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## The Siddha concept of *aruḷ / iruḷ* in the service of politics: how the vision of backwaters defined by Nārāyaṇa Guru in *Śiva Śatakam* 65 by means of the *poli-āli-cuḷi* trio could become the metaphysical reflection of the social and religious transformation implemented within Kerala's body

The *aruḷ / iruḷ* concept which constitutes the basis for the complex Siddha system of liberation process was introduced by Nārāyaṇa Guru<sup>1</sup> in many of his devotional hymns. Guru basically follows the concept of eleven states of liberation crowned with the Twelfth End, which is explained in detail in *Tirumandiram* (TM) 8 2269–2296, although the version that appears in Guru's works is simplified and unconceptualized. The idea takes into account the three states of *jīva*, *Parai* (*Parā Śakti*) and *Paraṅ* (*Para Śiva*), comprising ten stages<sup>2</sup>. The tenth and final level is followed by the Eleventh State, which is devoid of any aspect of Śakti (TM 8 2285)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Nārāyaṇa Guru (1856–1928) was a saint, social reformer and mystic from Kerala. He composed in three languages (Malayalam, Tamil and Sanskrit) over sixty works (devotional hymns, works of moral importance, prose works, philosophical poems). His philosophical system comprises *Vedānta*, *Yoga*, *Sāṅkhya*, *Śaiva Siddhānta* etc. „It was Nārāyaṇa Guru who transformed the *Advaita* philosophy from an elite theoretical doctrine into a relevant principle of practical applicability. Thereby, he expanded its scope to effect phenomenal social changes, and enabled one of the most profound yet bloodless social revolution in history” (Krishnan 2018). Needless to say that the *Advaita* philosophy was successfully mingled by Guru with Tamil *Śaiva Siddhānta* doctrine in order to promote the idea of Siddhas expressed among others in *Tirumandiram* (*oṅṛē kulamum oruvaṅṅē tēvaṅṅum nanṛē niṅaiṁiṅ* (“There is only one race, one God; do think only of the truth” – TM 7 2104). (Cf. Krishnan A.V. 2018. *Sree Narayana Guru. The Perfect Union of Buddha and Śankara*. New Delhi: Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd; Jayakumar V. 1999. *Sree Narayana Guru. A Critical Study*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd.; Balachandran M. 2019. *Sree Narayana Guru. The Mystical Life and Teachings*. Thirsur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi; Mitra, C.R. 1979. *Sree Narayana Guru and Social Revolution*. Shertallai: Mitraji Publications).

<sup>2</sup> According to Natarajan's interpretation this three-levelled state comprises *Para Śiva jāgrat*, *Para Śiva svapna* – *Paramam* and *Para Śiva suṣupti* – *Paramparaṅ*. All these stages go beyond the *Parai* – *Paraṅ* state, i.e. they are deprived of [even the Higher] Śakti.

<sup>3</sup> *Paramśivam mēlām brahmam [Paramam], parattil parambrahmam [Paramparaṅ] mēlām; Parabōdham / viriṅṅa svapnaṅṅa[akarrīṅṅum suṣupti uramtarum mānanditan satyapporuḷē* (Nāyar 2007:695) (“*Paramam* is above both *Param [Parā Śakti]* and *Śivaṅ [Para Śivan]*”).

Although completely freed from the *śakti* aspect as the representation of pure oneness, the level of Substance (*poruḷ*) continues to have its counterpart and reflection in *Parāparai* which is Grace (*aruḷ*) or effulgence (*cōdi*)<sup>4</sup>, paired up inseparably with *Parāparaṇ* / *Parāparam* which is equal with *poruḷ* or *uṇmai* – Reality<sup>5</sup>. Thus the Eleventh Stage finalizes the stage of pure oneness and reveals itself through Grace<sup>6</sup>.

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(“*Paramam* goes above *Para Śivan*, being beyond both of them, i.e. the *Parai-Paraṇ* pair); *Paramparaṇ* is what goes beyond [any] *Param* (it goes beyond any *Param* state as it is deprived of any *Param* aspect); [the states are]: *Parabōdham* [*naṇavu* – the Awakened State], blossoming [from that] is *Svapnam* [*kaṇā* – the Dream State], after completing [that] – *Suṣupti* [*suḷḷuṇai* – the State of Deep Sleep] bestowing the core-support – Aloneness of Reality *par excellence* (*uṇmai tāṇē*) which is *Mā Nandi* [*Para Mahā Śivam*] State”). “Beyond *Para Śiva* is *Paramam* (*Brahmam*); beyond *Paramam* is *Paramparam* (*Para Brahmam*); thus are states ascending; from *Para Śiva Jāgrat* to *Para Śiva Svapna*, and to *Para Śiva Suṣupti*. The *Jīva* that has *Para Śiva* become reaches the Finite Truth that is *Parānandi*”. The title given by Natarajan is as follows: “Further Beyond *Para Śiva* state is *Paramam* (*Brahmam*), *Paramparam* and *Para Mahā Śivam*” (Natarajan 2018: 357). “*Paramam* is superior to *Param* and *Śivam*, *Paramparaṇ* is still superior; from *Para-jāgrat* expands *Svapna*, removing sorrow and *Suṣupti* secures *jñāna* with realization of *Para Śiva*” (Kandaswamy 2010:8. 2560).

<sup>4</sup> Comp. *Tirumandiram* 4 1142, in which *Paramaṇ* is said to be the companion of *cōdi* – the effulgence identical to Grace): *paintoḷiyum paraman iṭattilaṇṇu tiṅkoḷiyāyū tikaḷunna jyōṭiyāyū / viṅkoṭipōle viḷaṇṇi varumatāl penkoṭipōle naṭanniṭum lōkavum* (“The lovely-braceleted one remains as the left side of *Paramaṇ*, as a strongly-fixed creeper, as the shining effulgence, like a heavenly creeper – when it appears manifesting around – the universe keeps proceeding in accordance with that Creeper-Lady” – Nāyar 2007: 365). *Arūḷ* or effulgence is equal to the enlightenment that confers bliss (*ānandam*). The mystical visions of the stage of *aruḷ* (the Eleventh State, i.e. the stage of Grace working for the final liberation of the soul) contain a variety of figures of speech emphasising the absolute union of the ultimate reality called *Nandi* and the soul filled with bliss (*ānandi*) – cf. *Tirumandiram* 7 1804: *akam pukkavan aṭiyaniḷ aruḷatāl akam pukkum aṭriyilla aruḷillōr / akam pukkū ānandamākki śśivamākki akam pukkavan nandiyānandiyāyū* (“Thanks to Grace He entered the Heart of His servant; for such a one who does not experienced [His] Grace He is not to be known even after entering the Heart; He entered the Heart having brought Bliss [*ānandam*] as Bliss – *Śivam* [*civam*]; He entered the Heart being the Blissful One [*Ā-nandi*] bringing bliss [*ānandi*]” – Nāyar 2007: 548). Natarajan identifies the state of *Parā Nandi* with the Eleventh State which leads (through Grace) to the final end called *Mā Nandi* (*Parā Mahā Śivam*).

<sup>5</sup> Another term which is used by Nārāyaṇa Guru after Siddhas is *meyū* – the truth or reality (cf. *Śiva Śatakam* 37, where *Śivan* is supplicated for approaching together with *Uma* in order to grant such a state; *Indriya Vairāgyam* 1 where it is said to appear within the Centre or Grace). The state of *poruḷ* or *uṇmai*, which is equal to the Eleventh State, is described in *Tirumandiram* 7 1768 as follows: *śaktikku mēlē parāśakti tannuḷil sūdhasivapadam tōyātūya oḷiyatu / at-tan tiruvaṭikkum appurattinnappuṇam aṇṇu ottumovvā īsan tan satyanilayē* (“Beyond *Śakti* is *Parā Śakti*; within is the pure State (or: pure feet) of [*Para*] *Śivan*. There is the brilliant Light not to be immersed (unwetable or unjoinable), beyond and beyond His holy feet (or: that pure State): it is a state of Alone Reality or Truth (*uṇmai*) of the Lord, with whom nothing can be paired up” – Nāyar 2007: 538).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Svānubhava Gīti*: *aruḷē ninkaḷiyaruḷāl aruḷiṭṭunniyenikkorarumarayē! iruḷē veḷiyē! naṭvāmaruḷē, karaḷil kaḷikkumoru poruḷē! //23//* (“O Grace! What is said to me like that is thanks to Your Grace being Your game; o, the Sole Excellent Mystery! O You, being Darkness

Such a reality can be defined either as the Substance of Self-Wholeness – *nīraporuḷ*<sup>7</sup> (which comprises all) – or as *śūnyam* or *pāl* (Emptiness or Voidness) – since it absorbs everything, i.e. external objects, the liberated soul and the whole process leading to emancipation, as well as fetters<sup>8</sup>. At this stage the proportion or relations between Grace and Bliss (*ānandam*) keeps transforming: at the end of day, Grace is to be absorbed absolutely for the sake of the final goal of Bliss alone. The ultimate Reality within which the inseparable couple of *poruḷ* – *aruḷ* remain immersed<sup>9</sup>, is defined as *dvādaśāntam* – the Twelfth End or *paramporuḷ*, depicted in *Tirumandiram* as an endless void (*ulappu il pāl*) identical to formless (sharp<sup>10</sup>) space – *kaḍuveḷi* (4 1357)<sup>11</sup>. Once the polarized union of *poruḷ*–*aruḷ* is dissolved, the oneness of *Pati-Paśu* relations become ready to be transformed into pure soleness – *kaivalyam*, defined as magnificence (as soon as all is absorbed into the void, its greatness and magnificence becomes revealed) and

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and Brightness of Space as well! O Grace which is the Centre [of everything]! O Substance ever-sporting in [my] heart!”)

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Svānubhava Gīti* 37: *śaripaṇavatīnum mati nincariṭamoṭitukoṇṭatinnu nīkar ituvē / aruḷappeṭumoru poruḷēt- arivāḷariyappeṭāta nīraporuḷē! //37//* (“Your stories [stories about You] are enough to tell about the Only One Truth, as only this one [story] is equal to that one (truth). O Substance that is Self-Wholeness, which cannot be comprehended through [any kind of] knowledge, and defined [by means of Grace alone] as “what the One Substance is?”)

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Svānubhava Gīti*: *veḷiyāmatu vannenmunveḷiyāvellām viḷuṇṇi veruveḷiyāyū veḷimutalañcilumonnāyū viḷayāṭṭiṭunnatāṇu tīrunaṭanam //14//* (“That which is space, appears in front of me as the light of consciousness, as the empty space which devoured everything; Your divine dance is what keeps playing the game uniting the five elements together beginning from space”). *vīḷumbōḷiyavellām pālil taniyē paranna tūveḷiyām / āḷikkeṭṭilavan tān vīḷunnōnallitāṇu kaivalyam //19//* (“When all this falls down as useless (or: into the Void), it becomes itself the expansive splendourous space. Does not the one who falls down into that bond of depth become [that depth] itself? It is the [state] of soleness [*kaivalyam*]”).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Svānubhava Gīti*: *Oru talayiruḷum veḷiyum varavum orarumakkoṭṭikku surataruvē arutarutarimakaḷ arivatin arivarar arumī prasamgamoru śariyē /36//* (“O Heavenly Tree [being support] for the lovely creeper, on the one side of [You] there is darkness, brightness of space, while on the other one – boons. It is not possible to know all that is invaluable [in You]; O the Only One Truth, being harmony which is able to cut down mighty enemies”). *naṭanam darśanamāyāluṭanē tānīnīrunnu naṭunilayām.naṭunilatannilirikkum neṭunālonnāyavannu saukhyam tān //15//* (“When one has an insight into that dramatic dance, one immediately remains fixed, as being in the state of sameness. When one remains in such a middle state for many days (for a long time), together with that, bliss would come to that one”).

<sup>10</sup> The term *kaḍu* means „pungency; extremity, sharpness” (Emeneau 1961: 82). It brings to mind the concept of the mountain top as well as the tip and the end of the reality which is hard to be attained and associated with the pungent taste.

<sup>11</sup> “All places become endless void; former habitats become formless space; no more places, no more ways; no more *Paśutvam*; no more transmigration; be poised in your beatitude” (Ramachandran 2010: 4. 1466). *urra iṭam ellām ulappillā pālāya ceṛra iṭam ellām kaṭum veḷiyāyū māṛiyāl maṛra iṭam illā; vaḷiyillā, tānum illā, caṛṛum iṭam illā calippaṛṛuninṇiṭum nī* (“The whole space that was inhabited [by *Śakti* = thanks to *aruḷ*] has become the limitless Void; the well-learned space that was covered with darkness became the extreme sharp (pungent) Space (*kaḍuveḷi*); no more other spaces; no more Path; no more state of being “by oneself” (*paśutvam*); no more space restricted; one remains immersed in the lack of weariness (or: lack of movement)”) – Nāyar 2007: 422–423).

essential happiness<sup>12</sup>. Such an ultimate state is defined as *perum-cuga-veḷi*, the Great Blissful Space<sup>13</sup>; *Śivam, Mā* [*Mahā*] *Nandi* (*Tirumandiram*), the *niruvāṇam* or *cūṇiya* in Tamil literature<sup>14</sup>. It is claimed in *Tirumandiram* 8 2437 to be attainable only after death<sup>15</sup>. According to Guru's vision, such ultimate reality can be named *kaivalyam* (soleness) since it is perfect purity (*vaimalyam*), freed from the moss (*śaivalam*) as soon as the life is extinguished<sup>16</sup>.

Nārāyaṇa Guru follows the Siddha concept of *nirādhāra yoga* as being the one that differentiates in his mystical works between the level of *Parai-Paraṇ* and the state of *Parāparai-Parāparaṇ*, which is identical to *aruḷ-poruḷ* unity, also called *nīra-poruḷ*. The alternative version of the state of *Parāparaṇ*, i.e. *Parama Śivan* (its *Paramaṇ* variant is mentioned in Tamil literary tradition as the component of the Eleventh State – cf. TM 8 2285) is explained in *Śiva Śatakam* 27 by the compound *aruḷvaṭivū* – “the one whose essential form can be obtained through Grace alone” or “the one who has Grace for its essential form”. Within the same stanza one can find

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Svānubhava Gīti*: *Arutē paraṅvān uyirōṭoru peruveḷiyāya ninre māhātmyam; cerutum ninkṛpayenyē verutē ṅāninīrīkkumō śivanē //26//* (“May I not [try] to speak of Your magnificence, which is the sole great [noble] space or brightness united with breath (or: May I not [try] to speak of Your magnificence... as long as I am tied to life-breath). O Śivan, without even a little bit of Your mercy, how could I stay here [like this]?”).

<sup>13</sup> Ganapathy 2006: 267–268; Mahalingam 1989: 149–150.

<sup>14</sup> This state is defined by Ganapathy as follows: “In one sense *nirvāṇa* may mean absence of things. As such it may mean negation. [...] In this sense *nirvāṇa* is not a positive word. [...] Negative words do not have any boundaries. As such *nirvāṇa* may mean the unbounded, the limitless, infinite space. Although *nirvāṇa* may mean complete negation, a mere absence, yet it is also a positive experience, in the sense that it is consciousness of any particular existence” (Ganapathy 2006: 268–269).

<sup>15</sup> “He, who has attained liberation through knowledge of *tvam*, *tat* and *asi*, Has become *Parāparam*, without birth after death he shall verily be *Śivam*” (Kandaswamy 2010: 8. 2735) „*Tvam-Padam*, *Tat-Padam* and *Asi-Padam*: He who has these three states of liberation attained, has verily become *Parāparam* himself; no more birth shall be for him; and when he departs He shall indeed Śiva be” (Natarajan 2018: 380). *tōṇṇiṭum “tvam” padam “tat” ppadam cūḷavē ēṅṅiṭum “asi” padam immūnṇōtu eyuvōn / āṅṅa parāparamāḱum; piṛapparru ēṅṅa tanatātmā; śivamāyānīrīkkum* (“The one who attained liberation with these three experienced words: *TVAM*, *TAT*, and *ASI*, which encompasses all around, will become excellent *Parāparam*; released from birth, he will remain as *Śivam* when united with death” – Nāyar 2007: 745). In *Svānubhava Gīti* 26 Nārāyaṇa Guru mentions the *peruveḷi*, which is indefinable greatness (*māhātmyam*), united with Life or not to be uttered during one's lifetime: *Arutē paraṅvān uyirōṭoru peruveḷiyāya ninre māhātmyam; cerutum ninkṛpayenyē verutē ṅāninīrīkkumō śivanē //26//* (“Your magnificence, which is the sole great space, should not be spoken of with life-breath [i.e. as long as one is alive] (or: Your magnificence, which is the sole great [noble] space united with Life-Breath, cannot be spoken of); o Śivan, without even a little of Your mercy, wouldn't I remain here in vain? (how could I stay here [like that])?”).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Svānubhava Gīti*: *kaivalyakkaṭalonnāyū vaimalyam pūṅṅiṭunnatoruvaḷiyām / jīvitvam keṭumennē śaivalam akalunnatinu paragatiyām //20//* (“The ocean being soleness is [itself the proper] path which embraces its perfect purity in such a union; it is the ultimate path [the path of liberation] for removing the moss as soon as the state of life [i.e. the state of being *jīvan*] is extinguished”).

a reference to the lower stage of *Paran* alluded to by means of the concept of the Lord's holy feet (*tiruvaṭi*), which are to grant Grace (*anugrahikkuka*)<sup>17</sup>.

The key role of Grace in the process of transforming the lower levels of Śakti into higher ones – as well as in the process of attaining bliss – is emphasized by Guru in a number of stanzas by means of a variety of figures of speech. The main concepts concerning Grace which are presented by Nārāyaṇan in his works are as follows:

1. Nārāyaṇan differentiates between the two stages of *Parai-Paran* and *aruḷ-poruḷ* mentioned above by means of the association of both with Grace itself in various proportions as well as for different purposes; the lower one (*Parai-Paran*) is connected with all the activities and the process of granting Grace and includes the possibility of returning to lower levels of reality (the role of *Parai*), restrained by *Paran*. The higher stage is associated with the state of Grace (i.e. Grace remains now as the essential form of *poruḷ*)<sup>18</sup>.
2. Since *aruḷ* is basically identical to *iruḷ*, the process of transformation of the latter continues as long as Grace is working for the sake of such a transformation; in other words, *iruḷ* cannot be rooted out without the intervention of *aruḷ*. At the same time Grace – as the Centre of everything – plays a key role in the process of *iruḷ* transformation (in the *Svānubhava Gīti* 23 Guru mentions *kaḷi* – a game played by Grace itself and *maṛa* – the veil covering the sole mystery) as well as in the process of centralising individual experience which results in ultimate union within the one Substance)<sup>19</sup>.
3. Grace is an instrument of transformation that is not different from *poruḷ* itself; it is claimed to be inseparably associated with *poruḷ*; as an all-pervading essence, it comprises *iruḷ* contrasted with *veḷi*, which can be both the opposite of darkness, namely light or brightness [*veḷiccam*], as well as the opposite of ignorance

<sup>17</sup> *aruḷvaṭivāyōrupōḷ niraṇṇunilkkum paramaśivan bhagavānariṇṇusarvvaṃ / suranaditinkaḷa-ṇiṇṇadaivamē! nintiruvaṭinīyamanugrahicciṭēṇam //27 //* (“*Parama Śivan*, who remains while filling [all this] in the same way, as the one having Grace for the essential form, [as the one whose essential form is attained through Grace], the all-knowing Lord – o Deity, adorned with the river of gods and the crescent moon! May Your divine feet bestow Grace [on us] eternally!”).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. SG: *poruḷum padavumoḷiṇṇaṇṇaruḷum parayum kaṭannuvarumalayē! / varaḷum nāvu nanaccāl aruḷ poṇṇum vāridhikkatoru kuṛayō?//38//* (“O Wave transgressing both Grace and the state of *Parai*, giving up both the word and its meaning (or: going beyond the Substance and the pure state of the *Paran*)! If you damp [my] dried up tongue, would it lessen the ocean of water overflowing with [Your] Grace?”) *Paranē, parayām tirayil paranētāvāyīṭunna paśupatiyē, / haranē, yarikil viḷiccītorunēravum inniruttu karutarutē //25//* (“O Higher One, o *Paśupati*, who is the Higher Commander in the wave of the Higher [Power], o Remover [of sins], do not allow me to stay here even for a while; call me to [stay] close [to You]”). *poruḷē, parimaḷamiyalum poruḷ ētāṇṇō niraṇṇa niraṇṇaruḷē, / aruḷē, yaruḷṭuka tēruḷ ēṛāyān enik-kitiṭha paranē //24//* (“O Substance, o Sweet Fragrant Substance of a “What is that?” kind [i.e. undefinable one], o Substance that is Wholeness spreading and filling up everything; o Grace, bless me with Your words, so I can avoid mounting that chariot wheel here, O Higher One”).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. SG: *aruḷē ninkaḷiyaruḷāl aruḷṭunṇīyēnikkorarumarayē! / iruḷē veḷiyē! naṭuvāmaruḷē, karaḷil kaḷikkumoru poruḷē! //23//* (“O Grace! What I am saying is thanks to Your Grace being Your game; o, the Sole Excellent Mystery (or: Veil)! O You, being Darkness and Brightness as well! O Grace which is the Centre [of everything]! O Substance ever-sporting in [my] heart!”)

- now it becomes *velivū*, i.e. consciousness. Thus the complete transformation of the *iruḷ* brings the transformation of *veli* as well, which means that brightness as well as knowledge becomes absorbed within One by means of Grace alone<sup>20</sup>.
4. Grace itself, as soon as the transformation of all dualities is complete, remains absorbed within the ultimate transcendent reality, which is called *paramporuḷ*. The philosophical system of Nārāyaṇa Guru's philosophical system grants such soleness the status of Bliss or Happiness (*ānandam, saukhyam, sukham*) which is the result of absorbing all limits (between *Pati, Paśu* and *Pāśam*; moreover, the liberation path (*paragati*) reflecting the activity of Grace becomes dissolved as well) within the One Reality, which is identical to *Śivam*<sup>21</sup>.

Guru superimposes this complex Siddha concept of Grace on a variety of natural phenomena. Although, together with Tamil *Śaiva Siddhānta* literature, he shares a richness of metaphors and similes based on the idea of multi-levelled or multi-dimensioned space, the most complex and vividly depicted concept seems to be the one which has the phenomenon of water as its background. It evokes so many peripheral ideas that an interpreter should use extreme caution when dealing with Guru's twilight language, which requires deciphering from the inside.

The motif of rivers or lakes joining the one ocean – as employed by Guru at the service of social or political transformations – should not be mistaken for its well-known equivalent of *Advaita Vedānta*. The latter seems to concentrate on the effect of their coming in contact with each other, whereas the former reflects the complete process of transformation within the whole natural body, laying stress on the means by which results could be attained. Such circulation proceeding in two opposite directions (inside and outside or upwards and downwards) is capable of attesting the essential nature of all aspects of the one ultimate Substance<sup>22</sup>.

Once the status of reality has been admitted equally to each level of the phenomenal world, the transformation of the primeval darkness (*iruḷ*) becomes the possible and

<sup>20</sup> Cf. SG: *iruḷum veliyumitonnum puraḷātoḷiyāyū niṛaṅṅa pūmaḷayē, / aruḷitukakoṅṭariyātaruḷi unṇēnitinnu varamaruḷē //22//* (“You, o Flowery Rain, spread around as effulgence untouched by both darkness as well as brightness, with Your blessing [only], without being aware [of that], I am able to say [like that]. Bless me today with this boon, o Grace!”). Comp. *Tirumandiram* 9 2952: “Changing both darkness and appearance (*iruḷum veliyum*), merging the thing with the Substance (*poruḷ*) by changing the form due to Grace (*aruḷ*), the immovable hard mind experienced the feet of the Lord” (Ganapathy 2010: 9. 3358–3359). (“Having transformed both darkness and brightness, having harmonised the yoked Heart as substance within the Substance, after becoming loosened thanks to Grace, I remained with the unrolling stone-fixed mind settled with affection thanks to the Lord's feet” – Nāyar 2007: 911).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. SG: *ānandakkaṭal poṅṅittānē pāyunnitā parannorupōḷ / jñānam koṅṭatilērippānam ceyyunnu paramahamsajanam //7//* (“When the ocean of bliss, having overflowed by itself, has spread, lo! Here! In the same way; having entered into that by means of wisdom, *Parama hamsa* people are able to drink it”).

<sup>22</sup> *Tirukkaḷirruppaṭiyār* 11: “The river water that flows into the billowy sea loses its nature and becomes sea's own water; when it flows back, it is sea-water that flows. Even so, when soul merges with Śivan, its knowledge becomes Śiva-consciousness; when it flows out, it streams as Grace and does away with our *malas*” (Ramachandran 2003: 17)

natural tendency within the whole body of the universe. Nārāyaṇa Guru's Substance or Soleness appears to be transcendent yet immanent, as it owns the Power (called Grace) capable of bestowing absolute union or oneness (by means of the Lord's holy feet) on individual souls, with fetters completely absorbed into such a transcendent void.

Deprived – in the form of *liṅga* – of a bottom, a top and a centre – three equivalents of *kriyā*, *icchā* and *jñāna* powers respectively, the One is devoid of any trace of *Para*[ī]. The static idea of the support or essential form (*vaṭivū*) remains associated with the concept of Grace – the Heart of the Lord, whereas the dynamic idea of the Lord's holy feet – with the *Parā Śakti* activated for the sake of liberation. Ultimate reality is preached as the one beyond both of them: *Parai* – the direct source of *tattvas* and *Parāparai* – Grace that works for their final dissolution. Although defined as the One transcending all forms, it remains the basis or essence (*vaṭivū*) for the diversity of phenomenal objects (*palaporuḷ*). Such a concept has been presented in Guru's language of paradox: the compound *pala-poruḷ* (diversity of forms) introduced in SG 55 / 95 corresponds with the Siddhas' concept of the *param-poruḷ* – the transcendent Substance<sup>23</sup>. Thus the most common figure of speech introduced by Guru for the sake of emphasizing the identity of ultimate reality and the variety of the phenomenal world is *śleṣam* (pun). It reflects the natural state of the all-pervading supreme truth which thanks to Grace itself remains the unchangeable essence and support of all phenomena. At the same time – again with the help of Grace – it allows them to get rid of defilements through union with the sacred feet. Comparison or metaphor as well as examples well-known in the *Vedāntic* literary world would not be as convincing as the Siddha twilight language. By means of the twilight language based on the multi-levelled *śleṣas*, Guru seems to point to all limitations – which order us to create the limiting factors as regards the One and multiplicity – as established by means of our own mind. Thus the recognition of each *śleṣam* releases liberating power within our mind.

### Guru's concept of Grace superimposed on the image of backwaters phenomenon in *Śiva Śatakam* 64–65

Let us analyze two stanzas of *Śiva Śatakam* (64–65) dealing with the concept of backwaters<sup>24</sup>. In the latter (65)<sup>25</sup>, the term *paramāli* can refer to the depth of transcendent

<sup>23</sup> Cf SG: *aṭiyōṭumuṭi naṭuvarren piṭiyilaṭaṅṅātirunnu, palaporuḷum / vaṭivākkikkoṇṭannannaṭiyō ṭonniccolīṅṅu varumonnē //55/ 95//* (“Deprived of the bottom, the top and the centre [middle], You remain without being subdued to my comprehension, when providing support (*vaṭivū*) for the diversity of forms (*pala-poruḷ*), at that very same time having united [that diversity] with Your [holy] feet – You come beyond all that, o Only One!”)

<sup>24</sup> Kerala backwaters are a complex system of lakes, lagoons, rivers and interconnecting canals distributed along the Malabar coast.

<sup>25</sup> *miḷikaḷinnoḷukunnamṛtattirappoḷikaḷil vīṅoḷukum paramāliyil / cuḷikaḷil ninnu cuḷannucūḷannu nin kaḷalkaḷil vannanayunnatumennu ṅān?//65//* (“Within the profound (transcendent) depth [of the ocean], which flows to fall down into bunds in between waves (or: which flows to bring to an end to the bunds in between waves) being *amṛtū* flowing out from [Your] eyes, I keep wandering round and round in whirlpools; when would I be able to dissolve myself in both Your feet?”)

reality as well as to the fire-pit of the phenomenal world<sup>26</sup>. In the previous stanza (64), the universe is depicted in terms of the *ślēṣam paramoru tumba[m]*<sup>27</sup>. Such a pun can be interpreted as a poetical depiction of the *samsāram* world – as soon as one recognizes it to be the highest suffering (*paramoru tumbam*); yet it can be turned into blissful reality when individual being is able to comprehend it as a milky breast (*paramoru tumba[m]*), symbolizing in the twilight language of the Siddhas the nectar of Grace granted by *Parai* or *Parā Śakti*. In the consecutive stanza, 65, the very same vision is constructed with the help of three key words, namely: *poḷi*, *paramāli* and *cuḷi*. The term *poḷi* means “sand bank between the sea and back waters (which disappears during the monsoon)”, “bund between the sea and a lake” or “an outlet of a river into the sea”<sup>28</sup>. Nāyar associates such a natural phenomenon with the concept of *Paramātmāvū* and *Jīvātmāvū* differentiated by means of *upādhi* imagined by Guru as *poḷi* itself: “Here, by means of symbolic imagination, Guru describes an individual being’s attainment of the state of *Paramātmāvū* in an extremely attractive way. *Paramātmāvū* is the ocean of *amṛtū*, which is bliss. *Jīvātmāvū* is like a small lake (backwaters) very close to that ocean. The bund of sand which divides both of them is the egoity of the body. The raised sand-bank (sand dune) which divides the sea from the backwaters is called *poḷi*. When it is breached during the rainy season, the backwaters, having flown down into the ocean, becomes united with it. Similarly the wave of bliss called *Ātmāvū*, which rises together with the rain of tears within the mind of an individual who is dissolving in devotion, pushes and cuts that sand bank which is the egoity of body. Afterwards the lake called *Jīvātmāvū*, having flown down into the ocean of *amṛtū* which is *Paramātmāvū* itself, turning round and round in the whirlpools of bliss, becomes united with it.”<sup>29</sup>.

The vision adopted by Guru is based on the concept of the Lord granting divine Grace by shedding tears of *amṛtū*; along with that, the individual being is capable of

<sup>26</sup> Cf. ŚŚ 53, in which the *samsāram* has been defined as *kuḷi* – “pit”: *kaḷaliṇa kātukiṭannu viḷikkumennaḷalaviṭunn ariyāṭeyirikkayō? / piḷapalatuṅṭivanenṇu ninaykkayō? kuḷiyilirunnu karēruvatennu ṇān //53//* (“Have You remained without regard for the burning grief of the one who calls You and keeps waiting for both Your feet? Do You remember this [devotee] having committed [so] many mistakes? When – having been seated in the pit [of *samsāram*] – would I be able to ascend and reach the shore?”). The term *āli* denotes the depth of the ocean as well as the fire-pit (*tīkkūḷi*) – *Śabdatārāvali* 2011: 299.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. ŚŚ 64: *paramoru tumbamenikku bhavānoḷiṅṅoruvarumilla digambara! Ninpadam taraṇam enikkatukoṅṭaḡham okkeyum taraṇamahamkaravāṇi bhavārṇṇavam //64//* (“O Sky-Clad, [this phenomenal world] is the highest suffering for me (or: [You are] the milky breast, which transcends everything); there is nobody [for me] apart for my Lord! Your foot is a ship for me; may I cross all impurities by means of it – the agitated ocean of phenomena!”).

<sup>28</sup> MED 2016: 811. MED 2002: 949.

<sup>29</sup> *jīvanre paramātmaprāptiye atyākarsakamāyi pratīkakaḷpanayilūṭe vivariccirikkukayāṇivite gurudēvan. ānandāmṛta samudramāṇu paramātmāvū. atinu toṭṭaṭuttuḷḷa oru ceṛiya kāyalpōleyāṇū jīvātmāvū. ivaye vētirikkunna poḷiyāṇu dehābhimānam. samudratteyūm kāyalineyūm vētirikkuna maṇalttiṭṭayāṅḷō poḷi. varṣakālattu poḷi muṛiṅṅāl kāyalsamudrattil oḷuki vīṇū atu māyicērunnu. atupōle jīvanil bhaktikoṅṭaliyūna manassil aśru varṣattōṭoppam ponti varunna ātmānandattira dēhābhimānamākunna poḷiye muṛccutaḷḷunnu. tuṭarṇn jīvātmāvākunna kāyal paramātmāvākunna amṛtasamudrattil oḷuki vīṇū ānandacuḷikaḷil kaṛaṇṇikaṛaṇṇi atumāyi onnucērunnu* (Nāyar 2012: 1. 258–259).



becoming merged within such an ultimate state as soon as obstacles or limitations are overcome and annihilated. Such a limiting factor (*upādhi*) – as mentioned above – assumes the form of *poli* here. In another mystical poem – *Sadāśiva Darśanam* 3<sup>30</sup> – Guru introduces the term *āli*, which in this particular case depicts the impermanent world of *saṃsāram*; however, it does correspond with the verb *alīyuka* – “to become loose, untied”. The relevant noun *ali* means “an opening into the sea, river-mouth; the place where the lagoon joins the sea”<sup>31</sup>. Thus the *ali* can become loose or absorbed into *āli* – the depth of transcendent ocean – by means of the Lord’s Grace; the *āli*, on the other hand, can be recognised as the final goal or result of *ali*. The term *poli[v]* also denotes rain in the Tamil language; such an idea corresponds with the concept of *amṛtū* showered gracefully from the Lord’s eyes. Along with the concept of Grace which plays a key role in the process of liberation, Guru includes encoded so-called transformation points or transition points in his works, which can be called *arṛam* (the tip), the state between the stage still to be transformed by Grace and the state of the goal attained by means of Grace; the term *poli* can be treated as the one of them.

One of the most amazing examples of the transition point depicted by means of twilight language can be found in stanza 5 of *Navamañjari*. This hymn devoted to Subrahmaṇyan was composed in heavily encoded language, which can be claimed to be the language of transition. In the case of stanza given below, Nārāyaṇan provides us with a vision of *iruḷ* overcome by the power of Grace or compassion. The majority of the terms can refer to both levels (the stage of *iruḷ* and *aruḷ*) in the microcosmic as well as the macrocosmic aspect. The whole concept is based on the *Kuṇḍalini* experience; the climax is represented by the dot at the top, which can be comprehended as damage of defilements at the end as soon as the dark vapour appears, or energy condensed into a point (*muṭivil potṭū*); the top of the mountain which has the rain cloud for the *bindu* evokes the idea of the rain of nectar. The darkness of ignorance becomes transformed by means of the dark rain cloud showering Grace. Subrahmaṇyan himself remains as the support of the mountain or difficulty for defilements (i.e. that which is an obstacle for impurities)<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> *Aram tiḷaccu poṇṇumāṭalāli nīntiyēriyakkarekkaṭannu kaṇṭapōṭaliñṇoliñṇu ninna nī curannu cūlavum coriñṇiṭunna sūkti kaṇṭu kaṇṭirannu ninnīṭunniten muṭikku cūṭumīśanē //3//* (“While swimming across the depths of the ocean, which boiled and overflowed swiftly with grief (dance), having reached the other shore, I could see You alone standing there, all bonds untied, free from everything, oozing out and constantly showering words of wisdom all around; and, seeing it, staying with You, I will crown my head with them, o *Īśan!*”).

<sup>31</sup> *ali – kaṭalum kāyalum sadā toṭṭukiṭakkunna bhāgam (iṭaykkuḷḷa kara aliñṇupōyatū ennartham)* [cf. *poli*] – “the part which is always stays neighbouring both the sea and the lake” (*Śabdatārāvali* 2016: 244).

<sup>32</sup> *krṭṭāyi vanna nila viṭṭōṭi vannoru kuruṭṭāviyinkaloru kaṇṇiṭṭālum appoḷutiruṭṭārum entoru miraṭṭāṇitokke muruka,viṭṭālivannoru varaṭṭāśu nīyatin iruṭṭāvi vannu muṭivil potṭāyi ninnamalamuṭṭāya nīy avan amiṭṭālum inṇu kṛpayā //5//* (“Please fix Your eye with compassion within this breathing soul [immersed] in blindness, having come as a boat / united after leaving the land / the state where / when You walked as [unattached] *saṃnyāsi*, o Murukan, and then the darkness will be removed. What kind of terrifying thing is all that! If You leave this [humble servant] alone, he will soon become nothing but dry grass; You, being the support / the difficulty

The pun *cuḷi* can be interpreted as the microcosmic equivalent of the compound [*param*]*āli* as far as the correlation between these two key words becomes established based on the second meaning of both, i.e. *cakram*. Such a connection can be confirmed in accordance with the vision given in *Śiva Śatakam* 14, where the navel pit of Śivan Himself (*nābhi kkuḷi*) is metaphorically presented as the whirlpool (*cuḷi*) that arises within the depths of the heavenly Gaṅga<sup>33</sup>. The opposite course of descent is represented by the ultimate reality, which reveals itself in the process of differentiating a multitude of rivers or lakes; accordingly, the individual keeps wandering around in the circles [or whirlpools] of births. Thus the term *cuḷi* denotes the twists and turns of the *saṁsāra*-ocean, as well as the *cakra*-whirlpools of the ocean of Grace. Such ambiguity as regards the term *cuḷi* can be found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> stanza of *Navamañjari*, where Nārāyaṇa Guru asks Subrahmaṇyan to grant the nectar of Bliss as the devotee is now overpowered by the rush of the whirlpool or *cakram* fire<sup>34</sup>.

The term *āli*, as mentioned above, can be treated as the representation of both the phenomenal and the transcendent world. The same polarised meaning of *āli* is revealed in Tamil literature in reference to its microcosmic aspect, i.e. the human heart<sup>35</sup>. When referring to the soul – *āli* denotes the whirlpools of the *saṁsāra* depths or the

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for the mountain / **defilement** which remains in the form of a dot [*bindu*] / **damage** at the top / **during the time of destruction / at the end**, after a life of dark smoke or vapour – dark cloud / **darkness or ignorance** has come to this [*devotee* / **a world covered in darkness / blindness**] // {or: You, as the support for the mountain, which has the dark cloud at the top as a decorative mark}: please agitate / **frighten** this [slave] here with Your compassion!”). Due to the ambiguity of the stanzas composed by Guru, two versions of the puns translated in the text are given here: in the former, the first of the underlined terms corresponds with the series of relevant underlined terms within the whole stanza (therefore it should be interpreted as follows: the land...support... the mountain etc.); accordingly, when another interpretation is required, one should read the second translation following the sequence of bold terms (the state...difficulty...defilement etc.).

<sup>33</sup> *oḷukiṭum ambaraṅgatarre nīril ccuḷiyoṭutulyam udiצעlunna nābhi / kkuḷiyilelunna kaḷinda kanya mēlōṭoḷukiṭum ennaṅaṅaku rōmarāji //14//* (“A soft row of hair rising from the pit of Your navel, equal to the whirlpool, [which is born] in the waters of the heavenly Gaṅga flowing [down to the earth], looks like a river streaming upwards – the daughter of Kaḷinda”).

<sup>34</sup> *rāpāyil vīṇuḷarumāpāpamīyaruti rāpāyipōle manamē, nī pārvaṭitanayam āpādacūdam aṇimāpādanāya niyatam pāpāṭavī cuṭum iṭāpāyamī marudinōpāsānēna cuḷiyil tī pāyumārum adhunā pāyamuṇmatinu nī pāhi mām arumukha //2//* (“May this sin – the trouble of falling into drinking at night-time – not happen [to you], o mind similar to a drunkard in the darkness [of ignorance]; You, [o Heart], [remain] totally restrained for the attainment of *aṇimā* powers from head to foot [like] the Son of Pārvaṭī (or: please decorate the Son of Pārvaṭī from head to foot for the sake of the attainment of gracefulness – *mā*); the jungle of sins will be heated up (or: burnt), bringing destruction; along with the daily worship [spent on] a desert (or: along with the service devoted to the greatest tree (or: god)) – within the whirlpool [of twists and turns or of the *cakra* which have been opened] in the manner of a flowing (or: rushing) fire; for the sake of a drink of ultimate reality and truth at this moment, protect me, o Six-Faced one!”).

<sup>35</sup> *Tiru Iraṭṭai Mañimalai 20*: “If you die, your loving kin will pile up dead wood and burn you; o heart like unto *āli*, while yet alive live loftily; listen with zest to the glory of Him – the Bather in ghee who ate the venom of the vast sea – and stand redeemed” (Ramachandran 2008: 59). As stated by Ramachandran, “the term *āli* is interpreted in more ways than one. The heart like the *ālai* (sea) is deep. Again like the *āli* (wheel), it twirls” (Ramachandran 2008: 59).

energy centres in the body of each individual. Each soul is capable of remaining within *samsāra* whirlpools as well as opening its own *cakras*. Along with any activated *cakras*, the *ālī* (wheel of *cakram*) appears to be *ālī* (universal – transcendent depth). The very same process which comprises the transformation of the poison (*viṣa*) into *amṛtū*, is referred to as the churning of the ocean in mystic works. In *Arddhanārīśvara Stavam* 1 Nārāyaṇa Guru considers *ālī* to be being equal with *tīkuḷi* – “the fiery [*samsāra*] pit”<sup>36</sup>; on the other hand, in *Svānubhava Gīti* he defines *ālī* as an empty space (*pālū*) and the soleness (*kaivalyam*) which absorbs the *Pati – Paśu – Pāśam* trinity as well as the completed path of the transformation of the soul (*vaḷi, paragati*)<sup>37</sup>.

### The Siddha concept of Grace superimposed on the image of backwaters phenomena as a weapon used by Guru in his fight for reformation of Kerala society

It is striking that the whole process of *ālī* transformation – starting from the fiery pit of the phenomenal world and leading to the ultimate state of soleness *via* activated *cakras*<sup>38</sup> – imagined with the help of natural phenomenon characteristic of the Gods’ own country in *Śiva Śatakam* 65, namely the backwaters, has now been situated now in Kerala’s body. Thus the Siddha concept of liberation, which is explained by Ganapathy as “the realization of the oneness amidst all diversities”<sup>39</sup>, has been employed in the service of politics by a philosopher who was both Siddha and a social reformer. Such an idea might have become an instrument in his attempt to transform the “dark” social status of low caste people into “social bliss”. The social aspect of the *aruḷ-iruḷ* idea

<sup>36</sup> *Ayyōyī veyilkoṇṭu venturuki vāṭṭunnu nīyennyē / kaiyēkiṭṭuvatinnu kāṅkiloruvan kāruṇyavānārahō! Payyārnnī janamāḷiyil pativatinnunnē parannūḷiyil peyyārākamē ghanāmbu kṛpayā gamgānādīdhāmamē //1//* (“Alas! All is fading, having melted under that scorching heat of the Sun – without You; while looking around for the hand given as support, who else would be merciful enough! Before this living being, afflicted by famine, falls into the fire-pit, with all Your mercy, the cloud-rain should be poured all around the earth, o abode of the Gaṅga river!”).

<sup>37</sup> *vīlumbōḷivayellām pālil taniyē paranna tūveḷiyām / āḷikkeṭṭilavan tān vīlunnōnallitānu kaivalyam //19//* (“When all this falls down into the empty void of consciousness, it becomes in itself the expansive splendourous space. Does not the one who falls down into that bond of depth, become [that depth] itself? It is the [state] of soleness [*kaivalyam*]”). *kaivalyakkaṭalonnāyū vaimalyam pūṅṭṭunnatoruvaḷiyām / jīvitvam keṭumennē śaivalam akalunnatinu paragatiyām //20//* (“The ocean being soleness is [itself the proper] path, which embraces its perfect purity in such a union; it is the ultimate path [path of liberation] for removing the moss as soon as the state of life [i.e. the state of being *jīvan*] is extinguished”).

<sup>38</sup> In Tamil literature, the expression “fiery pit” can refer to the activated *mūlādhāra cakra*. Cf. TM 2 345: *mūladvārattil mūḷum oruvane mēladvārattil amarṭti nōkki – mun / kālu urru kālanekonnagni yōgamārnniṭil nālattaṭiyūr kaṭannu nalamārnniṭam nāḷellām* (“Having perceived before the one who is kindled in the entrance of *mūla* [*cakra*] and raised up to the entrance at the top, having got in contact with the foot (basis; wind; channel), having burnt up the Time or Death (*Kālan*) through the *Agni Yōgam*, [*yogi*] resides in good fame and prosperity in the land of *Kaḍavūr*” – Nāyar 2007: 129). Cf. also TM 2 360.

<sup>39</sup> Ganapathy 2006: 281.

is depicted by Guru in his *Arddhanārīśvara Stavam*. This short hymn consisting of 5 stanzas was composed by Guru in 1894 during his stay at Aruvippuṅgam. Literary tradition claims Nārāyaṇan was approached by people seeking consolation as they had been tormented by a severe drought. Guru sat for a while immersed in deep meditation, and then chanted this hymn; within two hours there was heavy rain and the nearby river Neyyār overflowed<sup>40</sup>. It is intriguing that Guru introduces the term *āli* in such a context. In most cases its meaning is the equivalent of the ocean depth, but here it has another meaning, i.e. *tīkkuli* (the fiery pit – Bhāskaran 2015: 134)<sup>41</sup>. As regards Arddhanārīśvaran Himself, Nārāyaṇan describes Him in stanzas 3 and 5 respectively as the one who remains in His root[sitting] position (*mūṭṭilttanneyirunniṭunnu*)<sup>42</sup> as well as the one who remains in the state of *Paramātmāvū* – transcendent reality (*paramātmaniṣṭhayilirunniṭunnu*)<sup>43</sup>. The former stage, when connected to the natural conditions that have been described (a severe drought), could be identified with the point which is to be transformed, but is still deprived of the intervention of Grace; the latter one points to the ultimate goal. The first stage is to be transformed by Grace, while the last stage is to grant Grace. Guru manifests the whole process himself (while remaining immersed in meditation); tradition attests the coming of torrential rain (corresponding with the bestowal of Grace). Although Prasād described the hymn as apparently satiric, as well as the biographical story it reflects in minute detail the concept of *iruḷ*

<sup>40</sup> Balachandran 2015: 39–40; Kumaran 2014: 90. Satchidananda 2007: 40. The circumstances in which this hymn was composed are presented by Balachandran, who also gives some other examples of rain showers in the writings of Nārāyaṇa Guru (Balachandran 2015: 38–41).

<sup>41</sup> *kaiyēkiṭuvatinnu kāṅkiloruvan kāruṇyavānārahō! Payyārnnī janamāliiyil pativatinmunnē parannūliiyil / peyyārākamē ghanāmbu kṛpayā gamgānadīdhāmamē //1//* (“Alas! All is fading, having melted under that scorching heat of the Sun – without You; while looking around for the hand given as support, who else would be merciful enough! Before this living being, afflicted by famine, falls into the fire-pit, with all Your mercy the cloud-rain should be poured all around the earth, O abode of the Gaṅga river!”).

<sup>42</sup> *ūṭṭittīrri vaḷarttum unbartatiṇī nāthannumippōḷuyirkkūṭṭattōtoru kūrumilla kathayentayyō kuḷappattilāyū / nāṭṭil kkaṅṅataśēṣavum bata naśiccīṭunnatum kaṅṅu nī mūṭṭilttanneyirunniṭunnu muṅṅayō? mūḷaraddhanārīśvarā //3//* (“Lord of the river of gods, who gives nourishing food to bring up the multitude of living beings, now shows them no affection. Alas! How is it possible? Having seen the destruction of all that exists – alas! – on the land as put to confusion and muddle, is it proper that You remain in the root-basic, unbound state? Do make at least a sound to agree with me, o Arddhanārīśvaran!”). *mūṭṭilttanneyirunniṭunnu* – “You remain Yourself in the basic, original state”. *mūṭṭil – āsanattil* – “You remain in a [yogic] posture” – *nī yōgāsanattiltanne irikkunnu* (Bhāskaran 2015: 165). *anakkamillāte vrkṣaccuvaṭṭilttanne (nissamganāyū ādikāraṇamāyī tanne)* – “[You remain] at the root of the tree without any movement, as the unbound one who is the primeval cause” (Prasād 2001: 57). *ellārriinum ādikāraṇamāyī viḷaṅṅunnu* – “You shine as the primeval cause for everything” (Nāyar 2012: 1.286).

<sup>43</sup> *Muppārōkkeyitā muṭṭiṇṇu muṭṭiyil colpoṇṇumappum dharicceppōḷum paramātmaniṣṭhayilirunniṭunnu nīyentahō! Ippār āriṇiyāḷum ippariṣayinnārōḷurayakkunnu ninṭṛppāḍattaṅalenṇiyē tuṅṅa namukkarddhanārīśvarā //5//* (“All three worlds have been ruined; and You, the one who bears illustrious water on His head, remain in a constant state of *Paramātmāvū* – Alas! Why is it so? Who else will take care of this earth in the future? To whom can these low folk complain today? Is there any other help for us except for the shade (or shelter) of Your divine feet, o Arddhanārīśvaran?”).

transformation (identified with *mūlamalam* – root impurity)<sup>44</sup> given in *Tirumandiram* 4 1091, emphasizing the key role of Grace<sup>45</sup>.

Moreover, the differences in the biographical tradition of the story given above would follow the Siddha scheme of *aruḷ / iruḷ* transformation: Parameśvaran’s version says Guru composed the five verses of *Ardhanārīśvara Stavam* and ordered people “to chant it with heart-felt devotion after bath”<sup>46</sup>. According to *Śaiva* tradition, grace becomes attainable as soon as one melts with tender love (*Tirumandiram* 1 272)<sup>47</sup>.

Thus Guru’s biography itself turns out to be an intriguing transcript of this Siddha concept employed in the service of politics. Two variants of the biographical story describing the circumstances of the establishment of the Talaśśēri Temple (including Guru’s struggle to permit Pulayas to enter the temple area, which was accomplished thanks to Grace manifested through Guru himself) – can attest the political context of the *aruḷ-iruḷ* idea as propagated by Guru. The first variant of the story says that in accordance with Nārāyaṇan’s will all people irrespective of caste and creed should be free to worship in the temples consecrated by him. However, many people expressed their displeasure with the decision to allow Pulayans (untouchable ones) to enter the temple of Talaśśēri. Guru himself met the local chieftain, who said a decision could be made after a period of one year (*varṣam*). Guru accepted his words; before the meeting ended, the sky became cloudy and rain (*varṣam*) came and ended. The Nārāyaṇan’s answer was: “What do you say, now the one *varṣam* is over? So, now we can allow them to enter the temple”. In such a way, the wall erected in the name of caste and creed was demolished by Guru’s sharp intellect<sup>48</sup>. The second variant of this biographical story

<sup>44</sup> Raj 1989: 105.

<sup>45</sup> *tāmakuḷali dayākkaṇṇi uḷḷinilkkuṁ ēvaliruḷ arttiṭṭuṁ iḷamkoṭi / hōmappērum cuṭar uḷḷileḷuṁ nuṇṇuka mēviya amutoṭu miṇṇatu kāṇuvin* (“The woman with curled hair adorned with flower-garland, her eyes [filled with] compassion, remains within the Heart; She – tender creeper, blows away the darkness which is abatement; soft smoke that rises inside as the great effulgence (*peruṇcuḍar*) of *ōma* [fire]; together with *amudū* [*amṛtū*] remained [there], it comes back here – Oh! see!” – Nāyar 2007: 351). “A garland adorns her tresses, her eyes pour mercy (*daya*); She – a liana, blows away the well-nigh indestructible; inner murk; from the homa fire (*ōma*) she rises like smoke; rises aloft and returns with the ever-vivifying elixir (*amudu*)”. (Ramachandran 2010: 4.1253). Com. commentary: “The inner murk is *āṇava mala*. The *homa*-fire burns in the *mūlādhāra*. The smoke is the power that blends with the vital air (*prāṇa-vāyu*); it reaches the *sahasrāra* and then descends with the elixir of immortality” (Ramachandran 2010: 4.1253).

<sup>46</sup> Parameśvaran 1979: 63.

<sup>47</sup> *elline viṛakākki iṛacci arattiṭṭu ponnennapōl kanalinkaliṭṭu kācci urukkiyāluṁ / anpatāl urukkiyē ankam aliyuvōrkkallā empōl enmaṇiyanekkāṇa kaṅkaniyillahō //* (“Having turned bones into firewood, having chopped the flesh, melt and fry it, putting it into the blazing, golden heat; but unless your Heart becomes tenderly well-cooked and dissolved through the Lord’s love, you will not achieve unity with the Precious (Golden) Gem – *poṇ-maṇi*”) – Nāyar 2007: 108). “Use the bone as fire wood, chopping the flesh, fry it hard in the golden fire; Unless your self mellows and melts with tender love, You cannot attain our Lord, the priceless gem” (Venkataraman 2010: 1.335). “You may turn your bone to fuel, your flesh to meat, and let them roast and sizzle to the gold-red blaze; but unless your heart melts in the sweet ecstasy of Love, My Lord, my Treasure-trove, you ne’er can possess” (Natarajan 2018: 42).

<sup>48</sup> Balachandran 2015: 82–84.

personalises the phenomenon of the rain of grace while involving Guru himself directly; he is mentioned as having shed tears of compassion which allowed him to conclude that the chieftain's decision to wait a year was superceded since the rain (*varṣam*) was over<sup>49</sup>. Thus the social and religious uplifting of the “dark” untouchable ones – or the transformation of their status, which was affected by ignorance, blindness and the illusion of diversity – could be implemented by Guru by means of compassion (*karuṇa*) and Grace (*aruḷ*) manifested through Nārāyaṇa himself. When analysing the details of Guru's biography (or biographies) in the light of his literary works and the concepts included in them, one may face the question of the genuineness of such stories; the number of biographical variants as well as the content force us to take into consideration the possibility of later supplements in accordance with Guru's political tendencies.

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As a social reformer, Nārāyaṇa Guru was an ultimate representative of the politics of Grace, showing a preference for the *navākṣari* idea expressed in his *Anukampā Daśakam* 3: “the one, who has Grace for his heart (within), is the really living one”<sup>50</sup>. Such politics of Grace appeared to be a continuation of the concepts and principles of the Siddha tradition, which propagated the idea of following the middle path (*naṭuvu-nilaimai*)<sup>51</sup>. Nārāyaṇa Guru seems to combine all these visions along with the Śaiva concept of the churning of the ocean depth with the supporting stick or essential form (*vaṭivū*) of Grace being the Centre (*naṭuvū*). Having devoted himself to the static life of *pañcākṣara*, he managed at the same time to implement social or religious transformations by means of his politics of Grace. The longed-for goal of his political efforts is exposed in the last stanza of his universal prayer – *Daiva Daśakam*<sup>52</sup>. Since ultimate Bliss – *sukham*, *saukhyam* or *ānandam*, is recognised as the human goal which can

<sup>49</sup> This version was relayed to me by Lal Salām, a follower of Guru from Trivandrum who owns an impressive library of over 1500 books related to the life and works of Nārāyaṇa Guru.

<sup>50</sup> *aruḷ anbanukampa mūnṇinum poruḷonnāṇitu jīvatāarakam / aruḷuḷḷavanāṇu jīviyennuruviṭṭukayī navākṣari //3//* (“For such a trinity: Grace, Love and Compassion, the substance is one and the same: The Star that helps the *jīvan* to cross the ocean. Repeat this nine-syllable chant: “The one who has grace in his heart is the living one””).

<sup>51</sup> Ganapathy in his commentary to the first *tandiram* of *Tirumandiram* (1 320–323) explains this concept as follows: “Tirukkuraḷ defines *naṭuvu-nilaimai* as impartiality, action without bias or favour, a state of equipoise in thought, word and action, displaying justice and fair play [...] When the conduct of human affairs is regulated by impartiality, righteousness thrives and the moral status and eminence of society grows. Justice is a key concept in righteousness. [...] The term *naṭuvu-nilaimai* is also used in the yogic sense. The process of directing the flow of *prāṇa* through the central *suṣumna-nāḍi*, whereby the *yogī* experiences divine bliss, is referred to as *naṭuvu-nilaimai*. [...] Tirumūlar appears to have used the word *naṭuvu-nilaimai* with a different meaning [...] of the desirable position of the soul close to Śiva and Śakti, at the confluence of *jñāna* and grace, where the soul is freed from blemishes. [...] Free from *malas*, the soul stands surrounded by Śiva and Śakti, enjoying the divine bliss” (Ganapathy 2010: 1.385–386).

<sup>52</sup> *ālamērum ninmahassāmāḷiyil ṇaṇṇāḷakavē / āḷaṇam vāḷaṇam nityam vāḷaṇam vāḷaṇam sukham // 10 //* (“May we become immersed in the ocean of Your greatness, which is the depth itself; may we sink and remain there eternally, remain and reside there – as [ultimate] bliss!”).

be attained through the Lord's Grace alone, Guru establishes a microcosmic or "personalised" version of such a state in his philosophical work *Advaita Dīpika* 8, namely *priyam* or *sukham*<sup>53</sup>. *Priyam* represents the spark of the *ānandam* aspect of the ultimate Substance, innate for all sentient beings<sup>54</sup>. In *Ātmōpadēśa Śatakam* – the hundred stanzas constituting the selection and conclusion of the philosophical thought spread by Guru, the social background to the theoretical instruction seems to reveal the essential goal preached by Nārāyaṇa<sup>55</sup>. Thus the reflection of ultimate bliss (*ānandam*) within each individual being (*priyam*) should only be of one kind: *priyam oru jāti*. However, in accordance with the words of the mystic and social reformer of Kerala, such a non-egoistic attitude should be deeply rooted in one's social responsibility as well as in the philosophical and religious conditions. Only in such a case is one able to comprehend the sentence mentioned above as "What is blissful – *priyam* [with the support of ultimate reality being Bliss] – is the one caste – *oru jāti* – since *priyam* is the same for me and for you as well as for the [socially] inferior one (*apara*)".

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<sup>53</sup> *ajñānaveḷayil asti vibhāti raṅṅum ajñātam alla sukhavum vilasunnu mūnnum / rajju svarūpam ahiyoṅṅum idantayārnnu nilkkunṅatinniha nidarśanam ām it orttāl //8//* ("Even in the state of ignorance, one's "exists" and "shines forth" – these two are not unknown; and the "it is pleasant" appears as the third aspect. When the essential form of rope becomes associated with [the idea] of a snake, the concept of Thisness arises; when considered as such, this example illustrates the afore-said"). The trinity of *sat-cit-ānanda* reflects in human consciousness as *asti-bhāti-priya* aspect (cf. Prasad 2010: 95–97).

<sup>54</sup> Yati 2013: 152–153; Śāstrikaḷ 2014: 78.

<sup>55</sup> *Priyam oru jāti yiten priyam tvadīyapriyam aparapriyamennanēkamāyi / priyaviṣayam prati vanniṅṅum bhramam tan priyam aparapriyamennarīñṅiṅṅam //21//* ("Endearment is of one kind; this is dear to me, that is dear to you and the other thing becomes dear to another one – in such a way the confusion as regards the multitude of dear objects keeps rising: "What is dear to oneself certainly would be dear to others": everyone should comprehend such a [truth]").

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### Abstract

The *aruḷ / iruḷ* concept which constitutes the basis for the Siddha vision of the release process has been introduced by Nārāyaṇa Guru in plenty of his devotional hymns. The idea emphasises the key-role of Grace (*aruḷ*) – the essential form of the Sole Substance (*oru poruḷ*) identical with Śivaṅ / Śivam, by means of which the ultimate Bliss becomes attained – in the process of transformation of *iruḷ* (darkness = ignorance) rooted itself within the One. The mentioned above concept – when superimposed on the image of backwaters phenomenon – could be used by Guru as an instrument in his attempt to transform the “dark” social status of the low caste people into the “social bliss”. Such a social aspect of the *aruḷ / iruḷ* idea has been depicted by Guru in his *Arddhanārīśvara Stavam*; on the other hand, Guru’s biography itself turns to be an intriguing transcript of this Siddha concept employed in the service of politics. The metaphysical reflection of the social and religious transformations initiated by Guru should be thus considered in terms of Tamil literary sources. In such a case the *poḷi-āḷi-cuḷi* trio presented in *Śiva Śatakam* could be comprehended as follows: 1. *poḷi* symbolizes obstacles = limitations [of any kind], also the turning point [of transformation of any kind]; 2. *cuḷi* means the twists and turns within *samsāra*-ocean, as well as the *cakra*-whirlpools activated within the transcendent ocean; 3. *āḷi* symbolizes [the depth of] the ocean = the ocean of phenomenal world, or the transcendent ocean of grace. Both meanings are included in the equivalent of the term *āḷi – tikkulī* (which means the fiery pit [of *samsāra*] and the fiery pit [of activated *mūlādhāra cakra*] as well as the *ājñācakra* by means of which the the former type of ocean [*samsāra* depth] becomes transformed into the latter [i.e. the depth of Grace or Bliss]).

### Keywords

Nārāyaṇa Guru, Siddha, backwaters, *aruḷ*, social reformation, Kerala, *Tirumandiram*