

***Ciṛṛampalam – ‘The Cosmic Eye’ of the Divine: The Āgamic Traditions of Tamil and Sanskrit***  
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... ‘As far verily, as this world-space (ākāśa) extends, so far extends the space within the heart. Within it, indeed, are contained both heaven and earth, both fire and wind, both sun and moon, lightning and the stars, both what one possesses here and what one does not possess; everything here is contained within it.’  
(*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.1.1 and 5).

Between the eyebrows on the forehead  
Observe the Mantra that radiates  
Dedicated feel the Graceful Lord  
That is *Ciṛṛampalam*, where I reached by his grace.  
(*Tirumantiram*, 2770)<sup>1</sup>.

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and the *Tirumantiram* (lit. *mantras* of the sacred) state a relatively similar idea that the primeval divine power is contained within human self. While the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* assumes that the magnificent power of the divine forms part of the heart, the *Tirumantiram* assumes that this is within the forehead. According to Tirumūlar, the author of the Tamil religious text *Tirumantiram* – c.a. 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century - *ciṛṛampalam* ‘the locus of *consciousness*’ is the basis of all creation, and it encompasses everything within it - a metaphysical concept that is very similar to what is denoted in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* as the exhaustive and spiritual space within one’s heart.<sup>2</sup> The term *ciṛṛampalam* signifies symbolically the form of Śiva in his manifestation as a “Blissful dancer” in the *Cit Sabha* ‘the Hall of *consciousness*’ in

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<sup>1</sup> neṛṛikku nēre purvat titaiveḷi  
uṛṛup pārṅka voliviṭu mantiram  
paṛṛukkup paṛṛāyp parama niruntituṅ  
ciṛṛam palamenṛu cērntuko ṭēnē.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, David. *The Dance of Śiva: Religion, art and poetry in South India*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996., p. 81.

Chidambaram. Understanding the relationship between what is presumed to be a driving force within one's heart/mind and what is manifested in the *Cit Sabha* in Chidambaram in a material form as Naṭarāja in his dancing posture constitutes the main line of argument in this paper. In an earlier paper<sup>3</sup>, I discussed in some detail the historicity and the myths surrounding the halls, with a special reference to the *Cit Sabha* in the Naṭarāja temple in Chidambaram. The present paper is mainly a comparative study of the yogic approach to the worship of Śiva as advocated by Tirumūlar and the idol worship as understood in the Sanskrit *Āgamas*.

The *Tirumantiram* attempts to link symbolically the two widely studied Śaivite topics namely the *consciousness* in one's heart (*Cit*) and the material representation of Naṭarāja's blissful dance in Chidambaram. Crucial to this linkage is the understanding of the 'blissful state' in one's heart as a result of internalizing the glory of the divine (Śiva) - what is otherwise termed *mukti* or 'salvation' in *Śaiva Siddhānta*. In order to attain this 'enlightened state' (Tirumūlar uses the Tamil word 'Telintār' to refer to this state of mind), one has to follow closely the yogic practices that Tirumūlar suggests concerning how the divine elements of *Jīvan* 'life' and *Vindu* 'source of human creation' ought to be controlled

Tirumūlar's approach to worshipping Śiva from a *jñāna* standpoint parallels the treatment of idol worship in the Sanskrit *Āgamas*, where external objects and structural temples play a significant role. Specifically, what Tirumūlar attempts in his work is to set the premise for rituals and rites within one's heart, as opposed to the

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<sup>3</sup> Renganathan, Vasu, "Rūpa, Arūpa and Rūpa-Arūpa: The Three Forms of Śiva worship at the Naṭarāja's Temple of Chidambaram, South India and their impact on the Temple Architecture", MS. , 2003.

externalized forms of temples and idols, as the Sanskrit Āgamas propose<sup>4</sup>. Demonstrating the metaphor of “human body as temple and Jīvan (the soul) in its enlightened<sup>5</sup> form as Śīvan”, Tirumūlar constructs a system where the human body acts as a location for the divine. On the other hand, the Sankrit Āgamas propose a system of worshipping Śīva in temples following closely the rules stated in the *Kriyāgramadyotikā* by *Agoraśīva*, *Kāmikāgama*, *Rauravāgama* and so on<sup>6</sup>. Temple and the image of Śīva on the one hand and the human body and *jīvan* on the other hand parallel the objects of worship.

### **The concept of ‘Cit’ and the notion of ‘Consciousness’**

As already stated, the term ‘Cit’ and the way it is understood under the realm of realizing the divine in one’s heart require an in-depth study of Śīva worship from a *Jñāna* point of view. The literal meaning of the Tamil word *ciṟṟampalam* is ‘locus of consciousness’, but it is used in an extended meaning as ‘cosmic eye’<sup>7</sup>, which is understood to be a micro space where the power of the divine is manifested. This sacred space is considered to be the driving force of all conceivable actions constituting the all-encompassing power. The term *ciṟṟampalam* is misunderstood by some<sup>8</sup> as ‘hall of consciousnesses’ and ‘little hall’ in conjunction with the ‘sacred hall’ that exists in Chidambaram namely *Cit Sabha*, where the Lord Nataraja’s image is kept.

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<sup>4</sup> In one verse Tirumūlar states that his realization of temple within his heart (neñcam) occurred to him after his subsequent visits to various temples in the Tamil country. This obviously illustrates why Tirumūlar takes the position of assuming ‘mind’ as the locus for source of divine power.

<sup>5</sup> The term Tirumūlar uses for “enlightenment” is the Tamil term *teḷintōr*, which means that ‘those who are keep themselves clean from sins and worldly desires’

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ishimatsu, Ginette, “Ritual texts, authority, and practice in contemporary Siva temples in Tamil Nadu” Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1994, ( p.5).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Smith(1966)

<sup>8</sup> See Younger (1995), Davis (1985) and Smith (1986).

In order to understand correctly the meaning of the word *Cit* and its relationship to the word *Chidambaram* one needs to understand how the latter is derived from the former. The word *Chidambaram* is derived from *Ciṛṛambalam* by the application of the phonological rule of *ṛṛ* becoming *tt* on the root *Ciṛṛ-*. The words *ambalam* and *ambaram* are simply the synonymous forms meaning a ‘space’. Misunderstanding the word *Ciṛṛampalam* as ‘small hall’ by the analogy that the word *Ciṛu* means ‘small’ fails to capture the conceptual basis of the word *Cit*, which means ‘consciousness’ or ‘Cosmic eye’. Tirumūlar’s employment of the term *Cit* along these lines of thought constitutes the core of his entire work.

### **Rūpa and Arūpa form of Worship in the Naṭarāja’s temple of Chidambaram**

The dancing image of Śiva, a perceivable form called *rūpa* in Sanskrit, is housed *Cit-Sabhā*, and it is referred to by Smith<sup>9</sup> as the heart of the world and the heart of individual self (*Cit* means ‘consciousness’ and *Sabhā* means ‘hall’). To the right of Naṭarāja is an empty space, which is popularly called *Rahasya* - a Sanskrit word meaning ‘secret’. This space designates the formless manifestation of Śiva, and is called *arūpa*, an opposite of *rūpa*. The *arūpa* form of Śiva is also called *Ākāśa Liṅga*, assuming that the space or the ether is the other manifestation of Śiva in Chidambaram (see Smith 1993: 62 and Smith 1996: 83). Thus, the custom of worshipping the space in Chidambaram developed a new architectural vocabulary namely *Chidambara Rahasyam* (Secret of *Chidambaram*) in Tamil.

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<sup>9</sup> Smith (1996: 82).

The other manifestation of Śiva is the *Liṅga*, which does not conform to any conceivable object<sup>10</sup>. The *Liṅga*, then, is both a form and without a conceivable form, so it can be understood as *rūpa-arūpa* “form and formlessness”. Evidence for this tripartite representation of Śiva in Chidambaram can be drawn from one of the verses in *Tirumantiram*, where Tirumūlar distinguishes the three terms namely *uru* ‘form’, *aru* ‘formless’ and *Para Rūpam* ‘all-pervading divine’<sup>11</sup>. As we will see below, textual evidence to substantiate the manifestation of the Lord Śiva in these three forms in *Chidambaram* is also found in the works of the Śaiva hymnists Appar, *Māṅikkavācakar* and Sundarar, whose dates are generally assumed to fall between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E.<sup>12</sup>

One of the significant references to the vocabulary of formlessness (*Arūpa*) occurs in one of the verses of the Tirumular’s *Tirumantiram* as follows.<sup>13</sup>

uruvinṛi yēninṛu uruvam puṅarkkum  
karuvanṛi yēninṛu tānkaru vākum  
aruvinṛi yēninṛa māyap pirānaik  
karuvinṛi yāvarkkum kūṭaonṇātē.  
(2840:6)

He has no form, but he forms the basis of  
all forms.  
He is the Cosmic eye, the pervading power  
of all creations  
It is impossible for anyone to reach him  
without his attaining his grace.

<sup>10</sup> Although there are many interpretations of the form of *Liṅga*, we confine ourselves to its concrete form, which is incomparable to any perceivable object.

<sup>11</sup> *Tirumantiram*, (2790:69 Ninth tantra):

“For Rishis Patanjali and Vyagrapada

In the splendid Temple of Chidambaram

He danced as a Form, a Formless and a Cosmic Form,

With the Divine Grace of Sakti He danced,

He, the Citta, the Ananda; Gracefully stood and danced.” (Unless otherwise noted the translations of the Tamil hymns in this paper are rendered by the author, with necessary consultations of Smith 1996, Peterson 1989 and Shulman 1980.)

<sup>12</sup> See Zvelebil (1998) for an account of the dates and the works of the Śaiva hymnists.

<sup>13</sup> See Zvelebil (1998: 40-43) for an account of the dates between 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. during which the poet saints including Maṅikkavācakar, tirumūlar, Nambi Āṅṅār nimbi, Cēkkiṭṭār, appar and campantar, who have made important mentions about both the dancing image as well as the Citambaram site. For the text, see *Tirumantiram* by Tirumūlar, trans and notes B. Naṭarājan, gen. Ed. N. Mahalingam (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1991).

Because this verse is included under the chapter on *Corūpa utayam* “Genesis of the magnificent form” (verses 2835 to 2846) in the *Tirumantiram*, it may be understood that the project that Tirumūlar develops concerns not the material form for the Lord, but an invisible, yet metaphysically perceivable form.

The Tamil version of Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy took its form largely from the works of the four Śaiva saints namely Tirumūlar (5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> A.D), Appar (7<sup>th</sup> A.D.), Sundarar (7<sup>th</sup> A.D.) and Māṇikkavācakar (9<sup>th</sup> A.D). Essential to the teachings of the Tamil tradition of Śaiva Siddhānta is the study of the three metaphysical concepts namely *pasu* (soul), *pati* (god) and *pāsa* (bond), and these concepts have been discussed widely in the works of the Śaiva saints. Controlling one’s mind and senses so as to experience the supreme within is the principal goal of this tradition. All these saints claim that the *Agamas* come directly from Śiva himself. Māṇikkavācakar, who wrote one of the *Tēvāram* texts called the *Tiruvācakam*, claims that he was an ardent follower of the *Agamas*, which he regarded as the sacred revelation (*Tiruvācakam* 2: 20). Māṇikkavācakar claims that Śiva disclosed the *Agamas* from the Mahendra Hill through his five faces (*Tiruvācakam* 2: 20), and he recovered them from the great fish that swallowed the text (*Tiruvācakam* 2: 18).

The *Tirumantiram* is believed to have been offered to the world by the Lord Śiva himself through Tirumūlar. This text is well known for its treatment of Śaiva philosophy from the point of view of the yogic tradition, which is commonly attributed to

the Siddhars of the North India<sup>14</sup>. According to the traditional accounts, he composed three thousand verses constituting the *Tirumantiram* while in the state of meditation<sup>15</sup>.

### Traditions of *Āgamas* and *Tirumantiram*

Like the Veda, the *Āgamas*, according to Tirumūlar, are composed by Śiva himself.

añṇaḷ aruḷāl aruluñ civākamam

Through His grace, the Śaiva āgamas are revealed by the Lord (58 and 64)

Passing the text through Sakti, Sadasiva, Maheswara, Rudra deva, Vishnu and Brahmisa, the Lord presented the *Āgamas*, at the end, to Tirumūlar, who in turn offered them to the world in the form of three thousand verses composed in Tamil.

In a number of places in the *Tirumantiram* we find references to *Āgamas* and their divisions in general terms as *kāraṇam*, *kāmikam*, *cintiyam*, *vātuḷam* and *yāmaḷam*<sup>16</sup>, but without any explanatory notes for these terms. Tirumūlar's references to these Sanskrit terms without much discussion suggest the popularity of the *Āgamas* during his time. Ishimatsu<sup>17</sup> notes that the *Āgamas* and the ritual manuals in Sanskrit, on the other hand, virtually ignore the Tamil Śaiva works. One possible exception, however, is *Pūrva Kāmikāgamā* of the *arcanam vidhi paṭala*, which according to her,

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<sup>14</sup> Legend has it that Tirumūlar was a North Indian yogi - also called *Siddha* - came to the South and entered into the body of a dead shepherd boy, named mūlar, in order to soothe the crying cows, which were grief-stricken due to the death of their master. Unable to find his own body afterward, he remained in the body of the shepherd boy and went into the state of meditation.

<sup>15</sup> It must be pointed out that there is no evidence whatsoever either in his own work or in any other texts substantiating this legendary background of Tirumūlar. Further, there is no textual evidence whatsoever to prove the fact that Tirumūlar is from North India and is not a South Indian. His north Indian origin must have been assumed by his “yogic” approach to worship of Śiva.

<sup>16</sup> *Tirumantiram*, verses 57 to 66,

<sup>17</sup> Ishimatsu (1994).

makes a generic reference to Tamil *Āgamas* as *Drāviḍabhāṣāṅgam*<sup>18</sup>, which needs to be chanted at the end of rituals.

The nine agamas that Tirumūlar claims to have obtained from the Lord himself include *Karanam*, *Kāmīgam*, the *Vīram* ‘good’, the *Sindam* ‘high’, *Vadulam*, *Vyāmalam* ‘the other’, Kalottaram, the *Subram* ‘pure’ and *Makutam*<sup>19</sup>. *Tirumantiram* is divided into nine chapters and each one of them is understood to contain references from all of the nine *Āgamas* namely *Kāraṇāgāmam*, *Kāmīgāmam*, *Vīrāgāmam*, *Cittāgāmam*, *Vātuḷāgāmam*, *Viyāmaḷāgāmam*, *Kālōttarāgāmam*, *Cuppirāgāmam* and *makuṭāgāmam*<sup>20</sup>. According to Tirumūlar, God (Śiva) composed the *Āgamas* in Sanskrit and Tamil simultaneously, and the Tamil version is known to us as *Tirumantiram*<sup>21</sup>.

By no means, can this be taken to mean that the *Tirumantiram* is a translation of the Sanskrit *Āgamas*. However, in all nine chapters, Tirumūlar discusses parallel ideas from the *padas* (divisions) of the Sanskrit *Āgamas* namely *cariya* (exoteric worship), *kriya* (esoteric ritual), *yoga* (exercising mental postures to realize the divine in *Jīvan*) and *Jñāna* (knowledge)<sup>22</sup>. We will see below that Tirumūlar’s approach to Śiva worship concentrates on the last two *padas* namely *yoga* and *jñāna padas* in stating that

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<sup>18</sup> *ūrdhvaṃ drāviḍabhāṣāṅgam gābaṃ nṛttayutaṃ tu vā*. “songs in the Dravidian language, joined with dance.” C. Svaminatha Sivadarya, ed., *Kāmikāgama* (pūrvbhāga) (Madras: South Indian Archagar Association, 1975), 21.

<sup>19</sup> *Tirumantiram*, Verse 63.

<sup>20</sup> Arunachalam 1982. *Tirumantirak kōṭpāṭu*. Pari Puttkap paṇṇai: Chennai.

<sup>21</sup> *Tirumantiram*, verse 66. It should also be noted that Tirumūlar does not make any explicit reference to any *Āgamic* text, either in Sanskrit or in Tamil, that would be considered as the authoritative source for *Āgama*. In the verses 57 to 66, however, he makes clear references to the presence of nine *Āgamas*, and their divisions, but what is not clear by this is whether he refers to the Sanskrit *Āgamas*, that he is adopting his work from, or they belong to any Tamil sources, which might have been destroyed.

<sup>22</sup> The *Cariya* part deals with the service and teaches the basic moral values. The *Kriya* discusses rituals, *Yoga* for *asanas* and *pranayamas*, and *jñāna Nyana* to deal with knowledge.



*neñcam* ‘heart’ is the temple and the *Cīṟṟu* ‘Cosmic eye’ is the divine element that dwells in it. In the other two *padas* namely *cariya* and *kriya* he discusses the ways by which one can realize the *Cīṟṟu*. What is basic to Tirumūlar’s treatment of divine worship is that god is formless, and in order to realize him one has to perform a series of *ātmārta pūjas* in the form of yogic postures, which help control one’s senses. This is in parallel to the Sanskrit *Āgamas*, which mainly endorse *nitya pūja* or *parārta pūja* to be conducted with idols and images at home and temple.

If Tirumūlar’s *Tirumantiram* is understood to be the Tamil version of the *Āgamas*, which stands in parallel to the corresponding Sanskrit version, the *pūjas* that Tirumūlar formulates neither contain any information about the consecration of temples, nor does it prescribe the details of daily rituals in a concise manner. Since neither the *Tirumantiram*, *Tēvāram*, nor *Tīruvācakam* postulate any ritual practices to be conducted in the temples, the Sanskrit *Āgamas* still stand as a religious manual to build temples and conduct rituals.

Zvelebil<sup>23</sup>, for example, comments that Tirumūlar makes almost no reference to the worship of God through *arccanai* (Tamil equivalent for Sanskrit word ‘arcanam’) in temples. The reason for this is that Tirumūlar’s account of Śiva worship, as already stated, focuses upon the principles of *Yōga* and *Jñāna*, according to which the human body is assumed to be the center of study both for the realization of god as well as for demonstrating one’s devotion to god through soul. Thus, Tirumūlar’s verses operate exclusively upon the central metaphor of “human body as temple” - omnipresence of the

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<sup>23</sup> Zvelebil, Kamil V. *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973. p. 226.

god as not confined within the four walls of the temple, but existing within the human body itself. This is expressed precisely in the following verse from the *Tirumantiram*<sup>24</sup>:

Mind is the magnificent temple, the fleshy body is the temple  
For the generous Lord mouth is the gateway  
For the enlightened ones the soul(cīvan) is the Śīva Liṅga  
All the five senses are the ceaseless sacred lamps<sup>25</sup>.

Basic to the understanding of the human body as temple is the illustration of the notion of *enlightenment* (*Teḷintār*) of soul and the attainment of knowledge – i.e., *Jñāna*, by controlling all the five senses that are vulnerable to the worldly desires – i.e., *pāsa*. According to Tirumūlar, the soul - *jīvan* – and *Śīvan* are not to be understood as two different entities; often *jīvan* fails to understand *Śīvan* or is incapable of realizing it due to its preoccupations with *pāsa* – the worldly desires.

At the moment when *jīvan* is capable of realizing *Śīvan*, both *jīvan* and *Śīvan* unite to form a single entity.<sup>26</sup> Tirumūlar illustrates this well using the figurative expression of a sculpture of an elephant made of wood and the mind. When the charm of the sculpture is stressed, the wood is out of focus, and when the wood is looked at attentively, the beauty of the sculpture goes unnoticed. Similarly, the *Jīvan* and *Śīvan* are like the wood and sculpture. The charm of *Śīva* can be experienced only when the soul is free from all worldly desires. This requires an attentive meditation within one's mind.

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<sup>24</sup> Tirumantiram, verse 1823.

<sup>25</sup> Uḷlam perunḱōyil unuṭampālayam  
Vallaṟ pirānārkkū vāy kōpura vāsal  
teḷlat teḷintārkkuc cīvan civaliṅgam  
Kaḷḷap pulanaintum kālā maṇi vilakkē

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, verse 2017 and verse 2290.

The ultimate endeavor of realizing Śivan within one's *jīvan* becomes the central focus of study in Tirumūlar's work. His allegorical reference to the wandering soul as a cow that roams without any aim distinguishes two types of men: one belongs to the category of men who have not yet attained the wisdom of Śivan in their *jīvan*, and the other called Śiva yogis by Tirumūlar. The Śiva yogis, unlike the first type of men, enjoy the supreme bliss of Śiva within their *jīvan*. Śiva yogis, who are like cows that yield precious milk, are the ones who attained knowledge - Jñāna – because of their *enlightenment*. The other type of men, by contrast, fail to become conscious of Śivan in their soul (*jīvan*) and thus remain barren<sup>27</sup>.

Throughout his work Tirumūlar distinguishes between the two terms *Siddhānta* and *Vedānta*<sup>28</sup>, which according to him, refer to the Tamil Śaiva *Siddhānta* tradition of the South and the Sanskrit Vedic tradition of the North respectively. Both the *Veda* and the *Āgama*, according to Tirumūlar, are the creations of God<sup>29</sup> and lead one to *mutti* (salvation) and the enlightenment of the *Jīvān*<sup>30</sup>.

### **The Supreme Bliss and the Dancing form of Śiva**

Tirumūlar devotes an entire chapter in the ninth tantra to the dancing form of Śiva and the importance of the locus of *Cittam* on one's forehead. The word *Cittam* is normally translated as 'Consciousness' by scholars mainly based on the Sanskrit word '*Cittah*'. But, what is stressed by Tirumūlar through the word "Ciṙṙampalam" is

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, verse 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, verses 2385, 2386, 2387, 2392, 2393, 2394 and so on.

<sup>29</sup> Vedamō ṭākamam meyyām iṙaivannūl "The Vēda along with the Ākama are revelations of God", *Tirumantiram*, verse 2397.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. verse 2394.

nothing other than the notion of *Cittam* – the essence of all knowledge and power. This is the ‘supreme bliss’ that one experiences upon enlightenment by realizing Śivan in *Jivan*. According to Tirumūlar, the spot between the two eyebrows is where one feels Śiva and that is where Jivan is felt as well<sup>31</sup>.

Between the eyebrows on the forehead  
Experience the transcending Mantra upon careful observation  
There remains the Graceful Lord to those dedicated  
That is the Ciṛṛampalam where I have reached<sup>32</sup>.

Even though Younger<sup>33</sup> observes the fact that that this chapter in the *Tirumantiram* is an elaborate theological interpretation of the Dancing Image of Chidambaram, but fails to capture the significance of the metaphysical representation of bliss in one’s *Jivan*, which forms the core of this chapter. What Tirumūlar attempts to illustrate in this chapter is the ways in which one can realize the Śivan in Jivan, and consequently enjoy the “supreme bliss”. The blissful state is symbolically represented in Chidambaram in the form of dancing Śiva.

### **Pūja – Worship of Śiva, Guru and Mahēṣvara**

The three chapters namely Śiva Pūja, Guru Pūja and *Mahēṣvara Pūja* (worship of devotees) that Tirumūlar presents in the seventh *Tantra* deal with the *ātmārtha*, *Ajītāgama* and parārtha *pūjas*. These *pūjas* parallel the worship methods as defined

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<sup>31</sup> Tirumantiram, verse 2770 repeated here.

<sup>32</sup> neṛṛikku nēre purvat tiṭaivelī  
uṛṛup pārkkā voliviṭu mantiram  
paṛṛukkup paṛṛāyp parama niruntituñ  
ciṛṛam palamenṛu cērntuko ṭēnē.

<sup>33</sup> Younger, Paul, The Home of Dancing Śivan: The Traditions of the Hindu Temple in Chidambaram, Oxford University Press: New York, 1995.

in the Sanskrit *Kāranāgama*<sup>34</sup>, but differ from them in stating the worshipping of Śiva in one's own *Jīvan* in contrast to idol worship.

According to the *Kāranāgama*, *ātmārtha* worship is performed at home with one's personal *liṅga* for the purpose of protecting the soul from everything<sup>35</sup>. In the opening verse (1823) of the chapter on *Śiva Pūja*, Tirumūlar describes the objects of worship to be nothing other than one's own body parts. As cited above, verse 2770 relates the body parts to the components of a temple as follows: the heart is the *garbhagr̥ha*; the body is the temple tower; the mouth is the gateway; for the enlightened one the *Jīva* is the *liṅga*; and the ever-burning lamp is all the pervasive five senses.

In the subsequent verses of the same chapter, Tirumūlar illustrates how one would perform the *pūja* to the Lord who dwells in one's own soul. According to him, chanting with the songs of praise to the Lord must be performed both in the morning and in the evening so that the god with matted hair (Śiva) would be pleased by it<sup>36</sup>. The Tamil phrase *pāṭṭavi kāṭṭatum* pālavi yākumē “songs are like milk” in this verse can be taken to mean that Tirumūlar is comparing his methods of worship of Śiva in one's own heart with that of performing the ritual bath (Skt. *Abhiṣeka*) to the object of *liṅga* with milk.

A similar idea is expressed by him in another verse in the same chapter, but this time with a specific reference to the prayers with the folded hands. He states that those

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<sup>34</sup> *The Sanskrit Tradition and Tantrism*, ed. Teun Goudriaan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990). Cited from Ishimatsu (1994, p.48).

<sup>35</sup> *sarveṣām ātmarakṣārtham Iṣṭaliṅgārcaṇam gr̥he / ātmārtham iti vikhyātam* – Cited by N. R. Bhatt, ed., *Ajītāgama*, vol. 1. (Pondicherry: Institut français d'Indologie, 1964), 196, n. 4. – Cited from Ishimatsu (1994, p. 48).

<sup>36</sup> *Tirumantiram*, verse 1824.

who are unable to express their devotion to Śiva within one's heart are bound to experience the anguish in the ocean of sorrow<sup>37</sup>. Thus, praying to the deities with folded hands and meditating the Lord inside one's heart are the two different types of ritual practice. He further asserts that those who can not praise the Lord who stays within the lotus of *Jīvan (Āvik kamalam)* are ignorant of the science of *mantrā* to be recited to him.<sup>38</sup>

### **Mahēṣvara Pūja (Entertaining the Śiva bhaktas)**

One of the much discussed practices in Śiva bhakti is fulfilling the devotion to Śiva by duly respecting the Śaiva saints. Many legends reveal how Śiva bhakti is shown by the kings by treating the Śaiva saints respectfully. Tirumūlar devotes a separate section under the chapter *Mahēṣvara Pūja* - 'Puja to the great Lord'- explaining how this is to be understood as Śiva bhakti. According to Tirumūlar, what is offered to god in temples is of no use to the Śiva bhaktas, but instead, what is offered to Śiva bhaktas is equivalent to offering to gods in temples (verse 1857). When a Śiva bhakta consumes the food offered to him by a respectful devotee, the pleasure that he gets is similar to the pleasure of all the lives in the three worlds (verse 1858). Tirumūlar suggests that offerings made to one Śiva bhakta finds no other match, neither offering to one thousand Brahmans nor building one thousand temples would be equivalent to this (verse 1860). The entire chapter on *Mahēṣvara Pūja* expresses the supreme nature of the Śiva bhaktas in comparison to the Brahmans and their ritual practice. This is another indication of the fact that there was indeed a contest over the hegemony of ritual beliefs and practices between the Brahminic and non-Brahminic traditions at the time of Tirumūlar.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Verse 1834.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Verse. 1842.

## Becoming a Śaivaite and uniting with Śiva

Goal of any Śaivaite is to attain *mokṣa*<sup>39</sup> – the highest state of being that can be achieved by a soul - and it can only be attained by conducting a series of rituals that are capable of enabling the soul to obtain liberation from worldly bonds. Liberation of a soul is nothing other than uniting with Śiva, and thus, can be free from being born again. This spiritual state of the ‘divine body’, which is called *ātmasuddhi*, is the crucial part of daily worship. Smith’s discussion on liberation of the soul surrounding the three fetters namely *mala*, *karman* and *māyā* are based on *Mṛgendrāgama* and *Kāmikāgama* provide definitions of ritual practices to be conducted by humans with a *liṅga*. On a similar note, the Saiva Siddhānta discusses the process of freeing oneself from all the human qualities by transcending to the state of “Śiva yogis”, *Siddhas* and *Ñānis*, who not only can liberate themselves from the worldly bonds, but also enjoy Śiva in their *Jīvan*.

One of the common problems of the *Jīvan* is to get trapped frequently in the bondages of life. Tirumūlar suggests that this is because of the *Jīvan*’s inability to control *Vindu*, ‘the source of creation’. In a separate section on the power of *Vindu* (the *Tirumantiram*, verses 1923 to 1974), Tirumūlar states how taking control of the power of *Vindu*, and not wasting it can lead one to attain the status of *Śiva yogi*,<sup>40</sup> and realize *Śiva* in the heart. “The power of *Vindu* is limitless and its commencement inside human body invokes all the powers of the five supreme gods *Sadāsiva*, *Viṣṇu*, *Rudra*, and

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<sup>39</sup> See Smith (1996: 83-111)

<sup>40</sup> Tirumantiram, verse 1950.

*Mahēṣvara*; and finally emerges as the power of *Kuṇḍalini* – the supreme strength” (Verse 1923).

Thus, Tirumūlar captures the two divine essentials central to the human body namely *Jīvan* and *Vindu*, and he attempts to relate them to the wisdom of Śiva from the point of view of *Yōgic* and *Jñāna* standpoints. His attempts to make the human body and heart sacred, and realizing the divine within the heart form the central point in his discussion. The *Śiva Yōgīs*, who are not constrained by any fetters and worldly desires, according to Tirumūlar, are capable of achieving this state. *Śiva Yōgīs* are the ones who always keep themselves away from the lustful eyes of women, and destroy the powers of evil elements in their mind. By doing so, they prevent the supreme energy of *Vindu* from being wasted (Verse 1937). What Tirumūlar offers in the subsequent verses (1932 to 1947) in the same section is an illustration of how the accumulation of *Vindu* by *controlling* all the five senses leads to the union inside womb, and subsequently procreate the *īcan* “god” with a life and great power

...īcan uyirōṭum karuttatu vittaayk kaaraṇa kāriyam

‘that the god emanates in the form of ‘life’ becomes the cause of all the worldly deeds’ (verse 1947).

This metaphysical interpretation of sexual union and the cause for the materialization of *īcan* (*karu*) present an answer to the question of why Tirumūlar is formulating a *Yōgic* project focusing primarily upon the human body, both as a locus of worship as well as the object of worship.



## Concluding Remarks

The two metaphysically significant terms *Cīvan* (Skt. *Jīvan*) and *Vindu* that Tirumūlar discusses in detail in his text play a crucial role in his defining the epistemological system of Śaiva philosophy. The ultimate goal of any human, according to Tirumūlar, is to become *Teḷintār* 'enlightened'. Attaining this state requires controlling of *Jīvan* and *Vindu* in a proper manner. Contrastively, the *Āgamas* state that the worshipper transforms Śiva into *liṅga* and commences his services of worship on this embodied form<sup>41</sup>. Further, one finds in the *Āgamic* tradition a variety of this kind of ritual practices performed by the priests belonging to various categories of class and caste. To quote one example, the Sanskrit *Āgamic* texts, such as *Suprabhedāgama* and Rāmakaṇṭha's *Jātinirṇaya pūrvakālayapraveśavidhi*, as discussed in Smith (1991, p.70), groups worshippers into various categories and also assign restricted spaces only within which they can perform their rituals. This includes such relationships as the Śaiva-brāhmaṇa priests, non-ādiśaiva brahmans, common brahmans, Kings (*kṣatriyas*), vaiśyas and *Śūdras*.

But, Tirumūlar's approach to Śiva worship, among many other distinguishing characteristics, does not propose any such hierarchical divisions of worshippers on the basis of their status or power. He knows only two types of worshippers namely those who are *Śiva Yōgis* and the others who are not, based strictly on how they perform the *Yōgic* practices, which he considers to be the path to attain the Wisdom of Śiva. In this sense, Tirumūlar's *Tirumantiram* can be treated as an indigenous system of *Āgamic*

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<sup>41</sup> Davis (1991 p.71).

practices concentrating on the human body itself. The Śaiva Siddhānta tradition that advocates a non-idol and monotheistic approach to Śiva worship are demonstrated in the texts of Śaiva Nāyanmars, including Tirumūlar. Tirumūlar's *Tirumantiram*, which was composed much earlier than the other Śaiva texts, superimposes the idea of 'man' as a divine creation and he is the absolute potential for the divine power. The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* states that the Soul and the supreme God are united together – *Atmasthanam*:

‘Atmasthanam ye anupasyanti tedhirah tesam sugham sasvatama na iteresam

--*Svetasvatara Upanishad*

The same idea is revealed in *Tirumantiram* in the following verse, which states that realizing Śivan in one's heart is the ultimate step toward the unity with Him, and to prepare oneself to achieve this spiritual experience is the goal of any soul.

Soul and Śivan are two different entities,  
when the soul the soul is incapable of experiencing the Śivan.  
When the soul realizes the Śivan within,  
The soul and the Śivan appear as one<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup>

Cīvan enac cīvan enna veeṇillai  
Cīvanār cīvanārai arikilar  
Cīvanār cīvanārai arintapin  
Cīvanār cīvan āyīṭṭirupparē -*Tirumantiram*, verse 2017.

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