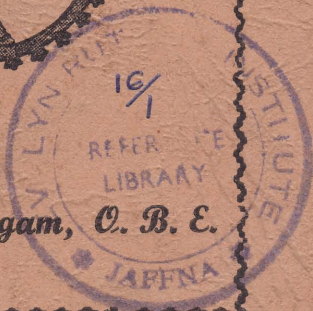


THE
SPECIFIC PHILOSOPHY
OF THE TAMILS



by

Dr. A. Viswalingam, C. B. E.



THE SPECIFIC PHILOSOPHY OF THE TAMILS

by

DR. A. VISWALINGAM, O. B. E.

Sidthanta — Its Significance

In the world of today — the atomic age — we find in every direction the frontiers of knowledge have been extended, the resultant effect upon thought in general has been profound. The evolutionary theory of the last century, the discovery of radio active substances, and the unveiling of the structure of the atom and the splitting of it perhaps the most marvellous achievement yet of man in the present century, have powerfully affected some of our fundamental ideas. The intimate beliefs, philosophies, and personal standards of modern men have been shaken by these changes. We live in an age of spiritual unrest, in a chaos of religious beliefs.

Dissolvent agencies of an intelligent kind have been at work among the more educated classes throughout the world and even South India and Ceylon have come in for their share

in it. Dissolvent agencies are at work throughout the world to do away even with religion. We must fortify ourselves against such tendencies. Some order, some positive faith, some recognition of a law to be obeyed was a necessity for successful living. Our citadel of the principle of the cosmos is *Sidthanta*.

A Peculiar Philosophy

What is *Sidthanta*? It is the philosophy — the special philosophy of the Saiva religion. It is the peculiar philosophy conceived of the genius of the Tamil peoples. It is not a bundle of dogmas as some of our so called 'intellectuals' think. It is a way of life. It represents the culture and civilization that prevailed when the Tamils of Dravidian India carried their civilisation to various parts of the world. Sidthanta philosophy has as its object to teach man to live well, and with that object to think rightly of God, the world and himself. It stands as an example of a civilisation which judged by spiritual standards was supremely great, and judged by material standards utterly puny and poverty-stricken, a standing example in human history of the practice of simple living and high thinking.

Cream of Vedanta

A great theologian says: "As a system of religious thought, as an expression of faith and life, the Saiva Sidhanta is by far the best that South India possesses. It represents not only in the South, but in the whole of India, the highest water-mark of Indian life. It is the religion of the Tamil people by the side of which every other form is of foreign origin'. No greater words of truth can have been uttered. Saiva Sidhanta is the "cream of Vedanta ". According to this philosophy there are 3 eternal verities, God, Soul and Universe. The whole personal relationship of man is summed up in the pregnant words "*pathi - pasu - pasam*;" Pathi is God; Pasu is the Soul; *Pasam* is the Universe (the world of attachments). The Soul is wedged in between God and the Universe, and as it draws near one or the other it partakes of its characteristics. Its aim is to get off the bonds one by one till it merges in the Over-Soul. The body and the senses and the Universe are given forth to work out this emancipation by sacrifice, dedication and devotion; *Pathignanam* (knowledge of God) is absolutely essential. and beatitude is out of the question without the guidance of the supreme Intelligence and Power manifested as Grace and Love.

Meikandan's Codification

The teachings of the philosophy are contained in the Tamil Vedas, the Siva-Gnana-Bodham, and the other Sidthanta Sastras which are 14 in number. There is the peculiarity to be noted in this connection that in the Saiva conception, God cannot be born in the flesh and cannot have *avatars*.* It is absurd to believe that God who is inconceivable unknowable, and undescrivable can be born as a finite being. In Saiva literature Siva is not identified with one of the Hindu Trinity, but as the Lord Supreme who cannot be known even by the Trinity. This peculiarly Tamilian philosophy was codified by Meikandan and the disciples who followed him: and the Saiva religion based on this philosophy has been systematised by the four Saints (Nayanmar) popularly called *Navalar*, whose religious experiences are embodied in the Adankan—Murai etc. The Agamas prescribe rules for various rites that serve to bring the philosophical thoughts into practice of every day life. Metaphysical thoughts and their practical use in life find effective correlation when inculcated through the medium of the language one speaks. Thus the subtle expressions used in this connection find ready response through the finer feelings of the individual. God is known as Kadavul—as that which is beyond comprehension by the mind. God is also referred to as Theivam—knowledge

* INCARNATION

personified or the Absolute, more often as Sivam the All Highest and by means of an inflection in the first letter @ in Sivam it is transformed into & Seevan which is the Soul, the inflection connotes the change *sat* to *asat* because of its association with *malam*. A further change transforms the word into *Seeviyam* – the life process connecting the Universe and the Soul which is immersed in it. Subtleties like these which enable the mind to grasp the essentials more readily are lost when religious teachings are imparted in any language other than ^{the} vernacular of the individual. Religion therefore to be of any success should find expression in one's own language. What could be a better example than the expressions (²⁻⁴⁻¹⁷ Soul) and (²⁻¹⁻² Body) to explain the intimate connection between God and Soul, and the Soul and the Universe. Such expressions so natural in the alphabet of our language convey to the mind the intimate personal relationship essential to correct understanding and realisation.

The True Aim

Religion and philosophy are considered as two distinct spheres in the West, but our great teachers recognised them not as distinct spheres with different aims and purposes but as an essential unity. They recognised that metaphysical truth and religious truth are not two different kinds of truth, but that the true concepts of religion and philosophy are identical.

Real religious belief is also knowledge, whereas faith if it is not at the same time a form of knowledge is valueless. True religion and philosophy have the same task and pursue the same aim, namely, to enable man to participate in the Eternal, through knowledge of God. For immortality, the participation in the Divine, man achieves only through knowledge of God, and of the Universe. Thus the acquiring of knowledge becomes the ultimate ethical task to which all other tasks of man are sub-ordinated, and the supreme value to which all other values are subsidiary.

The True Concept

But since the true concept of religion can be obtained only by a philosophic process of thinking of which not everyone is capable, it is the task of the theologian, the Guru or Saint, who possesses the true concept of religion to discover in the sacred books the esoteric parts and correlate them with the philosophy. Reason is the ultimate judge in matters of truth and what reason declares to be untrue cannot be made the contents of faith. Since reason compels us to apprehend the concept of the unity of God in such a way as to exclude every multiplicity of positive qualities and attributes, for His unity is an absolutely simple one, therefore the Anthropomorphic passages in the sacred books have to be so explained, that they can be

harmonised with the concept of unity as taught by philosophy. This has been done in a pre-eminent degree by ^{our} ~~one~~ philosopher – Saint Meikandan and others. Thus philosophy must be the torchlight of reason to illuminate the way to religion. Thus it is easy to understand the why and wherefore of the emphasis laid on Sidhanta as the very essence of living. For in the scale of values, the highest value for man is knowledge of God, of self and the Universe – the faculty of pure thinking and contemplation constitutes the essence of man, which places him above all other beings. It is by this faculty of pure thinking and reasoning and contemplation which is so eminently characteristic of our race that Meikandan and others deduced the system of thought called *Sidhanta* which has been handed to us to serve us and the world as a citadel for all times.

Present Position

In the light of the foregoing, if we could see ourselves today as others see us, we must admit that the spectacle we present is lamentable. We find ourselves in the midst of a confusion confounded, we have lost values, we have lost our standards, where these have been lost momentary desires have rushed in and we are

smothered by a plentiful crop of noxious weeds in morals, in literature, and the arts. The poison to start with has insidiously worked itself into the fountain-head of our life stream. I refer to the centres of ancient learning and the sacred places of our worship the very men who preside over these institutions appear to have succumbed to the poison. The positive faith and the recognition of a law to be obeyed which were considered necessary for our life have not been followed or obeyed. The antiquity of our race and their faith go so far behind history that the authentic findings from the excavations at Mohenja Daro bearing testimony to the further antiquity of the Tamil race have staggered the historians and anthropologists. The seals found in this region contained the emblems of Siva Lingam in abundance and the inscriptions have been deciphered into the Dravidian languages, the majority being of Tamil origin. This has served to confirm the common belief that Tamil is the oldest of the present Dravidian languages. prevalent in India today.

.The Dravidian Culture

The Dravidians (Tamils) migrated all over India and civilised the country. The faith they pursued was the worship of Siva. They classified regions of the country according to the nature of the soil, and the inhabitants on the basis of their

calling or pursuit. Land was classified as Mullai, Kurunchi, Marutam, Neithal, and the inhabitants as Vedar, Idayar, Kalvar, etc. This is peculiarly unique of the Dravidian culture and civilization. The group of people so classified came under the four main headings of Arasar (Kings & Rulers) Anthaner, those devoted to learning Scriptures, Vanikar (the merchants), and the Velalar (the real gentry, land-owners and agriculturists). As arts and crafts developed, the grouping went along lines of technical training, and the development of aptitude for particular crafts which became the exclusive occupation of certain artisans, who specialised in that particular craft and kept the knowledge gained therefrom closely guarded and transferred it from father to son. Thus the caste system in Dravidian civilisation was based as a device to secure a certain degree of division of labour. The caste system we see implanted on our fellowmen in South India is entirely foreign to Dravidian culture. There is no mention of it in Tholkapyaam.

The Weed of Caste

We are not conscious of it in Ceylon, although insidiously it has worked its way into our temples. This is one of the noxious

weeds that have grown into society and our sacred institutions. This is due to our ignorance of the history of our race and the grandeur and antiquity of our faith. Anthanar* means the people possessed of real knowledge and who show compassion towards all beings - the acquiring of this knowledge was not limited to any particular class. Any member of the Society who possesses such knowledge was recognised, as is the case with Meikandan Thiruvalluvar, Appar, and a host of others; so that this ignorance of the significance of our faith and culture is at the root of all evil. It is therefore imperative that those who are in charge of the Saiva institutions should be enlightened on the true teachings of their religion and philosophy". It will be seen from such a study that God the All-Highest is called Siva that Siva is not one of the Thirumoorthis (Trinity) and that unless one is initiated in Siva Deeksha he is not qualified to perform any rites or ceremony nor even enter the °Adimoolam in the temple. A correct understanding of Saiva Sidhanta alone will arouse the ignorant Saiva Public to guard against the insidious, sly and ever aggressive tide of the so called Aryan spiritual domination from further undermining the foundations of the strongholds of Tamilian

* Sages

o Holy of Holies (Altar)

thought and culture. It is the duty of every Saiva to see that the system of worship in Saiva temples is in accordance with Agamic rules, and that the *Pujahs* are performed only by those initiated into *Siva Deekshai* "and who worship Siva as the all Highest (*Kadavul*)." It is essential that we should not only clearly understand the religion, but should also have positive faith. In the absence of a positive faith we are likely to be led astray and even become a party to decry the very institutions and culture that gave us life, and to accept systems of thought, which are wholly opposed to the philosophy of our people which is the admiration of eminent scholars and theologians of other lands.

Dr. G. V. Pope addressing the English people said: "If the Tamil people and the English are ever in any degree to understand one another and to appreciate each other's thought and feelings regarding the highest matters, our English people must have the means of obtaining some insight into the living system which exercises at the present day such a marvellous power over the minds of the great majority of the best Tamil people. For under some form or other, Saivism is the

real religion of the South of India and of Ceylon and the Saiva Sidhanta philosophy has and deserves to have far more influence than any other." These words should be dinne~~g~~ into the ears of those of us who are being swept away at the moment by novel ideas of reform movements to do away with temples and ceremonies. There is design and purpose behind temples, ceremonials, rites and wor~~k~~ship. They may be animate with life. We should keep an open mind to the new, and yet preserve the balance.

It is a pity that the majority of the Tamil Saiva public are grossly ignorant of the very ends and aims of their institutions, and what is worse, are labouring under a confusion of their faith with Smarthaism, because of the absence of any organised system of instruction in the tenets of religion, which not a few erroneously call the Hindu religion. Swami Vivekananda referring to the so called Hindu religion says: " It has lost its significance. for all the people who live on this side of the Indus, you may mark in modern times. do not follow the same religion as they did in ancient times I therefore would not use the word "Hindu". By the use of it the ~~d~~oor is open for the interference of members

of one religion with the interests of the adherents of another and this is most likely to create a confusion of creeds."

Inroads into Institutions

Western and Eastern scholars of Sanskrit who knew very little of the prevailing religion of the Tamil country have identified the term Hinduism with the Vedanta system, which prevails in one of its forms as Smarthaism with which we have to contend in the Tamil land, if the inroads it has made into our sacred institutions and even into our life are to be checked, if not eradicated before we ~~are~~ awake ^{up} from our slumber and find our identity gone.

The great Saiva scholar, K. Subramania Pillai M. A. says "there are no two religions in the world which are so dis-similar as the Smartha Vedanta and *Saiva* religions in respect of conception of God, mode of worship, revelations, ceremony of initiation principles of philosophy and social ideals. The source of the one is Vedic while that of the other is Agamic. In the Rigveda the oldest books in the so called Aryan worship there is hardly any mention of Siva, whereas in the whole range of Agamic literature Siva is regarded as the All-Highest. The great Vedic scholar Ragozin in his 'Vedic India, says' the oldest Dravidian peoples were the

originators of the worship of Siva.' The Smarthas worship the Gods of Hindu Trinity as the highest manifestations of Brahman, the Saivas worship them in that spirit. In Saiva religion God (*Kadavul*) is worshipped as Siva the formless (*Aruvam*), as Sadasiva in an indefinite form (*Aru-uruvam*) represented by *Sivalinga* and as *Mahewar* with definite form (*Uruvam*) represented by Sri Nataraja, *Dakshinamurthi Ganapathy Subramanya* etc. In the form attributed to Siva are not at all included the descriptions of those of the *Tirumurthis*. It should be remembered that the forms and functions which *Smarthas* identify with *Rudra* of the Trinity and attribute to Siva regarding the two as synonymous is against the Saiva conception.

The Philosophical Conflict

In the field of philosophy the cleavage between the two is distinct. In the Smartha Vedanta view nothing exists in reality save the supreme spirit ~~sof~~ which the soul is an unreal reflection while Saiva Sidthantam holds God and Soul to be separate entities and the world to be yet another entity. On this ground Ekanma - vatham is for doing away with Temple worship save for those who seek material ends and aims, whereas the Saiva Sidthanta regards it as symbolic of the great truth of philosophy.

The priesthood of one is independent of the other. In the Saiva religion, the Adisaivas are given the highest place in society. The Smarthas view them as aliens – a class outside the pale of Aryan Society. According to the Saiva Agamas, the Adisaiva alone can perform the Puja in the Saiva Temples. A Smartha even though initiated in Siva Deeksha can only serve as a cook or any other menial servant. In the Agamic view the act of supplying food to a good Adisaiva is more meritorious than feeding a crore of Brahmins. If a Brahmin is uninitiated in Siva Deeksha he should be treated as an alien altogether in matters of religion.

Sir John Woodroffe wonders at the contrast between the cosmopolitan character of the Agamas and the parochial restrictions of the Vedas. While the study of the Vedas is restricted to the Brahmin that of the Agamas is open to all classes and communities.

By Agamic initiation one attains the status of Anthanar equivalent to the Brahminhood on the Vedic side, ~~although the Vedic side~~, although the Adisaiva claims superiority even above the Brahmin. Be this as it may, it is clear that Agamic Saiva Religion is different from the religion ~~for~~ of the Srutis and Smritis. It has been recognised as early as the days of the Upanishads.

Constitution of Temples

Now to examine the constitution of the Saiva Temples we find that the one who is worshipped as the Almighty in all his various manifestations is Siva. The Siva Sakti that is worshipped in the Saiva Temples is Siva's personified energy imminent in the universe and described in the words of Dr. Pope "As the originator, source, fountain, and beginning of all emotion, action, wisdom and grace." If any other deity has a place in the Temple it is as the ^{servant of} Lord Siva and is viewed as an advanced Soul. Speaking of the South Indian Saiva system Dr. Pope says; "According to it there is really but one God. He is called among many other names "Sivan" the blessed one. "Vishnu and Brahma and other so called Gods are but dependent souls like the rest and at the beginning of each aeon their place and office are arranged by the Supreme as the result of merits accumulated. Of the advanced Souls, the 63 saints are revered most and find a place in the Saiva Temples. The Nandi before the Siva Lingam represents the Soul seeking to break off its bands of birth by dint of the beatific vision. The Siva Linga represents the primeval form of Saivite worship. Every item of daily and festive worship on the Saiva Temple is symbolic of some principle or truth of the Saiva Sidhanta philosophy. Hence the necessity that every Adisaiva and every Saiva

must have a knowledge of the principles of the Saiva Sidhanta philosophy to appreciate and benefit by the symbolic worship daily conducted in Saiva Temples. Besides, the temple is the home of the Tamilian fine arts. The best specimens of the Dravidian architecture are found only in Saivaite Temples and there is great scope for painting and sculpture in them. Music representing the enchanting tunes of Tamil devotional lyrics is to be had there. Rough specimens of the great Tamil drama in the festivals are so arranged as to be congenial to the varied seasons of the year and reflect the communal life of the Tamil people. According to Agamic rules there should be a library of religious books and a lecture hall in every temple. (These two requirements we have provided in the exquisite Sivan Temple we have recently created in Malaya and we are proud of them).

The Encroachment

Now let us see what is happening amongst us. The indigenous life of Saiva Temples has been encroached upon by Smartha interference which threatens to eat into its vitals. The ignorant trustees in many of the Saiva Temples deluded by the pretensions of the Smartha priests have replaced Adisaiva with them, with the consequence that the temple worship is not always conducted according to Agamic rules.

In many of Saiva Temples where Thevaram is sung, it is done by someone other than the priest outside the Holy places disquietly and its singing is not done with the solemnity it deserves. The celebration of the Puja to the 63 Saiva Saints is neglected. These Saints come from all classes of the community from the Brahmin to Pariah and their seat in temple points to the cosmopolitan ideal of Saiva religion, ^{merit} that and not Birth is the passport to Heaven. According to Smarthic ideal born Brahmins alone can attain mukti. Another cosmopolitan feature in Saiva Temples is distribution of food offered to all classes alike in the Holy presence. Herein lies the gem of interdining of all castes and classes united by one religion. In Smarthis institutions this is forbidden to non-brahmins. It is interesting to note that at Thiruchendur some of the Samarthas are fed in a spot in the Sannidhanam of the Deity at the time of the Neivedyam perhaps by way of providing messmates to God Subrahmanya.

The Mercenary Spirit

There are two circumstances that give rise to these malpractices. Occupied too much by their business to learn the elementary principles of Saiva Religion many of those in charge of temples take the opinion of the temple priest in respect of every thing connected with the temple. The priest of the temple on the

other hand is mostly sunk in gross ignorance of the tenets of the religion and treats his office more or less in a mercenary spirit. He feels and behaves as though he has no common interest with the worshippers and he is intent on material progress and prosperity. Within living memory almost all Saiva Temples were wholly in the hands of Saivas, but this state of affairs has been wholly changed by the Smarthas coming into power taking undue advantage of popular indifference to religion.

It must be admitted that the great majority of the Saiva priests themselves have very little knowledge of their religious duties and are in the same category as the Smartha priests.

The ignorance that prevails amongst the priesthood can only be remedied by creating a college for their education and training under a competent authority — a Scheme for which I advocated elsewhere.

The Remedy

The antidote to worldly materialism at the present age is the spirit of the Sidhanta. If we have lost positive faith, lost our ideals, lost religion, it is because we have no longer any standard or ideals, any firm ground on which faith

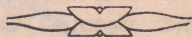
can rest. We have lost the spirit of Sidhanta; lost the foundation of Sidhanta philosophy and bartered serenity of soul for random incoherency and the anarchy of modern desires. "The purpose for which one is brought into this world is to meditate on the wonders of God." The power of seeing straight, and knowing what is beautiful or noble, quite undisturbed by momentary boredoms or taste is a very rare gift, and never possessed in full by anyone. But there is a profound rule of art bidding a man in the midst of all his study, or pursuit of his own peculiar imagination, from time to time "to steep himself again in nature," and in something, the same way it seems as if the world ought from time to time steep itself again with Sidhanta. It is the material side of life that engrosses the mind in the present day: our practical daily life is dominated by the idea of material standards of material wealth, fostered by the enormous advance of scientific inventions and technical perfection of the business of living. We must begin afresh in our truth seeking back to Sidhanta sense and sanity.

The Aid of Sidhanta

It is through Sidhanta we would be enabled to 'see beyond the prison of the material present to the heavenly places from which

the human spirit drew its life.' Sidthanta embodies the essential Oneness now thought of by the Scientist. The Arul Sakti of Parasivān is the energy of "Higher availability" imagined by the scientist. The perpetual unremitting vibration of the electrons is the Cosmic Dance of Siva. The scientist says the ultimate realities are beyond the comprehension of the human mind. Sidthanta says it is possible to comprehend them through the Lord's Grace. He becomes visible to those who pass over to Him from the illusion of material bondage to the emancipation of freedom of man's spiritual destiny. In the eternal all pervading cosmic dance, the court ^{of} which is Chidambaram (the centre of the universe and in the psychic sense the heart of man.) His divine wisdom embraces all and radiates His Supreme bliss on all. The scientist admits that the mind may pass where the body cannot. Our saints saw this and comprehended the essential Oneness through their psychic eye. The Andams, Puvānams, and Logams are the universes that are being discovered by the various observers. While the scientist is still floundering with his crucibles and optical glasses Sidthanta has laid down an orderly and exact science that has anticipated all the discoveries of modern man. Hence Sidthanta is all comprehensive and is the True End.

Let us then say to every Saiva, wake up from your lethargy, educate yourself in the tenets of the religion which is the life blood of your great race. preserve it if you can't add to it and determine thenceforth to preserve your self-respect and remember what the poet said: Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control, these three alone lead life to sovereign power. May Parashivam's blessings be on all.





Printed at P. L. S. Press, Petaling.