh* recital is started with an invocation song on Lord *Vigneswara*,





followed by an obeisance song to the teacher (guru) and conducted with songs of *Aru Padai Veedu*. It is continued with *Kandhar Anuboothi* and hymns in praise of *Vel*, *Mayil* and *Seval* and concluded with the “*Eru Mayil*” number.

*Arunagirinathar* himself has set certain basic requirements to be fulfilled before one sets out to render a *Thiruppugazh* song. A true *Thiruppugazh* devotee should necessarily have a heart full of devotion, love and compassion, a mind devoid of any feelings of lust, ego or anger, and also capable of concentrating on and surrendering before God.

Saint *Arunagirinathar* gave a new orientation to Tamil devotional literature. In contrast to *Valluvar* and *Kambar* who used pure literary Tamil (“*Thooya Ilakkiya Thamizh*”) *Arunagirinathar* has copiously used Sanskrit terms. Because of his unique style of composition, his universal outlook and his masterly analysis of the complex nature of human relations and behaviour, the saint has been variously hailed as a giant among poets, a rare genius and an erudite scholar. Going by the lines of *Thiruppugazh*, one realises that literature and devotion have never been blended so harmoniously before.

## **Conclusion**

Religion, spirituality, and music have long been intertwined with one another. In every religion, it's natural to express faith through song and rhythm. Perhaps even more than other religions, Hinduism is deeply rooted in musical traditions. Devotional songs and mantras are sung in the temples alike, intertwined with daily rituals. Indian classical music as a whole is inspired by spirituality. Worship through the music generates the expression of devotion, reverence and love to the Lord, of keen yearning to be united with him and of spiritual thirsting to hold conscious communion with him. The devotee prays to the Lord for granting him intense devotion. He pines for his benign grace. He constantly remembers his name. He repeats his Mantra. He sings his



praise. He does Kirtana. He hears and recites. He meditates on his form, his nature and his attributes. He visualises the form of the Lord with closed eyes and enjoys supreme peace and bliss

One important way that music in Hinduism is used as a tool of preservation of the religion. The history of Hinduism, the beliefs of Hinduism and the practices of Hinduism can all be passed down in chants. Children should learn and begin to chant stories of their gods even before they know the meaning of the words and sounds. Many parents believe that their children develop a sense of their religion by teaching Hindu children songs about their gods. If you took music out of Hinduism generations and generations might lose a sense of Hindu traditions and beliefs.

According to this, we can worship the god by singing *Thiruppugazh*. *Thiruppugazh* has many proper elements to pray the god by music. *Arunagirinathar* saw the Lord through the stanza of *Thiruppugazh*.

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