

## **THIRUGNANASAMPANTHAR – Group 1**

Thirugnanasampanthar is my favourite Saivite saint because he was a little child like me when he first sang about Lord Shiva!

One day, when he was 3 years old, Sampanthar and his father went to the Temple. His father went to bathe in the Temple Tank, and left Sampanthar on the steps. Suddenly, little Sampanthar could not see his father and became frightened. He looked at the Temple and cried out “Ammah! Appah!”

Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi heard his frightened cries, and came down from heaven to comfort him! Goddess Parvathi fed Sampanthar with her own divine milk in a golden cup. And, as he drank this precious milk, he calmed down and wisdom dawned on him. Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi comforted him and then disappeared when his father came out of the water.

When his father saw the milk dripping from his mouth, he asked Sampanthar who had given the milk. But all the little boy would do was smile and point to the Temple! His father became very angry and raised his hand to smack Sampanthar. Then the little boy started to sing his first composition – “Thodudaiya Seviyan!”

After this miracle, he was known as Thirugnanasampanthar and became well known and loved by all for his wonderful Thevarams

## THIRUMURAIHAL - Group 2

Thirumuraihal are songs that have come from holy people who have loved and lived for Lord Shiva, without any thought of self. So their source is pure and they are as powerful as mantras. We sing them in God's praise. We also sing them when we ask God for help for ourselves or for others. Unfortunately they had not been properly stored or documented. Some othuvars knew some songs and sang them in their temples. But no one knew where the whole set of songs were.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, there lived King Rajarajacholan, who loved these songs and wanted to discover them all. He wanted to bring them back into daily use. He heard about a little Brahmin boy called Nambi, who talked to Lord Pillaiyar regularly. He asked Nambi to ask Pillaiyar the whereabouts of these divine songs. Pillaiyar told Nambi that they were all locked up in a room at the Chidambaram Temple.

So Nambi and the king went to Chidambaram and, with the help of the temple Brahmins, they opened the door of the particular room. Inside, they found, to their horror that most of the manuscripts had been damaged by white ants. Then a heavenly voice was heard, "Only those that are suitable for the present day are intact!" So they carefully collected the remaining ola leaves.

The king asked Nambi to compile them and all the other holy songs that were existing in that period. This compilation of holy songs are what is known as Thirumuraihal.

The Thirumuraihal has 12 parts;

the first 3 parts are the Thevarams of Sampanthar,  
the next 3 are the Thevarams by Thirunavukarasar,  
the 7<sup>th</sup> is the Thevarams of Sundarar,  
the 8<sup>th</sup> is the Thiruvagasam and Thirukovaiyar of Saint Maanikavaasakar,  
The Thiruvisaippa and Thirupallandu are the 9<sup>th</sup> ,  
The Thirumoolar Thirumanthiram is the 10<sup>th</sup> and  
the 11<sup>th</sup> are the songs of 12 holy people.

The 12<sup>th</sup> called The Periyapuram tells the life stories of the 63 Nayanmars who lived only to serve Lord Shiva and His devotees.

There are, all together 18,326 songs in the Thirumuraihal. These are our treasures and religious heritage. We must honour them and preserve them and sing them in our temples and houses so that their light will continue to shine for ever.

### **SRI LA SRI ARUMUGA NAVALAR – Group 3**

Arumuga Naavalalar was a national hero, a forerunner in the Freedom Movement, a guardian of Saivism, Master of Tamilian Prose and an excellent exponent and deliverer of the Saiva Doctrines.

He was born in Nallur, in December 1822, and passed away at the age of 56 on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1879. His parents were deeply religious and devout and Naavalalar imbibed those qualities at an early age. Even as a teenager he mastered Tamil, Sanskrit and English, and made an in-depth study of Tamil grammar, language, literature and religious works.

Saivism, which was held in prestige and fame in Tamil Eelam and India from ancient days, dwindled during the foreign rule of the Portuguese, Dutch and the British from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The conquerors demolished many Saiva Temples and ill-treated the Saivaites. Unable to resist the pressures of the foreign rulers, and in order to gain benefits, many Saivaites embraced Christianity.

Arumuga Naavalalar could not bear these assaults on his beloved Saivism. He conducted many debates and challenges against the Foreign Missionaries. He held many discourses expounding the glories and principles of Saivism. In this context, however, it must be emphasised that though Arumuga Navalalar fought against the conversion of the Tamils to Christianity, he was not a religious fanatic. He was a good friend of Rev. Percival who was a Wesleyan missionary teacher at Jaffna Central College. When Rev. Percival requested Naavalalar to translate the Bible into Tamil, Naavalalar happily undertook the task. Even the Tamil scholars of Madras of the 19<sup>th</sup> century acclaimed his efforts as the best Tamil translation. This aspect of his life revealed not only his command of English and Tamil but also proclaimed to the world his broad thinking and religious tolerance – an example to us all.

Naavalalar released many pamphlets, books and journals about Saivism. To facilitate his publications, he established his own printing press in Chidambaram in India, and also in Jaffna. He also established many Saiva Schools to educate Saiva children in their own cultural environment.

Many texts, like the Periyapuramam, Kandapuramam, Nannool etc are in verse form. These were difficult for the ordinary layman to read and understand. So Naavalalar wrote them in prose form and published them, enabling the beauty and richness of their contents to reach a much wider section of the community. He also wrote many wonderful books like Saiva Vina Vidai; Paalapaadam and Paalabothini for young Saiva children like us! His work and service were very much liked, appreciated and honoured by many who conferred titles such as Naavalalar, which means *Authority on prose form*.

The life of Arumuga Navalalar was in total conformity with everything he said and wrote. Indeed, his life was his message. He maintained a high moral standard in both private and public life, and even his opponents respected him for this. The breadth of his knowledge and the wealth of books he created have influenced many aspects of our life today. So let us resolve to abide by the teachings expounded by Naavalalar and live as good Saivaites in the world today.

## THIRUKKURAL – Group 4

The Thirukkural is a 2,200 year old South Indian Dravidian classic on ethical living. It is one of the most revered scriptures in South India and Sri Lanka, where every Hindu child learns to recite its verses by heart. In the courts of law in Tamil Nadu, it is given the same status as the Bible and the Koran, as it is used by Hindus to swear upon to tell the truth during legal trials.

It was written by a Tamil weaver sage called Saint Thiruvalluvar. In Tamil *Thiru* means “holy” or “sacred” and *kural* means a brief verse or literary couplet.

There are 1,330 verses in the Thirukkural. Each verse is extremely short, containing only two lines and is, in fact, the shortest form of verse in the Tamil language ..... similar to the Sanskrit sloka.

Saivism’s four legitimate goals of life are Aram, Porul, Inbam and Veedu known in English as Virtue, wealth, love and liberation. The Thirukkural is divided into 3 parts, dealing with three of those four great aims in life - Aram, Porul, and Inbam in depth. Veedu means consciously returning back to our source. Thiruvalluvar does not deal with the fourth aim in life in his Thirukkural. Some say that this is because if you follow the first three perfectly, Veedu will be automatically achieved.

The first part, called Arathupaal, in 38 chapters enumerates the ways to live a morally upright life; touching on such things as the ways of a householder and a monk - focusing on good conduct and warning about the perils of wrong doing. The second part, called Porutpaal, in 70 chapters tackles the conduct of those involved in administration and socio-political life; about social interactions and citizenship. The last part, called Inbathupaal, in 25 chapters discusses the relationships of men and women.

The Thirukkural has achieved a perfect balance between the secular and spiritual life. Much of what is said revolves around the home and day-to-day living. Saint Thiruvalluvar talks about the faithful husband, the devoted wife, of the fine children they raise and the joys they experience, of the value of relationships and how to nurture and sustain them. He speaks of age and its merits and of the importance of honouring the elderly. He also tackles difficult issues that continue to perplex us. He speaks of killing, of alcohol addiction, of the debilitating effects of gambling, of adultery and the tragic loss of a life lived in lazy indifference. He guides us in matters of education, of the roles and responsibilities of leaders. He speaks of making money and using it wisely and explores values such as purity, humility and friendship. And, throughout, we encounter glimpses of his humour, which he uses to make us laugh, even when he points out our most stubborn flaws!

Saint Thiruvalluvar lived with his wife, Vasuki, in what is today a part of Chennai in South India. They lived a peaceful and loving life and had children to delight them. Vasuki was the perfect example of simple devotion and traditional intelligent co-operation with her husband, and there are many stories depicting the wonder and harmony of their marriage. And, to this very day, Vasuki is a role model for tens of millions of Tamil women, who pray to Lord Shiva that their lives may be as loving and virtuous as this remarkable, humble and devoted lady.

Saint Thiruvalluvar spent the fullness of his life quietly and intelligently observing mankind. Towards the end of his life, he was asked to speak out and share his wisdom with the others in his community ..... and this sacred book was his response.

The Thirukkural was Saint Thiruvalluvar’s only known work and, although it is relatively short compared to other major sacred texts, it brought renown to a simple and highly observant weaver, making him a venerated sage and lawgiver of the ancient Tamil Dravidian people. This classical work in Tamil has been widely translated in over 60 languages of the world. The simplicity of its writing and its extreme practicality are its strengths – giving us a timeless classic for practical daily life, for every age and for every section of the community.

## **The Fate Of Saivism In The West – Group 5**

(Abridged version of a speech given by Dr. Kumuthan Sriskandarajah at the  
1<sup>st</sup> Saiva Conference of the Federation of Saiva Hindu Temples in July 1998)

Saivism is more than just a religion.....it is a way of life. It is a fundamental part of our rich culture and heritage, a mechanism by which members of our community can grow together and an important part of any child's development

The temple is the most practical instrument by which children can be made aware of the vastness of Saivism. Traditionally, temples have always been the cornerstones of our community, providing a place in which to allow one's spiritual and intellectual awareness to develop, allowing the various classical arts to be studied and providing a powerful opportunity for our children to be introduced to our religious and cultural beliefs. It gives them a chance to meet and form friendships with other Saivaites and, of course, provides a place to worship peacefully together as a congregation. Temples are undoubtedly an important part of any Saivaites' life.

The time and effort expended by a few visionary members of our community has given us the opportunity to grow and blossom within these temples. But, as the children of my generation reach their mid-to-late teens, their frequency of visits to the temple is diminishing. Why is this happening?

After many discussions and debates with my fellow peers, I have been able to collate the main problems associated with the temples as seen by my generation:

- The main underlying problem that was often brought up was the issue of boredom. Many children associated the temple with standing for long periods of time, listening to monotonous chanting in a foreign language and observing rituals that they did not even know the significance of.
- The second major point was the fact that they have very little free time whilst undertaking their GCSE's, A-Level's and university degrees.
- A smaller minority felt that the temple had little to offer, other than a communal place in which to worship "Why should I go to the temple when I can pray at home?" - was the question most often asked.
- Finally, a very small percentage said that they did not actually believe in Saivism anymore...

To address each point in turn:

- Those who state that they have insufficient time to attend the temple, seem to find enough time to go out with friends, watch hours of TV, play computer games, etc...! Those children that regularly visit the temple have always found time to visit. They lead very successful academic lives, whilst also developing their interest in the arts and sport. Thus, I feel, visiting the temple is just a matter of re-prioritisation of your free time. If an individual has a desire to reach a goal, he/she will strive to make time in order to realise that goal. Therefore, it is clearly evident that these individuals are merely giving excuses for their poor attendance and lack of interest. In addition, parents whilst emphasising how important it is to study, must also remember to guide their children towards the benefits that the temple can provide.

- The minor percentage of individuals that are undecided about Saivism, quite often have many misconceptions about their religion. Many parents lack the ability to convey the knowledge and purpose behind their faith and consequently are unable to satisfy their child's thirst for logical answers. As a result, this leads to the child looking elsewhere. The solution for this involves the education of parents about the philosophy behind Saivism and providing the children with the right resources to learn about our great religion and traditions.

In the end, parents cannot force Saivism upon the children of today. In fact, Saivism actively discourages it! The child must find his/her own path to reach God.

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Parents and elders can only guide the child, because devotion will not be strong and true unless it is allowed to develop from the natural progression of the child's free-will.

Saivism is like a seedling growing in all our children - it is very fragile with roots yet to be established, and hence great care must be taken to ensure successful growth and strengthening of the roots - then only will the plant (i.e. the faith of the individual) be in good shape to withstand the trials of life in the West. It is the job of parents and elders to help plant these seeds of faith within the child and to help them grow and blossom within the shelter of our Temples.

Temple co-ordinators need to address the lack of interest that the children and young adults have whilst they are at the temple, and work towards establishing the temple as more than just a place of worship, so that it can appeal to a broader section of the community (parents and children likewise). This could include:

- i) Organising philosophical and religious talks, debates & discussions at the Temple.
- ii) Organising Tamil language and history lessons.
- iii) Allocating days when the opportunity is provided for groups of students and young devotees to sing and play devotional songs, helping them realise that they are an integral part of the temple community.
- iv) Involving more children in the day to day running and rituals of the temple, giving them responsibilities that will allow them to feel a vital part of the temple and its continued development.
- v) Organising special workshops and activities during special festival days to help educate children who don't come to the temple regularly

We, the youth, feel that, if such solutions are considered carefully and actively implemented, they will help to change the image of the temple, in the eyes of the youth of today. For, unless a temple is able to engage its youth and make them active participants in temple life and worship, future generations will not be there to carry on the traditions and vision of the temple founders and they will become just empty buildings, remnants of a once great religion. Let us strive together to ensure that this does not happen and that, instead, a new generation of young men and women, strong and confident in their faith and traditions, will take Saivism to even greater heights in generations to come.