

Appendix II

Sources on the contact between J. M. Nallasvami Pillai and Vivekananda

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Later in the same afternoon, at about 4 p. m., there came a deputation to the Swami from Tiruppattur in the Salem District, a place now transferred to the North Arcot District. The Swami was, I think, seated in the same room as before. The deputation consisted of five or six persons, all Shaivites. There was no Brahmin among them. This would be easily understood, when one knows that they seemed – at least to me – to have been prepared and sent on to meet the Swami by the then District Munsiff of the place, who was later on in the same year to become the founder and editor of the *Siddhânta-Deepikâ*, now for some years defunct, and also the founder and organizer of the movement known as the “Shaiva-Siddhânta-Mahâsabhâ”, which continues still to hold a peripatetic annual gathering and has also given the inspiration for many local Shaiva Sabhas and their activities and annual festive gatherings. Mr. Nallasvami Pillai was well known to me and even very friendly. Though he was a strong advocate of the Shaiva cult and *siddhânta*, he wanted to liberalize it and propagate its tenets so as to make it acceptable to all, not only in India, but all over the world. He seemed to me – and I still think so – to have been fired by the example of the Swami and his activities and triumphal progress in America, England, India, and elsewhere. He was anxious to maintain the traditions of Shaivism, and to include the Brahmins, too, among the believers and brethren of the Shaivafaith. As the Swami was an Advaitin, the deputation from Tiruppattur was, perhaps, expressly prepared and sent to beard the lion in his den and to tackle him on some fundamental points of Advaita doctrine. The head of the deputation had a whole sheet filled with questions, and he told the Swami that he wanted answers. The Swami nodded assent, and wanted him to begin. The first question was, “How does the Unmanifested become the manifested?” The Swami’s reply came on at once without a moment’s hesitation, but it fell,

too, like thunder from the blue vault of heaven, paralyzing its victims and stultifying their nervous system and its workings. The same question was put later at one of the Swami's question meetings (in the *shâmiâna* put up for the purpose at Castle Kernan) by a young Mâdhva Brahmin who was then, I think, a college student and is now an active member of the Madras Corporation. He, too, got the same answer, couched in the same or similar terms, and with the same stunning and electrifying effect. The Swami's reply was, "Questions of how, why, or wherefore relate to the manifested world, and not to the Unmanifested which is above all change and causation and therefore above all relation to the changing universe and our *sâmsârîka* (transmigrating) life in it. The question, therefore, is not one which can be reasonably put. Put a proper question – a more rational question – and I will answer." The reply brought about an *impasse*, and his interlocutors felt that they were face to face with one who could meet and solve philosophic puzzles and queries of all kinds, a master before whom they must need bow in humility and meekness rather than launch forth in a game of dialectics. They seemed at once to have forgotten their carefully prepared and transcribed scheme and synopsis of questions in the manuscript they had brought, and suddenly, felt the wand of the magician in their front, and his enchantment was stealing over their minds and hearts with its occult power and overpowering grasp. The Swami at once realized the situation. Then followed a scene which it is not possible adequately to depict. This past master of the arts and weapons of Indian dialectics, this lion of the Vedanta with his conquering air and roar, the impetuous and rolling thunder of his voice, and his lower jaw symbolizing, as he once told me himself, his "combative temperament" all on a sudden became transformed into what seemed a long-lost comrade of one's youth or a tenderly-loved brother restored after a long separation and whole-heartedly interested in all that concerned one's welfare. The Swami began to address them in a strain and in tones captivating all his listeners and all who were present. He spoke somewhat as follows: The best way to serve and seek God is to serve the needy, to feed the hungry, to console the stricken, to help the fallen and friendless, to attend upon and serve those who are ill and require service, and so on and on. The deputation kept listening while the Swami's heart went out to them in a fervour of passionate exhortation to serve their fellow-men. It seemed as if after all they had met the one messenger of joy and peace from heaven for whom they had been searching in vain, one in whom there was no doubt or equivocation, a master who had searched their hearts and finding the void in them, had supplied the pabulum they needed, had taught them the central truth of life and of deliverance from its troubles. The shades of evening fell, they offered their homage at the

feet of the saint; and as they took their departure, their countenances showed traces of a new light having touched their hearts and given them a new impulse to life and work.

K. M. Balasubramaniam

(From: K. M. Balasubramaniam, *The Life of J. M. Nallaswami Pillai*. Tiruchirapalli: Githa Press, 1965, pp. ix, 122–125)

(The description of the historic meeting between Swami Vivekananda and Mr. Nallaswami Pillai is entirely based on the faithful account of it given by the late Sri Isaana Sivaacharya Swamigal at a public meeting at Chennimalai in 1947. The Sivaacharya authenticated with his word of honour and averred that he, as a youth had had it described to him in all details by the late Mr. Nallaswami himself.)

Innumerable were the receptions that the enthusiastic public of Madras arranged in honour of the Swamiji. The glorious and eloquent addresses that the Swamiji himself delivered then are also too well known. They have become literature on Hindu Religion. In one of these meetings held in honour of Vivekananda, Mr. Nallaswami Pillai had to take part. His pre-eminent position in the religious world as a powerful exponent of Saivism could not be ignored by the people who were in charge of the Swamiji's reception. In the course of the speech extolling the services of Swami Vivekananda, Mr. Nallaswami Pillai naturally enough made references to Saint Gnanasambandar and his unrivalled services to Saivism. Of course, he also said something about his pet creed of Agamantam and the principal features thereof. The great Swamiji was very much struck with those features of Saiva Siddhantam that were in vogue in the Tamil country, It was strange that he had not heard about these things. He confessed to a sense of regret that he had not known of them before. Naturally, like a true searcher after truth that he was, the Swamiji was curious to know something more about them in detail. He cordially invited Mr. Pillai to come to him and have a talk. There took place a meeting between the two – the redoubtable champion of the Idealistic View and the resourceful advocate of Suddhādvaita Saivism.

The interesting and epoch-making talk between the pair of savants of two different sects of Hinduism took place at Mylapore to the amazement of all. To begin with, Swami Vivekananda expressed his pleasant surprise at the interesting story of St. Sambandar. Then the conversation drifted to the essential tenets of Siddhantam. Mr. Nallaswami Pillai postulated the existence of the Tripadartha i. e. Pathi, Pasu and Pāsam, which according

to the Siddhantic School are the sheet-anchor of its metaphysics. "Belief in the eternal existence of these three fundamental entities constituted the bed-rock and the back-bone of Siddhanta Saivism. On the ultimate analysis of the world, said Mr. Pillai, everything in the universe, the seen and the unseen resolves itself into one of the three eternal Verities, They are God, Soul and Pasam or Bondage." Needless it is to point out that this is entirely opposed to the Vedantic doctrine of Vivekananda. There is only one thing and that is God. It is otherwise called the Self. All other things we see are nothing, mere illusion, Maya. And it is here that the difference comes in and it was on these points that Mr. Pillai dwelt in detail in order to completely clarify them. "The conception of the Monistic Maya is altogether different from the conception of Siddhantic Maya," continued Mr. J. M. N. "The former means illusion, a negation, a non-substance while the latter means a positive substance that not merely exists but is also eternal. There is such a thing as soul which is also eternal and which has a distinct existence. God is at once a separate entity and also one with souls and the universe." Of course, it is impossible for us so easily to give a detailed account of what all Mr. Nallaswami spoke on that occasion to the Swamiji. But let us only consider the fact namely that, in spite of the initial immunity of the Swamiji to any conversion, in the course of the talk he, however, saw the entire beauty of the conception. Visishtadvaitam, of course, Swami Vivekananda had known and that too very well. But Sri Kanta's commentary and the Siddhantic edifice based upon the Saiva Agamas he had not been familiar with. When Mr. Nallaswami Pillai had spent much of his energy, intelligence and ingenuity in completely presenting to the Swamiji a comprehensive picture of Agamantam, the latter became perfectly convinced that the doctrines of Saiva Siddhantam were altogether logical and perfect. But then, he asked Mr. Nallaswami Pillai as follows:

"Would it not be a source of greater help and clarity if, instead of these three (i. e. Pathi, Pasu and Pasam) a few more verities were invented and added as the constituent elements of the universe?"[1]

Mr. Pillai: "Is it not a fact that everything has a definition based on a clear analysis of the thing?"

Swamiji: "Yes, of course"

Mr. Pillai: "The Siddhantins have by their experience postulated these three entities as fundamental and have given the definition of each one in clear and unmistakable terms. For example, God is Pure Intelligence, Love and Light Who knows everything by Himself and enables souls to know. He exists by Himself and enables all else to exist. The soul is an intelligent being no doubt but it cannot by itself

and without the aid of God see or know anything. Pasam or the world cannot know anything; it is insentient. God is all-knowledge; soul is capable of knowledge but is saturated with impurity or wrapped in darkness and the world is unknowing and incapable of knowing. This unintelligent world (Pasam) is neither the All-knowing God nor the soul, which is ignorance. Each one of the three has a separate and exhaustive definition and everything we know must come under one head or the other. So far as we have been able to see, there cannot possibly be a fourth thing with a distinct definition other than these three.

“If, however, the Swamiji or some one else could kindly mention any such extra entity, we can certainly add it on to these three things we have already known.”

The great Swami Vivekananda was unable to conceive of any thing that could not be possibly brought under the head of one or the other of these three entities. Hence he magnanimously confessed to his inability to see anything in addition to these three and thanked and complimented Mr. Nallaswami Pillai. And as we have already mentioned the Swamiji expressed his wish that he had known about these things earlier. Mr. Pillai, after discussing with Swamiji some other knotty problems like the origin of the universe or the cause of creation etc. and clearly explaining the answers furnished by Siddhantam to these baffling questions, sincerely thanked that High-Priest of Hinduism and took leave of him with pleasure.

Pleasure and pride Mr. Pillai must have felt in the highest degree possible. And who would have been more perfectly justified than he? The pleasure was at the fact that God Siva, the All-Love had so contrived to arrange for such an historic interview between himself and the Swamiji as would otherwise have been certainly well-nigh impossible. It is also stated that the immortal H. H. Bhaskara Sethupathi, the then Rajah of Ramnad had sponsored this interview. The pride of course, was born from the conviction his Siddhantam had wrought in the sage.!

[1] (Editor:) This passage has a parallel to a note in *Siddhanta Deepika* 1 (1897/1898) 119–120, probably written by Nallasvami:

The October number of the ‘Awakened India’ has a short appreciative notice of our last two issues and proceeds to say, “An another side aims at establishing the preference of Sivite Siddhanta over the Vedanta. The Vedantin welcomes all such attempts and says, ‘so long as it is a mere matter of theory why assume only three

padarthas, assume three hundred as well, if by that means, you can simplify the problem and put an end to all metaphysical wrangling.[']” We appreciate no doubt the good nature which prompted the observation but we fail to see neither logic nor truth in it? All systems divide themselves into a code of practice, moral and spiritual and the exposition of a metaphysical or natural Theory as to the nature of things, and their ultimate origin or resolution.