

## RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY- SAIVISM

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*Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Flame?*

ROBERT BROWNING, Abt Vogler

Kalaithanthai was deeply religious. As one belonging to the *nagarathar* community, he was a devout Saivite. He firmly believed that he owed his success and prosperity to the blessings of Lord Siva. He was deeply read devotional poetry — he knew the whole of *Tiruvacakam* by heart and hundreds of *pathikams* from the other *Tirumurais*. As mentioned earlier, not a day of his life passed without his serene chanting of the *Tirumurais*.

As a devout Saivaite, Kalaithanthai fasted once a week. This practice he followed from his twenty-fifth year. Monday — *somavaram*— a day sacred to Lord Siva, was his fasting day. It was a coincidence that he attained the Lord’s feet also on a Monday morning.

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He strongly felt that religion should find a place in education. He felt sorry that religion, which is absolutely necessary for spiritual development, finds no place in the curricula in our schools and colleges. In his Founder’s Commemoration Day Address in Annamalai University in 1960 (vide *Appendix 7*), he made a fervent plea for the provision of opportunities for prayers, meditations and moral instruction in the campus.

“In Oxford, Cambridge and other Western Universities, which grew up under religious auspices, there are chapels where services are regularly held for the benefit of their staff and students. It should not be difficult for separate religious practices of the different faiths of our land to be permitted in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of our Centres of Learning.”

He insisted that theological colleges and schools for teaching Saiva Siddhanta and the *Tirumurais* should be established throughout the land. As long as Avvai S. Duraisamy Pillai was on the staff, Saiva Siddhanta classes were conducted regularly in Thiagarajar College. Kalaithanthai had an idea of starting a Saiva Siddhanta Research Centre in the College. True to his wish, such a Centre has been functioning in it since 1981.

Kalaithanthai regularly visited the Saiva mutts and often took part in conferences organized by them. In his discussion with the mutt chiefs he would outline the kind of service the mutts should take up.

Kalaithanthai was keenly interested in the growth of the Saiva Siddhanta Society. It was his desire that the Saiva religious works should be translated into English and other languages.

### 3

He regularly worshipped at temples. For several years he went daily to the Sri Meenakshi Temple at Madurai and the Muruga Temple at Thirupparankundram. When he had time he would undertake pilgrimages to different temples. Before going he would insist on reading the holy hymns sung on the temples by the great Tamil saints.

When going on a journey with him, I used to feel nervous like a schoolgirl taking an examination. He would expect me to have a thorough knowledge of the *Thevaram* and be able to remember which line occurred in which song and on which place. On one occasion we were going to Haridwar. Kalaithanthai raised a few points on the songs of Kariakkal Ammaiyar, and a literary discussion followed. Kadiapatty T.N.M. Arunachalam Chettiar who was travelling with us was amazed at the depth of Kalaithanthai's knowledge of Tamil Literature.

Kalaithanthai loved to tell stories connected with the various temples. One such story is connected with the temple at Thiruppoovanam, celebrated by the three great saints Appar, Sundarar and Gnansambandar. It was the site of one of the sixty-four miracles of Lord Siva. Ponnaniyal, a devotee, longed to make a gold idol of the Lord

and was sad that she had not the necessary means. The Lord appeared before her as a *Siddha* and bade her bring all the iron, copper, lead and brass vessels with her and converted them into gold and because of this, He came to be known as an alchemist. Ponnanaiyal made a beautiful idol of Lord Siva, which fascinated her so much that she lovingly pinched its cheeks and the mark is visible even today on the idol.

Pazhamudircholai on the Alagar Koil hills near Madurai is one of the six important places sacred to Lord Muruga. But in the course of history it had disappeared. But in the middle of the last century certain devotees took steps to rebuild a temple there. Kalaithanthai supported the move and worshipped the *Vel*, when it was being taken to Palamudircholai.

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He selected one of the stanzas of *Tiruvacakam* as the prayer song for the Thiagarajar Arts College. The college motto is “*Anbum arivum sivam*”

On the southern extreme of the Meenakshi Mills premises near the Thiagarajar High School there is a small temple of Rowtha Royya Swamy. The deity is supposed to be a form of Lord Siva who came as a horse-dealer for the sake of Manickavasagar. The people in the nearby Palanganatham regularly offered worship there and Kalaithanthai was happy to spare this land belonging to the Sree Meenakshi Mills for them to carry on their worship.

5

Kalaithanthai revelled in religious discussions with Tamil scholars and Saivaite saints. *Tiruvacakam* was the book he almost worshipped. It was his conviction that it is a treasure house of profound divine resplendence. He found certain passages in it obscure and would discuss them with scholars.

In 1974 Kalaithanthai and I went to all the major Siva temples in Tamil Nadu. After getting back to Madurai, he had Professor A. Sankaranarayanan sing the *Thevaram* songs connected with these temples and explicate them. This went on for many days and

Kalaithanthai put off important office work during those days and did not even see the Mills' officials who came to meet him.

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As a community, the *nagarathars* belong to one of nine temples. Kalaithanthai's family belonged to the temple at Mathur. The deity is *Ainnutrisan*. The traders' community that worshipped this God were called *Ainnutruvar* and were believed to have traded in rice and grains and in horses.

Kalaithanthai took a leading part in the renovation of this temple. It was the tradition that all the families belonging to the temple must participate in its renovation. The consecration was done in April 1974. A special function was arranged to felicitate Thiru Chidambaram Chettiar; who had overseen the renovation. Kalaithanthai was to preside, but that was not to be — before that he was called to his Heavenly Abode.