

# THE CULTURAL SOURCES OF THE SAIVA SIDDHANTINS

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## Abstract

I have something to tell though this Article joys are increased when we share them with others even more than intelletural, moral and aesthetics joys. The bliss of God-experience cannot be kept to oneself. Saint Thirumular also describes God as a fruitfull. Hence I describe significane of Saiva Siddhantins and it usually interpreted on the accomplished end. All other systems are Purva-Paksa. While it is the final conclusion the Siddhanta.

That Saiva Siddhanta, in spite of its antiquity and significance should be so little known calls for explanation. One of the reasons is the language difficulty. "All the Dravidian languages are extremely difficult" says Slater. "The Tamil Literature of Dravidian Sivaism is ignored by many European scholars" says C. Eliot, Furthermore, while countless numbers of Dravidians have studies North Indian languages and by their writings have given wide publicity to the cultural attainments reflected therein, very few North Indians, particularly in recent centurries, have rendered similar service to South Indian cultue. The post-independence trends in India, howere, have in them the promise of rectifying this failure to know and appreciate the Dravidian contributin to Indian and world culture. The Dravidians themselves, at long last, are becoming alive to the greatness of their achievement in past centuries. Some of the contemporary Tamil publications have, with zeal, taken up this matter for consideration. An intelligent knowledge and just appriciation of this culture is indispensable for a fair evaluation of Saiva Siddhanta and for a right understanding of its adherents. The independence asserted by them in maintaining their school of thought over against the views of others is understandable when it is seen that they had a highly developed culture of their own, which thought influenced by other cultures, was characteristically Dravidian. Similarly of Saiva Siddhanta also it may be said that it is Dravidian for the most part. "The Saiva Siddhat" says Dr. Pope,<sup>6</sup> "is the most elaborate, influential and undoubtedly the most valuable of all the religions of India. It is peculiarly the Southern Indian and Tamil religion and must be studied by every one who hopes to understand and influence the great South Indian peoples.

## Introduction

Saiva Siddhanta the most highly development of Saivism, claims to be the 'end of ends' with reference to other systems of Indian philosophy. It bases such claim on the gain in religious values it has made in comparison with other schools of thought. These values comprise with other schools of thought. These values comprise the lofty conception that it has of God, the large sco pe for spiritual progress that it opens up before the soul and the utility of furthering a worthy cause that it finds for the material world. It is obliged to champion these values against opponents views calculated to compromise the oneness and the supremacy of God, and to confuse the godhead with either the soul or the material world or with both. The enquiring mind is anxious to learn how the controversies are handled by the opposing schools, and to assess the results earned by the respective parties.

However, the Siddhanta system which has much to offer in the values it upholds and in the interest it arouses, has unfortunately had but scant attention given it by Indian Western scholars. 'The Sarva-Darsana-Samgraha' by Madhava Acharya, which is a 'Review of the Different Systems of Hindu Philosophy'. Saint Manikkavasakar sings 'Siva that hath the Southern Land Prise ; the God tht belongeth to all lands Praise', What the saint-poet suggests in these momentous lines is not so much that South India is a Chosen Land but

that it is a land that has the distinction of worshipping the one God of all times as Siva. The sentiment expressed in these lines lends credence to the view held by many scholars that Siva was a contribution of the Dravidians to the Indian Religion as such. It is often applied to many gods of the pantheon in the sense of 'propitious'. and once indeed to Rudra himself (x. 92. 9), meaning paradoxically that the God of wrath is the very apotheosis of propitiousness. The origin of Saivism is lost in obscurity and the Saivism of history is acknowledged by historians to be a blend of two lines of development, the Aryan and the Pre-Aryan. The Mohanjadaro and Harappa excavations prove fairly beyond doubt the vogue of a civilisation, pre-Aryan in content and presumably Dravidian. From these excavations we get the first available evidence of Saivism, specially the worship of the figure of Siva or his ancient prototype". Sir John Marshall rightly observes that Saivism takes its place as the most ancient living faith in the world.

Even those advocating a Vedic origin of Saivism admit that Vedic Rudra came to be identified with Siva of indigenous people. Whether the two deities were originally identical, or different but later on identified, it seems to be a fairly accepted view today that the religion of Saivism itself is anterior to the Vedic cult of the Rudras. The name Siva itself, it has been shown with plausibility, is Dravidian in origin, though later appropriated by Sanskrit.

Of the four Dravidian languages spoken in the southern part of the country. Tamil has the oldest literature dating well back to the pre-Christian era and as such can be taken to represent, amply and aptly, everything that was Dravidian. And, as the canonical and doctrinal works of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy are available almost exclusively in Tamil, it is but proper to look into the history of the Tamil literature to trace the worship of Siva in the Tamil Land, and the philosophy that grew up with it.

### **Key Words :**

**Dravidians, Tamil, Culture, Civilization, Pandian, Literature, Tolkappiyam, Silapathikaram, Manimekalai, Sociology, Sarva-Darsana-Sangraha, Madhava Acarya, Hindu Philosophy, Saivism.**

Various theories put forward as to the original stock and home of the Dravidians have not been substantiated by indubitable evidence. All that can be said with certainty on the basis of present knowledge is that the Dravidians appear to have lived in India from the dim past and to be the children of the soil. Oppert concludes his enquiry into this matter saying, "So far as historical traces can be found in the labyrinth of Indian antiquity, it was the Gauda-Dravidian who lived and tilled the soil and worked the mines in India."

The Tamilians form a sect of the Dravidians today. Originally, before some of the other Dravidian languages branched off from Tamil, the terms, 'Tamils' and 'Dravidians' were interchangeable. The Tamils lived and learned. Their civilisation reached no mean level. This progress, however suffered an unexpected and severe setback from two or more floods that at different intervals swept over the land. Concerning this disaster, it has been said, "The sea has been the great devourer of the work of the grand old Tamil era. . . . They (the floods) have in the first place obliterated from human view the glorious golden gates cities of Madura and Kapadapuram: the Pandyan monarchs had garnered behind these golden gates the inestimable treasures of Tamil literature. What remained of the great aeons was the eternal sob of the southern sea and the 'Tolkappiam'. That is the slight but magnificent segment from which with the eye of vision we infer the whole circle of the grand age of Tamil civilisation. For the past 3,000 years, the Tolkappiam has been the unfailing fount of inspiration for the students and scholars of Tamil sociology." Other ancient Tamil works that are available today and which shed light on the ancient culture of the Tamils, are 'Manimekalai' (said to be composed by about A.1). 90, and which sheds light on Buddhism, and 'Silappatikaram', which was composed about A.D. 600, and which contains vivid accounts of the different classes of Tamil society at that time. Besides the floods, other factors that account for the obliteration of this ancient culture are the perishable material in which literary compositions were recorded prior to the introduction of paper and printing, the destruction wrought by invaders with antipathy towards Hinduism and other political disturbances.

One of the reasons that accounts for the soundness of the progress and the depth of the attainments of this people is that they are, on the whole, a law-abiding and peace-loving people. This natural bent of mind not only freed them from the conflict between social and anti-social ways, but also spared them the waste of energy that such conflict involves. On such vantage ground, they were able to orient their intelligence towards individual and social progress, and with superb energy work for such ends. Wholly engrossed in constructive efforts and in outstripping previous levels of excellence, the thought of giving publicity to their accomplishments hardly occurred to them. In these circumstances, they have not won the recognition due to them for their achievements. As a present-day illustration of this, note the following insertion in *Tue Pioneer* (a daily of Lucknow) dated 1st February, 1953. "Certain procedures of rice culture, which have now caught public attention as the 'Japanese method' were not new to South India, where they have been successfully adopted for many decades now;" observed Dr. S. Krishnamurti, University Professor of Agriculture. These methods had been evolved and introduced in South India by the Madras Agriculture Department, which found them conducive to higher yields of rice.

In spite of the hoary antiquity of Dravidian culture, and the great heights attained by it, adequate information concerning it is still not available. Deploring the paucity of literature on this subject, H. J. Fleure in his foreword to Slater's book, 'The Dravidian Element in Indian Culture' says, "The notion of a barbarous India on which Aryan civilisation descended has been fairly widespread and the number of books which tell us of Southern Indian civilisation is not as large as one might wish."

Tamil India consisted of large kingdoms such as Chera, Cola, Pandya. Megasthenes Who visited India in the 4th century B.C. mentions some features concerning the Pandyan kingdom. King- was an ancient tradition with the Tamils. One of the evidences for this is that in Tamil there are no less than twelve Synonyms for the term, king. The king's duty was to care for the subjects' welfare. Hence one of the terms for a king has the meaning of a shepherd who tends his flock. He revered wisdom and learning. Learned men were invited to live in and grace the palace. Astrologers whose deviations were considered indispensable to regulate the royal policy were among the palace personnel. The king with these advisers, followed the considered policy of *nyayam*, *viram* and *kodai*, that is justice, bravery and generosity.

Among the essential duties of the king was that of promoting learning. He deemed it a privilege to be associated with movements intended for the betterment of learning. In many cases, the kings were themselves devoted to learning and were thus qualified for membership in the Tamil Sangam or Academy, which judged literary works for setting on them its seal of approval. The working of the Sangam had the effect of maintaining a high standard of excellence. The works approved by it have been well able to stand the test of time. In taking stock of these works at the present day, it has been said, "Tamil is a very ancient Indian language with a voluminous classical literature of very high merit." The care with which the language and literature were thus nurtured have proved their worth through the ages in that the language has maintained its individuality and the literature been an influence for good. Concerning the independence asserted by the Dravidian languages against encroaching forces, it has been said, "The persistent independence of the Tamil idiom (and to a lesser degree of the other Dravidian languages) in the face of Sanskrit, is in striking contrast with the almost total disappearance of non-Sanskritic vernaculars in the north of India." The literature has helped to give a balanced and wholesome outlook on life and to lift to a high plane every walk of life.

### **Methodology**

Geographical factors moulded to some extent the pattern of life the different groups of people:

1. In the coastal region, the Paratavar, braced by sea breezes, challenged by the waves, took to venturesome occupations ailing, pearl-diving and fishing. In their leisure time, they made salt and salt-fish. The fruits of their toil promoted food supply and ornaments at home, and trade and colonization abroad. They came to be, 'hardy fisher-folk, expert pearl-divers, and bold sailors. They also made their own sailing vessels out of the trees in those regions. Attempting at first only the coastal region, they ventured later to distant seas; and



opening up new sea-routes, reached other countries and established markets for their wares of salt, salt-fish and timber.

2. In the dry sandy regions, the Maravars lived their care-free, irresponsible and anti-social life. They way-laid travelers and robbed them. They looted the goods of travelers and sold them cheap. They stole cattle from the neighbourhood. These means and the hunting that they did with their bow and arrow, supplied their needs.

3. The hilly tracts were the abode of the Kuravars. With bow and arrow, these expert hunters, hunted wild animals, the flesh of which they ate, and the skins of which they used as bedding and clothing. Their knowledge of the medicinal values of the herbs that covered the hill-sides, enabled them to be their own physicians. From the tall trees where the bee-hives abounded, these folks obtained their supply of nectar. The sandal wood tree supplied them the fuel and the flavour that they required for roasting flesh.

4. In the level plains, dwelt the agricultural group, the Vellalas. Rivers and lakes provided their fields with water. Where such water-supply was not available, they built canals or used water-lifts. They grew the grains and pulses that were the staple food in the country. They also grew cotton and wove cloth. They were skilled in carpentry and made tools, carts, etc. They were wealthy and often owned much property.

5. In the temples were the priests, or parpar, who saw to the affairs of the temples and imparted learning and wisdom to the people.

6. Travelling hither and thither by land or sea or by both were the Vanikar or traders. With their families settled in the mother country, they set out to sell their wares in foreign markets and to bring back money or goods in exchange. They were practical, enterprising and industrious men, who in making good business, furthered the interests of the country.

Internal trade was not considerable owing to poor communications. Pedlars and animals transported the goods. External trade, however, growing from small beginnings attained an eminent position. India had the wherewithal for foreign markets. Her forests abounded with teak, sandalwood, indigo, ivory, apes, peacocks; her subterranean depths had embedded in them gold, silver, tin, sapphires and other precious stones; her fields yielded pepper and rice; her seas gave corals and pearls. Concerning the textiles of those days, it has been said, "Flourishing trade presupposes a volume of industry, the principal of which was Weaving. . . . There are thirty varieties of silks mentioned, each with a distinct appellation of its own . . . The character of the cotton stuffs which were manufactured is indicated by the comparison instituted between them and 'sloughs of serpents' or 'vapour of milk' and the general description of these as 'those fine textures the thread of which could not be followed even by the eye'," All of these products were greatly in demand in foreign lands.

In the broadcast entitled, 'Maritime Enterprise in Ancient India', made by the Lucknow Radio station, and which was published in the Pioneer Magazine section of 11th January, 1953, it is said, "In the epic and post-epic periods, India witnessed a grand outburst of seafaring activity and maritime enterprise. This gave wonderful impetus to the rise and growth of a Greater India across the seas... India's maritime enterprise was almost limitless in extent!" These great enterprises were confined to the Dravidians even after the Aryans appeared. It is said, "The Aryans in India lost contact with the sea in course of time and viewed sea-going with disfavour. It was left to the Dravidians to develop the shipping and maritime activities of India,"

The sailing vessels they used were in all probability not seaworthy for long voyages. It seems surprising that with inadequate equipment they adventured as far as they did. Commencing their maritime ventures in the back-waters of the west coast, and actuated by the desire for excellent fish, they obtained their early familiarity with the sea. Intervening islands now submerged, and favourable winds in different latitudes helped in the longer trips. Concerning nautical achievement of the Southerners, it has been said, "The greatest achievement of the Dravidian was in the art of navigation... There are native words for boats of all

sizes in the Dravidian languages as well as for different parts of the vessels.” It was the naval power of the Chera, Cola and Paliya kings that enabled them to defend their coasts.

It is interesting to note the commercial *contacts* made with other countries in those early days. Among the ruins of Babylon was found teak that keeps well-preserved through the years. It grows on the Malabar coast of South India and nowhere else. Egypt took from India indigo and muslin. Indigo was used for the dyeing industry. Muslin was used to wrap the dead. In Palestine, King Solomon (about 1000 B.C.) imported from India peacocks, apes, gold, silver, ivory and sandalwood. The Greeks took rice and pepper. Pepper was used to preserve meat, to give flavour to food and for medicinal purposes. Hippocrates, the Greek physician of renown, bestowed on pepper the name, ‘Indian medicine’. It fetched much wealth to India from all the countries that imported it. The Romans took sweet smelling substances such as spikenard, and also pearls. They used the scented stuff for cremating their dead. Their women desired the pearls. Roman ladies fancied the pearls to such an extent and made such lavish use of them that the officials of Rome were concerned at the extent to which the coffers of the state had to be depleted to meet this expense. Describing the wife of the Emperor Cams, Pliny says, “she was covered with emeralds and pearls which shone in alternate layers upon her head, in her wreaths, in her ears, upon her neck, in her bracelets and on her fingers.”

There are some who maintain that there are evidences of Dravidian culture in countries outside India. N. C. Kandiah Pillai maintains that in Java there are many images of deities with six heads and twelve arms. He also observes that here and in the Celebes, there are evidences of Siva lingam worship having prevailed from early times. Chaman Lal maintains that the early inhabitants of India had contact with the two Americas, and have left there the impress of their culture. The writers whom he quotes, in his book give the impression that in the early centuries, India made a vital contribution to countries spread out far and wide, J. A. B. Scherer in his book entitled, ‘Cotton as a World Power’ holds the view that India is the original home of cotton and that it was first seen in Europe when the soldiers of Alexander, the Great, brought some of it as a curiosity in the 4th century B.C. At the time it was new to Europe, the cotton industry had far advanced in India.

One of the contributions made to India by the Dravidians is in metallurgy, which they rather than the northerners developed in the early ages. The occupations of goldsmiths, silversmiths and blacksmiths were hereditary. The skill acquired through the ages explains the rich variety, fine finish and creative genius displayed in the household metal vessels in South India. The variety and creative skill are also explained by the high culinary art of the Dravidians. In the article entitled, ‘Hindu Culture Expressed in South Indian Household Vessels’ (*The Pilgrim*, January 1953, the Quarterly Magazine of the Christian Society for the Study of Hindustan, p. 7) it is said, “The inherent spiritual and mental capacity of the people as a factor in South Indian Culture is readily seen the moment one sees these vessels. ‘A thing of beauty is a joy forever.’ These people created and enjoyed beautiful forms and shapes. The graceful contours and artistic engraving and inlaying of these lovely vessels testify that these people were able to appreciate and enjoy grace, rhythm, proportion, in short beauty so much that they must create it and have it with them for their daily use and constant ‘enjoyment.’”

Modern achievements and modern investigations in South India are bringing to light its legacy of a culture that has developed unobtrusively on sound lines through countless generations. Dravidians have always excelled at the art of using the common things of life to create rare works of art. A modern example of this is the beautiful silver-lace-bordered mat, which Queen Elizabeth II will receive from South India. It is a present to her on the occasion of her coronation made by the Mat Weavers’ Association of Pattamadai, a village in Tinnevely District. “The mat, fine and shiny like a piece of silken embroidery, can be folded to the size of a table napkin. The korai grass used for this comes from Tambraparni river-bed in the district. The long experience of the textile industry enables South India to play a leading part in formulating policies and in inculcating attitudes that will give due recognition to diverse interests in this sphere. Mr. R. Venkataswamy, Chairman of the Southern India Mill-owners’ Association and Chairman of the Reception Committee of the 10th session of the All India Textile Conference, while clarifying to the delegates the role of the technician, said, ‘It is time that he should not be satisfied with technical knowledge alone, but he

should also develop deeper understanding of the reactions and psychology of labour and their needs and should strive to foster a harmonious relationship between management and labour.” The geological survey that is being made in South India claims that some of the Andhra districts that in future are likely to become the ‘-Kimberly of South India’, were flourishing diamond mining centres three centuries ago. It is from here that the kohinoor that adorns the British crown was obtained.

One of the achievements of the Dravidians was international contacts. As proof of this one may note that Roman coins of different periods have been found in different places in South India. These contacts made a great impact on their attainments. Testifying to this It has been said, “Between four and five thousand years ago, Dravidian India received the seeds of many sorts of culture and received them into fertile soil.”

South India has had the devoted service of people who coming from different quarters, made their home here. The Buddhists who came to South India, both contributed to the literature of the Tamils and served their interests in other ways. Their teaching spread for several reasons. Their unselfish and helpful lives, their preaching of a classless society, their feeding of the poor and succour of the handicapped at centres supported by funds collected from the rich, and their promotion of learning, won the hearts of the people to this faith. However, the religion was stamped out from their midst by the Tamils as the theism in their own religion had a great hold on them. The Buddhist literary contributions, however, constitute a permanent part of Tamil literature. Chief among these is ‘Manimekalai’, which contains information about Buddhism and about the social conditions of that time.

The Jains were also interested in advocating their religion, which after temporary Success began to decline. In literature, their attempts to over-Sanskritise Tamil were resisted as this robbed Tamil of its spontaneity and crippled its individuality. Some of the Jains who were great scholars, added to the literary heritage of the Tamils ‘Naladiyar’, written by a Jain, has wielded ret influence in the South.

The Missionaries who came to South India have, in the course of their ministry, rendered great service to the Tamils. Briefly reviewing the history of Tamil literature, S. D Sargunar says, “The most brilliant age in Tamil literature, the Sangam Age, came to a close at the downfall of the three Tamil dynasties, and was succeeded by dark ages, which continued all through the long period of anarchy and misrule in South India. It was after the advent of Europeans in general, and European Christian Missionaries in particular that the revival of Tamil letters began.” The Missionaries furthered the interests of Tamil in many ways. They simplified the script and introduced punctuation. They gave an impetus to prose works, and were the first to write Tamil treatises on science. They introduced printing presses, and set up societies such as the *Madras School Book Society*, for promoting Tamil works and other literature. They introduced the printing of Tamil tracts, books and papers. Tamil works were printed prior to works in any other Indian language. English works were translated into Tamil, and Tamil works into English. That this is great service, is gladly acknowledged by Tamils today.

Special mention needs to be made of Bishop Caldwell and Dr. Pope. Bishop Caldwell (1815-1892) was born in Ireland and educated in Scotland. He came to India as a member of the S.P.G. Mission and ministered in South India for 54 years. He studied Greek, Hebrew and Latin in order to learn the great truths of the Holy Bible. In Scotland, while studying Greek at the Glasgow University, his own love of learning and aptitude for scholarship were greatly fostered by the inspiration aroused in him by the lecturer. Caldwell used these talents in the service of India and by his monumental work, ‘A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages’, he stemmed the tide of wrong notions that militated against these languages and infused fresh life into them. Concerning the origin of these languages he says, “the supposition of the derivation of the Dravidian languages from Sanskrit, though entertained in the past generation by a Colebrooke, a Carey and a Wilkins, is now known to be entirely destitute of foundation.” Both because of the antiquity of Tamil and because of the advanced nature of the civilisation of the people, the language had a copious vocabulary. There is, therefore, no need for extensive borrowing from other languages. In fact, large-scale borrowing has the tendency to distort its style. Caldwell stressed this fact with saying, “Tamil can readily dispense with the greater part or the whole of its Sanskrit and by dispensing with it, it rises to a Purer and more refined



style.” The keen mind that Caldwell had led him to be interested in diverse matters. He produced a history of Tinnevely and noted therein many matters of historical interest. To his diverse interests, he added geological exploring and ascertained interesting facts regarding an ancient South Indian port noted for its pearl industry.

Dr. Pope (1820-1908) who started work as a missionary in his 19th year, was Professor of Dravidian languages in the Oxford University, missionary in South India and a devoted student of Saiva Siddhanta. By his writings, he drew the attention of the English reading public to the glories of Tamil and the values of Saiva Siddhanta. At a time when Tamil suffered a setback due to various discouraging trends, Dr. Pope gave the sorely-needed encouragement with saying, “Let the Tamils cease to be ashamed of their Tamil.”

The diverse cultural elements that permeated society made for an awakening of the mind of the people. The different philosophical and religious view-points that confronted the Siddhanta sastra writers up to about the time that these sastras were written, that is the 14th Century A.D., opened their minds to different view-points which they incorporated into their *Weltanschauung*. These diverse viewpoints far from driving them into seclusion, led them to judge them with reference to their own position and to formulate their philosophy concerning different forms of religious approach. In doing so, they both zealously guarded their own values, and gave due recognition to the values of other schools. Such an approach to diversity of views that the Siddhanta sastras passed on to posterity, as well as the play of foreign contributions, have been a great influence among the people. The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society of Tinnevely and Madras, have encouraged publications appreciative of the cultures and religions of different peoples in the world. The ancient traditions of internationalism and the spiritual aspirations of the people would surely pave the way for them to attain great heights in the spiritual realm and to contribute towards the unity and welfare of India, international fellowship and world peace.

### **Result**

Moreover, Saiva Siddhanta did not exist in isolation. It had controversies with the whole gamut of Indian philosophical systems as a result of which it emerged as ‘the end of ends,’ ‘the final truth’. Its sastras are hence, in the nature of an apologetic, where practically all of its cardinal tenets are sought to be justified before the bar of opposed views and of world opinion. This confident, uncompromising and bold assertion of individuality in the realm of religious philosophy, and this zeal to guard the values contained therein, are better understood against a background of the ancient Dravidian culture with its hoary traditions. Modern Tamil scholars have tried to recapture these past attainments from old Tamil literature such as *Tolkappiam*. Furthermore, archaeological findings are continuing to throw light on this subject of interest. After an introductory review of the philosophical system that the Siddhantins were keen to preserve, the cultural environment in which their genius flowered forth is briefly sketched in the paper. Thereafter, a full presentation of Saiva Siddhanta is made.

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