



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

History

A FAILED QUEST FOR IDENTITY: AN ANALYSIS OF SAIVA PRAKASA SABHA AT THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

KEY WORDS: Saiva Prakasa Sabha- runs by Tamil linguistic Minority- in the name of Lord Siva-Thiruvananthapuram-Kerala.

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ABSTRACT

Saiva Prakasa Sabha- organisation of Tamil Speaking people in Thiruvananthapuram-in the name of Lord Siva –functions for the welfare of the minority Tamils-conducting Purana discourses -doing Research in Tamil literature- continues its service in the lable Saivamum Tamizhum.

Saiva Prakasa Sabha is a pioneer organisation of Tamil speaking people of Kerala, which is existing at Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of the state. It functions for the welfare of the Tamil minorities in the name of Lord Shiva, the supreme deity of the Dravidians. The details and the work of the Sabha are not known much; the present venture is to highlight the nature of works done and the quantum of achievement scored by the Sabha.

Of the several sects which found their haven in the Tamil country, Saivism is one of the oldest. Saivism adorns Siva as its sole God. Moreover, it considers Siva as the supreme God. Siva is worshipped both in the human and linga forms. It is considered the God of fertility. Saiva Siddhanta as one of the finest systems of religious philosophy evolved in the country particularly in Tamilnadu. The sentiment expressed through their expression lends credence to the view by many scholars that Siva was a contribution of the Dravidians to the Indian religion as such. For example, G.U Pope (1820-1908) writes, Saivism is the old pre-historic religion of South India, essentially existing from pre Aryan Times.

In the late 19th century witnessed the revival of Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy concomitantly with the development of Tamil renaissance. The spiritual and religious awakening of Tamilnadu had its own Socio-Cultural ethos. A Number of cultural organisations sprang up in different parts of Tamilnadu as a sequel to the revival of Tamil language, culture and Religion. From the 1880's onwards non-Brahmin Tamil Scholars seem to have attempted to show that the Dravidian religious system was distinct and also superior to the teachings of the Vedas by propounding the Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy. The renaissance of Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy started with the founding of the associations in different parts of South India. As early as 1883, a Saiva Siddhanta Sabha was founded at Tuticorin in the then Tirunelveli District for the revival and propagation of Saivism. A similar Saiva Siddhanta Sabha was founded at Thiruvananthapuram on 1st Chithirai 1885(the first day of the Tamil New Year and also the Kollem Era 1060). These were the attempts to revive and propagate Saivism which is generally accepted as the original religion of the Dravidians.

Thiruvananthapuram was the capital of the erstwhile princely state of Travancore since ancient times, lot of Tamil speaking population were living here. But there was no organisation to work for the progress of Tamil language and Tamil culture. Professor Sundarampillai (1885-1897) was perhaps the first non-Brahmin Tamil scholar to propagate the ideas, concerning the antiquity ad cultural self sufficiency of the Dravidians. Sundarampillai, in his book entitled History of Tamil Literature pointed out, "there was a period, lost altogether in hoary antiquity, when the native Dravidian religion... was alone in vogue". Only because of the inspiration given by Professor Sundarampillai the Saiva

Prakasa Sabha was started at Thiruvananthapuram in 1880s. Sundarampillai was one of the earliest proponents of Neo-Saivism in the late nineteenth Century. He extolled in his works a Tamil identity devoid of any foreign influence when he was the Principal of the MDT Hindu School at Tirunelveli, learnt Saiva Siddantha from Kodakanallur Sundara Swamigal and held a long discussion with Swami Vivekananda during his visit to Kerala. Moreover, he was supported by Thycaud Ayyavu Swamikal (1814-1909), who delivered several lectures and discourses on Bhakthi, Yoga and Vedanda to the leading personalities in and around Thiruvananthapuram. The first organizing committee consisted of Valiya Melezhuthu Thiraviyampillai as the President, Manonmaniam Sundaram Pillai as Vice-president and Advocate Swaminathapillai as its Secretary. Sri Moolam Tirunal (1885-1924) the then Maharaja of Travancore also extended his support to the progress of the Sabha. In 1929 it was registered under the Travancore Registration Act. T. Lakshmana Pillai, V. Subramaniya Pillai and A. Viswalingam Pillai were president, Secretary and Treasurer respectively.

The aims of the Sabha were (i) Arranging lectures in front the image of Siva, (ii) Arranging Purana discourses (iii) Promoting Tamil Language, art and culture, (iv) Removal of existing evils from the Tamil society, (v) Improving the economic condition of the Tamils, (vi) Protecting the rights of Tamil minority, (vii) Providing vocational and higher education and (viii) Promoting research to the Tamils. The Sabha has succeeded to a very great extent, in realizing these goals.

Saiva Siddhanta was highlighted as a 'Dravidian religion' by Prof. Sundaram Pillai for the next two years. The most scholarly practitioners of Saiva Siddhanta were two of his disciples viz J.M Nallaswami Pillai and Swami Vedachalam (Marai Malai Adigal) both of them had propagated the religion at Madras. In 1886 Prof. Sundaram Pillai wrote as follows, "With all difference to the Vedas, which have subsequently become the Dravidian as well as Aryan Bible, I believe that Saiva system of thought and worship (is) particularly our own". (Letter of P Sundaram Pillai to J.M Nalla swami Pillai, dated 31st March 1896, published in Siddhanta Deepika vol. II. no.5). However within two years after the establishment of the Sabha, one of its founders, Prof. Pilli died on 26th April 1897 at the young age of 42. But his followers worked hard for the growth of the Sabha further.

The Sabha had its own building within a year. For the construction of its building its members purchased seven cents of land with an old building at on the main road (near the present Ayurveda College at Trivandrum Road) in 1886. In 1888 five more cents were purchased for the Sabha. In 1971, a new three storied building was constructed there at a cost of three lakhs rupees and it was opened by V. Viswanatham, the then Governor of Kerala. Realising the first goal, the Sabha had produced a lot of Tamil reputed Scholars like Isaichelvar T. Lakshmanapillai, Researcher K.N. Sivarajapillai,

R. Vaithiyalingam Pillai, P. Nataraja Pillai etc. They worked as administrators and members of the Sabha and also convened series of meetings for discussing prospect of their researches. These scholars themselves later mentioned about the benefit they received from this Sabha during their research career. There is an auditorium in the top floor of the Sabah's building. A Siva idol is installed there and regular pujas are conducted. Special religious functions are also celebrated here.

In 1954, P.S. Nataraja Pillai, son of Prof. Sundaram pillai was a minister in the Travancore government and like his father, he too worked as Vice-president of Sabha from 1955 to 1962. The Thiruvaduthurai Adinam, a Tamil scholar delivered lectures on Saiva Siddhanta at Thiruvananthapuram. Since 1952 the Kantha Sasti Vizha was celebrated. Since 1957 two more functions were introduced viz. Thiruppavai and Thiruvempavai and these are conducting in the Tamil month of Margazhi every year. In addition to this, since, 1978, free Tamil Language coaching was given to those who like to learn Tamil. This benefited the Malayalam speaking population of Thiruvananthapuram to learn Tamil. On 20th September 1985 the centenary of the Saiva Prakasa Sabha was celebrated. In Memory of its centenary the Sabha published a Souvenir and an endowment was opened in the name of its founder Prof. Sundaram Pillai with a view to conduct Tamil Lectures in the Tamil Department of the University of Kerala. An amount of Rs.10,000/- was given for conducting seminars in the Department.

The Sabha brought out Guga Avadara Ragasiam and Baktra Paadia Pamaalai in 1960. The discourses on Sivapuranam, Tirumurugattuppadai, Tiruvacakam, Tevaram, Peria Puranam, Tirukkural were conducted and the selected discourses were published and circulated among the Tamil Scholars for free of cost. The research papers presented were collected and edited and published with the caption Karutharangu Malar. To cater the need of the reader a library was opened in the Saivaparkasa Sabha in 1971. Tamil dailies, journal and periodicals are subscribed here for promoting learning in Tamil. Protecting the rights of Tamil Minority was one of its goals of the Sabha. It offers prizes to the Tamil students who are getting highest mark in SSLC, +2, B.A and M.A, in the State of Kerala. In addition, the Sabha petitions to the Kerala government to protect their rights and alleviate their legitimate grievances.

Since its establishment several scholars and politicians visited the Sabha. Dr.S.Radhakrishnan, former President of India, Thiru.VVGiri and P.Ramachandran, former Governors of Kerala, K.Kamaraj, President of the Indian National Congress and Former Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. Ma.PoSivagnanam, T.P Meenakshi Sundaranar, Tavathiru Kunnakudi Adikalar, Thirumurga Kirubanatha Warriar etc. are in the long list of eminent personalities who graced the Sabha by their visits.

Up to 2003 Kavimamani.P.Kumaesan was the President of this Sabha. As a scholar he is with the Sabha for the past fifty years and he published the Biography of Prof.P. Sundaram Pillai in 1994. Enjoying the support and encouragement given to this Sabha by leaders and scholars, it continues its services under the label Saivamum Tamizhum, which means by the name of Siva working for the progress of Tamils and their language and culture.

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