

[Ancient Tamil Scripture Published For First Time in U.S.](#)

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## Ancient Tamil Scripture Published For First Time in U.S. 2,100 Year-Old Eastern Classic Translated by East/West Saiva Sangam

One of mankind's most venerable scriptures, revered in the East since before the birth of Christ yet little-known in the West, has been translated into American English for the first time and printed by the Siddhanta Press in an abridged edition as the fourth in a series of Inspired Talks published by Saiva Siddhanta Church. The Holy Kural, known in the Tamil language as the Tirukural, is one of the most universal expositions on right thought and right conduct ever written. Indeed, many claim that the Holy Kural is man's earliest statement of the ostensibly contemporary ecumenical tenets, for it is entirely without the dogmatic principles which commonly attend religious scripture. Like the Prophet of the Lebanese mystic Kahil Gibran, which is its closest analogue in Western literature, the Holy Kural elucidates the natural wisdom of man with such insightful perception that his innate kindness, compassion and usefulness blossom forth. Albert Schweitzer became enthralled with the Kural, describing it thusly: "With sure strokes the Kural draws the ideal of simple ethical humanity. On the most varied questions concerning the conduct of man to himself and to the world its utterances are characterized by nobility and good sense. There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims in which we find so much lofty wisdom."

This first translation into American English represents the combined efforts of an East/West Saiva Sangam. It has taken four years to complete and the scripture is only half finished. For this abridged edition only the first thirty-eight chapters were selected, and from these chapters only four of the ten couplets found in each have been published. As the full text of the Kural contains 133 chapters of ten verses each, or a total of 1,330 two-line verses, and as 152 appear in the Inspired Talk pamphlet, just over ten percent of the text is represented in the new publication. The talk is entitled Holy Kural: Scripture of Saivite Hinduism.

In spite of the inherent difficulties found in Saint "Tiruvalluvar's terse and often archaic language, the Holy Kural has been translated a number of times into English during the last two hundred years. The first was the incomplete selections composed by Kindersley in 1794. Kindersley was not the only scholar whose

attempt to tame the Kural was never finished. Of the twenty-five known translators only fifteen were able to conclude the task, some taking ten years and more. Though Kindersley was the first, he is not considered one of the major translators. That high honor is shared among several outstanding pundits, the foremost being Rev. G.U. Pope, a Christian missionary who spent many years in Tamil Nadu, South India. His scholarly efforts contributed much to Western understanding of the Tamil language and literature. Rev. Pope's translation was published in 1886 in rhymed verse. Other major translations have been composed by Rev. W.H. Drew (1840 in prose), V.V.S. Aiyar (1916 in prose), K.M. Balasubramaniam (1962 in couplets), Yogi Suddhananda Bharathi (1968 in couplets) and Mr. G. Vanmikanathan (1969 in prose). A brief comparative sampling of four of these major translators is given elsewhere in this edition of the *The New Saivite World* under the title "The Holy Kural: Other Perspectives."

The Holy Kural; Scripture of Saivite Hinduism is double the normal length of the Inspired Talks series. The eight-page introduction is the transcription of a talk given by Master Subramuniya on the occasion of Saint Tiruvalluvar's Guru Puja Day, February 15, 1979. In his introduction Gurudeva describes the place of the two foremost works in the Saivite tradition, Holy Kural and the Tirumantiram of Saint Tirumular. He speaks briefly of the humble weaver who lived in the Madras area and toward the end of his life was urged to share what had become a great spiritual insight with the community. Gurudeva also elucidates in his introduction the reason that the Saiva Siddhanta Church undertook yet another translation, how and why it was conceived and executed, and how he envisions its use by Western Saivites. Much emphasis is given to memorizing the verses and applying them to our life at the most fundamental and pragmatic level. He also explains the importance of teaching the principles of the Holy Kural to our children, thus providing for them firm, common sense values. In the new publication Gurudeva commends the Holy Kural to all the people's of the world, regardless of religious affiliation or belief. And he recommends it be used as an introduction to those in the West who may never have had the opportunity to read the scriptures of the East. One of the hallmarks of Saint Tiruvalluvar's genius was his ability to deftly define and subtly delineate the Sanatana Dharma or Eternal Spiritual Path to all men equally, never limiting his audience to a sectarian view. Even when he speaks directly of God, and this he does only in the first ten verses of the beginning chapter, his broad heart praises not the God of this faith or that, but sings its panegyric to "God Primordial," "the Incomparable One," "the Gracious One," and "the Compassionate One."

Although it has been in print a relatively short time, the Kural has already been proclaimed one of the best translations ever. It has inspired many responses, among them these: "How I am enjoying the beautiful thoughts expressed in your

translation of the Holy Kural! I appreciate your sharing them with me. It is a true inspiration, reminding me of the Bible, yet more understandable," and "The language is beautiful, and if all who read could only understand what a world this would be."

Work continues on the Kural each morning in the Kadavul Koyil at the feet of Siva Nataraja. With the abridged edition now published, which is the first to our knowledge to be distributed without cost to all who request it, even more sedulous efforts are being made to complete the four selected verses of the first 108 chapters. When this is completed, a second edition will be printed incorporating the 432 verses and a series of artistic photographs in a fine gift edition. When all ten verses of the 108 initial chapters are translated, a third and final edition will be made available.

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