

9. The Saints of Tamilnadu

EMBODIMENTS of love! The human being is a combination of *Naithikam* (morality), *Dharma* (righteousness) and *Adhyaathmikam* (spirituality). All three constituents are con-rained in man. Hence, to recognise the Divine in man, his humanness should not be divorced from his Divinity. Divinity is immanent in man. Men consider themselves as mere human beings. This is nor so. All of them are manifestations of the Divine. It is because men do not recognise this fact, all kinds of confusions arise in respect of human activities in the phenomenal world. Every person should develop the awareness that he is *Brahman--"Aham Brahmaasmi."* Only then will he understand his true nature. God is not distinct and apart from man.

Bhaarath has been conveying profound truths to the world from ancient times. It proclaimed the universal message: "*Lokaassamasthaas-sukhino bhavanthu*" ("Let all people everywhere be happy"). Unfortunately, because of attachment to the things of the world, the people have lost this sense of universal well-being and are wasting their precious lives. Worldly wealth and comforts are transient. Bhaaratheeya culture has glorified adherence to Truth and Righteousness.

There is nothing greater than forbearance

God is the Indweller in the human heart (spiritual heart). There is no meaning in going *elsewhere* in search of God. Realising this, men should lead a life of kindness to all beings. A man without kindness is an animal.

There was once a person in Tamilnadu who belonged to a place named Puumpuhaar on the banks of the river Kaaveri. He used to earn a living by weaving cloth and selling it. In the same place there was a rich man whose son was a naughty boy. This lad came to the weaver and asked what was price of the sari he was selling. The man replied: "Three rupees" (the price of those days). The lad tore the sari into half and asked what was the price of half the sari. The weaver replied- "A rupee and a half." The lad tore it again into two and asked what was the price of the torn piece. The man replied-"It is worth twelve annas" (three-fourths of a rupee). The weaver did nor get angry at the lad's behaviour. He was calm and unruffled. The young lad was astonished. He asked the weaver: "How did you acquire this quality of *Kshama* (forbearance)?" The man replied: "Forbearance is truth. It is right conduct. It is non-violence. It is a source of joy. It is heaven itself. It is the summum bonum in this world. There is nothing greater than forbearance in this world."

The weaver composed numerous poems in praise of *Kshama* (forbearance). This work is known as "Thiruvaachakam." Its author is none other than the Saint Maanikkavaachakar. Maanikkavaachakar, who achieved the highest goal of life by the quality of forbearance, brought glory to Tamilnadu by his devotional songs. Over the centuries many other saints known as Aalvaars were born in Tamilnadu.

"Everything belongs to God"

Here is another example: Among the various Tamil kingdoms, the reign of Paandyan Kings is famous. One of the paandyan rulers wished to develop his kingdom by breeding horses. He had a young minister in his court. He was a man of character, full of piety and devotion. He led a pure life. He led a life of integrity and dedication. The king gave him the necessary money and commissioned him to purchase horses. The minister set out on his mission with his escorts. On the way he saw a Shiva temple in ruins. There he saw a holy man, Shivayogi. Conversing with

the *yogi* and listening to his teachings, the minister stayed with him as a disciple. He lost interest in the mission of buying horses. He was immersed in the contemplation of God. He used the money he had brought with him for the renovation of the Shiva temple. This news reached the Paandyan King. He summoned the minister and charged him with misusing the money that had been given to him for buying horses. The minister replied: "I have not misused the money. Everything belongs to God. I have used the money as an offering to God."

The king asked: "Who gave you the money?" he replied: "It all came from God. You did not come from it. It was all a gift from God. And I offered it to God".

The king sent the minister to prison. But because an innocent man had been sent to jail, the king could not sleep or take food. The prisoner was singing poems in praise of God. These poems have become famous as "Thirumanthram." This work is esteemed as another *Vedha* in Tamilnadu. The author is known as Thirumular.

Such a sacred land as Tamilnadu has witnessed a decline in spirituality. Selfishness is rampant. Very few are filled with fear of sin or love of God. Fear of sin, love of God and morality in society have become scarce. People can experience God if they adhere to the path of truth. Very few pray to God for His grace. Most people pray for material benefits which are ephemeral. The sacred and precious human life is being wasted in the pursuit of trifles. Men are stricken with the maladies of the craze for wealth and power. What is earned should be used for the benefit of the society

There is one other disease with which all are afflicted to varying degrees. It is the disease of *Ahamkara* (egoism). There is no basis at all for this conceit. There is no reason at all for anyone feeling proud about one's wealth or any other possession. The only thing about which one should feel proud is one's goodness. People should cultivate love and cherish the feeling of oneness with all beings.

Embodiments of love! All your *bhajans*, penances and the like are of no avail unless you have a pure heart filled with love. It is like preparing food in an untinned vessel. It is bound to get spoiled. It is to develop a loving heart that you have to embark on the spiritual path. This pure love is the direct path to God. It is love which is unbounded and divine.

The love of God should not depend on whether your prayers are fulfilled or not. Remember what ordeals the sages and saints passed through in their devotion to God. They braved all difficulties and earned lasting fame as great devotees. Life is a challenge- Meet it! Life is a game- Play it! Life is love- Enjoy it! Life is Awareness! The best way to love God is to love all, serve all.

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