

Barriers To A Blissful Life And Ways To Overcome Them According To Siddhars

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Abstract

Tamil society have respected *siddhars* as persons with incomparable power or capabilities and great compassion. Their songs are a literary heritage containing lofty philosophies. To those who are educated and have true knowledge, the verses are elucidations of very eminent spiritual philosophy in simple folk language and style. The *siddhars* taught the people to give up the triple desires and remove the impurities. They also show path to control the five senses and the mind which tends to follow the senses. The *Patinen Siddhargal Periya Nyanak Kovai* edited by V. Saravanamuttu Pillai and published by Irrattina Nayakar Sons had been used as the basic of this article. The aim of this article is to examine and to explain the evils caused by triple desires, five senses, mind, attachment, *vaacanai* and the ways to overcome them according to *siddhars*.

Keywords: Siddhar, God realization, yokam, triple desires, five senses, *Periya Nyanak Kovai*.

Introduction

For centuries, the Tamils residing in the Tamil Nadu have been familiar with the term *siddhar*. They have respected these *siddhars* as persons with incomparable power or capabilities and great compassion. Their songs are a literary heritage containing lofty philosophies. Some of their verses are sung popularly to this day at all levels of society even though the meaning of some of these verses is not clear. But to those who are educated and have true knowledge, the verses are elucidations of very eminent spiritual philosophy in simple folk language and style. Such *siddhars* continue to grace the Tamil soil from ancient times to this day.

The philosophy of the *siddhars* helps us to realize God who dwells within. To experience God, inner purity of the heart and mind and virtuous conduct are more important than external purity. Purity of the mind and love towards all beings are the peerless qualities cherished and fostered by the *siddhars*. They have great compassion for the people of the earth. They felt pity for people who, not realizing God who dwells within, believe in external rites and falsehood which are of no use but only bring disappointment and sorrow. Hence they have sung verses which indicate the virtues that ought to be practiced. The *siddhars* taught the people to give up the triple desires

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(i.e. for land, wealth and women) and remove the impurities. They also show path to control the five senses and the mind which tends to follow the senses. Today, the songs of the *siddhars* are available as Anthologies of Single Poems and the compilation called Nyanak Kovai. Of these the anthologies of single poems are more in number. But the Nyanak Kovai compilations are considered to have greater literary merit. There are many such anthologies of the songs of the *siddhars* have been published. Of them, the Patinen Siddhargal Periya Nyanak Kovai edited by V. Saravanamuttu Pillai and published by Irrattina Nayakar Sons had been used as the basic of this article.

Aim Of This Study

The aim of this article is to examine and to explain the evils caused by triple desires, five senses, mind, attachment, *vaacanai* and the ways to overcome them according to *siddhars*.

The Triple Desires

The *siddhars* strongly believed that the greatest benefit of having a body is (for the soul) to search for God and to realize Him within the body. They put forward many reasons for a person's inability to see Him within himself before the body, wherein God resides, is destroyed by death. Removing the obstacles to God-realization and bringing the mind to the proper path is the true way of the *siddhars*. Man should endeavor to remove the impurities that have resided with him since birth. Among the impurities to be removed, the triple desires are paramount. It may be stressed that there is no human being who is not immersed in these or at least affected by them. Those who overcome these triple desires become capable of realizing God. The *siddhars* due to their great compassion that wishes all men to follow the path of God and reach Him, have explained the evils caused by these triple desires, and the ways to remove them.

Desire for Women (*Pennaacai*)

Of these three desires, that for women is considered more binding. The *siddhars* strongly believed that the birth and death for the souls is caused by women and so are the illusions (*maayam*), senses (*intiriyam*) and *vaacanai* (*Periya Nyanak Kovai*.1949.58:201). In Saiva Siddhanta, this term is used to denote the effects of one's previous birth even when the soul has attained purity.

The world praises women's beauty using various terms and phrases. They are praised as *puuvai* (also meaning the *kuyil*), *paavai* (also meaning a doll or statue), *pon* (gold), *puuntiru* (Goddess Lakshmi seated on the lotus), *pokkisham* (treasure), *kovai* (a string of beads, a creeper), *kokilam* (Indian nightingale) (*Ibid.* 58:209); *mayil* (peacock), *maanikkam* (ruby), *maan* (deer), *ten* (honey), *vaanamutham* (nectar from the heavens) and a graceful, beautiful peacock (*Ibid.* 56:209). But the *siddhars* have realized that all these are lies. The *siddhars* feel sorry for the ignorant men who remain deluded, try to make them see the truth and thereby renounce their desire for women.

Yet the *siddhars* knew that it is not easy to give up one's desire for women. This *siddhars* further stress that many who openly say that they have renounced their desire for women, forget such words and thoughts when they see an attractive woman; this destroys *nyaanam* or knowledge (*Ibid.* 89:693). Uroma rishi describes the evils of carnal desire. According to him, there are false ascetics who have memorized some

Vedic verses and *mantirams*. Pretending to know the whole truth they go about giving advice; they cross forests and mountains bathe in rivers and eat roots and fruits: yet scorched by the fire of lust, they die (*Ibid.* 11:355). Cattaimuni who concedes that it is difficult to renounce the love for women, also shows that it may be achieved with God's grace. This is possible if one controls the senses which are the means for carnal desire, thinks only of the primordial being and reveres it (*Ibid.* 5:670), controls his flow of semen (*vinthu*) which is the cause of such desires, practices *yokam* so as to raise the *kundalini* (*Ibid.* 87: 693) and fixes his thoughts in the heavens. Such efforts will help to cut off such desire which is like a snake. Itakkatar says that those who do not remove their desire for women cannot think of heaven (*Ibid.* 58:230).

However, the *siddhars* have not denounced or degraded domestic life. Neither did they consider a householders life as a hindrance to salvation. They regarded women as their own mothers (*Ibid.* 35:107). Then what is the reason for speaking so lowly of them and saying that they are an obstacle to the spiritual liberation of men? It has been noted earlier that according to the *siddhars* themselves, renouncing the desire for women is not easy. This desire will disturb the single-minded concentration of the spiritual aspirant. If his mind falters and concentration is slackened, the period of spiritual practice will be further lengthened. For the mind to be totally involved in an object or act, one should ensure that the mind thinks about it continuously seeing an object often or repeating a word or phrase continuously helps one to achieve this end. Similarly to forget or dislike something thoughts which can create a hatred for it becomes useful. It may be said that the *siddhars* used this technique to help men renounce their desire for women. Their description of women as being disgusting could have been the outcome of such a technique.

Desire for Wealth

The desire for land and property (*mannaacai*) as well as gold or cash (*ponnaacai*) are no less harmful than *pennaacai*. Unlike carnal desire which to a certain extent is limited by age and health, desire for wealth has no limits. It may be found at all times in all people and is a great obstacle for the soul to reach its destination. These transient objects (*maayaipporul*) prevent the mind from seeking the Everlasting Truth (*meyporul*). These objects are like a dream; destructible. Even the world and the body which are thought to be lasting are not eternal. Only god is the indestructible, eternal truth (*Ibid.* 82: 233). The *siddhars* have tried to make the people realize that wealth (*man* and *pon*) is not merely transient but is also capable of veiling one's love for the Eternal Truth or God.

To stress further that wealth is not lasting the *siddhars* have listed out the different types of material wealth and add that they do not accompany the soul when it leaves the body. These are the country, city, house, wealth, and other treasured possessions (*Ibid.* 40:207). Other objects man may think of, mountains of reddish gold (*Ibid.* 44:207) many-storied mansions with large drawing rooms, beautiful halls, palaces surrounded by walls (*Ibid.* 43:207), elephants, armies, chariots and horses (*Ibid.* 41:207). Even the pleasures man enjoys on earth like the triple fruits (ie mango, banana and the jack fruit) and other foods of appropriately fine taste (*Ibid.* 46: 207), beds with cotton and flowers mattresses (*Ibid.* 45:207) colourful silks, scents, the lovely form one is blessed with, the colourful umbrella (*vankavikai*) and fan (*Ibid.* 47:208) can last only as long the soul resides in the body. The *siddhars* have stated very clearly that they will not accompany the soul to the next world.

Beside, those who think that life on earth is lasting and indulge happily in it, will wander and become weary like the deer that searches for the mirage (*Ibid.* 49:208). The *siddhars* also hit out at such men who desire worldly life by comparing them to possessed monkeys and declare that they will wander about like dogs and foxes (*Ibid.* 62:231). If one is driven by his desire for gold, he cannot attain God realization which is the very purpose of his birth on earth. (*Ibid.* 60:203). With such statements of advice the *siddhars* try to remove people's desire for wealth. Itaikkatar personifies desire as a cow and adds that if it dies, one may attain Truth-realisation (*Ibid.* 15:225). Konkanar likens the mind to a bull which has been let loose and advises that it be tied up to attain such realization (*Ibid.* 42 : 341). Those who do not indulge in idle talk but have a higher level of existence as their aim are freed from desires and reach Godly state. The *siddhars* show that one may reach salvation (*mutti nilai*) by renouncing the triple desires and the desire for God may be gained by getting rid of the desire for worldly possessions, (*Ibid.* 82:232). They also show that control of the five senses is necessary to remove the triple desires completely.

Control Of The Five Senses

The triple desires have their roots in the five senses. All beings function according to the control of their senses. Alugani Siddhar describes how the souls function out of fear for the power of the senses with a metaphor where the body housing the soul is the town and the five senses controlling it are the five kings. He also says of the body which is said to be eight spans of one's own hand. The body controlled by the senses seems to act independently and fearlessly.

The *siddhars* have tried to explain this power of the senses with the help of various similes and metaphors. Cattaimuni says that the mind trapped in the mortar of infatuation is pounded by the five senses as the pestle (*Ibid.* 17:673). By this he conveys the idea that these senses are the basic cause for all kinds of desires, including that for women. Itaikkatar declares that "those who allow their senses to roam like dogs are mad or possessed of the devil (*Ibid.* 99:235) and the sense organs like that dog should be chained (*Ibid.* 103:235). He also compares the senses to goats and their gratification as the forest where they graze. He advises that they be guided into the unique space (*eka veli*) which the space of *yokam* (*yoka veli*) where God resides (*Ibid.* 27:226). Besides, the five senses which are like a flock of goats, must be guided away from sense gratification which he likens to tigers (*Ibid.* 101:235). The excellence of those who have subdued their senses is also mentioned by the *siddhars*. When the nature of the senses is understood, transience may be overcome, and the senses are subdued. Only those who have attained this state see knowledge (*nyaanakkaatci*) (*Ibid.* 18:133). They overcome death (*Ibid.* 18:237). Itaikkatar explains briefly, the means to control the senses and the resulting benefit. When one realizes that all worldly objects or wealth is perishable, the senses become subdued and God-realization becomes possible.

Mind

The five senses are like the fertile soil in which desires grow. When the senses inform, the mind knows. Then it examines this knowledge and based on the nature of each information it accept or rejects it. This act is like that of the rider who guides the horse

according to the terrain it crosses; the mind too has to act knowing the good from the bad. Just as the well-guided horse reaches its destination without fail, a discerning mind helps the soul to experience the goal of its birth. The *siddhars* knew that a mind that follows the senses cause obstacles to the liberation of the soul. Those who read many books when their hands do something, eyes see something else, their deceitful tongue speaks falsehood and their action and mind are not united, will only fall into the pit of ignorance. If the mind follows the senses, knowledge is lost, warns Karuvurar (*Ibid.* 7:361). Those whose minds are not subdued cannot remove their egotism; cannot set aside anger that causes them to sin; cannot give up the pleasures of the body; cannot remain calmly in silence (*Ibid.* 32:677). Kakapucuntar stresses this when he sings that only when the mind is subdued egotism and anger will leave; only when the mind is subdued worldly desires are destroyed and God-realization is gained (*Ibid.* 29:735). God may be realized and attained only when the mind is subdued. Itaikkatar compares the mind to a snake that dances with its raised hood; but it should be controlled to become the snake within the box (*Ibid.* 104:235). He also compares the mind to a bull which should be controlled (*Ibid.* 113:236). Only when that bull is brought under control salvation becomes possible (*Ibid.* 13:225).

Those who attain salvation can exist for a long time in the solitary Brahman. Their body becomes firm and lasting, says kakapucuntar (*Ibid.* 58:743). He adds that they, with eminent deathlessness, are united in *pirammam* and take many *avathaaram* like a preceptor of spiritual knowledge (*nyaanaguru*), a king, Indra and the virtuous Trinity namely Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra (*Ibid.* 53:742). Thus the *siddhars* were of the opinion that by subduing the mind one may attain a state comparable to that of God.

Attachment (*Parru*)

The *cittar* verses also speak of life without attachment. According to them people should not be attached to desires, the five senses and the mind. Marriage creates attachments or bonds like wife, children and relatives. These last till death. Pampattic *cittar* says that it is unwise to hold on to them even after seeing corpses which can have no desires, (*Ibid.* 109:217) for one's children, wife and relatives do not die with the person who had been very attached to them in life (*Ibid.* 48:208). Konkanar points out the wife may accompany him up to the village common ground (*mantai*) and the children only up to the cremation ground. No one follows him till the end (*Ibid.* 81:347). "This is the bond that causes (further) births; do not hold on to it; cut it" advises Itaikkatar (*Ibid.* 19:225).

The *cittar* also show how this bond may be cut off. They use very effective similes to illustrate their point. Pampattic *cittar* explains that people should live in this world, unattached like "the tamarind fruit and its shell" (*Ibid.* 74:21), "the lotus leaf and water" (*Ibid.* 70:211), "the gryllo-talpa insect (*pillaiappucci*) which lives in mud but its body is free of mud" (*Ibid.* 73:211). He also compares the mind which feels such attachments to a horse. It should be subdued to be a riding horse; with knowledge (*arivu*) as the bridle fixed around its mouth and anger (*cinam*) as the whip. (*Ibid.* 78:212). In another verse this *cittar* likens anger (*kopam*) to a frenzied elephant. Its frenzy is the attachment. It should be controlled with a goad (*Ibid.* 76:212).

Pampattic *Cittar* also explains how people whose minds become deranged like the flies that fall into honey, may be saved so as to make them fly again in the sky (*Ibid.* 81:213). Kutampaic *Cittar* advises that a person who has freed himself of his

attachment to himself which manifests in his thoughts and feelings of *I* and *Mine* will be placed in the same high position as the *devas* (*vanor*). Realising this, the *meynyanis* or those who have attained true knowledge and wander unattached like corses, should not be attached even to the hand-cymbals they use to keep time when singing the praises of God (*Ibid.* 24:254). Alukanicittar explains that all relationships are evident because God the creator is forgotten. But to those who, thinking of God, forget themselves, emotional bonds of father and mother are broken (*Ibid.* 26:326). Feelings of attachments which sprout in the heart (*ullam*) should be plucked out, root and all; only then salvation is possible. According to the Tiruvalluvar those who are detached become attached to God (*Kural*.350); hence one should renounce worldly attachments and become attached to God. But even when one becomes free from desire, the power of the senses, mind and attachments, he cannot get away from the effects of his past *karma* (*vinaippayan*). So the souls have to rid themselves of the effects of such *karma*.

Vaacanaai

This word, literally meaning fragrance, has a specific meaning in philosophy. It refers to the predisposition or specific aspects of one's nature in the present birth due to experiences in his past births. It is also referred to as *vaacanamalam*. The *cittars* compares this to a monkey that enters the five senses and harasses them. It can hack the mind to pieces and prevent it from attaining salvation or true knowledge. If this *vaacanaai* is controlled, all those who have been unseeing like the blind may see the path of *nyaanam* (*Periya Nyanak Kovai*.51:603). The *cittars* also show the way to chase away this monkey called *vaacanaai*. The same *cittar* says that the effects of past *karma* is endless and he compares it to the water in a well which fills out even when emptied (*Ibid.* 55:684).

He also says that whenever it is hidden, it rises forcefully (*Ibid.* 55:684). The words used to denote forceful rising is *ekiri*. This is used colloquially to denote impetuous speech or behavior. The literal form would be *ehkural* which means "to rise suddenly with the impetus gained by kicking the foot on the ground" (*utaitterural*) and "to oppose" (*etirkkural*). He who has destroyed this *vaacanaai*, making it impossible to rise, is a *nyani*; he who defeats or thrashes it so that it becomes immovable is a *cittan* (*Ibid.* 56:684). To do this one must remain in speechless concentration (*mounam*) (*Ibid.* 55:684). This *mounam* refers to the last stage in the *attankayokam* known as *camaati*. Thus he points to *yokam* as a sure way to defeat this *vaacanaai*. In this light, the advice of the *cittars* and the practice of the ascetics (*turavi*) of not doing anything (*cumma iruttal*) is very difficult but very meaningful in spiritual practice.

Observing Good Behavior

Though most of the teachings of the *cittars* might sound "negative" in the sense that their advice is to control, subdue or renounce what are thought to be natural emotions or behavior, they also give "positive" advice. The advice may be stated very briefly as observation of good behavior or virtuous conduct (*olukkam*). In fact, this itself will overcome the evils that have been discussed in the earlier part of this chapter. To the *cittars* virtue is a way of seating God within the heart and realizing Him. In order to reach this stage excessive lust, drunkenness, avarice for wealth, evil thoughts and words that cause harm should be avoided. The mind that follows the senses should be set on the right path. The heart thus cleansed of evil must be filled with purity, love

and goodness. The *cittars* realized that virtue is to be cherished more than life itself and lived accordingly. While trying to show the means to the "great life without death" (*maranamarra peru vaalvu*) they advice people to guard their minds against sin. They explain that if a person commits sins, Yama, the God of Death becomes angry and takes away the soul. Hence a sinless life is necessary to overcome death (*Ibid.* 1:256). Sin here implies causing distress to those who are less fortunate than us, causing harm to those who seek our refuge, being deceitful to anyone and other evil deeds (*Ibid.* 86:348).

Besides, the *cittars* stress that one should not reciprocate the curses or harsh words (*vaithal*) heaped on him or cheat anyone even when the whole world cheats him. One should be free of all evil thoughts and deeds and live without harming even small beings like birds (*Ibid.* 25:260).

Konkanar says that evil deeds like speaking lies, killing and stealing have to be avoided (*Ibid.* 90:348). Katuvelic *cittar* warns that if any one commits unspeakable cunning/gambling (*cuuthu*), speaks lies or is fraudulent, his family and relatives (*curram*) too will be ruined (*Ibid.* 3:256). Akattiyar lists the following as the rules of righteous conduct to be observed by individuals: Follow truth (*cattiyam*) without fail; stand firmly in the state of union with God (*camaati*) through meditation (*nittai*); do not forget virtue and purity (*punniyam*); and do not argue loud out of enmity (*puucal kontu tarukkattil itupatate*) (*Ibid.* 9:308). Never uttering words that may cause harm is considered the best virtue (*aram*) because speech are the basis of good behavior or the manifestation of inner morality.

The *cittars* reprove immoral acts like smoking opium (which in modern times would include the abuse of all forms of addictive drugs) drinking toddy (or any form of liquor) and suicide (*Ibid.* 29:260). Anger should be removed, only then spiritual success (*citti*) may be gained (*Ibid.* 14:2250). While speaking of avoiding immoral behavior with self-control (*manak kattuppatu*), *katuvelic* *cittar* adds that begging, desire for gold (or wealth) or anything else (*ponnacai, iccai*) should be avoided (*Ibid.* 10:259). He also advises that being rid of these, one should seek the good path, search for God and be in the company of those who have gained true knowledge (*meynyaanikal*) (*Ibid.* 6:257). Thus, their message is not merely negative. Some of the verses of *konkanar* are also positive in their approach. According to him, food should be given to the poor and hungry if there is any. They should not be sent away saying "there isn't any today. We shall see tomorrow" (*Ibid.* 85:347). Charity (*tarumam*) should be done whenever there is an opportunity to do so (*Ibid.* 82:347).

Service to *periyar* brings happiness and other benefits. In daily speech the word *periyar* is usually used to denote parents and other elders. But in this verse it is qualified by the adjective *karuttar* (*karuttu + ar*) meaning "fullness or beauty of mind or thought." Thus here it means those whose minds are full of virtue and thoughts of God. As such the *periyar* could be the sages who should be approached and served in order that they, accepting these humble people as their pupils guide them in the path to spiritual bliss. This is mentioned in *kakapucuntar's* verse as anyone can vouch for the happiness obtained through service to the great sages (*Ibid.* 12:770). *Tirumular* advises, there is only one race and only one God ; think only Good (*Tirumantiram.* 2104). Akattiyar points out the inseparability of God-consciousness and a virtuous life as one should worship God as the Unparalleled Being and live on earth as a person of integrity (*Periya Nyanak Kovai.* 4:307).

He also stresses on the beauty, greatness and uprightness (*cemmai*) of the mind (*manam*). According to him if one attains such a mind, it is not necessary to utter *mantras* raise the *kuntalini* or control the breath. It will give the mind the energetic power of *mantras*,

manamatu cemmaiyanal mantiram cepikka ventam
manamatu cemmaiyanal vayuvai uyartta ventam
manamatu cemmaiyanal vaciyai nirutta ventam
manamatu cemmaiyanal mantiram cemmaiyame (Ibid. 1:313).

Love for all living beings, pleasant, truthful words, respect for and protection of the elderly, charity and other such virtuous acts purify the human mind and make it beautiful and upright. To make God shine within the purified heart, the *cittars* followed the path of *yokam* which consisting of eight stages.

Conclusion

Siddhars made it clear to the people that if they let go of the three desires which conceals the divinity within and thus prevent God realization, control the five senses and mind and observe good conduct, God will reside within them. Through the above ideas, the siddhars have tried to clarify in their uniquely hidden language that when the triple desires that prevent people from knowing their soul is gradually removed they would realize their pure state. The *cittar* have expressed clearly that the triple desires prevent man from attaining God-realisation. However it may be attained through the control of the five senses. Their stress on the virtuous behavior of each individual may be said to be their most useful advice to the society at large.

However, *yokam* is their path. They have dealt with the great benefits that a seeker of Truth or God may obtain by following it. They seem to have been concerned with teaching society to discard untruths, choose truth, practice *yokam* and attain Godliness. This may be considered their foremost message to mankind.

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Abstract

Later 17th and early 18th centuries marks the mass migration of people from India to Malaya to work in estates with majority of them came as merchants and to work in civil service. The majority group shared their religious practices by worshipping the deities. On the other hand, the minority group settled in urban areas and they initiated the proper religious practices by building temples for the main deities such as Lord Venkateswara, Lord Hanuman as well as Lord Venkateswara. After the independence of Malaya, many of them residing in the estates began to shift to urban areas for improvements in their life. These people began to have realization on the actual way of religious practices and were attracted to the prayers in the main deities such as Lord Venkateswara and Lord Hanuman. Currently, besides the prayers to the main deities, Hinduism in India has high level of spiritual awareness as well as meditation and Buddhist philosophy. Though there is a significant evidence of religious awareness among Malaysian Indians, Hindu practices practiced in Malaya still centre in the old-fashioned practices and the worship to deities. As such, this research intends to explore the reasons for the production of such ideas in local Hindu practices. Besides, the researcher also wants to find out the reasons in comparison to the current practices. This research also would shed light on the life of the local Hindu devotees, practices, and the order of their practices rather than the reality.

Keywords: Hindu Religion, Malaysia, Hindu Devotees, Malaysian Hindu, Hindu Practices, Great Deities.