

Classic Poetry Series

Sivavakkiyar
- poems -

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Sivavakkiyar(10th Century AD)

Sri Sivavakkiyar (sometimes Civavakkiyar) was a great Tamil Poet who lived in the period preceding the 10th Century A.D.

Sivavakkiyar was an early rebel against the Brahmanic order, he was resolutely opposed to the Caste system and was opposed to idol worship and temple ceremonies. His rebellion against any kind of orthodoxy meant his work was left out of the Saiva canonical literature however some of his poetry is well read in Tamil literary compendiums.

Sri Sivavakkiyar, was born with Lord Shiva's name on his lips. He said that the constant repetition of the Lords name would even turn ones body into gold. A great renunciate he is said to have lived for over 4,000 years. His works include Naadi Parikshai and Sivavakkiyar 1000.

He came to Kasi after learning vedas. There he met a Siddhar/Seer/Saint, who was also a cobbler. Though the Saint/Siddhar could sense the power of Sivavakkiyar, he wanted to test him. So he gave Sivavakkiyar some money and asked him to give it to his sister, 'River' Ganga. He also gave him a bitter Bottle Gourd and asked him to remove the bitterness from the Bottle Gourd. Sivavakkiyar immediately left for the river bank without any second thoughts on whether the tasks can be completed or not. After he reached the banks, a beautiful hand raised above the water and Sivavakkiyar without any second thoughts placed the money on the hand. The hand returned back into the water. He also washed away the bitterness from the bottle gourd and took it back to the Siddhar. The Siddhar was happy to see that Sivavakkiyar had passed the test. He wanted to test him once more. So he gave Sivavakkiyar a waterbag and instructed Sivavakkiyar to call out for Ganga and ask for the money that he had given her earlier. Sivavakkiyar at once called out to Ganga asking for the money. Immediately a beautiful hand appeared from the waterbag and gave him back the money. Sivavakkiyar, without being perturbed even for a single moment, took the money and gave it to the Siddhar. The Siddhar was really impressed on Sivavakkiyar's ability to focus without being bothered by doubts or anxiety. Then he asks Sivavakkiyar to lead a family life till he attains samadhi. He also gives him some sand and a bottle gourd and says that the lady who cooks both the sand and the bottle gourd would be his wife.

After taking leave from the Siddhar, Sivavakkiyar continues his pilgrimage. In the midst of his travel, he meets a Nari Kurava (Gypsy) group and they welcome him wholeheartedly. After talking to them for some time, a lady from Nari Kurava

gang rushes upto him and says that she will be happy to serve him and that he should not hesitate to ask for her help. Sivavakiyar immediately gives her both the sand and bottle gourd and asks if she could cook both sand and bottle gourd together. The lady without hesitating a moment, takes both and rushes to the kitchen. After some time she comes back with cooked rice (the sand has turned into rice) and bottle gourd curry. Sivavakiyar immediately realizes that he has met his wife and asks the group if he could marry her. They also agree to the proposal on the condition that he also stays and travels with them. He also agrees and marries his lady. But he also makes sure that he does continue with his spiritual practises.

Siddhar Sivavakiyar continued to stay with the Gypsy group and also diligently learnt their work. Once he went to the forest to get firewood. He chose a tree and started to cut. Suddenly Gold Dust started sprinkling from the tree. After seeing this he started to run shouting that "Lord Yama" (Angel of Death) has arrived. His group asked him what happened and he told them what he saw. Hearing this some 4 people left for the forest with gunny bags to collect Gold Dust. By the time they had filled their bags it started to darken. Since they were hungry, it was decided that two of them would go to the nearest village to get food. Those who went to the village planned to kill their partners who had stayed behind, so they added poison to the food. And the two persons who had stayed behind also plotted against the other two partners who had gone to get food. On their way back to the forest, the two persons who had gone to collect the food were done to death by the other two persons. After killing their partners, they sat down to have their food and in no time they also passed away. Next day Sivavakiyar saw the four bodies and felt sorry that these four people had lost their lives to "Lord Yama" (i.e. the Tree).

Sivavakiyar had a friend with the name Konganar, who was also a great Siddha. Konganar felt very bad that his friend, who is a Master Siddha, was living a life of poverty. So one day, he went to Sivavakiyar's home, knowing that Sivavakiyar would not be available. He asked Sivavakiyar's wife to get some Iron and turned the same to Gold and left after handing over the Gold to her. Sivavakiyar's wife narrates the incident to him after his return. Sivavakiyar asks his wife on whether she wants the Gold. His wife replies that his love is all that she wants and not the gold. Then he asks his wife to drop the gold in the well and his wife also obliged wholeheartedly.

One day few devotees of Siva came to Sivavakiyar and asked whether he would teach them to make Gold, so that they could eradicate poverty and this also will help in removing negative Karma. Hearing this Sivavakiyar laughed and asked why Gold is required for removing negative Karma. He also advised them to

leave behind all materialistic desires and merge their consciousness with Lord Siva. And added that this is the only way to attain Nirvana.

It is believed that he was an Atheist who later converted to Saivism and then to Veera Vaishnavism. He attained Siddhi at kumbakonam. Even now pujas are regularly conducted especially on Full Moon Day. Those who pray to him are blessed with clear mind without any anxieties or worries about the past or future. One can pray to Sivavakkiyar on Mondays, wearing white clothes and with white flowers. This is told as a remedy for those people with Chandra Dhosham.

He was generally considered to be an iconoclast because he vehemently decried temple worship. He did so no doubt, but he said still more vehemently that man should make his heart the temple of God. He had scant respect for rituals which in popular belief had become a substitute for love and service to God and to fellow beings. He was a vehement opponent of caste. Almost all the siddhas believed in the oneness of all creation and they preached a philosophy of love and service and of an inward contemplation. Sivavakkiyar is a shining example of this faith. Some of his verses have the force of a sabre thrust.

Sivavakkiyar explains the transformation of the physical body into a divine body on the analogy of a worm turning itself into a butterfly. Let us state briefly the various stages involved in kaya sadhana. Sthula sarira is the unripe, ordinary, physical body not disciplined by yoga. It is a "deceptive threshold", and one has to "open" it , i.e., go beyond it to achieve kaya siddhi. Sivavakkiyar says that people should protect, immortalize, and preserve the body through the method of yoga just as they would protect a beautiful lady of the house⁷³. When the sthula sarira is disciplined by yoga it becomes ripe or pakva.

Sivavakkiyar is fond of using the expression threshold, i.e., " vasal " in Tamil and he calls the human body as a threshold where God resides. The concept " threshold " is a mystical one and the body is one such mystical threshold, the other threshold being the guru.

In Siddha literature the threshold is a mystical thing. It is a boundary between two worlds, the ordinary, profane world and the sacred world beyond. It is a point where we pass from one mode of being to another, from one level of consciousness to another. The term " vasal " used by the Tamil Siddhas stand for the moment when we ourselves open up to new depths of our being. They say that one need not go to places of pilgrimage or study sastras when the threshold is in oneself. The idea of the body as a microcosm of Reality received a spiritual, mystical denotation in the Tamil Siddhas as against the purely physical denotation of it in the other

traditions. The inter- relations of man's body and the universe (that is Reality) have to be realized by spiritual endeavour. Kaya sadhana is such an endeavour.

Another important aspect of the Siddha view of the human body is nyasa, which consists of feeling the God or powers representing the Gods in different parts of the body.

He Is Not Hari, He Is Not Lord Siva

He is not Hari, He is not the Lord Siva.

He is the Ultimate Cause,

In the Beyond of the Beyond,

Transcending Blackness, Redness, and Whiteness,

Immoveable.

Try to understand:

He is not big, He is not small.

He is Infinite Distance,

Immovable,

Transcending even

Supreme Quiessence.

Sivavakkiyar

Melt With The Heart Inside

In the Four Eternal Vedas,
In the study and reading of scripts,
In sacred ashes and in Holy Writs
And muttering of prayers
You will not find the Lord!
Melt with the Heart Inside
and proclaim the Truth.
Then you will join the Light-
Life without servitude.

Sivavakkiyar

Silence

Silence, unmoved and rising,
Silence, unmoved and sheltering,
Silence, unmoved and permanent,
Silence, unmoved and brilliant,
Silence, broad and immense like the Ganga,
Silence, unmoved and increasing,
Silence, white and shining like the Moon,
Silence, the Essence of Siva.

Sivavakkiyar

Sivavakkiyar's Padal

48

Why, honey is the bee's saliva;
the beetle's saliva is on the flower,
the cows milk itself is mixed with the saliva of the calf!
why should there be so much fuss over it?

36

Milk does not return to the udder, nor butter to the butter-milk;
Nor the life within the sea-shell, if it breaks, to its body;
The blown flower, the fallen fruit, do not return to the tree;
The dead are not born, never, never, never, never!

Sivavakkiyar

Sivavakkiyar's Verses

Verse/38

Where is the pariah woman?

Where is the high-caste woman?

Are there numbers inscribed on the skin and flesh?

Is the pariah woman's delight different from that of a the high-caste woman?

Analyse the pariah woman and the high-caste woman in you.

Verse/46

Drawn milk doesn't return to the breast.

Churned butter doesn't return to the butter-milk.

The broken conch's sound and the beings don't re-enter the body.

The blossomed flower and the fallen half-ripe fruit never return to the tree.

The dead are never born. Never, never, never.

Verse/78

When earthen vessels tumble they keep it in order

When bronze vessels tumble they tend with care.

When our vessel sinks they forsake it because it stinks.

What an inexplicable one is your trick of mingling with the numbers? Oh Lord!

Verse/83

Where are the temples? Where are the holy ponds?

You loathsome people who worship the temples and ponds! Temples and ponds

are in one's mind.

There is neither creation nor destruction.

Never, never, never.

Verse/23

When the boat exists one can run and ride for recreation.

While the boat exists one can determine.

When the boat is smashed, In the incomparable space

There is no goat, no stick, and there exists none.

Verse/15

There is no sampradhaya sans the seed, either above or below.

In what way can the palace sans the architect take shape?

You ignorant! You sell your mother and turn her a slave!

When there is no emancipation there is no life.

Never, never, never.

Verse/51

As one traps the tiger with a goat Is it fair for you to delude me showing a cow?

Oh! King who killed and skinned the elephant with a stick:

You should reveal me showing the way of emancipation.

Sivavakkiyar

The Supreme It

The slothful

Sluggards

Say: He is far, far, far

Away!

But the Supreme It

Is spread everywhere

on Earth and in Heavens.

O you poor dumb ones,

running

stunned and suffering

through towns and fields and forests

in Search!

He is right there

within you!

Stand still

and feel Him,

feel!

Sivavakkiyar

The Ultimate Cause

He is not Hari, He is not the Lord Siva.
He is the Ultimate Cause,
In the Beyond of Beyond,
Transcending Blackness, Redness, and Whiteness.
Immovable.
Try not to understand:
He is not big, He is not small.
He is Infinite Distance,
Immovable,
Transcending even
Supreme Quiescence.

Sivavakkiyar

What Are Temples

What are temples, tell me!
And what are sacred tanks?
O you poor slaves who worship
in temples and tanks!
Temples are in the mind.
Tanks are in the mind.
There is no Becoming,
There is not Unbecoming,
None, none whatever!

Sivavakkiyar