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# WORLD-VIEW AND SALVATION ACCORDING TO SAIVA SIDDHANTA

## 1. Introduction

In the present-day world 'Freedom' and 'Liberation' seem to be the catch-words both in World-view and Salvation. Indeed, freedom is the perennial and ceaseless quest of man. There has ever been and ever will be this constant struggle to become more free. One often hears about freedom from economic, social and cultural bondages. But is not life itself subject to bondage?

In the Indian traditions, as in the other world-philosophies, we find different answers to this question. There is Carvaka to whom the problem is irrelevant, as his attitude is: "unborn tomorrow and dead yesterday—why fret about them if to-day is sweet?" The Buddha recognizes the bondage; but for him there is no person who is in permanent bondage. The Advaitin accepts *Samsara* as a fact. According to him, however, there is no attainment of freedom but only an awareness of his identity with Brahman. There is yet another answer—that of the Hindu theist (Vaishnavite and Saivite)—which recognizes the bondage as something real and can be overcome only by the grace of the Supreme. To the theist, freedom is freedom *from* bondage and *for* service to the Lord. The Siddhantin in particular is characteristically emphatic in his belief that bondage can be overcome *only* by the grace of *jnana*. Hence, the concern of the Siddhantin could be summed up as—'Human Bondage and Divine Grace.'<sup>1</sup> The twelve *Tirumurai* and the fourteen *Meykantsastra* constitute the Tamil canon of Siddhanta. The expose here follows the formulated exposition found in the *Meykantsastra* especially basing itself on *Sivajnana Potam* and *Sivajnana Cittiyar*, which are the most basic works among the Sastras.

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1. Cf. Dr. V. A. Devasenapathy, *Of Human Bondage and Divine Grace* (Annamalai University, 1963), pp. 85-100.

## 2. World-View

(a) *Thematic Awareness of the World*: The Saiva Siddhantin sees around him a phenomenal world subject to origin, growth and dissolution. Such a changing world demanded someone who was the cause of these changes. Besides these, there must be a spiritual principle in man who makes all these observations. This spirit cannot be a part of the phenomenal, since the latter manifests as 'jada' or unintelligent; neither can it be identified with God. Therefore, besides the *phenomenal world* and God, there are also souls.<sup>2</sup> These three realities: *Pati* (Irai-Lord) *Pasu* (uyir soul) *pasam* (Kattu-Malam), are eternal.<sup>3</sup> The whole life of the Siddhantin consists in his full realization of this *related existence*: *The pasu* (soul) bound by *pasam* (anava) is being liberated by *pati* (the Lord).

(b) *State of Bondage*: Siddhanta states that the souls are not aware of their close relationship to God. They dwell in darkness of ignorance known as *anava*.<sup>4</sup> In this ignorance the souls are, as it were, in a swoon unable to perceive, think or act. Caught up in *anava*, their true nature is marred in the same way as verdigris covers copper. As in the case of rice, it is not known when the husk covered it, so in the case of the soul it is not known when *anava* began to envelop it.<sup>5</sup>

(c) *Process of Liberation*: As the souls are utterly lost, inactive in this darkness of ignorance, they cannot act without God's help. The phenomenal world also has not evolved; it is in a formless state known as *maya*. But God has pity on these poor souls and sets in motion the process of evolution. His aim in doing so is the ultimate release of these souls from bondage and the realization of their true nature.

In concrete terms, this goal is reached through the experiences of the world. The souls are embodied so as to undergo various kinds of experiences. But these acts are not neutral. They are good or bad. These acts, therefore, set in motion the law of *Karma* and transmigration. This law, however, is not independent, since, it is God who administers it and at the moment of realization he can make it ineffective. There is an intermediate heaven and hell where the souls sometimes go to reap the fruits of their deeds.

2. In *Siva-Jnana Potam*, the first three *sutras* argue for the existence of *Pati*, *Pasa* and *Pasu*. Cf. J. H. Piet, *A Logical Presentation of the Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy* (USCL, Madras, 1952), pp. 20-30.

3. The Siddhantin holds that nothing can come out of nothing and that which is cannot become nothing.

4. Cf. *Siva-Jnana Potam*, *Sutras* 2 and 5.

5. Cf. *Cittiyar*, 2.86.

As the soul proceeds from birth to birth, it acquires more and more experience and knowledge. Ultimately, when the soul is ripe<sup>6</sup>, God intervenes and imprints on the soul true knowledge of himself, of the soul and of the inseparable union existing between them.<sup>7</sup> It is through His *Arul Sakti* (gracious power)<sup>8</sup>, which is not different or distinct from Him, that Siva saves the souls; Siva and his *Sakti* are related like the sun and its rays. His grace works in the souls as the rays of the sun. He himself undergoing no change.

(d) *Breaking the Bondage* : In the process of liberation the soul is not simply passive. It actively experiences and makes itself mature to receive the grace. In its striving towards the goal of freedom that is realized through the grace of *Jnana* the soul passes through the stages of *kevala*, *sakala* and *suddha*. Emerging from the *kevala* state with the heavy chains of *anava*, it enters the *sakala* where it encounters the difficulties of two other *malas*:<sup>9</sup> *maya* and *karma*. The various products of *maya* incite the soul so that it pursues them and *seeks* them under the effects of *anava*; the soul sees the world in false colours and leads a restless life. Consequently, the soul is loaded with *karma* and is weary of the *sakala* state or *samsara*; when the soul is depressed with disillusionment of the world, it seeks refuge beyond these; then, God appearing as a *guru* leads the soul to the *suddha* state where the soul is freed from the fetters of *anava* by the grace of *jnana*.<sup>10</sup>

(e) *Paths to Mukti* : The soul, in order to receive the grace of *jnana*—which is the saving knowledge or realization—has to practise, out of a spirit of *bhakti*, *tapas* or religious austerities. There are three kinds of *tapas* to be practised in ascending order: *Carya*, *Kriya* and *Yoga*.<sup>11</sup> The path of *Carya* consists in the external service of God in the temple, a service which creates a yearning in the mind for spiritual advancement. *Kriya* consists in worshipping Siva with rites and ceremonies, in yoga the devotee, besides performing external ceremonies, must establish a definite concept of God in his mind. This is mental worship based on the control of the senses and concentration that aims at ridding

6. The ripening of the soul is called 'Malaparipakam'—or 'Iruvinai oppu' (balancing of the deeds), Cf. *Potam*, Sutra, 8.

7. The doctrine of Guru is central to Saiva Siddhanta. Cf. X. Irudayaraj, *Guru in Saiva Siddhanta* (Thesis) (Paris, 1974).

8. Siva acts only through His *Sakti* and hence *Sakti* is called grace and the forms of Siva are seen as grace-forms.

9. *Karma* and *Maya* are called 'mala' only in a relative sense. Cf. *Cittiyar*, 2.86,

10. Cf. *Potam*, Sutra 8.

11. Siddhanta does not mention *bhakti* as a separate *marga*, since *bhakti* has: be found in all the four paths.

oneself of all egotism and possessiveness or desire. When the soul has reached this third stage, Siva manifests himself to it and confers upon it the grace of *jnana* which leads to realization.

(f) *Manifestation of the Guru* : This manifestation takes place through a *Guru*,<sup>12</sup> who has already realized union with God. Just as a crystal which is placed in the sun emits light, so the soul that has realized '*advaita*' can manifest Him to others and thus make them also attain realization. God has to manifest Himself in this way because it is impossible for God, who is all-perfect, to become incarnate and subject himself to *Maya*, to imperfection and change.

(g) *Jivan Mukta* : The soul which has thus realized union with God is called a '*jivan mukta*'<sup>13</sup> as long as it lives. When such realization takes place, God releases the soul from the bonds of *anava* and *maya*, destroying all the *karma* that may still be left in the soul as fruit of its past action. But the soul can still easily yield to the attractions of the world and can once again fall into bondage and succumb to the cycle of rebirth. Hence it has to meditate constantly upon God and associate itself with his servants till it reaches '*paramukti*'.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Mukti in Saiva Siddhanta

Before explaining the concept of *mukti*, the Siddhantin<sup>15</sup> considers the opinion of others and finds them incorrect and inadequate : " People believe that the pleasures derived in the company of young and beautiful damsels is the highest *mukti*. Others believe a residence in different heavens as the highest *mukti* ; others postulate the annihilation of the five *skandas* as the end ; and others again, the becoming possessed of the eight attributes ; others postulate a condition analogous to stone and others *viveka*, (knowledge of oneself as God) ; and others say that the becoming of the true form of God is the end. What we postulate is that the reaching of the Feet of God is the true *mukti* " (Cittiyar 8. 2).

Of all these opinions the one which the Siddhantins attacked vehemently is that of the Mayavadin to whom *mukti* is the merging of the soul into Brahman just as the air in a pot gets merged with the atmospheric air when the pot is broken. As opposed to Mayavadins

12. Cf. *Cittiyar* 8.

13. Cf. *Potam*, Sutras 11 and 12.

14. Though the term is similar in Hindu traditions, its significance varies in each tradition.

15. The first part of *Cittiyar* is called '*Parapakkam*', it deals with the opinion of other systems and traditions.

the Siddhantin holds that the self in *mukti* is not identified with Brahman; the experience of *mukti* itself is for the self and not for Brahman. Refuting the Aikiyavadins (who holds that the soul becomes one with God just as water mingles with water) the Siddhantin affirms that God and the soul are not of the same nature; if the soul becomes one with God, it gets destroyed; how can the destroyed be united? What is it that experiences *mukti*?

The position of the Sivadvaitin is also not acceptable to Siddhanta for he teaches that in *mukti*, the soul does not feel the distinction between the knower (itself), the knowledge itself and the primal one. For, according to Siddhanta, in the experience of *mukti* there is, besides a known, a knower who knows that there is something other than himself; however there is not duality implied either as in *Bhedavada* since the Lord is one with the soul's knowledge and not like an object to be known (6.2.5).

The comment of Nallaswamy Pillai<sup>16</sup> on the text of Cittiyar (8.12) is illuminating. "Each belief and action are consequent on the particular end in life, which, each one gradually places before himself; and each one thinks his ideal is the best and would not be convinced that it is not the best. As you stay in a mango grove, you will find different persons entering it with a certain definite object... and deriving some pleasure and profit according to his tastes. Yet, any honest thinker cannot fail to see that there are various degrees of pleasures and profit, differing in quality and quantity."<sup>17</sup> To the Siddhantin, his position on *mukti* is more meaningful than any other.

(a) *Siddhanta Description of the Liberated State*: In Siddhanta the liberated state is described in many ways—as reaching heaven, enjoying bliss, reaching the Feet of the Lord etc. Once the soul is liberated, it is said to attain '*Vitu*'—which means emancipation, freedom, liberation, house, abode, final release...<sup>18</sup> Evidently, for the Siddhantin, it means to reach the Lotus Feet of the Lord as the final abode where there is only eternal bliss.

(b) *Meaning of 'advaita'*: The nature of the soul's Union with the Lord in *mukti* is explained as '*advaita*' union.<sup>19</sup> Meykantar,<sup>20</sup>

16. Nallaswami Pillai is one of the exponents of Siddhanta; he has translated both *Potam* and *Cittiyar* into English.

17. Cf. *Cittiyar* 8.

18. Cf. Burrow and Emenean, *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary*.

19. Cf. *Potam*, Sutra 2.

20. Meykantar provides a brief commentary for his own texts of *Potam*. Cf. *Piet, Op. Cit.*

in his commentary on the *Second Sutra of Potam* elaborates the meaning of 'advaita'. This 'advaita' is not *abheda*, which asserts oneness as that of gold and gold ornaments; nor is it *bheda*, which upholds difference as between light and darkness; nor *bhedabheda*, which implies one-and-different, illustrated by words and meaning. Instead, it is an inseparable union like that of soul and body, eye and sun, and the soul and sun in the act of seeing.<sup>21</sup> Hence 'advaita' union signifies neither two nor not-two.

The 'advaita' of the Siddhantin is also known as *tatanmiyam* (*tadatmya*) which, according to Sivajnana Muni,<sup>22</sup> can have two different meanings: (i) one reality can appear in two different forms which at the same time exist without separation of difference; this is *tatanmiyam* as such; (ii) one becomes united with the other, that is, both are one by union; one by union is the 'advaita' of Siddhanta. In brief, 'advaita' means two in reality and one by union.

Though the 'advaita' union is inexpressible in words, the Siddhantin tries to explain it by means of analogies. Siva-Jnana-Potam (11.2.3) says that the union of the soul and the Lord is like that of salt with water. Just as the salt is indistinguishable from water, so the soul is one with the Lord without losing itself. Cittiyar gives another analogy similar to this one: God and soul remain united and undistinguished like a mixed syrup of sugar-cane-juice, honey, milk, fruit-juice and sugar-candy (11.12).

Tiruarutpayan<sup>23</sup> describes the final bliss as union in love. "If there is the bliss above all bliss, it is now realized. It is the state of love" (80). The 'advaita' union is therefore easily understood in terms of love, a love which is experienced, in which the union is one, different, and one-and-different. Hence it is called *suddha 'advaita'* by Siddhantins.

(c) *The Triple Eternal in Mukti*: Now, in Siddhanta, the Lord, the soul and the *anava* are eternal. The question therefore arises with regard to *anava*. What happens to it in the final state of bliss? "First of all, in the state of jivanmukta", says Cittiyar, "*anava* is not annihilated, but its veiling potency is annihilated; and when the body does not exist any more, it also wanes away (11.4). It is, therefore, like a burnt seed."<sup>24</sup>

21. Cf. Sivajnana Muni, *Patiyam*, (SSS, Madras), p. 106.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

23. The meaning of the title is—The fruit of divine grace; written by Umapati, Sivacarya; that forms a supplement to his important work *Siva-prakasam*.

24. Marijnana Desikar, a commentator on *Cittiyar*, points out that '*anava*' at this stage does not cause births.

Umapati Sivacarya<sup>25</sup> takes a definite stand on this issue. For, if *anava* were to be destroyed, the Scriptures need not say that all the three-God, soul, and the *anava* are eternal. But, if it is not destroyed in the final bliss, the bliss would not be full (as *anava* causes ignorance). The author himself provides an answer to the problem with an analogy: The darkness which disappears at the presence of light is not annihilated; so too *anava* is not annihilated, even in the bliss.

In Unmaivilakkam, Manavacakangatantēr requests his master to explain graciously how the three are eternal in the final state of bliss. The master says: "O my son, understand this in love! Hear how the three entities are in the final state! He who enjoys the supreme bliss is the soul. He who imparts this bliss is God (*Irai*). That which causes to increase (*vilaivittal*) is the *anava*".<sup>26</sup> In commenting on this text Ramanatha Pillai explains it with examples. For instance, a sick man when he is cured of his sickness with the help of a doctor, is happy. Possibly the sickness has created a situation for a new experience of good health. Similarly, the presence of *anava* (in its unveiling state) may be said to increase the joy of the final bliss of the soul.

What interests us most is the idea that the understanding of the reality of '*anava*' even in bliss throws light on the nature of '*Suddha Advaita*' union which distinguishes Siddhanta from other traditions.

#### 4. World-view Vs Salvation

Now that we have considered briefly the world-view and salvation in Saiva Siddhanta, let us attempt to point out some characteristic aspects found in the Siddhanta understanding of salvation which result from the special (particular) world-view it has.

(a) *The three eternal*s: First of all, what strikes us most is the affirmation of the Three Eternals..*Pati* (Lord), *Pasu* (Soul), *Pasam* (bondage). As soon as one postulates the triple eternal, the problem that arises is the relationship these bear to one another. The manner in which the three are related is illustrated thus: "The three are eternal as the space of the sea, water and salt exist together always." This is the way the Siddhantin formulates his world-view.

Now we could see whether such a world-view has its corresponding relatedness also in the understanding of *mukti*. When we ask the

25. Cf. *Pirakasam*, p. 88.

26. Cf. Verses, pp. 49, 50.

Siddhantins about the state of *mukti*, they affirm positively that in 'advaita' union too, the three realities exist. Indeed, one could easily accept that in *mukti* the soul and God are in union, since union implies at least the two. But a doubt arises as to how 'anava', that causes ignorance in bondage, could exist even in *mukti*, which is the final bliss attained by the grace of *jnana*. The explanation offered for this understanding of existence of *anava* even in *mukti* is the special contribution made by Siddhantins.

According to them, in the beginning, the existence of 'anava' causes to affirm the reality of the soul (*Pasu*) as distinguished from the reality of the Lord (*Pati*); in *mukti*, 'anava' which has lost its power of veiling plays the role of differentiating the enjoyer and the impartor of the bliss, and thus helps the soul to enjoy the bliss.

Now let us consider how it is explained. In the bondage state 'anava' obscured the soul in all its three powers, i.e. knowing (*jnana*), willing (*iccha*) and doing (*kriya*); and now that the concealing power of 'anava' is removed, the same makes the powers of the soul function fully. In particular, the 'iccha-sakti' of the soul is enabled to experience the bliss by 'anava'. For, due to the presence of 'anava', the soul is not only aware of the bliss but is ceaselessly desiring the bliss.

We might note here that the distinction made between the bliss and the experience of this bliss is one of the finer points of Saiva Siddhanta, which gives a special character to its world-view and salvation.

(b) *Mayai (Maya) and Kanmam (Karma) are aids to break the bondage*: *Mukti* in Siddhanta is, in the first instance, liberation from bondage (*malam*-evil). Evil (*malam*) according to Siddhanta, is as indicated in the first part threefold, namely, *anavam*, *kanmam*, and *mayai*.<sup>27</sup> While 'anava' is inherent (*Mula malam, Sahaja malam*) in the soul, the other two are provided to remove the primordial taint. Cittiyar says: "Just as the washerman washes clothes clean by mixing with the cow-dung, fuller's earth, etc. so the Lord removes the *anavam malam* with *maya-mala*."<sup>28</sup> Umapati illustrates the divine pedagogy with another analogy: "Like the lamp which loses its brightness at day-break, *maya* enlightens the soul by its various forms of body, senses, etc. . . . , as long as the dark *anavam* recovers its consciousness a little by the light of *karma* and *maya*, which loses its brightness, once the light of *jnana* appears."<sup>29</sup>

27. Siddhantin also says that there are five *mala*. Cf. *Pirakasam*, p. 32.

28. Cf. *Cittiyar*, 2.52.

29. Cf. *Tiruarutpayan*, pp. 3, 9, 10.



Hence, according to Siddhanta, the Lord uses *maya* and *karma* as his pedagogical means to liberate the soul. It is similar to beating a man to wake him up from sleep. For, in order to remove the power of *anava* which prevents the soul from recognizing its own true self, God gives the soul a body made from the evolutes of *maya*; while in this body, the soul performs deeds, the fruits of which are administered by *karma*. In this way, the soul is slowly led by the power of knowledge coming through *maya* and *karma* till it becomes mature enough to receive the grace of *jnana* that breaks the power of *anava*.

In this vision, all the five acts (*Pancakritya*) of Siva<sup>30</sup> are nothing but the five steps of his divine pedagogy. The fundamental three-fold operation—creation, conservation, and dissolution—is meant only to bestow the grace of *jnana* on the soul.

Thus, in the world-view of Siddhanta, the only evil is *anava*; all other experiences of bondage in life contribute somehow to the growth of maturity of the soul. The body too is considered to be only one of the means to liberation. Consequently, there are no 'bodily' aspects in the liberated state. For, the Siddhantin says: "Once the evil is removed, the body too disappears."<sup>31</sup>

(c) *Absence of the communitarian dimension in Mukti*: Doubtless, the Siddhantins admit the plurality of souls: "Countless is the flock of souls that have attained the Feet of the Lord, and of those who in future will attain the final end, just as the days of the past and days to come are countless."<sup>32</sup> Also, as we read in Potam,<sup>32</sup> the *jivanmukta* is asked to live in communion with the *bhaktas* of Siva, and hence the company of the lovers of Siva is seen as a necessity for *jivanmukta*. But while considering the soul's final union with the Lord, there is no reference to the communion of the souls.

The reason is not far to seek. For, to a Siddhantin, the liberation of the soul depends upon its own maturity and so the Lord guides each one individually and manifests Himself (as a Guru) to every soul at the proper (ripe) moment. Thus the process of maturity and liberation for each soul is unique. Deeper still, if the '*advaita*' union with the Lord is the ultimate goal and the only eternally real, all other associations are passing and a passage to the one that lasts forever.

30. Cf. *Cittiyar*, 1.33.

31. *Ibid.*, 2.3.

32. Cf. *Pirakasam*, p. 19.

33. Cf. *Potam*, Sutra 12.

What is implied is the view of the Siddhantin to whom community dimension belongs to the realm of *maya* and *karma* and hence his only concern is to realize 'advaita' union that neither includes nor excludes explicitly communitarian aspects of *mukti*. For, in the last analysis, the reality of eternal *mala* (*anava*) even in *mukti* is open to interpretation.<sup>34</sup>

(d) *Non-existence of an Eternal Hell*: As in other Hindu traditions, Siddhanta too believes in the doctrine of hell. Cittiyar states clearly: "He who commits wrong against the injunctions contained in the Sacred Sastras given out graciously by God, will suffer pain in the dark regions of hell, and thus work out his sin. The virtuous man also works out his *karma* by eating the fruits in heavenly regions. This kind of suffering and enjoyment are the two kinds which the supreme Physician administers for the removal of man's *mala*" (11.33). This is further illustrated in the following verses: "He who follows the rules given in books of hygiene will never suffer sickness. If such rules are neglected, sickness will torment a man. The physician will administer medicine to the suffering man and remove his illness.... Our earthly physicians cure certain ills by cutting and cauterizing; other ills are cured by feeding with milk and sugar. So also the Lord cures the ills of *karma* by subjecting mankind to pain and pleasure" (11.34, 35).

According to Siddhanta, therefore, Siva has prepared regions of heaven and hell in which some of the fruits of *karma* may be experienced. Hence the soul whose bad deeds far outweigh the good ones goes to *naraka*. In whatever way hell is described or defended, one thing is clear that it is for the ultimate good of the soul, as God is like a doctor who gives his patients medicine. And hence Siddhanta considers that the sufferings of man whether in hell and on earth are really the same.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, in this perspective, there is no eternal hell, which affirms the eventuality that a soul could be separated from God forever.<sup>36</sup> Surely, the 'advaita' relation the Siddhantin has posited between the soul and God is so strong that he could not imagine how the souls could be separated from God forever. For, the only eternals are *Pati*, *Pasu*, *Pasam*.

34. Because there is difference of opinion among the Siddhantins themselves concerning the inter-relation between *anava*, *maya* and *karma*. Cf. Commentary on *Cittiyar*, 2, 86.

35. Cf. *Cittiyar*, 11.32.

36. Cf. V. A. Devasenapathi, *Op. Cit.*, p. 87.