Saivite Church Founded In Madras to Propagate World's Oldest Religion
Category : April 1983
Published by Anonymous on Apr. 01, 1983

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Community Leaders Take Bold Steps to Provide Needed Spiritual and Social Ministry

Out side the Dharmapuram Propaganda Center on a blistering February 4th evening, the tumultuous Madras traffic howled its horn-honking cacophonies. Inside the venerable two-story building, an impressive array of dignitaries had taken sanctuary in the large library/hall to quietly inaugurate a new Saivite church. While most of their peers were content to bemoan the deteriorating state of religious effort and education in South India's largest city, one courageous band had sallied forth with a dynamic, highly practical solution in the form of a religious and social institution which could provide regular and much-needed services for millions of Saivite Hindus: the Tirumular Tirumantiram Tiruchabai (T.T.T.).

With a hall packed to capacity, the Honorable Justice R. Senkotavelan stood to inaugurate the meeting and to announce the noble purpose for which the T.T.T. was being founded. He introduced T. Venkataraman, IAS, Home Secretary for the government of Tamil Nadu, and S. Sivakumar, founder of the organization, both of whom described the functions of the new institution.

Firstly, it would propagate the monistic Saiva Siddhanta of Saint Tirumular as presented in the San Marga Master Course published by Kauai Aadheenam in Hawaii, USA. The nine lessons of this course are based on a scripture written over 2,000 years ago - the Tirumantiram - composed in the Tamil language by the great Siddhar Tirumular. H.H. Sivaya Subramuniyaswami gave his blessings for the new church and spoke about the greatness of Saivism and the uniqueness of the great monistic philosophy of Saiva Siddhanta expounded therein, as opposed to the pluralistic school commonly associated with Meykandar Saiva Siddhanta. Founder S. Sivakumar explained, "Our Tiruchabai will hold weekly classes in Saivite Hinduism for three categories: 1. boys and girls up to age 20; 2. adults; and 3. advanced Study Circle classes in Saiva Siddhanta. We want to reach the massive Saivite community in and around Madras, many of whom do not deeply understand

their religion."

The new Tiruchabai will work in close alliance with the Saiva Siddhanta Church in Hawaii in its efforts to promote Saivism. Sivakumar later announced that finances had been made available through a special grant. Sivakumar outlined the T.T.T.'s broad manifesto to include making hospital visits to console the disabled and suffering; feeding the poor once each month after temple worship; pilgrimaging yearly to the holy temples of Tamil Nadu to encourage temple worship and inspire both the pilgrims and the people of the area; teaching the sacred hymns and lives of the Saivite saints through the Saivite Holy Bible - the Tirumurai; providing emergency services, including disaster relief from draught, fire, flood and personal misfortune; and attending as a group, marriages and other important events to offer congratulations.

The founding officers of the Tiruchabai are S. Sivakumar, founder; M. Devasigamani, M.Sc., Advocate, Commissioner of Oaths and Notary Public and President of the Youth Congress; T. Venkatiraman, IAS Officer and Home Secretary; K.E. Arunachalam, M.A./B.Com.; Dr. Salem Jayalakshmi, Ph.D.; and Mr. Palanisamy, Advocate B.A./B.L.

The T.T.T. is openly borrowing from the patterns developed through the years by the Christian sects, which they note have been alarmingly effective in their campaign to convert Hindus in South India. Hinduism, they feel, can take a lesson from the social and educational successes of the Christians, thus providing more services to their Hindu brothers and sisters.

In an interview with the founder of the Tiruchabai, S. Sivakumar, it was discovered that this is but the next step in a long and lustrous life of service to Saivism. He spoke lovingly of his father, Satchidanandam Pillai (1887-1972), former Director of Public Instruction, who was, it turns out, a dynamic Saivite missionary who structured his activities on the church model, founding what was known as the Weekly Worship Movement. Working primarily from the Saiva Tirumurai (the 12 foremost scriptures, forming Saivism's Holy Bible), Sivakumar's father would hold meetings every Friday evening (regardless of where he was, it is told) for one hour. A typical worship meeting included: collective prayer for 5 minutes; silent prayer 3 minutes; readings from the scripture for 15 minutes; a sermon for 30 minutes and Thevaram hymns. His spirited efforts earned him the title "Saiva Padre." Thus, Sivakumar confided, it was only natural that he himself undertook weekly sermons

for many years following his father's death eleven years ago. And natural, too, that S. Sivakumar was appointed a minister, or amachar, of his new Church, the Tirumular Tirumantiram Tiruchabai, by Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, on the same night of the inauguration. Gurudeva explained that an amachar is not a Guru, swami, priest, or pundit, but he works in conjunction with them and the elders of the community to improve the religious life of the area. His Holiness suggested that every temple should have one or more amachars attached to it, available to help in personal and community problems and to give 52 encouraging sermons a year. Amachar Sivakumar's training will now continue under Amachar Sanmugasundaran of Saiva Siddhanta Church of Sri Lanka.

Born in 1916, now 57-years old and in the Vanaprastha ashrama of his life, Amachar Sivakumar has decided to dedicate his remaining years to this religious work. In his words, "My ambition is to use the last lap of my life for arresting the deterioration in the faith among our youth in our religion and culture. Leave alone improving. It is deteriorating so fast. We have taken to Western culture without knowing what it is." Even during his 25-year career (1945-1970) as a covenented officer with Binny & Company, he devoted his weekends to religious work and worship. Until her demise in 1981, his wife, Ph.D. in Saiva Siddhanta, worked sedulously by his side in all his religious efforts.

Faced with the diverse problems brought on by a modern consciousness of material salvation, living in a city where many have abandoned the faith of their grandparents, have turned away from the Nayanar saints and surrendered temple worship, the members of the Tiruchabai have deliberately taken the path of traditionalism. They recall the early teachings of their youth, and are emboldened by the new surge which they see within Saivism, a new recognition of inherited treasures. They intend that these treasurers will be passed on to the next generation by means of a coherent, consistent teaching program coupled with an effective and efficient organizational structure. As Amachar Sivakumar concluded, "We fully intend to go right into the homes of Saivites, to take Saivism to them, if needed, to combine religious service with social/welfare service, as either of these divested of the other does not achieve its fullness. The T.T.T seeks to bring the fullness of Saivism to others through love, service and sacrifice."

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