

INTRODUCTION

The fundamental aim of all religions is the realization of Truth. This is a matter of direct experience, in which neither the mind nor the intellect nor any human faculty is involved. It is a question of being.

There is only one Reality, which is God or 'That' (*tat*), so that 'realization of Truth' means being aware that you are one with God or that you are 'That' (*tat tvam asi*). This is the meaning of "know thyself". He who knows himself knows everything and is one who has attained liberation while in the human body (*jivanmukta*). There is nothing left for him to do, but to help others to come to the same realization. Such a man is the true master (*sat-guru*).

Those who have attained this state are exceedingly rare. But one such 'realized soul' was living in Jaffna, in North Ceylon, for over ninety years, and left his body only in 1964. The contents of this book are his songs and sayings. These flowed from him spontaneously and were written down at the time by anyone who happened to be present.¹ No intellectual process was involved. He was the mouthpiece of the Divine.

In any endeavour to translate these songs it is inevitable that, unless the translator has reached a similar level, much of the force and beauty and subtlety of the original will be lost in rendering it into another language. But it has been felt that, for those who have "ears to hear", something of great value will certainly come through and that for this at least it is worth while making the attempt.

1. Occasionally he wrote them down himself.

It is thought best to let the contents of the book speak for themselves. Commentaries and expositions can all too easily mislead rather than lead, and the more profound the original the greater this danger becomes. For the commentator will, in all probability, only comment from his particular view-point and on his particular level. But writings of deep wisdom can be understood on many different levels and from many different points of view, some of which may even appear contradictory, since on the relative plane Truth can often only be expressed in contradictions. Therefore it is better for each reader to extract what he can for himself according to his nature and level of understanding.

However, for those not familiar with the background against which all that appears in this book is portrayed, some words of explanation are necessary; but it is intended to limit these to what is needed from the point of view of intelligibility alone.

The language from which the following translations have been made is Tamil. This is the tongue of most of the people of South India and of the inhabitants of North and North-East Ceylon. It is a Dravidian language of very ancient origin. The majority of the Tamils and of other members of the Dravidian races are Hindus. All the truths that are contained within the pages of this book have been expressed in Hindu terms and forms and, since a proper understanding of the Hindu tradition is, even today, very rare outside India, it is necessary to say a few words about it and, in particular, about that branch of it which is the faith of most of the people of South India and of North Ceylon and which is almost entirely unknown in the West.

The word Hindu means 'one who is born in the Indus valley' and, strictly speaking, only those born in the Indian sub-continent east of the River Indus are Hindus. For

those who are not so born, Hinduism appears bewilderingly complex and amorphous, and it is said that you have to be born a Hindu; you cannot become one. One of the main reasons for this is that, unlike all the other ‘revealed’ religions, Hinduism, at least as it is known today, has had no founder, who appeared at a particular moment in time and imparted to mankind a particular form and expression of the Truth, together with some code of moral and ethical rules. Hinduism is said to be the *Sanātana Dharma* — the Eternal Truth, which has existed ever since the world was. No historical origin can be traced to it.¹ Every tradition is a living and growing thing, but the growth seems to be much more prolific and luxuriant, where no fixed code or rules have been established at the outset, and Hinduism has, through countless ages, embraced and adapted to its formal development material from an immense range of diversified sources. In fact it is possible to find, within one or another of its ramifications, something akin to almost all the forms and practices in which other traditions have sought to express and attain the Truth. That is why it is said to be “the mother of all religions”.

The knowledge of Hinduism of most people living in the West is, of course, confined to what can be learnt from books, and, with very few exceptions, these books are limited to various modern interpretations of the principal *Upanishads*², mainly in accordance with *Śankarāchārya*’s commentaries upon them, and of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which is often also spoken of as an *Upanishad* and on which

1. The truths of the *Sanātana Dharma* were revealed, in some prehistoric past, to great *rishis* (sages) who ‘heard’ them in their hearts (like St. John, the Evangelist, at Patmos), and were later codified in the four *Vedas*. For all Hindus the *Vedas* constitute the primary scriptural authority, which is called *śruti*—‘that which is heard’, in distinction from the secondary authorities which are known as *smṛti*— ‘that which is remembered’.
2. Each of the four *Vedas* is divided into two sections, one being known as the ‘practical’ part and the other as the ‘metaphysical’ part. The ‘practical’ part consists of hymns to be sung and rituals to be performed. The *Upanishads* constitute the ‘metaphysical’ part.

also Śāṅkarāchārya wrote a commentary. The basis and viewpoint of Śāṅkarāchārya's interpretations of the *Upa-nishads* is generally known as *Advaita Vedānta*¹, and, in the realm of metaphysical writings, represents one of the closest approximations to Truth that it is possible to find through verbal expression alone. But Truth is beyond mind and intellect, as the *Upanishads* emphasize over and over again, and a purely theoretical and intellectual understanding, however subtle and profound it may be, can never reach it. It is something that has to be realized.²

This realization requires a long process of preparation and purification. And this involves discipline and sacrifice, for one of the most fundamental laws that govern man's activity on earth is the law of economics, that the more valuable a thing the higher the price that must be paid for it. In Hindu terminology the 'payment' that has to be made to attain any spiritual objective is represented by the word '*tapas*', which in modern renderings of Hindu scriptures into English is often translated as 'austerity' or 'penance'. But this does not cover the full signification of the term. The word '*tapas*' is derived from the Sanskrit root '*tap*', which means 'to burn', and conveys the idea of 'brooding' or 'one-pointed concentration'. This 'brooding' or 'concentration' may be applied in many different ways and may give rise to many different exercises or practices, the persistent and unflagging pursuit of any of which would also be covered by the word '*tapas*'. All the Hindu scriptures are unanimous in emphasizing that, "if one does not practise *tapas*, there can be no success in acquiring self-knowledge or in the perfection of any works", for "by *tapas* purity is gained and from purity understanding is reached and from understanding is the Self attained"³. For Śāṅkarāchārya, *tapas* is the focusing of the mind and the senses on one object, that is —the One Reality or the Eternal Self.

1. *Advaita* means 'non-dual' and *Vedānta* 'the end of knowledge'.
2. Lord Jesus Christ said: "I am the Truth". Pontius Pilate (in a different context) put the question: "What is truth?", to which the Lord gave no reply.
3. *Maitri Upanishad*. Chapter IV, v 3.

But very few are qualified to reach the summit by the crystalline purity of *Advaita Vedānta*. For most people, at least on the earlier rungs of the spiritual ladder, forms of some kind or another are necessary to lead them to the formless. These Hinduism supplies in abundance. It is like a great river, which on its long course to the sea carries with it from its tributaries materials originating from” vastly different lands and climes. Each Hindu, according to his taste, temperament, heredity and, upbringing, can find what is best suited to his growth. He will, of course, only imbibe what is appropriate for him. The rest he will ignore. But an outsider, looking at the whole, will be completely bewildered and unable to see any unifying principle behind it. This may help to explain why *Vedānta*, which is beyond forms, is the aspect of Hinduism that is most widely known in the West, and also why Hinduism cannot be ‘exported’.

Hindu forms are innumerable and of almost indefinite variety. They have accumulated over long periods of time through the media of myths, epics and songs, and of art and architecture. Altogether, they constitute the expression of the Hindu tradition. Forms are part of all traditions, whether in the East or West, but the store is infinitely richer in the case of Hinduism, because of its great antiquity. But forms are always secondary. They are simply a means of expressing and a help to understanding the Eternal Truth. They are constantly growing and changing, because a tradition is a living thing. And, in fact, in Hinduism from time to time (for historical or other causes) whole theogonies seem to be discarded or transformed and replaced by others. Yet the *Sanātana Dharma* remains the same, for it is the Eternal Truth, which is as it has always been and cannot suffer change.

Forms are only symbols of reality. Reality cannot be expressed through the senses or the mind or the intellect, because it transcends all these, so that a symbol can never be more than an approximation or a support for contemplation. But a symbol is a far more effective approximation to the Truth than any philosophical discourse or treatise.

because Truth, when manifested, has an infinite number of aspects, and symbolism can convey at least some of these simultaneously, whereas philosophical and purely rational works can only deal with one at a time. That is why it is often possible for wholly unlettered people to attain to a much higher level of understanding than learned scholars and philosophers.

India has been called the “cradle of spirituality”, and, until recently, almost all Hindus, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, ‘good’ or ‘bad’ had consciously or unconsciously an innate sense of the relativity and impermanence of the visible, sensory world and an understanding that, behind and beyond it, there lies the One Reality, which does not change and which cannot be described and the attainment of which is the sole purpose of life on earth. This was inbred in them. For the ultimate aim of the Hindu is not everlasting life in some heaven of eternal happiness and pleasure, but liberation (*mukti*) — that is liberation from illusion¹. He knows that the manifested world is by its very nature relative and transient, and that what is real and permanent can alone be of value.

The charges of polytheism, idolatry, crude superstition and so on have often been leveled against Hinduism. But these mostly arise from misunderstanding. Hinduism, when it has a theistic form, is essentially monotheistic, because Truth or Reality can only be One. But that One in manifestation has infinite aspects, and the innumerable variety of divine forms and gods and heavenly beings, which Hinduism begets, are all simply different symbols of that One. Each aspirant can choose those which he understands best and which can best help him to reach his goal. But they are symbols only and not the Truth itself. The Truth transcends all expression and is wholly different by nature from anything manifested. That is why Hindu forms are not realistic and why their divine images often have several arms or faces or the heads of animals and so on,

1. c.f. Gospel according to St. John. Chap. VIII, v32., “Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

which may easily seem monstrous and repellent to a non-Hindu. For they are essentially symbols of Reality, and in this way the dangers of anthropomorphism and sentimentality can largely be avoided. And all these apparent aberrations of the human form are not arbitrary. They all have a definite meaning and significance, which may or may not be understood by the worshipper. A Hindu 'idol', in its proper traditional form, is in fact a complete metaphysical treatise in itself.

In historical and, in relation to Hinduism, relatively 'modern' times — that is within the last three or four thousand years — two main streams can be traced in its development — the Aryan or Indo-Iranian from the North, and the Dravidian from the South, and Hinduism, as it exists today, is largely a happy and organic blend of the two. It is futile and detrimental to attempt to separate them. At the same time, in many respects, the courses of these two streams still remain quite distinct. In the West, it is the northern or 'Aryan' stream which has been studied, largely owing to the interest of scholars in an early Indo-European civilization, which was the common origin of race and language for both East and West; and, in consequence, almost all the translations of Hindu scriptures have been from Sanskrit.¹ The southern or Dravidian stream has been almost completely neglected, but it is that which is in question here.

The Dravidian or South Indian branch of Hinduism is theistic. By the majority of South Indian Hindus the Supreme Being, who is both God and Godhead, is called *Śiva*.) Here there is a possible source of confusion, because *Śiva*, the destroyer, is also one of the Hindu trinity or the three principles, which govern the manifested world. These are represented as three gods—*Brahma*, the creator* or manifesting principle (not to be confused with *Brahman*, the Absolute of *Vedānta*), *Viṣṇu*, the preserver or sustaining principle, and *Śiva*, the destroyer or dissolving principle.

1. The scriptures of the northern stream are written in Sanskrit and, though for the southern stream the *śruti* is also in Sanskrit, the majority of its scriptures are in Tamil,

But they relate to the manifested world only and are of a much lower order than *Śiva*, the Supreme Lord of All. In fact, in this connection, to avoid confusion, the alternative name of *Rudra* is often employed to designate the third principle.

At the same time it is not an accident or coincidence that the same name has been used for both aspects, because, for the Hindu, the whole purpose of life and the supreme act of Divine Grace is to destroy illusion; and this God does both on the microcosmic or subjective and on the macrocosmic or objective scale (though there is, strictly speaking, no 'objective'), for, according to Hinduism, at the end of regular cycles of vast periods of time the whole manifested world is consumed and dissolved, and then, after an interval of complete quiescence, it is issued forth again. And this process of creation and destruction, or evolution and involution, has no end and no beginning. It *is* the manifested world and is simply a replica on the macrocosmic scale of the birth, growth, decay, death and rebirth of the microcosm.

In the same way, *Viṣṇu*, the sustaining or preserving principle in the trinity of manifestation, is also worshipped by many Hindus as the Supreme Being, and the two principal cults of Hindu worship today are represented by the *Vaiṣṇavas* (those who worship *Viṣṇu* as God) and the *Śaivas* (the worshippers of *Śiva*). The majority of the inhabitants of the north of India are *Vaiṣṇavas* and those of the south *Śaivas*, though there are many important exceptions on both sides. The great Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahābhārata*, of which the *Bhagavad Gītā* forms a part, both spring from the *Vaiṣṇava* tradition, and *Rāma* and *Kṛṣṇa* are *avatāras* or incarnations of Lord *Viṣṇu* Himself.

In both cults the Supreme Being is given many different names, according to the function and -aspect that the worshipper wishes to express. In the *Śaiva* faith, *Śiva*, in His supreme transcendent nature, is often called *Paraśivam*. Of this no description is possible. It is beyond speech and

thought and all manifestation. This is the Absolute or Godhead—the one and only true Reality, which does not change, but remains the same for ever, and apart from which there is nothing.

Yet, for mankind, the manifested world of time, space and causality exists. Its nature is change and movement. It is always in flux—the direct antithesis of the One Immutable, Transcendent Reality. But there is and there can be only One Reality, which is infinite and omnipresent, and so that must also include this world of apparent change. How the One Perfect, Changeless, Eternal and Infinite Reality can also be the transient world of creation or manifestation, is the ultimate mystery of mysteries, which by its very nature can never be comprehended by the human reason, but for which every religion in some way or other has to try to give an explanation.

According to Hindu metaphysics, by the mere Will of the Absolute the whole of manifestation is evolved. The first stage in the process of its appearance is the undifferentiated state of Pure Being, which contains in itself the entire diversity of the world that emerges from it. This can be compared to a limitless ocean, and manifestation to the waves on its surface. In the *Śaiva* tradition this Supreme Essence is symbolized by what is known as the *liṅgam*, which is said to have form and yet to be formless. The *liṅgam*, which is probably the oldest of all Hindu symbols, is essentially the symbol of *Śiva*, and is the only image that is found in the innermost shrine or ‘holy of holies’ of every *Śiva* temple. The literal meaning of the word is a ‘sign’ or ‘mark’, and it consists merely of a short cylindrical pillar, nowadays usually of black stone, with a rounded top. It signifies also the Unchanging Reality, the ‘vertical axis’, which runs through everything, but like the centre of a wheel is itself unmoving, and about which the ever-turning circle of manifestation appears to revolve, though in reality contained within it.

In the *Śaiva* school of Hinduism the manifested world is portrayed symbolically as the dance of *Śiva*. And in this

aspect He is known as *Naṭarāja*—Lord of the Dance. Everything that exists, that ever has existed and ever will exist is His dance. In fact existence is the dance; and He is dancing in each creature. If He ceases to dance, the whole world comes to an end and is dissolved into the “Pure Void”, which is also He; and this is what happens periodically at the end of vast aeons of time. Existence or manifestation is movement and there is nothing that moves except He. All other apparent entities are simply movement of the One Eternal, Immutable Spirit.

This Supreme Mystery is also represented in terms of sound or vibration. The whole of manifestation is said to be comprised within the sacred monosyllable *Om̐*, which includes in itself all other possible sounds or vibrations and from which they all derive. It is, as it were, the One Fundamental, of which all existing things are harmonics or ‘overtones’. And at the same time it is also the One Transcendent Reality. This word is the kernel and essence of the *Vedas*. It is the *Mantra* of *mantras*¹. It is the ‘logos’ of Christianity, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, “the Eternal Word which was in the beginning” and beyond which there is nothing else. And, in the symbolism of the dance of *Śiva*, *Naṭarāja* is always portrayed as dancing within a halo or circle of flame, which represents the Tamil letters that signify *Om̐*.

The dance of *Śiva* is existence. It *is* the manifested world. Why the Lord dances, why there should be anything other than the Pure, Perfect, Silent Void of the Unmanifest Absolute is the mystery of mysteries. That is why, in Hinduism, another analogy that is frequently used is that of ‘play’ (*līlā*). The whole of existence is said to be nothing but the play of the Lord; and the word ‘play’ can be taken in both its meanings—that of ‘drama’ as well

1. A *mantra* is a syllable or syllables with power, and like all power can be used for any purpose—good, bad and indifferent. The word is, however, commonly employed to denote a sacred word or formula, that is recited or contemplated in divine worship or repeated as a form of invocation.

as that of ‘sport’. The role of the individual soul, or *jīva*, is, or should be, simply that of a spectator or witness.

The Divine Dance or Play is ceaselessly performed until the end of the world. At the end of vast cycles of aeons of time the whole universe is destroyed, and amidst the general conflagration Lord *Śiva* dances in ecstasy. And He is often described as “the One who dances in joy on the cremation ground”, for it is illusion that is being burnt—the illusion that He Himself has created. Then there is nothing but the Pure Void or Spirit Space, that no words can describe. This is what is called ‘*chid-ākāśa*’.

“As above, so below”—what is true for the macrocosm is true for the microcosm as well, and this “spirit-space”, or “open hall”, is also referred to as the “cave of the heart”, or “the golden hall”, where the Lord dances when the ego has been overcome and all illusion destroyed. This may help to explain why the “terrible aspect”, which often seems shocking or repellent to Western minds, is so frequently found in Hindu symbolism, particularly in that of the *Śaiva* tradition. For terror can only belong to manifestation, to the individual ego. There can be no terror for the Divine. As the *Upanishads* say, “When there are two then there is fear.”¹

Therefore, if manifestation or individuality disappears, nothing remains but the One All-pervading Reality of Being, Consciousness and Bliss (*Satchidānanda*). And this ‘destruction’, in relation to individual souls, is the supreme function of the grace of God. That is why the *Saivas* claim that the “destroyer” is the highest of the three principles of divine manifestation, and why, too, Lord *Śiva* is also as frequently described as the “Lord of Compassion”.

There is another way in which Hindu symbolism expresses the mystery of the unity of the manifest and the Unmanifest, of the changing transient world and the One

1. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* I. 4. 2.

Taittirīya Upanishad II. 7. 1.

Unchanging Reality. In common with other traditions, the manifested world is regarded as the activity of the female principle. All is taken to be the work of the Divine Mother, from whose womb all the worlds have sprung and who nourishes and cares for all living beings and yet remains eternally a virgin. The male principle is the “Unmoved Mover”, the One Unchanging Reality, which lies behind all movement and change, which permeates everything and without which nothing can have existence. The ‘Father’ does not change, but remains the same for ever. Yet there is change. It is the ‘Mother’ who gives rise to change. The ‘Mother’ is the Divine Energy or Power (in Sanskrit — *Śakti*), and each of the Hindu deities has a ‘consort’ who represents this principle.

But the manifested and the Unmanifested are One. God and His Power are One; *Śiva* and *Śakti* are One, and therefore Lord *Śiva* is often symbolized as having the right half of His body male and the left half female. And this duality in unity is also conveyed in the images of *Naṭarāja*, where the Lord is always depicted as wearing a female earring (called *thodu* in Tamil) in His left ear¹. On the microcosmic scale also, ‘Father’ and ‘Mother’ are within each creature. In all traditions the soul is represented as being female, and the purpose of human existence can be said to be the consummation of the marriage of the female with the male, the Mystic Union described by certain Christian saints.

The Divine Power is inseparable from God, and the analogy is often given of the sun and its rays. *Śiva* is the sun, *Śakti* the rays, and it is only through the rays that the sun has effect on the world. So that it can be said that *Śakti* is really equivalent to Divine Grace. Indeed many Hindus worship the ‘Mother’ as the Supreme Being, and devotees of *Śakti* (*Śāktas*) are very numerous throughout India.

1. In earlier times Tamil men also wore earrings, but of a different pattern from those worn by women, and, even today, in country places, this practice still persists.

In Hinduism, both in the *Śaiva* and *Vaiṣṇava* cults, numerous focal points or centres of concentration are provided, but this does not mean that it is polytheistic or that the principle of the Oneness of Reality is in any way impaired. Different people can choose a different ‘support’ according to their temperament and understanding, but in every case it is the same Unique Reality that is being worshipped. All the many forms simply represent different aspects of the One Truth, which cannot be comprehended in its entirety by the human mind.

Some choose to worship the ‘Father’, some the ‘Mother’ and some the ‘Son’. For, according to *Śaiva* mythology, *Śiva* and *Śakti* had altogether four sons, of whom the first two are the most important. The eldest is *Gaṇeśa*, the elephant-headed God with a big belly, containing all the worlds. He represents wisdom, and his very form symbolizes the sacred monosyllable *Om*¹. According to the *Vedic* rules, every rite or ceremony or undertaking should be preceded by the word *Om*, both in speech and writing, for it is the beginning and end of everything. In the same way, in the *Śaiva* cult, no work should be begun without first invoking *Gaṇeśa*.

The second son is called *Murukan*, which means literally ‘beauty’ and also ‘tenderness’ or ‘freshness’ (as of the young shoot of a plant), and in one aspect he is always represented as a child. Every Hindu symbol has a myth or story behind it to explain its meaning and existence, and it is related that, once upon a time, *Viṣṇu*, *Brahma* and all the other gods and celestial beings (*devas*), who were being afflicted and overcome by the demons (*asuras*), besought Lord *Śiva* to come to their rescue. This He did by bestowing on them the gift of *Murukan*, His son, who after many hard-fought battles defeated the *asuras* and restored the *devas* to their rightful places in the heavens. This explains why, contradictory though it may seem, *Murukan* is also the god of war, and one of his names is *Kandaswāmi*,

1. The Tamil characters that represent *Om* can be very easily discerned as the head of an elephant.

which, it is said, is a derivation of *Skanda*, the war-god of Aryan mythology. In this aspect he is symbolized as having six faces, representing all possible activities on the earthly plane, and twelve arms, each wielding a different weapon. For, while *Gaṇeśa* can be said to be the Lord of Wisdom, *Murukan* is the Lord of Action.

His *Śakti* or energy is usually described as being threefold; two of its aspects are symbolized by his two consorts, one representing the power of action (*Kriyā Śakti*) and the other the power of will and love (*Ichchā Śakti*). The third *Śakti* is the *vēl*, the lance with which he is always depicted and which is the symbol of Divine Wisdom (*Jñāna Śakti*), the weapon that can pierce the impenetrable and destroy ignorance, the only enemy of the soul.

In the Hindu pantheon there are innumerable minor gods of varying importance, both beneficent and maleficent, each of which has some particular function or functions, and which, on the macrocosmic scale, can be regarded as the presiding deities of the various forces of Nature and, in relation to the microcosm, as the powers of the soul. The greater part of Hindu mythology consists of accounts of wars and conflicts between the *devas* and the *asuras*. From time to time the *asuras*, as the result of boons granted to them by the Lord, achieve great power and conquer and devastate all the heavens and make their inhabitants their slaves. Then the gods approach Lord *Śiva* and entreat Him to come to their aid and deliver them. (In *Vaiṣṇava* mythology almost exactly similar stories will be found with *Viṣṇu* as the central and supreme figure).

This 'war' is in fact being waged unceasingly. It is also part of the Divine Play, and, on the microcosmic scale, the whole meaning of existence can be looked upon as a "spiritual combat" between truth and ignorance, light and darkness, in which, by themselves, the powers and faculties of the soul can never be victorious without the intervention of That which is beyond them, that is Divine Grace. But, only when the soul realizes that by itself it

is powerless to achieve the victory over ignorance and egoism, is that help granted.

In Hinduism the centre can be anywhere, so to speak. One will take *Murukan* as the focal point, or rather one of his aspects, for instance the tender child or the victorious warrior, or he may worship the lance (*vēl*) itself. Another will concentrate primarily on *Gaṇeśa* as the Lord of Wisdom, or as the remover of all obstacles. A third will ask the Divine Mother for all he needs or will worship Her in Her terrible, ferocious aspect, as *Kali* who devours everything, and so on. A lesser number will meditate on Lord *Śiva* Himself, as relatively few can approach the Supreme Being direct, as it were. But it is, understood that all these different forms are simply different aspects of the One Reality. (In the *Vaiṣṇava* cult there will be a similar range of possible 'points of concentration').

There are countless myths connected with each of the many divine forms, and in fact every detail of the symbolic figures by which they are portrayed has a story behind it to account for its existence. And each locality, each temple has its own legend to explain the particular form of its presiding deity and how it came to be there. All these innumerable stories are interwoven into a vast network which will appear baffling and incomprehensible to the outsider, but which altogether is the expression of the whole Hindu tradition¹. In all traditions, it is through myth and legend that the truths, which they enshrine, have been preserved and handed down from one generation to another through the ages, for in this way they are, or

1. There are a great many collections of these stories, grouped according to the central figure in each of them, which form the larger part of what are called *Purāṇas*. The *Purāṇas* constitute one of the principal secondary authorities for Hindus. They can be described broadly as the medium by which the philosophical, ethical and practical teachings of Hinduism are conveyed to the ordinary man, and for this reason they consist mainly of myths and stories. Each school of Hinduism has its own collection of *Puranas*, in which the principal deity or deities of that school will play the chief role in the numerous stories they contain.

rather were, imbibed naturally by everyone from the cradle, and it is only at a relatively late point in the development of all traditions that attempts are made to codify them into philosophies and systems.

The philosophical expression of South Indian *Saivism* is called *Saiva Siddhānta*. The word '*Siddhānta*' means 'the end of ends', but it can also have the same meaning as *Vedānta*, namely 'the end of knowledge'. *Saiva Siddhānta* posits three entities, which exist eternally and which are called — *pati*, *pasu*, *pasa*. *Pati* means 'lord' or 'master'; *pasu*, the literal meaning of which is 'that which is bound', is the Tamil and Sanskrit word for 'cattle', and stands for all souls or all beings; *pasa* means a 'rope' or 'fetter', and signifies bondage. God, or the Lord, is one. Souls are innumerable. Bondage is threefold, and its three constituents are also called the three impurities (*malas*) — *ānava*, *karma*, and *māyā*.

Of these *ānava* is much the most important. It is sometimes described as "the innate taint" and is something very similar in conception to the "original sin" of Christianity. It is derived from the word '*anu*', meaning an atom or something exceedingly minute, and can be said to signify basically that which makes the greatest appear small. It thus denotes, on the microcosmic scale, the individual 'I' or ego, which differentiates the One Reality and sees itself as separate from other apparent existences. In ordinary speech it has the meaning of 'egotism' or 'arrogance'. On the macrocosmic scale, it is the formless darkness (something akin to the "waters" of the Book of Genesis),¹ in which, according to the doctrine of *Siddhānta*, all souls are initially enveloped. This darkness is the antithesis of the endless light of the One Reality, the 'atomization' of which is what really constitutes manifestation. It is thus the "sin of sins" and represents the bottom or hollow of the eternally rolling wave, which is called existence, and the crest of which is, in Hindu terms, "the feet of the Lord".

1. *Genesis*. Chapter I. v 2.

From this darkness the Lord calls forth all souls at the beginning of each world-cycle and into this darkness He summons them again, when the whole universe is consumed and destroyed. That is why, in the figure of *Naṭarāja*, one of Lord *Śiva*'s hands holds a drum, which represents the Primordial Sound or Vibration and is the symbol of creation, and another fire—the symbol of destruction. A third hand is raised giving the *mudrā* (manual sign) that signifies protection and is thus the symbol of preservation.

But in addition to the three functions of creation preservation and destruction, God, according to *Śaiva Siddhānta*, performs two other divine actions, which may be said to be the expression of His Holy Grace. Why, besides the Perfect One, there should be the apparently imperfect many, why souls should be plunged in the darkness of chaos, is the mystery of mysteries, the unanswerable question. Taking this for granted, *Siddhānta* regards the whole of existence as an ever-continuing process of evolution from formless chaos into formless bliss, which is effected by the action of Divine Grace, or the *Śakti* of the Lord. This operates in two ways, by obscuring and by revealing. The first is called *Tirodhāna Śakti*, the second *Anugraha Śakti*.

By themselves the individual souls (or *jīvas*) would be hopelessly and helplessly lost in the darkness of *ānava*. In order to help them to escape, the Lord, out of His infinite compassion, gives them bodies and faculties and all the external world to enjoy. This is what, in *Śaiva Siddhānta*, is called *māyā*. In using their organs and faculties souls perform actions, which give appropriate results. This is designated by the word *karma*, the literal sense of which is action. In this way souls gain experience, by means of which they are enabled gradually to evolve from darkness into light. At the same time, both *karma* and *māyā* hide from the soul the true nature of the Lord and its union with Him, by making it believe in an objective world that is outside and separate from Him. That is why they are called 'impurities'. But unlike *ānava*, they are given to the

soul expressly to help it to free itself from that ‘innate taint’ and therefore represent the action of the Lord’s Grace or *Śakti*. Yet, as they conceal the soul’s true relation to Him, they are said to constitute His ‘obscuring’ or ‘veiling’ *Śakti*. Thus everything, apart from *ānava*, is God’s Grace. He is not other than His Grace and He is not other than souls; and yet souls are subject to *ānava*, while He is not.

But the *māyā* of *Siddhānta* is not the same as the *māyā* of *Vedānta*. For *Vedānta* it is *māyā* and for *Siddhānta* *ānava*, which constitutes the great obstacle to the realization of Truth. In *Siddhānta*, though it forms a part of the bondage from which the soul must strive to free itself in order to attain liberation, *māyā* also has a positive aspect. It is an aid given by God to enable the soul to extricate itself from the enveloping obscurity of *ānava*, like a lamp which helps to illumine the darkness of the night before the rising of the sun.

There has been, and still is, a certain amount of controversy between *Vedānta* and *Siddhānta*, but this, like all controversies, is largely based on misunderstanding and difference in emphasis, and is the activity of those who have not realized the Truth through either school. And in some ways there is no fair ground for comparison; for *Vedānta* is a purely metaphysical doctrine and also a purely metaphysical method (if that is not a contradiction in terms), which can only be followed and realized by relatively few, who have the necessary determination and strength of mind to approach the Truth by a more or less purely intellectual path. *Śaiva Siddhānta*, on the other hand, is both metaphysics and religion, and has to cater for all souls that come within its orbit, whatever their temperament or level of understanding may be. *Vedānta* may be compared to a course of

1. The word *māyā* is derived from the root *mā*, which means ‘to measure’.

It is that by which things are measured or formed and which makes the One Formless Reality appear as many. It has been described as “the form of the Formless”. It is only when considered in relation to the Formless that it can be called the cause of illusion.

training for an ‘honours degree’; whereas *Siddhānta*, while it finally offers an equally advanced course, provides in addition all the stages in the educational ladder from the kindergarten to the university. But all who have ‘graduated’, from either school, affirm that there is no difference between the ultimate goal of each, since Truth is One.

Vedānta looks at the world from the top—from God’s point of view, whereas *Siddhānta* approach is from the standpoint of individual souls. Both are correct and both are wrong, because the Absolute Truth cannot be expressed in words or be understood by the mind and intellect. “If you speak, you lie!”

For *Vedānta* there is only the one *Ātma*—the Universal Spirit. Everything else, including the idea of individual souls (*jīvātmas*), is *māyā* or illusion. *Saiva Siddhānta* maintains that there is the one *Paramātmā*, which is *Paraśivam* or the First Principle, but many *jīvātmas*, which are real positive entities existing eternally.

In order to try to explain the inexplicable, every religion is compelled to have recourse to a mystery, and the chief factor that differentiates them is the point, so to speak, at which they place it. *Vedānta* says that there is nothing but the One Reality—the *Ātma* or *Brahman*, and That is consciousness and not matter. As there is nothing but That, each apparently individual soul is also That. Therefore “thou art That” (*Tat tvam asi*). This cannot be ‘known’; it must be ‘realized’. When the soul finds out what it is, that it is That, and can say: “I am *Brahman*” (*Aham Brahmāsmi*), body, faculties and the whole world disappear, and it remains what it has always been—pure and perfect spirit or consciousness. It is only *māyā*, which has no real existence, that prevents it from seeing what has been and always will be, the unchanging Truth. The whole world

l. Here and in what follows the word ‘soul’, unless specifically stated otherwise, is used to denote the individual or embodied consciousness—the *jīvātma*, which in *Siddhānta* has real, but in *Vedānta* only apparent existence.

therefore, from the Absolute point of view, is illusory, and the only purpose of existence is to realize this. Yet, although all that *māyā* presents to the individual soul may have no real existence, the illusion itself exists. It is here that *Vedānta* ‘places’ its mystery, by saying that *māyā* is at the same time real and yet not real, because in reality individual souls are unreal also, since there is nothing but the One Spirit. But, as long as the soul thinks that it has individual existence, then the world is real. When it realizes its oneness with *Brahman*, the world ceases to exist for it and there is nothing but the One and only Reality on which, under the delusion of *māyā*, it had been ‘superimposing’ the whole of manifestation. And it makes no difference whether this One Reality is called *Brahman* or God or *Paraśivam* or the Absolute or the real ‘I’, for only One is there.

In *Siddhānta* the mystery is involved in the explanation of the soul’s relation to God. Like *Vedānta*, *Saiya Siddhānta* also claims to be a philosophy *oi+dvaīta*, but it interprets this in a rather different way, whereas *Vedānta*, at least as expounded by *Śankarāchārya*, uses the word *advaita* in a purely monistic sense, as meaning ‘non-dual’, *Siddhānta* takes it to imply ‘neither one nor two’, and adopts a position midway between the monism of *Śankarāchārya*’s *Vedānta* and the dualism of other faiths. It maintains that the soul is one with God and yet separate from Him, and many analogies are given to illustrate this relationship, such as the butter in milk, the fire latent in firewood, a flower and its scent, fruit and its flavour, a gingili seed and its oil and so on.

Godhead, or the Absolute, whether called *Brahman* or *Paraśivam*, is pure Spirit or Consciousness (*chit*), and this is the only Reality, which lies behind the whole of manifestation. *Siddhānta* explains the apparent coming into being of the world as a process of evolution (or devolution) of *māyā* from the first vibration of Pure Consciousness, which is the Primordial Sound, or the Word (Logos), that is *Om*, through various stages from the finer to the coarser, from the subtle to the gross, until the so-called material world

is produced. Each of these various stages is called a *tattva*, which means literally ‘the essential nature or property of a thing’. In *Siddhānta* there are thirty-six *tattvas*, in *Vedānta* twenty-four.

According to *Vedānta*, as the whole universe only has existence relatively to the soul, the first *tattvas* or stages of evolution are the faculties of the individual consciousness, since from these the whole manifested world appears to arise and without them there can be no manifestation, because then there would be no means by which the soul could be ‘deluded’.

Siddhānta divides *māyā* into three levels, which it calls ‘pure’, ‘semi-pure’ and ‘impure’. Of these, the first two together comprise twelve very subtle *tattvas*, which represent the process of the evolution of *māyā* from the Primordial Sound or Logos and its subsequent differentiation, until the third level of ‘impure’ *māyā* is reached.

The first *tattvas* of this third stage, which corresponds to matter or the ‘*materia secunda*’ of the medieval Christian scholastics, are the soul’s faculties of cognition, and it is here that the Vedantic classification of the *tattvas* begins, which thenceforward is in complete conformity with that of *Siddhānta*. According to both systems these faculties are fourfold and are called the *antaḥkaraṇas*, or the ‘inner instruments’. These four are given the names of *buddhi*, *ahamkāra*, *manas* and *chitta*. In a very general way, it can be said that *buddhi* is the intellect and the determinative faculty, which decides “this is such and such”, or “this must be done”; *ahamkāra*, which means literally “the ‘I-maker’”, is the source of self-assertion or ‘I’-ness; *manas* is the mind and also the seat of desire, whose chief functions are to focus attention and to apprehend and synthesize the material supplied by the senses or organs of perception; *chitta* recalls to memory and dwells on the momentary experiences provided by *manas*, which have been arrogated to the particular self by *ahamkāra* and determined in the light of *buddhi*.

From these four *tattvas*, in the process of evolution, all the rest follow, which are, in order, the ten ‘outer

instruments¹, namely, the five organs of perception—the ear, the eye, the nose, the tongue and the skin, and the five organs of action—the mouth, the hands, the feet, the anus and the genitals; and their objects, the five subtle elements—sound, colour and form, touch, taste and smell, and the five gross elements—ether, air, fire, water and earth. Altogether ‘this makes twenty-four categories and these comprise the whole manifested world.

Maya, considered on the third or ‘impure’ level, is also known as *prakṛti*. *Prakṛti*, according to both *Vedānta* and *Siddhānta*, has three qualities or *guṇas*, called *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. It is difficult to find exact definitions for these words, since what they signify is the basis and root of all that is and all that happens. But, in a very general way, it may be said that *rajas* is active, *tamas* passive, and *sattva* harmonizing. *Sattva* reflects the light of Pure Consciousness, which is the One Unchanging Reality, and without which nothing could exist; *rajas* is the expansive energy of growth and movement, and *tamas* represents the forces of contraction, resistance and dissolution. In relation to the cosmic trinity, *sattva* predominates in *Viṣṇu*, the sustainer and preserver of the universe, *rajas* in *Brahma*, the creator, and *tamas* in *Rudra*, the destroyer. The action of these three qualities is operating continuously. In the absence of any one of them, the whole world would cease to exist, and it is their varying interaction that constitutes the substance of all aspects and levels of manifestation, subtle and gross, macrocosmic and microcosmic. In most books that deal with the subject they are explained from the point of view of morality or human action, and it is generally said that *rajas* signifies passion, *tamas* inertia or dullness, and *sattva* calmness or goodness².

1. It should be made clear that the physical organs themselves only represent the gross aspects of these ten ‘outer instruments’, whose subtle aspects are the faculties of the mind operating through them; e. g. the mouth, the eye, the surface of the skin, the feet, etc. are the gross aspects, and the faculty of speech, the faculty of seeing, the faculty of touch, the faculty of locomotion, etc. are the subtle aspects.
2. c.f. *Bhagavad Gīta*. Chapters XIV and XVII.

When the three *guṇas* are in equilibrium, *prakṛti* is quiescent; when their equilibrium is disturbed, the whole world of manifestation evolves. At the end of each cycle of existence the equilibrium is restored and the world disappears, to reappear once again when a fresh cycle is begun. This unending process is enacted in just the same way on the microcosmic scale, for all the impressions and experiences of the day are dissolved at night in sleep, to reappear when the individual being awakes.

At night in deep sleep there is no awareness of anything, and yet there is something that gives continuity to the experiences of each day. This substratum is the soul, which exists in several conditions or states of consciousness, called *avasthās*, but is independent of them all. *Vedānta* describes these conditions as the waking state, the dream state (which exists in the day-time as well), and the state of deep sleep without dreams. According to *Śankarāchārya*, all phenomenal experiences are included in these three states, which thus comprise the whole universe and are represented by the three letters of the sacred monosyllable *Om* or *Aum*¹. Yet the soul is something other than they, and, when it is considered in its pure essence, it is said, according to *Vedānta*, to be in the state of *turīya*, which means ‘the fourth’. This is not really a state of consciousness at all, but is the condition of Pure Being, which no words can describe, since it transcends all individual experience and the range of all human faculties. And it is the attainment of this condition which is the goal and end of all individual existence, for only then is the soul free from the illusion of *māyā* and from the darkness of *ānava*.

According to *Siddhānta*, it is for this purpose alone that the Lord has created worlds and objects of experience, which it calls the ‘impurity of *māyā*’. But *māyā* also includes

1. See *Māndukya Upanishad*. vv VIII—XI.

the faculties and organs of the soul, by means of which it experiences the 'external' world. For the soul is not an inert and senseless thing like matter; it is an intelligent and active entity, which is capable of learning and purifying itself.

To assist it in that process, Lord *Śiva*, through His concealing Grace (*Tirodhāna Śakti*), has also bestowed the 'impurity of *karma*'. The word *karma* literally signifies 'action', but it comprises three meanings; first, all actions or activity of any kind; second, the fruit of action or the effect of the accumulated tendencies of past actions; and third, the law which governs the experience of the results of action.

According to *Siddhānta*, under the influence of *ānava* and *māyā* the soul performs actions, which may be 'good', or 'bad'. This is what is referred to as 'two-fold *karma*'. 'Good' actions may be defined as those which help it to emerge from the darkness of *ānava* and 'bad' actions as those which tend to keep it further immersed in it.

As the outcome of 'good' actions the soul experiences pleasure and as the outcome of 'bad' actions it experiences pain, though these results may not take effect immediately. For, according to Hinduism, after the death of one body the soul is born again in another or on another plane of existence, and this chain of birth and death continues endlessly until it attains liberation. All these successive lives are governed by the law of *karma*, so that actions, which are performed in one birth, will have their inevitable results either in that birth itself or in those succeeding it, and each soul, when it comes into the world, brings with it a store of the results of the accumulated actions of, its past existences. In fact *karma* is the cause of rebirth.

By experiencing the results of its actions through repeated births, the soul gradually evolves from denser or coarser states of existence into those that are more refined and subtle. Finally, it is born in a human body, in which it may have the opportunity of coming into contact with a true religion, that can reveal to it its real position and show it the way

to escape from the darkness of *ānava* and attain ‘the feet of the Lord’. The whole process of existence therefore is a process of purification.

The chief means by which *māyā* operates is desire. Desire creates attachment, through which the soul, ignorant of its true nature, identifies itself with the various aspects of the ‘objective’ world that *māyā* creates. This is the bondage of *māyā*. As the result of desire the individual soul, or *jīva*, is impelled to act, and its actions produce results, good and bad, pleasurable and painful, which give rise to fresh desires and fresh actions. The accumulated results of all these actions have to be worked out in accordance with the law of *karma*, and so the soul is reborn again and again in an endless chain of births and deaths. It is in fact only desire that causes birth. If there is no desire, there is no *karma* and no birth. Thus to be totally free from desire is the equivalent of liberation. As the *Bhagavad Gīta* says: “Desire consumes and corrupts everything. It is man’s greatest enemy”¹. Purification is therefore mainly a process of weakening and eradicating desire.

From the view-point of *Śaiva Siddhānta*, God (*Pati*) alone is real, in the sense that He is changeless, and is called *sat*. The world (*paśā*), which is unreal, because its very nature is change, is called *asat*. Souls (*paśu*) partake of the nature of both and are therefore said to be *sadāsat*.

The soul has the peculiar property that it cannot stand alone by itself. It must always identify itself with something else. At first it is completely enmeshed in the clutches of *ānava*, but gradually, as its intelligence is clarified through the experiences of countless births, it begins to realize its true nature and to develop a yearning to free itself from the darkness of *ānava* and the bondage of *karma* and *māyā* and to unite itself to the ‘feet of the Lord’. To help it in this struggle, *Śaiva Siddhānta* prescribes four stages or ways of purification, which are called—*charyā*, *kriyā*, *yoga*,

1. *Bhagavad Gīta*. Chapter III. v. 37.

and *jñāna*, and through which each human soul must pass either in one or several births, in order to attain its goal¹.

An aspirant on the way of *charyā* worships through the means of temples and images, and performs all kinds of physical work in the service of God and His devotees, such as cleaning the temple and its surroundings, lighting the lamps, collecting flowers for worship and so on. Here the object of worship and the form of worship are entirely external.

In the next stage, that of *kriyā*, the devotee performs worship internally as well as externally, for he sees and worships a symbol of God within his heart, as well as in the outward form of an image. The duties involved include the learning and reciting of the scriptures, singing God's praises, performing rites of internal and external worship and observing all the prescribed rituals with the aim of purifying the mind. This is essentially a way of devotion (or *bhakti*) and demands from the aspirant an intense love for God in the performance of all the activities enjoined upon him.

The third stage is that of *yoga*. The word *yoga* literally means 'union' (the English word 'yoke' is derived from the same root), and, in Hindu writings, has several different applications. For instance, it is used to designate the various possible methods of purifying the soul to enable it to realize the Truth, such as the way of knowledge (*jñāna yoga*), the way of faith and devotion (*bhakti yoga*), the way of action (*karma yoga*), and so on. In the West today, what is generally understood by the term corresponds more or less to what is known as *raja yoga*, which may be called the way of consciousness and is primarily directed towards the control of mental and bodily functions. This *yoga* comprises eight steps. The first two relate to internal and external purity, and can be described respectively as abstention from harmful practices and the observance of virtues. The next three are—the adoption of bodily postures suitable for meditation, control

1. These four ways have a certain correspondence with the three stages of the Christian 'Mystic Path'—Purgation, Illumination and Perfection or Union, the first two—*charyā* and *kriyā*—being both included in the way of Purgation.

of the breath and learning to withdraw the senses and the mind from outward objects and impressions. If the practices prescribed under these five steps are followed, the aspirant will have achieved control over his mind and senses and body, and be in a position to apply himself to the last three steps, which are—concentration, meditation, and *samādhi* or the state of consciousness where all physical and psychical functions are transcended. In *Saiva Siddhānta* philosophy the word *yoga* is used more or less in the sense of *rāja yoga*, but with a somewhat wider application.

Each of these three ways or disciplines—*charyā*, *kriyā* and *yoga*—involves its own peculiar relationship with God, and each, if practised whole-heartedly, will lead to a particular state of heavenly bliss. Thus, on the path of *charyā*, the attitude of the devotee towards God is said to be that of a servant towards his master, and eventually he reaches heaven, or the state of dwelling with God. On the path of *kriyā*, the relationship of the aspirant to God is that of a son towards his father, and the end of this path is the state of living in close proximity to God in heaven. The *yogi*, or he who follows the discipline of *yoga*, looks upon God as his friend, and is said to attain finally the form of God.

But, according to *Śaiva Siddhānta*, none of these three ways can lead the soul to true liberation or *mukti*.¹ Although by following them it can to a large extent become cleansed of the impurities of *māyā*, and *karma*, yet the taint of *ānava* still remains. This darkness cannot be removed by the soul itself; it can only be dispelled by light from above, that is by God's Grace. After doing hard *tapas* and following all the practices prescribed, the soul begins to realize that everything is the work of the Lord, that 'good' and 'bad' deeds alike are both His action, and that by itself it can do nothing. Then it becomes ripe for the descent

1. This is the view of the *Śaiva Siddhānta* school, but many *yogis* would maintain that the highest degree of *mukti* can be achieved through the practice of *yoga* alone.

of Grace, and God, taking the form of a ‘realized soul’ or *jīvanmukta*, comes as the *sat-guru* (true *guru*) and appears before it, gives it initiation and bestows on it *Śivajñāna* or Divine Wisdom, which is symbolized by the opening of the ‘third eye’¹, situated in the centre of the forehead between the eyebrows. This removes its *ānava* and all remaining impurity, and shows it what has always been its true state, which is that of union with the Lord. This is the way of *jñāna* or Divine Wisdom, and here the soul’s relation to God is that of a lover and its goal is the consummation of the Divine Marriage.

The fruits reaped from the first three stages on the one hand and those arising from the last stage on the other, correspond to what are called in Christian theology, the ‘lesser’ and the ‘greater mysteries’. It is really with the approach to the latter that *Vedānta* begins. On the path of *Vedānta* there is only one thing to be done—namely to understand that there is nothing else but the One Reality and that “thou art That”, and never to forget this one essential truth—that is, in short, to know oneself and to remember oneself. By incessant and uncompromising concentration on this, the illusion of *māyā*, that there is something other than That, is dispelled, and there comes by degrees the realization of what has ever been and will always be the true, unchanging state of Reality. This realization cannot possibly be brought about by any psychological exercises or spiritual practices, nor by any amount of learning or intellectual study. All these are very necessary aids for purifying the mind and body, but they are all dependent on the human faculties, whereas Reality is something which cannot be apprehended by any individual instrument. For, from the point of view of *Vedānta*, the soul was never in bondage, and therefore there is nothing that can produce or be the cause of liberation (*mukti*), since that is the soul’s real state.

According to *Śankarāchārya*, realization of Truth can come through *viveka* or ‘discrimination’ alone. *Viveka*,

1. c.f. Gospel according to St. Luke. Chapter XI v. 34.

though a product of the human faculties, is nevertheless that which mistrusts them and all their creations. It is that which discriminates between the real and the false, the eternal and the transient, and finally leads the soul to the truth that everything is illusory except That; for, though it cannot give direct perception of Reality, it can reveal unreality, and that is all that is required. It is the basis of the ‘via negativa’, the negative approach—“not this, not this!” Its seed is that ‘divine discontent’, which is a man’s highest blessing. It is that ‘unknowing’, which gives him his true greatness, and vouchsafes to him the possibility of being ‘superman’.

Both *Vedānta* and *Siddhānta* (and indeed all schools of Hinduism) are emphatic that it is impossible to attain liberation or *mukti* without the help of a true guru¹. This is of fundamental importance and, without appreciating something of the real significance of the *guru* and his relationship to the disciple, no proper understanding of Hinduism is possible. The *guru* is “the Truth, the Way and the Life”, and no one can come to the perception of Reality except through him. In theological terms, he is the ‘means of Grace’ par excellence. He is in fact the embodiment of Grace, and the Lord and His Grace are one, just as the sun and its rays are one². In reality, the *guru* is the Self of the disciple; he is always there within, (“the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”), but the disciple’s perception is so clouded by *ānava* (or *māyā*), that he is unable to realize this, and the *guru* has to appear in physical form to reveal from outside what was inside from the very beginning. God, *guru* and the Self are not separate, and the whole function of the *guru* is to bring home to the disciple this realization³.

1. There are rare cases where realization of Truth has come without the intervention of a *guru* in physical form. Here God Himself becomes the *guru*, as it were, acting from within. But these cases are very much the exception.
2. It will be seen that a number of the songs which follow are in praise of the *sat-guru*, who in several of them is equated with Lord Siva Himself.
3. c.f. The Gospel according to St. John. Chapters XIV—XVII, and especially Chapter XVII vv 21-23.

Vedānta teaches that there is nothing except the One Reality—Brahman or the *Ātma*, and therefore the individual soul (or *jīva*) is also That. Consequently there is nothing to be done except to realize that one essential truth. *Siddhānta* says that the true, unchanging Reality is *Śiva* or God and that everything is His action. Therefore the soul (*jīva*) must realize that it cannot do anything by itself and that its whole purpose and function on this earth is to unite itself with God and become His instrument. In both cases realization of Truth is only possible through complete surrender on the part of the disciple, because what is surrendered can only be the individual ego, that is—*māyā* or *ānava*; for it is only *māyā* or *ānava*, which prevents the soul from realizing its true nature, that it is the One Universal Spirit and not separate from God. Unless the ego is ‘crucified’, the Kingdom of God, which is and always has been within, can never be attained.

The images of Lord *Śiva* as *Naṭarāja* (Lord of the Dance) have four arms and two legs, one of which is bent and raised in dance. The other stands on the small figure of a demon, which is writhing on the ground. This represents *ānava* or the individual ego, which is crushed but still alive. The standing leg signifies the Lord’s ‘obscuring’ Grace (*Tirodhāna Śakti*). After the soul has been engaged in sincere and constant struggle against desire and egoism through repeated births, the bonds of *karma* and *māyā* gradually become weaker, and it approaches the understanding that all is the action of the Lord and that its own true state is union with Him. Then the desire to be with Him begins to obliterate all other desires, and the operation of *Tirodhāna Śakti* has had its effect. But this understanding is only theoretical, and of this the soul becomes more and more painfully aware, the stronger its desire to be with God. It feels its own utter helplessness and becomes increasingly desperate. This intense yearning is necessary to soften it and make it ripe for the injection of the Lord’s ‘revealing’ Grace, or *Anugraha Śakti*. This comes at the right moment in the form of the *guru*, who gives the soul initiation and bestows on it Divine Wisdom or *Śivajñāna*.

‘Initiation’ is a word which is often rather loosely employed and which can have many different applications on many different levels. Its literal meaning is ‘to introduce for the first time’, and there are several formal rites of initiation in Hinduism similar to the sacraments of baptism and confirmation in Christianity. But on a higher level it is the inception of ‘new birth’ and corresponds, on the subtle plane, to the physiological process which gives rise to animal birth on the gross. For animal birth results from the initial meeting of a male with a female cell. Unless the female cell is in the proper state of maturity, the male cell will have no effect upon it, and in the absence of the male cell the female cell will, of course, always remain inert and sterile. Similarly, without the infusion of the spirit into the ‘water’ of the soul through initiation by the *sat-guru*, there can be no ‘second birth’. But the ‘water’ must first have been purified; otherwise nothing can take place. Just as the period of gestation varies with different animals, so also the interval between the moment of initiation and the actual realization of Truth may be longer or shorter according to the ‘ripeness’ of the disciple, and in certain cases the act of initiation can give rise to realization instantaneously. The external means of imparting initiation can take many forms—it may be given simply by a look, or by a touch, or by a single word or a single phrase or sentence², or even by a thought.

In the *Saiva* tradition one of the highest forms of initiation is the placing of the *guru’s* feet on the disciple’s head. In Hindu symbology, both in the *Vaishnava* and the *Saiva* cults, the ‘feet’ have a special significance, for the ‘feet of the Lord’ represent the point of contact between the Divine and earthly planes. God, or the Absolute, cannot be comprehended by the human faculties. They can only be aware of His trace or impression on the terrestrial sphere, and so it is His ‘feet’ which are made the object

1. c.f. The Gospel according to St. John. Chapter III vv 3-8.
2. This is called in Tamil *oru molī*, which means ‘one word’.

of veneration. It is the feet which dance, and it is *Naṭarāja's* feet, which are the symbol of His Grace. For, while the standing leg, which crushes the demon of *ānava* or egoism underfoot, represents the Lord's 'obscuring' Grace (*Tirodhāna Śakti*), it is the leg uplifted in dance, which is the symbol of his 'revealing' Grace (*Anugraha Śakti*), and the foot of this leg does not even touch the ground. The fourth hand, in the image of *Naṭarāja*, points to the upraised foot, giving additional assurance that that is the way to liberation.

The three hands, which stand for creation, preservation and destruction, and the two feet symbolizing Divine Grace represent the 'five-fold acts' of God, and the Dance thus signifies the whole of the Divine Operation in the world—in fact it portrays the manifested universe in its entirety and the whole process and purpose of existence. And this Dance is being enacted in the 'golden hall' of each and every creature.

The Dance is everything. It has no beginning and no end. It continues without ceasing. And it is the Lord who dances. Yet in His essence He does nothing. He is beyond the Dance and all manifestation, which cannot in any way affect Him. He is '*summā*'. This word has no equivalent in any European language. It is commonly used in ordinary Tamil speech in several different senses. It can mean—'idly', 'uselessly', 'simply', 'purposelessly', 'freely', or 'gratuitously', and when mothers tell their children to be quiet, they say: "*Summā iru!*" ('*iru*' is the verb 'to be'). In the book of the Psalms of David in the Old Testament appears the phrase—"Be still and know that I am God."¹ That stillness is the state of being *summā*. In His essence God is *summā*, and yet He dances without ceasing. In its essence the soul is *summā*, and yet apparently it ceases not to act. This is again the mystery of mysteries.

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1. Psalms XLVI v 10.

The contents of this book cannot be said to conform exactly to *Vedānta* or *Siddhānta* or any one particular school of thought, for their author was above all philosophies and systems. Since the majority of his followers were Hindus, his teaching was expressed mainly in Hindu terms, but he himself was beyond all distinctions of religion also. Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and agnostics would all come to him for help and guidance, for he had reached the summit to which philosophies and religions are merely paths.

Like a good doctor he knew what was best for each of his 'patients' and altered his 'prescriptions' accordingly. His teaching embraced all the *yogas*, and at the same time lay beyond all of them.

He was known as *Yogaswāmi* and took birth a hundred years ago¹ in the Jaffna peninsula in the north of Ceylon. He received his early education in a Christian missionary school and, either then or later, acquired a good knowledge of English. After leaving school, he was employed for some years as a store-keeper in the irrigation section of the Public Works Department at a place about forty miles south of Jaffna. During this time, in his early manhood, he must have met his *guru*—*Chellappaswāmi*² by name; and soon afterwards he gave up his job—and everything else—in order to follow him.

Chellappaswāmi, of whom several graphic descriptions are given in the songs contained in this book, was usually to be found in the neighbourhood of *Nallūr*, now a suburb of Jaffna town, but once the old capital of the Tamil kings of the place. There is situated the most important temple in Jaffna, dedicated to *Kandaswāmi* (*Murukan*). Close to the temple itself is a large building used to house the massive wooden 'car', on which the image of the deity

1. 1872.

2. The word *swāmi* literally means 'one who is himself'. It is used very generally to designate anyone who has renounced 'the worldly life' and is following, or thought to be following, some spiritual path. It is also an epithet of God.

is drawn, when it is brought out for all to see on the occasion of the yearly festival. This was *Chellappaswāmi's* favourite haunt, and the place where, it seems, he imparted most of his teaching to his disciples. He did not do anything, but wandered about as he pleased, clothed in rags and begging food for his sustenance. Most people thought that he was mad, for he would often throw stones at those who tried to approach him and abuse them in obscene language. Only very few had the purity of mind and heart and understanding to perceive his true greatness and to detect the unlimited wealth that he had it in his power to bestow.¹

He did not give instruction by means of long and profound discourses, and the essence of his teaching was contained in a few short sentences or aphorisms, which later came to be called *mahāvākyas* ('great sayings'). One of these, it seems, he would often repeat to himself over and over again, sometimes for a period of a year or more, after which he would change to another. A number of these are quoted in the songs translated in this book, but it will be seen that in general they can almost all be comprised in four principal sayings, from which, in one way or another, they all derive. These four, rendered very literally into English, are as follows:

“There is not even one wrong (or harmful) thing.”

ஒரு பொல்லாப்பும் இல்லை. *Oru pollāppum illai.*

“We do not know.”

நாம் அறியோம். *Nām ariyōm.*

“It was all finished (or accomplished) long, long ago.”
(or “It was all perfect and complete from the very beginning.”)

எப்பவோ முடிந்தக் காயும். *Eppavo mudintha kariyam,*

“All is truth.” (or “The entirety of everything is Reality.”)

முழுதும் உண்மை. *Muzhuthum unmai.*

1. The word ‘*Chellappan*’ means literally ‘wealthy father’.

It would appear that *Yogaswāmi* was only with his *guru* for a few years and that at a certain point he was driven out and told to “stand on his own legs”; and there is a story that, when he came to visit *Chellappaswāmi* in the final stages of his last illness, the latter would not allow him to enter the hut in which he was lying, but shouted from within —“Stand outside and see!” (*veliyē ninru pār*).

During the years immediately before and after *Chellappaswāmi's mahāsamādhi*², *Yogaswāmi* was living under a tree at *Colombuthurai* on the outskirts of Jaffna town. At this time he appears to have been practising severe austerities and in his outward behaviour to have followed the example of his master, for he would drive away those who tried to approach him. But gradually, as more and more devotees gathered round him, his austere demeanour seems to have been relaxed, and he was eventually persuaded to occupy a small hut in the garden of a house near the tree under which he had been living. This remained his ‘base’ for the rest of his life. There devotees would come to him for help in all their problems, usually in the early mornings and in the evenings. During most of the rest of the day he could be seen walking about, dressed like any ordinary man, in the busy streets and bazaars of Jaffna town, sometimes sitting in a small ‘boutique’ or the larger shop of a well-to-do merchant, sometimes visiting the houses of one or another of his followers. At times also he would leave Jaffna and travel to Colombo or Kandy or ‘up-country’, where the tea estates are found, if any of his devotees happened to be living in those places. Occasionally he would make a journey to India, usually in the company of one or two others. He was always *summā*, yet constantly ‘on the move’, but his movement invariably had one single purpose behind it, and that was to give his help to those

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1. The word *veli* means ‘outside’, but also ‘an open space’ and is the word used for the ‘Open Void’ or ‘Pure Void’. (see p. xi)
 2. When a great saint or sage leaves his physical body, he is said to attain *mahāsamādhi* or the great *samādhi*.

who needed it. And in this way the whole of his long life was spent.

Nearly all his devotees were ‘householders’ and engaged in some employment or other, and, apart from one or two exceptions, he rarely advised them to retire. People would often come and say that they wanted to give up their jobs in order to be able to devote more time to ‘spiritual practices’, but he did not usually encourage them to do this, since, for him, the whole of a man’s life had to be made a ‘spiritual practice’ and he would not admit any division of human activity into ‘holy’ and ‘unholy’. To most of those who came to him he would end by saying: “Now go and do your work!” He laid great emphasis on work, and “work for work’s sake”—that is *karma yoga*—was, like *Śivadhyāna* (meditation on God or what is Real), one of the ‘medicines’ that, in one form or another, he most frequently administered.

He gave no lectures and held no classes. His teaching was given spontaneously as it came, either at his hut in the mornings or evenings, or at some apparently chance encounter in the bazaar or on the streets, or may be, if a man was sufficiently fortunate, at a surprise visit to his own house. Most of what he said was usually intended for one particular individual, though others present would of course also profit from it.

Though he untiringly tried to raise his followers to the understanding that Truth lies beyond all forms, nevertheless throughout his life he did his best in many different ways to encourage and revive the proper observance of traditional practices, and every evening at dusk a lamp, symbolizing the sacred fuse, would be lit in his hut and certain devotional hymns sung in his presence.

As his followers became more and more numerous, he gave them work to do and encouraged them to translate into Tamil a few writings in Sanskrit or English that he considered to be important. In 1935, he made them start

a monthly paper devoted exclusively to religious subjects¹. In every issue would appear one of his songs. These songs, to which he gave the name of ‘*Natchintanaj* that is—’ Good Thought’, flowed from him spontaneously and might come forth at any moment. Any of his devotees, who happened to be present, would write them down as he sang, and sometimes he would write them down himself.

In 1953 he sanctioned, at the desire of some of his followers, the establishment of a place in Jaffna town, where they could meet; and later this developed into a centre, where they were able to practise meditation, sing devotional songs, hold classes in religion and philosophy, and generally carry on any activities useful for spiritual growth.

The name, which he gave to the paper, to the institution and to the organization which controlled it, was *Śivathoṇḍan*. *Śiva* is God, and *thoṇḍan* has the meaning of ‘servant’ and also that of ‘devotee’, so that the word *Śivathoṇḍan* signifies a ‘devoted servant of God’ or ‘one whose service is devoted to God’—that is, one who does everything that he has to do for God and not for himself. He must do his duty as a good servant; the results, whether successful or unsuccessful, are the concern of his master. As his actions are performed for God, he must execute them as well as he possibly can. Every act, from the grandest and noblest to the meanest and most trivial, thus becomes a sacred rite and then “work is worship”. In this way the whole of life is sanctified and the distinction between ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’ ceases to exist.

Everything is God’s work, and in one sense everything is doing *Śivathoṇḍu*, but man has won the unique privilege of being able to do it consciously. To make use of this rare opportunity is the best and easiest way open to him in this age, of purifying himself, subjugating his ego and attaining thereby that unalloyed happiness which is his by right.

1. At first this was printed in Tamil only, but later an English section was added.

Thoṇḍan means ‘servant’; *thoṇḍu* means ‘service’. But the word *Śivathoṇḍu* can mean both ‘service of God’ and ‘service by God’. And both meanings are applicable for, through sincere and persistent service of God, the *thoṇḍan* becomes an instrument in the hands of God, and God acts through him. Then all his service is done by God and “*Śivathoṇḍan* has become all *Śivaliṅgam*.”

NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

The majority of the songs here translated were sung for the benefit of particular individuals, and each was given a content, form and style suitable to the hearer and the occasion. In 1959 most of these songs and all of the prose writings, together with one or two of the letters, were collected and published in Tamil in book form under the title of *Natchintanai* ('Good Thought'). A second and more complete edition was produced in 1962. The songs contained in this book represent about half of those included in the second edition.

In every case a very literal rendering has been offered, coupled with an attempt to give the English version some semblance of metrical form, wherever it seemed possible to do this without in any way altering the essential sense of the original. A short title has been added to each song and to each of the prose items simply for ease of reference.

It is hoped that the main principles underlying all that follows will have been covered by the Introduction.

Certain symbols to which reference is frequently made in the text and some important, but somewhat specialized, aspects of the *Śaiva* tradition have been dealt with in separate appendices. Footnotes on details that seem to need some explanation have also been provided.

In cases where there is no satisfactory equivalent in English, Tamil and Sanskrit words have been retained in their original form. All Tamil and Sanskrit words and proper names have been printed in italics and, to avoid a superfluity of notes, the meanings of those appearing in the text itself have been given in a glossary at the end of the book,

except where explanations have been provided in special footnotes.

Preference has been given to Sanskrit spelling, since Western readers will probably be more familiar with that, but, where words have been retained which are of pure Tamil origin or which are more commonly found in the scriptures of the South Indian *Śaiva* tradition than in Sanskrit writings, the Tamil spelling has generally been adopted.

Long vowels have been marked with a macron, e.g. \bar{a} , \bar{e} , etc., ' \bar{a} ' being pronounced like the 'a' in 'father', ' \bar{e} ' like the 'e' in 'grey', \bar{i} like the 'i' in 'machine', ' \bar{o} ' like the 'o' in 'post' and ' \bar{u} ' like the 'u' in truth. The diphthongs 'ai' and 'ou' are pronounced as in 'aisle' and 'shout' respectively. In Sanskrit there are three sibilants, which have been shown as follows: *s*, *sh*, and *ś*, the pronunciation of the last being somewhere between that of the first two.