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ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

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

History

KEY WORDS: Saiva Pra Sabha- runs by Tamil lingu Minority- in the name of Lord Siva-Thiruvananthapuram

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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 noble 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 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 Chithurai 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 and 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. He learnt Saiva Siddhanta from Kodakanallur Sundara Swamikal 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 Vedanta 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 of 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 1888 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. Pillai 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 1888. 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. The Sabha had produced a lot of... Sabha had...