CHAPTER II

TAMIL MYSTICS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION
TO SOUTH INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Introduction:

'Mysticism is to be commended as an attitude towards life, not as a creed about the world'. In South India, it dates back to St. Tirumūlar who lived in 5 – 6 century A.D., Traditionally, the Tamil Siddhas trace their origin to Aka-
ttiyar (Agatya), and to various works on mysticism, worship, 2 medicine and alchemy ascribed to him. Siddha tradition is the oldest tradition in Tamil Nadu, and even today it is a living tradition. Saiva texts speak of two classes of people, the bhaktas, and siddhas, the pious, and the realised souls. The term 'bhaktas-siddhas' occurs frequently in 'Devāram'. (Vide Sambandar 2:34:1) "Paluvūr, where the bhaktas and the siddhas pray, is the place of our Lord".

Though the tradition is the oldest, no proper study of Tamil Mysticism' has been done so far. There has been a neglect of the siddha works because of their opposition to tra-
ditional beliefs and practices as well as due to the usage of words that are esoteric, and the condemnation of socio-religious practices. Orthodox Hindus in Tamil Nadu have always had a
The Siddha tradition is a part of pan-Indian Siddha tradition. The 'Nāth-cult' of North India is the Siddha tradition in North India. The Siddhas in Tamil Nadu are certainly not an isolated, and unique body of free thinkers, but part of a very general tradition, well separated in space and time in medieval India—the tradition of the Siddhācāryas, who are again part of a larger āgamic, tāntric and āgnic tradition of India'. The Nāth-cult seems to represent a particular phase of Siddha cult of India. The Siddha cult is a very old religious cult with its main emphasis on a psycho-chemical process of yoga. They aim towards attaining an immortal spiritual body.

The Siddha tradition in Tibetan Buddhism has eighty-four Siddhas. The aim of the Nāth-siddhas is 'Jīvan-muktī or liberation while living, and the state of liberation means immortality. While the other schools of thought regard the final dissolution from the body indispensable for liberation, the Siddhas seek liberation in a transformed or transmuted body, which is the perfect body.

Caṭṭaimunī, Cuntaranaṭa tēvar, Kutambai-o-
ciṭṭar, and Kōrakkar. The siddha tradition continues

to be a living tradition. The number 18 seems to have some
mystical significance. It has religious as well as literary
importance.

The oldest siddha work in Tamil is Tirumantrim of
Tirumūlār which is one of the basic texts of Saiva Siddhānta.
N. Subramanian, in his 'History of Tamil' observes; 'There was
a streak of native Tamil thought best represented by siddhas,
who were perhaps the 'Ariyār' mentioned as ascetics in Aham
literature which substituted its own system of religious and
philosophical thought for Brahminical assumptions. Tirumūlār,
Paṭṭinathār, and others represent a mode of religious conscious-
ness which presume over Brahminical religious attitudes.

The siddha works are in a poetry form, and full of alle-
gorical meanings. Metaphysical speculations have very little
place in siddha tradition. Their main aim has been to 'conquer
death', and live in the same world with a transformed body.
Siddha teachings consist of yogic practices, occultic teachings,
medical advice, alchemic findings, religious, and social ideals.
Though the siddhas use simple language, it is difficult for the
common man to understand the meaning of the siddha songs. This
is one of the reasons for the neglect of the study of the
siddhas.
Religion and Philosophy of the Siddhas:

The two most typical features of the religious conception of Tamil siddhas are anti-ritualism, and the denial of contemporary religious practices. Though the siddhas condemn the rituals, temple worship, and reading of the scriptures, they were neither atheists nor agnostics. Because, the siddhas say that self-realization must come from within, and for this self-analysis, and meditation are essential. Idol-worship with practices like camphor burning may not be favoured. The siddhas condemn the performance of rituals without understanding their rational basis. Thus, on the theological level, siddhas are not atheists, but if any designation is to used they may be called theists and pluralist. For most of them, there is a deity, Čivam without limitation and attributes; it is the Supreme Being (parāpāram), present everywhere (तत्सप्तसनिमोऽध्याज), and at the same time within man.

Mystical experiences were not exclusive only to the siddhas. The mystical life is wide in its dimensions. The life history of Nāyanmāra shows that there were mystical happenings in their lives. In the lives of the four Saiva Samavācāryas we have evidences to show that they had mystical experiences. The four ācāryas followed the traditional of devotion, whereas the siddhas followed different
that emphasised the search within. Reality is such that permits men to approach it in different ways.

It was not the intention of the siddhas to remove the devotional path from the society. But, they emphasised the need for inner awakening, without permitting one's mind to be absorbed in ritualism. Hence A.V. Subramania Aiyar says as 'Bhakti is not ruled out for the siddhas. On the other hand the need for Bhakti towards the Lord Siva is stressed in several poems which have the sweetness, and emotional appeal of the great hymnists'. There are three verses in Tirumantiram that render support to this point.

According to the philosophy of siddhas, 'world is real and not illusory. They were pluralists, realists and theists in their philosophy. They were devotees of the supreme God Siva and negate all kinds of rituals, and religious practices. It must be mentioned in this context that siddhas used the word 'Sivam' in a broad sense, and not in the religious sense. In siddha tradition 'Sivam' signifies 'Perfection, Purity'.
Tamil Mysticism

In both Vaishnavism, and Saivism we have first a school of mystics and the saints who composed devotional songs in the vernacular, and then, at a later stage, a school of philosophers who created theistic system. Religions had originated from the mystical traditions (siddha mūrgam). In so many places this truth has been forgotten. Today it will be a mockery if any one states the fact. But the siddha tradition originated from the Lemurian continent (तत्त्वज्ञानी), and spread in different directions to different nations, where they were called by different names. The Tirumantiram of Tirumūlar is the oldest text in Saivism, which explains the fundamentals of 'Saivism' (Saivam, Love is Śiva). This text is the first work to use the words, Śaiva Siddhānta, caiva, kṛiva, vōkā, jñāna, and to explain the four different paths of Saivism.

The siddha tradition has been widely prevalent in 15th century. The four Śaiva Śamavācaryas were siddhas who emphasized the teachings of the siddhas. But the siddha tradition has been neglected gradually, and even given a low status by those who followed the religious (devotional) path. But the common man of the country had appreciation for the siddha literature. The low-status given by the scholars to the siddha literature is evident from the following words of
A.V. Subramania Aiyar. 'On the whole the literature of the siddhās is definitely inferior to the hymnal literature of Saivism or Vaishnavism, but that should not be the reason why it should not be studied or appreciated for such literary merits as it has.' The prejudice of the orthodox Saivites against the Tamil siddhās was deep-rooted. They either ignore or look down upon them.

The Eighteen Great Tamil Siddhās and Their Works:


Another editor of 'siddhar-ţhēna-koḻai' gives a list of 36 siddhās, as well as their occupations and abode of living. From this we come to know that they belonged various
professions ranging from barber to priest. (Gorakkar was a robber, whereas Tanvantiri was a Brahmin priest). They came from the various parts of the world.

The recent publications on siddhas, include the teachings of the recent siddhas like Kari-c-citlar, as well as Gunangudi-Masthan Sahib. The siddha tradition is a living tradition in which we are seeing the representatives through the ages. In southern most part of India, in the state of Tamil Nadu (Madras), siddha doctrines have survived probably better than anywhere else in India, and are still a very vital undercurrent which has played an important role in modern and contemporary poetry and prose, religious thought, social fabric and in medicine and science.

The Nature of the Siddhas:

The siddhas are said to be the possessors of eight great powers. They are (1) Anima: 'shrinking', the faculty of reducing oneself to the size of an atom, (2) Mahima: 'illuminatability' the power of increasing one's size without limitation. (3) Laghima: 'lightness' (4) Prapti: fulfilment of desires "The power of attaining everything desired". (5) Prakriva: 'irresistable will', the power to overcome natural objects and go anywhere. (6) Jatva 'Supremacy', dominion over animate and inanimate nature. (7) Jayatva:
'dominions over the elements', the power of changing the course of nature and assuming any form. (8) Garima: 'weight' the power of rendering the body unmaterial and able to penetrate matter. The lives of the siddhas go to prove the existence of these powers. An understanding of the philosophy of Tamil siddhas is necessary to have a correct perspective of religious social, and literary history of Tamils, for they voiced the feelings and convictions of a cross section of the community that believed in religion mainly as pertaining to the spirit of man.

The songs of the siddhas themselves describe the nature of the siddhas. According to Siva-vēkkiyar the siddhas are not mad persons as the deluded common folks decide, but highly evolved souls who do not see any difference between this and that, and whose minds always perceive oneness. According to Vāmikar Sūtra-jñānam, a siddha is a person of pure-vision and a perceiver of Śiyam everywhere. The Tirumantiram of Saint Tirumūlar describes the siddha as one who has the transcendental vision of things and perception of divinity (Śiyam) everywhere. From the poems of Tirumūlar, we understand that the siddhas are the realised souls.
Religious Reformations of the Siddhas:

The songs of the siddhas reveal the fact that the philosophy of Tamil culture has been concerned with the happiness of the mankind as whole. The siddha songs reflect the sama-rasa which is beyond all religious conflicts, and which brings together all religions. The siddhas live in a pure plane which is beyond all religious disparities. It is the common man who wrongly judges the mystics as Hindu, Buddhist, Islam, and Christian. Mystics around the world speak from the same experience. The siddhas accept all religions as true and see the same God being present everywhere. One of the siddhas, Kailāya Kampali Cattaimuni Nāyanār sings, 'there is Śivam and Śakti in every religion, but the fools divided these into various religions'. The siddhas never engaged in metaphysical discussions which are of no use for peaceful living. They have been always speaking with their inner experience, upon whose authority they rejected all the superfluous religious practices.

The siddhas concern the practice of reading the Vedās, without knowing Śivam. Śivam in siddha language means 'perfection'). The siddhas and the tamil sufí mystics uses the religious words like, Umayāl, Ganapathy, Nandhi, Vālai, and Manōmāni in different sense from their religious sense. The purpose of reading the Vedās is to get away from the miserable life which is full of lust, and anger. Without getting rid of
these diseases and meditating within, one does not gain any fruit spiritually by repeating the words of the Vedās. This emphasis upon the inner achievement is the common trend in all the siddha songs. Though the siddhas condemned the religious practices and rituals of the people they were not atheists. The siddha songs even go to prove the existence of God by refuting the contention of the atheists as, 'You are saying that there is no God. But, your negation implies affirmation'. In the songs of the siddhas, the words 'Śīram', 'Śāivam', are used in a different meanings. The siddhas describe the Reality in negative aspects, and through interrogative methods.

**Man and His Destiny in the Teachings of Siddhas**

In the siddha philosophy, proper place is given to Man. The siddha philosophy does not discuss the metaphysical questions, but it discusses the problem of 'conquest of death'. Death being a great danger to Man's life - it's discussion becomes central to the siddha philosophy. Both the siddha tradition of South India, and the 'Nāth cult' of North India give a predominant place to the problem of death, and man's conquest of it.
All the schools of Indian Philosophy believe in the eternity of the souls. The *siddha* doctrine teaches that man can live forever in his body without death. It teaches the means for attaining that deathless state. These means are related to the disciplines pertaining to food, sleep, proper use of the senses, and practice of *yoga*. The *siddhas* often condemn the negative approach to life. They say that it is impossible to control the senses even for the *celestials*. On the other hand Tirumūlar advises the sublimation of the senses in good paths in divine ways.

The *siddhas* have their own branch of medicine, that is unique. These *siddha* medical practices are known by the names of the great *siddhas*, Pōkar, and Tanvantiri. Tirumūlar, the great mystic in his classical work on *Tamil mysticism*, *Tirumantiram* treats at some length the facts of obstetrics.

No other philosophical school in India gives so much of importance to the preservation of health and strong body as that of the *siddhas*. Tirumūlar equates the body itself with a temple (நிறுவன கோவில்). He emphasized the need for the preservation of the body. Man's happiness in this earth is the supreme value for the *siddhas*. 
Social Philosophy of the Siddhas:

True mysticism is active and practical, not passive and theoretical. It is an organic life process, something which the whole self does, not something as to which its intellect holds an opinion. Though practical, its aims are wholly transcendental and spiritual, in the sense that it trains human beings to live a full life, at the level of the body, mind, and spirit. This life, though lived in this world, may extend beyond it.

The social philosophy of the siddhas is a practical philosophy that envelops within itself an empirical philosophy that is well-balanced, and spiritual philosophy that is well defined. The ethical philosophy of the siddhas is a reformation of the traditional ethical norms and their religious philosophy is a challenge against the crystalised superstition of traditionalists. Man’s existence on earth is emphasised and man’s welfare in this life is glorified. Since the social philosophy of the siddhas treats the human life with spiritual meaning, the divinity within everyone of the living person is recognised. Therefore, the maximum importance is given to the service to man than to any other thing. Hence Tirumular says that the service to the walking gods (people) is the service to the Gods in the temple and not vice versa.
Property:

The social philosophy of siddhas is not a life, and world negating philosophy. As such it does not deny the importance of wealth in contributing to the welfare of man. But the siddhas have been against the greedy possession of wealth. Pāmpattī-citiṣṭār sings ten verses about the abolition of the desire to possess the wealth (பாம்பாட்டிச்சித்தர்). Paṭṭi-nātār sings that one must give away one’s own wealth to the needy and the poor. He criticises the people who hoard wealth without sharing it with others. Thus, the virtue of charity that has been praised by Tiruvalluvar has been equally emphasised by the siddhas.

Woman as Wife:

One of the misconceptions concerning the siddhas is that they were against family life, especially against married life. But this is not correct. Indian philosophy is not against the pleasure of this world, especially the pleasures of married life. In fact, certain ancient works expound a systematic way of enjoying sexual life but even they give an elevated concept of sex. The Kāma-sūtra in Sanskrit, and the Aganānuru, the Tiruk-kōvaiyar, and the Tirukkural speak about the love life (sex-life) in glorious terms. Life is incomplete without this part of life. But love should not degenerate into lust.
**Woman as Mother:**

Siddhār gives a prominent place to motherhood. Pāṭṭi-  
matār in his songs glorifies his mother, and through her,  
motherhood itself. St. Rāmalingam himself recommends the  
need for philosophical education for woman.

**Condemnation of Superstitions:**

In every age and in nearly every society we come across  
men and women, sometimes even groups of people, on whom the  
hold of convention has visibly weakened, who have lost faith  
in existing social ideals and practices, who, sooner or later  
step out. Example of such individual withdrawal or escape,  
protest or non-conformity have come down from the earliest ages  
from Egypt, Persia, India, China, even from the primitive tribes.  
These were the born ascetics, monks, holy men often credited  
with supernatural power and insight who were among the most  
highly respected members of the tribe, even though apparently  
they did not belong.

Superstitions spoil our personal and social life. In  
religious, social, political, and other aspects of life we  
are suffering from superstitions. The superstitions are  
nothing but the irrational beliefs, and practices based upon  
them. When a particular belief or practice has no rational
basis, it is considered to be a superstition. These superstitions are dead-locks to the progress of society. Hence, the great religious leaders, and social reformers have been always against these. One of the ancient superstitions which has spoiled the peace of this country is the caste-system, based upon birth. The siddhas, therefore have condemned caste-system so far as it is based upon birth. The anticausticism, and opposition to the superiority of the particular caste in society is one trend which is common to all the siddhas. But the common religious teachers also criticise the practice of casteism, but not so openly and pungently. In the songs of the siddhas we observe open criticisms. The siddhas condemn the caste system, because it is against the humanistic and spiritualistic way of life. To denounce today caste, worship in temples and religious and āgaric rituals does not require much courage, but to have done so in the centuries in which Tamil siddhas lived required extra-ordinary heroism and strength of conviction. Siva-vālkiyār, the revolutionary siddha condemn this superstitions in many places of his work.

The siddhas emphasise the true love for good and the spiritual striving which depends upon the inner purification, and meditation. Therefore, the religious formalism, that consists in breaking coconuts and burning camphor as well as visiting temples mechanically, has been criticised, and even
laughed at. The *siddhas* emphasises three things that are closely connected with each other. They are (1) Inner Purity, (2) Spiritual striving, and (3) Loving service to humanity. Purity of love is the basis for the success in spiritualism, and the loving service to humanity is contribution to the latter.

The *siddhas* dreamed of a casteless society that would create a world-family, a state of glorious social life where mankind's enemy will not be man. This has been the dream of the *siddhas* like Badragiriyar, and the modern saints like St. Ramalingam and Nārāyanaguru.

Śaivism and Siddha Tradition:

Śaivism as a system of philosophy is inseparably connected with *siddha* philosophy, which depends purely upon the spiritual experience of man. Almost all the *siddhas* were *saivites*, and their philosophy closely resembles the philosophy of Śaivism. Śaivism as a philosophical theology contains *siddha* philosophy as a spiritual nucleus. Śaivism uses concrete terms to explain spiritualism where as *siddha* philosophy uses abstract terms. Śaivism has room for externalism, but *siddha* tradition is for internalism. Therefore, Śaivism becomes practicable for the common man, whereas *siddha* tradition demands abstract thinking and the love for meditation of the highly evolved individuals. This is the reason why *siddha* tradition has not only
been neglected by Saivites but often seen as a separate system. But as far as the Saiva Nayanmars are concerned they have been influenced by the teachings of the siddhas for their devotion of Saivism cannot be separated from the spiritual experience of siddha tradition, and we have the glorious example in the teachings of St. Rāmalingam where devotion and spiritual experience are found, and where the spiritual experience is given more value than it is given in the devotional path. The teachings of St. Rāmalingam are a continuation of the siddha teachings as he himself says.

Conclusion

The siddha tradition is a spiritual tradition that gives dynamism to the devotional aspect of Saivism. While preaching spiritualism, the siddhas did not neglect the importance of living a happy social life. Not all can become a siddha for as Tiruvalluvar says a man’s state of life is determined also by the effects of his past deed. Furthermore, a man must lead a happy and proper married life before passing on to the next stage.

Society (consisting of individuals) and siddhas are complimentary to each other. Society needs their service, and it can, in its turn, serve them. In this way society is esse-
ntial for the present sīdhas as well as the future sīdhas. This is the reason why the sīdhas recognised the importance of the social life of man. The sīdhas therefore have been given the practical philosophy for the common man and they have been actively interested in helping him. To quote Sisirkumar Ghose, 'the mystics, or contemplatives will help us in atleast four related and useful ways. They will correct our inadequate world view, they will point out the right methods for making this world-view effective in our lives; this they will do not by 'escape' (one word too often profaned) from life but by adding to it; finally, they will do this not in the life of the individual alone but also in the life of group or society as a whole. Incidentally, they will correct the fallacies and limitations of the technique of violent revolutions, and our obsession with matter and physical force as the only weapon or 'midwife' of social change.' Thus, we understand that the sīdhas have been an inspiration for better social philosophy. The spiritualistic social philosophy of sīdhas continued in the teachings of St. Ṣayumānāvar, and St. Ṣārālīngam.