

Thirumular's *Tirumandiram*: A Spiritual Treasure Trove

S. Jerald Sagaya Nathan

Assistant Professor of English
St. Joseph's College (Autonomous)
Tiruchirappalli- 620 002
Jsnathan1981@gmail.com

Abstract

Tirumandiram, the seminal Saiva Siddhanta work by Tirumular is a Spiritual Treasure Trove. It contains information as to how one might live a divine life amidst worldly affinities. It beautifully blends the spiritual life and the mundane dimension of life and expresses a thread of unity that exists beyond the many differences of time, county, country, language, caste, religion, social status and emotional experiences. The aim of this research paper is to probe into the Spiritual treasures hidden in Tirumular's *Tirumandiram* and to highlight guidelines that *Tirumandiram* offers to human beings that they might have a healthy and constructive understanding of the human 'Self', its relationship with God and the created world i.e. Nature.

Keywords

Tirumular; *Tirumandiram*; Saiva Siddhanta; spiritual life; human 'Self'; God, Man and Nature.

Introduction

Thirumular's *Tirumandiram* is a seminal work in the Saiva Tradition of Tamil Nadu. It is also popularly known as the refined Tamil Agama (*Centamil Agamam*). Saiva tradition in Tamil Nadu has twelve *Tirumurais*.

Dr. R. Jegadeesan in the chapter titled "Tirumandiram kurum Valkkai Nerigal" in *Ilakkiya Pudupunal* states that The *Twelve Tirumurais* are called *tottirams* (stotras – devotional literature). They constituted the Bakthi Literature of Tamil Saivism. The philosophical literature of Tamil Saivism is called *cattiram* (sastras – philosophical treatises). Tirumular's *Tirumandiram* which constituted the Tenth *Tirumurai* enjoys the unique status of being both *tottirams* (stotras – devotional literature) and *cattiram* (sastras – philosophical treatises) (1).

The Form and Structure of Tirumandiram

Tirumular's *Tirumandiram* is voluminous with little more than three thousand stanzas written in Kaliviruttam metre, which is close to speech rhythm.

Dr. T. B. Siddalingaiah, in *Saiva Siddhanta in Historic Perspective* states that *Tirumandiram* is unique in its form and content. He also adds that the language

of Tirumandiram is simple but at the same time more difficult to follow because it uses symbolic language (50). Tirumular's *Tirumandiram* contains nine sections titled *tantiram*s. The length of the *tantiram*s varies and so do the subject matter. It is to be noted that the naming of the different sections of a work as *tantiram*s is not found in any other classical Tamil work other than Tirumular's *Tirumandiram*.

Tirumular: The Author of *Tirumandiram*

The biographical account of Tirumular is found in Cekkilar's Periya-Puranam, which give the life stories of all sixty- three Nayanmars (Saints of Saivism). Cekkilar's *Periya-Puranam* speaks of the life story of Tirumular under the title "Tirumula-deva Nayanar Puranam". Another account on the life of Tirumular is found in Nambi's *Tiruthondar Tiruvanandhi*. There is no much difference between the life history of Tirumular as stated in Nambi-yandar Nambi's *Tiruthondar Tiruvanandhi* Nambi-yandar and Cekkilar's *Periyapuram*. Nambi-yandar Nambi's *Tiruthondar Tiruvanandhi* precedes *Periyapuram*. *Agattiyar Vaittiya rattina curukkam – 300* presents the life history of Tirumular with variation. *Caturagiri tala Puranam* has many more additions to what is being stated about Tirumular in *Agattiyar Vaittiya rattina curukkam – 300*. All these biographical accounts on Tirumular has one thing in common that is the name 'Tirumular' was not the original name but a name that was give because of the act of the Siddha entering into the body of Mulan, a herdsman who died. Cundaran, the disciple of Nandi Devar transmigrated into the body of Mular, a resident of a village called Cattanur (Tiruvavaduthurai), in order to console the herd that was mourning the death of its herdsman. The rest of the legend is attributed to the play of Siva. The name of the Yogin in the body of Mulan became Tirumular. *Tiru*, the prefix in Tamil language means 'Holy'. The change in the name of the Yogin from Mount Kailash to Mulan denotes a transformation from one's mortal self into self which is detached from this world in all its aspects.

Tirumular's Purpose in writing *Tirumandiram*

Tirumular poured out his divine knowledge (Siddha-vidya) for the well being of all the people in the world. This idea is found in *Special Introduction* (In Praise of God), Verse 85) of *Tirumandiram*:

All the world may well attain the Bliss I have
Received
If the name of the lord chanted by the great ones
is repeated ... (14)

So, it may be deduced from the above verse that the ultimate purpose of Tirumular in writing this monumental work is Bliss to Humanity at large. It also proposes means to attain Bliss or Realization which is to chant the name of the Lord with utmost devotion, as done by the realised beings [*Special Introduction* (In Praise of God, Verse 85) of *Tirumandiram*] (14). The verses that were uttered by

Tirumular were considered to be a garland of holy hymns which in Tamil language meant “Mandira Maalai” (*Special Introduction* (In Praise of God), Verse 86) of *Tirumandiram* (14).

***Tirumandiram* in its essence is ‘Divine’**

Devanathan, the author of the book *Tirumularin Tirumandiram* which is subtitled *Kalladavarkaluku arivaiyum, katrvarkaluku thelivayum valangakudiya karuthu karuvulam* (A Knowledge Treasure that would impart knowledge to the illiterates and wisdom to the literates) states that Tirumular was a blessing to Tamil Language but Tirumular was humble enough to state that God blessed him to sing his praise in Tamil Language. This virtue ‘humility’ is a sure sign of Sainthood. In this line, one can state without any doubt that Tirumular is a Saint (13). According to Devanathan, the author of the book *Tirumularin Tirumandiram*, the nature of *Tirumandiram* is Divine. If one chants the verses of *Tirumandiram* meaningfully with full awareness, one is sure to reach God (13). *Special Introduction* (In Praise of God), Verse 99 of *Tirumandiram* has been cited by Devanathan to affirm his claim.

Three Thousand Holy Hymns, Mula in Tamil
composed,
Did he, Nandi, reveal for all the world to know,
Those who wake early at dawn and sing
understanding the meaning
Will win the splendid soft repose
Of the Bosom of the Lord. (15)

Thus, *Special Introduction* (In Praise of God), Verse 99 of *Tirumandiram* stands as a clear example for the altruistic spirit of Tirumular. Tirumular is ‘other’ centered in his approach. His Mysticism delves deep into his inner self and drinks deep into the realms of spirituality and surfaces to reach out to alleviate the sufferings of fellow human beings, which is mainly due to avidya or ignorance.

Uniqueness of *Tirumandiram*

Tirumandiram is philosophic and is called *Agamantam* in Saiva Siddhanta tradition. In Saiva Siddhanta tradition, Siva can be reached through two ways. The first way is theistic or the method of Bakthi which believes in personal god and devotion as a means to reach god, the second way is the method of Tantric which believes is yoga tantra as means to reach God.

T. N. Ganapathy, the author of the book *The Yoga of Siddah Tirumular* in his Preface to the book states that that *Tirumandiram* can be viewed in two ways: theistic and absolutist. Theistic way of looking at *Tirumandiram* would mean that it can be seen as a sacred work that deals with a personal or devotional relationship to God based on the method of bhakti and absolutist way of looking at *Tirumandiram* would mean that it can be seen as a work that deals with Tantric form of reaching God based on Kundalini-Yoga and jnana Yoga (xvii).

The word 'tantiram' in Sanskrit meant elaborate statement. It meant Agama or Scripture that has come down from tradition. Each *tantiram* contains several adhikarams (sections) which show the method of attaining the state of Bliss. There are 232 adhikarams in all. The whole work has been classified into three parts namely – *tantra*, *mantra*, and *upadesa*. The first three *tantirams* of *Tirumandiram* deal with Karma; the second three *tantirams* deal with *upasana* or worship; and the last three tantirams deal with jnana.

The usage of the term 'Tantiram' in *Tirumandiram* is unique as no work earlier to *Tirumandiram* had used it. Tantra is all-inclusive term in the sense that it is meant for all human beings. There is no discrimination on the basis of gender, caste or race. While Brahmanical and Vedic religions believe in social stratification on the basis of castes and their respective pursuits, Tirumandiram does not do so.

Treasures embedded in *Tirumandiram*

Tirumular's Tirumantiram which is divided into nine chapters, 9 tantras (tantirams) communicates the following information to the believers:

1. Philosophical views and divine experience, impermanency of the physical body, love, education etc.
2. Shiva's glory, His divine acts, classification of souls etc.
3. Yoga practices according to the eight-angled way of Patanjali.
4. Mantra, tantra, etc.
5. Various branches of Saiva religion; the four elements of Shaiva Siddhanta.
6. Shiva as *guru* bestowing grace and the devotee's responsibility.
7. Shiva Linga, Shiva worship, self-control
8. The stages of soul experience.
9. *Panchadsara manthiram*, Shiva's dance, the state of Samadhi, etc.
10. "Our body is temple, the breath is Siva, Nanthi, Natha and all" (Ganapathy 36-40). The Verses in *Tirumandiram* have a unique metrical structure, each line consisting of 11 or 12 syllables depending on the initial syllable.

Three Mahavakias enunciated in *Tirumandiram*

In a single reading of *Tirumandiram*, a reader can arrive at the following three great statements:

- The first great sentence is that *Love is God* (Verse 270, Tantra 1).
- The second great statement is the desire of Tirumular that all the beings in the world attain the bliss that he has received (*Special Introduction* (In Praise of God), Verse 85) of *Tirumandiram*).
- The third great statement is that the whole mankind is but one family and that there is only one God (Verse 2104, Tantra 7).

All these three statements seem to center on Love which is nothing but Bliss. This Love or Bliss can be attained by anyone irrespective of any segregating aspects. Bliss or Oneness with God can be attained through Yogic practice which demands doing away with egoism. To curb egoism, one must embrace all human beings as one's own kith and kin. The basis of union or yoga is Love. Tirumular is firm in stating that Siva can be attained only through Love. Thus, Tirumular's *Tirumandiram* can be seen as Siva Yoga. It is a process by which the jiva identifies itself with the Supreme Being i.e. Siva.

Tirumular is a God Mystic

Tirumular is a Mystic who sees God as a being which encompasses all beings. God pervades in all beings, henceforth, he is fully present in Nature and Human Beings. Verse 31 in the section Special Introduction (In Praise of God) of *Tirumandiram* affirms the presence of God in all created beings. Thus it asserts the mysticism of Tirumular to be God Mysticism.

The Earth is He, the sky is He! Well He be!
The Heaven is He, truest gold is He! Well He be!
Sweetest song's inmost rapture is He!
Him my love besought, from heart's central core. (07)

'God' according to *Tirumandiram*

Tirumular's *Tirumandiram* is considered to be a Saiva Siddhanta Classic. It is a pioneer work on Saiva Siddhanta tradition too. The four Saivite saints, Appar, Cambandar, Cundarar and Manikavachagar may be considered as religious men, Tirumular may be called the man of spirituality (philosophy). The four Saivite saints worshipped God as Siva in various temples situated in Tamil Nadu. They have sung poems in praise of gods and goddesses of various temples. They fell in line with Nayanmars and Alvars. They believed in personal god and intimacy with god whereas Tirumular is different from the above said religious men in this aspect. He believed that that god is abstraction. For him Sivam is "It" or "Adu" or "Thatness" or "Suchness" or "Paraparam". So Tirumular believed in impersonal god.

Non-dual concept of 'Soul' in *Tirumandiram*

Tirumular's *Tirumandiram* insists on the non-duality of human soul and supreme soul. Tirumular in the opening verse in Tanta One of *Tirumandiram* speaks of Non-duality of the Soul. He tells that the God descended into human body and helped the human soul which was a part of his self to face the dictates of karma by showering grace. The intimacy experienced by the encounter of the supreme soul and the human soul in the deep recess of human heart is termed as Bliss or Rapture (Verse 113 Tantra 1) (18).

Relationship between God and Man in *Tirumandiram*

Tirumandiram speaks of the relationship that exists between God and man. Verse 432 and 433, Tantra 2 of *Tirumandiram* states that Siva is the Primal One, the

architect who fashioned a framework and clothed human beings flesh and skin and blessed them with sweet life. The sense organs were subtly inbuilt and the body was endowed with mind and the power of cognition and wisdom to discriminate between good and bad. Thus human beings and human body was the artefact of God, well fashioned and executed. Thus, ever human being is precious and has moral responsibility to preserve the physical body because it has treasures unfathomable that God has enshrined. (67)

Celebration of human body in *Tirumandiram*

Tirumandiram is a unique Saiva Siddhanta text because it celebrates human body even when it affirms the fact that the nature of human body is transitory. Tirumular speaks of Body as a bag (Kaayapai) which contains many ingredients. Body contains within it another bag that is Maya bag. When the air or jiva leaves the body like a thief the Maya bag becomes like dust. The analogy of air leaving the body bag to a thief secretly entering in the house and leaving swiftly without the knowledge anybody is startling down to earth. It is utilising common day happenings to drive home some great truth, in this context it is teaching the devotee the truth that air or jiva may leave the body anytime. Thus, Tirumular like any other enlightened being disown body in favour of the spirit. (Verse 2122, Tantra 8) (332). The verse quoted above conveys an idea that is communicated by another Siddha song, "Kaayamae Idhu Poiyada/ Verum Kaatradaitha Paiyada" (The human body is just an illusion and it is just an air filled bag, empty and useless), which is often cited by religious leaders to teach their followers to disown their body in favour the spirit stating that the body is transitory.

Tirumular, who like all other Siddhas despised Body initially realising that God resides within, started celebrating the Body because it was the Sacred Vessel that contained the spirit of God and it was the temple that housed the Lord of Life.

Time was when I despised the body;
But then I saw the God within
And the body, I realised, is the Lord's temple
And so, I began preserving it
With care infinite. (Verse 725, Tantra 3) (114)

Tirumular after attaining the supreme realization that the body is the temple of God began to think in this line "Kaayamae Idhu Meiyada/ Adhil Kannum Karuthum Vaiyada" (The body exists in reality, so take the utmost care to maintain it carefully). Tirumular in verse 1785, Tantra 7 of *Tirumandiram* foretells that the people who have realised that their heart is Siva's temple by means of breath control and concentration are the ones who would enjoy the company of the saints who die to this earth and reborn to eternal life, people who lack this awareness are sure to be in the company of ghosts of the dead who are eternally damned. (279)

‘Means to Spiritual Progress’ advocated by *Tirumandiram*

Tirumular presents Yoga and breathing exercise as means to live healthy and live as long as 166 years in verses 727 and verse 728, Tantra 3 of *Tirumandiram* (114). Yoga demand breath control and concentration. The yoga that Tirumular upholds is Kundalini Yoga. God according to Kundalini Yoga is seated on a thousand petals Lotus on the Siras (head) and he could be reached through breath control and concentration (Verse 796, Tantra 3) (125).

God is seen as the breath that human beings inhale and exhale. The process of inhaling and exhaling air happens naturally most of time human beings are completely unaware of the movement of air into their body and movement of air out of body. Concentration and awareness are essential for following the movement of the air inside of one’s body. Tirumular tells that Nandi like the air the air we breathe in and out is subtle. The subtlety of Nandi is compared with the fragrance that is within flower by analogy. Singleness of thought is the means by which one can realise god within oneself and end the cycles of births and deaths (Verse 1460, Tantra 5) (226).

Tirumular considers Yoga Tantra as the supreme means to keep one’s body healthy and realise the God within. Grace of God dawns upon the Yogis when they course the Kundalini through the six centres, sitting immovable, and concentrating on the single aim. “The word kundalini generally refers to that dimension of energy, which is yet to realize its potential. There is a huge volume of energy within you which is yet to find its potential. It is just there waiting, because what you call as a human being is still in the making” says Yogi and mystic, Sadhguru. (<http://isha.sadhguru.org/blog/yoga-meditation/demystifying-yoga/kundalini-awakening/>). The Six Centers through which the kundalini travels are as follows:

Muladhara: coccyx, base of the spine, at the perineum

1. Svadhistana: sacral plexus, genital area
2. Manipura: solar plexus, navel center
3. Anahata: cardiac plexus, heart center
4. Visshuddha: thoracic plexus, throat center
5. Ajna: pituitary center, eyebrow center
6. Sahasrara: crown of the head

In Verse 1462, Tantra 5 of *Tirumandiram*, Tirumular tells that neither mantra, nor song, nor the sixty-four arts can sever birth and its bonds, but Yoga. Yoga is the supreme way to the Sublime and the yogic practices turn a person into a true tapasvin. Yogi realises God in Single-mindedness and becomes one with the heavenly beings.

Wavering in thought while doing yoga will lead one into the world of darkness says Tirumular in Verse 1463, Tantra 5 of *Tirumandiram* (227).

Conclusion

Tirumular's *Tirumandiram* is a Spiritual Treasure Trove that presents ways and means to attain oneness with Siva through Siva Yoga gaining the supreme realisation that one can live a divine life amidst worldly one. It beautifully blends the spiritual life and the mundane dimension of life and expresses a thread of unity that exists beyond the many differences of time, county, country, language, caste, religion, social status and emotional experiences.

Disclaimer: This research paper is not comprehensive but an attempt to give a glimpse of what Thirumular's *Tirumandiram* is all about.

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