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Tumuli Stones, Sacred Geography, and Meditation Halls for Mantra

The Tamil Yoga Consensus of Sri Sabhapati Swami*

ABSTRACT: This article examines how the patronage of tumuli, belief in sacred geography, the institution of meditation halls, and the practice of mantra at these halls converged in Tamil Nadu at the turn of the 19th century to facilitate a pan-sectarian Tamil "consensus" on yoga in the literature of Sri Sabhapati Swami (Capāpati Cuvāmikaḷ, b. 1828). The article begins by analyzing the phenomenon of tumuli (Tamil *jīva-camāti*) among Sabhapati's gurus in the line of Kumara Devar (Kumāratēvar), as well as his own students. It then shows how such a phenomenon was intertwined with the mythology of Agastya and the Tamil Siddhas via Sabhapati's other guru line. Consideration is also given to the role of mantra in these tumuli and their accompanying "Meditation Halls" (*maṭālayam*s). The article concludes by claiming that intersections between tumuli sites, yoga, and mantra warrant more attention given their ability to attract emotional investment and financial patronage from various levels of society.

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KEYWORDS: yoga, Tamil, mantra, Sanskrit, death, tumuli, sacred geography, meditation, mythology, Siddhas, Agastya

Patronage of tumuli, belief in sacred geography, the institution of meditation halls, and the practice of mantra at these halls all converged in Tamil Nadu at the turn of the 19th century to facilitate a pan-sectarian consensus on yoga. One of the best examples of this consensus is found in the literature of a lesser-known but nonetheless prolific Tamil author and "Madras yogi" named Sri Sabhapati Swami (in Tamil transliteration Capāpati Cuvāmikaḷ, ca. 1828–1923/4). By "consensus" I mean a general agreement on the scope and boundaries of Hindu religious practice, including a rationale for the practice of yoga, which bridged Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and other sectarian affiliations.

Many readers of this journal may not be familiar with Sabhapati Swami given the lack of attention given to his works since the early 20th century. Yet from an Indological point of view, the context *before* the swami's lifetime, or rather the context into which he was born and brought up, is at least as equally compelling as this individual swami's life and the reception history of his works. Understanding the context is not limited to literary or archival data but is also directly tied to the historical role of networks of so-called "jeeva samadhis" (Tamil *jīva-camāti*, derivative of a non-attested Sanskrit compound *jīva-samādhi*), or "tumuli," also present in northern India and in Sufi contexts (McLaughlin 2021). In Tamil Nadu a "jeeva samadhi" is a place where yogic adepts (*cittar*s or *cuvāmikaḷ*s) are usually entombed beneath a Śivaliṅga ("phallic stone for Śiva"), in this specific context in the guru-line of the circa 18th-century Śaiva reformer Kumara Devar (Kumāratēvar). Two tumuli are especially important in Sabhapati's historical context, that of Kuzhandaivel Swamigal in Mylapore and Chidambara Periya Swamigal in Velachery, both of whom were disciples of Kumāratēvar. Both tumuli are still extant and accessible, and pan-sectarian, that is, one doesn't have to be a Vaiṣṇava or Śaiva or identify with

any specific sect or religion to go and worship there. They participate in a kind of sacred geography, which Diana Eck has compared to the wider idea of *tīrtha*, or "crossing over," especially bodies of water, but also points in which the natural world crosses over into the divine (Eck 2012). These tumuli stones and sacred geography informed Sabhapati's establishment of so-called "Meditation Halls" (*maṭālayam*s < Skt. *maṭha*) as a complementary site for a kind of consensus-based yogic worship and the practice of mantra.

Sabhapati's mantric *magnum opus*

The most explicit connection between these tumuli stones, their accompanying sacred geography, and Sabhapati Swami's practice of yoga and mantra is indicated in the title page of his large Tamil work that provides instructions on mantra and yogic practice (Cuvāmikaḷ 1913, see Fig. 2). While the swami published many books in several different languages, this Tamil work was the last of his known vernacular works published while he was alive and can be viewed as the culmination of his career—a true *magnum opus* that spans every aspect of his teachings and like some of his other works is also lavishly illustrated with woodblock prints. The book's full title is *Carva māṉaca nittiya karmānuṣṭāṉa, carva tēvatātēvi māṉaca pūjāttiyāṉa, pirammakñāṉa rājayōka niṣṭai camāti, carva tīkṣākkramattiyāṉa, cātaṉā appiyāca kiramāṉucantāṉa, caṅkiraha vēta tiyāṉōpatēca smiruti* (< Skt. *sarva mānasa nitya karmānuṣṭhāna, sarva devatādevī mānasa pūjādhyāna, brahmajñāna rājayoga niṣṭhā samādhi, sarva dīkṣākramadhyāna, sādhanā abhyāsa kramānusaṃdhāna, saṃgraha veda dhyānopadeśa smṛti*), "Inspired Treatise on the Instructions of Meditation, as Compiled from the Scriptures, on Every Mental Ceremony to be Performed Daily, on a Mental Ritual Meditation for Every God and Goddess, on the Steadfast Composition in the Yoga of Kings that is the Gnosis of Brahman, on Every Meditation on the Sequences of Initiation, and on an Inquiry into the Sequence of the Practice of the Rites." How-

ever, the title in the Madras Record Office catalogue entry is shortened to "Mantira Sangraha Veda Dyanopadesa Smriti," an Anglicization of Tamil *mantira caṅkiraha vēta tiyāṉōpatēca smiruti*, which reveals the main emphasis of the book on mantra. The book's contents are not just limited to mantras to a wide variety of deities, however, but also contain poetry, instructions on ritual based on attributive correspondences, a wide array of numbered visual diagrams, and lengthy instructions on Śivarājayoga or the "Royal Yoga for Śiva" (Cantú 2023a).

The description of Sabhapati Swami in Fig. 2 is divided into three parts. The first part introduces him as *kumāratēvar ātiṉa vētascirēṇi upatēca uṇmai cāstirakarttā citampara cuvāmikaḷiṉ ciṣyar*, "A student of Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal (Vētacirēṇi Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ), author of the work *Truth of Instruction* (*Upatēca uṇmai*) in the order (*ātiṉam* < Skt. *adhīna*) of Kumara Devar (Kumāratēvar)." While still relatively unknown to most scholars of South Asian religions, these are important authors in the history of the Tamil language and more especially its modern Śaiva literature, and informed to the yoga-based consensus that Sabhapati promoted throughout his life. In other words, while on the surface the title page of this work is nothing more than a list of descriptors to describe Sabhapati Swami, the page is a veritable gold mine of information if carefully examined line-by-line (or name-by-name). It is a critical piece of information since it explicitly connects Sabhapati's works on mantra and yoga to the historical *paramparā* of Kumara Devar, to the Siddha mythos of Agastya, and to the wider Tamil temple culture of visiting tumuli stones.

Sabhapati's Śaiva background and local reception

Early modern Tamil Śaiva movements often remain neglected compared to earlier movements on the one hand, accessible through texts and inscriptions, and contemporary movements on the other hand, accessible through ethnography. This has started to change with

increased examination of critical transition periods where manuscript culture became supplemented by printed text (Fisher 2019, Raman 2022 and Steinschneider 2016). Sanderson had already alluded briefly to some of these later developments as found in early form in the c. 12th-century work *Tirumantiram*, attributed to Tirumūlar, who is considered a Vīraśaiva himself by many Vīraśaivas (cf. Sanderson 2009: 286, fn. 686).[1] The connection between yoga and the mythology of the Siddhas also persisted in Tamil-speaking milieus up to the 18th century as evident by the poem *Cittarkaṇam*, or "The Troops of Siddhas," composed by the Tamil poet Tāyumāṉavar (for a published version see Piḷḷai 2010). Vīraśaivas were also very active in Tamil Nadu even up to the early 20th century, although while conducting ethnographic fieldwork I found that many simply identify themselves as Śaiva (Caiva) today and are much less familiar with the Vīraśaiva label, which has a more Kannada connotation. Labels aside, Steinschneider has shown that the "polyvocality of Tamil Śaiva theology" had created enough space for a tenuous but remarkable consensus between the monism of Vedānta and the dualism of Śaiva Siddhānta, often considered contrasting philosophical expressions or ways of relating to Śiva, and with it space for new institutions, deities, and spaces for yogic teaching (Steinschneider 2016). Such a synthesis had already begun as early as the 15th century, as Srilata Raman points out:

> The bringing together of the Vedānta and the Siddhānta as one continuum already begins with Aruḷnanti Civācāriyār and is cemented in the commentaries on the *Civanāṉacittiyār* between the 15th–16th centuries. Integrated into its soteriology is the idea of a path of

[1] Fisher has argued that its contents reflects influence from Śrīvidyā, a "goddess-centered (Śākta) esoteric ritual tradition, whose origins have been definitively traced back so far as early second millennium Kashmir" (Fisher 2013: 53 and 229–30). For more information on this text, which has been translated but never critically edited, see Tirumūlar 2016; the Introduction in Tirumūlar 1991; Thayanithy 2010. A helpful translation of this text with multiple descriptions in English was released in multiple volumes by Babaji's Kriya Yoga and Publications; see Tirumūlar 2013.

knowledge (*nāṉa*) called the *caṉmārkkam*, which by the late 14th century integrates a yogic path ostensibly called the *aṣṭāṅgayoga* but in reality also incorporating other yogic modes within it.[2]

Further developments from the 18th century onward in this path of knowledge (*ñāṉam* < Skt. *jñāna*) contributed to the establishment of a wide variety of tumuli (*jīvacamāti,* based on a non-attested Sanskrit compound *jīvasamādhi*, "[the place where a guru achieved] *samādhi*), writings on yoga, and accompanying systems of temple patronage in Tamil Nadu for the students of Kumara Devar (Kumāratēvar) and his guru Perur Santhalinga Swamigal (Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ).

One of the best examples of this is the still-extant tumulus of the aforementioned Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal (Vētacirēṇi Citampara Cuvāmikaḷ, also called Chidambara Periya Swamigal, d. 1858), the first guru of Sabhapati Swami and a celebrated author and yogi in his own right. Today Velachery is the site of a major campus of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and a thriving suburb near Chennai's international airport and the home to one of the city's largest shopping malls. Yet Vedashreni, an old name for Velachery (Cuvāmikaḷ 2014: 15), is also a historical temple village that by Sabhapati's time had already been an important Śaiva religious site for at least almost a millennium. It is also associated with the 16th-century pandit Appaya Dikshita (Appaya Dīkṣita) and was later even the site of a short-lived French military camp (Irājakōpālaṉ 2003).

As noted in Sabhapati's description (see Fig. 2), Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal was the author of *Upatēca unmai*, or "Instructive Truth," an as-yet-untranslated collection of 192 verses on Vedānta and Yoga published at least as early as 1881 and still in print today along with useful paraphrases and commentaries for each verse, which was originally composed in an archaic style of Tamil

[2] Srilata Raman, personal correspondence with the author, 17 July 2020, as taken from the thesis in her book (Raman 2022: 80–81).

religious verse (Cuvāmikaḷ 1881).[3] Chidambara Swamigal's earlier name was Veeraswamy Swamigal (Vīrācuvāmi Cuvāmikaḷ). He is said to have received the name Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal upon his initiation (Skt. *dīkṣā*) from his guru, Kuzhandaivel Swamigal (Kuḻantaivēl Cuvāmikaḷ), whose own tumulus in Mylapore is not too far from the historic Kapaleeswarar Temple (Ramaṇaṉ 2018). Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal is sometimes confused in library records with another person who lived earlier, Thiruporur Chidambara Swamigal (Tiruppōrūr Citambara Cuvāmikaḷ).[4] The most recent edition of *Upatēca unmai* emphasizes Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal's connection with the aforementioned ca. 17th-century CE Vīraśaiva author Kumara Devar (about whom see Steinschneider 2016). This recent edition also offers a short life-sketch of this Kumara Devar, analyzes Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal's guru line (*paramparā*), and also interprets one of the latter's verses (189) as a praise of his guru Kumara Devar.[5] No fewer than sixteen individual works were attributed to this Kumara Devar, "...including the *Cuttacātakam*, the *Attuvitavuṇmai*, and the purportedly autobiographical *Makārājātuṟavu* ("The Renunciation of the Great King")" (Steinschneider 2016: 20–21). These along with some other Tamil works have been included in a publication entitled *Cāstirakkōvai* ("Series of Scriptures"), which was published at least as early as 1908 (Śrī Kumāratēvar 1908),[6] and possibly as early as 1871 (Kumāratēvar 1871). Kumara Devar's guru

[3] For a contemporary edition that contains a paraphrase (*urai*) and commentary (*viḷakkam*) for each verse see Cuvāmikaḷ 2014. The latter at the time of writing is available for purchase at Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal's sacred tomb (*jīvasamādhi*).

[4] For example, the Roja Muthiah Research Library erroneously lists at least one copy of *Upatēca unmai* as the work of Thiruporur Chidambara Swamigal and not Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal, which has also been reflected in the library microfilm catalogues of the University of Chicago.

[5] Citampara Periya Cuvāmikaḷ 2014: 12–14; 220–21.

[6] This edition was at least partially reprinted in 1909. I am grateful to Brindha Thirumalai at the library of Senthamil College for finding this publication for me.

Perur Santhalinga Swamigal was also an author in his own right and composed four major works, including *Vairākya Catakam* (< Skt. *Vairāgya Śataka*, "One Hundred Verses on Dispassion") and *Vairākya Tīpam* (< Skt. *Vairāgya Dīpa*, "Lamp of Dispassion").[7] While a full list of the swamis' names between Kumara Devar and Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal is absent in the edition mentioned above, based on available data the names of Sabhapati Swami and his guru Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal's line are traceable through the latter's guru Kuzhandaivel to Thiruporur Chidambara Swamigal and even further back to Kumara Devar and his guru Perur Santhalinga Swamigal (Pērūr Cāntaliṅka Cuvāmikaḷ), as well as Santhalinga Swamigal's own guru Thuraiyur Sivaprakasa Swamigal (Tuṟaiyūr Civappirakācacuvāmikaḷ).

Sabhapati Swami (c. 1828–1923/4), on whose life I have written elsewhere (Cantú 2023a, 2021), was one of Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal's most enigmatic students and also participated in this context of Śaiva tumuli. Hagiographical accounts and streams of literature exist in a variety of languages, each of which often presents a different spelling of his name. For the past century this yogin has remained a largely forgotten yet enigmatic figure in both the fields of yoga studies and esotericism. Born in Velachery, then a small temple village south of colonial Madras, he was educated at a Scottish Protestant missionary school (Free Church Mission School) in his early childhood yet remained deeply connected to Śaiva temple culture via his family's service to Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal, the aforementioned Tamil Vīraśaiva guru in the line of Kumara Devar (Kumāratēvar). As his three surviving hagiographical accounts state, Sabhapati had a vision of the transcendent Śiva (*civam*) who instructed him to travel to Agastya's hermitage in the Pothigai Hills, a mountain range on the border with what was then Travancore (modern Kerala). While it is difficult to historically account for what exactly transpired at this hermitage, it is clear that

[7] *Vairāgya Śataka* is also the title of a different work by Bhartṛhari, not to be confused with the work of Perur Santhalinga Swamigal.

he did engage with a network of yogins who were interested in revitalizing earlier traditions of the medieval Tamil Siddhars (Tam. *cittar* < Skt. *siddha*), a group that gradually by Sabhapati's time came to be transformed into and blended with a new group known as Swamigals (*cuvāmikaḷ* < Skt. *svāmin* and Tamil plural/honorific suffix *kaḷ*).[8] The hagiographies of Sabhapati—or Sabhapati Swamigal (Capāpati Cuvāmikaḷ) as he was known in Tamil—claims that his new guru, a semi-legendary and centuries-old figure named Shivajnanabodha Rishi (Civañāṉapota Ruṣi < Śivajñānabodha Ṛṣi), had instructed him to take his message to the rest of South Asia. While there is no corroborating evidence as to just how many temple complexes he visited in north India, we conclusively know that by 1879 and 1880 CE he was in the Kangra Valley of Himachal Pradesh and Lahore in the British Punjab (now in Pakistan). In Lahore he met with Shrish Chandra Vasu (Śrīś Candra Basu, 1861–1918), then a Bengali student of Government College Lahore and budding legal advocate whose father had migrated to the Punjab from what is today Bangladesh. Shrish Chandra edited and helped to publish the first edition of Sabhapati's lectures along with extra material (Swami 1880) and was involved in its Bengali translation. He also likely helped Sabhapati arrange a meeting with the founders of the Theosophical Society, Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Henry S. Olcott (1832–1907), who remained friendly but ultimately very distant on account of their disbelief (at least publicly) over Sabhapati's claim to have physically flown to the semi-legendary Mount Kailasa (Cantú 2021, Baier 2016).

Sabhapati became largely forgotten by the Theosophical Society and his relationship with Shrish Chandra Basu appears to have gradually faded by the end of the 19th century, yet he did not disappear from the historical record. Sabhapati instead became ex-

[8] For various ways in which scholars have framed the contours of this group, some more convincing than others, see Venkatraman 1990, Zvelebil 1996, Weiss 2009, Mallinson 2019, and Ezhilraman 2015. For consideration of their place in the wider pan-Indian context of the Siddhas, see White 1996 and Linrothe et al. 2006.

tremely active in another world, that of Tamil vernacular or folk religious ritual practice[9] and its use of mantra or sacred formulae. While Sanskrit (often verging into a late form of the Tamil-Sanskrit hybrid language *maṇippiravāḷam* < Skt. *maṇipravāla*, "pearl and coral") provided the linguistic foundation for most of Sabhapati's religious teachings from the outset, it is clear from his works on mantra for Tamil audiences that he gradually began to much more consciously integrate guidance on holidays and the rituals surrounding local religious festivals. As a result, his later works came to reflect a fluid interface between both Sanskritic and Tamil vernacular religious worlds, and the central place of Śaiva tumuli remained ever-present in the background.

The best example of this interface is his four-part pamphlet *Cakalākama tiraṭṭu* ("A Compilation of All Āgamas"), the first part of which was published in 1894. In this work we find Hindu ritual observances of a wide array of holidays assigned to Tamil months (Yōkīsvarar 1894). These include annual celebrations and astrological events, most of which are celebrations intended for the general public, in this case Tamil speakers, since the work is in Tamil with essentially no English. It is accordingly a valuable record of what kinds of rituals were taking place on a regular basis at the Konnur "Meditation Hall," Sabhapati's own translation for the *maṭālayam* (< Skt. *maṭha* + *ālaya*) that he established in a village to the west of Madras (now Villivakkam, Chennai) after returning there in the 1890s. These celebrations included more prominent observances like Shivaratri (*civarāttiri viratam* < Skt. *śivarātri*) and Vinayaga / Ganesh Chaturthi (Mpvl. *viṉāyakacaturtti* < Skt. *vināyakacaturthī*),[10] but also relatively less-common festivals and local observances that

[9] By "vernacular" or "folk" here I loosely mean customs that were popularly accessible and open to members of all castes, often connected with natural environments, landscapes, and things (e.g. stone, metal, water, flowers, leaves, and so on), and grounded in local religious customs and traditions.

[10] "Chaturthi" (*caturtti* < Skt. *caturthī*) is the fourth day of a lunar fortnight after a new or full moon.

may reflect Sabhapati's travels outside of South India (e.g. "Dol" or "the Observance of Lord Kedar").[11]

This legacy of festival observances has survived to the present, where the current "Shrine of Sri Sabhapati Swami and Ananda Ananda Swami" (Śrī Capāpati Cuvāmi marrum Āṉantā Āṉanta Cuvāmikaḷiṉ Cannitāṉam) on Red Hills Road in Villivakkam regularly holds religious festivals advertised via WhatsApp and Telegram, events that are often combined with folk dancing and music. One of the most regular of these, which was also practiced in Sri Sabhapati Swami's time according to *Cakalākama tiraṭṭu*, is a Tamil-specific "evening worship" (*piratōṣam* < Skt. *pradoṣa*) on auspicious nights for Śiva (often held bimonthly on the 13th day of the lunar fortnight), connected with the myth of the churning of the ocean of milk.

The festivals recorded by Sabhapati in his pamphlets were not only to be observed in a highly organized fashion on specific days of the year but also were connected to an elaborate system of mantras to be recited at auspicious moments. As a result, the ritual attitudes cultivated on non-festival days (i.e., in daily ritual practice) inform these special observances, even those that have a more folk-like quality connected to dance, music, and ritual. The demand for further guidance on these proper ritual attitudes and associated mantras is reflected in another of Sabhapati's pamphlets published four years later and entitled *Cātaṉāppiyāsāṉupava upatēcam* (< Skt. *Sādhanābhyāsānubhava upadeśa*, "Guidance on the Exercises and Practices of the Rites," Svāmikaḷ 1898). This work, published in Vellore, a city west of Chennai, included such topics as "Guidance on the Order of Ceremonies that Must Be Carried Out in the Morning" (*kālaiyil ceyyavēṇṭiya aṉuṣṭāṉaviti upatēcam*), "Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava Assignments of the Limbs and Assignments of the Arms" (*caiva vaiṣṇava aṅkarnniyācam, karnniyācam*), "Meditation on the Recitation of the Gāyatri [Mantra]" (*kāyattiri jepattiyāṉam*), as well as "Guidance on the Mantras for Recitation of Every Deity" (*carva-*

[11] The festival of Dol Purnima (Bng. *dol pūrṇimā*) / Dol Yatra (Hindi *dol jātrā*) is sometimes celebrated with a swinging palanquin.

tēvatā jepamantiraṅkaḷiṉ upatēcam) and "Guidance on the Sacrifice and Meditation of the Nine Celestial Bodies" (*navakkirakattiyāṉam yākam upatēcam*). This latter guidance on the nine celestial bodies (< Skt. *navagraha*) reflects engagement with a specific folk ritual practice, prominent in a wide variety of local Tamil temples, of circumambulating stone fixtures of the celestial bodies clockwise so as to remove astrological defects (*doṣa*s) that affect one's potential for success in life.

Agastya and tumuli stones

Sabhapati, like his predecessors, referred to tumuli sites in connection with material representations of Śiva's *liṅga*, called "phallic stones," on the one hand, and on the other hand the Tamil Siddhar preoccupation with physical longevity and vitality. These sites as well as a belief in the powers of the Siddhars (or Siddhas) also became an integral part of the Hindu pan-sectarian consensus that he was trying to create. For example, Sabhapati's trilingual 1884 work declares the following:

> The Rishís and Yogís after remaining as many hundred years as they like Kulpa Siddhi (as my Guru who is two hundred years old, though he seems to be of eighty), in the state of Spiritual perfection (*jivaṉmukti*), i.e. full absorption in I. Spirit, or stand as I. Spirit even while in body. Change their body and *bless* it to become "The Self divine Spiritual Universal fully pervaded Circle of stone to worship as Personal God (*svayampu mahāliṅkam*), and their Spirit joins the I. Spirit. Thus many of the phallic stones, which stands [sic] as "Imitated Spiritual Universal circle of stone with Divinity (*liṅkākāram*), seen in the holy caves, are nothing more than the metamorphosed bodies of the Holy Rishis. Others *bless* their bodies to remain uncorrupted and unputrefied [sic], and in the same posture for centuries, while their Spirits remain absorbed in the I. Spirit, and the most of the Ghiana Yogis [sic, = *jñāna yogī*s) leave their bodies, to get changed to mud, as of the worldly men… (Yogiswer 1884: 17)

Today this is reflected in the *liṅga* worshipped at the Sri Sabhapathy Lingeshwarar Koil, which is currently revered as the tumulus of Sabhapati Swami himself, although there unfortunately is still no conclusive proof of his body residing there.[12] The site is the same as Sabhapati's meditation hall, the address of which is given in his literature as west of the Perumal temple in Villivakkam, and the land can be confirmed on land survey maps dated to the British period (Cantú 2023a). Regardless of whether Sabhapati indeed is buried at the site, the belief in the power of the tumulus accords with Sabhapati's literature; Vinayagam Swamigal, the current temple trustee, has said that centuries-old Mahans like Sabhapati were known to "bring themselves to the earth and perform miracles and disappear into the lingam."[13] The *liṅga* at Sri Sabhapathy Lingeshwarar Koil is believed to extend around seventeen feet deep into the ground, and during a previous excavation the word *liṅgeśvara* (Tam. *liṅkēsvar*) was found inscribed on the *liṅga*, which is how the temple acquired its name. This tradition continued with Konnur Ramalinga Swamigal, whose tumulus is located at a different location, and Ananda Ananda Swamigal, whose tumulus is conclusively located in Sabhapathy Lingeshwarar Koil. Hariharan Swamigal's death broke with this tradition, and there were funerary rites, but he was cremated according to the more prevalent Hindu custom. In addition, Sabhapati's other student Om Prakash Swami also followed the tradition of the tumulus, and his is located outside the former British hill station of Ooty, in an area called Kandal.

All of the preceding information can be gleaned from the first of Sabhapati's titles, yet the conjunctive enclitic "-um" in Fig. 2 tells us much more, namely that Sabhapati's other guru is a part of the Siddha legend if the guru-succession (*paramparā*) of Agastya (Akattiyar, Akasttiyar). The second part reads: "and the student of Śivajñānabodha Ṟṣi, [who is] the student of the great *ṛṣi* Akasttiya

[12] For more on this temple and the worship of the *liṅga* there as it was prior to my own field work see Hariharaṉ 2017.

[13] Personal communication via WhatsApp with Vinayagam Swamigal of the Sri Sabhapathy Lingeshwarar Koil, 2 November 2021.

(Agastya), who dwells in a cave on the southern Kailāsa" (*takṣaṇa kailāca kuhāvāciyum, akasttiya mahā ruṣiyiṉ ciṣyar civakñāṉapōta ruṣiyiṉ ciṣyarum*).

This is where the notion of sacred geography and pilgrimage start to become salient, as the mythos of Agastya connects to rivers, such as the Thamirabarani River, waterfalls, and mountains, such as Agattiyamalai, Agastya's Mountain. This attention to geography is explicitly illustrated in a diagram provided at the beginning of Sabhapati's 1913 Tamil work, an illustration that also transposes the "triple-braid" (*triveṇi*) of Prayagraj in the north to the south (see Fig. 3). The diagram also acts as a sacred map of sorts, depicting Agastya, Sabhapati's semi-legendary guru Shivajnanabodha, and Sabhapati himself with the title Guru Father Rishi. Its full title is "the diagram of the tradition of succession between guru and student on the mountain called Mount Agastya, the Southern Kailasa" (*takṣaṇakailāca akastiyācala parvata kuruciṣya pāramparaiya paṭam*). The three yogins are meditating in caves (Mpvl. *kukaikaḷ* < Skt. *guhā*) at the confluence of the Thamirabirani River and two other (possibly legendary or "yogic") rivers, the Amrita River (Mpvl. *amirutanati*) and the Siddhi River (Mpvl. *cittinati*). These form the "triple-braided" (Skt. *triveṇi*) confluence that mirrors the famous confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and (subterranean) Saraswati in present-day Prayagraj.

In the context of his mountain, Agastya is known not just as a Vedic rishi but as the foremost among Tamil Siddhas (Cittarkaḷ), whose images are also often found in the temple installations built up around the tumuli of Kumāratēvar's line, such as that of Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal. These Siddhas also take on their own life embedded in the sacred geography of Tamil Nadu.[14] Numerous books have treated various aspects of the Siddhas such as their yoga, medicine, sexual practices, and especially their songs,

[14] The Sanskrit word *siddha* is rendered *cittar* (*citta* + *-r* suffix, denoting a person) in Tamil on account of the lack of separate letters for voiced and aspirated consonants in Tamil. I have retained "Siddha" for the sake of consistency with Sabhapati's non-Tamil literature.

still performed and available in print across Tamil Nadu today (see e.g. Kailaṣnāt 2017). Scholars have also noted evidence of Siddha presence outside of Tamil Nadu at Srisailam in Andhra Pradesh, further connecting their mythology with legends of alchemy, as reflected in a chapter of the Rasāyanakhaṇḍa perhaps added later (White 1996, 57–77; cf. Mallinson 2019). Alchemy, while it plays a minor role in Sabhapati's works, is present in the background given the preoccupation with longevity and the numerous citations given that his gurus have obtained near immortality with the context of these stones. His Tamil hagiographical account even mentions techniques that he had learned but that he was forbidden to express publicly, implying at least that the public receiving a work like this would expect a yogin like Sabhapati to have these kinds of special powers.

The relationship between Sabhapati and the Pothigai Mountains is especially significant, as it is held even to this day to be sacred to the devotees of Agastya, who have revered its highest peak, Mount Agastya or Agastyamalai as his embodiment for many centuries, and the peak was even mentioned in the Vaishnava classic *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (IV, 28, 29), where, as the scholar Friedhelm Hardy notes, it was called Kulācala (Hardy 1983: 637). The Thamirabirani (as Tāmraparṇī) is mentioned along with two other unknown rivers, the Candravasā and Vaṭodaka, and another passage (X, 79, 16f.) records Agastya's association with the mountain (*ibid.*).[15] By the British period it was mapped with a variety of routes connecting it to nearby Papanasam, and the artists of Sabhapati's works also depict it in an artistic style similar to depictions of the mythical Mt. Kailāsa in the Himalayas. A good idea of the way Agastya was envisioned in this frame is found in a description of Agastya's visitation to his ashram once in every fifty years that is given in one of Sabhapati's Tamil hagiographical accounts:

[15] I am grateful to Alesandar Uskokov for his assistance with these references.

In the year 1880, on the day of the full moon in the asterism of Chitra, at the time of sunrise, just as with the vision before his very eyes of Shiva on holy Kailasa, the twenty-four Mahatmas who are the Guru's Beloved, with their students encircling them at their side and performing the sixteen acts of reverence (*cōṭacōpacāram* < Skt. *ṣoḍaśopacāra*), came within and beneath him. They were continually reciting praises and the collections of the Vedas, and their students were making the sounds of the conch and the lion's roar (*ciṅkunātañcaṅkunātam* < Skt. **siṃhanādaśaṅkhanāda*). The Goddesses of Power (*caktitēvikaḷ* < Skt. *śaktidevī*) were waving their chowries (*kṣamaram* < Skt. *chāmara*) and fans (*viciri*, possibly < Skt. √*vij*) to the great rishi Agastya, the undivided Whirler of the Teacher's Wheel (*kurucakkiravartti* < Skt. **gurucakravartin*), accompanied by his retinue (*āravāram* < Skt. *ārava*), with his threefold mark (*tiripuṇṭaram* < Skt. *tripuṇḍra*) and his mark on the lower neck (*kantatilakam* < Skt. **skandhatilaka*). He was ornamented by a necklace of rudraksha seeds (*ruttirākṣaciramālā* < Skt. *rudrākṣamālā*), a collar (*kaṇḍamālā* < Skt. *kaṇṭhamālā*), an armlet (*pujamālā* < Skt. *bhujamālā*), and a bracelet (*kaṅkaṇamālā* = *Skt.), and was wearing red ochre and golden robes, a girdle of ascetics, and had a crown of dreadlocks (*jaṭamakuṭam* < Skt. *jaṭamakuṭa* or *jaṭamukuṭa*) with matted hair (*kapirṇam*, possibly < Skt. *kapardin*) falling upon his feet. He was holding in his hands a wand (*cukkumāntaṭi*), a yogic staff (*yōkataṇṭu* < Skt. *yogadaṇḍa*), a water vessel (*kamaṇṭalam* < Skt. *kamaṇḍalu*) a bag (*jōḷṇā*, < Hi. and Bng. *jholā*, likely < Skt. *jyaulikā*), and a pouch filled with the ashes of cow-dung (*vipūticañci* < Skt. **vibhūticañca*), and he was wearing a yoga strap (*yōkappaṭṭai* < Skt. *yogapaṭṭa*). He came to the entry-way of his cave, and then was at the base of the tree of sixteen qualities (*cōṭcakalāvirukṣam* < Skt. *ṣoḍaśakalāvṛkṣa*) that he himself had created, which is his same size, and which is comprised of sixteen kinds of branches, leaves, blossoms, and fruits. He was lying on a tiger skin (*viyākirācaṉam* < Skt. *vyāghrāsana*), a dark sheet (*kiruṣṇācaṉam* < Skt. *kṛṣṇāsana*), a thick blanket of jewels (*rattiṉajamakkāḷācaṉam* < Skt. *ratna* + a compound of Hi. *jama* + Skt. *kālāsana*), a skin of musk deer (*kastūri mirukācaṉam* < Skt. **kastūrimṛgāsana*), a mat made from tree bark (*mara uriyāl tiṇṭu*), and a sheet made from golden fabric (*pītāmparattāl mettai* < Skt. *pītāmbara* and Tam. *mettai*). He then rose and sat upon the li-

> on-throne (*cimahācaṉa* < Skt. *siṃhāsana*) of the Whirler of the Teacher's Wheel.[16]

As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Cantú 2023a), Agastya also figures prominently in Sabhapati Swami's Tamil-language hagiography, composed by one Shivajnanaprakash Yogishwara (Civakñāṉappirakācayōkīsvara, dates unknown), and also in his English language works. For example, we read of a legend that Agastya is still living and appears once in every fifty years, and also of a temple that Sabhapati frequented prior to establishing his Meditation Hall:

> He then approached the city of Chennai and is in Holy Konnur in Villivakkam. In ancient times Agastya established a pilgrimage bathing site of Agastya and a temple of Agastya at a forest of bael trees (*vilvavaṉam* < Skt. *bilvavana*) where he slew the asuras Vatapi and Ilvala. He instituted a large pool, called the Offering Pool (*yākakuṇṭam* < Skt. *yajñakuṇḍa*), and made an offering (*yākam* < Skt. *yajña*) upon coming to Holy Konnur. He approached the large pool, and was in his gnostic vision of the past, present, and future (Mpvl. *tirikāla ñāṉatiruṣṭi* < Skt. *trikālajñānadṛṣṭi*) while on the ground in steadfast devotion. While in his steadfast devotion, he also established a hermitage and abode of instruction (*maṭālayam* < Skt. *maṭhālaya*) after a short time. He dwelled there in that place and made offerings at the great lake called the Offering Pool. On the ground at the north side of

[16] "1880 varuṣattil cittirā paurṇami tiṉattil cūryōtayakālattil cākṣāt śrīkailaiyil civataricaṉampōṉṟu taṉkīḻuḷḷa (24) kurupīṭikaḷum yavarciṣyavarkkaṅkaḷum puṭaicūḻntu cōṭacōpacārañceyyavum, vanta mahātmākkaḷ, vēta:kō:ṣam, stauttiyañceytuvara, ivarkaḷiṉ ciṣyavarkkaṅkaḷ ciṅkunātañcaṅkunātañceyya, caktitēvikaḷ kṣamaram viciripōṭa akaṇṭa kurucakkiravarttiyām śrī akastiyamahā ruṣīsvarar āravārattuṭaṉ, tiripuṇṭaram, kantatilakam, ruttirākṣaciramālā, kaṇṭamālā, pujamālā, kaṅkaṇamālā, tarittum kāvikāpītāmparam ciracilaṇintum laṅkōṭu kapirṇattōṭum jaṭamakuṭattōṭum pātarakṣaiyiṉpēril, cukkumāntaṭi, yōkataṇṭu kamaṇṭalam jōḷṇā, vipūticañci kaiyilēnti yōkappaṭṭai māriliṇantu vantu taṉ kuhai vācalil taṉṉāl ciruṣṭikkappaṭṭa orē timmai, patiṉāṟuvita kiḻaikaḷ, ilaikaḷ, puṣpaṅkaḷ, kaṉikaḷ uṭaiya cōṭcakalāvirukṣattaṭiyil viyākirācaṉam kiruṣṇācaṉam rattiṉajamakkāḷācaṉam, kastūri mirukācaṉam, mara uriyāl tiṇṭu paṭṭupītāmparattāl mettai mutaliyatukaḷālamaitta uyarnta kurucakkiravartti cimahācaṉattiṉ pēriluṭkārntaṉar" (Cuvāmikaḷ 1913: 11–12 [of hagiography section]).

> this Pool of Sacrifice was where the Lord of All (Carvēsvara, < Skt. Sarveśvara) had given the vision of his dance (*naṭaṉam* < Skt. *naṭana*) of five activities (Mpvl. *pañcakiruttiyam* < Skt. *pañcakṛtya*) to Agastya, and where his disciples had gone to perform worship rites to 1,008 lingas and 108 shaligrams.[17]

Holy Konnur (Thirukoṇṇūr, also just Konnur or Connoor) was a village in the Saidapet Taluk of Chingleput District that today has been almost entirely subsumed within the northwest Chennai suburb of Villivakkam (Villivākkam), and a Vijayangara-era temple called Arulmigu Agatheeswarar Temple (Aruḷmiku Akastīsvarar Tirukkōyil) still exists at the site. A published pamphlet about this sacred site (*talam* < Skt. *sthala*) in Tamil, entitled *Vilvāraṇyat tala purāṇac curukkam* ("Summary of the Legend of the Sacred Site of the Bael Forest"), refers to both the bael forest and to the same destruction of Vatapi and Ilvala by Agastya in Villivakkam (Tāsar 2000, see Fig. 4). The earliest known mention of this story appears to be in the third book (Skt. *parvan*) of the *Mahābhārata* epic, entitled the *Vana Parvan*, chapter ninety-nine according to Sørensen's order (1904: 237, 720) and chapter ninety-seven according to Sukthankar's numbering of what he calls *Āraṇyakaparvan* (Sukthankar 1942, 339–341; see also Zvelebil 1992, 238 and Appendix Three). The prominence of the story of Agastya's digestion of the two "demon" (Skt. *daitya* or *āsura*) brothers Ilvalan and Vātāpi—the latter of whom even has an ancient temple site named after him in Badami, Karnataka—provides one compelling example of how the Sanskrit mythos of Agastya became intertwined with Tamil and other south Indian

[17] "vilvavaṉattil ātiyil akasttiyar vātāpi, vilvāpiyacurāḷaikkoṉṟu akasttiyāralayamum, akasttiya tīrttamum stāpittu ipperēri ye:ṉpatil yākakuṇṭam erpaṭutti yākañceytupōṉa tirukkoṇṇūriṟkuvantu pērērikku yaṭutta nilattil niṣṭaiyilirukkumpoḻuthu taṉ tirikāla ñāṉatiruṣṭiyil, tāṉ niṣṭaiyilirukkumiṭam akasttiyaruṣi koñcakālam maṭālayayācīrmam erpaṭutti, vacittupōṉayiṭamāyum, pērēri avar yākañceytayākakuṇṭamāyum inta yākakuṇṭavaṭapuṟanilattil akastiyarukku carvēsvarar taṉ pañcakiruttiya naṭaṉa taricaṉam koṭuttatāyum, 1008 liṅkaṅkaḷai 108 cālikkirāmaṅkaḷai taṉ ciṣyarkaḷ pūjittu pōṉatāyum" (Cuvāmikaḷ 1913: 13 [of hagiography section]).

vernacular legends as well as Śaiva practices of yoga (Powell 2018). This mythology and its link with mantra is everywhere in the background of the tumuli sites associated with Sabhapati Swami as well as their patronage by devotees and the informed public more broadly.

In other words, the second of Sabhapati's titles in Fig. 2 is intertwined with the mythological context and the sacred geography associated with Agastya's *paramparā*. The implication of this intertwining is that Agastya's mythological context was the networks of tumuli of the Siddhars and Swamigals, including the historical and present-day temple of Sabhapati Swami (Sabapathy Swami Lingeshwarar Koil) outside Chennai, which even had a large portrait of Agastya hanging at its entrance when I visited numerous times between 2018 and 2020.

The centrality of mantra

The final part of this article analyzes the incorporation of a wide variety of mantras for a range of gods, goddesses, and planetary deities in the Tamil vernacular literature of Sabhapati Swami, the theory of which informs the ritual practices that were and are engaged in around these tumuli.[18] Modern yoga in India from the colonial period onward is often perceived as departing from its historical connection with the formalities of vernacular ritual in many contexts, a perception partly due to Swami Vivekananda's modernization of yogic teachings, the efforts of the Theosophical Society, and later an emphasis on physical body culture and exercise (Singleton 2010, De Michelis 2008). Nevertheless, a wide variety of ritual forms remained vibrantly popular in some vernacular contexts of yoga that predated and were contemporary with this modernization. Yoga in the Tamil vernacular context of Sabhapati Swami's

[18] Although heavily edited and recontextualized, portions of this final part are adapted from a publication (Cantú 2023b) that focuses specifically on the connection between Sabhapati's use of mantra and the category of "folk religion" as it pertains to the tumuli of the Siddhas and Swamigals.

literature, for example, maintained an intrinsic connection with not only mantras but also an accompanying ritual apparatus that was deeply intertwined with festival traditions connected at the tumuli for the Tamil Siddhas and so-called "Swamigals."

Sabhapati's emphasis on mantra as central to religious practice and to the observance of popular festivals held at tumuli sites, and is unique in that he imbued his pan-Indian teachings on mantra with what I would call a distinctly Tamil vernacular "flavor." This flavor is reflected in at least three qualities that distinguish his teachings: First, his entire system is framed in the yogic mythology of Agastya and by extension the Tamil Siddhas, whose aforementioned tumuli as previously noted are scattered across south India; second, the mantras were published in a vernacular language and script of Tamil with explanatory notes for Sanskrit terms, allowing his teachings to be widely understood by his local audience; and third, the mantras connect with techniques of musical intonation in such a way as to make it popularly accessible, inviting local participation and intersecting with the world of Tamil folk devotional music. These features help illuminate the attractiveness of Sabhapati's teachings and their ability to attract patronage among devotees who regularly attended and still attend events at these tumuli sites.

The first two of the above three qualities as well as Sabhapati's elaborate system of mantras is probably most clearly articulated in his second book-length Tamil work, the aforementioned mantric *magnum opus* (Cuvāmikaḷ 1913). This work was published by the Office of Shanmuga Vilasa Press (Ṣaṇmuka Vilāsa Piras Āpīc) in the Puttur (Puttūr) area of Tiruchirappalli (formerly Trichy), today an important metropolis in Tamil Nadu, with portions also published by "Sivarahasyam Press, P. T." in Madras; little is known about both publishers. As mentioned previously, the work was registered with the Madras Record Office, in which the catalogue entry is shortened to "Mantira Sangraha Veda Dyanopadesa Smriti," an Anglicization of *Mantira caṅkiraha vēta tiyāṉōpatēca smiruti*, stressing its main feature as a work on mantra. The scope of the work contains mantras to a whole pantheon of gods and goddesses as well as a range of

instructions in both Tamil and English on Śivarājayoga, as well as on *dīkṣā* or what Sabhapati translated as "Mesmerism" (see Cantú 2023a and forthcoming). As mentioned previously, it also contains a diagram depicting Agastya in the Pothigai Mountains (Fig. 2).

The recurrent references to Agastya in the context of mantra are notable since the rishi later went on to play an important role in the Dravidian language movement as the legendary founder of the Tamil language (Weiss 2009). As Sabhapati's works predate this language movement, however, it seems that Sabhapati was more interested in using the symbolic capital of Agastya's power and authority as a primal guru (*ātikuru* < Skt. *ādiguru*) to attract patronage.[19] This is clear in the text's self-assertion that it is "a scripture on the mantra of Agastya's hidden guidance" (*akastiyar kuptōpatēca mantira vētameṉal*). As with many of these sections of "guidance" (*upatēcam* < Skt. *upadeśa*), the actual content of this section consists only of the following prose poem:

> Listen, O world! Listen, even if you won't listen. The giver of liberation and individuated bliss (*muktikaivalliyam*), the great and undying Agastya Rishi [pronounced] the truth and mystery of the scriptures as a hidden instruction. How much has this man been gracious unto me, he who is called the blessed Shivajnanabodha Rishi. Have I not also pronounced these also daily as the instructions of this compiled scripture, O expanse of the world![20]

While this may not seem like much in the way of new teaching, it is important as it firmly grounds the rationale for the use of mantras in this entire "compiled scripture" on mantra in the aforementioned Tamil mythology of Agastya and Sabhapati Swami's semi-

[19] For the history of various "Agastyas" in Tamil literature, see Appendix Three of Zvelebil 1992.

[20] *kēḷīrulakīr kēṭṭaikkēṭuttu kēṭilā muktikaival liyantarum*
māḷāta yakastiyaruṣi mākupta tōpatēcamāvētarahasciyōṇmaiyai
yāḷāveṉaiyāṇṭa yaruṭ civakñāṉa pōtaruṣiyeṉak karuḷiyavāṟē
nāḷāyuraittēṉ nāṉuñ caṅkirahavētōpatēcamāyulakuyyavē (Cuvāmikaḷ 1913: 3 [hagiography section]).

-legendary guru Shivajnanabodha Rishi. This rationale was also reflected in Sabhapati's lost publication of a work entitled *Aṭukkunilai pōtam*, "The Order of the State of Awakening," a series of verses attributed to Agastya that appear to derive from extant manuscripts known by the same title.

Sabhapati's efforts to employ vernacular languages and scripts also informs us about the likely audiences for his literature at these tumuli sites and their exposure beyond Tamil Nadu. Throughout his Tamil works we find mantric formulae and instructions for their application, all in the Tamil script, just as his Sanskritic Hindi and Telugu works and Bengali translation—not fully considered in this article for the sake of space—contain their instructions respectively in the Devanagari, Telugu, and Bengali scripts. The Sanskrit rendered in these scripts would not always have been understood by his audience, so they are often accompanied by additional notes to explain or clarify their meanings in vernacular languages wherever deemed necessary. While similar explanations are found in manuscript commentarial traditions and vernacular translations from Sanskrit, such an effort was very rare at this time outside of formal academic circles. This concern to "localize" Sanskrit-based terminology and make it accessible to various regions of India, in other words, opened the door for Sabhapati to willingly blend his Sanskrit-based teachings on yoga and mantra with vernacular religious worlds in his consensus-building quest to attract new students and patrons.

In the case of Sabhapati's Tamil works we also find vernacular instructions in Tamil for how these mantras are to be used in the observation of rituals:

> It is necessary to meditate according to the summary of this teaching, and this is the sequence: Having recited the mantra for bathing in the morning and taken a bath, sit in a solitary place. While reciting the rules for the sequence of daily ceremonies with your mouth, at that time also meditate with your mind. This should start at six o'clock in the morning and be finished at seven o'clock. Then after seven o'clock up to eight o'clock recite with your tongue the worship rites

> to be performed mentally, while also meditating on them in your mind. After finishing this you should go to work according to your circumstances. Then at night from seven o'clock to eight o'clock one should recite the meditations for the royal yoga (*rājayōkam* < Skt. *rājayoga*) and the meditations for the sequence of initiation, and while doing so meditate with your mind. With this you will be finished. In this way you will receive absolute purity, happiness now and in the hereafter, the fruits of desire and dispassion, the absorption of mind, wealth, offspring, trade for one's crops, employment, the knowledge of devotion, and liberation.[21]

Notice especially the sequence of times, which allows for anyone who is employed with other activities to perform the mantras along with their ritual practices, not just full-time ritual specialists (i.e. *pūjārin*s or *pūjārinī*s). This would have directly appealed to patrons who were pursuing more conventional careers yet wished to also support the work of these tumuli and even engage in some of the practices as their time allowed. Another indicator of these mantric practices' relevance to householders and other employees is the promise that performing these rites daily will not only bring one the attainment of soteriological goals but also lead to certain tangible results, such as wealth, offspring, and the "trade for one's crops" (*payir varttakam*).

Another interesting feature of Sabhapati's vernacular instructions is his combination of physical practices such as bathing and marking oneself with ashes with mental abstractions of religious ritual. For example, we find the following among other instructions:

[21] "inta upatēca kuṟippiṉpaṭi tiyāṉam paṇṇavēṇṭiyak kiramam kālaiyil sṉāṉamantirattaiccolli sṉāṉañceytu or taṉiyiṭattiluṭkārntu nittiyakkiramayaṉuṣṭāṉa vitikaḷai vāyiṉāl vācittukkoṇṭē appoḻutē maṉatiṉāluntiyāṉittukkoṇṭē kālaiyil (6) maṇimutal (7) maṇikkuḷḷāka ceytu muṭittuviṭṭu appoḻutē (7) maṇikkumēl (8) maṇikkuḷḷāka māṇacakiriyāpūjaikaḷaiyum vākkāl vācittukkoṇṭē maṉatiṉāl tiyāṉittukkoṇṭē ceytu muṭittuviṭṭup pirakuyavāḷavāl toḻiluk kuppōkavum. irāttiri (7) maṇimutal (8) maṇikkuḷḷāka rājayōkat tiyāṉaṅkaḷaiyum, tīkṣākkiramattiyāṉaṅkaḷaiyum, vācittukkoṇṭē maṉatāl tiyāṉittukkoṇṭē ceytu muṭikkavum. itaṉāl carvacutti, ihaparacukam kāmyiya niṣkāmmiyapalaṉ, maṉō[l]ayam, taṉam, cantāṉam, payir varttakam, uttiyōkam, paktikñāṉam muktikkiṭaikkum" (Cuvāmikaḷ 1913: 4).

(1) "Three small concentrations for the mind" (*maṉētiriciṉṉa taraṇam*), (2) "Guidance on all the ceremonies, mantras, and meditations" (*carvāṉuṣṭāṉa mantira tiyāṉa upatēcam*), (3) "Guidance on the mantras for bathing" (*sṉāṇa mantira upatēcam*), (4) "Guidance on the mantra for the three marks of ash" (*viputi tiricūrṇamantira* [*upatēcam*]), (5) "Guidance on the binding of the eight directions" (*aṣṭatikapantaṉa upatēcam*), (6) "Guidance on the nine celestial bodies" (*navakkiraha upatēcam*), and (7) "Guidance on (mental) formulation (*caṅkalpa upatēcam*). As mentioned above, it is clear from perusing these instructions that their contents make use of an elaborate Sanskrit technical vocabulary on mental formulation (*caṅkalpam* < Skt. *saṅkalpa*) and meditative cultivation (*pāvaṉai* < Skt. *bhāvanā*), while their language simultaneously connects it to Tamil rituals happening all around the margins of formal temple environments.

The popular consensus that Sabhapati Swami builds with these mantras moreover spans the sectarian boundaries of Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and goddess worship, and includes a whole pantheon of specific gods and goddesses, also including specific syllabic formulations for the same. These include, among others, (1) "guidance on the [mantras for] the praise for all gods" (*carvatēvatārccaṉā upatēcam*), (2) an "guidance on the [mantras for] the praise of all goddesses" (*carvatēviyārccaṉā upatēcam*), (3) "guidance on the recitation of the five-syllabled mantra of the Lord of All" (*carvēsvarar pañcākṣarajapa upatēcam*), (4) "guidance on the five-syllabled mantra of the Lady of All" (*carvēsvari pañcāṭakṣara upatēcam*) (5) "guidance on the five-syllabled mantra of Viṣṇu" (*viṣṇū pañcākṣara upatēcam*), "guidance on the eight-syllabled mantra of Viṣṇu" (*viṣṇū aṣṭākṣara upatēcam*), "guidance on the five-syllabled mantra of the great Śiva and Śakti" (*mahācivacakti pañcākṣara upatēcam*), "guidance on the five-syllabled mantra of the guru" (*kuru pañcākṣara upatēcam*), "guidance on the five-syllabled mantra for every god and goddess" (*sarvatēvatātēvi pañcākṣara upatēcam*), "guidance on the five- and sixteen-syllabled mantra of Gaṇapati" (*kaṇapati cōṭaca pañcākṣara upatēcam*), and

"guidance on the six-syllabled mantra of Subrahmaṇya" (*cuppiramaṇiyar ṣaṭākṣara upatēcam*) (Cuvāmikaḷ 1913: 30). As noted previously, this attempt to transcend various sectarian and deity-based boundaries of Hinduism reflected a wider popular concern in South India during Sabhapati's lifetime, a concern that was not only promoted by the Theosophical Society in Adyar but also even earlier by Tamil Vīraśaiva authors (Steinschneider 2016) and informed by the antinomian legacy of the Siddhas (Zvelebil 1996).

Lastly, Sabhapati's writings emphasize a connection between mantra and sound, allowing one to deeply appreciate the sonic atmospheres of tumuli sites. The theoretical framework of mantras and their meditation may be construed as Sanskritic and elite, yet the application of vocalizing Tantric mantras and seed-syllables in Sabhapati's yogic teachings helped to bridge his folk vernacular world with the elite temple contexts in which the Vedas and other scriptures were recited and intoned (cf. Gerety 2021). Sabhapati's literature accordingly outlines the contours for a kind of religious folk musical practice that developed out of the early modern reception and performance of the musical expressions of the Tamil Siddhars, songs that to this day are held up as an exemplar of Tamil folk religious identity (Zvelebil 1973).

For example, Sabhapati's trilingual work in English, Tamil, and Sanskrit contains vivid descriptions on how each of the twelve faculties or Tantric *cakra*s or lotuses (*kamalam* < Skt. *kamala*) are "created as puffing and swelling as bubbles" (Yogiswer 1890: 158). Each of these lotuses correspond to what Sabhapati calls "Divine words" (*pījamantiram* < Skt. *bījamantra*, lit. "seed-mantras" or "seed-spells"). For example, there are five such words (or "seed--syllables") in the case of the "Kundali [Skt. *kuṇḍali*] of elements or Mooladharam [*mūlādhāra*]." Each of these words have what Sabhapati translates as "Spirit" (*tēvatamsam* < Skt. *devatāṃśa*, lit. "part of a deity"), which dwells in what he calls a "bubble" (an idiosyncratic translation of *kamala*, lit. "lotus"): the Spirit of the syllable *om* creates ether in the center, and the spirits of *va*, *ca*, *śa*, and *sa* respectively create air, fire, water, and mud (i.e. earth). These words

create five faculties (*tattva*s) that accordingly contain "sins, vices, impurities and unholiness" which "must be purified by silent and dumb meditation" (*maunajapatiyāṉam* < Skt. *maunajapadhyāna*, lit. "meditation of silent [mantra]-recitation). Their impurities arise on account of *māyā*, what Sabhapati translates as "delusion," which is analogized with "impure water." The "pure water," by contrast, is the divine word or seed-spell of each Spirit that, when daily recited by the yogin, can wash away the impurity and cause the *tattva* to eventually be re-absorbed into the transcendent Śiva.

Sabhapati's hagiographies mention that he was celebrated during his lifetime as a Tamil poet and his works include lyrical songs and poetic compositions, so it is perhaps no surprise that the aforementioned practices on mantric seed-syllables were not just a cosmological abstraction but also linked to the theory and practice of intoning musical *svara*s. In other words, the mantras are linked to phonetic sounds that comprise lyrical music, and the student is instructed to think beyond the bliss that arises from singing musical lyrics and also meditate on the sounds from which these lyrics are molded. These in turn correspond to cosmogonic "inherent natures" (*svarūpam* or *cuvarūpam* < Skt. *svarūpa*) that can be invoked using sounds. The vowels (*svara*) are the obvious place to start, but this also includes the labial and nasal humming associated with syllables like *am*, *nam*, *oṅ*, and *ram*. This then gives way to the bliss of the Śaiva five-syllabled mantra (Skt. *pañcākṣaramantra*), in Tamil rendering *na*, *ma*, *ci*, *va*, *ya* (< Skt. *namaḥ śivāya*), which are all integrated in the *praṇava* or syllable Om.[22] We return finally to the "gamut of the Vedas" (*vedasvara*), which are what Sabhapati calls "Spiritual sounds" (*piraṇavasvarasaptalaya saṅkītam* < Skt. *praṇavasvarasaptalaya saṅgīta*, lit. "music of the seven-fold absorption in the sounds of the syllable Om"). This seven-fold absorption in sound (Mpvl. *saptalayam*) are the seven *svara*s plus their

[22] For a dated but useful translation of Tamil verses pertaining to these syllables, see Pope (1900: xxxix–xlii). For more analysis of the mantra in Tamil Śaiva-specific contexts see Winch (1975: 72–75). For other contexts in which Om is linked to sound and yoga, see Gerety 2021.

octaval resolution (Mpvl. *ca*, *ri*, *ka*, *ma*, *pa*, *ta*, *ni*, *ca* < Skt. *sa*, *ri*, *gā*, *ma*, *pa*, *dhā*, *ni*, *sa*), the notes of which form the basis for musical improvisation in Indian modes or *rāga*s, including the Tamil vernacular songs of the *Tēvāram* and those of the Tamil Siddhas.

There are so many other examples of mantra-based practices in his works that it is nearly impossible to count them all, however most of their constructions usually follow a kind of logical formula. For example, mantras to invoke the nine celestial bodies (Skt. *navagraha*) are provided as follows (Cuvāmikaḷ 1913: 6–7):

1. *Sūrya* (Sun): *om om mattiya cūryatēvāya namaḥ cuvāḥ*
2. *Śukra* (Venus): *om ḷṛīm pūrva cukkiratēvāyanamaḥ cuvāḥ*
3. *Candra* (Moon): *om um takṣaṇa pūrva cantira tēvāyanamaḥ cuvāḥ*
4. *Maṅgala* (Mars): *om haram takṣaṇa aṅkāraka tēvāyanamaḥ*
5. *Rāhu* (Caput draconis): *om hirōm takṣaṇapaścima rāhū tēvāyanamaḥ cuvāḥ*
6. *Śani* (Saturn): *om yrīm paścima cani tēvāyanamaḥ cuvāḥ*
7. *Ketu* (Cauda draconis): *om krōm uttira paścima kētu tēvāyanamaḥ cuvāḥ*
8. *Guru* (Jupiter): *om hrīm uttira kuru tēvāyanamaḥ cuvāḥ*
9. *Budha* (Mercury): *om am uttira pūrva puta tēvāyanamaḥ*

The logic that informs these mantras is based on the following formula: 1) the syllable *om* + 2) a specific seed syllable for each *graha* + 3) the position of the *graha* as arranged in its physical sculpted *mūrti* arrangement + 4) the common name of the *graha* + 5) the word *tēvam* (< Skt. *deva*, declined in dative form and attached to the word *namaḥ* "reverence to" + 6) the syllable *cuvāḥ* (< Skt. *svāhā*), usually used to exclaim an oblation. Embedded in each mantra is a series of correspondences that allow one to mentally envision or perceive the placement of each *graha*, that is, the sun in the center or *madhya*, Venus in the east or *pūrva*, and so on. These placements and directions match physical installations of the *navagraha* found at tumuli sites across Tamil Nadu, including that of Sabhapati Swami's first guru Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal (see Fig. 4), connecting these mantras with the physical act of devo-

tees circumambulating these installations to correct astrological defects (Skt. *doṣā*s).

Sabhapati's mantras are not just associated with physical ritual worship but are also a kind of code that becomes central to his system of internalized *mānasapūjā* or "mental worship." For example, a few pages later, in the section "Meditation on the Places of the Nine Celestial Bodies" (*navakkirahastāṉat tiyāṉam*), mantras are also used to map the nine celestial bodies onto the human body:

> Touch the right eye, saying, "*om cūryastāṉāyanamaḥ*"
> [Om, reverence to the place of the Sun]
> Touch the left eye, saying, "*om cantirastāṉāyanamaḥ*"
> [Om, reverence to the place of the Moon]
> Touch the right ear, saying, "*om cukkirastāṉāyanamaḥ*"
> [Om, reverence to the place of Venus]
> Touch the left ear, saying, "*om kurustāṉāyanamaḥ*"
> [Om, reverence to the place of Jupiter]
> Touch the right nostril, saying, "*om ketustāṉāyanamaḥ*"
> [Om, reverence to the place of Cauda draconis]
> Touch the left nostril, saying, "*om rākustāṉāyanamaḥ*"
> [Om, reverence to the place of Caput draconis]
> Touch the mouth, saying, "*om putaṉ stāṉāyanamaḥ*"
> [Om, reverence to the place of Mercury]
> Touch the penis or vagina, saying, "*om canistāṉāyanamaḥ*"
> [Om, reverence to the place of Saturn]
> Touch the anus, saying, "*om aṅkārakastāṉāyanamaḥ*"
> [Om, reverence to the place of Mars][23]

These kinds of mantras map the physical rituals that would take place at temples or tumuli shrines onto the body using an elaborate

[23] *oṃ cūryastāṉāyanamaḥ eṉṟu valatukaṇṇait toṭuka / [oṃ] cantirastāṉāyanamaḥ [eṉṟu] iṭatukaṇṇait [toṭuka] / [oṃ] cukkirastāṉāyanamaḥ [eṉṟu] valatukātait [toṭuku] / [oṃ] kurustāṉāyanamaḥ [eṉṟu] iṭatukātait [toṭuka] / [oṃ] kētustāṉāyanamaḥ [eṉṟu] valatu nāciyait [toṭuka] / oṃ rākustāṉāyanamaḥ [eṉṟu] iṭatu nāciyait [toṭuka] / [oṃ] putaṉ stāṉāyanamaḥ [eṉṟu] vāyait [toṭuka] / [oṃ] canistāṉāyanamaḥ [eṉṟu] liṅka upastattai [toṭuka] / [oṃ] aṅkārakastāṉāyanamaḥ [eṉṟu] kutāvait [toṭuka]* (Cuvāmikaḷ 1913: 10).

system of attributive correspondences. They also encourage the memorization of a wide variety of mantras so that the correspondences continue to intersect with one another; the more mantras an aspiring student of yoga has memorized, the more external rituals are able to be performed internally both inside and outside of temple contexts.

Concluding thoughts

This article has shown how patronage of tumuli sites (*jīva camāti*s) of Siddhas and Swamigals, especially those in the line of Kumara Devar and later Sabhapati Swami, allowed for a unique consensus of sorts to be formed between practitioners of Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Goddess traditions and members of all castes. While traditional rituals were and are employed at these tumuli sites, their main sonic medium was the practice of mantra as embodied in techniques of yoga, most of which were elaborate innovations on earlier practices derived from extant works composed in Sanskrit and Tamil. The intersections between these techniques, colonial modernity and alternative religious movements (e.g. Theosophy and Thelema) all warrant further study that requires Indology to expand its scope to allow for the persistence of Sanskrit-based religious forms as reconfigured in vernacular as well as Anglophone spheres. Such intersections can potentially allow scholars to better understand how these tumuli, on the surface sites commemorating death, were and continue to be so attractive to male and female patrons, householder devotees, and world-renouncing *yogin*s and *yoginī*s.

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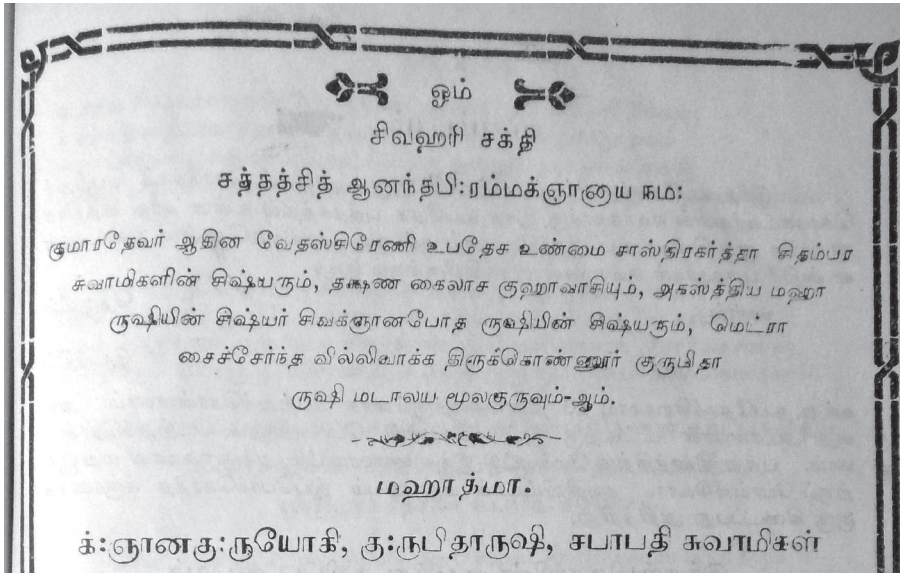
Figure 1. A map of select places of relevance to Sabhapati Swami. Designed by the author on Adobe Illustrator, with the outlines based on a German map of the region now in the public domain


ஓம்

சிவஹரி சக்தி

சத்தத்சித் ஆனந்தபி:ரம்மக்ஞாயை நம:

குமாரதேவர் ஆகிய வேதஸ்திரேணி உபதேச உண்மை சாஸ்திரகர்த்தா சிதம்பர சுவாமிகளின் சிஷ்யரும், தக்ஷண கைலாச குஹாவாசியும், அகஸ்த்திய மஹா ருஷியின் சிஷ்யர் சிவக்ஞானபோத ருஷியின் சிஷ்யரும், மெட்ரா சைச்சேர்ந்த வில்லிவாக்க திருக்கொண்டூர் குருபிதா ருஷி மடாலய மூலகுருவும்-ஆம்.

மஹாத்மா.

க:ஞானகு:ருயோகி, கு:ருபிதாருஷி, சபாபதி சுவாமிகள்

Figure 2. A title page of *Carva māṉaca nittiya karmānuṣṭāṉa, carva tēvatātēvi māṉaca pūjāttiyāṉa, pirammakñāṉa rājayōka niṣṭai camāti, carva tīkṣākkramattiyāṉa, cātaṉā appiyāca kiramāṉucantāṉa, [mantira] caṅkiraha vēta tiyāṉōpatēca smiruti* ("Inspired Treatise on the Instructions of Meditation, as Compiled from the Scriptures [of mantra], on Every Mental Ceremony to be Performed Daily, on a Mental Ritual Meditation for Every God and Goddess, on the Steadfast Composition in the Yoga of Kings that is the Gnosis of Brahman, on Every Meditation on the Sequences of Initiation, and on an Inquiry into the Sequence of the Practice of the Rites"), published in 1913

Figure 3. A diagram of Sabhapati's Guru Line (*kurupāramparaipaṭam* [sic]), published as a frontispiece to Cuvāmikaḷ 1913

Figure 4. An installation of embodied sculptures (Skt. *mūrti*) of the Navagraha or nine celestial bodies at the tumulus of Vedashreni Chidambara Swamigal. Photo by the author