

Group 5 – Saivites And Their Beliefs

Saivites worship Lord Shiva as the supreme omnipresent Lord. Saivism is the oldest form of Hinduism or Sanathana Dharma. Other denominations of Hinduism include Vaishnavism and Sakthism. It differs from all the other major religions of the world in that it has no single founder or prophet. It was created by a group of rishis, highly elevated spiritual souls who created a religion that would help all of us to reach God, regardless of intellect, status, caste or creed.

Saivism, as practised today, can be divided into three main sects – Kashmir Saivism in the North, Vira Saivism in the Middle and Siddhanta Saivism in the South of India, Sri Lanka and in other Tamil-speaking areas of the world.

Saivism has no single central book (as it does not seek to confine its ideas or devotees) but has a variety of sacred scriptures. The Vedas and Agamas, revealed by God, are Saivism's sovereign scriptures. Their timeless truths, passed down from generation to generation, are expressed in the most profound mystical poetry known to man. The Vedas permeate Saiva thought, ritual and meditation, proclaiming life's sacredness and the way to oneness with God. The Agamas are revelations on sacred living, worship, yoga and philosophy, specific to each denomination, and many are over 2,000 years old. The 28 Saiva Agamas form the bedrock of the rituals and philosophy of Saivism. Puranic stories are important scriptures that explain the complex Vedic philosophy to the common man, in the form of popular folk narratives about the Gods and Goddesses that teach us about faith, belief and moral codes.

The twelve Thirumurais, dating from the 3rd century, contain the Thevarams, Thiruvagam, Thirumanthiram, Thiruvissaiyapah, Thirupallaandu and other divinely-inspired outpourings of our Saivite Saints in Tamil. These devotional songs, many of which are still sung in our temples today, are dedicated to Lord Shiva and often refer to the Vedas and ancient Puranic stories that highlight our Saivite beliefs.

The Thirumurais also contain the Periyapuram, by Sekhilar, which tells the life stories of our 63 Nayanmar (Saivite saints). Principal among them are the four Saiva Samaya Kuravar – Thirugnanasampandar, Thirunavukarasar, Sundaramoorthy Swamikal and Manickavasagar. These 4 Nayanmar, by their Thevarams and Thiruvagam, performed many miracles. They demonstrated the power of God's name, Thiruneeru and the Panchaatchara Manthiram – "Om Namah Shivaya". They are regarded as the apostles of the Saiva religion and should be known and venerated by every Saivite.

The philosophy of the Saiva religion is called Saiva Siddhanta. In his book "Sivagnanapodham", Saint Meikandar, in the 13th century, codified these philosophical thoughts from the Vedas, Agamas and early Tamil works, including the devotional hymns of the Nayanmar. This forms part of the 14 Meikandar Sastras, which are the authoritative Tamil Books of Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy.

Saivite beliefs and practices include:

- 1) The belief that there is only one, all-pervasive, omnipotent Supreme Reality – Lord Shiva “Pathi”, “Pasu” – souls and “Pasam” – materials of bondage.

“Pasam” is made up of three things:

“Aanavam” our egoism and ignorance,
 “Kanmam” our good and bad deeds, and
 “Mayai” the ever-changing physical world.

Saivaism teaches us how to get rid of these three things so that we can reach the feet of our beloved Lord Shiva and gain “Mukthi” or liberation.

- 2) A belief that temple worship, rituals, community and personal prayer create a communion with their favourite God forms (e.g. Lord Ganesha – Remover of obstacles, Goddess Saraswathy – Goddess of Knowledge) which are symbolic representations of that Supreme reality.
- 3) A belief in Karma or Kanmam, the law of cause and effect, creating our own destiny by our thoughts, words and deeds.
- 4) The belief that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved and moksha (spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth) has been attained.

Even though there are so many beliefs, the most fundamental and most significant belief in Saivaism is to show love to all and to be kind to all.

Saint Thirumoolar beautifully illustrates this fact in his following Thirumanthiram:

<p>“Anbhum Sivamum irendenpar arivilaar Anbe Sivamaavathu aarum arikilaar Anbe Sivamaavathu aarum arinthapin Anbe Sivamaay amanthirunthaare”</p>	<p>Only the ignorant say that love and Siva are dual, Seldom do they know that love and Siva are one Once they realise that love and Siva are one & the same, They will become the very embodiment of love.</p>
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“Thennaadudaiya Sivane porttri Ennaatavarkum Eraiva Porttri”