

Ocean 2 Wisdom : Po monthly.

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THE OCEAN OF WISDOM

An English bi-monthly devoted to a comparative study of
Religion, Philosophy, Psychology, Ethics and South Indian History.

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VOL. II

SEPTEMBER, 1938

Nos. 6

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The Conception of God as Rudra
(Continued from the 1st no. of the 2nd Vol.)

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Printed and Published at

THE T. M. PRESS, PALLAVARAM.

5th October, 1942.

For a volume: Three Rupees & eight annas or 5sh.

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M-41, N 3570

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PRAYER FOR THE VICTORY OF THE ALLIED NATIONS

Offered by Swami Vadachalam on the 6th of September, 1942,
at 6 p. m. at the Victoria Public Hall, Madras, under
the presidency of His Excellency Sir Arthur Hope,
the Governor of Madras

O God, our gracious and eternal father and all-merciful and loving mother in one, O our great and all-knowing Sire that brought us forth to this earth and sustainest us by providing beforehand all that are needed for our life; to thee our Lord who dancest ever before our eyes in the form of light, who dancest ever within our heart in the form of love and joy, who movest ever within our mind in the form of thought and settest it in perpetual motion, to thee our heavenly parent and judge, we thy poor and helpless children assemble here, to offer our prayer and implore thee to preserve to us the noblest structure of humanity raised by the patient and unremitted labour of thy sober-minded posterity and save it from the ruin and destruction that is being wrought on it by that part of thy progeny which is rude, inhuman and thoughtless.

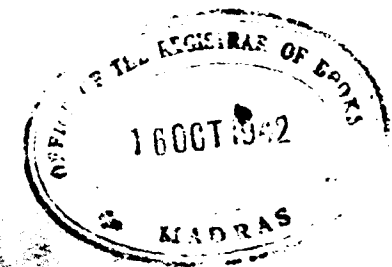
O God the almighty, we the Tamils of this part of India have, from time immemorial, been such staunch believers in thy grace, thy wisdom, and in thy parental care that we never thought nor did anything at any former time against thy will, but directed our course in the tangled path of this earthly life only under the guidance of thy divine will, and attained, in consequence, to a high pitch of civilisation even in the pre-Aryan times.

But alas! O Almighty Father, from the time when our forefathers, exulting in the glory of their exalted position, came to slip away from their faith in thee and began to adore a multitude of mortal heroes, from the time our kings and rich men, coming under the influence of some privileged classes, sought either in their own interest or in the interest of their favoured few to oppress their people and suck the means of their existence, their downfall came as surely as night follows day. And then it was, O Lord, that thou sentest forth the Aryan hordes, and the Huns and other merciless people from the remotest corners of the north, into this vast continent of our ancient Bharata rece, as a severe

religions of Christ and Mohammed are becoming more and more repugnant to the reason and sentiments of thoughtful persons. On great religious problems man might be made to think but on no account should he be forced to accept them quite blindly. But the Vaishnavites in their eagerness to make their religion popular, threw overboard their former ideal conception of God and put in its stead the worship of human heroes and insinuated it into the religious observances of the Tamils, the two epics having served them to do it rather imperceptibly.

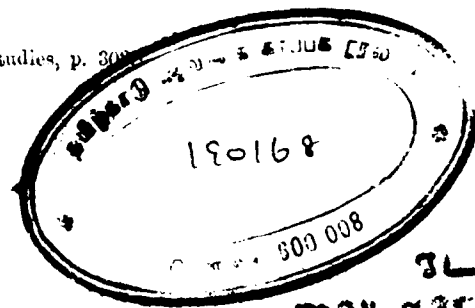
It was pointed out before that the worship of Krishna was introduced into the south previous to that of Rama. The cause of it was the recital of the story of the Mahabharata which had been brought into the south by a colony of northern brahmins early in the first century A. D. A Tamil version of the Mahabharata seems to have been made by the poet Perundevanar probably towards the end of the second century A. D. Almost the whole of this work was lost, except a few stray stanzas quoted by the great commentator Nachinarkkiniar and others. There was also another version of it made in the ninth century A. D., by another poet of the same name. And many more had been made from the ninth century downwards up to our own time.

While we have thus so many Tamil versions of the Mahabharata from the second century A. D. down to the nineteenth, we have got no more than a single version of the Ramayana made by Kamban as late as the twelfth century



A. D. Does not this fact prove itself very significant? It appears certain that the story of the Ramayana had been brought into the south not before but only after the sixth century A. D., by a later colony of northern brahmins and made by them very popular close upon the extinction of the Buddhist and the Jaina religions, although its main incidents seem to have become known here as early as the second century A.D. Why Rama is not so often addressed to as is Krishna, even in the devotional poems of the early Vaishnava saints as Poikai, Pei and Bhutam cannot be explained on any supposition other than this. In other words, it was just at the time of the first three Alvars that the story of the Ramayana was coming to be looked upon as sacred and that Rama himself exalted as an incarnation of Narayana. This could not have taken place prior to the second half of the seventh century A. D., for in the early centuries of the Christian era Buddhism at first and Jainism soon after were eclipsing the original creeds and only after the two heretical cults had declined and almost died out, did the two old religions begin to revive and prevail, one in its more philosophical character and the other in its newly acquired Puranic setting. I think Mr. M. Srinivasa Aiyangar, M. A., is not wrong in assigning the time of the three first Alvars to the latter half of the seventh century A. D.¹

¹ Tamil Studies, p. 308.



After the deified heroes of the north had, in this way, been made to usurp the place of Lord Narayana, the schism between the two faiths became more and more pronounced than it was before the beginning of the Christian era; for the worshippers of Lord Rudra feeling they could not honestly accommodate themselves to the degenerated tenets of their brother-religionists, probably thought it necessary to style themselves by a class-name which should unequivocally articulate their difference from the new church, and for this purpose chose the name 'Saivites'—the name by which they came to be called ever afterwards from the first century A. D. As a matter of fact, the old Tamils had no name of their own making to specify either religion, simply because there was then no other creed in existence from which it must have been deemed needful to distinguish their own by a particular name, simply because the very thought of naming it did not occur to them under the circumstances then existed. A cursory glance at the immortal Tamil work of the pre-Christian era, I mean the sacred Kural of Thiruvalluvar, would be enough to convince you of the veracity of this statement made as regards the nature of the old Tamil religion. The social, moral and religious principles laid down in that great work belong not to one society or one nation or one religion, but are common to all classes of people and their thought and to all kinds of religion. You cannot detect in it to what particular kind of society it is addressed, or to what people its moral and

religious instruction is imparted either in name or in substance. The sacred Kural is the real embodiment of the ancient Tamilian thought, it constitutes the very highest reach to which that thought attained. When the time comes for the world to recognize the value of the ideal teachings enshrined in this incomparable work and adopt it as the one universal Bible of the whole mankind, we may indulge in our imagination the coming of the kingdom of God verily on this earth, with its one religion, one race and one society all inspired with genuine love for all living beings and eternal God.

CHAPTER VIII

THE EFFECT OF BRAHMIN COLONIZATION

But from the time the northern brahmins and the Sanscrit language set foot on this land, the process of deterioration set in. High qualifications were thrown into the shade; birth-right was brought to the fore. In pre-Aryan times the people who were engaged in different occupations did think very respectfully of the calling of each group being useful to every other group. But as time went on, those who formerly combined to work for the general welfare of society, now came to be split up into castes and subcastes and be called by Sanscrit names which tended to breed in them vain and invidious distinctions; hero-worship was set up; legends and mythical accounts multiplied and clustered around each and every deified hero and brought into existence religious sects ever contending for supremacy one over the other; the Puranas were written so that one religious sect might produce them as their authority and fight with the other endlessly; interminable rites and ceremonies that constitute a perennial source of income to brahmin priests were invented and elaborated and stringent rules for conducting them came to be laid down in treatises—all in Sanscrit, so that the people might not know them nor practise them without the aid of priests; in short, everything calculated to tear the Tamilian society to pieces was

deftly devised and brought into operation so smoothly that nobody could apprehend the evil motive which prompted it. All these were done so cautiously as to make the new settlers' position quite secure. Here I am very anxious to notify that in thus recounting the causes which led to the degeneration of the Tamilian society, my motive should not be misconstrued or misunderstood as anything but good. For a correct understanding of the root-causes that were at work in bringing about the disintegration of a highly civilized society will, as all must admit, help us, in our reconstructive work, to discern the destructive and disastrous elements in it and eliminate them from their usurped place. The amazing progress which other nations have achieved in all walks of life, calls for our immediate action so to re-organize our society as to make each member of it co-operate whole-heartedly with every other in accordance with the needs of the time and bring back its ideal state and set it as a model to others. Unless we compare our present position with our past and adopt remedial measures to remove at once the canker that eats into the vitals of our society, we cannot expect to live long and happily but must die soon and miserably in the midst of an enlightened community which is more vigorous, whose life is more wholesome and more capable of adapting itself to varying conditions of life as time varies in its progress.

CHAPTER IX

DESCENSION OF VAISHNAVAISM

To return to our subject, the worshippers of Rudra and Uma, who were called the 'Saivites' in after times, held so steadfastly to their original conception of God that they ever persisted in not bringing the two Supreme Beings down to the level of mortal man. Even while they were inventing stories for the sake of instructing masses and counteracting the influence exercised by the two famous epics, they were ever solicitous to impress on our minds the supreme truth about Lord Siva and Uma that they are unborn, immortal and superhuman. Often and often do we meet with this unequivocal declaration in all their writings, however absurd, fantastic, and extravagant they may seem to us in other respects. But it is regrettable that our brother-religionists drifted farther and farther away from their original conception of Lord Narayana to such a long distance as not only to lose sight of his unborn and immortal nature but to ascribe also births and deaths and human sufferings to him.

Besides cherishing this contemptible conception of God, they even took to view Narayana as one of the three gods who make up the later Hindu Triad and then tried to lift him up above the other two. This marks the third stage of descent to which the Vaishnava religion has gone

down from the time of the early Alvars up to our own. Although we come across one or two stray references to the Hindu Triad in the classical Tamil poems written at the beginning of the Christian era, we do not find there any one of the Triad made supreme and others subordinates. To the still earlier Tamil poems the Trinity is altogether unknown. Even when the Trinity came to be admitted, the old Tamils held a fourth being Lord Muruga to be superior to the three.¹ This constitutes the pre-eminent doctrine of God—of God being the fourth principle lying above and beyond the three gods: Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra, to which the Saivites cling tenaciously even unto this day. Whether they take Muruga to be the Supreme Being, or Siva as such, they do not hold either of them as one of the Trinity but take him to be superior to all the three. According to the Saiva religion, there are many higher beings who are called 'Rudras' and who to all appearance look like the greatest Lord Rudra or Siva but who are, in fact, his mere servants treated as his sons on account of their nearness to him in love and devotion. This view is countenanced even in the Rie-Veda which invokes Rudra thus: "May the healing Rudra, with the Rudras, be favourable to us"². "May the divine Rudra with the Rudras be gracious to us"³. Consequently the Rudra in

¹ Paripadal, 8, and Thirumurnktruppada, II-128-176.

² "Sam no Rudro Rudrebhir jalashah" vii. 35, 6.

³ "Rudro Rudrebhir devo mritayati" x. 66, 3.

the Trinity the Saivites maintain to be none other than one of the many higher beings who bear that name but who are not, in truth, the highest Lord Rudra. The Vaishnavas of the later period held only three beings to be higher than gods and of these three they made 'Vishnu' the highest, ascribing to him the preservation of created beings as a special function; still they believed not in the existence of a fourth being transcending the three. And of the Vaishnava Saints who proclaimed this doctrine, Poigai Alwar was the first; others simply followed him in his track.

But, how three gods can exist instead of two; how the preservative function can be performed without having as its antecedent the creative one; how a god, whose care is to preserve the created order and who is, therefore, a dependant on the creator, can be regarded as higher than the creator; how a being who, from the nature of his office, cannot prolong it to an indefinite period while there is a destructive agent, but must necessarily succumb to him when he dissolves the worn-out matter, how such a being can be raised to a mightier position than that of Rudra—all these vital points do not seem to strike the minds of the Vaishnava saints in general. To a degree, a difficulty similar to these appears to have presented itself to the first Alwar Poigaiyar but he too made no attempt to solve it.¹ The Vaishnavites merely rest their faith on the Puranic stories and question not whether they are authentic accounts or

¹ See his Centenary poem, stanza 69.

mere fabricated fictions. So powerful was the influence wielded by the brahmin priests over the minds of the pious Tamils by means of such myths and so firm is the hold they still continue to have on the minds of even educated people.

But in the case of Poigaialwar, we may make a grand exception. He seems to have had such a clear mental vision at times that it enabled him to penetrate to the deep mystery which underlay the original conception formed of God by the Tamils of the Tholkappiam age, and he even yearned to go back to it. In a significant stanza,¹ he plainly tells us the fact that there exist not three but only two supreme principles inseparably united, one the red-coloured being Rudra and the other the blue-coloured being Narayana. Nevertheless, he was wavering between the original conception of God and the later Puranic phantasy, for a long time it appears, but finally after having had a true spiritual experience, perhaps not without a great and hard struggle, he settled down to the original conception and ended by adoring only the two Supreme principles the red and the blue.²

We have already seen that creation proceeds from an appropriate combination of not three but only of two principles, the fiery and the watery; and the created worlds can endure so long only as these two elements maintain their balance; but when the time approaches in which one

¹ Ibid, 5.

² Ibid, 97.

element outweighs the other, the destructive action begins to set in. A careful insight into the forces of nature and their workings cannot fail to show that it is fire and not water that brings about the ultimate destruction of all including water also. To keep in harmony the two blind and inanimate forces, the activity of two spiritual and all-intelligent forces of similar character is necessarily required as pointed out before. Hence it follows as a momentous conclusion that there can exist in reality not more than the spiritual heat principle Rudra and the cold principle Uma or Narayana, a third thing being unimaginable and unscientific. As we have seen these two Supreme principles together performing the creative, the preservative, and the destructive functions, it is against all reason and science to uphold an independent third principle either to direct or to control the function of preservation. Further, preservation is not a separate function, but is involved in the creative, it being nothing more than the mere continuation of the creative process, so to speak. For, is it not a fact that at every moment and every second as old cells in our body die out, newer ones come to fill up their place, as old particles of dust fly through the air newer particles fall down and accumulate on the earth? Is not preservation a mere displacement and replacement of matter that is continually going on in cycles? If the creative action could come to a stop, that is, if things were not re-created every time that they break up, the preservative function cannot outlast

but must disappear along with it leaving the destructive process to begin its work immediately and carry it out irresistibly. There are, therefore, only two functions in reality and only two Supreme principles Siva and Uma that perform these two functions conjointly.

CHAPTER X

PERSONAL STATEMENTS OF TAMIL SAINTS

So far our inquiry based on solid scientific facts has led us to confirm the truth of what our Seers, Saints and Sages, from ancient times down to our own, have perceived and proclaimed as regards the nature of the Supreme Soul. Now, it may be asked whether there is any authentic personal record of any seer who declared that he saw God face to face and that the God he saw was composed of a double personality, one a red-coloured male and the other a blue-coloured female. In answer to this, I may say at once that, though I have not met with any record of high antiquity which enshrines the personal statements of any ancient seer, yet when we approach the mediaeval period of Tamil literature, which begins from the third century A. D. and ends with the eighth, we do obtain a number of inestimable lyric poems as authentic documents in which the Saints have plainly declared the wonderful experience they have had with a personal God. As a matter of fact almost all the personal outpourings of very ancient Saints have perished, leaving the spiritual truth to be preserved and told in the works of the later Saints who came in succession in the medieval ages. That is why in all the oldest documents that have come down to us, we find ancient gods and goddesses mentioned not by the seer himself but by those who

came to worship them in subsequent periods. For instance: in the antique Egyptian records, the great sun-god Osiris is represented to have the goddess Isis as his wife; in the Chaldaean, the god Ea to have Dav-kina as his consort, and the sun-god Tammuz to have Istar; in the Phoenician the principal divinity Baal to have Ashtoreth; in the Grecian, Zeus to have Hera; in the Roman, Jupiter to have Juno; in the Teuton, Woden to have Frigga; and in the Peruvian the sun-god Inti to have the moon as his wife. Again in the very first chapter of Genesis the first book in the Bible, it is stated thus: "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." By the way, I wish to draw attention to the words uttered by God in the above quotation: the words denoting God being in the first person plural as 'us' and 'our,' whereas in the subsequent verses in which God addresses man, the words are in the first person singular, as "I have given you every herb-bearing seed." etc. This difference, it must be noted, is very significant, since 'us' and 'our' express God's will as including in it the will of his divine consort, to produce human beings in the forms of male and female like himself and his better half, while 'I' in the following passages represents him simply as exercising his authority singly over man. Although all the ancient religious writings speak of God in the terms of male and female, we do not meet with a single one in them which

contains the bold declaration of a seer in the first person—the declaration: "I saw God, and it was twofold; father and mother in one indivisible whole." For want of such an honest, sincere, bold personal affirmation, the world, except southern India, has not only lost the invaluable treasure of Divine truth that might have accrued to it, if it had realized this ultimate fact, but even went to the length of ridiculing the Fatherhood and Motherhood of God and dared to treat it as a mere anthropomorphic myth. It should never be forgotten that it was not man that created God in his image but it was God himself that made man after the pattern of His gracious spiritual image. Although man cannot create God's most glorious form dazzling with brilliant beauty, yet he can disfigure it as when he struggles to bring it before his mental and physical eyes, by investing it with such appendages as his ugly and mistaken notions of beauty, adornments and decorations put upon it. Of the quaint notions entertained by him of God's spiritual nature and functions, the grotesque images and idols he has set up all over the world as their visible and tangible representations still stand as clear and indisputable witnesses. Only so much can man make and only so much, if you like, may you call anthropomorphism. But, of the transcendent beauty of God's spiritual image, ordinary man can form no idea, although the few chosen seers to whom it was given to perceive it can form a correct notion of the personality of God. Had there been one Saint who had not only seen God

but had also proved the fact of it at every turn of his miraculous life, as well as in the lyrical utterances he poured extempore while he was on earth, we can then easily bring ourselves to form in our mind the true spiritual image of God and not otherwise. But, for one true account of a vision seen and proclaimed by a few real Saints, thousands of false accounts touching the personality of God came to be fabricated by self-interested persons and made to eclipse the true account of the glory of the true God and his resplendent person. As matters stand, the task of disentangling what is true like a gem from the heap of falsities has become a very hard work for us. Ever since the opening of the Christian era, romantic stories and religious myths streamed into the south not only from the ritualistic Brahmanism but also from the nihilistic Buddhism and Jainism. Even poets of rare genius and scholars of profound learning such as Ilangovalikal and Satthanar allowed their minds to be swayed to a certain extent by the people's credulity which had been very much captivated by the Puranic myths newly introduced. Yet they lost not wholly their characteristic critical acumen to discern the deep-lying truth and bring it out at times from the over-lying heap of falsehood. If such had been the case even with the highly cultured Tamils, what the condition of the less enlightened and illiterate people could be under the new magical influence of northern priests might be better imagined than described.

CHAPTER XI

ST. MANICKAVACHAKAR

In the third century of the Christian era, the people of the Tamil country came so low down to the point of ignoring the real and most valuable conception of the Godhead—the conception of its Fatherhood and Motherhood, just then quite opportunely St. Manickavachakar appeared on the scene, pointed out the momentous fact and saved not only the Tamils but the whole of mankind also, from the clutch of rank ignorance and gross misconceptions. Manickavachakar was an young man of vast and deep learning and was employed as the prime minister to the then Pandian king in Madura. He says that while he was passing through all kinds of worldly experience and enjoying all kinds of pleasure, his heart was all along leaping forward to sound the deepest mystery that underlies the existence of both the animate and inanimate worlds, and was yearning to yield to it his very humble self as an offering, if he could only find it out. He panted after it, he cried incessantly aloud and wept for it but he could not find it; his heart failed at the thought whether he would be left helpless and he deemed his very existence quite intolerable. While he was in this pining mood, the Pandian king sent him on to purchase horses with which he might replenish his army for purposes of war. Accordingly he went on his

journey and, while he was nearing Thirupperundurai, then a sea-coast town in the ancient Chola kingdom, the conversion of his soul came over him all on a sudden; for, God appeared to him under the shade of a *kurunda* tree, placed His holy feet on his head, and made him His devotee. Forthwith, the young prime minister came to be transformed into a new being altogether. God's grace and bliss ineffable filled his soul, mind and body so much that he could not bear this earth-bound existence but yearned to burst it out and rest peacefully under the sacred feet of his Lord. In this state of mind he gave expression to his pious feelings in Tamil lyrics which, for their pathetic melody and passionate devotion, for sublime spiritual truths and overflowing religious sentiments are inimitable and unsurpassable by any of their kind in any language. Almost in every one of them he glorifies Lord Siva for His having come down to him so easily and extended to him His great grace and mercy which could not be obtained even by the celestials. These Tamil lyrics called 'The Thiruvachakam' or 'The Sacred Utterances' have, after a thirty years' preparation, been translated into English verse by Dr. G.U. Pope, a veteran Tamil scholar and a pious Christian missionary; still the hand of a Milton or a Shelley alone can be expected to do full justice to a poetic rendering of these fervent and devout outpourings. From a careful and critical study of this Tamil Saint's poems, we get glimpses into his real life; and we can even construct a faithful biography

of him, by picking up from them all the incidental references to his life and stringing them up together.¹ In many places of his poems the Saint plainly and repeatedly avers that God came to him in person and made him His vassal. I select three of them most important for our purpose and give their English rendering as follows:

"With Her that hath eyes gleaming fine with jet
Thou camest and me madest Thy slave;
Thenceforward I of thee thought not as beyond my
reach;
But I took Thee to be as easy of access as a golden cup
In the hands of a little child."

(Thiruchchathakam, 92).

"The primal source, the middle, and the end hadst
Thou been,
Thee the Three could not know; who else can know
Thee ?

Thy spouse and Thee did visit the worn-out huts
Of Thy slaves; O Supernal one! To me Thou camest
And showedest me Thy sacred form that glows like
red-hot embers,

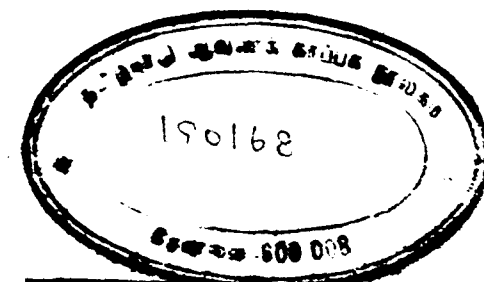
Thou showedest me also the temple at Thirupperundurai
As well as Thy benignant person;

Thy servant Thou mad'st me Ambrosia ! rare"

(Thiruppalli eluchchi, 8).

¹ This I have done in my Tamil work 'The Life and Times of St. Manickavachakar.'

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“On one side it has fresh water-lilies blue
 On the other it has new lotus flowers red;
 On one side flock the birds,
 On the other murmur the ripples,
 Their dirt to wash off many go to it
 So that this bubbling pond looks like our

Lady and our Lord” (Thiruvembavai, 13).

In these three verses St. Manickavachakar has sung quite incidentally and not with any set purpose, bear in mind, stating the fact that Lord Siva with his spouse Uma appeared before him and made him His servant, and that the person of Siva was glowing then with a brilliant red while that of Uma was gleaming with a light blue hue. It is indeed true that a century before Manickavachakar, the poet Perundevanar ascribed red colour to the person of Siva and blue to that of Uma in the invocatory stanzas which he prefixed to some of the eight collections of classical Tamil poems, but that never even once did he hint us that he had himself ever caught sight of God and the double aspects of his personality. That goes to prove that he was merely describing the double-coloured personality of the Godhead in strict conformity with the then prevalent tradition and nothing more. But quite different is the case of our St. Manickavachakar; for, his statement does not so depend on mere religious tradition, but is firmly grounded in his direct personal spiritual experience alone. His lyrics, informed not only with deep religious fervour but also with sublime

literary grace and insatiable sweetness both in style and sentiments, his sanity of judgment and noble reasoning powers exhibited as well in his literary productions as in his disputations with the Buddhists, invest his mind with a strength and lucidity that leave little room for any doubt as regards the soundness of his spiritual experience. St. Manickavachakar gave a death-blow to the nihilistic Buddhism and re-established the original theistic conception of God, that is, the conception relating to the Fatherhood and Motherhood of the Godhead on the strong basis of scientific fact discovered by his direct, clear and sound spiritual insight.

The Saints who came after him from the fourth century onwards: namely Thirumoolar, Appar, Thirujnana-sambandar, and Sundarar, have been all perfect seers who have had such a direct, distinct and true mental perception of the Godhead that there is not a tittle in their hymns which comes into conflict with the spiritual experience of St. Manickavachakar, but all is in entire harmony with his view of Divine nature. All of them unequivocally declare that they saw God not in dream but while they were fully awake and aver with perfect confidence that what they saw consisted of a red male principle and a blue female principle, in other words: the Divine Father Rudra and Mother Uma.

CHAPTER XII

ST. THIRUJNANASAMBANDHA

If there be still any lingering scepticism on this supreme point, that may be finally removed by making a deep study of the life and hymns of St. Thirujnanasambandha who existed in the first half of the seventh century A.D. This unique personality constitutes the greatest wonder that the world has ever seen. For, while John Stuart Mill was grappling in his third year with his Greek lessons, and John Ruskin was in like manner scribbling verses in the third year of his life, just in the very same third year of his childhood St. Thirujnanasambandha became a master not only of his mother-tongue Tamil, but even of the vast and extensive Vedic literature in Sanscrit and poured forth his thoughts extempore in hymns after hymns in glorification of Lord Siva and mother Uma.

In this connection I venture to affirm that I am speaking under no deluded state of mind but I am stating the fact in a solemn and sane mental mood permeated by a historic sense grounded on solid and substantial genuine literary records of the past. For a study of our saintly child, I do not rest my belief entirely on what is written by his biographer St. Sekkilar, although he is the only hagiographer in the mediaeval period who is supported by recent archaeological evidence. Our Saint's own lyrics

which are in all three hundred and eighty four in number, each consisting of eleven stanzas, as well as the hymns composed by his contemporary St. Appar and his immediate successors St. Sundarar and St. Nambiandar Nambi, constitute the fertile authentic sources from which we derive almost a complete account of his life. It is also remarkable that that which is satisfactorily and conclusively proved in the religious and literary history of South India by co-ordinated literary and epigraphic evidences is the great fact pertaining to the date of this celebrated St. Thirujnanasambandha. And it is this date that stands as a beacon light serving to light up the preceding centuries that had hitherto lain dark for want of a reliable date in the history of the mediaeval ages that have elapsed in this part of our country.

Here it is not my intention to enter into any detailed treatment of his life beyond what is pertinent to our subject. His conversion came on in this wise: in his third year, the child followed his father who, being very pious, went to the sacred tank in the Siva temple at Seerkali which was the birth-place of the saint, in order to perform his ablutions. Leaving the child on the bank, the father went down the steps, sank into the water and remained a few minutes within, for practising the retention of breath in meditation. Not seeing his father, the child began to cry, but lo! the Heavenly Father and Mother appeared before him and gave him milk in a golden cup. Whilst the child

was engaged in sipping the milk, his father, having finished his ablutions, came up and saw the child sipping milk from a cup held in his hand. The father being an orthodox brahmin, rebuked the child for having taken the milk given by some unclean hands, but behold! our little lord opened his sweet little mouth and sang extempore in Tamil a splendid hymn of eleven verses pointing out to him the Mother and Father who gave him milk. From this time until he disappeared in the light of God that appeared to him in his teens, he was incessantly visiting temple after temple and warbling hymn after hymn in praise of Lord Siva and Uma.

Whether he actually saw God when he was but an innocent child only three years old, whether he sang the glory of Lord in flawless lyrics are questions of paramount importance in his life which require to be settled, before attaching any value to the vision he had of God. For, during the period of childhood, all the latent faculties of the human mind come into play only one after another slowly and gradually as days and months roll on as it grows. In its earlier days the child knows not what the world is; neither has it sufficient memory power to call to mind what it saw and heard, nor sufficient imaginative power to connect the different disjunctive ideas produced by words and objects and make up from them consistent, permanent and vivid mental pictures, nor has it again sufficient expressive power to exhibit these pictures in highly finished poems. Still, if

it can be proved that a superhuman exception to this general psychological law of mental evolution, showed itself in the life and work of a human child, then that child cannot be taken to be a mere human offspring, but must be regarded as some superhuman being that appeared as the receptacle of the grace and inspiration of the almighty God of the universe to bestow it on the humanity. After this has been proved, we can no more entertain any doubt as regards the divine nature of that child's sacred mission and message.

I have already mentioned that St. Thirujnanasambandha sang many hymns in Tamil which fortunately for us survive in a well-preserved form up to this day, although one thousand and three hundred years have elapsed since his disappearance from this earth. All his hymns were composed extempore, not with any other intent than that of glorifying Lord Siva and Uma. Rarely does he refer in them to any incidents of his life, and where he does it, he does so merely by chance in order to bring into greater relief not the events of his own life but only the graciousness of his Lord who manifested himself in his personal and intimate relation to the events of his very devoted life. From a study of his hymns, one can quite clearly understand that, in alluding to these incidents of his life, he was possessed with no any set purpose to record them in his poems but that his piety it was which made him feel deeply, fervently and gratefully the divine grace so easily and personally

shown him by his Lord and led him to give utterance to such feelings in inimitable songs. Even a rank and uncompromising atheist cannot but admit this fact from a patient study of his lyrics, that is to say, he cannot but take the incidents as so many real historical events that occurred in his short earthly career. Almost all these allusions to the events of his life may be ratified by a comparative study of what his contemporary St. Appar and his immediate successor St. Sundarar likewise relate of him incidentally in their solemn, sacred and glorious hymns composed similarly in praise of Lord Siva; still this is not the occasion for giving an extensive treatment to all such matters and so let us confine our attention to a consideration of a few points gleaned from what our saintly child himself says about himself.

I told you just now that Thirujnanasambandha was given milk by the Heavenly Father and Mother who appeared before him while he was standing and crying on the bank of the temple-tank at Seerkali and that when his father came up the tank and reproved him for taking milk given by unclean hands he broke out in a hymn and pointed out to him the parents who gave him milk and who were just vanishing from his sight. From that time forward the child became not only a wonder of his own age but that of other ages to come. Nevertheless the child himself viewed with no wonder the miraculous occurrences of his life, for he deemed that to God nothing was impossible. On the other hand he became enraptured with so much love for

the Divine Parents that all his thoughts centred on their gracious person, that he could rest no more without thinking of them, without feeling their sweet love for him, without giving expression to his love and gratitude for them in innumerable lyrical songs. Since he was blessed with the vision of his Lord Siva and mother Uma in a Siva temple, he became possessed with an ardent longing to visit every Siva temple all over the country, in the hope of meeting his Heavenly Parents therein again and again and of finding an opportunity anywhere there to get himself permanently united to them. To this wish of his, the child's earthly father readily acceded and carried him on his nape to a number of Siva temples for some time, until a palanquin set with pearls was sent to him by God in a mysterious manner. In a hymn he composed extempore at the Siva temple in Thirunanipalli when he was thus carried there, he distinctly says that he sang the hymn just as he was sitting on the nape of his father.¹ I need hardly say that on the nape of a man no one—even a grown-up boy, can sit comfortably both to himself and his bearer, except a small child below four years.

I will give one more reference taken from his hymns to his having been only three years old when he saw God. When our Saint visited the Siva temple at Madura in

¹ “ஞானமுனிவன், இப்பறை ஒன்றை அந்தப் பியல்மேலிருந்து இசையால் உரைத்தபனுவல்.” 11th stanza.

response to the invitation of the Pandian queen, he stayed there for some time. At the instigation of the Jain priests who were at that period the bitterest enemies to the adherents of the Saiva religion, the king Kunpandian being then a convert to the Jain religion, secretly agreed and permitted the Jain priests to set fire to the hermitage in which St. Janasambandha and his numerous followers were lodged. In the dead of night the cruel deed was done, and when the whole hermitage was on fire, our Saint knowing in an instant who was the cause of it, implored in a pathetic hymn the mercy of his Lord to save them all and send back the fire in a mild form to the king himself. Immediately the fire disappeared but the king suddenly got a burning fever. The whole palace was astir; the Jain priests who were experts in the healing art were summoned, and all sorts of remedial measures were resorted to but all proved of no avail. At last, the queen who was a devout Saivite suggested that Thirujnanasambandha might be requested to try. Accordingly at day-break the saint was invited to the palace. On seeing him on a seat near the bedstead of the king, the Jain priests, who were assembled there, began to speak ill of him and even taunted him. It was very painful for the queen who stood by to see the little and innocent saintly child thus loaded with reproaches and she was about to raise her voice in his defence when, with an undaunted and marvellous courage—marvellous on the part of a little child, he addressed her in a

beautiful hymn, the first stanza of which may be rendered in English thus:

“O mother thou that hast fawn-like eyes! O Thou, the chief
and great spouse of the Pandian king,
Hear me and grieve not that I who am here
a mere infant sipping milk by lovely lips;
As Siva of the sacred Alavai is my guard
am no inferior to these ill-bred
Who live in spots as Anaimamalai
in the midst of untold woes.”¹

In this stanza the occasion makes our little lord refer to his being at the time a young child fed purely on milk. So much clear and incidental reference in his own lyrics constitutes an internal evidence which proves unquestionably the fact of his having been a mere child on the occasions which called forth the composition of those lyrics. Now let us see whether there is any more evidence to testify to the direct vision he had of God when he was a little child.

It seems that the love he cherished in his heart for his Heavenly Parents who came and gave him milk so very easily and graciously, made the thought of it stand uppermost in his mind while he was in Madura and prompted

¹ “மானின் கேவழிமாதராய் வருதிக்கு மாபெருக் தேவிகேள்,
பாணல்வாய் ஒருபாலன் ஈங்கென் என் றகீ பரிவெய்திடேல்,
ஆனைமாமலை யாதியாய் இடக்கனிற் பல அல்லல்சேர்
ஈனர்தட் செனியென் அலென் திருஆலவாய் அன் கிற்கவே”

him to glorify that act of grace in a fine hymn which is also remarkable for showing his complete reliance upon God. The second stanza of the hymn specially commemorates that most important incident as follows:

“He, who made me his servant by presenting into my hands
Milk in a lotus-shaped golden cup, so that my father
Believing it to be unclean did fret; with modest Her abode
In Kalumalam He the great Lord having rings in ears.”¹

Does not this explicit reference to his conversion from the moment he received milk from the hands of his Heavenly Parents establish beyond doubt the fact of his having seen God while he was yet an young child only three years old? In addition to this, the flawless, pure, chaste, dignified Tamil lyrics which he poured forth in profusion, the series of miracles which he wrought every now and then and which culminated in the raising up of a maiden in Mylapore from the ashes to which she was reduced by a snake-bite, his successful disputations with the Jains and the Buddhists—all these, as resulting from the divine grace and power which filled him beyond measure, point him out as a unique personality that came with a special mission to reveal the real nature of the true God and save humanity from worshipping false Gods and multiplying thereby the births and

¹ “பேராதையார் பொற்கிண்ணத்தா அடிசில் பொல்லாதெனத்
தாதையார் முனிவுடறத் தான் ஏனை ஆண்டவன்,
காதையார் குழையினன் கழுமல வளகர்ப்
பேராதையானவனோடும் பெருந்தகை இருந்ததே”

deaths endlessly. In the whole range of the world's religious history you cannot find another Saint who, like Jnana-sambandha, saw God in his third year, who wrought miracles like him simply to vindicate the ways of the true God, and who told as the direct vision he had of God in his own poetic compositions bequeathed to us as invaluable and imperishable records of a genuine historical personage. There may be—nay there are, stories fabricated by religious sects and fanatics with an intent to raise their favourite teachers and priests to the level of St. Thirujnanasambandha, nay even superior to him, but a careful and impartial examination of such tales will show you that they could be nothing more than mere fables. In their own sayings or writings they had left us, you would find them to betray their commonplace character and in a few instances to rise no more than persons of average mental capacity. So far as my knowledge of certain teachers of world-religions is concerned, I venture to say that there is not any substantial evidence in their sayings handed down to us by their disciples, much less in their writings which are unfortunately very scarce, that would warrant as in believing them to have had a direct vision of God. Be it far from me to make any invidious comparison between one religious teacher and the other from any motive other than good. To ascertain the intrinsic value of an object of thought, comparison is most necessary; yet, I am not going to enter upon that difficult, in a way even delicate, task, but leave

it to those who have the necessary ardour, patience and intelligence to accomplish it as an interesting and useful labour of love. I merely suggest here that an unbiassed comparison may be instituted between St. Thirujnanasambandha and other religious teachers with a view to discern which of them will come out from it to show us the real God and send us along the path that will lead us direct to his kingdom of righteousness and love.

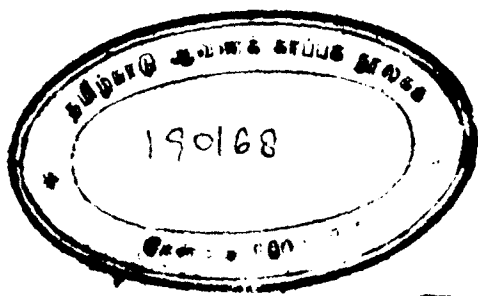
Suffice it for our present purpose to say that the evidence supplied by the life and writings of St. Thirujnanasambandha possesses a value unique in the religious history of the world, since it infuses new life into the almost dying original conception of God held by ancient seers and handed down to us by their successive lines of disciples in the oldest works both in Tamil and Sanscrit, and as such that it should, on no account, be overlooked by earnest seekers after truth and the true God, if they care to be saved. Unless we worship the true God that created us, unless we have a right conception of him as a vital element of that worship, unless we secure his grace as the strongest vessel that would carry us through the ocean of births and deaths in the midst of stormy cares and miseries, how can we hope to reach him safe? We may build up theory upon theory, we may create God after God as suits our fancy and may even dare to call ourselves God, but all these will not avail to lead us to our real Heavenly Father who alone can save us by put-

chastisement for their misrule. And as the invaders who came into this land up to the 18th century served nothing more than as mere instruments of retribution in thy hands, they cared not to rule us justly, and therefore they too in their turn were made by thy might to disappear from the scene and make room for the occupation of a very enlightened, just and Godfearing nation as the British.

O our Lord and Father, the source of infinite mercy and wisdom, it is with the establishment of the British rule that thou hast caused the destinies of the whole Indian people to be governed impartially, it is with the introduction of that rule that thou hast brought the era of true culture and civilisation to dawn once more upon us.

O all-wise God and beloved Father, what a great gift hast thou bestowed upon us after bringing us through very troublous times of more than fifteen centuries in having given us to enjoy the benefits which have accrued to us from the grand and unrivalled knowledge acquired by the British in arts, crafts and inventions. For they have not reserved that knowledge to themselves alone but have opened its gates to all people all over the world without making any distinction among them. Enjoying the benefits of their knowledge and industries we live with ease, comfort and freedom and with a strong belief in the complete security of our person and property. O our gracious Lord and benevolent Father, we are perplexed how adequately to tender our heart-felt thanks to thy sacred feet for thy conferring upon us so many blessings unexpected and unasked.

O Almighty God of the universe, we cannot think that a nation which produced Paley and Cairds in theology, Shakspeare, Milton, and Shelley in poetry, Burke, Mill and Hume in political, moral and social philosophy, Newton and Darwin in science can rule us otherwise than just and that they can be vanquished by a nation or nations which are godless, cruel and aggressive. O our Lord of infinite wisdom and power, grant us to realize with a deep feeling of gratitude the greatness and beneficence of the British rule and be thou pleased to open the moral sense of some of our misguided youths to discern the worth and undimmed glory of the British reign and lead them to join with us to pray and



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