

# Nandanar and Lord Shiva

Once upon a time, a long time ago, a poor man named Nandanar lived in a village deep in the jungles of India. Nandanar worked hard all day long tending his master's cattle - feeding them, taking them to the river to drink and guarding them from the tigers and wolves that hid in the shadows in the jungle. He cared for the cattle like they were his children and they were gentle with him - even the bull who was the leader of the herd.

Nandanar was a simple man and was content but for one thing: he had dedicated his life to the service of the great god Lord Shiva but he had never been to his temple in Thiruppunkoor. Day and night, Nandanar would pray to Lord Shiva, thanking him for the blessings bestowed upon him. Nandanar's heart sang when he thought of Lord Shiva.

"Oh, how I wish I could go to Thiruppunkoor and worship Lord Shiva at his temple," Nandanar would sigh. But Nandanar's master would not let him leave.

"Who will look after my cattle?" he would cry. "You must stay here, Nandanar. You cannot go to Lord Shiva's temple in Thiruppunkoor."

Nandanar did not give up. Every day he rose from his thin blanket in his little hut, bathed in the river and prayed to Lord Shiva. Every day he looked after the cattle. And every day he begged his master to let him go to Lord Shiva's temple in Thiruppunkoor.

Finally, Nandanar's master lost his patience. "Every day you beg to go to Lord Shiva's temple in Thiruppunkoor - I am tired of hearing this request! I will make you a deal - if you can plow my 40 acre field in one day, you can leave and go to Lord Shiva's temple in Thiruppunkoor. And if you fail, you cannot go and I never want to hear about it again!"

The next day, Nandanar rose from his thin blanket in his little hut, bathed in the river and prayed to Lord Shiva.

He found the bull and said to him, "Dear Bull, help me complete this task. Help me plow these 40 acres."

The bull stood quietly as Nandanar hitched him to the plow and set to work, never pausing to rest. And by the time the sun set, Nandanar and the bull had plowed the entire 40 acre field.

"Now may I go to Lord Shiva's temple in Thiruppunkoor, master?" asked Nandanar.

The master stood there, staring in shock at the beautifully plowed 40 acre field. He turned his gaze to Nandanar and saw a soft light shining from his eyes. He stepped back a step.