

Saiva Siddhanta is a *bhakti* (loving devotion) tradition. This system is a dualist (this is somewhat problematic but will be discussed in the section on philosophy) form of Saivism that has ancient roots in north India, though is most popular now in southern Tamil regions of India (Prentiss 1996). The goal of this system is ultimately liberation (*moksa*) from the cycle of rebirth, achieved through the Lord (Siva).

Hillary Rodrigues translates Saiva Siddhanta to mean “the ultimate goal of Saivism” (Rodrigues 270). In a definition that expands from a literal translation to one more anchored in the Indian philosophical system, Dr. S.C. Nandimath tells us that Saiva Siddhanta “means a system of Saivism, the doctrines of which are logically proved and are accepted as true” (Nandimath 80). The portion about being “logically proved” will come up again when we turn to Saiva Siddhanta philosophy. In the past, Saivism and even Saiva Siddhanta had a very strong presence and development in northern India (Gwalior state for example), though now it appears to be most influential in southern Indian Tamil regions and Sri Lanka (Prentiss 1996).

Saiva Siddhanta is an ancient system that has an equally long textual tradition. Tracing its history through its literature we see that Saiva Siddhanta seems to have gone through earlier phases to later become the influential tradition it is now. According to the tradition the Saivagamas are the original works, but according to Nandimath “available copies are very corrupt; therefore an attempt to determine their age on linguistic evidence must be abandoned at present” (Nandimath 80). This is important because it directs us towards a more historical study, as does Nandimath’s approach to Saiva Siddhanta literature. In the earliest phases the literature appears to be somewhat ambiguous. The tradition appears to be found in inscriptions as early as 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> (Nandimath 80) century

with the Pallava king Rajasimha. Nandimath also tells us that there is a very important link with the Saivacaryas. He argues that the Saivacaryas became prominent around 900 CE (Nandimath 82) and had links with Saiva Institutions (*mathas*). It is through monasteries, and *mathas* that Saivism, and particularly Saiva Siddhanta was spread through out India. According to Nandimath the Saivacaryas were not simply Saivites; many were followers and teachers of Saiva Siddhanta. Vairocana and Srikanthasiva are said to significant Saivacarya teachers of Siddhanta doctrine. This demonstrates that as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> century, Saiva Siddhanta existed in some form and that it was spreading and still popular nearly one-thousand years later. This has been a short history of a massive amount of literature of Siddhanta Saivism produced over around two-thousand years of existence.

Ultimately, all Saivism sects directly trace their lineage back to the sage Durvasa. Somananda wrote that there was a time in which all *rsis*, the Saiva Sastras and their knowledge disappeared. This seems to have been heralded as a particularly spiritually bleak time. As mythic accounts tell, Siva took pity on the mortals and went to a particularly chaste sage named Durvasa, and charged him with spreading the sastras (Nandimath 83). Durvasa in kind “charged [his three sons]... with establishing spiritual order and of teaching men again the...Saiva faith and doctrine in their three aspects of Unity, Diversity, and Diversity in Unity” (Nandimath 83-84). Tryambaka is the immediate ancestor (after Durvasa) of Somananda, who is held to be responsible for establishing Kashmiri Saivism. There is disagreement as to which branch of Saivism was originally established by Somananda in Kashmir. Dr. S.C. Nandimath argues that because Tryambaka was charged with teaching the aspect of Diversity (here the dualist or rather

the pluralist Saivism), it is most likely that Somananda and his ancestors also taught the dualist version of the Trika; “Trika refers to the triad of God, souls, and bonds, with which the philosophy deals” (Rodrigues 566). This is problematic because Trika generally is used in reference to a non-dualist philosophy, and has for some time. Rohan A. Duniwala states that Amardaka was “one of the reputed founders” (Dunuwila 26) of the pluralist Saiva Siddhanta. The issue here is on the specific roots and founders of Saiva Siddhanta. The position that Nandimath takes is based on an interpretation of the mythic account of the origin of Saivism (in which Somananda (descendent of Tryambaka) actually taught a dualist version of the *trika*), where as the argument that Dunuwila makes is based on tracing the history of literature (Dunuwila 27).

Saiva Siddhanta is a dualist tradition, though in reality this tradition appears to be pluralistic. The simile most often evoked to explain the basic elements of Saiva Siddhanta is that of the pot (Nandimath 145). Here Saiva Siddhanta claims “three important eternal entities” (Ibid). The three eternal entities are explained in terms of the evolution of the universe; here the name Siddhanta is evoking the logic previously mentioned. To start Saiva Siddhanta does not deny the reality of the material world. In fact, the existence of the material world is crucial to understanding Saiva Siddhanta. The three basic elements are the Lord (Siva), Matter (the world) and the Soul. These elements are eternal and are eternally different. In this system Siva “is both transcendent, yet immanent in all aspects of creation” (Rodrigues 270). To better understand what the above quote means we can think of the evolution of the universe as being conceived in this way: the Lord creates a pot (Lord and Matter), and only creates a pot for the use of a consumer (soul)(Nandimath 145-146). Through this simile we again see that all is dependent on the Lord and yet is

distinct from him. Liberation, as is implied, is achieved through the Lord. The critical distinction in Saiva Siddhanta (that distinguishes it as pluralistic) is that once a soul becomes liberated and realizes it is like the Lord, the soul does not then become (or become united with) the Lord after liberation (i.e. “three eternal distinct entities” and “the Lord is immanent and yet transcendent”). While caught in the cycle of rebirth the soul is completely dependent on the Lord as the source of all knowledge and especially of liberation. By saying that the soul realizes it is like the Lord the system is recapitulating the idea that makes this system dualist; it is saying that the soul is intelligent like the Lord and also is liberated like the Lord. The important piece of information here is that the soul is like the Lord and is never equated with the Lord as per the three eternal entities. This is a major point of philosophical difference between Saiva monists and dualists, as both take Siva to be the immanent factor in the world. The point is that for monists once liberation is achieved the soul is no longer distinct from the Lord (in this system the only reality is Siva), while for dualists (or more appropriately pluralists) the soul and Siva are eternally different.

#### Bibliography:

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Prentiss, Karen Pechilis (1996) *Tamil Lineage for Saiva Siddhānta Philosophy*. [History of Religions](#), Vol. 35, No. 3 (Feb., 1996), pp. 231-257. Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

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### **Related Terms:**

Saivacayas  
Mathas  
Vairocani  
Somananda  
Durvasa  
Tryambaka  
Amardaka  
Srinatha  
Siva in Srikantha form  
Matta-Mayura matha

### **Websites:**

Wikipedia:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaiva\\_Siddhanta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shaiva_Siddhanta)

Saiva Siddhanta Church:

<http://www.himalayanacademy.com/ssc/>

Saivism.net

<http://www.saivism.net/sects/siddha/siddhasaivism.asp>

Vedic Books (a good source for books on a variety of topics relating to Hindu religion/spirituality)

<http://www.vedicbooks.net>

A general google search that has a lot of promising websites:

<http://www.google.ca/search?hl=en&q=Saiva+Siddhanta&btnG=Google+Search&meta=>

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