

## Thirumanthiram

SP Annamalai

"Humanity at large is of one clan and the differences in the religions are superfluous, for God, the creator is one and the same" says Thirumular, the reputed author of Thirumanthiram, the first and unique treatise in Tamil on yoga.

The word 'yoga' means 'to become united' with the object being meditated. In the religious context the one who is meditated is God. Hence the treatises on yoga in both Sanskrit and Tamil deal with a system of yoga practice that results in the mystic experience of having personal contact with God.

Thirumanthiram, though classified amongst the Saiva hymnal literature, is really a scientific exposition of yoga philosophy banded down from the Vedas.

According to the Saiva religion, there are three means of worship, namely, Carya (service in the temple), Kriya (religious rites or the worship proper) and Yoga (meditation). They lead to the attainment of gnosis.

The significant aspect of the practice of yoga is that while it leads to God's bliss, it is accompanied by an enlivening of the whole body-system. The body attains 'deathlessness' while the soul within attains gnosis and emancipation from worldly bonds.

"This is the final goal to be reached by man and he can reach this here and now. There is nothing to be reached in the other world" declares Thirumular. This is a unique declaration indeed in the context of widespread religious beliefs about the other world. Other Saiva saints like Manickavasagar speak of our world as the final birthplace if only one is blessed with God's grace. According to Thirumular the all-encompassing love cutting across castes, creeds, races and religions enriched by service to the living and accompanied by the practice of yoga will lead to that goal.

Thirumular is the first to successfully challenge the theory that the human body is base and mean. "A great amount of wealth is innate in the body. It may serve as an abode of God," says Thirumular, "hence One has to take immediate steps to preserve his physical energy".

His considered opinion is that spiritual development and emancipation are not possible beyond the limits of life and if only one knows how to lengthen one's life, one can gain time for this attainment. Yoga is a sure way for lengthening the lifespan, and for attaining spiritual bliss and emancipation from worldly bonds.

Thirumular evolved the system of 'Siva Yoga' which introduced the meditation of mantras. He explained yoga in the light of Saiva Siddhanta. He also explained the various aspects of Sakti, the Divine Energy and the female manifestation of the godhead.

Thirumular prescribes a code of ethics and explains various virtues in the light of yoga. Chief among them are 'non-violence' (ahimsa) and love for all. Non-eating of flesh teetotalism and avoidance of illicit contact with women are also prescribed.

The forces involved in yoga are the life-force (prana sakti), the soul force (atma sakti), and the divine force (deiva sakti). According to Saiva Siddhanta the divine force is immanent in the other two. This is because God is all pervading.

Pranayama and Pratyahara are the practices relating to the utilisation of the life-force (prana sakti) in full to awaken the soul-force (atma sakti). This is the most significant factor of yoga. In the language of the mystics this is known as the awakening of the soul. In the philosophical language this is called 'Self-realization'. According to Saiva Siddhanta this is known as the first step of Pantijnana in which the divine entity itself helps one to know one's own 'self'.

The practice of pranayama (regulating the respiration process) helps the adherent, not only to control the nerve-currents of the body, one on the left side and the other on the right (Idakalai and Pingalai nadis) but also to discover a new passage of medieval nerve-current namely, Sushumna nadi. Thirumular prescribes time duration for inhalation, exhalation and stoppage.

The pranayama is not just about the regulating of the breath. The word prana also denotes life. All the powers of the body and all the functions of the senses and the mind are expressions of the force of prana. The divine force as is immanent in the life-force is called Kundali. After gaining control over the medieval nerve current, the yogi starts the exercise of pratyahara which means 'control of the senses'. According to Thirumular, the yogi invokes the divine power by meditating a particular mantra to transform the semen into a dynamic life-force. Thirumular mostly calls this a fire. The yogi directs it upwards. The medieval nerve-current conveys it to the six centres of consciousness (adharas) located on the medieval passage (spinal cord) namely, muladhara, swatishtana, manipuraka, anakata, visuddhi and agna.

The area of these centres is divided into three divisions namely, agni mandala, surya mandala and candra mandala in which the celestial powers Agni Surya, Candra and the stars add their force to the life-force. The life-force thus energised with the divine and celestial forces keeps the senses under control.

This process is followed by meditation and absorption (dhyana). As a result of prolonged practice, the yogi is blessed with divine visions. A new chapter is opened in his life, as he comes under the direct control of the divine power.

Another significant factor of this yogic attainment is the opening up of glands that had not functioned so far. Thirumular identifies two spots in the body in which these glands are situated, namely, the forehead and the top of the head. He calls the secretion 'nectar' (amudhu). According to him, this liquid makes the body live long.

The practice of yoga does not stop here. The yogi reaches higher states by taking the life-force to the top of his head. Thirumular says that with the help of a special device, the yogi discovers the opening on the pharyngeal part of the mouth and through it he directs his life-force to the skull. There, at the particular spot, called sahasrara, he gains contact with the cosmic space. Hence the space is called chitambaram by Thirumular. Chit means the wisdom of the soul and ambaram denotes the space. For the yogi this is a unique experience of having simultaneously, the realization of God and of perceiving the space that has come in contact

with him as full of radiance. Thirumular calls this the cosmic dance of Siva and equates the yogi's head to the 'golden hall' (ponambalam) at Chidambaram.

The vital part of Thirumular's system of yoga is Tiruambalacakra. It refers to his invention of a new set of five combinations of the five lettered mantra, Pancakshara.

Meditation of mantras during the practice of yoga, as a device to evoke divine force was in a well-developed stage in Thirumular's time. The Sakta cult used the device in its tantric methods even in the 2nd century A.D. The impact of this cult on Thirumular is felt in his detailed description of Sakti, the female manifestation of Siva. But it is obvious that he was not overpowered by this impact, for he does not claim superiority for Sakti over Siva. One of the major evidence is the Tiruambalacakra in which their equal status is established.

Thirumular, besides being a full-blown yogi, takes the role of a teacher as he explains his yoga system step by step, first introducing Patanjali's Ashtanya Yoga and then adding details of the celestial powers, centres of consciousness, the divine force and the consummate mystic experience. His work Thirumanthiram is a compendium of the philosophy, the theory and the practice of Siva Yoga.