

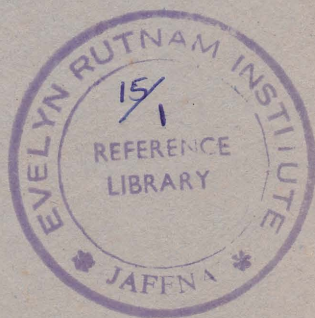
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THE RELIGION OF THE TAMILS

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THE RELIGION OF THE TAMILS

Dr. A. Viswalingam

Man lives in accordance with his philosophy of life, his conception of the world.

A fair knowledge of philosophy is as vital to the individual as are food, air and water to the organism. For philosophy is the main spring of one's existence, it is the faith which determines the progress of the individual and of the race, and progress in whichever direction it may be, depends on the level of enlightenment reached by the mass of the people. No doctrine or belief is worth talking about, which does not influence character and prescribe conduct

It is the pride of the Tamil People that from the remotest antiquity, they have evolved a philosophy and a faith, which give direction to their everyday life. Whatever men do or make, their religion and philosophy are at the back of it. It is to religion and philosophy that men do owe their existence, their very being.

Our purpose is to present a bird's eye view of this faith and philosophy, which dominates the life of the many millions of Hindus in general, and the forty millions of Saivas in the Tamil country and elsewhere in particular.

We propose to discuss briefly certain aspects of the history of the Tamil people. We do not attempt to give a full story, but shall begin our remarks on that period of our history prior to the coming of the Aryan into the Tamil land.

Prof. T. R. Sesha Iyengar says :—

“The influence of the Dravidians (Tamils) on the culture of India has been ignored, because the literature which records the development of the Hindu religion in India was the work of a hostile priesthood whose only object was to magnify its own preten-

tions and decry everything Tamilian. But the truth is that the Tamilians had already developed a civilisation of their own, long before the Aryan civilisation was transplanted into their midst. The division of Society among the Tamils shows that they had enjoyed an orderly, peaceful and settled form of Government for centuries. Their civilisation was more ancient than that of the Aryans, for among the latter, the fighting men were next in rank to the priests, where as among the Tamils, the farmers or Velalas were next to the religious men, and the military class were below that of the herdsmen and artisans.

The Tamils had been in possession of India, long before the Aryans entered it. They established mighty kingdoms in the North and South, and supplanted everywhere the civilised tribe whom they retained as slaves to till and fight for them. They reached a high degree of civilisation, and as regards refinement and culture, they were more advanced than the shepherd Aryans."

The Dravidians

The word Dravidian indicating a linguistic rather than a racial section of the people of India has been used to denote all the races of the South of India, of whom the Tamils are the typical members. *Dravida* in Sanskrit means Southern and was employed by the immigrants to embrace all the people, who speak the language of the South. The antiquity of the Tamils is undoubted.

Dr. Macclene says that the Dravidians are indigenous to India and specially to South India. Dr. Chatterji says, that civilisation first arose in India, and was associated probably with the proto-Dravidians. Then it was taken to Mesopotamia to become the source of the Babylonian and other ancient cultures, which form the basis of modern civilisation. According to Sir Walter Raleigh, India was contiguous with the submerged continent, which is considered by Prof. Haeckel and other scientists to have been the home of the human race.

B. C. Mazumdar in the *Modern Review* (1912) observed that Southern India was once only the Eastern Half of the extensive Continent that stretched from Africa to India, the Indian Peninsula being connected by land with Madagasgar to the West, and with

the Malay Islands to the East. At this period, South India was not quite connected with the North, because of the flooded sea of Central Asia. The Dravidians were in the South as an indigenous race for countless generations. They are not and do not differ ethnically from the Aryans, who are supposed by some to be new comers into India in the historic times. By the time the Central Asian Sea was bridged over a very extensive continent was available for the Southern people to move Northwards.

Sir T. W. Holderness K. C. S. in his "Peoples and Problems of India" says that the Deccan i.e. South India is geographically distinct from the Indo-Gangetic plain and Himalayas. It is the remains of a former continent, which stretched continuously to Africa in the space now occupied by the Indian Ocean. When the world was still in the making, and before the elevation of the Himalayas, the space now occupied by the plain i.e. Indo-Gangetic, was a sea. The Southern shore of this sea was what is now Peninsular India. With the rise of the Himalayas the sea disappeared and the rivers draining the Himalayas flowed into the depression.

The ancient India which Sir John Marshall has exposed in digging up the ruins in Mohenjo-daro, has rolled back the curtain, that hid the origin of India Civilization. India ranks today with Mesopotamia and Egypt among the pioneers of civilisation. Few decades ago the Aryan myth that civilisation in India began with intrusion of the Aryans about 1750 B.C. may have held its ground, but the culture and civilisation revealed by the excavations at Harappa in Punjab, and Mohenjo-daro in the Sindh going back to about 3000 - 4000 B.C. leaves no room for the fallacy to continue further. These two cities, which are now barren supported an urban population about 5000 years ago. The cities were planned and built on modern lines of town planning on the rectangular American model. Their system of sanitation was superior to anything that was in Europe before the last century.

The excavators estimate life in these cities round about 3000-4000 B.C. and they say that the least amateur perceived at once a family likeness between that civilisation and those of Sumeria and Elam. The seals have since been deciphered and found to be characters of Proto-Tamils.

Dr. C. P. Ramaswamy Aiyar's writing on Sanskrit and Dravidian civilisation records, that "Recent writers have, with great unanimity insisted that the Tamil country was the seat and origin of the characteristic religious, artistic and social ideals which radiated to the East and West and Father Heras in particular has been emphasising that it was a Tamil cultural invasion that started from South India founded the Mohenjo-Daro Civilisation and spread the culture through Baluchistan and Persia to Babylon, Assyria and Crete".

The most constant Symbol for Divinity that is noticed in Mohenjo-Daro is that of the three faced figure Aan, the Supreme God of the people of the Indus Valley. Aan in Modern Tamil means man, but in its compound form from "Andavan" and "Andal" is associated with the Supreme Being in the male and female aspect.

Evolution of Social Institutions

Social institutions were constructed on very original lines. The people were in those days classified according to the nature of the land in which they lived. The Tamils divided the land into five divisions, Hill country (Kurinchi) where lived the hill tribe (Kuravar and Vedar); forest and pasture land-Mullai, where lived the herdsman (Idayar); the arable land (Marutham) where lived the cultivators (Velalar); the sea coast (Neytal) where lived the fishers (Paravar); and arid or dry land (Palai) where lived the robbers (Maravar) and the hunters (Vedar). From these types arose a tribal organisation which has its distinctive characteristic born of environment as anthropography holds, is unique in having realised the five different stages of human life in pre-historic times. As society expanded itself, a division of class or sect was distinguished, based on profession in one and the same region. There were the Kings and noblemen (Arasar), holymen (Anthanan), seers (Parpar), agriculturalists (Velalar), and merchants (Vanikar). It is significant that priests, ascetics and holy men came from all the tribes. The Anthanan, so called on account of their compassion to all living beings, were respected and honoured by the people as beings superior to all the rest. The Kural says :

Towards all that breathe, with seemly graciousness adorned
they live,

And thus to virtue's sons the name of Anthanar men give.

They were family and temple priests and were later called Kurukal.

Each sect is self-contained and would not concede that it is inferior to another sister sect or class as is the case with Aryan castes. There was no question of superiority of one sect over another.

The Velalas were the important elements in society. From this class arose the Arasar (Rulers) and Anthanar or Sages and Priests. This social democracy of a simple type was disturbed by a socio-religious institution, which brought in a complete social organisation. The King grew in power and extent, much dignity and divinity was attached to the office. Thus as the Kingdom expanded, social organisations became more and more complex in character. Direct or personal rule of the Kingdom no longer was effective and a devolution of functions became imperative. The central organisation, had merely the control of local administration, the maintenance of peace and order in the country and providing for the defence of the realm against external enemies. The Kural says: A state is a seven limbed Kingdom. The ministry, fortifications, territories, allies, the army, and the Treasury are the six limbs. These together with the King make up the Kingdom of the state. The king was assisted by a Council of five, The Chief Minister, Kurukal (High Priest), the Commander-in-Chief, the Ambassador and the Intelligence officer. In the council chamber the Queen was also present and took part in the deliberations.

Thus arose the three chief historical powers of South India, the Pandyas of the extreme South, the Cheras of the Malabar coast, and the Cholas, who ruled over the tract watered by the Kaveri River. These Kingdoms are mentioned by a Sanskrit Grammarian of the 4th Century B.C. and by the Greek Ambassador Megasthenes B.C. 300, in the inscriptions of Asoka, who refers in his edicts to the Tamil Kings and Chiefs as his allies on terms of equality, and by the Greek and Roman Geographers. All ascribe to the three kingdoms a very high antiquity.

Maritime Expeditions and International Relations

The early Kings of South India could claim not only kingdoms, but also boast of dependencies. One of them penetrated as far as the Himalayas, where the Tiger Seal was planted in glorious token of an uninterrupted successful march. On the way the northern Indian Kings of Vanga, Magadha and Avante offered tributes. They presented a canopy, a hall of Audience and a triumphal Arch respectively. There were similar expeditions to far off lands and Islands. Apart from literary pieces of evidence, there are the more reliable inscriptions. Rajaraja Deva, whose accession according to Prof. Kielhern is A.D. 985, is said to have destroyed a great fleet of the Cheras at the port of Kandatur. Again Rajendra Chola extended his conquest to Kadaram, the Nicobar Islands, Malaysia, Java, Sumatra and ports along the coast of Burma. These activities bear eloquent testimony to the fact that naval warfare was not unknown to the ancient Tamilians. Thus maritime activities led to international relations. These exerted commercial relations between South India on the one hand and Babylon, Arabia, China and Egypt on the other. In the beginning of the Christian era, we find a growing trade between South India and Greece and Rome.

Spices, precious stones, ebony, sandalwood, gold and embroidery were shipped to the western world from Ceylon and the South Indian ports. Roman ships sailed direct to the Malabar Coast, as evidenced from numismatic, lithic and artistic evidences, as well as from the works of Strabo, Pliny and others. It is clear that there were intimate relations between Rome and India for nearly 1500 years. The fleet of Solomon collected their ivory, apes and peacocks (the Hebrew words for which are in Tamil) from the Tamil land a thousand years before Christ. Oriental scholars are of the opinion that Ophire, where these were shipped from was none other than Ovari, now a small fishing village near Tuticorin, but a large seaport in ancient times near Korkai, one of the capital cities of the Pandyas. Further between the tenth and the sixth centuries B. C. the Tamils had a great trade with China and Babylon.

The Romans had a mint in Madura District and coined copper money, which is found no-where else in the world except the Madura District, showing conclusively that they were coined for

a local trade, while the findings of gold and silver coined in Rome and Constantinople proved that the trade had wider relations than those of a local colony.

“Among the various Indian Embassies to Rome, Strabo mentions one from Pandiya to Augustus. Another Embassy to Cladius included ambassadors from Divi and Seremdivi - Malive and Ceylon. It was a Tamil Embassy. The Ambassador-in-Chief was a Tamil of Jaffna named Rasiyah, and Sir Emmerson Tannet thinks that Rasiyah was the representative of the Rajah of Jaffna. Another from India to Antonius Pius went to pay homage to his virtues”:
(Dr. Isaac Tambyah.)

The Coming of the Aryans

Under such prevailing conditions, there was probably some hiatus in the social life of the community, which was not adequately filled; and of which the venturesome bands of people from the North took full advantage benefitting by the asylum and hospitality afforded to them by the Tamilians. They settled down to thoroughly inform themselves of the habits, social conditions, customs, literature, religion and philosophy of their host and created themselves into a sect of people, Arya-Brahmin. Having done this, as Pandit Sooryanarayana Sastriyar says, “They then set themselves the task of translating learned treatises from Tamil to Sanskrit in secret to give the impression to the mass of the people, that these translations were original productions in Sanskrit, and were later translated into Tamil — a not uncommon trick practised by nations even to this day. The initial success they attained at the hands of their royal masters would appear to have emboldened them to greater venture. They claimed for themselves every position, that gave them social eminence. In place of the Pandaya-Nan-Marai, the ancient treatises on Aram, Porul, and Inbum and the Agamas of the Tamil land, the Vedas, Upanishads and allied literature were introduced. In the temples were installed a multiplicity of gods and goddesses, thereby causing confusion in the minds of the followers of the rational Monotheistic religion of the Tamils.”

Dr. Har Dyal says:— “They set about to control all the social activities of the race, especially such as are essential for social

welfare, and therefore confer special prestige on those who guide them. They offered knowledge to all and became their gurus. They studied astronomy, and were consulted as to the propitious time and day for all social and religious ceremonies. They monopolised the teaching of most branches of knowledge and all social activities were brought under their control. The domination of the will of the people has thus been consolidated. The sense of racial self-respect grew weak and finally perished as time went by."

"Social conquest is the process, which leads to the moral bleeding of a race, and is more dangerous than the loss of wealth. A people who have parted with their self-respect and racial pride cannot regain their material prosperity. Social conquest, which brings about the decay of the manhood of the race, increases the moral drain by giving the foreign element opportunities of acquiring and asserting social superiority in every day life over the people. Political conquest may bend a race, but social bands them."

The falsity and pertensions of the so-called Aryan Superiority, and the bogey of an Indo-Aryan race have been exposed by eminent and impartial historians and scholars as Prof. Slater, Prof. Poornalingam Pillai, Dr. Chatterjee and a host of other historians. The archaeological findings at Mohenja-Daro and Harappa excavated by Sir John Marshall, Mr. Chopra and others have also exposed the hollowness of the "Aryan" myth that civilisation in India began with the advent of the Aryan somewhere about 1750 B. C.

Unreliable Historical Sources

As to the Vedas as a source of historical information regarding the Aryan entry into India and their contact with the indigenous races we find the Vedas are full of bias and bigotry, praising the Aryan and decrying the Dravidians. The Aryan Priests hated the latter, who did not recognise their gods. The Aryans referred to them as Asuras, Dasyus, Daityas and Nagas. They found the latter were rich and possessed hundred gated cities, jewels, castles, palaces, houses of stone and arms. Their armour covered chariots resisted the spears and arrows of the Aryans. Some of the inimical and naturally prejudiced Aryan references bear unwilling testimony to the degree of Tamilian civilisation, which compelled the dread of the Aryans.

Referring to the Rig Veda and the Vedic tribes, Mr. Thomas observes "It places before us reminiscences of the leading streams of the Kabul valley and the more direct Indian approaches by the Kurram and Gomali. It indicated entire oblivion of any earlier habitat and makes no reference to the successive waves of ruling motives which carried these pastoral tribes on to their ultimate destination on the banks of the Sutlej, where they effectually changed their nature, submitted to the influence of prior civilisation, accepted the aid of Amanuenses for their unwritten hymns and finally merged their still vague faith into a compromise with the indigenous faith which resulted in the Brahmanism."

The Ramayana and Mahabharata are often referred to as a source of inquiry into the early history of India and more particularly of South India. A claim of great antiquity for these epics is made. It is said that these were the "Books written in India thousands of years ago", whereas the consensus of opinion of historians is that Valmiki's Ramayana was written in the third century B.C. Let us hear what an eminent authority says about these epics.

After an exhaustive study of the whole literature of the epics, Mr. Shesha Iyengar says "Much will be gained, if the prevalent faith in the high historical value of the epics for the purpose of the ancient history of the Peninsula received a rude shock. The periods, which are depicted in the epics, are more modern than the student of the ancient South Indian history hopes to find, and therefore the impression that is left upon the reader's mind after a critical study of the two great epics is that the future historian of ancient South India will do well to seek for his material in the numismatic, epigraphic, literary, linguistic, traditional and archaeological records of the Dravidian people rather than in the epics of Aryan India."

The two systems of Philosophy

Now let us look into the development of the two systems of religious and philosophic thought prevalent in India about this period of history. For, what follows I am indebted to the facile pen and deep scholarship of the late Rev. Dr. Isaac Tambyah by whose death the Tamil race has lost one of her ablest and most

worthy sons (see Foregleams of God). It is interesting to enquire if there are traces of the Trinity of the Puranic Hinduism, Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra or of the Siddhanta High God-the Sole Siva in the pages of the Vedas. Vishnu is certainly mentioned in the Rig Veda. He is praised in many a hymn as the upholder of earth, heaven and all creatures. Siva is not mentioned as one of the gods of the Vedic pantheon, and there is no hymn addressed to him as such. An Indian scholar thinks that the name Rudra - the Red One - is possibly a translation of the Dravidian name Siva - and was incorporated in the North Indian pantheon. As to Brahman, his name does not occur in the Rig Veda in any form. His name appears to have come later with the Brahmanas, and the tenth book of the Rig Veda is possibly a reflexion of the age of Taittiriya Brahmanas.

It may be assumed generally that the gods, who correspond to aspects of natural forces and phenomena personified, such as the sun, moon, storm and lightning have to them ascribed the functions natural to them.

The religion of the Vedas

It is useful to examine the religion of the Vedas. They are composed of hymns meant to accompany the Soma oblation and the fire sacrifice. The religion of the age of the Veda was developed in stages: There is at first abundant evidence of worship of many gods. The number excluding many minor deities is given as 33 and 3339. The total is given in terms of the number 3. A particular god is for a time only to be replaced later by another, the arbitrary nature of the selection to supremacy being in accordance with their service to the worshipper. The deifying of natural forces as fire, air, earth, sky, water, thunder, lightning, rains, storm and other cosmic forces resulted in the personification of those into gods. Then the Vedic man appears to have dimly perceived the manifestation of a Divine power. By the time the tenth book is reached he appears to have perceived that behind all the polytheistic manifestations there was one power.

In the gradual development of God-head, sacrifice was of sustained importance. It was thanks offering of gifts of butter, milk, Soma, cakes etc. Animal sacrifice came in as an accessory

to the Soma oblation. The sacrificial post, tall, upright, planted to the East of the Fire assumes importance, the pole is suggestive of the victim tied to it. The horse and the goat were the animals offered. The slaying of the dappled goat is associated with the most important sacrifice in the Rig Veda, the asva-medha horse sacrifice.

The Various stages of the evolution of the religion that had its beginning in the Vedas, are Animism, Polytheism, Monotheism and Monism.

The suddenness of transition from the tangible reality of the Rig Veda to the abstraction that came in later was perhaps due to the poet of the Veda developing into the priest. The prayer (Hymn) has produced the prayer-maker the Brahman, who in time became the minister officiating at a sacrifice. Towards the close of the Vedic period we find him well established, as most influential and important minister of religion invested with intercessory powers. His prayers keep alive a whole race, give freedom, persuade Indra to grant success and his service is effectual even in war. He has thus become the priest, poet, doctor, the minister standing between man and God and worthy of great rewards and high privileges.

The climax of priestly ascendance is recalled in the code of Manu, which belongs to about the period of second century B.C. to second century A.D. By these means the Brahmans sought to secure their own ascendancy and to perpetuate an organised caste system in subordination to themselves.

The code of Manu has as its author a legendary figure Manu, who is said to be the institutor of sacrifice, the father of the Aryan race, probably a heroic rishi. It exercises great influence on the religious and social life, and thought of India. In the code of Manu the theory of caste and the superiority of the Brahmans are the hinges, on which the whole social fabric turns with all the other classes as its satellites.

The code by its elaboration of caste rules, and particularly by its detailed account of future punishments, served to keep the system of caste in cohesiveness, and to wield a terrible sway over

millions of men, keeping an iron hold on the ethical consciousness of the Indian people.

Philosophy of the Brahmanas

In time to come the philosophy of the Brahmanas took predominance. This resulted in the production of the hidden doctrine of the Veda, thought became emancipated from ritual. But ritual despite philosophy remained for the many. Philosophy after all was for the few. But there was danger that with the leaven of thought spreading, many were likely to be left without 'God'.

The legends, traditions and superstitions of the people were put to use in the deifying of heroes, and in making warrior dynasties trace their origin to the Rig Vedic deities, the sun and the moon. The mythological tendency fostered by the Brahmanas worked itself in later times into the imaginations of the unlearned many by means of the Puranas, which popularised the cult of personal gods, and out of it, Hindu sectarianism would appear to have arisen. The Upanishads which embody the fundamentals of philosophic Brahmanism teaches that God is all, the all pervasive, the self of all, all are in Him; God alone is, and the Self-God, Brahman is the same as human self—'Thou art That'.

Vedanta

Vedanta-phase of Brahmanism, less influenced by sectarian tendencies and more faithful to the Upanishadic spirit, grew into a system popularly known as Vedanta, and on this foundation, Sankaracharya in the beginning of the 9th century built up his great body of doctrine under the name of the Uttara-Mimamsa or Vedanta, which now reigns supreme all over India, except in the Tamilnad. Its whole doctrine is summed up in two Upanishadic phrases: - "Ekam evadvitiam—Verily one without a second", and "tat tuamasi, thou art that". There are no two, says the Vedantist, who puts it happily in this wise.

In reality Brahman alone is, nothing else is, and all that appears to be is He. To the seer the question was not how the world was created, but how it came to be so by mistaking the unreal for the real. His care was to remove the error. The Vedanta

is thus more a system of removal of our belief in the reality of duality than a system of the establishment of Unity.

Siddhanta

In the Siddhanta philosophy on the other hand, which is peculiar to the Tamils, and is the choicest product of Dravidian intellect, the relationship between God and man is differently conceived. According to a high Siddhanta Authority, the Vedic text **Ekam evaadvityam Brahma** means that there is only one Supreme Being without a second. And this one is the God and not the Soul. You who would say (ignorantly) you are one (with the Lord) are the soul, and are bound up with Pasam (Matter). Just as we say that without (the primary sound) 'A' all other letters will not sound, the scriptures (Nan-Marai) say 'Without the Lord no other things will exist.'

The Adwaita of the Siddhanta is different from any similar theory in the vedanta. The Siddhanta does not follow the Vedanta in its postulating of identity without difference between God and the Soul.

Nallaswamy Pillai in "Sivagnana Bodham" says an identity is perceived and a difference in substance also is felt. It is this relation, which could not easily be postulated in words, but which may be conceived, and which is seen as two Dwaitham, and at the same time as not two, Na Dwitham. It is this relation which is called Adwaitham (a Unity or identity in duality) and the philosophy, which postulates it is the Adwaitha philosophy. The substance of this philosophy is thus put in a nutshell. God is all, but all is not God. He is therefore all and not all. He is every thing and yet above everything. The doctrine is very popular in nearly the whole of Tamil literature, and is most vividly expressed in the favourite phrase (All and yet not all). The Vedanta view that all is illusion is not accepted by all who profess Brahmanism. According to Sri Sankaracharya the philosopher of the Vedanta, God appears as the manifold world without undergoing any change in His real nature.

The conception of a personal God was brought out in a great book of later Brahmanism the Bhagavad Gita including therein

the Vishnu—Krishna Vamadeva. It taught that God was but a Being, all good and immanent in a world of reality. Here there are references to a Higher Brahman, a lower Brahman, and even a suggestion of a third the Highest.

The Siddhanta, while having associations with the Rig Veda and the Upanishads, particularly the Svetasvatra possesses characteristics peculiarly its own, unborrowed from other source, uninfluenced by earlier thought and fundamentally different from the tenets of the Vedanta. In its distinguishing features, it is purely Dravidian, despite its vast commonness with Sanskritic philosophies. On the subject of God in relation to phenomena, the Siddhanta says:—

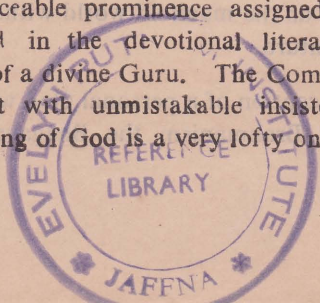
- (1) The god is all but all is not God.
- (2) That God is different from all nature and from man.
- (3) That man is not God, and does not become God.
- (4) That God is Being, and also Love, and as such is personal.
- (5) That Maya is not non-existent, not caused from God, nor is it illusion. It is cosmic matter in the process of evolution and resolution.

In the Siddhanta sense, Maya (illusion) with reference to the world denotes that 'the fashion of this world passeth away' and that the things seen are temporal, the things unseen are eternal.

Comparison of Vedanta and Siddhanta

The Vedanta argues that the Soul is God, and it is God going to God, like longing for like - indeed there is no longer, no going, no Soul, it is all God. God alone is; the rest is illusion (Maya).

The Siddhanta not only postulates a personal God, it emphasises the necessity of God manifesting Himself to man for man's salvation. Hence the noticeable prominence assigned in all the Siddhanta scriptures, and in the devotional literature of the Siddhanta to the teaching of a divine Guru. The Coming of God as Guru, teacher, is taught with unmistakable insistence in the Siddhanta, the man-becoming of God is a very lofty one.



- (1) That God must needs come to men as the Guru, for even the old scriptures require His illumination.
- (2) That God assumes forms, human forms like a decoy for snaring men in the snare of his Grace.
- (3) That the God — Guru is one who knows the infirmities of human nature, as an intimate relation knows the secret disease. This last is a requisite in the God — Guru, so that he might be in sympathy with Soul's infirmities.

The Vedanta boldly declares — I am God. The Siddhanta, consistent with the environment, enunciated the man becoming of God as preliminary to the possibilities of the God becoming of man. It says man is not God. God is not man, yet God assumes the form of man, that He may teach the secret of the Grace, which is to give men the means of attaining the fulness of stature of God-likeness. The Siddhanta lays stress on the forms assumed by God. These manifestations are not incarnations. The Siddhanta will not have the idea of God being subjected to the limitations of birth and death.

Siddhanta Based On Tamil Literature

Unlike other systems of philosophy, the Siddhanta is evolved from the religion and literature of the Tamils. Dr. Pope says "Tamil possesses rare and original indigenous elements of great beauty and of great importance for historical purposes." According to Prof. Sheshagiri Sastriar, while the early part of the Hindu religion is based on the Vedas, Smritis and the Agamas, its latter part owes its origin to the customs, manners and religion of Southern India, and is founded on the Tamil literature. It is therefore, clear that the religion of the South has had an independent existence, though in later times it was subjected to Aryan influence. However, the Tamilians remained unaffected by the Aryan religious influences, besides producing an appreciable effect upon the Aryans. The Brahmanical systems of thought and practice founded on the Vedas have never gained universal acceptance.

In the period lost in antiquity the primitive system of Tamilian faith buried though it was beneath a mass of rites had the instinctive craving of the human heart for communion with God. We

discern in it not merely a belief in a spirit world, but a desire to come into personal communion with spiritual beings. The foundation of true religious feelings, which craves for expression had its germ in this simple desire for communion with a deity. It is no wonder, therefore, even in this pre-historic period, there took place considerable development in the religious ideas and beliefs of the Tamil people.

Even in those remote times the Tamilians had the belief in the existence of one Supreme Being "Kadavul". Scholars like Dr. Pope believe that the indigenous religion was a kind of Saivism. Ragozin holds that the worship of Siva was originally Tamilian. Ferguson in his "Tree and Serpent Worship" maintains that Saivism is certainly a local not an Aryan form of faith, and belongs rather to the South, than to the North of India. Dr. Stevenson holds that Siva was the Tamilian God, and was worshipped in two forms, one as a spiritual object of meditation, the other as a material symbol of Linga to represent the invisible to the visible eyes.

The Linga, Its Significance.

Adoring God with flower and incense was an ancient practice prevalent among the Tamils. Flower represents the heart and incense the melting of it. It is said of Ravana, that he was a staunch votary of Linga and carried always with him a golden Linga, which he worshipped with incense and flowers. Ravana and Vali were great devotees of Siva. The Siva Linga according to Swami Vivekananda is the least anthropomorphic of symbols. Of all the forms that are to be met with in our temples from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, the form of the Linga is the most universal and frequent, and is the most met with in the pages of Mahabharata. Vyasa declares, after the defeat of Ashwathama by Arjuna, that the real cause of Arjuna's superiority lay in his worshipping the Linga form of Siva, whereas Ashwathama worshipped only the personal form of the God.

On Linga worship H. H. Wilson observes "The Linga is twofold external and internal. The ignorant who need a visible sign, worship Siva as "Mark" or "Type" which is the proper meaning of word "Linga"—of wood or stone, but the Wise look

upon the outward emblem as nothing and contemplate in their minds the invisible, the inscrutable type "Alinga" which is Siva Himself.

What ever may have been the origin of this worship in India, the notion upon which it was founded, according to the impure fancies of European writers, is not to be traced, even in Saiva Puranas.

The worship of Siva under the type of Linga is almost the only form in which that Deity is revered. In the various neolithic settlements in Southern India have been found several Lingams, and in the Mohenjadarro excavations there were similar finds in abundance. According to Mr. P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar, there is ample evidence that the worship of Siva in the form of a Linga existed in the Stone age in India, which certainly preceded the Vedic age. Agastya is said to have learnt Tamil, the language of the South from Siva. From this it may be inferred that Siva was the Dravidian Deity: Dakshanamurthy i. e. the God of the South. The Agamas, which are said to be of Tamilian origin, and which form the basis of Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy are said to have been proclaimed at Mahendra Mount, one of the peaks in the Western Ghauts. Manika Vasakar refers to the mountain in the following lines:—

“மன்று மாமலை மயேந்திரம் அதனில்
சொன்ன ஆகமம் தோற்றுவித்த குளியும்”

Tradition has it that the First Madura Sangam (Academy) had Siva as its patron. The original indigenous Tamil name for the Supreme Deity — Kadavul meaning that which is beyond understanding or the final conclusion reached by the mind, is proof of the belief in the existence of one Supreme Being.

We learn from the Vedic literature that the Aryan worship of natural phenomena and their sacrifices appeared to the Dravidian mind sacrilegious. The deities of the Aryans were treated with contempt and the animal sacrifices were checked, wherever they were found.

Prof. A. B. Keith says that there is nothing in Vedic literature to suggest that the idea of metempsychosis presented itself to the Aryan mind. Prof. MacDonald says, 'the doctrine of Transmigration is entirely absent from the Vedas and the early Brahmanas. The Aryans borrowed them most probably from the Tamilians.'

Siva and Rudra

With the advent of the intruders, some process of fusion seems to have been effected by the Aryans, identifying the Tamilian's heroes, God and minor deities with the Vedic deities of the Brahmanas. But this attempt at a compromise would seem to have effected very little, and Rudra was sublimated into Siva as one of the Trinity. But the Tamils who recognise Rudra as one of the Trinity have always retained the conception that Siva was synonymous with the All Highest - Kadavul.

However Rudra, the Vedic God of Storms, was given the attributes of Siva and was assigned to take His place. The Colonists ever ready to make compromise with the people among whom they settled persuaded them to believe that the attributes of Siva were in conformity with those of the Vedic God, Rudra, and thus resulted the conception of a half Dravidian and half Aryan Deity, Rudra, whom the Aryans held before the Tamils as their Siva, the Supreme Deity.

Imposition of Rudra as Siva

Thus was symbolised in the Vedic pantheon the Trinity:—Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra, Brahma for the exclusive externalism of ancient tradition. Vishnu became the humanised sun-god and emerged from the rigid enclosure of scriptural texts into the world of living human heart, and Rudra of the Aryans slowly grew into the Siva of the Hindu Triad. With the passage of time Rudra came to embody the conception of the various deities, Indra and Agni, Varuna and Vayu, Surya and Soma, Vishnu and Brahma and Siva. And when the Vedas came to be arranged into Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, Rudra's position as the god of gods had become assured. By the time of the earliest Upanishad, the worship of Rudra-Siva supplanted the worship of the Vedic deities.

In the late Vedic period, however, Rudra was sublimated into Siva as one of the Trinity. But the Tamils who recognise Rudra as one of the Trinity have always retained the conception that Siva was synonymous with the All - Highest. Quotations from the Tamil literature and scripture can be cited by the hundreds in support of this. We have in the Thiruvvasagam such passages as "King of the Three" and "Thou life's way".

The indigenous religion of the South came under the influence of those who introduced the Vedic religion into the Tamil land. Rudra, the Vedic god of storms was given the attributes of Siva and was assigned to take His place.

When the Vedas came to be arranged as Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, Rudra's position as the God of Gods had become assured. By the time of the earliest Upanishad, the worship of Rudra-Siva supplanted the worship of the Vedic deities. The Tamilian conception of God as an immanent transcendental Being—Kadavul—worshipped as Sivan has thus been equated with the Rudra of Thirumoorthis and other Gods of the Vedic Pantheon, with Rama and Krishna, who are regarded as gods born in the flesh and subject to the infirmities of humanity. This is quite contrary to the Saiva conception that God is never born in the flesh nor manifests Himself as an avatar. The all pervading Bramah of the Vedanta conception may perhaps be equated with Siva the All Highest of the Tamilian. For after all what is there in a name. But there is a world of difference between the Rudra of the Triad and Siva of Tamilnad.

It is abhorrent to the Saiva conception of God that the sublime value attached to it should be lowered or even, appear to be lowered by such misconceptions and malpractices, and the observances of festivals based on puerile legends and fables in the temples.

The Tamils are a peace-loving people, who practise the principle of 'live and let live' and look upon the many races now in India as of one common origin. In spite of the cry raised by the immigrants that they are Aryans and therefore different from the people of the land, the Tamils recognised that whatever has been

evolved, be it religion, literature or philosophy was born of the rich heritage of their motherland, conceived of the genius of her people.

The raison detre of Saiva Temples

The late K. Subramania Pillai, M.A., M.L., the great scholar and patriot says : "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 Smartheism, because of their 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 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 door is opened for the interference of members of one religion with the interests of another and this has created a confusion of creeds."

"Western and Eastern scholars of Sanskrit who know 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 had made into our sacred institutions and even into our life are to be checked before we awake from our slumber and find our identity gone."

K. Subramania Pillai says further : "There are not two religions in the world which are so dis-similar as the Smarthaic and Saiva religions in respect of conception of God, mode of worship, revelations, ceremony of initiation, principle of philosophy and social ideals. The source of one is Vedic, while that of the other is Agamic. In the Rig Veda the oldest book in the so called Aryan world, there is hardly any mention of Siva, where as in the whole range of Agamic literature Siva is regarded as the All-Highest."

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 Vedas is restricted to the Brahmin, that of the Agamas is open to all classes of the community. By Agamic initiation one attains the status of Anthanar

equivalent to the Brahminhood on the Vedic side. It is clear that the Agamic Saiva religion is different from the religion of the Srutis and Smritis. It has been recognised as early as the days of the Upanishad.

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 Ones Vishnu and Brahma and other so called gods are but dependent souls like the rest and at the beginning of each aeon their functions are assigned by the supreme on the merits 'accumulated'."

We should not only clearly understand 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, which is the admiration of eminent scholars and theologians of other lands, and to accept systems of thought foreign to our conception of our ancient faith.

There is design and purpose behind temples, ceremonials, rite, and worship. They embody mind. They may be animate with life. We should keep an open mind to the new and yet preserve the balance.

Siva Linga represents the primeval form of Saiva worship. Every item of daily and festive worship in the Saiva Temple is symbolic of some principle or truth of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. A knowledge of this Philosophy is necessary to appreciate the benefit of the symbolic worship daily conducted in Saiva Temples. This peculiar Tamilian philosophy was codified by Meikandar and the disciples who followed him and the Saiva religion based on this philosophy has been systematised by the four Saints (Nayanmar) popularly called **Nalvar** whose religious experiences are embodied in the **Adankan Murai**. The Agamas prescribe rules for the various rites that serve to bring the philosophical thoughts and their practice into every day life.

Meta-physical 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 as Theivam - knowledge personified or the absolute. More often as Sivan (சிவன்) the All Highest, and by means of an inflection of the first letter in Sivan is transformed into (சீவன்) seevan which is the Soul. 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 real use should find expression in one's own language. What could be a better example than the expression (உயிர்) Soul and (மேய்) body to explain the intimate connection between God and Soul, and the Soul and 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.

Religion and Philosophy

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 in relation to one's soul. Thus the acquiring of knowledge becomes the ultimate ethical task to which all other tasks of man are subordinated, and the supreme value to which all other values are subsidiary.

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 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, 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 philosopher - Saints, Meikandar and others. Hence philosophy must be declared to be the torchlight of reason to illuminate the way to religion. Thus it is easy to understand the why and wherefor of the emphasis laid on Siddhanta as the very essence of our living. For in the scale of values, the highest value for man is knowledge of God, of Self and 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 thinking and reasoning and contemplation, which is so eminently characteristic of our race, that Meikandan and others deduced the system of thought called Siddhanta, which has been handed to us to serve us and the world at large as a citadel for all times.

In an epoch of phenomenal advances in Science and Technology and Interplanetary space travels it would seem incumbent on the presiding Authorities of the **Madams, Ashrams**, and similar Institutions in conjunction with the priesthood of the Athi-Saiva order and other denominations, and leaders of thought in the Saiva world, to deliberate jointly and bring about a Reappraisal of our ancient faith in its practices and tenets to counter and do away with the irreverance and even atheism prevalent at the moment amongst a considerable section of the followers of the Saiva Faith.

Verities continue to exist as they shall for all time; their understanding is dependent on the level of advances in knowledge and conditions of life. The methods and manner of approach to realise the verities should necessarily be in keeping with the level of enlightenment reached by the mass of the people. In other words, a reinterpretation of the ancient doctrines consistent with modern living must be sought.



esoteric parts and correlate them with philosophy. Reason is the ultimate judge in matters of truth, and what reason decides to be truth cannot be made the contents of faith. Since reason cannot be made the contents of faith, the concept of the unity of God in such a compass is to apprehend the concept of the unity of God in such a compass as to exclude every multiplicity of positive dualities and attributes. For His unity is an absolutely simple one, 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 philosopher - Saints, Muktananda and others. Hence philosophy must be declared to be the torchlight of reason to illumine the way to religion. Thus it is easy to understand the why and wherefore of the emphasis laid on Siddhanta as the very essence of our living. For in the scale of values, the highest value for man is knowledge of God, of Self and 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 thinking and reasoning and contemplation, which is so eminently characteristic of our race, that Muktananda and others deduced the system of thought called Siddhanta, which has been handed to us to serve us and the world at large as a guide for all times.

In an epoch of phenomenal advances in Science and Technology and Interplanetary space travels it would seem incumbent on the guiding Authorities of the Madhwa, Ashrama, and similar institutions in conjunction with the priesthood of the Adhi-Saiva order and other denominations, and leaders of thought in the Saiva world, to deliberate jointly and bring about a Reappraisal of our ancient faith in its practices and tenets to conform and do away with the irrelevance and even atheism prevalent at the moment amongst a considerable section of the followers of the Saiva Tana.

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A FEW OPINIONS—EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS.

"I read your essay on 'The Religion of the Tamils' with considerable interest. It deserves to be translated into Tamil and published in Tamil magazines and also in a separate pamphlet form..... Your essay gives in a succinct way the essentials of the ancient religion of the Tamils as observed in the days of yore."

Rao Bahadur C. M. Ramachandra Chettiar,
Coimbatore.

"I had very great pleasure in reading the essay of Dr. Viswalingam of Kuala Lumpur, on the 'Religion of the Tamils'. It is a correct and clear account of the history of Aryan and Dravidian currents of religious thought in the Tamil country and is bound to be an eye-opener to all seekers of Truth in religious history.

Furthermore, the treatise contains a summary of the highest philosophy of the Tamil people. I wish the work a successful wide circulation and am confident that its utility when appreciated will make a turning point in the history of the Dravidian mode of worship and religious thought."

K. Subramaniam Pillai, M.A., M.L.,
Advocate
Tagore Professor of Law.

"I read your pamphlet on the 'Religion of the Tamils' with pleasure and great interest.

It is a correct summary of the Siddhanta philosophy, and deals succinctly with the main features of Siddhantam. It exposes the idealism of Vedanta Philosophy, which almost identifies the soul of man with God Himself and how it amounts to a negation of religion. It is a fine and scholarly exposition of the cult of the Tamils."

Dr. S. S. Bharati, M.A., B.L., D.Litt.
Pasumalai, South India.