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THE SIDDHA WORSHIP IN MALAYSIA:
AN INTRODUCTION

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Introduction
Malaysia is a multiracial country with 58% of the population being made up of Malays, 25% Chinese, 7% Indians and 10% other ethnic groups. Though Islam is the official religion, the others also have religious freedom. Most of the Indians follow Shaivism or Vaishnavism. But the Sanits are more on number. Even while the organic way of worship flourishes, Siddha worship seems to have made an impact among the Indians for the past 20 years. It has become more intense during the past 5 years.

Siddhar is one who places his mind entirely on Siva, subdues it and he himself becomes Siva. The siddhas who worship the Ānanda (soul) as Śiva. This was the central idea of their way of life. In the study of the Siddhas, it must be understood that placing the mind totally on Śiva actually means placing it on the soul. Thus those who realize the soul realize Śiva. Such people are the ones fit to be called Siddhas. It may be concluded that the siddhas were of the opinion that it is not necessary to search for God outside. He is in every living being. The aim in life is to know Him and obtain His grace.

Siddha worship is a form of guru worship. The siddhas are worshipped as the spiritual guru and also as Paramout God. The siddha worship is based on the internal / personal form of worship (akara/pata).

Objective of the study
1. To identify the causes for the spread of siddha worship in Malaysia.
2. To bring out the effects / results of this siddha worship in Malaysia.
3. To create a base for a complete/comprehensive study regarding the worship of the siddhas.
Causes for the spread of the Siddhar Belief in Malaysia

There are many reasons for the belief in the Siddhars to gain popularity in Malaysia. Of these, the Agastyo Sammarga Sangam, palm-leaf manuscripts, siddha medicine self-realisation courses and media are discussed here.

Agastyo Sammarga Sangam

The Malaysian Tamils did not know much about the Siddhars prior to the 1980’s. After the release of the Tamil film Agastyar, they came to know about the ancient sage Agastya. But after the establishment of the Agastyo Sammarga Sangam they began to receive proper explanations about the Siddhars because the Sangam conducted bi-weekly classes on the Siddhars. Each month, they conducted group prayer on full moon days. In addition, they also distributed pamphlets, containing explanations about the Siddhars, donations (tanam) and meditation.

The Sangam, under the leadership of Thamivanan, collected funds from the public for their monthly free-load programmed and their other activities. Donors are given receipts on which photography of sage Agastiyar and Rangaraya Swami are printed. Often, while collecting these donations, donars who enquired about the Siddhars, donations and meditation are given the necessary explanations by the collectors.

Thus in the course of time, the service and activities of the Agastyo Sammarga Sangam helped to disseminate various types of information regarding the Siddhars to the common man.

Palm-leaf Manuscripts

Towards the end of the 1980’s the Tamils of Malaysia came to know about ruudi jyothidam and astrology based on ancient palm-leaf manuscripts. Within a few years this form of astrology received great popularity.

This trust and popularity is mainly due to the belief that the guidance given by sages who could know the past, present and future is certainly superior to that provided by the ordinary human astrologers.

These manuscripts were ascribed to various Siddhars like Agastiyar, Karuvurar, Kavukkar, Vashidam, Kasiapandar and the Septanidam. Among these, the manuscripts of Agastya gained greater acceptance/reception among the people.

Among the teachings of the Agastyo Sammarga Sangam, the concept of karma (vina) is considered important. They preached to their followers that it is possible to remove one’s Karma from their previous births by following the path or approved conduct shown by the Siddhars and that only the Siddhars who have overcome their Karma can show how men may remove his.
Due to this, people came to worship these siddhars as the preceptors of True knowledge (srama-guru). Even those who had never heard of the siddhars came to worship them through their introduction to Jaiji-jaritham in the 1990's. Many astrologers from India are said to read such manuscripts cached in on this wave of popularity.

Thus, it would not be wrong to say that these manuscripts played a great role in introducing the siddhars to the Malaysian Tamils. They identified the siddhars as sages who knew the past, present and future as astrologers who could calculate and divine the future and as teachers of spiritual knowledge who helped men attain salvation.

Siddha Medicine

During the past 20 years, herbal medicine / treatment has become popular among the Malaysians in general and the Malaysian Tamils in particular. Thus the Malaysian Tamils began to consider herbal or siddha cures along with modern ones. Some followed courses on siddha medicine (conducted by Indian Centres) through postal tuition while some others came to India and took up short courses on siddha medicine. On returning to Malaysia, they set up treatment centres named after one of the siddhars. Agastya Siddha Vaidya Nilayam, Agastya Vaidya Nilayam (herbal) Nilayam, Sepatarshi Vaidya Salai and Babaji Maruthatham may be cited as examples. These names also introduced these siddhars to the people as the propagators of herbal medicine.

Most of those who practice siddha medicine in Malaysia have a picture of the siddhars at their centres. After examining the patients and dispensing their medicines, they are advised by the practitioners to take the medicines thinking of the siddhars. This shows their strong belief in the siddhars. This practice in the course of time, created the interest in reading the medical texts left behind by the siddhars. It may be said that siddha medicine also paved the way for the spread of the concept of the elixir of life (kalyanakorn).

"Self" related courses

Hindu organisations in Malaysia are actively involved in spreading the basic concepts of Hinduism among the Malaysian Hindus. Among these, Hindu youth organisations on their part are more zealous and active. While this Hindu awakening is gaining momentum on one side, the siddha worship that stresses "inner-worship" also seems to attract them. The various courses on self-awareness, self-realisation, self-confidence, spiritual awakening and the like could be the reason for the pull towards siddha worship.

In Malaysia, the Indians conduct more courses on these topics than the Malays or the Chinese and the participants are also mostly Indians. With these, their attraction for external forms of worship fades and they begin to realize the importance of inner worship. Even the speakers who come to Malaysia from Tamil Nadu, in their speeches stress the importance of inner worship.
Scope of study

There are many organisations that foster the path of the siddhars. Many individuals also follow this within their own family cycle. Of these organisations, the Agastya Sampradaya Sangams seem to be better known among the common people than others. Of these, only the Agastya Sampradaya Sangam at Dengkil, Malaysia and the researcher’s 15 close friends who practice siddhar worship have been chosen for this study. Research on siddhar worship in Malaysia is a very vast field. Hence, this paper limits itself only to the study of the causes for the spread of these religious phenomena and the results and repercussions it has caused.

Research Methodology

This paper is merely an introduction to the Belief in the Siddhars (Siddhar Belief) in Malaysia. Five siddhar organisation and 15 respondents were interviewed. This paper is based on the information thus obtained and material collected through observation. After this conference, a complete / more detailed proposal is to be submitted incorporating the input of the participants.

Background to siddha worship in Malaysia

It is not possible to say when and who began the belief in siddhar’s in Malaysia. It is said that Swami Sivananda Paramahamsa arrived in the then Malaya before World War II in 1937 and established the Siddha Vidhya Sangam and spread the knowledge of the siddhars (siddha vidhya). Then an ashram (Siddhasram) was established in Taik, Penak. At present the Swami Sivananda Paramahamsar Bhavana Manram at Jagan Serai, Penak teaches siddha-vidhi. According to information received through interviews, Swam Dharumalingam began to spread the ideas about the siddhars from the beginning of 1986. It is also mentioned that he was the one who first established the Agastya Sampradaya Sangam in 1989 and taught people about the ways of the siddhars.

The Sangam Sangam named Orturar Kudil in Trichy District, Tamil Nadu is the mother organisation model for the Agastya Sampradaya Sangams in Malaysia. Donation / gift (donam) and meditation (dyanam) are the two basic principles of these Sangams. Feeding the destitute, providing free medical service and conducting marriages form part of their important services. The founder of this Orturar Kudil is Bangaraja Swamimal. Mr. Tamilvanan learnt the path of the siddhars as a disciple of his founder and established the Agastya Sampradaya Sangam in Dengkil, Selangor in the year 1994. Mr. Ramakrishnan began such a Sangam in Kepar and continues to manage it.
Some youths have forgotten or even abandoned their families and their studies and consider the siddhar organisation as their refuge. Some considering themselves to be young ascetics denounce marriage. There are husbands as well as wives who have abandoned their homes including their children. Due to their extremism they have come to the conclusion that except for the path they follow, all else including other paths or religions are useless. This has caused sorrow and bitterness among members of their family and their relatives.

Problems in the family / relationships

Many Hindu families are facing problems due to the influence of siddha worship. Such problems are not common in families where the parents follow this path because children who are under the guidance of their parents tend to follow them naturally. But in families where only the children are involved, many problems have arisen. Such children do not participate in the agamic rites or rituals usually performed by the family. They stay away from family functions involving marriages, rites performed for the ancestors or at death, coming of age ceremony for young girls, various celebrations and also festivals. Besides, the time these people spend with the family becomes less because most of their time is spent at or for the organisation they belong to.

Even when the whole family is involved in the siddhar way of life there are problems. They are unable to adapt to the ways of their relatives. Usually festivals and family functions are the binding factor among relatives and friends. But when they stay away because of the agamic rites, performed at these functions, their relationship with the others becomes strained and may even be broken.

Conclusion

Siddha worship completely stresses inner worship. However it does not set aside external forms of agamic worship. The way of the siddhars is to guide the souls from external to internal worship based on the spiritual maturity of the souls. In short, it may be said that it combines Vasthanta and Siddhanta concepts and helps the souls to reach salvation.

The followers of the siddhar way and associations propagating it should realise the basis of this path. The differences between the various organisation should be eliminated. This can be achieved only through the exchange of ideas. Seminars and conferences could provide the opportunity for this exchange. To hold such seminars, they must first be brought together.

Before they meet, interviews may be held with those who follow this path, so as to know the actual problems faced by them. These problems may be presented at the seminars / conferences so that appropriate solutions may be found.

It is hoped that this paper presented here will be of great help in achieving the above aims.
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This trend makes it easy for the Indians especially the youths to be pulled over to siddha worship.

Medias
During the past five years or more, TV drama serials from India have become popular. They have introduced certain information regarding the siddhars, palm-leaf manuscripts and the effects of karma to the public. It may be noted that the character Sooladoc Siddhan in the serial Annamalai and the serial Sivamayam have played an important role in establishing firmly the belief or thoughts about the siddhars.

The serial Sivamayam, brought to the people certain explanations regarding the siddhars like their characteristics, nature, songs, knowledge of alchemy, yoga and eternal life.

Besides, books on the siddhars and even CD's containing talks and songs on the siddhars also contributed to the popularity of the siddhars in Malaysia.

The problems / effects of Siddha worship in Malaysia
The effects of siddha worship in Malaysia certainly have to be given considerable thought. Only then, negative or detrimental effects may be identified and addressed before it is too late. Only three such effects are dealt with here.

Difference in doctrine / principles
The siddhar organisations in Malaysia hold differing views / doctrines regarding the siddhars. They do not seem to be clear about who the siddhars are, their teachings, their doctrines regarding God and the soul and other basic concepts. Those who belong to siddhar organisation as well as individuals who do not belong to any such organisations, teach such matters according to their own / individual knowledge and experience. This leads to differences so that the ideas of one organisation is not necessarily accepted by another.

The followers, accepting the leader of their organisation as their spiritual teacher follow his path whole heartedly. Due to this there is no exchange of ideas between these organisation. But in the course of time, if the followers begin to have any difference of opinion with their leader, or are dissatisfied with his teachings, do not hesitate to join another organisation or even start a new one on their own. This has given rise to numerous siddhar organisation.

Extreme / Too Intense Involvement
The way of the siddhars consists of mind-control and penance. Those who follow this path from a young age are able to find a balance between worldly life and spirituality. But when a youth who is used to the external forms of worship switches suddenly to the inner - worship of the siddhars he becomes an extremist. Such extremism has caused many confusing acts or situations.