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Transformation in the Lives of Tamil Śaiva *bhakta*s

SUMMARY: The article deals with the tradition of the medieval South-Indian branch of Hinduism, which can be defined here as the religion of Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* reflected in the poetic compositions (the corpus *Tirumuṟai*) composed by a group of saints called *nāyaṉār*s ('leaders'). Hagiographic sources of this tradition, first of all *Periya purāṇam*, and the *nāyaṉār*s' poetic creations reveal some constant motifs which form a certain pattern, a typology of their legendary life-stories. They include: the encounter of a *bhakta* with Śiva, a trial (a test of devotion, an initiation, a heroic deed), a participation in the myth, rejection of sexual (family) life, emotional experience and revelation of a poetical gift.

KEYWORDS: typology, Hinduism, Śiva, *bhakti*, *nāyaṉār*s, *Tirumuṟai*, *Periya purāṇam*.

It goes without saying that the life of any person consists of crossing boundaries and undergoing transformations of different kinds—physical, mental, psychological and so on. This maxim is, of course, a part of common knowledge and well reflected in academic studies. Suffice it to mention here a famous work by Arnold van Gennep (Gennep 1909) in which he developed a concept of the so-called rites of passage, which accompany a person from the childhood

to the end of their life, and defined three stages of these rites: a person leaves their previous status; enters the intermediate or liminal stage; obtains a renovated status. A convincing analysis of this process in Indian context is offered by J. C. Heesterman (Heesterman 1957), who demonstrated in every detail the structure of the ancient Indian ritual of the king's consecration consisting of a cycle of transformations which lead its subject, that is the king, from a symbolic state of a human embryo to the position of a god. Generally speaking, the realm of Indian culture, mythology, literature and art is full of cases of crossing boundaries and transformations of different kinds. All of them show original and peculiar features, but possess common fundamental structural and typological characteristics. The present paper deals with this phenomenon in the sphere of Indian religion, namely Hinduism in its *bhakti* form and considers the process of transformation as reflected in life-stories of some Tamil Śaiva devotees. They are known under the name of *nāyaṉār*s (lit. 'chiefs, leaders') and by virtue of their absolute devotion to Śiva had achieved the status of saints, "servants or slaves [of God]" (*āṭkaḷ, aṭikaḷ, toṇṭar*). Within the limits of the present article, it is possible to take up only several figures, most of them representing a poetic tradition which formed and developed within the period from the 6th to 12th centuries. The creations of the poets were collected in a corpus of texts known as *Tirumuṟai* ('The sacred order', 'The holy division'), consisting of 12 parts. Its last part is a poem based on stories, or, rather hagiographic legends, about 63 Śaiva saints—*nāyaṉār*s. It was composed by a court poet of the Cōḻa dynasty Cēkkiḻār (12th century) and was named *Periya purāṇam* (hereafter PP), 'A great *purāṇa*' or *Tiruttoṇṭar purāṇam*, 'A *purāṇa* about sacred slaves'.[1] The legends disclose details of *bhakta*s' life,

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[1]   *Periya purāṇam* was composed by the order of king Kulottunga II (1133–1150) as a counterpart to *Jaina* literary pieces (especially a poetic masterpiece *Jīvakacintāmaṇi,* a poem by Tiruttakkatēvar). It demonstrates some features of the Sanskrit poetic form *mahākāvya*: a division into chapters (called *purāṇa*s), using of poetic conventions and figures of speech, changes of poetic meters and some other).

their deeds and behavior, and also enable us to reconstruct a certain pattern within them consisting of a number of persistent features which we can understand as marking points of crossing certain boundaries in the course of a *bhakta*'s life and signs of transformations he undergoes on his way from an ordinary person to a position of a saint (and in a number of cases a poet[2]). In principle this pattern can be well analyzed in terms of rites of passage but I propose here to analyze it from a different angle, namely, as a set of repeating motifs, forming a certain typological structure. It will be convenient for our consideration to single out at first only one figure, the woman-saint known as Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār (6th century). The reasons for this choice are as follows: chronologically, she opens the row of *nāyaṉār*s and, secondly, and more importantly, her story forms a certain hagiographic pattern, well recognized in many other stories.

According to Cēkkiḻār,[3] this woman-saint was born in the coastal town of Kāraikkāl and was given the name of Puṉitavati. From her early childhood she was an ardent devotee of Śiva. She states it herself in the very first lines of her composition *Aṟputattiruvantāti* (ATA), "The sacred *antāti* about wonders":[4] *piṟantu moḻipayiṉṟa piṉellāṅ kātal/ ciṟantuniṉ cēvaṭiyē cērntēṉ* ('After I was born and learned to speak, my love became grand and I joined your beautiful feet' (ATA 1, 1–2).[5] However, in other respects her life was typical of a beautiful girl from a rich merchant family. In due course her parents found a bridegroom for her (also from the merchant community) and organized a pompous

[2]   It should be noted that there are only 27 poets, the authors of *Tirumuṟai*, among 63 saints presented by Cēkkiḻār in his poem.

[3]   *Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār purāṇam* (PP 24, 1–66). The first number indicates the chapter, the next—the strophes.

[4]   *Antāti (anta-āti)* is a poem consisting of a hundred strophes which are connected by a poetic device: the last word of one strophe is repeated as the first word of the following.

[5]   The translations of texts belong to the author (if not specified). In some places of the original examples *sandhi* is lifted for clarity.

wedding ceremony. So, she crossed the boundary of childhood, entered the period of matrimonial life and followed a route usual for a young Hindu woman. There was nothing dramatic in it. She was very pious and kept venerating Śiva but a real change in her spiritual life happened one day when a hungry Śaiva mendicant, a *brāhman*, came to their house. Puṇitavati gave him one of the two mango-fruits kept for her husband's meal. When her husband came for lunch, she brought him the one that was left. After eating it he asked for another. She was in a predicament and prayed to Śiva to restore the first fruit and it did appear in her hands. Its taste was so rare that the husband suspected something unusual and asked what had happened. She had to tell him the truth. The husband immediately understood that a miracle had taken place and his wife was a possessor of a great divine power. He ran away from her to his native place (Nākapaṭṭiṇam), where he started a new family. Puṇitavati waited for him patiently as a devoted wife should and on learning about his whereabouts went there to join him. However, her husband treated her not as his spouse but as a saint and together with his new family worshiped her. Puṇitavati realized that she was free from matrimonial bonds and serving Śiva became the only goal in her life. She decided to reject her feminine beauty and asked Śiva to turn her into what is known in Tamil mythology as *pēy*, a demoness, an ugly creature, emaciated, with disheveled hair, protruding teeth and ribs and other disgusting features.[6] According to Śaiva mythology, such figures constitute a part of Śiva's retinue (*gaṇa*), and thus she had a possibility to be near the god:

> *periṇum piṛitiyātum vēṇṭē namakkī/*
> *tuṛiṇum uṛātoḻiy mēṉuñ—ciṛitu uṇartti/*
> *maṛrorukaṇ neṛrimēl vaittāṉṛaṉ pēyāya/*
> *naṛkaṇatti loṉṛāya nām* (ATA 86*)*

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[6]   *Pēy*s are often described in the previous Tamil poetic tradition, the so-called *caṅkam* poetry. They usually dance on battle-fields and cook the flesh of fallen soldiers.

If [we] get [a chance to see him] we do not want anything else, if it happens
or not, what of it!—He taught [us] a little and we have become a *pēy* among
the good *gaṇa*s of him who keeps one eye on his forehead.[7]

On becoming a demoness, she went to Kailāsa to see Śiva and when
she approached his abode, he addressed her: '*ammaiyē*' ('mother'!).
She greeted him in the same way exclaiming '*appā*' ('father!')
(PP 24, 59). From that moment she became known as Kāraikkāl
Ammaiyār ('Mother from Kāraikkāl'). She asked Śiva for a boon:
*piṟavāmai vēṇṭum mīṇṭum piṟappuṇṭēl uṉṉai eṉṟum maṟavāmai
vēṇṭum iṉṉum vēṇṭu nāṉ makiḻntu pāṭ aṟavā nī āṭumpōtuṉ aṭiyiṉ kīḻ
irukka eṉṟār* (She said: 'I want not to be born. If I am born again, I want
to never forget you. And more, I want, oh Righteous one, to enjoy sing-
ing and to be under your dancing feet') (PP 24, 60). And Śiva direct-
ed her to the place called Tiruvālaṅkāṭu, where he used to dance on
the cremation ground.

 Even this short and schematic rendering of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār's
story shows that her life is an expressive example of crossing borders
and undergoing transformations. Some of them are quite ordinary
(like rites of childhood or marriage), but others are full of signifi-
cance. The first among the important events of her life is connected
with the visit of a Śaiva mendicant (*Paramaṉār tiruttoṇṭar*, 'The slave
of him who is High'), which radically changed her fate. She herself was
absolutely aware of this change and in the 8th strophe of ATA, pointed
out the day when it happened: *āyiṉē ṉāḻvāṉuk kaṉṟē peṟarku ariyaṉ
āyiṉēṉ* ('On that day I became [a slave] for him, I became the one who
is rarely obtained'). The last phrase, probably, means that the image she

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    7   Note that Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār in this case and elsewhere (not always) uses
the pronoun 'we' for 'I'. It is a usual convention in Tamil poetry (and in everyday
parlance, for that matter). In this case she certainly means 'I' which is clearly seen
in the passage: *pēyāya… oṉṟāya nām*, 'we who have become one *pēy*'). On the other
hand, we have to bear in mind that *bhakta*s often position themselves as a part of a group
of soul-mates. Such corporative feeling can be detected in the poetry of many of them
and of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār too.

acquired is impossible to obtain by anybody else. Though she expressed
her experience in a very general way, it seems that she knew what she
was talking about: she had crossed the boundary between the profane
and the mythological worlds and entered the latter to become one of its
dwellers. This event, that is the crossing of the boundary between two
worlds, can be defined as one of the important typical features of the lives
of *nāyaṉār*s. Many of them not only met Śiva in person or in dis-
guise but happened to undertake what we suggest to name 'a penetra-
tion into the myth' or 'a participation in mythological events'. Again,
the most eloquent example here is the story of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār,
who not only became a part of Śiva's *gaṇa*s, but happened to be a wit-
ness of the dance of Śiva in Tiruvālaṅkāṭu.[8] Another good example
is the story of a famous poet Cuntarar (or Cuntara mūrtti *nāyaṉār*),
who claimed to be a friend of Śiva and did not hesitate to address him
for a material support. Generally speaking, meeting Śiva in this or that
form is an important turning point in *nāyaṉār*s' lives.

Obviously, a crucial point in Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār's life (and
of her story) was her encounter with a Śaiva *brāhmaṇ*, who certainly
was a messenger of Śiva. In fact, we can safely assume that he was
Śiva himself, for in life-legends of some other *nāyaṉār*s, Śiva regu-
larly appears before them in disguise. Thus, Cuntarar, a famous poet
(8th century), met Śiva in the form of an old *brāhmaṇ* who claimed his
right on him as a slave and even produced a document confirming it.
In the case of Appar (7th century), Śiva was represented by one of his
attributes. A convinced *Jaina*, he was dying of a disease, but his sister,
a devotee of Śiva, offered him sacred ashes (*tirunīṟu*) as a medicine.

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[8]   The dance in Tiruvālaṅkāṭu was performed by Śiva in the context of his
competition with Umā, and represents a famous episode from South Indian mytho-
logy. Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār described it, as seen by her own eyes, in two compositions:
Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭut tiruppatikam and *Tiruvālaṅkāṭṭu mūtta tiruppatikam* ('The sacred
patikam of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu' and 'The older sacred *patikam* of Tiruvālaṅkāṭu'). Though
she sang about this particular dance, there is no doubt that she simultaneously meant
the cosmic dance of Śiva. *Patikam* is a poetic form usually consisting of ten strophes
connected with a refrain, a phrase repeated in each of them.

After taking it, he was restored to life and also became a famous poet. His contemporary Tiruñāṉacampantar, when a small child, drank milk from the breast of an unknown woman who appeared to be Pārvati; Tiṇṇaṉ, a chief of the hunter-tribe, during his hunting raid came across a *liṅgam* and began to serve it by bringing meat from his catch. Vātavūraṉ, a minister of the Pāṇṭiaṉ king, was sent to the sea-port to buy horses for the king's army but in the town of Peruntuṟai, near a Śaiva temple, he saw a young *brāhmaṇ*, a guru surrounded by a group of Śiva's devotees. Instantly, he experienced an ecstatic feeling of love for him and realized that he had met Śiva himself. He described his emotional state in many places of his poetic cycle 'The Sacred Utterance' (*Tiruvācakam*—TV). For instance:

> Lest I should go astray, He laid His hand on me!
> As wax before the unwearied fire
> With melting soul I worship, wept and bent myself,
> Danced, cried aloud, and sang, and prayed.
> They say: 'The tooth of elephant and woman's grasp relax not,'
> So I with love, real, intermitting never,
> Was pierced, as wedge driven into soft young tree.
> All tears, I like the refluent sea was tossed;
> Soul was subdued, and body quivered with delight.
> While the world called me demon, mocking me,
> False shame I threw aside; the folk's abusive word
> I took as ornament; nor did I swerve,
> My mind was rapt; - a fool, but in my folly wise,-
> The goal I sought to reach infinity! All wondering desire,
> As cow years for its calf, I moaning, hurried to and fro.
> Not ev'n in dreams thought I of other gods. (transl. Pope, TV: 34).[9]

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[9]   TV IV, 59–74:
tappā mētām piṭittatu caliyāt
taḻalatu kaṇṭa meḻukatu pōlat
toḻutuḷam uruki aḻutuṭal kampitta
āṭiyum alaṟiyum pāṭiyum paraviyuṅ
koṭirum pētaiyum koṇṭatu viṭātenum

Vātavūraṉ rejected his former life, donated all treasures he had for buy-
ing horses to the temple and to the people in it and became an ardent
devotee of Śiva, who gave him the nickname of Maṇikkavācakar
('He whose words are rubies').

Though the transformation a person undergoes after meeting Śiva
is mostly of a spiritual nature, it is often accompanied by some outer
changes in the devotee's life and in the body as well. For Appar, it was
a change of a religious confession, for Māṇikkavācakar—of his social
status. Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār rejected her feminine body, Tirumūlar also
changed his physical form by entering (with the strength of his yogic powers)
the corpse of a young shepherd (and took his name after that). The same
Appar, in fact, had been given a new life and in addition had trans-
formed his body by imprinting images of the trident and the bull on his
shoulders.

Along with it one more important transformation should be men-
tioned, concerning the *nāyaṉār*s' names. Practically, all of them were given
nicknames or epithets under which they had become known in the tra-
dition. Thus, Puṉitavati became Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, Maruḷṉīkkiyār—
Appar (or Tirunāvukkaracar, 'The king of sacred tongue'), Vātavūraṉ—
Māṇikkavācakar, Tiṇṇaṉ—Kaṇappaṉ, Nampi Ārūraṉ—Cuntarar
(Cuntara mūrtti) and so on.[10]

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paṭiyē ākinal liṭaiyaṟā aṉpiṟ
pacumarattāṇi aṟaintāṟ pōlak
kacivatu perukik kaṭaleṉa maruki
akaṅkuḻain taṉukula māymey vitirttuc
cakampēy eṉṟu tammaic cirippa
nāṉatu oḻintu nāṭavar paḻitturai
pūṇatu vākak kōṉutal iṉṟic
caturiḻantaṟimāl koṇṭu cāruṅ
katiyatu paramā aticaya mākak
kaṟṟā maṉameṉak kataṟiym pataṟiyum
maṟṟōr teyvaṅ kaṉavilum niṉaiyā

[10]   It is worth noting in this connection that generally bodily transformations
and new names are known to be the signs of a person's initiation, including religious
conversion, shifts in a social status or even a recognition of one's merits.

The encounter with the god can be realized, as we saw, in many ways and under different circumstances but its inner meaning is always the same: it is the call of Śiva, who summons (chooses, recruits) a person and gives them a chance to become his slave, or servant. As Māṇikkavācakar expressed it (TV V, 125): *aṟivilāta eṉaip pukuntu āṇṭukoṇṭu aṟivatai aruḷi*… ('He came to me, who did not know [him], enslaved [me], made a favor to know [him]…'). Or:

> *yāvar kōṉ eṉṉaiyum vant āṇṭu koṇṭāṉ/*
> *yām ārkkuṅ kuṭi allōm yātum añcōm/*
> *mēvinōm avaṉaṭiyar aṭiyrōtu /*
> *mēṉmēluṅ kutaintāti ātuvōmē'* (TV V, 117–120)

He, a king to everybody, came to me also and enslaved me. We[11] are nobody's kin, we fear nothing, we love, together with the slaves of his slaves we, bathing [in this love], shall bathe more and more.[12]

Secondly, the encounter with Śiva is usually combined with a trial, a test, which offers the chosen person a possibility to prove his love and devotion. This motif also occurs in life-stories of *nāyaṉār*s quite regularly. The tasks differ considerably and their range is wide: from

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[11]   These lines again demonstrate the mixing of individual and corporative attitudes of *bhakta*s.

[12]   In this connection it is not out of place to mention a motif often met with in *bhakti* poetry—a singularity of the object of veneration. In the words of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār (ATA, 3): *avarkkē yeḻupiṟappu māḷāvo meṉrum/avarkkē nām aṉpāva tallāṟ—pavarccaṭai mēṟ/pākāppōḷ cūṭu mavarkkallāṉ maṟṟoruvark/kākāppōm eññāṉrum āḷ* ('In the seven births we shall be servants only to him, we shall love only him, to him whose *jata* is crowned with the full/not full moon [the moon which can be full or not - A.D.], not to others we always shall be servants'). Cf. Māṇikka-vācakar (TV IV, 74): *maṟṟōr teyvaṅ kaṉavilum niṉaiyā* ('I am not thinking about other gods even in dreams'); Cuntarar: *miḷā aṭimai umakkē āḷāy piṟarai vēṇṭātē* ('Unescapable slavery—to you, having become [your] servants [we] do not want other [masters].' (Tev. 2, VII, 95, 1).

more or less simple tests (Puṇitavati feeds a *brāhmaṇ*, Maruḷnīkkiyar, or Appar, agrees to take the sacred ash) to unbelievably brutal actions described in many stories, for instance, about Caṇṭēcurar (Caṇḍēśvara) and Ciṟuttoṇṭar *nāyaṉār*s: the first one cut off his father's legs, who kicked the jar of milk prepared for a *pūjā* to *Śivaliṅgam* (PP 20, 50–51), the latter[13] fulfilled the request of a *brāhmaṇ* who asked for food but insisted that he would eat a curry prepared from the meat of the devo- tee's son (PP 36, 51–54). This event is, of course, especially tantalizing and full of inner meanings and elements of a certain interplay between the two partners of this drama, that is Śiva and his adept. D. Shulman, who devoted a part of his book *The Hungry God* (Shulman 1993) to a minute analysis of the story (in the Tamil and Telugu variants), remarks that 'at no point in the Tamil text is the notion of testing the devotee even intimated'. However, it was a real test but very spe- cific, combined with Śiva's desire to play with his servant, to mock at him, to torment him (for instance, he demands that Ciṟuttoṇṭar should share the meal with him). This attitude shows 'an overpower- ing drive or passion working within the deity, pushing him outwards toward the devotee' (Shulman 1993: 31). Ciṟuttoṇṭar on his part readily accepts the dreadful game and fulfills all requests of the ascetic with love and joy (*kaḷippāl kātaloṭu*) (PP 36, 52). There is no doubt that Śiva, creating such extreme situations for his adepts, makes them prove their absolute devotion to him, which crosses all boundaries, conven- tions and norms. As a reward he usually organizes happy ends to such stories. In the case of Ciṟuttoṇṭar, for instance, the ascetic disappears, the son is found alive and the initial situation is restored.

The behavior of the devotee in these stories can be considered heroic (see Dubyanskiy 2014), but it is possible to view it in terms

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[13]   His initial name was Parañcōti. His nickname Ciṟuttoṇṭar ('A small slave') came as a recognition of his humble service to Śiva, which consisted of daily feeding at least one of Śiva's *bhakta*s. One day there was nobody to feed and he was in despair, but, luckily, a Śaiva ascetic in the image of Bhairava came to the village. It goes without saying that he was Śiva himself.

of sacrificial acts, namely, sacrifices of flesh, which can be that of animals as in the story of Kaṇṇappar (the one who served *Śivaliṅgam* by feeding it), the flesh of close relatives (Cantēcura and Ciruttoṇṭar) and at last one's own flesh. The latter case is well illustrated by stories of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār (PP 271–281), who in fact sacrificed her body to Śiva, and, again, Kaṇṇappar, who, on seeing that one of the *liṅgam*'s eyes is bleeding, plucked his own eye and offered it to the *liṅgam*.[14]

An expressive example of rejecting one's body, and, in fact, sacrificing it to Śiva, is given in the story of Vātavūraṉ placed within the *Tiruviḷaiyāṭar purāṇam*.[15] Here is a fragment from Vātavūraṉ's emotional speech at the moment of the encounter with Śiva:

> I do not throw my body, which is a vessel of low deeds, into
> the fire,
> I do not exterminate it by making it perish in the mountains,
> I do not cut it with a poisonous sword,
> O, Ruler, I was afraid because it is your property;
> Life does not perish, it is like him,
> O Lord, I am unable to be separated from you.
> What shall I do? You burn [me], burn [me],'
> –Thus he spoke, rolling and weeping.[16]

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[14]   The motif of a sacrifice of one's body to the god is very old in India and well known to Tamil culture. Suffice it to mention the episode from the poem *Cilappatikāram* (V, 85–86) telling about soldiers who cut off their own heads in front of the belligerent goddess Korravai. This act of self-sacrifice is represented in stone in one of the cave-temples of Mahābalipuram. See also: Sudyka 2013: 89–106.

[15]   *Parañcōti Muṉivar. Maturai aṟupattu naṉku tiruviḷaiyāṭar purāṇam* (TVP), 'The *purāṇa* about the sixty four sacred plays [of Śiva] in Madurai' (16–17 c). The story of Vaṭavūraṉ is presented in the part called *Vātavūraṭikaḷukku upatēcitta paṭalam* ('The part about the instruction given').

[16]   TVP 58, 55:
> *vañcaviṉaik koḷkalaṉā muṭalait tīvāy*
> *maṭukkilēṉ varaiyuruṇṭu māyppē ṉallēṉ*
> *nañcoḻuku vāḷāluṅ kuṟaippe ṉallē*
> *ṉātaṉē yatuvuniṉa tuṭaimai yeṉṟē*

The emotional outburst which is generated by meeting the god is often accompanied by a feeling of bitter remorse and self-accusation, even contrition, for not being with Śiva before. The disappointment of a person in his previous life can be caused, apart from being distant from Śiva, by different circumstances. For instance, Appar acutely pitied the time when he was a *Jaina* monk and described it very expressively:

> Not knowing anything about [my] fate [*kati*—also state, way, happiness—A.D.], with inflamed eyes, with the head [hair] plucked, eating from hands, [roaming] in [many] places, and in big streets of [every] village people on seeing me laughed and I did not get ashamed; I was ignorant*,* without the way of salvation which I [could have reached] drinking, mouth filled with the honey streaming in Ārūr that gives knowledge—thus [one] warms himself by the light of a fire-fly, when there is a [bright] candle.[17]

Māṇikkavācakar, addressing Śiva with words of self-accusation, recollects his affairs with women, as in TV VI, 173–174: *muḻutail vērkaṇṇiyar eṉṉu mūrit taḻaṉmuḻukum/viḻutaṉai ēṉai viṭuti kaṇṭāy*' ('See! You are leaving me who was like oil poured in fierce fire of those whose eyes are spears, all sharpness'); *uḻaitaru nōkkiyar koṅkaip palāppaḻat tīyiṉ oppāy/viḷaitaru vēṉai viṭuti kaṇṭāy* ('See! You are leaving me, lustful, who was like a fly caught in jack-fruit of breasts of those who gain with their glances' [probably, prostitutes—A.D.] (TV VI, 181–182). Such examples in TV are numerous.

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añciṉēṉ ṟāṉēyu maḻiyā tāvi
yaiyaṉē niṉaippirintu māṟṟa killēṉ
eṉceykō ventāyō ventā yōveṉ
ṟiraṅkiṉār puraṇṭalutā riṇaiya colvār

[17]   Tev. 2 , IV-5, 7:
kati oṉrum aṟiyāte kaṇ aḻalat talai paṟittu kaiyil uṇṭu
pati oṉru neṭuvītip palar kāṇa nakai nāṇātu uḻitarvēṟku
mati tanta ārūril vār tēṉai vāymaṭuttup paruki uyyum
viti iṉṟi matiiliyēṉ—viḷakku irukka miṉmiṉittī kāynta āṟe

Nampi Ārūraṉ's, or Nampi Nāvalūraṉ's (later Cuntarar), meeting with Śiva is a different story. It is told by Cēkkiḻār in the part of PP called *Taṭuttāḷ koṇṭa purāṇam*, that is 'The *purāṇa* about taking a contradicting slave'. It is about a young *brāhmaṇ* who was going to get married but in the course of the wedding ceremony an elderly Śaiva *brāhmaṇ* appeared and claimed that the marriage should be stopped because the groom is his slave. Then he produced a palm-leaf with a signature of Nampi's grandfather testifying to that. Nampi became angry, called the old *brāhmaṇ* a madman, refused to obey and tore up the document. However, it was acknowledged by the council of elders as authentic. The old man led Nampi to the temple of Śiva and told him that this is his home and revealing his identity said:

> 'You spoke rudely to me and you've got the name 'A rude slave'.
> And to us there will be service songs,
> Magnificent and full of love; that's why
> Sing about us on the earth in [well]-worded Tamil'
> Thus said the one by whose mouth the Veda is sung.
> Looking at the friend favorably, The Great god made a favor:
> 'Earlier you called me Madman, that is why
> You will sing about me as Madman'—he said.
> And The Rude slave (*vaṉtoṇṭar*) began to sing about The Munificent.[18]

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18 PP V (*Taṭuttāṭkoṇṭa purāṇam*): 70, 73.
maṟṟunī vaṉmai pēci vaṉṟontaṉ eṉṉum nāmam
peṟṟaṉai namakkum aṉpiṟ perukiya ciṟappiṉ mikka
aṟcaṉai pāṭṭē ākum ātalāl maṇmēl nammaic
coṟṟamil pāṭuka eṉṟār tūmaṟai pāṭum vāyār. (70).
aṉpaṉai aruḷiṉ nōkki aṅkaṇar aruḷic ceyvār
muṉpeṉai pittaṉ eṉṟe moḻintaṉai āta lālē
eṉ peyar pittaṉ eṉṟē pāṭuvāy eṉṟār niṉṟa
vaṉperuntoṇṭar āṇṭa vaḷḷalaip pāṭaluṟṟār (73).

Analyzing the episode of Cuntarar's wedding, a Russian scholar Alexander Piatigorskiy paid attention to the strange behavior of the hero. When the old Śaivite pronounces his claim, he laughs at him (*nakkāṉ*, 38, 4) and calls him 'madman' (*pittaṉ*, 40, 4). Then the image of the old man unexpectedly generates some feeling of melting with love (*kātal cey turukā niṟkum*, 42, 1) and at the same time anger (*kōpam*, 42, 2). Then he becomes enraged (*vekuṇṭu*, 43, 3), seized the palm-leaf from the hands of the old man and tears it (*kīṟiyiṭṭār*, 45, 4). Nevertheless, his mind is boiling with some desire (*viḻaivuṟu maṉamum poṅka*, 48, 3). After the case was proven in the assembly of *brāhman*s, he recognizes his fault (*vitimuṟai ituvē ākil yāṉ itaṟku icaiyēṉ eṉṉa icaiyumō* (63, 3–4, 'if it is the rule, I who said not to agree to it, shall but agree'). When they come to the temple of Śiva and the old man disappeared there, Nampi stands in bewilderment (*tikaittu niṉṟāṉ*, 65, 4). Then, hearing the voice of Śiva, he screams like the newly-born calf on hearing the voice of the cow (*īṉṟa āṉ kaṉaippukkēṭṭa kaṉṟupōl kataṟi*, 68, 1–2), surrenders to Śiva and, indeed, becomes his slave.

The behaviour of Nampi is so unstable and contradictory that, as A. Piatigorskiy remarks, it seems that there is more ground to apply the epithet 'madman' to Nampi himself (Piatigorskiy 1962: 152) and to consider his case as an example of madness, or, rather, the cultic madness which is 'a standard for all cults which include an imaginary contact with the object of the cult, especially for shamanistic cults'.[19]

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[19] *Ibid.:* 153–157. The name (and the image) of Śiva as a madman (*pittaṉ*, *piccaṉ*) is common for and characteristic of South Indian Śaivism and is used practically by all poets from Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār to Māṇikkavācakar. Here is an extract of TV VI, 194–196: *veṅkariyiṉ/ urippiccaṉ ṟōluṭaippiccaṉ nañcūṇ piccaṉ ūrcuṭukāt/ terippiccaṉ eṉṉayum āḷuṭaiya piccaṉ eṉṟēcuvaṉē* ('The Madman who peeled off the skin of an angry elephant, the Madman who has the skin [for a garment], the Madman who swallowed poison, the Madman of the wild fiery ground of the village [the cremation ground—A.D.], the Madman who has me also as a slave, my Lord!'). There is no doubt that this feature comes down to local shamanistic cults and to Vedic figure of Rudra.

However, it might be that such behavior at the moment of encountering Śiva, an ecstatic joy and the overwhelming feeling of love for him are bright typical features of the life of *bhakta*s reflected in the poetry and in PP. The instance from *Tiruvācakam* V given earlier confirms it well.

The transformations experienced by adepts, connected with emotional explosions and even a kind of madness (the cultic madness) can include cases of strange and eccentric behaviour. In principle the extract above is a good example of that. We can also state that the behaviour of persons who were mentioned earlier (Kaṇṇappaṉ, Ciṟuttoṇṭar, Tirumūlar) and their heroic deeds go far beyond the course of life which by a general consensus can be called normal. But the most conspicuous example is, of course, that of Kāraikāl Ammaiyār, who turned herself into a demoness and went to Kailāsa in a most eccentric and spectacular way—on her head.[20] We can also consider as eccentric the behaviour of the king Cēramāṉ Perumāḷ, who, on seeing a *dhobi* (*vaṇṇaṉ* in Tamil) covered with a white washing powder, descended from his elephant, came to the man and bowed to him, because he reminded him of Śiva covered with sacred ashes (PP 37, 18–19).

A. Piatigorskiy also paid attention to a transformation that takes place in the sexual life of the adept. Analyzing the case of Cuntarar, he observes that the meeting with the god coincides with the meeting with a woman (the marriage ceremony) and prevents the latter. "The object of sexual relationship is replaced by the object of cultic relationship and typologically the behaviour inherent in the first is preserved in the latter" (Piatigorskiy 1962: 15). The theme of sexual transformations in the sphere of religion was further analyzed by the author,

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[20] *kāliṉ naṭaiyṉait tavirttu pār mēl talaiyiṉāl naṭantu ceṉrār* (*Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār purāṇam*, PP, 55, 4). 'Having rejected walking on foot [she] went by head on the earth.' Since this method of walking is impossible to imagine, local painters, like the one who made frescoes on the walls of her temple in Kāraikkāl, represented her figure walking topsy-turvy on her hands.

who connected it with archaic shamanistic practices, with cultic gender transvestism (*ibid.*: 157–163). As a general observation, it can be said that, indeed, in the *bhakti* stream of Hinduism, in Śaivism in particular, the internal emotional attitude of the adept towards the god is principally feminine. A discourse on this thesis is beyond the scope of this article, but one moment in the lives of *nāyaṉār*s, or to be exact, the poets-*nāyaṉār*s, should be noted. To define A. Piatigorskiy's thought more precisely, the coincidence of the adept's meetings with Śiva and with a woman is a case applicable only to Cuntarar, who is altogether an exceptional figure. It is true, his marriage ceremony was broken, but later he obtained two wives and led a family life, though not regular. The heroes of other stories are withdrawn from their family and sexual life completely. The example of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār is conspicuous in this respect. Appar and Campantar certainly were free from matrimonial bonds (the marriage of Campantar was once arranged but not consummated, for he and his bride dissolved in the light of Śiva). Māṇikkavācakar, who, according to his own confession was submerged in sensual pleasures, resolutely rejected them after meeting Śiva. Though this kind of transformation is not comprehensive with regard to all *nāyaṉār*s, it is very meaningful in the stories about those who became poets. It can be stated that its inner reason is a switch (a sublimation) of one's sexual energy into an artistic creative potential but on the level of narration it appears that Śiva chooses not only his slaves or servants but also the persons who would glorify him with beautifully arranged songs. His initiative in this process is seen in several stories: he suggested that Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār should sing about his dance in Tiruvālaṅkāṭu and blessed her by calling her '*ammā*', he crowned Vātavūraṉ with the epithet Māṇikkavācakar, he commanded Cuntarar to glorify him as 'a Madman'.

In a later story about the famous Tamil poet Aruṇakirinātar (15th century) the relationship of this kind between an ordinary person and a god is expressively presented. Aruṇakiri lived in the town of Tiruvaṇṇāmalai and was famous there for his riotous way of life. One day he realized his sins and decided to commit suicide by jumping

from the high tower (*gōpuram*) of the temple of Śiva. But he was saved by Śiva's son Murukaṉ, who came to him lying on the ground, touched his tongue with the tip of his spear and said: *pāṭuka* ! (sing!). And the youth immediately began to sing the glory of Murukaṉ.[21]

We see that transformations that Śiva's devotees undergo can take place on different levels—psychological, physical, social, sexual, poetic. There is also a way to interpret them on a theological level, in terms of the Tamil religious-philosophical school *Śaivasiddhānta*. As Whitney Cox showed, taking as an example the story of Tiṇṇaṉ (Kaṇappaṉ), the process of transformation, or transfiguration, of the hero is realized on his way from the brutal material world to the high and subtle realm of Śiva's consciousness and, accordingly, by a compromise between two kinds of *karma* supervised by Śiva.[22]

To sum up: there is a set of stable motifs in hagiographic legends about Tamil saints-*nāyaṉār*s, supported by their poetry, which can be considered as their typological or canonical features. They include: the encounter of a *bhakta* with Śiva, a trial, or an initiation[23] (a test on devotion, in some cases in the form heroic deeds, in some as a sacrifice), a participation in mythological events (close contacts with the god), rejection of sexual (family) life, a profound emotional experience, the revelation of a poetical gift. These motifs not necessarily appear simultaneously and in every case but they are reliable diagnostic features of these legends and can be detected not only in Tamil religious context but in many other local branches of the Hindu religion.

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[21] See: Zvelebil 1973: 240.

[22] For a detailed analysis of this concept, see Cox 2005.

[23] Cox discerns in the interaction of Kaṇappaṉ and Śiva some signs of the ceremony initiation known as *dīkṣā*. (Cox 2005: 274).

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