

Group 5 - Saiva Literature and Our Way of Life

Saivism is not merely a system of worship; it represents a complete and meaningful way of life. It is founded on the profound philosophy that “Love itself is Siva” – “Anbe Sivam” (அன்பே சிவம்). Based on this principle, Saiva life integrates devotion, moral discipline, social harmony and spiritual wisdom. Saiva literature serves as the medium through which these noble ideals are expressed, preserved and transmitted to society.

Saiva literature is ancient and rich in philosophical depth. Although numerous, they can broadly be classified into two major categories – One is Thothiram - bakthi literature and the other is Sasthiram -theological and philosophical literature. The most important examples of each category are the Twelve Thirumurais and the Meykanda Sasthirams.

The Twelve Thirumurais consist of the devotional hymns sung by the great Saiva saints Thirugnanasambandar, Thirunavukkarasar and Sundaramoorthy Nayanar. They also include the *Thiruvagasam*, composed by Manikkavasagar, along with the devotional compositions of other Saiva Saints. These sacred compositions highlight intense devotion to Lord Shiva and describe the spiritual experiences of His devotees.

The Meykanda Sasthirams are made up of fourteen philosophical books, such as the Sivagnana Bodham. These texts explain the principles of Saiva Siddhantam in a systematic and logical manner. They analyse the philosophical concepts of the soul, God and bondage - to guide individuals towards spiritual liberation.

Saiva literature provides clear guidance on how human beings should live their lives in a righteous and meaningful manner. Thirumoolar states that “those who claim that love and Shiva are different, lack true understanding” – “Anbum Sivamum irandenbar arivilaar” (அன்பும் சிவமும் இரண்டென்பார் அறிவிலார்) – emphasizing that showing love and compassion to all living beings is the path to realizing God. The words of Thayumanavar also express this universal love. He declares that he “knows nothing, other than wishing that all beings should live in happiness” – “Ellaarum inbutru irukka ninaippadhuvae allamal verondru ariyen paraaparam” (எல்லாரும் இன்பற்று இருக்க நினைப்பதுவே அல்லாமல் வேறொன்று அறியேன் பராபரமே).

Thirunavukkarasar states that “My duty is simply to perform service,” “En kadan pani seythu kidappadhe” (என் கடன் பணி செய்து கிடப்பதே), teaching the value of selfless service without expecting any reward. Serving the devotees of God is considered equal to serving God Himself. This teaching encourages a spirit of mutual assistance and compassion within society.

Saiva literature strongly emphasizes equality beyond caste and social divisions. Thirunavukkarasar even questions the value of lineage and caste distinctions! According to Saiva thought, all people are equal before God, and this idea promotes social harmony and unity.

In Saiva philosophy, the human body is regarded as a sacred temple of the soul. Therefore, maintaining the health of the body is considered essential. Practices such as yoga and meditation help control the mind and lead to spiritual purity and balance.

Saiva literature not only guides individual morality but also contributes to the development of a just and harmonious society.

In the sphere of education, the Thevarams praise the importance of studying and also listening, stating that “Those who possess both learning and attentive listening are the truly knowledgeable” – “Kattral kettal Udaiyaar” (கற்றல் கேட்டல் உடையார்), highlighting the Saiva view that a truly educated person is one who both studies and listens attentively to knowledge from teachers and sacred teachings. In economic life, Saiva teachings encourage people to earn wealth through honest means and to use it for righteous and charitable purposes. In relation to nature, the tradition of revering trees, plants, and animals as sacred, fosters respect for the environment and promotes ecological protection.

Thus, Saiva literature is not merely a collection of devotional hymns; it is a powerful guide that shapes human character and ethical living. Through devotion, it teaches discipline and, through love, it promotes social unity. The noble ideal expressed in the words “May the happiness I have experienced be enjoyed by the whole world” – “Yaan pettra inbam peruka ivvaiyagam” (யான் பெற்ற இன்பம் பெறுக இவ்வையகம்) reflects the universal outlook encouraged by Saiva teachings.

In today’s technology-driven world, where people struggle to find peace of mind and purpose in life, Saiva literature continues to serve as a guiding light for humanity.