

## THE NATURE OF THE WORLD - DEPICTED BY THE SAIVITIE CANONICAL LITERATURE - PERIYA PURANAM (THE GREAT ANCIENT TAMIL EPIC)

Article Particulars: Received: 23.03.2018 Accepted: 18.04.2018 Published: 28.04.2018

**Dr. C. MANIMEGALAI**

*Associate Professor, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India*

### Abstract

*The Nayanmars of south India glorified Shiva Mahadeva. The ishta or Lord of the Theistic Upanishads, who is manifest in the wild aspects of nature, mountains, forests, plants, animals, indeed, in all forms of life. He is the Energizer, The Changer as well as the Destroyer. But above all He is Shiva the Auspicious One who can transform even the most horrible, tragic aspects of existence into a blessing. The Cosmic Dance of Lord Shiva is the visual Symbol of the innate nature of matter - vibration or movement. The quantum Physicists now report that seemingly solid matter is nothing but energy, a cosmic dance of sub-atomic particles. In fact Fritj of Capra in his book the Tao of Physics calls Nataraja "The perfect symbol of quantum Physics"*

**Keywords:** *Upanishads, Cosmic Dance, quantum Physicists, Nataraja, devotional literature, Hindu religion*

Devotion to Shiva takes many forms in the Nayanmar's ecstatic outpourings. One Rasa - Sringara - erotic love - is however mostly absent. The erotic relationship of lover and beloved is found later in the devotional literature of the Alvars, Bhaktas of Vishnu. Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar the foremost of the Nayanmars, describe the cosmic nature of the Lord frequently in their songs. Many of their hymns rise from mystic experiences which they enjoy in a particular temple. Thus the hymns are classified according to the place or the temple in which the inspiration rose.

Among various religious sects in the world saivism is one of the ancient philosophical systems of Hindu religion which propagates God's glory and purifies human senses. The canonical literary works which form the basic of this sect are called "Saiva thirumuraigal".

'Periya puranam' composed by the eminent scholar Sekkizhar is soaked in the nectar of devotion. It is this exceptionally great work which praises the glory of God.

'Periyapuranam' narrates the history of 63 Nayanmars (Saiva saints).

Worshipping the venerable master, the symbol of Lord Siva and the 'Adiyars' are the three systems of worship which is surpassed by the worship of the holy devotees who sought solace in the sacred shadow of God 'Periyapuranam' narrates the tale of such devotees.

It takes great pride in revealing the nobility and truths related to the religious system of saivism. Sekkizhar alternatively called it 'Thiruthondar Puranam'. This work is the form of lyric entwined with melody and Metre.

### The Evolution of 'Periyapuranam'

The thought sequence of the Epic, The growth and development of 'Periyapuranam' started with a work called 'Thiruthonda Thogai' by a sage called Sundarar. It blossomed in their work and bloomed as a flower in another work called 'Thiruthondar Thiruvandadi' by a scholar called Nambiyandar Nambi. Later, it ripened as an epic by the effort of Sekkizhar as 'Thiruthondar puranam' which ultimately developed in the final stage of creation as 'Periya Puranam'.

### Sekkizhar

He was born in a region whose inhabitants insisted on purity of thoughts and never even dreamt of anything evil. He dedicated his entire life for the cause of saivism. Singing in praise of

God could be of two kinds- on a perspective of God alone. This second way of worship takes a lyric of wisdom to the level of awareness of the truth and acquisition of true knowledge.

Sekkizhar was a poet of true knowledge who acquired wisdom through his exceptional devotion. He enjoyed the echo of the wisdom of 'Adiyars' (Religious followers) and has created 'Periyapuranam' as a devotional text.

### Achievers of Rare Achievements

It is believed that Nayanmars were born to spread the glory of God as a boon for all the good that they had done in their previous birth. Hence we can say that they were capable of doing the impossible. The truth that the Nayanmars were second to none and that no one can equal them in accomplishment of difficult tasks is depicted by the renowned sage 'Pattinathar' in his stanza as follows

“வாளால் மகவரிந்துட்ட வல்லேனல்லன் மாது சொன்ன  
குளால் இளமை துறக்க வல்லேனல்லன் தொண்டு செய்து  
நாளாற்றிற் கண்ணிடந் தப்பவல்லேனல்லன் நானினிச் சென்று  
ஆளாவ தெப்படியோ திருக்காளத்தி யப்பருக்கே”

Poor hunter called Kannappa was an ardent devotee of Lord Siva. Manivasagar described his devotion in the following couplet:

“கண்ணப்ப னொப்பதோர் அன்பின்மை கண்டபின்  
என்னப்பன் என் ஒப்பில் என்னையும் ஆட்கொண்டருளி”

Sekkizhar also says about another Nayanar called Kungiliyakalaya Nayanar. Kungiliyam means Frankincense. It is believed that this Nayanar sold his wife's wedding jewel (Thaali) to buy this Frankincense in devotion of God.

'Lingam' is a symbol of Lord Siva. Another Nayanar called Thiruneelaganda Nayanar renounced his wife when he found her killing a spider which had rested one lingam worshipped by him. He could not tolerate even an insect being harmed. Sekkizhar narrates about him too in 'Periyapuranam'.

Thiruneelakanta Nayanar once had a dispute with his wife over the issue of a begging bowl. It is believed that Lord Siva helped them reconcile. It is generally not easy to make people renounce marital life and obligations but Sekkizhar describes the strange lives of such devotees who sacrificed all worldly pleasures to become one with God.

### Devotional Love

God and love are inseparable. Very few people realize that love is God. According to Thirumoolar only such people are truly wise who have Godliness in themselves. Sekkizhar also narrates about four other religious followers who expressed their devotion through the act of love. Manivasagar has created an exclusive text called 'Thhirukkovaayar' adapting the literary style of the Sangam Age and forming segments of love.

Depiction of girls in love, sending honeybees with messages to their lovers, is quite common in Tamil Literature. The great devotee of Siva, Sambandar worshipped God treating him as his beloved. In one of his devotional lyrics he begs a honey bee, thus Similarly, Navukkarasar describes the devotion of a girl who is in a state of oblivion, forgetting herself and her love for Siva

“முன்னம் அவனுடைய நாமம் கேட்டாள்  
மூர்த்தி அவனிருக்கும் வண்ணம் கேட்டாள்  
பின்னை அவனுடைய ஆருர் கேட்டாள்  
பெயர்த்தும் அவனுக்கே பிச்சியானாள்”

Another Saivite called Sundarar has also composed similar devotional lyrics which depicts the devotee worshipping God as his beloved.

### Ethical Code of Conduct Preached by Periyapuranam

Doing well for the welfare of others is the primary ethical code of conduct. The renowned female devotee Avvaiyar has also stressed this when she says “Aram seyya virumbu” (which means “Do good to others”, “Be good to others”, Always be charitable etc.,)

An essential part of the South India Bhakthi movement of the Nayanmars was an intense love for temple worship. Most hymns were composed in praise of the temple or pilgrimage place and the presiding Diety dwelling there. The devotional poetry of the Nayanmars is distinguished by its preoccupation with these sacred pilgrimage places.

The Nayanmars of ‘Periyapuranam’ led a noble life believing serving others as their principal code of conduct. Building temples is one of the several ways of charitable service. Poosalar Nayanar is cited by Sekkizhar as an instance for such a charity. Thirumoolar has also sung about construction of temples and a charitable attitude in the following lines:

“படமாடுங் கோயில் பகவற் கொன்றீயின்  
நடமாடுங் கோயில் நம்பற்கு. தாகா  
நடமாடும் கோயில் நம்பர்க் கொன்றீயில்  
படமாடும் கோயில் பகவற்கு. தாமே”

Thus, ‘Periyapuranam’ depicts the history of saivites who served religious followers called ‘Adiyars’. Kariya Nayanar is believed to have received contributions from the Chera/Chola/Pandiya kings and constructed a temple. During the period of Sekkizhar, in the empire of the Cholas, there were many religious institutions like monasteries.

- It is said that one such mutt exists in a demolished condition in a place called Thiruppoonduruthi, which was built by Appar.
- At Thiruvathigai, opposite a temple, a mutt of chola Period called Thilagavathiyar Mutt. still exists in a devastated condition.
- When Appar spent his days at Thiruppoonduruthi, He is believed to have composed several devotional lyrics, according to Sekkizhar's Work.
- The following lines of Manimegalai -

‘மண்டிணி ஞாலத்து வாழ்வோர்க்கெல்லாம்  
உண்டி கொடுத்தோர் உயிர் கொடுத்தோரே’

Were adhered to by the devotees of Nayanars period, which is proved by the existing mutts (religious institutions) according to ‘Periyapuranam’

- It is also widely known that Appothi Adigal performed many Charitable services under the name of Navukkarasar.

### Court of Law as citadel of Ethics

We learn from Periyapuranam that courts existed in every town, Since it was believed that getting disputes solved is also one of human rights. Issues related to human rights and land disputes were settled by these courts. We understand that such courts existed in places like Puthur, Thiruvannainallur, Thillai Nagar, Pazhayanur etc.

On the occasion of Sundarar's wedding at Thirunavalur, the elders enquired the messenger sage where his residence was. The sage replied that he hailed from Thiruvannainallur. Sundarar decided to argue the case there. Sekkizhar says that the case filed in Thirunavalur was closed at the defendant's place Thiruvannai Nallur. The cases settled through such courts were as follows in various procedures adapted by

- Maintaining a copy of the main palm leaf script about a case.
- A case filed in a city, getting settled in another city.
- Compiling the signatures of citizens for comparing and verifying in future.
- Analysing all the records, facts, witnesses etc., and announcing the verdict.

All these procedures followed become clear through 'Periyapuranam' which is the topic of this Research Paper.

Thirugnana Sambandar meant to say that when God exists in him, Planets and Stars can do no Harm. Thus he raised voice against superstitions as evident from 'Periyapuranam'.

In Sambandar's life too these was no place for caste differences or communal fanaticism. To play an ancient stringed musical instrument (called 'Yazh' in Tamil) he took an untouchable devotee called Thiruneelakandar with himself to various places. The music played accompanied Sambandar's lyrics. Though Sambandar was a Brahmin, he made an underprivileged man accompany him. This nobility is revealed by 'Periyapuranam'. He took him along and passed through several streets and houses restricted for brahmin's habitation. These Brahmins feared that their sacred worship before fire would be spoiled by the presence and entry of an untouchable. But Sambandar daringly took Thiruneelakandar near the holy fire pit and made people notice that the fire actually intensified miraculously.

### Feminist Thoughts

'Periyapuranam' show us how women's rights were protected and how women's empowerment was considered important. The reputation of the wife of Ilayankudi Mara Nayanar is cited as an example. 'Periyapuranam' also glorifies three religious followers called Isaighaniar, Karaikkal Ammaiyar and Mangayarkarasiar in this respect.

Sekkizhar's work clearly depicts the disillusionment of Karaikkal Ammaiyar, the benevolent deeds of Isaighaniyar and the virtues of many other women who made them husband proud of their nobility.

Being faithful to husband was the hallmark of chastity according to the women of the period of 'Periyapuranam'. The wife of Iyarpagai Nayanar was also firm in this belief. Hospitality to guests and religious followers was the responsibility of women. Women exhibited hospitality despite inadequate sources. This is evident through 'Periyapuranam'.

The hymns of the Nayanmars are drenched with Divine Love for the Lord, in all the modes of human affection. The Lord is master, bridegroom, friend, father, mother, kinsman. He is all the things that the poet-devotee cherishes in this transient world. The images used are common to Bhakti poetry throughout India. The Bhava (state of feeling) expressed in the poetic our bursts are found in many religious traditions and range from the sorrow of separation and unrequired love to the overwhelming urge for union with the Beloved. The certainty of grace and fulfillment in joy and release is a dominant undertone. The hymns are also filled with descriptions of ritualistic worship. But only Pooja which is performed with genuine devotion has truth and beauty.

It is cited so far at random and the messages conveyed by 'Periyapuranam' which revolve around the course and nature of the world are highlighted.

All these instances cited prove this great Epic called 'Periyapuranam' is a literary fountain, flood of devotion and a vast Sea of Love. It drowns us in the Sea of mirth. Indoubtedly 'Periyapuranam' is the Supreme Star in the Galaxy of Tamil Literature.

### References

1. C. Cubbian, American Literature - An Anthology of Poems. Chennai. Emerald Publishers. 2005.
2. இராமசுப்பிரமணியம் வ. த. "திருஞர்னசம்பந்த சுவாமிகள் அருளிச்செய்த தேவாரம் - சென்னை வர்த்தமான பதிப்பகம்.
3. திருமுறைத் திருநெறி - தமிழ்ப் பல்கலைக்கழக வெளியீடு
4. பெரியபுராணம் - காசிமடம் திருப்பனந்தாள் மூலம். உரை வெளியீடு
5. அப்பர் தேவாரம் - காசிமடம் - திருப்பனந்தாள் மூலம். உரை வெளியீடு