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Response to S. Gangadaran and Israel Selvanayagam

V.A. Devasenapathi

Madras

THE SECTION ON *The Communion of Saints in the Tamil Śaiva Tradition* deals with most of the prominent features. I feel that reference to “the penetration of Brahmanic values such as the Agamic ritual tradition and individual liberation” as contributory factors to the decline of the saints’ movement” (page 12) and reference to Brahmanic Hinduism developing a social stratification on the basis of caste” (p. 10) could have been avoided. It is good to remember that great value is attached to ‘Satsang’ in the Sanskrit tradition. This recognition will in no way diminish the value in the Tamil tradition.

In the prefatory portion of the *Tiruttoṅṭar Purāṇam*, Saint Upamanya is described as seated, surrounded by other saints. Suddenly they see a great effulgence going skywards. Upamanya gets up with folded hands to pay homage. The other saints ask him why, when he is known to pay homage only to the Lord, he makes an exception now. He says that the light they see is Saint Sundarar whose mind enfolds the Lord in reverence and love. In other words, Sundarar’s mind is totally God-filled. This is a clue to understand also the lives of the other saints described in the *Tiruttoṅṭar Purāṇam*. They allow none and nothing to come between them and their love of the Lord and His devotees. Perhaps to show us that love for Saints does not exclude love for the Lord, we have two accounts complementing each other. Eyavarkon Kalikkamar is scandalized that Sundarar is accorded reverence and recognition as a saint when he had the effrontery to send the Lord on a peace mission to Paravai nachiyar. The Lord Himself brings about a situation to reconcile Kalikkamar to Sundarar and make them join in fraternal worship of the Lord. Vi-

ranmindar, another saint, feels enraged that Sundarar goes past the assembly of saints without first paying them homage. It was not lack of respect for them that made Sundarar pass them by. It was his feeling of unworthiness to go near them. In fact he prays to the Lord to make him the servant of these saints. The Lord is pleased to grant him his wish and, gives him the opening words of the *Tiruttoṅṭar Purāṇam* and also insight into the worth of saints.

The communion of saints in the Tamil tradition does not have a structural organization and set forms. However, even the worship in temples on the Agamic pattern provides the opportunity for worshippers to participate in the worship in spirit. They listen to the chanting of the *Mantras* and the recital of verses from the *Panniru tirumurai*. The *phalaśruti* of the verses of the saints refers to the benefits—spiritual and temporal of chanting the verses. Thus the voice of an early century echoes down to succeeding centuries, making hearts throb in unison of worship. In the verses Tirujnanasambandhar sang, to bring Poompavai back to life from her bones preserved in a pot, we have a description of festivals all through the year. In mind and spirit we can be with Tirujñānasambandhar and other devotees and join in the worship.

A flexible pattern, so to say, the communion at the time of daily worship and festivals, has its own value. The Spiritual vibration generated brings about a fellowship, not only with devotees of the present but also with those of the past. The *Gurupūja* of saints illustrates this process. The visible choir may thus include the past and by God’s Grace, the future also. Verily, in the words of Māṇikkavācaṅgar, the association of saints brought about by the Lord is a

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wonder, while their redemption from bondage is a *miracle*! In the concluding lines of *Kandar Kalivenpa*, Kumaraguruparan says that the Lord, after helping souls to overcome their bondage, unites them with ancient devotees, to

enjoy supreme bliss. These devotees, he says, are those who, without any thought whatsoever of themselves, are engaged in contemplation of Divine Grace.