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PRIESTHOOD

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Adisaiva priests share their profound and holy commitment with their wives

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When visiting the great Saiva temples of Tamil Nadu, pilgrims cannot enter the sanctum sanctorum. They must stop at the threshold of the small room in which the Linga shines softly. Around Lord Siva, priests busy themselves, waving camphor or offering fruits. They are usually called "Gurukkal." Yet their real name is "Adisaiva," the first among the Saiva community. They alone are allowed to touch the Linga because they have received the proper initiations, especially the nirvana diksha. A Gurukkal must have this initiation after they are married, and their wife must be initiated along with them.

Adisaiva's cannot be fully priests unless they are married. The wife protects her husband's necessary purity. Unless she cooks his food, makes sure he wears ritually clean clothes and raises the family with all the required rituals, he cannot fulfill his religious duties properly. Priests have to remain very pure and need a wife who is as spiritually enlightened as they are.

The aim of the initiations is to bring forward the consciousness of Siva. The first one, samaya diksha, is performed for adolescent boys. The last one, nirvana diksha, followed by the guru abhisheka, is the most important because it consecrates a Saiva priest, or a Sivacharya. It lasts two days, and in the night the man sleeps near the sacred fire and should have a vision of Lord Siva in his sleep. This nightly vision of Siva is the actual key of the diksha, and if someone gets this vision spontaneously, he or she is deemed to have had an initiation. The full diksha also consists of removing the disciple's karma, so that this life will be his last one. The conclusion of the initiation is the guru abhisheka, where water in which Siva's divine Energy has been concentrated through the rituals is poured over the priest and his wife.