

its capricious whims. In the world of Cēkkiḷār's literary, *purāṇic* vision in Tamil, one does that not through the severely ascetic practice of the Jain "great beings," but by focusing on, visiting, engaging in the timeless landscapes of countryside and temple, the habitually present deeds of Śiva and his *nāyanmār* who walked there once and remain accessible still. The *Periyapurāṇam*'s temporal modes, in other words, lay a critical foundation for Cēkkiḷār's vision of Śiva as supreme, and supremely gracious, divine being, for his vision of a poetically centered life of *bhakti* or devotion.

In this reading, then, the *purāṇa* in *Periyapurāṇam* is neither incidental nor a misnomer. Rather, Cēkkiḷār's (and the Tamil-speaking Śaiva tradition's continuing) use of the term signals a clear appropriation – and then rejection – of the primary temporal focus of the Sanskrit genre, particularly the Jain *Mahāpurāṇa*. Temporality becomes a critical foundation for Cēkkiḷār's vision of a powerfully supreme yet loving and accessible Śiva, of a set of sixty-three "great beings" whose lives and deeds and poetic works remain vitally relevant to the devotional lives of the *Periyapurāṇam*'s Śaiva audience. Time, less predictable and more capricious than in the *Periyapurāṇam*'s Sanskrit counterparts, brings Śiva and his community of devotees out of the remote past and into the light of the contemporary.

## The tale of the righteous king: king Maṇu in Ramalinga Aṭikaḷ (1823-1874)

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In June 1854 Ramalinga Aṭikaḷ,<sup>1</sup> the Śaivite poet-saint of 19<sup>th</sup> century Tamil Nadu, published his first piece of prose writing while he was still in his thirties, called *Maṇumuraikaṇṭavācakam* or the *The Tale of how King Maṇu observed Righteous Conduct*.<sup>2</sup> Ostensibly, this, his earliest work, is a prose rendition of a well-known tale from the classic 12<sup>th</sup> century Śaivite hagiography, the *Periyapurāṇam*. Yet, *The Tale of how King Maṇu* was not so much a prose rendition as a re-telling, for in it he ventured beyond the parameters of traditional learning even while adhering to its boundaries in most ways. That is, he also took certain liberties with the *Periyapurāṇam* version, which resulted in a very different theological focus. This paper focuses on the story of King Maṇu from the perspective of the emergence of such a tale in Tamil literary sources within the context of typologies of the righteous king. The paper attempts to show how such typologies emerged in the Tamil context through the interaction of Tamil and non-Tamil, Sanskrit and possibly Pāli sources before coming to be consolidated in medieval Śaiva hagiography. The paper then goes on to consider the afterlife of the tale in Ramalinga Aṭikaḷ and reflects upon the possible transformations wrought in the Śaivite religious sensibility in Tamil modernity.

A brief account of Ramalingar's life and achievements might be appropriate at this juncture before we turn to the text under consideration.<sup>3</sup> He was born in 1823 in Marutūr, a village near the famous Śaivite religious centre of Cidambaram. His family moved around upon the death of his father and finally came to Chennai when he was still a child. In Chennai Ramalinga eventually acquired the erudition of a traditional scholar of Śaivite religious texts and classical Tamil literature. During this period he started to compose what was eventually to become a vast

<sup>1</sup> In this article I have used diacritics in all cases except for Ramalinga Aṭikaḷ and for popular place names in the Tamil country such as Chennai and Cidambaram.

<sup>2</sup> According to Ūraṅ Aṭikaḷ (1997: 22) the title page has the following information: that the text had been written by Citamparam Irāmalinkap Piḷḷai on behalf of the Cāstiraviḷakkacaṅkattār; that it had been published by Pālayam Cupparāya Ceṭṭiyār at the Vittiyaṅanta Accuk Kūṭam of the members of the Caṅkam in the Aṅantavaruṭam Aṭimātam.

<sup>3</sup> This brief account might be considered a composite of the standard versions of his life story given in various biographies and hagiographies such as that of Ūraṅ Aṭikaḷ.

corpus of religious poetry and began to acquire the reputation of a man of great learning. In 1858, at the age of 35, Ramalinga Aṭikaḷ decided to leave Chennai permanently and commenced on a journey which brought him first to Karuṅkuḷi, where he lived and then to Vaṭalūr, a village 30 km to the north of Cidambaram, where he set up his organization and lived after 1867.

The early years at Vaṭalūr had been marked by a great deal of socio-religious activity and the building up of an organization dedicated to his religious ideas. In 1865 he established there a religious institution called the *Camaraca Vēta Caṇmārka Caṅkam* whose name was eventually changed to *Camaraca Cutta Caṇmārka Caṅkam* in 1872. It was meant to propagate the values of non-killing, vegetarianism, forbearance towards all beings, non-discrimination on the basis of caste or creed, non-adherence to rituals and burial instead of cremation of the dead. The central religious creed was the belief in an ultimate divine to be worshipped in an aniconic form, without any rituals as the "Great Light of Compassion", *Aruṭperuṅcōti*. Feeding and education of the poor were among the social priorities. In 1867 he established a charitable feeding house, the *Cattiya Tarumacālai* for the poor. Once this house was built Ramalinga shifted his residence from Karuṅkuḷi to this house. In this year the first edition of his selected works, a compilation of four volumes of his poetic corpus collectively titled *Tiruvaruṭpā*, was also brought out by his foremost disciple Toḷuvūr Vēlāyuta Mutaliyār. The growth of Vaṭalūr as a religious centre in this period and all the activities at the Tarumacālai appeared to have created a need in Ramalinga for some solitude. In 1870 he left Vaṭalūr for a small village near it called Mēṭṭukkuppam. In this village he resided in a house which he had named "The Place which bestows Siddhi," *Cittivaḷākam*. In 1872, on the basis of his instructions, a temple was built in Vaṭalūr. Its foundations had the form of an eight-pointed star and it consisted of a central hall in which the community could do daily worship in front of a lamp. The temple was named the *Cattiya Nāṇa Capai*. By 1873, though, Ramalinga Aṭikaḷ seemed to distance himself from the organization he had attempted to build up. He felt that worship was not properly being undertaken in the temple and remonstrated with his disciples about this. After sometime when he didn't perceive any change he locked up the temple, took away the keys and forbade any worship. His own religious discourses, he started to curtail considerably. An important date in the organization had been the celebration of the Kārtikai vrata, in November, when Ramalinga would deliver a public discourse outside his residence Cittivaḷākam. In November 1873, though, he refused to do so, placing instead a lighted lamp in front of his room door and locking himself inside. The next three months he emerged from his room only occasionally. January 1874 dawned. On the 30th of January, a Friday, he called

some of his close disciples, spoke to them at midnight, went into his room and was never seen again.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper I am going to argue for an analysis of Ramalingar's earliest piece of prose writing, the story of King Maṇu which unearths different layers of it, much as one would unearth layers in an archaeological dig. Part of this layering comes from the conceptions of the righteous king which have a long literary lineage in both Sanskrit and Tamil religious literature and which come to be anchored, in the sources we are considering, within the history of the lineage of the Cōḷas, a lineage which links Maṇu to another righteous king who was also considered a part of Cōḷa ancestry, Cempiyaṅ or King Śibi. This paper, therefore, traces certain notions of the righteous Cōḷa king which generally inform the Tamil religious landscape prior to Ramalinga Adigaḷ. It shows how such notions were really the product of a synthesis of old Tamil and Sanskrit models of ideal kingship and, with the composition of the *Periyapurāṇam*, how these models, through the foregrounding of King Maṇu, come to be integrated into the world of medieval Śaiva *bhakti*. With Ramalinga Aṭikaḷ's version the model undergoes even further transformation with a focus on an empathetic compassion and a vision of death which is uniquely his own, reflective of the period of early modernity in the Tamil region, which was his own historical context. Thus, in an exemplary fashion, *The Tale of King Maṇu* of Ramalinga Aṭikaḷ appears to embody a literary composition deeply indebted to the confluence of Sanskrit and Tamil, characteristic of the religious landscape of the Tamil country till well into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### The Righteous King in Sanskrit and Tamil Sources

The story of King Maṇu, or more precisely, the tale of the king who commits filicide to make reparation for the slaughter of a calf appears in literary sources prior to the medieval period, in the context of the Cōḷas. Maṇu is linked in Cōḷa dynastic claims together with another figure the King Śibi. I shall first deal with the story of Śibi since it very clearly belongs to the earliest strata of the mythology of the Cōḷas, who Tamilised the name Śibi to Cempiyaṅ. There is another reason for looking closely at the tale of King Śibi before we turn to Maṇu in that the former represents a typology of kingship which clearly had become part of the Tamil literary landscape at a very early stage, thus providing a model for how the story of Maṇu might eventually be elaborated upon in its definitive version, in the *Periyapurāṇam*.

The legend of King Śibi comes to us, in its earliest form, from the Pāli cycle of stories, the *Jātakas*, familiar in the Buddhist landscape as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century

<sup>4</sup> On the early hagiographical narratives concerning the disappearance see my article in the *Indologica Tauronensia*, September 2004.

B.C.E., if the evidence of Indian Buddhist art at Bārhut and Sāñcī is taken into account.<sup>5</sup> There are two versions of the Śibi legend: the first is about the king who donated both his eyes to a blind Brahmin who turns out to be none other than the god Śakra in disguise, come to test the generosity of the king, whose sight is then restored as a result of his perfection of giving – *dāna-pāramitā*. This story is depicted in a sculptural frieze from Gandhāra dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E.<sup>6</sup> The second concerns Śibi's donation of his flesh to a falcon as recompense for the flesh of the dove it is chasing. Both Oberlies (2001) and Ohnuma (2007) agree in assuming that the first version is, in all probability, the older one. It is to be found in the earliest Pāli sources, in the *Sivi-Jātaka* (IV 401.10-412.24).<sup>7</sup> The earliest source for the second story appears to be *Mahābhārata* 3.130.16 – 131.32.<sup>8</sup> By the time of the Caṅkam literature, or sometime in and around the turn of the first millennium,<sup>9</sup> it is the second story which had become an established motif to allude to the legendary generosity of the Cōlas. Thus, at least three poems of the *Puranānūru* 37, 39 and 46 refer to this legend when praising the Cōla king Kuḷamurrattut Tuñciya Killi Vaḷavaṇ. For instance, *Puranānūru* 37: *You descend from Cembaliyaṇ with his fierce army and shining spear, who freed a bird from its anguish.*<sup>10</sup> *Puranānūru* 39 tells us: *Since you were born in his lineage, he who dispelled the pain of a dove by climbing upon a scale and Puranānūru* 46 says of the same king: *You were born to the line of him who relieved the pain of a dove and wiped away many other sorrows besides!*<sup>11</sup>

Let us consider the contours of the story and its typology of the righteous king by looking a little more in detail at the *Mahābhārata* version. In it the King Uśinara, King of the Śibis, is offering a great sacrifice which is visited by the Gods Indra and Agni. Indra disguises himself as a hawk and Agni as the dove whom the former chases as its prey. Fearful, the dove approaches the king and seats itself on

<sup>5</sup> Ohnuma (2007: 36).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid: 121.

<sup>7</sup> Oberlies (2001: 247). Indeed Oberlies suggests that it is likely that the composer of the *Tīrthayātrāparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* adapts the earlier version to the framework of this section of the text, leading to the emphasis on the cutting into pieces one's own body, which is the hallmark of the second Śibi story.

<sup>8</sup> Meisig (1995: 3) lists all available versions of the story in the early Sanskrit sources which include two other sections, in the *Āraṇyakaparvan* and the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, in the *Mahābhārata* as well as *Tantrākhyāyika* and the *Kathāsaritsāgara*.

<sup>9</sup> The dating of the Caṅkam literature is a notoriously difficult and controversial issue. Hart and Heifetz (1999: xv) suggest the period between the first and third centuries C.E. for the *Puranānūru*.

<sup>10</sup> Translated Hart and Heifetz (1999: 30).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid: 31, 36.

his lap, seeking sanctuary.<sup>12</sup> The hawk then speaks, extolling the king as the embodiment of *Dharma* and, therefore, as one who should not do the injustice of depriving the hawk of the food meant for it. If he were to do so he would be privileging one *dharma* (that of kingly protection of his subjects) against another (the right of the hunter or warrior to his bounty). This, then, as Meisig has pointed out, is the main dilemma of the story, where two seemingly universal rights collide with each other.<sup>13</sup> The clash between these two imperatives is heightened by the testing of the mortal king by the gods. Thus, the king proposes obvious solutions to the dilemma: he offers the hawk substitute nourishment, some other animal – such as a bull or a deer – but the hawk refuses. The king then even offers his kingdom or anything else the hawk may wish to have – here, he provides the hawk with the opportunity to ask for the ultimate prize. The hawk demands that he sacrifice his own flesh – in equivalent weight to that of the dove – as fodder. The testing continues when the dove grows mysteriously heavier and heavier on the scales till the king has to cut up and offer his entire body. At this point the gods reveal their true form. They tell the king that they wanted to get to know him in a situation of conflict of *dharma*. Such has been his act of suffering that his fame now will spread over the three worlds. Meisig's analysis of the story may be paraphrased as follows: The story of Śibi is one without any theistic tones whatsoever. Rather, in it, both gods and men are subject to the impersonal world-law which is *Dharma*. The gods are superior to humans only in as much as they can capriciously influence and intervene in men's lives. Śibi's story is about how humans, though, through their active acceptance of pain, and freely chosen suffering, neutralise the capriciousness of the gods.<sup>14</sup> While Meisig's analysis reflects in the internal themes of the story of testing, generosity and suffering – all themes which we shall have to consider later – Oberlies makes a far more intriguing point. He shows how the Śibi story needs to be examined within its context in the *Mahābhārata* and, therefore, within the context of the Vedic sacrificial ritual which has been transposed onto the epic plot at this juncture, the *Sarasvatī-Sattra*. The core of the *Sarasvatī-Sattra* lies in the freely chosen ritual suicide of the participant – suicide which is accompanied by the ritual announcement of the dismembering of individual body-parts on each day of the sacrifice – for the purpose of reaching the heavens. Oberlies points to the unmistakable parallel between this event and not just the Śibi story but several other tales told at this juncture, including that of the King Somaka who sacrifices his own son Jantu (*Mbh* 3.127.19) and concludes that these tales reflect the epic re-

<sup>12</sup> Oberlies (2001: 241) remarks in footnote 2 that it is not without significance that the dove sits on the upper thigh of the king – an act which recollects what takes place in a traditional rite of adoption.

<sup>13</sup> Meisig (1995: 9).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid: 7-8.

enactment of a particular Vedic self-sacrifice.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the *Mahābhārata* version of the tale also appears to rest on the more archaic foundations of Vedic sacrificial ritual, where self-dismemberment is voluntarily undertaken for the rewards of heaven.<sup>16</sup> Even while this sacrificial element must be kept in mind as central to all versions of the story, Śibi story also appears to have another set of meanings and different ramifications in the Buddhist literature. Here, as Ohnuma's extensive analysis has shown, it falls within a genre of tales which has three, crucial elements: it features the Buddha in one of his former lives as a Bodhisattva; the bodily sacrifice itself is seen as a gift, *dāna* and, therefore the story itself is an exemplary one illustrating the "perfection of generosity" and showing us what makes the Bodhisattva a Bodhisattva and, finally, it is not some symbolic body but the actual, physical one which is being given away.<sup>17</sup> These elements too have to be kept in mind when we consider the general typologies of the righteous king in the Tamil religious literature.

The story of King Maṇu emerges at a slightly later period, linked yet again with the Cōḷa lineage in three early sources we can identify thus far. Thus, as far as the Tamil sources are concerned, we have references in both the *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*. In *Cilappatikāram*, *Maturaikkāṇṭam* 20.53-56, Kaṇṇakī, in singing the praise of the city of Pukār, says that it is in this city that the episode of the killing of the prince at the wheels of the chariot took place (*arumpeṇar-putalvaṇai āliyiṇ maṭittōṇ*). In *Maṇimēkalai* I, II 1-9; 22: 212, the king is referred to as the one who killed his own son (*makaṇai murai ceyta maṇṇaṇ*).<sup>18</sup> For the Sri Lankan source we have the fascinating account in the *Mahāvamsa*, chapter 21 of a Cōḷa chieftain called Elara who later gets defeated and killed by the Sinhala king Dūttagamini:

A Damila of noble descent, named ELARA, who came hither from the Chola-country to seize on the kingdom, ruled when he had overpowered king ASELA, forty-four years, with even justice toward friend and foe, on occasions of disputes at law. At the head of his bed he had a bell hung up with a long rope so that those who desired a judgement at law might ring it. The king had only one son and one daughter. When once the son of the ruler was going in a car to the Tissa-tank, he killed unintentionally a young calf lying on the road with the mother cow, by driving the wheel over its neck. The cow came and dragged at the bell in bitterness of heart; and the king caused his son's head to be severed (from his body) with that same wheel. A snake had devoured the young of a bird upon a palm tree. The hen-bird,

<sup>15</sup> Oberlies: 243-246.

<sup>16</sup> Arguing from a similar viewpoint Edith Parlier (1991) has made an equally cogent case for likening the Śibi story to the elements of the soma sacrifice and the agnicayana.

<sup>17</sup> Ohnuma (2007: 48-51).

<sup>18</sup> Ghose (1996: 327).

mother of the young one, came and rang the bell. The king caused the snake to be brought to him, and when its body had been cut open and the young bird taken out of it he caused it to be hung up upon the tree.<sup>19</sup>

There are two issues to be noted here. The first is that the story of a noble Cōḷa who had his own son killed to do reparations to a mother cow was well-known by the 5<sup>th</sup> c. CE (usually considered to be the period of the redaction of the *Mahāvamsa*) not just in Tamil but in Sri Lankan sources. Further, in all of these sources and most particularly in the *Mahāvamsa* version we have a very stark tale: the king metes out stern justice to his son who dies for the calf. The tale, so to speak, ends there. It is only much later, with the *Periyapurāṇam* version, that it gets re-modeled into a story of testing and of virtue rewarded, much like the tales of the testing of Śibi, in both the epic and Buddhist versions.

### The Original Story of King Maṇu in the *Periyapurāṇam*

The story found in the very first section of the text and functions as a kind of frame story of Śaiva devotion which anticipates the subsequent narratives of the exemplary lives of the 63 saints, the *nāyaṇārs*. It is told simply enough: King Maṇu, famed for his virtue and generosity rules over the sacred city of Tiruvārūr in the Cōḷa country, home to the form of Śiva known as Tyāgarāja. After many years of childlessness he and the queen are blessed with the birth of a male child. The young prince grows up worthy of the great Cōḷa lineage, skilled in all the martial and equestrian arts. One day, around the time he has reached the age of investiture as the heir-apparent, he sets out in a regal procession, to visit the shrine of Tyāgarāja. The entire town gathers to watch the procession and marvel at his beauty. On this journey, a calamity occurs. A young calf darts forward, unseen by the onlookers, is trapped in the golden wheels of the prince's chariot and dies. The mother cow which has followed it witnesses the death and is distraught as is the prince. He cuts short his journey and returns to the palace to consult with the brahmins there about what he needs to do to remedy the situation before he seeks out his father. They advise him to perform certain ritual expiations. In the meantime, the distressed cow goes to the palace of the king and rings the bell at the entrance with its horns to summon him. The king hears the bell, comes out and is told about the death of the calf by one of his ministers. The *Periyapurāṇam* says that, on hearing the story, the king "experienced fully the distress [of the cow] and suffered within as if strong poison had entered his brains."<sup>20</sup> The ministers see his distress and advise him to guide his son to do expiations as advised by the Vedic brahmins.

<sup>19</sup> <http://lakdiva.org/mahavamsa/chap021.html>

<sup>20</sup> *Tiruttoṅṭarapurāṇam*, *tiruvārūrttirunakaracciṅṭappu*, v 117a-b: *avvurai kēṭṭa vēntaṅ āvuru tuyaram eyti vevviṭaṅ talaikkōṅṭārpōl vētaṅaiyakattumikku...*

The king rejects their suggestion. He reflects on his duty as the protector of the earth who has to guard all the living beings in his kingdom from the five-fold dangers: those caused by himself, his relatives, enemies, thieves and strangers. The death of the calf illustrates that he has failed to perform this fundamental duty. Finally, he clinches his argument by reflecting that he cannot deal with his own son less harshly than he deals with his own subjects on whom he would pronounce the death penalty for murder.

The argument here has a two-fold structure. It arises, first, from the acknowledgement of a certain personal, private responsibility based, in turn, on an ethic of empathy. The king has to somehow adequately acknowledge and compensate for the loss of the calf and the mother cow's distress. The sacrifice of the son is the only adequate solution and acknowledges the tragic relationship forged between the son and the calf, the king and the mother cow. The second level of the argument is the public level. The king argues that he has to restore his own reputation. Finally, the crime committed by his son is particularly heinous because it has taken place in the sacred town of Tiruvārūr, the home of Śiva. The king is now resolved that since he cannot assuage the cow's grief, both copious and immense (*uru pēr iṭar*), it is only the right thing to do, it is fate (*karumam*) that he shoulder a similar grief himself through the death of his son (127).<sup>21</sup>

In the following verses the remainder of the plot unfolds. The king orders a minister to carry out the killing of his son, and when the minister kills himself rather than carry out these orders, he leads his son to the street where the calf was killed (128). While doing so, he pushes away all thoughts that the prince is the sole heir to the throne with the resolve, "Dharma should be followed". He runs the wheels of his chariot in the street over the supine body of his son (129).<sup>22</sup> Then, in honour of this act of sacrifice, the immortals rain flowers and Śiva himself with Umā and the heavenly retinue descends on the street to laud the king (130-131). The dead – the calf, the minister and the prince – awake once more to life (132) and the king joyfully enfolds his son in his embrace even as the mother cow feeds milk to her calf (133). *The Tale of King Maṇu* in the *Periyapurāṇam* ends with these images of the natural order restored, the filial bonds re-established, the grace of

<sup>21</sup> *Tiruttoṅṭarpurāṇam, tiruvārūrttirunakaracciṭappu, v 127:*

*eṇamoliṇtu marriṭaṇṭukk iṇiyituvē ceyalivvān  
maṇamaḷiyun tuyarakarra māḷḷāṭēṇ varuntumitu  
taṇaturu pēriṭar yāṇun tāṅkuvaiē karumam eṇa  
aṇakaṇarum poruṇṇintān amaiccarum aṇciṇarakaṇṇār.*

<sup>22</sup> *Tiruttoṅṭarpurāṇam, tiruvārūrttirunakaracciṭappu, v 129:*

*orumaṇṭaṇ taṅkulattukkuk uḷḷāṇ eṇpatum uṇarān  
tarumantaṇ vaḷiccellkai kaṭaṇ eṇṇu taṇmaintaṇ  
marumantaṇ ērāḷiy uṇavūrntaṇ maṇuvēntaṇ  
arumanta aracāṭci aritō marreḷitō tāṇ.*

Śiva conferring prosperity and plenitude upon Tiruvārūr, an event symbolized by the milk given by the cow to her calf.

There are many ways to both interpret and deconstruct this tale and at least two dominant motifs stand out. These are the motifs relating first, to the family, and second to the body. The motif relating to the family becomes apparent when we consider that the tale takes place in Tiruvārūr, the site sacred to Tyāgarāja who is none other than the form of Śiva known as Somaskandha – the God together with the Goddess Uma and his son Skandha. This triad of father, mother and child is mirrored exactly in the configuration of the King Maṇu, his wife and the male child and is also reflected partially in the dyad of the mother cow and the calf. So there is damage inflicted on an animal family here and restitution has to be made by the human family which mirrors the divine family, restitution which has to take the form of the sacrifice of one of its members. This is a motif, among others which I have looked at in greater detail elsewhere. But let us concentrate instead on the motif of the body for it is with regard to this motif that an inversion takes place in Ramalinga's re-telling, an inversion which underpins his theological vision. In examining this motif in the *Periyapurāṇam* version we need to keep in mind earlier tale of King Śibi and the motifs of the conflict of dharma, generosity, suffering and sacrifice which emerge from a careful reading of the many versions of the tale. Yet the story of King Maṇu, in addition, has certain features particularly specific to medieval Tamil Śaiva bhakti and I shall turn my attention to this next. In doing so, I am preempted by the late Dennis Hudson's insightful views on the mutilation of the body in Śaiva devotion.

In the thought-world of the *Periyapurāṇam*, as Dennis Hudson has shown, horrific self-inflicted sacrifices are a common-place.<sup>23</sup> Hudson poses the question as to why violent sacrifice/self-sacrifice to Śiva occurs in the *Periyapurāṇam* at all and what hagiographical purposes it serves. "How, for example, is it saintly to give your wife away to an ascetic who asks for her and then to chop up your relatives and hers when they try to stop him from taking her out of town? How is it saintly to chop the heads off everyone in your family, including servants and a nursing child, because during a famine they ate the food you had set apart for Śiva's temples? How is it saintly to kill your only son because a sādhu asks you to and then to cook him and sit down to eat him?"<sup>24</sup> He answers this question by suggesting that all these stories illustrate the nature of the exemplary devotee's love, or the Tamil word for it *anpu*, for Śiva, Four themes emerge, with regard to *anpu*, in these stories. "First, ... when anpu ripens a transubstantiation of the devotee's nature occurs that dissolves his bonds to others in society."<sup>25</sup> The devotee no longer respects the normal and

<sup>23</sup> Hudson (1996).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid: 375.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid: 381.

normative values, which would otherwise guarantee the social order, indeed these are cast away in the commitment to Śiva. This commitment, further, has been solicited by Śiva himself, when he sets into motion events which test it to its limits. Further this love casts aside both learning and ritual purity, in other words the love for Śiva is connected with flesh, blood and sacrifice. As Hudson, sees this (and I would agree with him), two ideas are connected with blood sacrifice in this context: one that "the slaughter of a sin-drenched outer body purifies the inner body,"<sup>26</sup> the second, that, "in blood and death the sacred power that regenerates life reveals itself."<sup>27</sup> These themes, then, weave together as exemplary Śaiva *bhakti*, of which the Śaiva saints, the *nāyanmārs* and King Manu are the representatives. Thus, it is, primarily, as the exemplary devotee that King Manu is acting: what he does in killing his son is to show that a violation of the sacred space of Tiruvārūr by the killing of a young calf can only be remedied by an appropriate act of blood sacrifice to Śiva.

Let us now turn to Ramalinga Aṭikal's version of the same story. We shall not go into all the particulars since, for major portions of it, his version does not differ from that of the *Periyapurāṇam*. Rather I shall hone in only on a final monologue delivered by the king to his ministers in the Ramalinga version, a monologue which emerges after several lengthy exchanges between them and which culminates in the articulation of the King's resolve to kill the young prince. Through looking at this monologue I shall show how it is at this point that Ramalinga's account deflects and moves away from the *Periyapurāṇam* version.

### King's Manu's Rationale in Ramalinga's Manumuraikaṇṭa-vācakaṁ

Here is the king's monologue:

"I have followed the injunction of the latter portions of the scriptures [to the effect that], 'Since the Lord of all dwells undifferentiated in each living being, one should regard all living beings as equal,' particularly with regard to bringing to an end the sin generated by the killing of a being (and not otherwise). ... You might ask me: in what way should one, disregarding other instances, consider all beings equal only when it comes to ending the sin generated by killing? To this I reply: All beings are forms of the power of consciousness. It is God who bestows bodies and the instruments of perception upon them. It is an unthinkable transgression to separate beings, which are his power of consciousness, from the bodies given by him. When life is separated from the body not naturally but through violence each such living being, when it departs from that body, experiences great sorrow. When one places

sugar-cane and mustard seeds in a press and grinds them, they are crushed, ground, squeezed, become reduced to particles and then the juice and the oil emerge clouded from them. Similarly, when murder takes place, it is common for the body to be crushed, ground, fragmented, and from it, trembling, the intelligence ruined, fearful, for the soul to emerge out in a clouded state. When one knows one is being murdered the body trembles, becomes panic-stricken, perspires, thrashes helplessly, the legs give way, the eyes mist over and become dimmed, the ears stop up, the nose shrivels, the mouth dries, the tongue slurs, the stomach feels squeezed and the heart, fearful, beating like the *paraī* drum, is in anguish through sorrow and exhaustion. Like a crow caught up in the sails of the mast of a boat,<sup>28</sup> like an insect caught up in waters of a whirlpool, like a speck caught up in a whirlwind, it is common to all souls that they whirl around and wander, in this terrifying condition. As soon as they die these souls experience and must grieve not only due to the suffering of passing but also the immediate agony of rebirth. We do not have the freedom to deliberately bring a person into life, nor do we have the right to take life; only God has the freedom to create and take life. I will have you know that when you, not understanding this, think that one may kill as one pleases, then you will attain everlasting hell. This is why one has to consider the murder of all beings as equal. In keeping with this logic I have determined to kill my son as retribution."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> I am indebted to Indira Peterson for pointing out this translation of "pāymaram".

<sup>29</sup> *Manumuraikaṇṭavācakaṁ*, 120-122: *paramēcuvaram avvavuyirkaḷiṭattilum vērupatāmal viḷaṅkukinrapatiyāl evvuyirkaḷaiyum potuvāka nōkkavēṇṭum eṇra uttarapākattin vittiyai nān aṇucarittuk koṇṭatu uyirkkolaiyākiya pāvanivarttikku māttiramēyallātu marrōṇṇilumalla ... āṇāl marraivaiyellām niṅka, kolaippātaka nivarattikku māttiram evvuyirkaḷaiyūṅ camamākak kolla vēṇṭum eṇpatu evvakaiyāl eṇpīrēl: uyirkaḷellāṅ cīrcaktiyiṅ uruvamākaiyālum ellā uyirkaḷukkum iraiyaṅē taṇṭakaraṇaṅkaḷaik koṇṭuttalāṇum, avaṇatu cīrcaktiyākiya uyirkaḷai avaṅ koṇṭuttaruḷiya uṭampinṇirum nīkkutal niṅaikappaṭāta aparātam-ākalāṇum eṇtenta uyirkaḷum iyalpiṇāl allāmal imcaiyiṇāl uṭampaviṇṭup piriyaṇṭa nēriṭṭāl antanta uyirkaḷukkum avvavvūṭampai viṭṭu nīnkumpōṭuṇṭakum varuttam peritāka irukkumākaiyālum, aṇṇiyum kolaiceyumiṭattu, karumpaiyum eḷḷaiyum ālaiyilūṅ cekkilum vaittāṭṭumpōtu, nerukkālakappaṭtu araipaṭtu nacukkuṇṭu cīṇṇāppinṇappaṭtu akkarumpilum eḷḷilumiruntu racamum neyyim eppaṭik kalaṅki varumō appaṭiyē, uṭal nacukkuṇṭu araipaṭtu cīṇṇamāka aṭiliruntu ṇaṇṇaṇṅki aṇṇivukēṭṭu tikaippaṭaintu kalaṅki varuvatu evvuyirkaḷukkum potuvākalāṇum, tamakkuk kolai nēriṭṭuvatai aṇṇintapōtu uṭampu ṇaṇṅkiyum, pataittum, viyarttum, taṭataṭatuṅ taḷḷāṭiyum, kāl cōrṇṭum, kaṅkalaṅkiyum, iruḷaṭaintum, kātukaḷ kummēṇru aṭaipattum, nāci tuvaṇṭum, vāy nīrularṇṭum, nākuḷariyum, vayiru pakīreṇru tikilaṭaintum, maṇam tikaṭṭup paraiyaṭiṭṭarpōr patapataveṇru aṭittuṭ tuṭittuṭ tukkamūṅ cōrvuṅ koṇṭu mayāṅkavum, pāyamaraccuṇṇil akappaṭta kākkai pōlavum, nīrcuḷiyil akappaṭta vaṇṭu pōlavum, cuḷal kāṇṇil akappaṭta turumpu pōlavum, uyir cuḷaṇṇu cuḷaṇṇu alaivaṇṭu uṇṭākiṇṇa payāṅkaram evvuyirkaḷukkum iyalpākaiyālum, irantavaṇṭu avvuyirkaḷ iḷappinṇappaṭta imcaiyumiṇṇi uṇṭāṅ pīrappinṇālum varuttamaṭaintu tukappaṭta vēṇṭumākaiyālum, nām vēṇṭi ṇuyiraip pīrappipparakum cutantiram illatappiyāl nām vēṇṭi ṇuyirai irappipparakum pīrappipparakum iraiyaṅē cutantiram-ullavaṇṇeṇṇāmāl ākāmiyattāl kolai cevyataṇāl miḷānarakam nērum eṇṇarintukoḷvī; ātalāl, evvuyirkaḷiṭattum kolaip pātakattaic camamākak kollavēṇṭum. inta niyāyattiṇṇaṭi eṇ puṭalvaṇaip paḷikkup paḷiyākak koṇṇu viṭuvatē muṭivu.*

<sup>26</sup> Ibid: 389.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid: 390.

Hudson (1996:376) remarked, with regard to the acts of the *nāyanmārs* in the *Periyapūrānam*, that their "violent devotion derives from emotional attachment, not from insightful detachment." It is in a state of profound anger and emotional agitation that King Maṇu in that version of the story delivers his verdict. In contrast to this, even when the verdict in the Ramalinga version is delivered in the same context, it is informed by theological insight and, indeed, that very theological explication which is the opposite of the emotional response of the *Periyapūrānam*. The king explains at length. The explanation rests on three very different premises. The first, is that, here, the Śaiva devotee acts from a theological knowledge of the categories of Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta. He is a man of wisdom who knows that Śiva has endowed all living creature with his power of consciousness, *citśakti*. The second premise is that killing others is wrong because the *citśakti*, the divine is within all of us. In the Tamil Śaiva Siddhānta, this premise does not entail a monism but remains firmly within the parameters of a dualistic vision, whereby the individual soul is separate from God and remains so even in death. So it is also in the case of Ramalinga Aṭikaḷ. But the unvoiced theological implications in his version seem to indicate a greater movement towards monism. The long, empathetic passage which then follows, poetically and lyrically describing the violent death of a soul, ventures towards a practical monism because Ramalinga Aṭikaḷ is saying that through "feeling" the death agony of others, when we kill others we are, in effect, also killing ourselves. Here, in the long peculiar passage, mystical empathy unfolds in a passionate vision of dying to and with the body in order to recognize the need to value and preserve the corporeality of the human being. This mystical empathy, informed by theological insight, has very different consequences from the emotional empathy of the *Periyapūrānam* where it results to the detachment towards the physical body. In the latter, the body can be ruthlessly deposed off, limbs severed, heads decapitated, precisely because the body is, in some sense, not one's own but Śiva's. Here, in Ramalinga, the body is inhabited by the divine, it is precious, its agonies and deterioration are very much one's own as they are also, simultaneously, Śiva's. The mystical sense of this can only be captured in a poetic vision of empathy in which killing, *per se*, is detested. The sacrifice of the son in the *Periyapūrānam* has implications of a blood sacrifice. In Ramalinga's account a blood sacrifice would be repugnant in the context of this empathetic vision. Also, it is perhaps here, exactly in this passage, that one can pinpoint the modernity of Ramalinga's theological vision. It is modern in the sense in which Wilhelm Halbfass has located the modernity of neo-Hinduism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which lies in its inversion of the traditional, normative relationship between metaphysics and ethics. In the pan-Indian philosophical tradition, as Halbfass points out, ethical, moral behaviour is not the result of the application of metaphysical insights but rather the "prerequisite" of metaphysically and soteriologically valid knowledge. One such realization has been achieved, good ethical conduct is no longer supposed

to be acting in accordance with certain ethical rules, norms or restrictions but a natural and spontaneous mode of being".<sup>30</sup> Neo-Hinduism inverts this proposition, with metaphysical insight preceding ethical action, as does Ramalinga in his version of the tale. The case against killing based on the inviolability of the body which he makes, aims at a universalistic ethic which can and does go beyond the thought-world of traditional Śaiva bhakti.

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<sup>30</sup> Halbfass (1995: 217). The bold font is mine.

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***PASSAGES: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN  
TAMIL AND SANSKRIT***

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© Institut français de Pondichéry, 2009 (ISBN: 978-81-8470-176-0)

Published by the French Institute of Pondicherry and  
Tamil Chair, Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies,  
University of California at Berkeley

Typeset by Mrs. T. V. Kamalambal, IFP

Cover Illustration:

Kāraikkālammaiṅār. Tiruvāṅkāṭu.

Bronze, Photo: IFP. Neg. No. 7985-9 (14.06.1978)

Cover design: N. Ravichandran, IFP

Printed at All India Press, Pondicherry

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