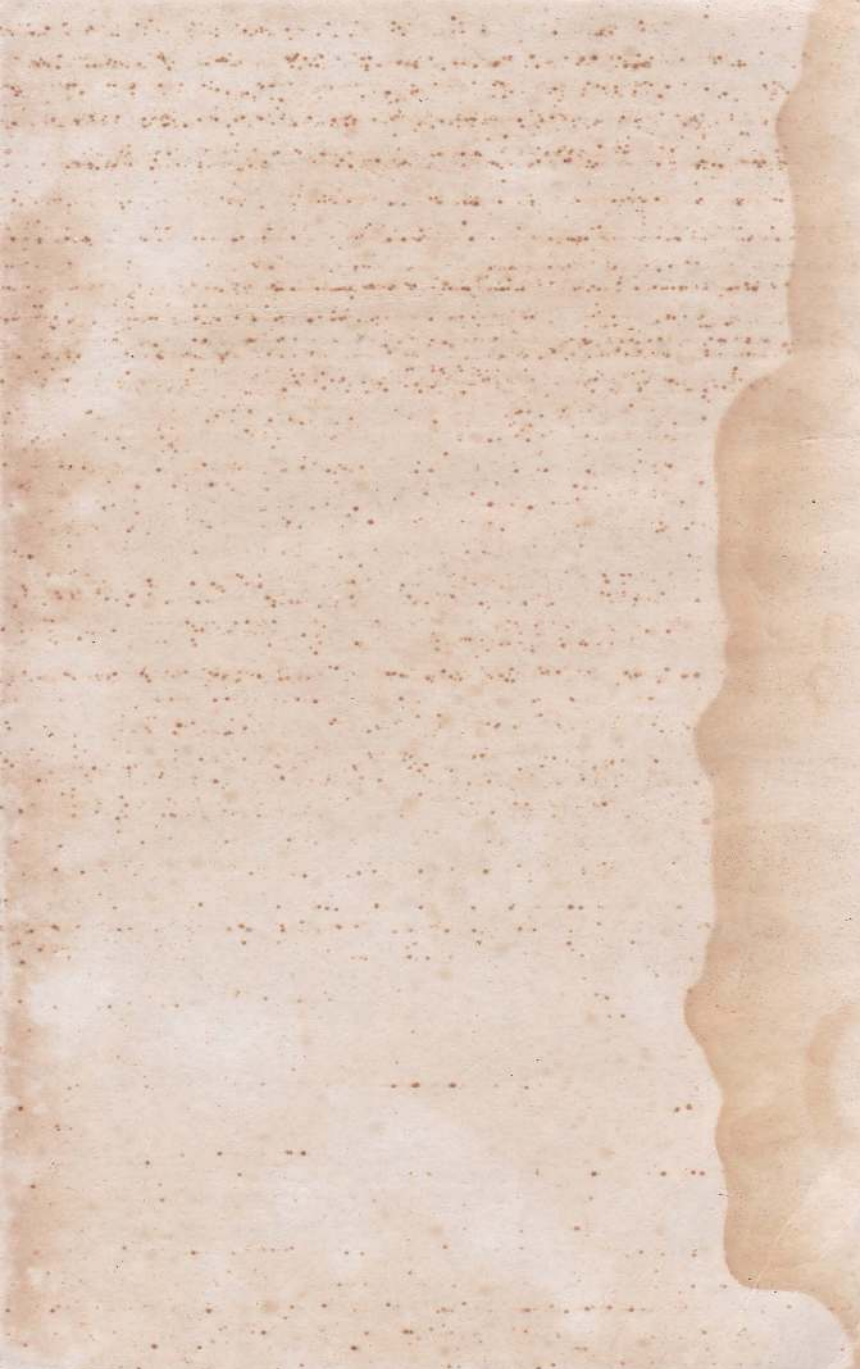


# THE SPIRITUAL TEACHER

[ A research paper read by *Shri M. Gnanapiragasam*,  
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at the Bandaranaike Memorial Hall, on 22-04-82,  
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# THE SPIRITUAL TEACHER

(A Saiva Agamic point of view)

*by*

M. GNANAPIRAGASAM

Religion which is the highest knowledge and the highest wisdom cannot be acquired from books. We may thrust our heads into all the corners of the world, we may explore the Himalayas, the Moon and the Solar systems, we may do the most recent researches in the quantum theory or the second Law of Thermodynamics, we may continue our further research on the proton and the neutron of the physicist, or the unicellular Bacilli of the Biologist, we will not find religion anywhere, until our heart is ready for receiving it and our teacher has come to commune with us in the hitherto -unspoken language of pure consciousness and unblemished love. And when that divinely appointed teacher comes and we serve him with child-like confidence and simplicity, freely opening our heart to his influence, we will see in him the hitherto unknown God manifested. To those of us, who seek God with such a spirit of love and veneration to the spiritual teacher are revealed the most



wonderful things about spiritual realities. All religions of this world are based on this simple religious fact of facts—the spiritual Teacher. This teacher in Hindu tradition is called Jnana Guru. He is the Guru of all Gurus, and in a way the God of all Gods<sup>1</sup> for he is the one who awakens us to a life of religion and love. No man can really see God in his other<sup>2</sup> aspect except through him. We are all aware of the story of an ignorant man who wanted to make an image of God Siva and who after days of hard struggle, manufactured only the image of a monkey. So, whenever we try to think of God in his absolute perfection we invariably meet with the most miserable failure, because we are men, we cannot think of anything higher than man.

Two kinds of men do not worship God as man; the materialist who has no religion and the jivanmukta<sup>3</sup> who has transcended the limits of his human nature. The former does not worship because of his ignorance, the latter because he has realised God in himself according to the vedic formula “Ātmanam atmani paśyēt”<sup>4</sup>.

1. The manifest is more dear to us than the unmanifest
2. Absolute aspect.
3. Liberated but living with the body.
4. Svet 2—15.

Faith in one's Jnana Guru is not easily achieved unless by divine appointment a bond of heavenly love is forged between the Guru and the disciple. This love will swell up and become an unceasing flow, if the disciple discovers that the Guru is equipped not only with unblemished love but also with unblemished character and moral certitude. It is only such Gurus who qualify themselves as 'Upadesa mūrtis' of the Saiva Āgamas. The purer the life of the Guru, the greater his spiritual insight, the most masterly his exposition, the stronger will be his hold on the disciple. It is only by such personal qualities a Guru can create in the minds of his disciples faith in himself and by means of that faith, faith in an unseen God. A Jnana Guru is pre-eminent as a teacher. All his teachings are based on his inner personal experiences about himself and his God. When he speaks, he speaks in a highly divinised tone. It is not that he speaks, but it is the divinity in him that speaks in a voice that is choked in God consciousness, vibrant, fresh and full of truth and full of love. Faith should naturally dawn to any spiritual minded person when he listens to such a voice choked with God consciousness. It is not the outside form or appearance of the Jnana Guru but it is his voice that makes him a true representative of God on earth.



## St. Manikka Vachakar

It is our humble submission to our readers that the entire spiritual transformation of St. Manikka Vachakar from a life of worldliness to a life of Godliness was mainly due to the God intoxicated loving and affectionate voice of his spiritual Guru in whom he saw the abiding presence of the almighty God Siva himself. Thiruvachakam is unsurpassed as a religious work not merely because of its devotional appeal but because of the very fresh, endearing and captivating words used by his Guru in his mood of overwhelming joy and fullness at the sight of his most perfect disciple. In Manikka Vachakar the great master had found an “adhitivra” disciple and that too after a long long incessant search for one. In introducing his newly found disciple, to the great assembly of his devotees he characterises him as his great friend<sup>1</sup> and great devotee.<sup>2</sup> There are pointed though cryptic references to this by the saint himself in his Thiruvachakam. In a mixed mood of dejection and confidence, the saint holds a spiritual dialogue with the Lord and says ‘It

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1. Kuyil Pattu-10—‘எந்தமராம் இவன் என்று’—Thiruvachagam.

2. Atisayappattu-2 — ‘என்னடியானென்று’ — Thiruvachagam

is you who went about searching for me and now it is your paramount duty to uphold my faith in you". Finding himself not a deserving disciple to the Lord, in a wrathful mood he questions the Lord, why on earth you selected me as your chosen disciple?<sup>2</sup>. In one of his triumphant moods of intense communion with the Lord the saint says 'you are greater than the greatest of Gods. I am a cur, lower than the lowliest of the low. Yet I have been blessed with a bliss not even dreamt of by any soul on earth'<sup>3</sup>.

Manikka Vachakar was perhaps the only saint who realised from his own experience the truth of the Saiva Agamic doctrine that the Guru is Sivam, and Sivam is the entire universe and beyond. The saint is very emphatic when he says that the endless one condescended to come as a human being to cast his gracious glance on him a cur, a lowliest of the low.<sup>4</sup> His experience is so sacred,

1. Vāzhā Pattu-3—'தேடிநீ ஆண்டாய்; உணர்த்துவது உனக்கு எனக்குறுதி'—Thiruvachakam.
2. (Settilāppattu-4 (இங்கு எனை எற்றினுக் காண்டாய்)?)
3. Tiruvenpa-8 'யாவார்க்கும் மேலாம் அளவிலாச் சீருடையான், யாவார்க்கும் கீழாமடியேனை'
4. Tiru Satakam-91 'ஈறிலாத நீ யெளியை யாகி வந்து ஒளிசெய் மானுடமாக நோக்கியும்',



so strange, so wondrous and so direct that it lays him down and becomes his very being. To us, it is the bliss of his experience that constitutes the most conclusive proof of the reality of a God above. In a sense he is the greatest of all our spiritual masters and he occupies the most prominent place in the renaissance of Saivaism during one of its most critical periods.

During the present phase of world history there are Bhaktas of various grades, there are siddha purusas, there are philosophers and tatva-jnanis but great teachers of spiritual truths are few indeed. Although they are rarely found, they are found in remote places undiscovered by others. They shun publicity and they perform worldly duties like any other worldly man. Ripe souls are drawn to them and learn of them in secret, the way to God realisation.

### **Pati Pasu Pasam**

Mere study of the principles relating to Pati Pasu and Pasam will not and cannot secure to the student true knowledge of God. What he reads in books or hears from others is apara Jñānam or second hand or Hearsay knowledge. What is needed is Para Jñānam or personal direct knowledge of God. This Para Jñānam is called Pati Jñānam in Saiva Siddhanta terminology.



## Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan

Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan of Sri Lanka was a Pati-Jnani par excellence. He was an ardent votary of the Āgamas. He was a builder of temples strictly following the rules laid down in the Āgamas. He was a firm believer in the doctrine of the spiritual Guru. Judged by modern norms of civilised life we may not be able to accept him as a large being. But he had a spiritual empire of his own far removed from this world of commotions and misunderstandings. He was one of those Rishis who had crossed the line of bondage and emerged into the border regions of freedom. He was an *adhyāṣrami*,<sup>1</sup> a controller of the senses, a ruler of his mind and intellect, a master of Panchasīla vidyā and a fountain of love. His mind was a steady flame unruffled and pleasing. It was a beauty of calm and peace and was completely freed from wrong feelings, uneasy dispositions and troubling thoughts. It was always open and receptive to divine forces and divine graces rushing from all sides. We do not know anything definitely about the spiritual station from which he functioned. But we know that he was not a child of *prakṛiti māyā*.<sup>2</sup> His station was much

1. He who has transcended the normal 4 Āśramas.

2. Low *aśuddha māya*

beyond the prakriti māstakam.<sup>1</sup> He was not just one of those freed puruṣas of Sankhya thought.

Like Vigjnana Bhikshu of ancient seṣhwara sankhya philosophy<sup>2</sup>, he was a guru with a religious mission to redeem qualified souls from the clutches of prakriti māyā. A few hours every day he would go into solitude and have communion with his God in truth and in love, in Jnanam and in Kriyai. To him, Truth, Love, Jnanam, Kriyai—all these were inseparable from each other. As a worldly man, he was wedded to a Dharmic Worldly life.<sup>3</sup> He was exemplary both in the art of living and in the art of withdrawing. In that sense, he was a highly integrated being. From his early childhood he was a true and honest worshipper of Sada-Siva—i. e. Siva in his Rupa and arupa aspects. All his religious aspirations and attainments could be summed up by his most favourite sloka in Sanskrit. The sloka runs as follows:—

Sarvendriya gunabhaṣam  
Sarvendriya vivarjitam |  
Sar vasya prabhum iṣanam  
Sar vasya śaranam suhrit ||

- 
1. Head or top
  2. Theistic Sankhya
  3. Prayritti Marga

Separate from the mind and separate from the senses, yet reflecting the qualities of all of them, he was the Lord of all, the ruler of all, the refuge of all and the friend of all.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan had spiritual powers of a high order. In his National, Educational, Official and Family duties his thoughts and prayers were amazingly fruitful for God was always on his side. He was a prince of paropakaram<sup>2</sup> and a true representative of Pati on earth. Hon'ble D. S. Senanayake the first Prime Minister of Sri Lanka after the British period in one of his elated religious moods said that Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan was the greatest Ceylonese of all times.<sup>3</sup> This statement of the Prime Minister may be true or may not be true. But we cannot deny the fact that Sir Ponnampalam was a unique spiritual phenomenon in the entire history of Sri Lanka. It is said that his spiritual transformation was effected by a spiritual guru who came to Sri Lanka in search of him from Tanjore in South India.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Svet—3 CH

2. His Endowments to Education and religion (Parameswara & Ramanathan Trusts' ordinances)

3. Life of Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan; Vaithilingam, Introduction.

4. Arul Parananda Swamigal.



## Saiva Agamas

The doctrine of the spiritual Guru is the most cardinal doctrine of the Saiva Agamas. The Jnanis who belonged to this school of philosophy were all realists in their outlook. They give a long list of Spiritual Gurus all stationed in the various realms of pure consciousness (Suddha Maya). They deal about Suddha Vidyaswaras (liberated beings, more energetic than emotional) and maheswaras (liberated beings more emotional than energetic). They even deal about anu sadasivas (liberated beings balanced in their devotional and energetic aspects). Without a study and research on these tatvas and tatveswaras and their evolution and involution, we do not think that a study of Saiva Siddhanta will ever become complete. Hence our appeal to all students of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy all over the world to make an earnest attempt to study the Saiva Agamas in their original Sanskrit.

Faith in the first Spiritual Guru is itself not enough. Faith in the Supreme God is the ultimate ideal and it should be in its full dimensions embracing the entire existence in its totality. The first Spiritual Guru, a 'Māyatatvadarshi'<sup>1</sup> and a sankhyan in out-

1. Seer of all the lower 24 tatvas of the Sankhya philosophy.

look awakens us to a life of religion and also to a life of inner purity. He inculcates in us the true direction in which our introspection and the analysis of the higher tatvas should proceed. In fact he has made us true pilgrims to the higher regions of pure consciousness. He has also helped us to have a 'darshanam' of prakriti māyā and her evolutes and thereby helped us to disestablish ourselves from those tatvas called Karmendriyas, Jnanendriyas, and in a sense even antakaranas.

Higher and nobler than the first Spiritual Jnana Guru is the second guru who is more universal and more powerful in the transmission of his spirituality to his devotees. A mere touch or a mere wish by this Guru makes his devotees saintly at his command with all their karmic vestments and egoistic impulses burnt. He qualifies us to have a 'darshanam' of our Karma and svabhāva gunas and guides us to our final goal of a 'consciousness about the supreme reality of this existence'.....

.....In the Saiva Agamic terminology he is called 'Ananta Deva Nayanār' powerfully seated on the mastakam<sup>1</sup> of 'Suddhasuddha Maya'. To make this point more clear, in a sense he can be compared to Sri Krishna, the

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1. top



Upadesa mūrti of the Bhagavad Gita. Sri Krishna was a Raja Guru who was there seated in a chariot in a mood to commune with Arjuna the dearest of his disciples. The Bhagavad Gita is the most popular Hindu Jnana Śāstra of today. It is the most misunderstood also. The book opens with a problem of duty. It is a spiritual dialogue between two kindred kshatriya souls in a battle-field. The two armies are arrayed on the battle-field. Arjuna gazes at the enemy line, perceives his kinsmen and his great gurus such as Bhishma and Drona, sinks in his chariot and refuses to fight. Sri Krishna exhorts 'Free from attachment to the fruit of works, everlastingly contented, one should do his duty according to his svabhava. That is Dharma; That is Dharma consciousness'. Sri Krishna continues 'By your svabhava, you think you are a warrior, you are a Kshatriya. The time has come for you to get rid of this svabhava and the associated karmic vestments, Arjuna? Fight on! like a warrior and purge out these Bhavas<sup>1</sup> and Karma malas.<sup>2</sup> Again in a loving and affectionate tone full of spiritual warmth Krishna continues 'You are my priya; you are my friend, you are most dear to me, you are

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1. Sri Krishna was initiated by St. Upamanyu

2. Bhāva Sanyāsam

3. Karma Sanyāsam



doing my work, you are devoted to me; Finish your duty and come to me, your last refuge'. In these exhortations, Sri Krishna emphasises citta suddhi and desirelessness in the first place, Dharma consciousness and duty according to Svabhava in the second place, and lastly, intense devotion to God which is the only weapon to erase off the last traces of karmic vestments.

In recent times, true to the spirit of the Bhagavad Gita, the most outstanding example of a soul who rose to the height of a modern saint was Mahatma Gandhi. In his early days he was greatly influenced by Jain thoughts and doctrines of absolute purity, spiritual warmth, and a high level of intellectual discernment; In his later life, he discovered the greatest secret in the Bhagavad Gita, the secret called the name of god. In life as well as in death the boat on which he sailed was, the name of God (Rama). He had addressed this world several times and said in his own language the blunt truth 'that in this fleeting world there is nothing more precious than the name of Rama.'

It is important that the intelligentsia of this country realise, that there are only 2 categories of saints in the most highly evolved state. They are saints who are devoted to

contemplation called Jnanayogis, and saints who are devoted to action called Karmayogis. To both classes the last refuge that is common is *the name of God*.

It is our humble submission that the Lakshya-artha of the Bhagavad Gita is *the name of God*. In the case of Arjuna and Mahatma Gandhi, the two saintly exponents of a life of action, the mantras that came to their rescue in life and in death were the Krishna mantra in the first case and the Rama mantra in the second case. Therefore to an earnest seeker, mantra (either the Lord's name or the guru-mantra) is the only boat that would help him to cross the oceans of kevalam,<sup>1</sup> and Sakalam<sup>2</sup>. It is the supreme bliss of sailing on that boat that will remove the last vestiges of karmamala and egoistic impulses.

This mantra transforms the devotee from his svabhava state of dharma consciousness, to the blissful state of God consciousness. In the svabhava state one thinks that he is the doer and that he is the knower. In the higher state of God consciousness he is informed by

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1. Inconscient State—Kevalam

2. Life in the planes of the senses, the mind, and the Super-mind.



his god in his spiritual whispers that God is the real doer and he is only a mere witness and sākshi.

It is true that the Bhagavad Gita is pre-eminent for the special appeal it has for the modern educated man and within the last 50 years there have been a plethora of commentaries on it to suit the prejudices and weaknesses of the west oriented intellectuals of our country.

The modern educated man is too prone to believe that there is and there can be nothing which he cannot judge and understand. To him any teaching must be such that, 'he who runs may read' and grasp. But the Gita does not lend itself to such reading and refers again and again to its own teachings as a profound secret, as even a casual reader cannot but be aware. ....

.....This aspect is however likely to be passed over lightly or even ignored. A few examples may therefore be of value in stressing this point. Thus in the 9th Chapter the doctrine taught is designated as rajavidya rajaguhyam (IX : 2) and is characterised as a profound secret, Guhyatamam (IX : 1). In the eleventh Chapter Arjuna refers to the teaching as profound beyond measure parama rahasyam (XI : 1).



Towards the end of the 18th Chapter Krishna himself speaks of wisdom disclosed as profounder than profundity itself Guhyat-Guhyataram (xviii—68) and in the next verse as the profoundest secret of all, sarva guhyat-amam and finally Arjuna alludes to it as Guhyam Paramam (xviii:75)—the ultimate mystery. It is needless to multiply instances; but it would appear as if the significance of the Bhagavad Gita is not all on the surface. It lies hidden in its utmost depths. It would be a mistake to think of this emphasis on secrecy, as an undemocratic device intended to perpetuate higher knowledge as a closed preserve for any classes or individuals. It aims rather at the fostering of a reverent mode of approach and the realisation of the limitations of the human understanding at the outset. It is an indication of the difficulties inherent in the topic itself and yet an encouragement to the earnest seeker. It is an affirmation of the realisation that only persons who have acquired the moral and the spiritual stature and fitness can hope for those instructions which reveal the nature of the supreme reality, that which is essentially subtle cannot be grabbed on the plane of the gross and that for its appreciation the pre-requisite is not cleverness or intellectual subtlety but

principally a fine-ness of pure receptive feeling called cittasuddhi, which alone is the foundation of all Jnana, Yoga, Kriya and Charya margas. The conclusion that may be drawn from the foregoing is that the Gita demands at the very start from its readers a desirelessness for things worldly, and a desire for spiritual peace beyond all understanding. It is only after a moral and spiritual fitness of this nature one is qualified to handle a book like the Bhagavad Gita.

..... As I said before this Sastra of Sastras is like our eternal mother, is like our final Jnana Guru—who initiates us by his silent whispers into the greatest mystery behind this mysterious universe, the mystery called the name of God. To us, who have been brought up in the age-long śaiva tradition, this name of God is the name of śiva, the name we love most.

### Conclusion

In this paper we have attempted to give a new approach to the study of the Bhagavad Gita to enable all students of Hindu Religion and Hindu Culture to delve more deeply into the subject matter of the book and discover its true lakshiyartha. We have also attempted to sketch briefly the lives of different religious personalities of different periods of History.

The spiritual transformation of these personalities is in conformity with the esoteric doctrine of the Saiva Agamas whose cardinal doctrine is the doctrine of the Spiritual Guru. The gradual process of spiritual transformation that takes place in a disciple and effected by the guru by Sankalpāna, sparsēna, drisdih and hōmaih, we hope, will provide a new field to all students of research of Śaiva Siddhanta and Śaiva Agamas.





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