

English - Group 6

The Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy

Saiva Siddhanta is the philosophy of southern Saivism. It owes its origin to no single author. It is midway between Sankara's Adwaita and Ramanuja's Visishtadwaita. Its literature consists chiefly of: (1) the twenty-eight Saivite Agamas, (2) the collection of Saivite hymns known as Tirumurai compiled by Nambi Andar Nambi, (it contains Tirumanthiram of Tirumular; the Thevaram of Appar, Sundarar, and Sambandar, and the Tiruvachagam of Manickavachagar), (3) the collection of the lives of Saivite saints, known as the Periyapuram, (4) Meykandar's Siva-jnanabodham, (5) Arulnandi's Sivajanasiddhiar, and the works of Umapati. Tirumular's work Tirumanthiram is the foundation upon which the later structure of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy was built.

The central doctrine of the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy is that Siva is the Supreme Reality, and that the Jiva or the individual soul is of the same essence as Siva, but not identical. Pati (God), Pasu (soul), and Pasa (the bonds) and the thirty-six Tattvas or principles which constitute the world, are all real.

The Saiva Siddhanta system is the distilled essence of Vedanta. It prevailed in Southern India even before the Christian era. Tirunelveli and Madura are the centres of the Saiva Siddhanta school. Even now, Saivism is a very popular creed in South India. It is a rival school of Vaishnavism.

Characteristics of the Supreme Reality: The Supreme Reality is called Siva. He is infinite consciousness. He is eternal, changeless, formless, independent, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, one without a second, beginningless, causeless, taintless, self-existent, ever free, ever pure, and perfect. He is not limited by time. He is infinite bliss and infinite intelligence. He is free from defects, the all-doer, the all-knower.

Lord Siva is the God of Love. His grace is infinite. His love is infinite. He is the saviour and Guru. He is engaged in freeing the souls from the thraldom of matter. He assumes the form of a Guru out of His intense love for mankind. He wishes that all should know Him and attain the blissful Siva-Padam (the state of Siva). He watches the activities of the individual souls, and helps them in their onward march. He liberates the individual souls from their fetters or bonds.

The Five Activities of the Lord: The five activities of the Lord are: Creation, Preservation, Destruction, Veiling and Grace. These, separately considered, are the activities of Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshwara, and Sadasiva.

Siva, Shakti and Maya: Lord Siva pervades the whole world by His Shakti. He works through Shakti. Shakti is the conscious energy of the Lord Siva. She is the very body of Lord Siva. The potter is the first cause for the pot. The stick and the wheel are the instrumental causes. The clay is the material cause of the pot. Similarly, Lord Siva is the first cause of the world. Shakti is the instrumental cause. Maya is the material cause.

Shakti is not the material cause of the universe, because She is of the nature of consciousness (Chaitanya). Siva is pure consciousness, but matter is pure unconsciousness. Shakti is the intermediate link between the two.

Shakti is the reflex of Siva. It has no independent existence. Siva assumes this form out of His great love for mankind. Siva wishes that all should know Him.

Evolution of the Tattvas from Suddha Maya: The world undergoes evolution for the benefit of the souls. The whole process of creation is for the sake of the salvation of the souls. The world is real and eternal. The world of matter and souls forms the body of the Lord.

The Saiva Siddhanta analyses the universe into 36 Tattvas or principles, as against the 25 of the Sankhya. The 36 Tattvas arise from Maya, the material cause of the world. Suddha Maya is Maya in its primal state. From it arise the five pure principles called Siva Tattva, Shakti Tattva, Sadasiva Tattva, Iswara Tattva, and Suddhavidya Tattva. Siva functions through these five pure principles.

Maya evolves into the subtle principles, and then into the gross. Siva Tattva is the basis of all consciousness and action. It is undifferentiated (Nishkala Suddha Maya). The Shakti of Siva starts her activity. Then Siva becomes the experiencer. Then He is called Sadasiva, known also by the name Sadakhya, Who is not really separate from Siva. The Suddha Maya becomes active. Then Siva, the experiencer, becomes the ruler. He is then Iswara, Who is not really separate from Sadasiva. Suddhavidya is the cause of true knowledge.

The bonds that bind the soul (Anava, Karma, Maya): Souls (Pasu) are by nature infinite, all-pervading, eternal, and all-knowing like Lord Siva (Pati). Yet they think that they are finite, limited and little-knowing, ignorant, and temporary. This is due to the bonds (Pasa), viz., Anava, Karma, and Maya, which are called the three Malas or impurities. Anava is the impurity which makes the all-pervading Jiva think itself to be atomic (Anu). It produces the erroneous notion of finiteness. The second impurity or bond is Karma. The soul acts in certain ways on account of its limitation, and does good and evil actions. Karma brings about the conjunction of the soul with its body. The results of the Karma have to be worked out in the world. There should be worlds and bodies, in order to experience the fruits of actions and acquire knowledge. These are provided by Maya, the third Mala or bond. Maya is the material cause of the world. The soul gets experience and limited knowledge through Maya.

The soul learns, by long experience, that this Samsara is full of pains and is transitory, and that he can attain eternal bliss and immortality only by attaining Sivatva or the nature of Siva or God-realisation. He develops Vairagya (dispassion), and Viveka (discrimination between the Real and the unreal, the Permanent and the impermanent).

Discipline and grace culminate in Jnana. Jnana is the supreme means of salvation or the attainment of the final beatitude. Karma and other means are only subsidiary to it. They are auxiliaries.

The attainment of Sivatva or Siva-nature does not mean complete merging of the soul in Siva. The liberated soul does not lose its individuality. It continues to exist as a soul in God. Sivatva is the realisation of an identity of essence in spite of difference. The soul attains the nature of Siva or God, but it is not itself Siva or God.

Three orders of Jivas: The Siddhantins divide Jivas or Pasus into three orders, viz., Vijnanakalas, Pralayakalas and Sakalas. Vijnanakalas have only the Anava Mala (egoism). Maya and Karma have been resolved. Pralayakalas have been freed from Maya alone, in the stage of Pralaya. Sakalas have all the three Malas.

The Malas affect only the Jivas, and not Siva. Those who are freed from the Malas or impurities attain Sivatva or the nature of Siva. They are the Siddhas or perfected beings.

The way to the attainment of Sivatva or God-realisation: You must free yourself from the three bonds, if you want to attain salvation. You must annihilate Maya, which is the root of all sins. You must destroy all Karmas which produce rebirth. You must remove the erroneous notion of a finite self.

The three bonds can be removed only through rigorous Tapas and proper discipline, the help of a Guru, and, above all, the grace of Lord Siva. Charya (observance), Kriya (rites), and Yoga (Yama-Niyama) constitute the discipline. When the aspirant practises in right earnest Charya, Kriya and Yoga he obtains the grace of Lord Siva. Then the Lord instructs the soul, reveals Himself and illumines him. Then the soul realises its nature as Siva.