

A Mystical Masterpiece Is Unearthed

One of mankind’s deepest esoteric treatises boasts a new English translation. Long hidden, will it be restored to its rightful place among Hindu scriptures?

THE WORLD IS AWASH IN YOGA, IN laughing yoga and hot yoga, in five-star spa yoga, weight-loss yoga and birthing yoga. But few know the authentic sources, and fewer still dive into them. One such source, long sequestered in its original Tamil and a singular broken English attempt, has been freed from obscurity. The *Tirumandiram*, the mystical classic by Tamil Saint Tirumular, was released at a gala celebration in Chennai, India, on January 17, 2010. The ten-volume edition was produced by a team of eminent scholars under the direction of Dr. T. N. Ganapathy, sponsored by Marshall Govindan Satchidananda, President of Babaji’s Kriya Yoga Order of Acharyas. The ceremony’s guest list was a testimony to the importance of this text, including heads of the Saiva monasteries at Dharmapuram, Tiruvavaduthurai, and Tiruppanandal, and the Union Home Minister, Sri P. Chidambaram.

There is good reason to celebrate. The translation is of excellent quality and the printing is competent. The books have the merit of being precise in the rendering of Tirumular’s Tamil into English, taking a neutral, balanced stand on issues of philosophical interpretation.

There had been previous versions of the *Tirumandiram* (also spelled *Tirumantiram*) in English, but with different goals in the translations. Marshall Govindan tells the story in the introduction, “The *Tirumandiram* is one of the first texts to emerge in the West from the gold mine of ancient Tamil literature, which until recently has been bypassed by scholars outside of South India. While the Sanskrit literature has been mined and studied by Western scholars for more than 200 years, the ancient Tamil language literature has been largely ignored. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami,

founder of HINDUISM TODAY and the Saiva Siddhanta Church in Hawaii, USA, commissioned the late Dr. B. Natarajan to translate the *Tirumandiram* in the 1980s.... However, the need for a more accurate translation became apparent as Tamil speaking specialists pointed out that Dr. B. Natarajan had too often sacrificed precision for poetic grace.”

Truly, Dr. Natarajan’s previous translation mostly resulted from devotion. He was no specialist in linguistics or the esoterics of yoga, being an economist by profession, a brilliant man who boldly undertook a momentous task. But in a book such as the *Tirumandiram*, written by a sage of the highest attainments, there are many layers of meaning in each verse, and secrets apparent only to the initiated, refinements that are elusive and sometimes cryptic.

Marshall explained, “It became apparent that the non-specialist would need a running commentary along with translation, in order to easily understand the meaning and

significance of most of the verses. This present work fulfills this need and several others.”

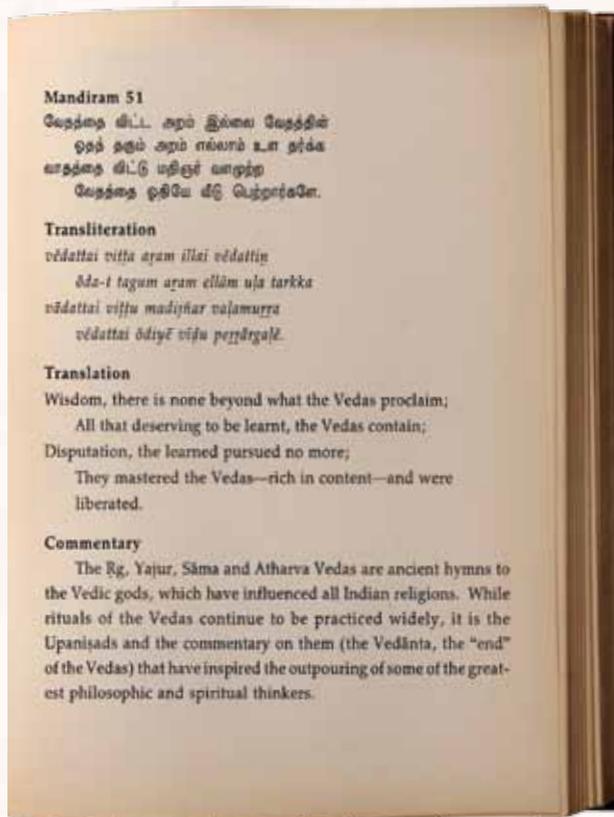
A Monumental Effort

Dr. T. N. Ganapathy, the team leader, is a widely respected expert in Siddha philosophy. He was the now retired Chairman of the Department of Philosophy at Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda College, Chennai. Dr. Ganapathy’s works are impressive in their breadth, discoursing on themes from Immanuel Kant (one of his bailiwicks) to Bertrand Russell and the Tamil Siddhas. He is at present the Director of the Yoga Siddha Research Project in Chennai, India.

His team of translators included T. V. Venkataraman, T. N. Ramachandran, K. R. Arumugam, P. S. Somasundaram and S. N. Kandaswami, all respected scholars. The book’s appendix brings two points of view on monism and dualism in Saiva Siddhanta, one by Sivaya Subramuniyaswami and another by T. N. Arunachalam, along with a chart on the thirty-six *tattvas* by Georg Feuerstein.

It was not an easy task. “The foremost difficulty was finding competent translators among the Tamil-speaking scholars on this subject,” explains Dr. Ganapathy. “The goal was so demanding that it made me stagger at times—myself being seventy-eight years young—and also made me wonder whether I was attempting the impossible.”

He continues, “My concern about the feasibility of bringing out this series with commentary was due to two factors. One was the technical challenges that old Tamil grammar presented. The other was that certain Saivites object to the writing of a commentary, especially in English, on the sacred text of the *Tirumandiram*, the only *Tirumurai* (sacred Tamil Saiva scripture) that is both a *cattiram* (philosophical treatise) and a *tottiram* (devotional literary product). This traditionalist view is supported in one of the verses by Tirumular himself: ‘Oh! Fools are they who try to describe the indescribable / How can one explain the One that is boundless?’”



An elegant rendition: (right) For each mandiram, or verse, the book presents the original Tamil script, a transliteration, the English translation and a commentary



"But there is also a statement in the *Tirumandiram* that can be interpreted as favorable to our task, which reads, 'The Lord with the matted locks stood blemishless / To those whose mind is like a waveless sea.' How can the Boundless One be bound in translations and commentaries? Tirumular provides the answer: only those with a clear mind, that is, a waveless mind like the calm deep sea, can comprehend it. Though the translators and commentators claim no such mind, we seek and obtain protection in the words of Tirumular."

So, is the commentary authoritative? Not exactly, says Dr. Ganapathy. "The commentaries are meant to be guides, pointing to the goal, to the essence, but themselves are unrealized, mere descriptions of truth." By keeping the translation as crystalline as they could, and relegating all speculation and scholarly analysis to the commentary, the translators created a book that will be interesting to several different audiences, from the expert scholar or the initiated mystic to the beginning student of South Indian mysticism.

However impossible it might have seemed, the task is now finished. Dr. Ganapathy states in the introduction, "In bringing out the entire Tamil text in translation, saint Cekkilar's words come before me: 'Though impossible to reach its limit / Insatiable love drives me to the task.'"

Scriptural Greatness

The *Tirumandiram* is one of the most important works related to yoga, tantra, Saiva Siddhanta philosophy and spirituality ever written (see the next page for a story of Saint Mular and how this book came to be). It is closely related to the *Saiva Agamas*, and often cited as an opus that summarizes them.

The book's first *tandiram*, or section, prepares the aspirant by defining the phi-

A yogi's treasure:

Ten volumes hold 3,000 years of yogic discipline as penned—more precisely, etched on palm leaves—by Saint Tirumular



HINDUISM TODAY

losophy of Saiva Siddhanta. In the second *tandiram*, creation and souls are explained, along with the five-fold nature of Lord Siva's actions. In the third, techniques for sadhana and yoga are laid out. In the fourth, mantras, yantras and *siddhis* are described and taught. In the fifth *tandiram*, the four *margas* (*charya, kriya, yoga and jnana*) are explained, along with four stages of liberation of the soul. In the sixth *tandiram*, advanced sadhanas that lead to *jnana* are explained. In the seventh, divine conduct is prescribed, which includes worship of the Sivalingam. In the eighth, high states of consciousness are elucidated; and, finally, in the ninth *tandiram*, the experiencing of Lord Siva is expounded and liberated souls studied.

Each *tandiram* takes up one volume of this collection. The tenth volume is comprised of a glossary, a selected bibliography, an index and an appendix containing two enlightening discourses on the nature of Saiva Siddhanta: whether it is ultimately monistic or dualistic. It is a discussion crucial to Saivites, the culmination of a centuries-long

A qualified translator: *The erudite T.N. Ganapathy approached the task with reverence and some trepidation, leading a team as talented as himself*

debate that questions the nature of the soul and whether it ultimately merges with Siva in *advaitic* union.

The publisher explains, "It has been a challenge to produce a translation that would not take sides in the important philosophical debate between Saiva Siddhantins [who are] realistic pluralists and those who see the *Tirumandiram* as an expression of the highest mystical states of consciousness accessible to the Yogi, [a stance called] monistic theism. The views of the two sides are in the appendix."

Is there a place in our fast-paced modern society for such a deep treatise? Is it meant only for yogis and scholars? Dr. Ganapathy addresses the question beautifully in his introduction: "If religion deals with ultimate Reality and society is a common system of ultimate values, then there must be a necessary connection between the two. To reveal this necessary connection is the purpose of the *Tirumandiram*." Dr. Ganapathy states that the *Tirumandiram's* ontology (a word naming the investigation of the nature of being) "is based on the notion of the Absolute not as a person, but as a principle and value, an Absolute Freedom or a Great Aloneness, called *taṇi urra kēvalam* in Tirumular's words." It's a book about freedom, liberation, *moksa*, nirvana or *vettaveli*."

From its unmatched lofty platform, the *Tirumandiram* proceeds to give guidance on daily life, prescribing humility, ahimsa, restraint of one's desires, courage, control of the mind, cleanliness and the steadfast cultivation of a pure and unswerving love. What else could be more relevant to our times?

TIRUMANDIRAM, 10 VOLUMES, 3,766 PAGES. ORDERS OUTSIDE OF INDIA US\$100 PLUS A FLAT SHIPPING RATE OF US\$50; ORDERS IN INDIA Rs. 4,400 PLUS ACTUAL SHIPPING FEES. TO ORDER VISIT WWW.BABAJISKRIYAYOGA.NET



HINDUISM TODAY



Tirumantiram, Fountainhead of Saiva Siddhanta

An Inspired Talk by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

I want to introduce you to Saint Tirumular who is the very fountainhead of Saiva Siddhanta, and to his scripture, the *Tirumantiram*, considered the final authority on subtle matters of philosophy and theology in this tradition. In fact, it is said to contain the whole of Saiva Siddhanta. Saint Tirumular is a theologian of our faith, but not merely a theologian. He is also a *siddhar*, an accomplished yogi. Our Hindu scriptures come from such great men, who have attained to the deepest realizations through their sadhana and their devotion. When their awareness dwells in the superconscious states resident in all men but penetrated intentionally by only a few, and when they speak out from that state, we consider that it is not man himself who has thus spoken but the Divine through man. Saint Tirumular's words are valued as a divine message for mankind.

The *Tirumantiram* delves into the nature of God, man and the universe in its depths. It is a mystical book and a difficult book. The original text is written in metered verse, composed in the ancient Tamil language. Saint Tirumular is the first one to codify Saiva Siddhanta, the final conclusions, and the first one to use the term *Saiva Siddhanta*.

Saint Tirumular codified Saivism as he knew it. He recorded its tenets in concise and precise verse form, drawing upon his own realizations of the truths it contained. His work is not an intellectual construction, and it is not strictly a devotional canon either. It is based in yoga. It exalts and explains yoga as the kingly science leading man to knowledge of himself. Yet it contains theological doctrine and devotional hymns. It is the full expression of man's search, encompassing the soul, the intellect and the emotions.

Saint Tirumular's story begins more than two thousand years ago in the Himalayas. His guru, the sage Nandinatha, who was also Patanjali's guru, sent his disciple on mission to South India to spread the purest teachings to the people there.

Rishi Sundaranatha, which was his name before he was sent to the South, had to walk all the way. Along the way he halted near the village of Tiruvavaduthurai, where he found the body of a cowherd who had died in the fields. The milk cows were wandering around aimlessly, lamenting the death of their master whom they clearly loved. The sight moved rishi Sundaranatha deeply, inspiring him to relieve the anguish of the cows. Leaving his physical body hidden in a hollow log, he used his siddhis, or yogic powers, to enter and revive the lifeless body of the cowherd, Mular—that was his name. He comforted and cared for the cattle and led them back to the village. But upon returning to the fields he was unable to find his original physical body. He searched and searched, but it was not to be found. It had simply vanished!

The rishi was deeply perplexed, and he sat in meditation to come

Rishi Tirumular's Mystical Well

Hotter than fire, cooler than water the Lord is;
His graciousness, none does understand;
To the worldly, He is far; but close to the loving ones;
More loving than the mother is He, with flowing locks.
Tandiram 1 Mandiram 8

Countless Gods pass away in regular succession;
The loving Lord with the three eyes alone is,
Eternal abode of grace He is; humans and Celestials
Know not that He is the most exalted one.
Tandiram 1 Mandiram 12

The compassionate One, the primal cause, He is everywhere;
Vishnu, abiding in the middle body, is He;
Brahma, the maker of the world, is He;
He is the world and the Holy Scripture.
Tandiram 2 Mandiram 391

The Primal One created the five great elements;
The Primal One created many aeons;
The Primal One created innumerable Celestials;
Creating, the Primal One sustained them, too.
Tandiram 2 Mandiram 447

If samadhi, in which jiva becomes Siva, is materialized,
The mala ceases, the soul-ness departs
In the great world the defect-less body exists
For those, deprived of eight-fold taints, becoming one with Siva.
Tandiram 8 Mandiram 2320

If one knows the light, the body is hidden;
If one constantly thinks of the perishing body, there is birth;
If one concentrates on the form of light, there is illumination;
If one melts in the light, He will become one with you.
Tandiram 9 Mandiram 2681





to some understanding of these strange happenings. Through his spiritual insight he discerned that it was Lord Siva Himself who had taken his body, leaving him to live thereafter in the body of the Tamil cowherd. He took this to be Siva's message that he should keep the South Indian body and serve in that way.

He accepted it all as Siva's will. Of course, there were certain advantages. For one thing, he could now fluently speak the language and knew the customs of the South.

Saint Tirumular began his mission of establishing the purity of the Saivite path soon thereafter when he settled down near Chidambaram. It was there that he began composing the *Tirumantiram*. Legend has it that the sage retired to a cave where he would sit in samadhi for a full year without moving. At the end of each year he would break his meditation long enough to speak out a single Tamil verse giving the substance of that year's meditations. Each verse composed in this manner was just four lines long, but the wisdom each contained was boundless. He wrote over 3,000 verses in all. This may not be accurate by the calendar, but it is true to the spirit and quality of the *Tirumantiram*, which has within it the wisdom of three thousand years of meditation.

It takes a bit of meditation to understand the *Tirumantiram*; it cannot be fully realized by merely reading or studying from the books. But the verses of the *Tirumantiram* are understandable if you learn how to absorb them into yourself. They are important because they tell about what our religion believes about inner, spiritual matters—about the soul and the world and their relationship to Siva. It is very important to remember that what a person is taught to believe creates his or her attitudes toward others and toward the world and stimu-

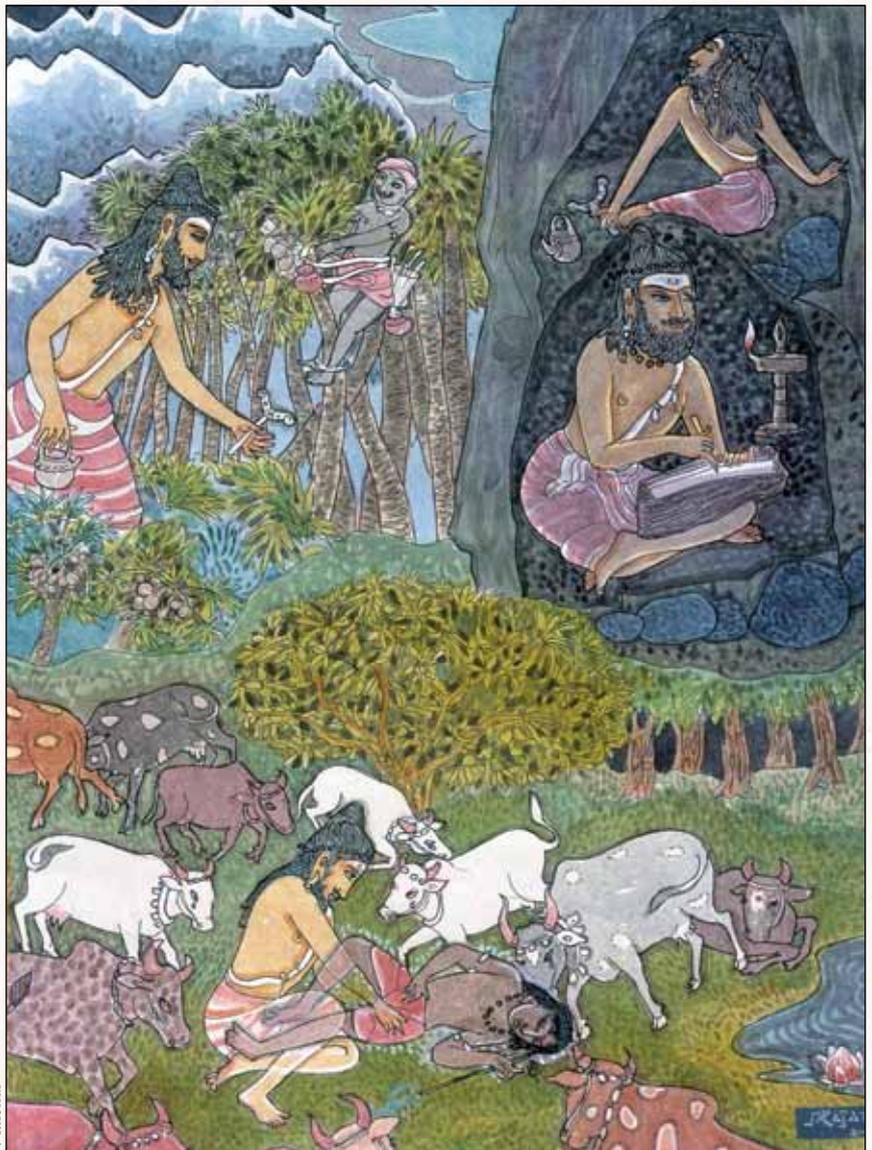
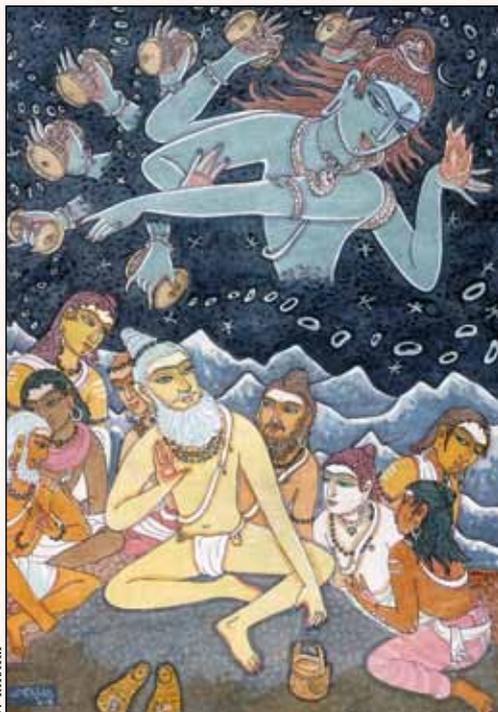
lates or suppresses desire. Beliefs create attitudes.

You must all study the great scriptures of our religion. These divine utterances of the *siddhars* will enliven your own inner knowing. The *Tirumantiram* is similar to the *Tirukural* in many ways. You can teach them both to the children and apply their wisdom to everyday life. You can use them for guidance in times of trouble and confusion, and they will unerringly guide you along the right path. You can read them as hymns after sacred puja in your home shrine or in the temple precincts. Each verse can be used as a prayer, as a meditation, as a holy reminder of the great path that lies ahead.

Understanding it is a difficult work, but don't be discouraged by that. Just accept that it could easily take a lifetime, several lifetimes, to understand all that is contained in this scripture, that it is for those deep into their personal sadhana. It was given by the saint to those who fully knew of the *Vedas* and the *Agamas*, and to understand it you too will have to become more familiar with these other scriptures, slowly obtaining a greater background.

The *Tirumantiram* has been taken from the past and magically transported into the future. Enjoy it. Study it. Meditate upon it. Let it become a part of your inner life, of your understanding of God, man and world. 

Source of celestial revelations: (below) Nandinatha shares Lord Siva's revelations with his eight disciples; (right) one of them, Sundaranatha, traveled far south and, in a younger Tamil body, wrote the *Tirumantiram*



S. RAJAM

S. RAJAM