

THE ŚAIVĀGAMAS, THEIR EXTENT AND AUTHORITY

The derivation of the term « *Āgama* » suggests that it is revealed. The « *Saivāgamas* » are regarded as authoritative and sacred by the Śaivas of all schools in the same manner as the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads* by the followers of the Vedic schools. The *Āgamas* and *Upaniṣads* are the outpourings of the mystics. The philosophy of the *Saivāgamas* is as deep and authoritative as the philosophy of the *Upaniṣads*. But, unfortunately the *Saivāgamas* have received much less attention from scholars, even though the extent of *Saivāgama* literature is more than that of the *Upaniṣads*. There are about two hundred and fifty three *Saivāgamas* (Twenty eight *Saivāgamas* and two hundred and twenty five *Upāgamas*). A number of manuscripts written in different scripts like Grantha, Nandināgari, Telugu, Kannaḍa, etc., in addition to Devanāgari are still available.

Though some of these *Saivāgama* manuscripts are available in Research Institutes, Manuscript Libraries, Maṭhas, Temples and other places, yet most of them are unpublished. Out of the two hundred and fifty three *Saivāgamas*, only about fifteen are published. Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondichery has published some *Saivāgamas* edited by Vidwan N. R. Bhat, Oriental Research Institute, University of Mysore, Mysore has published three *Saivāgamas* with Sanskrit commentary edited by Dr. H. P. Malledevaru. There are, in fact many more manuscripts yet to be collected. Among the manuscripts already collected, most of them are to be compiled and critically edited with good introduction. It is certain that they

will throw new light on many important aspects of the philosophical systems of India, the way of life, customs, traditions of the people and temple architecture. In this paper an attempt is made to state the authority (*prāmāṇya*) of the *Śaivāgamas*.

The *Śaivāgamas* are regarded by the followers of the Āgamic Śaivās, as the most authoritative works. Many systems of philosophy like Vīraśaivism, Śaivā-siddhānta etc., have accepted the *Śaivāgamas* as the highest authority. Let us examine the relation between the *Vedas* and the *Āgamas* based on the opinions expressed by the saints and scholars of the Śaiva schools.

Tirumūlar is supposed to be one of the earliest writers among the Śaiva saints. He says: « The *Vedas* and the *Āgamas* are both of them true, both being the words of the Lord. Consider the first as a general treatise and the latter as a special one. Both are revelations of God. When examined well, the truly great do not perceive any difference between them, even when some differences are perceived by others »<sup>1</sup>.

Aruḷnandi Śivācārya, another Śaiva saint, states in his celebrated work *Śivajñāna Siddhiyār* as follows: « As they expound all the truths the *Vedas* and the *Āgamas* are called 'Mudal nūl' 'revealed books' ». Their immeasurable meaning is given out duly by those who possess the grace of God. Others try to interpret them according to their own sense and found various schools. The *Smṛtis*, the *Purāṇas* and the *Kalāśāstras* etc., form the « Vāli nūl » « guide books ». The *Vedāntas* and the *Upāṅgas* form « Sārbu nūl » « aid books ». Nothing can compare, however, with the *Vedas* and the *Āgamas*. We cannot find anything to say to those who would assert otherwise »<sup>2</sup>. Thus Aruḷnandi Śivācārya accepted the *Vedas* and the *Āgamas* as the revealed ones. Hence, he emphasized their superiority and authority. Śrikanṭha Śivācārya also holds the same view stating that « the *Vedas* and the *Śaivāgamas* are of equal authority, as both proceed from the Lord »<sup>3</sup>.

1. *TM*, VII.276.

2. *SJS*, VIII.2.14, p. 230.

3. *SOS*, p. 9.

Nīlakaṇṭha Śivācārya states in his work *Kriyāsāra* <sup>4</sup>, « that the *Vedas* can be termed as *Saivāgamas*, because, they also emanated from the faces of Śiva. The *Vedas* have sprung from the breath of Śiva, whereas the *Saivāgamas* emanated directly from the faces of Śiva. Hence, the *Saivāgamas* should be regarded as superior even to the *Vedas*. The difference between the two is perceived only by dull-headed ones. Both the *Vedas* (*Nigamas*) and the *Āgamas* are revealed by Śiva, who is most trustworthy (*paramāpta*). Hence, the aspirants should acknowledge the validity of both the *Āgamas* and the *Vedas* ».

Śrīpati Paṇḍita gives an account of the emanation of the *Vedas* and the *Āgamas* in his work *Śrīkarabhāṣya* <sup>5</sup> a commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa as follows: Śiva has five faces, viz., Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, Aghora, Tatpuruṣa and Īśāna. The *Ṛgveda* emanated from the Sadyojāta face, the *Yajurveda* from Vāmadeva, the *Sāmaveda* from Aghora, the *Atharvaveda* from Tatpuruṣa and the *Āgamas* like *Kāmika* etc., from the Īśāna face of Lord Śiva. The author further states that the Vimarśarūpaśakti of Śiva possessed the form of the *Nigamas* (*Vedas*) and the *Āgamas* which manifest the tattvas. Hence, the person who makes a distinction between the *Āgamas* and the *Vedas* shall go to hell. Thus he warns persons not to make any distinction between them. Therefore both

4. *athavā śivaniśvāsaśrutibhyaste śivāgamāḥ /  
adhikāḥ śivavaktrebhyaḥ sāksādeva vinirgatāḥ //  
parasparāvīruddhārthāḥ śivoktā nigamāgamāḥ /  
alpabuddhibhiranyonyavirodhaḥ parikalpyate //  
nigamānāmāgamānāṁ paramāptopadeśataḥ /  
prāmāṇyamaviśeṣeṇa jñātavyaṁ tattvadarśibhiḥ //*  
*Kr.S., Vol. I, Upodghāta, St. 30-32, p. 4.*

5. *Sadyojātena ṛgvedaṁ vāmadevena yājuṣam /  
aghoreṇa tathā sāma puruṣeṇa tv atharvaṇam //*  
*Īśānena mukhenaiva kāmikādyāgamāṁs tathā /  
janayāmāsa viśveśas sarvasiddhipradāyakaḥ //*  
*vimarśarūpiṇī śāktiś śivasya paramātmanaḥ /  
nigamāgamarūpā syāt sarvatattvaprakāśinī //*  
*tasmād vedāgamārtheṣu yaḥ kuryād bhedabhāvanām /  
sa sahasrekulaṁ ghore narake patati dhruvaṁ //*

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*tasmān nigamādinām apauruṣeyatvam iśvarakāryatvaṁ  
ca yuktam eva //*

*Sr. Bh., Vol. II, 1.1.3.3, p. 37.*

the *Nigamas* and the *Āgamas* are revelations (*apauruṣeya*). Yāmunācārya, a vaiṣṇava scholar of great repute dealt with this problem in detail in his book *Āgamaprāmaṇya* <sup>6</sup>. He had taken into consideration all the aspects, and devoted the entire book to prove convincingly the validity of the *Pāncarātrāgamas*.

Appayyadīkṣita, a prolific writer, clearly proved the superiority of the *Saivāgamas* in his book *Sivatattvaviveka* <sup>7</sup>.

Īśānaśivācārya <sup>8</sup>, Śrīkaṇṭha Sūri <sup>9</sup>, Śivāgrayogīndrajnāna Śivācārya <sup>10</sup>, Śivayogi Śivācārya <sup>11</sup>, Sūryabhaṭṭa <sup>12</sup>, Nīlakaṇṭha Śivācārya <sup>13</sup>, Nandikeśvara <sup>14</sup> and a host of other writers and mystics clearly asserted the authority of the *Āgamas*.

The *Āgamas* are broadly divided into *Srauta* (which are consistent with the *Vedas*) and *Aśrauta* (which are not consistent with

6. *Ag.Pr.* by Yāmunācārya.

7. *Saivāgamānām eva sarvāgamebhyo balavattvavyavasthiteh, STV.*

8. *Sivāgamās ca vedās ca nityā eva pramāṇataḥ / nityā Sivāgamā vedaiḥ śivenādau abhedataḥ // ISGP, Kriyāpāda, Paṭala I, St. 70.*

9. *āptoktir atrasiddhāntaḥ śiva evāptimānyataḥ / na tābhyaṁ sadṛśaḥ kaścicchreya āptividhāyakaḥ // siddhānta eva siddhāntaḥ pūrvapakṣās tataḥ pare / āptas tu śiva evaikāḥ śivānyetvaśivā matāḥ // RTS, St. 10-11, pp. 5-6.*

10. *tasmān nityanirmalasarvajñapakṣapātarāhityayathārthāgrāhakavyaya-paripūrṇa - svatantrapaśupāśahanṭparamāptaparameśvara-praṇītatvenaiva vedāgamānām ca prāmāṇyām. SPB, p. 21.*

11. *vedasiddhāntayor aikyam ekārthapratipādanāt / prāmāṇyaṁ sadṛśaṁ jñeyaṁ paṇḍitair etayoḥ sadā // Si.S., V. 13, p. 57.*

12. *vedasyāpyāgamavadiśvarapraṇītatvād eva tathārthasādhanāt / na caivam anayor anyatarasya vaiyarthyaṁ // SSP, p. 3.*

13. *agamāścaiva siddhāntaḥ svataḥ prāmāṇikaḥ sphuṭam // Kr. S., Vol. III, Ch. XXIX, p. 234.*

14. *śivasamśkāriṇām caiva jñānadharmavatām satām / aṣṭāvīmśatibhedena proktaṁ śaivam iti smṛtam //*

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*ityāgameṣu vedeṣu vedāntopaniṣatsu ca / dharmas tu śāsvataḥ prokto mukter māheśvaro mahān // LDC, p. 72.*

the *Vedas*)<sup>15</sup>. If there is any criticism regarding the *Āgamas*, it refers only to the *Aśrauta Āgamas*. It has been clearly enjoined in the *Kāmikāgama* not to follow the *Aśrauta Āgamas*<sup>16</sup>.

The *Śrauta Śaivāgamas* strongly advocated a pure, chaste and holy life<sup>17</sup>. « The Kālottara preaches that no insect should be injured and no trees should be felled. Even flowers should not be plucked in making an offering to God. Only those which have fallen from trees and plants should be collected. Kālottara further forbids corrupt practices, such as sorcery and witchcraft »<sup>18</sup>. Thus the *Śaivāgamas* stand out preeminently even if they are compared with other sacred works.

Arul Nandi Śivācārya states « that the *Vedas* and the *Āgamas* are revealed by the perfect God. Of them, the *Vedas* are general and given out for all: the *Āgamas* are special and revealed for the benefit of the blessed and contain the essential truths of the *Vedas* and the *Vedānta*. Hence, all other books are *pūrvapakṣa* books and the *Śaivāgamas* alone are *Siddhānta* works »<sup>19</sup>.

A close study of the *Āgamas* reveals that they have attached more importance to the practical aspect of realizing the Fundamental Truth. They narrate clearly the method and procedure of worshipping God. In this respect, they are more practical than many other works.

It is very interesting to note the statement of Dr. V. V. Ramana Shastri on the *Āgamas* and the *Upaniṣads*, « The *Upaniṣads* teach

15. *āgamā dvivedhā jñeyā vedānām avirodhinaḥ / virodhinaś ca tatraite śrutimārgānurodhinaḥ // Kr.S., Upodghāta, Vol. I, St. 14, p. 3.*
16. *śaivāgamo'pi dvividhaḥ śrauto 'śrautaś ca sa smṛtaḥ / srutisāramayaḥ śrautaḥ svatantra itaro mataḥ // anyāni caiva śāstrāṇi loke'smin mohanāya vai / vedāvādaviruddhāni mayaiva kathitāni tu // vāmaṁ pāsupataṁ caiva vātulaṁ caiva bhairavam / na sevyam etat kathitam vedabāhyaṁ tathetarat // KĀ., quoted in SPB, p. 22.*
17. *ko māṁsaḥ kā śive bhaktiḥ ko madyaḥ kaḥ śivārcakaḥ / madyamāṁsaratānāṁ ca dūre tiṣṭhati śaṅkaraḥ // paśuṁ hatvā surāṁ pītvā kṛtvā palalabhōjanam / etair vai gamyate svargo nāraḥ kena gamyate // Vīrāgama, quoted in SCB, Vacana 142, p. 63.*
18. JKUH, Vol. VII, p. 40.
19. SJS, VIII.2.15.

the highest parokṣa Truth from the intellectual plane. The Āgamas have a practical end in view and they begin where the *Upaniṣads* leave. In other words, the Āgamas teach men how to make the parokṣa Truth actual facts of *aparokṣānubhava*, while they are still embodies »<sup>20</sup>.

Some Western scholars have criticized Indian philosophy as dogmatic. They said that reason is here subordinated to Scripture. We must know the field of reasoning and its limitations: reason holds good and should be accepted as *pramāṇa* in certain cases, but when it fails, other means are inevitable. For instance, in the case of ordinary experience, reason can definitely be regarded as the highest *pramāṇa* and its verdict must be final. The Scriptures are subordinated to reason where the actual experience of sense organs is concerned and in the same way reason gains the upper hand in questions relating to the intellectual plans. Ācārya Śaṅkara affirmed the superiority of reason only in respect of the experience of sense organs, while commenting on the *Gīta* « even if a hundred *Śrutis* may declare fire to be cold and devoid of light they cannot be authoritative »<sup>21</sup>.

One must realize the limitation of reason. The knowledge that is given by reason is mediate knowledge. This mediate knowledge always depends for its validity on some other knowledge. If that other knowledge is also mediate, then we shall be led on to a regressus ad infinitum. Thus, when we realize the limitations of reasoning<sup>22</sup> and when it fails to comprehend the Truth, Scripture comes to our rescue and helps us to realize the Ultimate Reality through intuition (*anubhūti* or *anubhāva*). This can be illustrated as follows. If a little quantity of salt is put into a flask filled with water and if after sometime, we look for the salt in the flask, can it be perceived? But because it is not perceived, can we say the salt is not there? If we speak in the negative, how far is our statement true? If the proper method is applied to evaporate the water, can we not see the salt positively existing? In the same way, through

20. SD, 10, n. 4 (oct. 1909), p. 122.

21. *na hi śrutīśatam api śīto 'gnir aprakāśo veti  
bruvat prāmāṇyam upaiti /  
Bh.GS, XVIII.66, pp. 294-295.*

22. *K.U.*, II.9, p. 6.

resorting to practice as enunciated in the Scripture, we can realize the Ultimate Reality. From this consideration, more importance and validity is attached to Scripture than to reasoning. Prabhākara holds that the only authoritative testimony to things beyond the reach of the senses and other means of proof is the Scripture<sup>23</sup>.

The message of the Scripture may appear dogmatic to those who are not competent enough to realize the Ultimate Truth. Dr. Radhakrishnan rightly observes: « what is dogma to the ordinary man is experience to the pure in heart »<sup>24</sup>. It is interesting to note the remarks of Prof. Karl H. Potter: « but when one examines the use made of appeals to the texts, one comes to the conclusion that the argument from authority is not as dogmatic as westerners are frequently prone to believe. In effect, what happens is that philosophers regularly appeal to authorities who say what they wish to say in more elegant language than they can muster »<sup>25</sup>.

An earnest seeker after Truth is not going to be satisfied merely by intellectual discussion and conclusion, but only by realization of the Absolute. Immediate knowledge through experience is infinitely superior to, and more valid than, mediate knowledge. Scriptures are statements of seers after the realization of the Reality. If at all one argues that the Scripture is not valid, then the mistake lies in him, who has not properly understood the scripture. Prof. Karl H. Potter rightly remarked: « it is frequently said that Scriptures can never be wrong, but men are frequently held to be wrong about what the Scriptures mean »<sup>26</sup>. Scriptures are records of the seers' experience. The experience of the seers becomes one's own actual experience when an individual acts as stated in the Scriptures with the utmost faith in them. Then naturally one will realize the authority and validity of the Scriptures. Thus, Indian philosophy in general, the *Vedānta* and the *Āgamānta* philosophy in particular, attaches the utmost importance and authority to Scripture.

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23. *KM*, p. 41.

24. *IPR*, Vol. I, p. 51.

25. *PIP*, p. 85.

26. *PIP*, p. 86.

Verbal testimony has been defined by Gautama as the testimony of a reliable person<sup>27</sup>. Mīmāṃsakas and the Vedānta philosophers have accepted the authority of the *Vedas*.

It is also stated in the *Pauṣkarāgama*<sup>28</sup> that *āpta* is one who conveys the Truth clearly and correctly as he perceives it through perception and inference. But Śiva is more trustworthy (*āptatara*), who in the form of transcendent joy is impartial, independent, omniscient, eternal. He causes this knowledge par excellence to manifest itself in the minds of Vijnānakalās. Thus the *Saivāgamas* have been revealed by Śiva. It is stated also in a manuscript entitled *Sivayogavarṇana*<sup>29</sup>, as follows: Śiva causes this knowledge par excellence in the form of *śabda*, in the minds of those who are competent enough to receive it for the salvation of mankind. The two-fold prominent function of *Sivajñāna* (the *Āgamas*) is very beautifully described in the *Svāyambhuvāgama*<sup>30</sup> viz., to realize the individual who is bounded by the three-fold taint, and to reveal the nature of Śiva. It is also recorded in the *Mṛgendrāgama* that at the time of creation Śiva granted this knowledge par excellence (*vimala*

27. *Āptopadeśaḥ śabdaḥ*  
NG, I.17.

28. *pratyakṣeṣānumānema yadi vārthaṁ suniścitam /*  
*yo vakti so 'yamāptaḥ syāt tasmād āptataraḥ śivaḥ //*  
*suprasannendriyagrāmaḥ sarvajñaḥ sarvagocaraḥ /*  
*pakṣapātavinirmukto yathārthagrāhakaḥ sadā //*  
*avyayaḥ paripūrṇaśca svatantraḥ paśupāśahā /*  
*pranūṇam ekaṁ tadvākyaṁ tathyaṁ śreyonidhiḥ sadā //*  
*sṛṣṭyanantaram eva saḥ śuddhādhaviṣayāṇaṇun /*  
*svaṁsusamsparsānād eva kṛtvā ḍṛkriyotkaṭān //*  
*sadāśivo'pi bhagavān nādarūpatayā gataṁ /*  
*ṣaṭpadārthamayaṁ jñānam anekacchanda eva ca //*  
*pūrvato daśasaṅkhyātāṁ śivabhedāṁ tathāparaṁ /*  
*raudramaṣṭādaśavidhaṁ tebhya 'vādīt kṛpānidhiḥ //*  
*Pau.Ā., paṭala I, St. 74-79 (Quoted SPB, p. 23).*

29. *Śivaṁ śivajñānātmakam avabodharūpaṁ paramaśive vidyate /*  
*śāndarūpan tu śabdārūpātmam eva paramātmakāraṇakaḥ*  
*parameśvaraḥ sṛṣṭikāle svātmani vidyamānam avabodharūpan eva*  
*śabdārū*  
*kṛtvā sarvānuiḡhṛkṣayā guruparamparayā yogeṣu pravartayati //*  
*Si.V., Ms., (R. 16809), p. 2, Govt. Oriental Manuscript Library, Madras.*

30. *athātmalamāyākyakarmabandhavimuktaye /*  
*vyaktaye ca śivatvasya śivajñānāṁ pravartate //*  
*Sv.Ā., Ms., p. 3, Institut Français D'Indologie, Pondichéry.*



*jñāna*) for the good of mankind<sup>31</sup>. Thus the *Śaivāgamas* originate from Him, and so they are eternal, *apauruṣeya* and valid. According to Agamic followers, the *Vedas* are general and the *Āgamas* are special, because they are more practical. The *Vedas* were also revealed by Śiva. Hence, it may be concluded that both the *Śaivāgamas* and the *Vedas* should be regarded as eternal, *apauruṣeya*, and of supreme authority.

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31. *sṛṣṭikāle maheśānaḥ puruṣārthaprasiddhaye /  
vidhatte vimalaṁ jñānaṁ pañcasroto'bhilakṣitaṁ //*  
*Mr.Ā., Upodghāta St. 21, p. 47.*

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