Comparison of
The Nandinatha Sampradaya of the
Saiva Siddhanta School of Hinduism
and
The Church of England Christian Denomination
and
The UK Unitarians the General Assembly of
Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

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2 Introduction

The Nandinatha Sampradaya of the Saiva Siddhanta school of Hinduism has a process of ethical conversion, which ensues that converts come with full understanding of both their new religion and any previous religions or beliefs [1]. Part of this process is to write a point-counterpoint comparison of Saiva Siddhanta Hinduism and previous religions to which they have had affiliation. Since I was brought up in the Church of England and was a Unitarian for a time this document compares these organisations.

I will refer to these organisations as follows through the rest of this document:

- Nandinatha Sampradaya of Saiva Siddhanta – The Nandinatha Sampradaya
- The Church of England – The Church of England
- The UK Unitarians the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches – The UK Unitarians
3 History and Origin

**History and origin of the Nandinatha Sampradaya**

Saiva Siddhanta is an eternal religion. Images of Shiva are found in the earliest archaeological remains in the Indus Valley. The Nandinatha Sampradaya originates from the MahaRishi (Great Sage), Nandinatha in around 200BC.

The 'modern' tradition follows from “The Rishi from the Himalayas” in the mid 1800s.

**History and origin of the Church of England**

The Church of England is a Christian Church. Christianity originates from the time of Jesus (traditionally 1CE to around 33CE), but the gospels were were written 50 years later and the Roman Catholic Church was formed in the 2nd Century.

The Church of England was formed in 1534 when Henry VIII had a dispute with the Catholic Church which would not grant him a divorce. It was not the start of the Protestant Reformation, which dates from Martin Luther in 1517. Many doctrines of the Church of England come from Luther and Calvin.

The Church of England is the State religion in the UK, where state schools have to hold a religious assembly in the C of E tradition. This Prime Minister is responsible for appointing the Archbishop of Canterbury, even if the Prime Minister is not a member of the Church of England!

**History and origin of the UK Unitarians**

The Unitarian movement in the UK grew from the Protestant tradition. Originally it was a movement within various organisation, belief in the absolute unity of God and the rejection of the trinity. This was an “underground movement” until 1813 when the Uniarian Relief Act amended the Blasphemy act to make the denial of the trinity legal.

The GAUFCC was established in 1881 by the merging of several independent Unitarian organisations. Within the UK Unitarians there are several sub movements, the traditional Christian Unitarians, the new-age influenced Earth Spirit Network and a Humanist movement.
4 Scriptures and Religious Texts

Scriptures and religious texts of the Nandinatha Sampradaya

As with all Hindus, the Nandinatha Sampradaya see the Vedas as the ultimate authority, the revealed scripture. The Sampradaya add the Saiva Agamas to their canon of revealed scriptures. These texts are explained and expounded upon by Upanishads, and the Tamil Scriptures the Tirukural, Tirumurai, and the Tirumantiram. Revelation of scriptures is a timeless and ongoing process. The scriptures have added to by the successive Kailasa gurus, and still are today.

A major revelation for modern times came from Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami in the form of the Nandinatha Sutras and the Master course trilogy, first written in English but now translated to many world languages. Today Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami continues to publish discourses, guiding followers on the application of the timeless principles of Saiva Siddhanta in modern lives.

Scriptures and religious texts of the Church of England

The primary religious text of the Church of England is the Bible, with particular emphasis on the New Testament. The Bible is considered to be the only revealed scriptures, everything following is man's attempt to explain the bible story, or deduce how it can be applied today.

The primary expression of the Church's doctrine is the 39 Articles, said to “define the biblically derived summations of precise Christian doctrine”. However today full belief in all 39 principles is not thought to be necessary for members of the Church of England, though ordained priests do have to swear to uphold them [2].

In addition to this there are authorised prayer books, orders of service, etc. These give instructions for carrying out various types of service and ceremony.

Scriptures and religious texts of the UK Unitarians

The UK Unitarians were traditionally bible-based, in fact it was from an analysis of the bible finding lack of evidence for the trinity that Unitarianism arose. The Christian Unitarians still follow this practice today. However many Unitarians take the view that all religious texts are valid, and may read from diverse sources such as the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the poetry of Omar Kayyam, the Bhagavad Gita, and the work of secular poets. In general Unitarians see religious texts as human works, at most being inspired by God.

Unitarians have no doctrine or creed [12], written or otherwise. They see this as a strength, in that they can accommodate people with a wide range of beliefs and outlooks.
5 Views of God and divine beings

The Nandinatha Sampradaya's view of God.

God is Shiva, who has both personal and impersonal aspects, the formless Parashiva, the Parashakti, the divine energy behind all existence and the divine soul. Shiva is traditionally seen in many forms, all of which are completely Shiva. Shiva is at the heart of everyone, every living thing, as the atman. He is the ultimate source and destination of all [3]. Shiva is ultimately neither male nor female, and can be seen in the Shakti forms such as Durga, Parvati, and Parvati.

Lord Siva is transcendent love and immanent reality. The Saturu Yogaswami of Jafna said “the only thing that Lord Shiva cannot do is separate Himself from us.

Other divine beings

In addition to Shiva there are great created lords, Murugan (also called Karttikaya) and Ganesha. Shiva decrees that any enterprise or undertaking should start with the worship of Ganesha, including start of worship. Murugan is worshipped also, particularly by those who undertake yoga.

As well as these great lords there are a multitude of devas, beings of light, or advanced souls. Followers of the Nandinatha Sampradaya don't worship devas. There are also asuras, lower or demonic beings. Followers of the Nandinatha Sampradaya never invoke asuras [5].

The Church of England's view of God

The Church of England see God as a trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy spirit. God the son existed in Jesus but existed since before the beginning of the world. God is separate from humans, who are all tainted with original sin since birth. However, those who accept Jesus and are baptised receive the Holy Spirit, which resides within them. God can only give this gift of the holy spirit to those who are baptised [4]. Those who are not part of the elect, predestined to be saved through Jesus are destined to eternal damnation.

I should add that despite this being the official doctrine, as defined in the thirty nine articles, many individual Church of England members often don't believe in eternal damnation of non-Christians.

Other divine beings

The Church of England believes that there are a large number of angels, archangels and other divine beings. It is absolutely forbidden to worship these by the Old Testament ten commandments. The Church of England also believes in Satan, a fallen angel, and a large number of demons. Invoking demons is banned, though many Church of England members don't believe that invocation is possible.
The UK Unitarians' view of God

The traditional Christian Unitarians see God as one whole, not as a trinity; invisible, and not viewable in any form. The newer liberal Unitarians see God in many diverse ways; the “earth spirit” group as a pantheistic force of nature. Some Unitarians see God only as an impersonal force. There are many humanist Unitarians, who do not believe in God as anything outside the human mind.

Other divine beings

Many Unitarians are humanist and don't believe in any divine beings. Traditional Christian Unitarians believe in angels, archangels, Satan, and demons, much like the Church of England. Since there is no creed there are wide-ranging views, with the Earth Spirit network believing in spirits, often associated with places.


6 Worship and Devotion

**Worship and devotion in the Nandinatha Sampradaya**

Worship and devotion is primarily personal. Even in temple worship the priest invokes God and the devas, and the devotees personally take in the presence spiritually [6]. That is not to say that there is no congregational aspect, festivals include the singing of bhajans, community activities etc [7]. These are seen as important for community adhesion, whereas personal worship is more important for the spiritual progress. The primary form of personal worship is puja at the home shrine, and japa, the chanting of mantras.

Devotees are encouraged to have a personal relationship with Ganesha [8], speaking to him daily, telling him of our problems, ideas, plans, and ambitions. Ganesha, as the remover of obstacles and the placer of necessary obstacles, is our helper with worldly matters.

**Worship and devotion in the Church of England**

The worship in the Church of England normally consists of services from one of two authorised prayer books, the traditional “Book of Common Prayer” and the more modern “Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England” [9]. The normal service consists of prayers, hymns, readings from the bible, and communion. Services are usually thought of a congregational, a community act of worship.

In addition to these services members of the church of England are encouraged to have a personal relationship with Jesus, speaking to him daily. Jesus is described as a mediator, prayers to God the Father can only go through him.

**Worship and devotion in the UK Unitarians**

The Unitarian service in traditional Christian Unitarian churches closely resembles that of the Church of England, with prayers, hymns, readings from the bible. There is no communion service, as this practice relates to the divinity of Jesus. Even in traditional Unitarian congregations readings sometimes come from books other than the bible. In the more liberal Unitarian congregations readings come from many sources, though they too often follow the same format of prayers, readings and hymns.

I found that in practice a lot of Unitarian worship became a lowest-common-denominator service. If someone mentioned God the Humanists would complain, and if someone said that they looked to humanity for the ultimate answers the theists would complain. This meant that services tended to use vague terms like “our common spirituality”. Also, any passion about belief was discouraged as being somehow impolite to non-believers. In one case when someone was talking about their personal relationship with God a rather senior Unitarian said quite disdainfully “I think that most of us have moved beyond the idea of a personal God”.

Many Unitarians appear to be happier debating religion than actually following it. A lot of them are good at intellectual debates.
7 The Ultimate Destiny of Souls.

**The ultimate destiny of souls according to the Nandinatha Sampradaya**

All atman (souls) come from Shiva and all will return to Shiva. Through successive incarnations we reach a point where we realise the true nature of ourselves (samadhi). From that point our soul-bodies grow in wisdom until we are Shiva. But since there is only one Shiva this means that we have re-emerged with the source, with no loss to ourselves. This is known as moksha.

People of all religions will eventually reach Shiva, some religions take you only a certain way on the path, others all the way.

**The ultimate destiny of souls according to the Church of England**

The Church of England's official view is that we each only have one life. If we are one of the saved then we well go to eternal paradise . If we are not saved we go to eternal hell. According to the thirty nine articles whether we will be saved or not is predestined before we are born, salvation comes from God not us. Though we have to accept Jesus to be saved it is not in our power to do so.

Needless to say many people within the Church of England don't follow this line, I suspect very few believe that you cannot chose to accept Jesus. Some also believe that good people of other faiths can be saved.

Traditionally heaven is seen as this world after the dead are raised to life, and the Kingdom of heaven has come. Hell is a place of pain and fire. Many Church of England followers today, however, follow the belief that originates in the Orthodox churches, that heaven is the presence of God and hell the absence.

**The ultimate destiny of souls according to the UK Unitarians**

Traditional Christian Unitarians believed in a heaven and hell, and would see following Jesus as a way of attaining heaven. Since Jesus is not seen as divine the Unitarians have always been open to the idea that salvation can come from other sources. In the USA they merged with the Universalists (who believe that everyone will be saved) to form the UUA.

The more liberal Unitarians have a wide range of beliefs, from the Humanist view that there is nothing after this life to a belief in reincarnation.
8 The Universe and Creation

The Nandinatha Sampradaya's view of the universe and creation

The universe is continually created and destroyed by Shiva in great cycles. The creation is an emanation from him, and he is the energy behind every atom in the universe. We use the analogy of the cosmic dancer. A dance is a combination of planing and the nature, ability, and form of the dancer. Shiva's nature is as much part of creation as his design.

The Universe is real but impermanent, we say it is relatively real. Only Shiva is permanent and unchanging.

The Church of England's view of the universe and creation

The Church of England see the world as being created from nothing, but being entirely separate from God. The traditional view of creation is of God as the demiurge, an artisan designing and creating the universe [10]. Creation is a one-off event. At the end of the world there will be the judgement day, after which souls will spend an eternity in haven or hell. After this no more souls will come into existence,

Most Church of England members don't take the biblical account of creation in seven days as literally true. It is seen as an allegory of the natural process.

The UK Unitarian's view of the universe and creation

The traditional Christian Unitarians based their beliefs on analysis of the bible, and so would have believed the biblical creation story. However I doubt if there are any moder UK Unitarians who believe it literally.

The humanists believe in the scientific explanations for creation, and others have diverse beliefs . Many of the earth spirit movement take a pantheistic view that the universe, believing that God is the universe and either both always existed or they came into existence at the same time.

Unitarians usually have a great respect for nature [11]. They see the power of nature as awe-inspiring and earth as our nurturing environment.
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10 Images

Page 3: Ganesha – From the Himalayan Academy Free to use image library
URL: http://www.himalayanacademy.com/resources/books/wih/image-library/chapter-24/detail.np/detail-01.html

Page 4: Nataraja (Musée Guimet, Paris) – From Wikipedia, released into public domain
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