

Preface

This Thesis is entitled "A study of Śaivism of the Epic and the Purānic periods, together with its Ancillary cults, with special reference to the Śaiva religious practices prevalent in South India and Ceylon".

It may be pointed out at the very outset that not much work has so far been done in this field. Whatever little work has been done previously is of too general a character. A specific study of Śaivism in the South with special reference to the religious practices, which have been prevalent in that region; obviously possesses some special significance. The religious history of India shows that the origins of Śaivism have to be traced back to a great antiquity. From the Vedic literature, we no doubt get a few glimpses into Śaivism and the several cults and religious practices associated with it. But the most profuse literary records relating to that religion are the Epics and the Purānas. Therefore, for any fairly comprehensive and detailed statement about Śaivism we have to

depend mainly on these literary works. The ~~RELIGIOUS HISTORY~~ of India also shows that Saivism and the South have been related to each other in a very special way. It may, indeed, be claimed that most of the essential features of that religion have been better preserved in the South than elsewhere.

It must be further emphasised that the various details of rituals, forms of worship, and other practices connected with a religion often throw considerable light on the origin, growth and essential character of that religion. These practices cannot be summarily dismissed, as is sometimes done, as a mere superstructure of religion. More often than not, they reflect the very fundamentals of that religion. This may be said to have particularly been the case with the religious practices of Saivism. No study of Saivism can, therefore, be complete without a proper appraisal of its religious practices.

Attention may be drawn at this stage also to the fact, ^{that} Saivism has perhaps given rise to a larger number of ancillary religious cults than any other religion. A study of these ancillary cults, incidental as it will necessarily have

to be in the present Thesis, is bound to prove of great help for a proper understanding of the Epic and Purānic Śaivism.

The scope and nature of the present Thesis are determined mainly in the light of the foregoing considerations.

This Thesis is divided into seven chapters, of which the first serves as an introduction to the entire study. It consists of four main sections, namely, a critical estimate of the previous work on the subject, the scope and nature of the present work, methods adopted in the present study, and a collation of the results.

The second chapter entitled " A survey of the Early History of Śaivism " seeks to provide a historical background for this study. Divided into five sections, this chapter deals with the origin of Śaivism and its early manifestations as seen in the Indus Valley civilisation and the Vedic literature. Naturally enough, attention has been focussed in these sections mainly on the Vedic god Rudra and his connections with the pre-Vedic non-Aryan red god, Śiva. A reference is also made to the various cults such as the brahmacārin-cult

the muni-cult, and the vratya-cult, which were directly or indirectly associated with the religion of Rudra-Siva. These cults mentioned in the Vedas have developed in a peculiar manner in the post-Vedic periods.

Chapter III deals with the decline and fall of the Vedic gods and the rise of the Trinity of the Hindu Gods. More particularly, it indicates the characteristic features of the Religion of Rudra-Siva, in the new settings. Reasons are adduced for the disappearance of the principal Vedic gods and the emergence of a new religious ideology. It is also pointed out how Rudra, who was generally isolated, in mythology and ritual, from the hierarchy of Vedic gods came to be rehabilitated as it were in that new ideology. A critical study is undertaken of the two Epics which seem to elevate the three gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. This elevation may be said to have been brought about in two ways. On the one hand, there is to be seen a gradual but definite deterioration in the importance of the Vedic gods, and on the other, new religious practices are seen to have been introduced with these new gods as their centre.

A reference has been made, in this connection, to such religious practices as tapas, mūlā, bhakti etc., which may, by and large, be regarded as having been outside the pale of Vedic sacrificial system. The stabilisation of the position of the three gods, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva is the next stage in the development of religion which may be observed in the Epics. In fact, it is to be specially noted that the Epics, which were originally intended to celebrate the exploits of kings and heroes, actually widened their scope and devoted themselves to a large extent, to the glorification of these three gods. Naturally, in course of time, exclusive religious cults developed around these gods, each cult trying to establish its supremacy over the others. There also became evident the phenomenon of Brahmā withdrawing from the scene, leaving the field to Śiva and Viṣṇu. It is, however, significant that in conformity with the spirit of Hinduism, various attempts were made to bring about a compromise between the Śiva-religion and the Viṣṇu-religion.

An attempt is made in the fourth chapter to present a comprehensive picture of Śiva as portrayed in the Purāṇas.

Various details relating to that god, whether major or minor, such as physical features, dress, ornaments, weapons, family, vehicles, banner, residence, functions, achievements and relationship with mortals demons and gods are systematically recounted. Significant names of Śiva occurring in the Purānas have also been collected and analytically presented. This whole statement is expected to serve as a necessary background for a study, in a proper perspective, of the Śaiva religious practices as they evolved in later times.

The fifth chapter is devoted to a study of the various types of images of Śiva that are installed for worship, especially in South India. Most of these images can be shown to have derived their distinctive features from the descriptions of the god in the Epics and the Purānas. Several instances have been cited of the images of Śiva, which can be traced back to Purānic traditions. In this context, a detailed study is also made of the liṅga-cult. Similarly the technique of image-making and temple-building is studied so far as it pertains to Purānic texts.

Chapter VI, which constitutes a detailed study of the various forms of Saiva worship and ritual obtaining in South India, may be said to cut much new ground. The origin of some of these can be certainly traced back to pre-Vedic times. But the tradition in this connection had undergone several vicissitudes until it assumed its present character. The entire history of this tradition is studied, special attention being paid to the new elements in the rituals, such as yantras, mantras, maṇḍalas, kunḍas, and maḍras. The Saiva rituals, systematised in the Āgamic texts, have been reviewed under the fourfold division of karsana, pratiṣṭhā, utsava and pravāscitta. The qualities and functions of the Guru and his assistants, the dīkṣā and the nitya and the naimittika rites have also been dealt with at some length. Normal features of daily worship, such as abhiṣeka, alākāra, naivedya, etc., are considered in detail. To this chapter are appended a special excursus on the Saiva rituals as practised in Ceylon and a detailed note on the Saiva vratas.

Under the ancillary cults of Śaivism, which form the subject of the seventh chapter, are studied the religious cults which had developed round such divinities as Umā, Gaṇeśa, and Kārttikeya. The origin and the present state of the worship of these divinities, particularly in so far as they relate to the worship of Śiva, have been clearly indicated.

Special mention may be made of as many as nine Appendices given at the end of this Thesis. They seek to amplify several topics which have been attended to but not been discussed at length in the body of the Thesis. It is further hoped that the various sketches, drawings, maps and photographs, which are added after the Appendices, will invest this work with a kind of completeness.