

ALEXANDER DUBYANSKIY

PATTERNS OF HEROIC BEHAVIOR  
IN OLD AND MEDIEVAL TAMIL POETRY

It is understood that what we may call a heroic behavior is a mode of acting which presupposes crossing the borders of normality and demonstrating a person's outstanding physical or spiritual qualities including readiness for suffering, martyrdom and death. Very often the notion of heroic behavior is connected with martial bravery but in fact it can be applied to other spheres of human activity, religious in particular. In this case he who possesses the above-mentioned qualities is often recognized as a martyr or a saint. The present article deals with such figures and its task is to discuss some specific patterns of heroic behavior in the sphere of the medieval Tamil Śaiva tradition. But before that it is reasonable to outline some aspects of such a behavior in the early Tamil poetry (the so called *caṅkam* poetry) because it is strongly connected with the subsequent religious tradition and several characteristic motives are taken up and developed by the latter. It is always interesting to see what changes take place in the process and how they are influenced by a new cultural and literary milieu.

The *caṅkam* poetry was not strictly religious and cultic, the religious emotions or praise of gods were not prominent in it. The poetry mostly concentrated on kings and chieftains who were believed to possess a certain sacred power but did not have any mythological status. They were heroes in the proper sense of the word and their physical strength, military skill, victorious deeds, martial bravery, their anger and cruelty towards the enemies were glorified in the poems which were collected and

rubricated by the tradition under the name of *puram* ('something outer').<sup>1</sup> To these features possessed by old Tamil heroes we can add one which deserves attention in the context of Indian culture at large and Tamil culture in particular: the readiness to sacrifice their belongings, even their body and life or their own flesh for the highest goal (be it God or a faith or some doctrine or a sacred object).

At first glance this feature, that is the generosity of Tamil kings and chieftains, does not seem to be connected with heroic behavior but in the *puram* poetry it was considered as one of their main virtues on par with their bravery in battles. The donation of gifts to supplicants (who are represented in poetry usually by poets and performers) is one of the main motives in Tamil *puram* poems. The heroic tune appears in them when the lavishness in gifts achieves extreme values. In some poems the chiefs and patrons are described so generous that they are ready to give away not only their riches but their lands and even themselves.<sup>2</sup> The last motive that is usually defined as the gift-of-the body (Skt. *deha-dāna*) is well known in Indian Brahmanic and Buddhist lore.

There is a well known expressive story in Tamil poetry about a famous chieftain Kumaṇaṇ who was in exile and lived in a forest because his younger brother captured his country and announced a price for his head. The poet Peruntalaic cāṭṭaṇār visited Kumaṇaṇ and sang a praise-song for him. Kumaṇaṇ being deprived of all his possessions could not reward him and suggested that the poet would cut off his head. Saying 'to let go a suffering supplicant who receives gifts for singing is worse than losing my land' (*pāṭuperu paricilaṇ vāṭinaṇ peyartaleṇ nāṭilaṇ tataṇiṇu naṇiyiṇ nāteṇa* PN 165,10-12) he gave him his sword. Naturally, Cāṭṭaṇār refused to use it and bringing it to Kumaṇaṇ's brother told him about Kumaṇaṇ's infinite strength [of character] (*ōṭā pūṭkai* PN 165,15) in a song (PN 165).

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<sup>1</sup> The description of the early Tamil heroism lies beyond the scope of this paper. The poetry of the *puram* category was well presented by K. Kailasapathy in his book "Tamil Heroic Poetry", L., 1968.

<sup>2</sup> The overwhelming generosity of kings, their acts of *dāna* are typical and ancient motives in Indian tradition (Sudyka 2008: 90-92).

Kumaṇaṇ's behavior reminds us of other stories from Indian literature where sacrificing a person's own flesh is described. A story of the king Śibi comes to one's mind first. This story was known in the South (see Sudyka 2008) and Śibi (who saved a pigeon from a hawk by substituting it with his own flesh) was even considered a predecessor of the Cōla kings whose dynasty title, Cempiyaṇ, was supposedly produced from the name Śibi (the name is not given in the texts but Śibi's deed is mentioned in PN 37, 5; 39,1; 43, 6-7). In this case the influence of Buddhism can't be ruled out but in the poem *cilappatikāram* the motive of self-sacrifice is placed in a context seemingly rooted in local religious practice. The chapter V contains a description of a gruesome military ritual: soldiers cut off their "heads, black, with reddened fierce-looking eyes, and place them willingly at the sacrificial altar saying: 'let the victorious king obtain victory'" *kaṭaivanta kaṭunōkkuk karuntalai/ verri vēntan korraṇ koḷkeṇa/ narpaḷi pīṭikai nalankoḷa vaittu* (CP V, 84-86).<sup>3</sup> But the most famous example of self-mutilation in this poem is given by Kaṇṇaki, the main heroine who on accusing the Pāṇṭiaṇ king of the death of her husband tore out one of her breasts. The similar act is met with at least two more times in old Tamil literature. In the poem PN 278 a soldier's mother having heard about the cowardice of her son who allegedly fled from the battlefield exclaimed: "I shall tear off my breasts which fed him" *uṇṭa eṇ mulai arut tiṭuven yāṇ* (PN 278, 4-5). She took a sword and went to the field, but contrary to the rumors found there the young warrior's body lying among other corpses. And she, as the poet puts it "rejoiced more than she did on the day of giving birth" *īṇra ṇāṇriṇum perituvantaṇalē* (PN

<sup>3</sup> The altar mentioned here (*pīṭikai*, or Skr. *pīṭikā*), probably, was connected with the cult of the Tamil goddess of war and victory Korṇavai. Commenting on this fragment V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar wrote: "The reference is to *talai-pali* [Skt. *bali* – A.D.], a very ancient custom prevalent in South India, bearing strong evidence to the early forms of *Śakti* worship. This is corroborated by the Pallava architecture [Mahabalipuram, Tiruchchirapalli – A.D.]. (See the interesting article 'The head-offering to the Goddess in Pallava Architecture' of Dr. J. Ph. Vogel in the Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, London, Vol. VI, Pt. II., 1931)" (The *Cilappatikāram* 1978: 124-125). It should be added that the motive of self-decapitation is introduced in the story of the king Śibi in its South Indian (Andhra) variant (Sudyka 2008: 94).

278, 9). Thus the author of this poem, who is by the way a woman (Kākkaip pāṭiṇiyār nacceḷlaiyār) is extolling the behavior of an unknown mother and her son which perfectly corresponds to the general character of the Tamil heroic poetry.

Another example of the same deed is presented in a love poem (NT 216) that is usually ascribed to the *maruta-t-tiṇai* and understood as a monologue of a hetaera (*parattai*) speaking about her love to the hero in spite of the suffering he caused to her. The last lines of the poem run as follows: “others are not pleasant [to me] but [only] he, the desirable, though he is among those who have heard about Tirumāvuṇṇi tearing off one of her breasts when a stranger made her suffer at the place where the watching tower is near the field difficult to reach, guarded by the god of the flame-like *vēṅkai* [tree]”:

*erimaruḷ vēṅkaik kaṭavuḷ kākkuṅ*  
*kurukār kaḷaṇiyiṅ itaṇattu āṅkaṅ*  
*ēti lāḷaṅ kavalai kavara*  
*orumulai yaṛutta tirumāvuṇṇik*  
*kēṭṭō raṇayā rāyiṇum*  
*vēṭṭō rallatu piṛariṅ nārē* (NT 216, 6-11).

The contents of the poem is certainly a love-affair but in my interpretation the speaker here is not a hetaera but the girl expressing her feelings towards the hero who has abandoned her. It may be that he gave her a promise to marry and let her down. Anyway, the poem looks more consistent as belonging to the *kuṛiṅci-t-tiṇai* (premarital meeting of the young pair) which is confirmed by the presence of ‘the god of *vēṅkai*’,<sup>4</sup> that is Murukaṅ. The mention of him is not a mere chance, because he is the god-protector of the *kuṛiṅci* landscape (forested mountains) and, besides, Tamil culture recognizes him the guardian of promises and vows (which were violated in this case). The heroine is in love with the hero but she is suffering and a recollection of a certain Tirumāvuṇṇi comes to her mind.

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<sup>4</sup> *vēṅkai* (*Pterocarpus bilobus*) is a mountain tree with flowers of yellow-red color. It was considered as a vegetative symbol of Murukaṅ.

It is said that she tore off her breast when ‘a stranger’ (*ētilālan*) ‘distressed’ her (*kavalai kavarrā*). Introducing the name of Tirumāvuṇṇi and stating that the hero must know the story the girl probably wants to say that she also could react to the situation in the like manner.<sup>5</sup>

All three cases of women resolving to such a way of self-mutilation take place in entirely different situations. But one common point between them can be found: the deed is performed when some moral code is broken or, more generally, a *dharma* is violated, be it a conduct of a warrior (the PN poem), a duty of a king (*cilappatikāram*) or a vow of a lover (the NT poem). From this point of view it can be associated with a kind of *satya graha* (Skr. “adhering to the truth”), a rite aiming to prove one’s innocence or purity. It usually includes acts of self-mutilation or self-sacrifice and can be considered as an example of a heroic behavior of a special sort.

The tradition of similar acts was developed and became prominent in religious movements under a general name of *bhakti*. We are dealing here with its later South-Indian development connected with a highly emotional cultic behavior of the adepts and special ways to achieve the union with their gods. In Tamiḷakam the movement started as shown by K. Zvelebil (1977) with the cults of Murukaṅ and Tirumāl, preserving many local, indigenous features. But a full-fledged *bhakti* movement began to spread there with a rapid growth of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava branches of Hinduism and was accompanied by a strong and vastly developing poetic tradition. Its beginning is usually ascribed to roughly the 6<sup>th</sup> c. and in many respects it can be considered as a substitute and further

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, the story of Tirumāvuṇṇi was known to Tamil people but no other information about it exists. Some scholars recognizing this fact try to connect Tirumāvuṇṇi with Kaṇṇaki. Viyapuri Pillai speaks about this connection with a touch of doubt and points out that the motive of a woman tearing off her breast is met with in Buddhist literature (Viyapuri Pillai 1988: 105, referring to M. Winterniz. *The History of Indian Literature*. V. II, p. 290. New Delhi, 1927). T. P. Meenakshisundaran mentions the fact but offers no comments (Meenakshisundaran 1965: 42). E. Wilden’s statement is more resolute: “Here doubtless a reference related to *cilappatikāram* plot...” (Wilden 2008: 491). However, apart from the act of tearing out the breast there seems to be nothing in common between the two stories.

development of the tradition of the *caṅkam* poetry which extinguished by that time. The relationship of kings-patrons and the poets-suppliants described in it was transformed into ties between gods and their adepts. At the same time numerous figures of saints of the local origin appeared in Tamiḷakam. They came from different social strata but formed a sort of a corporation consisting of persons who showed an outstanding religious fervor, supported by their devotional deeds for which they became known and renowned.

The period of the active development of the Śaiva *bhakti* movement (which is under consideration here and lies between the 6-th and 12 cc.) is crowned by a piece of literature named *periya purāṇam* (PP) or *tiruttoṅṭarp purāṇam* (“Great purāṇa” or “Purāṇa about sacred servants”) composed by a poet of the Cōḷa royal court Cēkkiḷār (12 c.). It is a hagiographical poem describing lives of 63 Śaiva saints, or *nāyaṇār* (leaders), that can be called heroes of Śaiva faith in the South India. The group of *nāyaṇār* (64 persons, for the tradition includes Cēkkiḷār in the list) includes 27 figures known as poets whose songs were canonized in the collection named *tirumuṟai* (‘The sacred order’), consisting of 12 anthologies (the 12-th being PP itself).

The poet whom the tradition considers the earliest in the row of *nāyaṇār* is a woman under the nick-name Kāraikkāl ammaiṅṅār (6<sup>th</sup> c.), that is “The mother from Kāraikkāl”. Her story contains a number of points typical for a half-mythological life of a Śaiva saint: the overwhelming devotion to Śiva, encountering him (usually coming in disguise), a test of the adept’s devotion, the rejection of family and home life, an unpredictable gift of eloquence (in case of poets to be), miraculous deeds. The most expressive episode of her life is her self-sacrifice to Śiva, or, to be more exact, the sacrifice of her feminine beauty: she asked the god to transform her, a young and beautiful woman, into a well-known figure of the Tamil demonology – *pēy*, a female demon with disgusting appearance: emaciated body, ugly features, disheveled hair, protruding teeth and bones etc (such creatures constitute a part of Siva’s retinue): “Constantly adoring the feet of the Highest she said: ‘Here is the way he laid. Now, for him I shall eliminate [my] flesh which

bears [my] beauty. Provide me, [your] servant, with the form of *pēy* who [being] close to you worship [your] strong feet’.”

*īnkivaṇ kuritta koḷkai itu iṇi ivanukkākat*  
*tāṅkiya vaṇappu ninratacaip poti kaḷittin kunpāl*  
*āṅkuniṇ tāḷkal pōrrum pēyvaṭi vaṭiyē nukkup*  
*pāṅkura vēṇṭum eṇru paramartāḷ paravi ninrār* (PP 24,  
 49; PP 1970: 278).<sup>6</sup>

The story of Kāraikkāl ammaiṅār presents a very original way of self-mutilation, a rejection by a woman not only her marital and family ties but her beautiful human body, for the sake of being close to Śiva.

Another example from PP also presents a case of self-sacrifice but in quite a different milieu.

The case of Kaṇṇapaṇ (PP 10; PP 1970:103-131) is closely connected with local Tamil religious tradition and at the same time demonstrates some features which are in general typical for mythological and epic stories about gods and heroes. Kaṇṇapaṇ (the nickname he was given later) was the son of the tribal chief of mountain hunters (*kuṛavar*). His birth was miraculous for it came as a blessing of Murukaṇ, the god of hunters (and the god of war of ancient Tamils). The chief and his wife were childless for a long time and they devotedly served and prayed the god asking him for an offspring. And the son was born whom Cēkkiḷār describes as an unusual, outstanding child: ‘he appeared with body spreading dark rays, as a beautiful child with tiger’s strength, demonstrating his immeasurable greatness not only to hunters but to the whole world, with perfectness proclaimed by many signs’ *karuṅkatir virikkum meṇik kāmaru kuḷavi tāṇum irumpuli paraḷin oṅki iravuḷar aḷavē yaṅri arumperal ulakellām aḷapparumperumai kāṭṭit taruṅkuri palavuṅ cārrum taṅmaiṅir polintu tōṅra* (PP 10,16; PP 1970: 106). He was so heavy at birth that nobody could lift him by hands and the hunters gave him the name Tiṅṅaṇ (‘Strong’).

<sup>6</sup> PP 24, 49 means the number of the PP’s part (*purāṇa*) and the number of the strophe (in some cases the lines are given). The second reference gives the pages of the PP’s edition used.

The necessary rites were observed and the boy began to grow.<sup>7</sup> On his sixth year he played with other boys of the hunters' village, went to the jungle with them, harassed dogs and wild animals and destroyed sand-houses of the girls (PP 10, 24-26; PP 1970: 107).<sup>8</sup> At the age of 16 he was brought to the ceremony of initiation.<sup>9</sup> A special bow was made for him by the local weapon-master and it was like the bow of Śiva. They tied a protective thread (*kāppu*, *rakśa*) on the bow and on the wrist of the youth and joyfully, with songs and dances celebrated the occasion. Tiṅṅaṅ began to practice the art of archery and soon mastered the bow expertly (as well as other weapons). At one moment his father decided that it was a proper time for him to leave his duties and after a number of rituals and a big feast Tiṅṅaṅ became the chief of the tribe. He was decorated all over with garlands and almost immediately was summoned to head a hunting expedition, the first for him (*kaṅṅi vēṭṭai*, lit. 'a virgin hunt'). It is described in the *purāṇa* on a big scale as a military march of hordes of hunters with dogs, nets and different weapons. The most prominent feature of this hunt is its aggressive brutality. Heads and legs of animals were severed, their bodies were ripped off, blood was streaming. It is a picture of a massacre of beasts which is known from Indian epic poetry where a 'wild hunt' is a prerogative of a king and an obvious substitute for a real battle. The hero demonstrates his strength, his heroic character, weaponry skill and celebrates his victory over wild and dangerous nature.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The process of growing is presented by Cēkkiḷār more or less in accordance with the medieval poetic genre *piḷḷaittamīl*, a poem about the childhood of a hero which is described stage by stage.

<sup>8</sup> The latter situation is met with in *caṅkam* poetry (*neytal-tiṅai*). The hero who comes to the village of fishermen to see his beloved destroys small huts made of sand (*vaṅṅal*) by a group of girls. Interestingly, Āṅṅāl (9 c.) in her poem *nācciyār tīrumoḷi* on behalf of the girls implores Kṛṣṇa not to crush their sand-houses: *cīṅṅil citayēl* (II.7.8). By the way this part of the Kaṅṅappaṅ's story reminds us of Kṛṣṇa's childhood (note also the dark rays spread by the boy that speak about the black complexion of his body). Cēkkiḷār never mentions Kṛṣṇa though and did not introduce the *asura*-fighting motive. However, the signs of heroic childhood and youth, which are typical for Kṛṣṇa legend are certainly present here also.

<sup>9</sup> Two age-borders given by Cēkkiḷār – 6 and 16, are meaningful because they contain the figure 6 sacred to Murukaṅ.

<sup>10</sup> The obvious parallel to this scene is the hunt of Duḥśanta in the *Mahābhārata* (I.63).

Tiṅṅaṅ successfully proved his efficiency as a hunter during his first hunting expedition. He acted as a real hero, *vīraṅ*, or *veñcilaikkai vīraṅār* “the hero with a fierce bow” (PP 10,76, 1; PP 1970: 115) and killed many animals – stags, boars, lions and elephants. At one moment chasing a big boar he and two his companions got lost in the woods. The angry and fierce boar was still around and Tiṅṅaṅ decided to fight it at a short distance and slew it with his sword. One of his companions informed him that there was a sacred place nearby, the abode of Śiva, and suggested they should go there and worship the god. Tiṅṅaṅ immediately agreed and went to the hillock just across a forest river, driven by some inner force, a sort of a desire: “He said: ‘What to do? It seems that when I approach and see it [this place – A.D.] the burden which is on me [of previous births –A.D.] will go away. A desire is boiling within me, my heart is full of love and has no other wish and speeds up [there]. Where is the God? Let’s go.’”

*āvateṅ itaṅaik kaṅṅiṅ kaṅaitoṅum eṅ mēṅ pāram*  
*pōvatoṅ ruḷatu pōlum ācaiyum poṅki mēṅmēḷ mēviya*  
*neṅcum*  
*vēṅōṅ viruppura viraiyā niṅkum*  
*tēvaraṅ kiruppa teṅkē pōkeṅrār tiṅṅaṅārtām* (PP.10,97;  
 PP1970: 118).

On the crest of the hillock he found a beautiful place, a garden with *Śivaliṅgam* in the center. At this moment his desire to see the god transformed into the hot feeling of love: “The vigor of his previous tapas showed in his endless good devotion, immeasurable longing was boiling, great love became acute, and the generous one moved to the hill craving [for god], with his bones melted.”

*muṅpucey tavattiṅ ṅṅtam muṅvilā iṅpa māṅa*  
*aṅpiṅai eṅtuttukkāṅṅa aḷavilā ārvam poṅki*  
*maṅperuṅ kātal kūra vaḷḷalār malayai nōkki*  
*eṅpunek kuruki uḷḷatteḷuperuvēṅkaiyōṅum* (PP 10,102; PP  
 1970: 119).

Overwhelmed by emotions he embraced and kissed the *lingam*. He was heavily breathing, the hair on his body was standing erect, tears streaming, the whole body was filled with a thrill – *paṭiyilāp parivu tāṅṅōr paṭivamām paricu tōṅṅra*..... “with unending delight he had the nature of the image of love” – as Cēkkilār puts it (PP 10,106, 4-5; PP 1970: 120). However, he immediately got distressed: Śiva is alone in fearful woods full of wild beasts! And he has nothing to eat! A desire to feed Śiva captured him.<sup>11</sup> He returned to the place where the other hunter had already fried the meat of the boar. He chose the most juicy and tasty pieces and brought them to the god. Cēkkilār leaves out the description of Śiva eating meat but when a certain *muṇi* who attended this place and kept it clean and in order, came there he saw bones scattered around and got infuriated because the sacred space was polluted. Nevertheless soon he had to give up because *Tiṅṅaṅ* was persistent in regularly bringing food to Śiva.

The final episode of this story brings some gruesome details. Once *Tiṅṅaṅ* came to the *lingam* and noted that one of its eyes was bleeding. He was in despair, tried to apply some medical herbs to the eye and since it did not help decided to replace the sore eye by his own. He plucked it out with the tip of his arrow and inserted it into the *lingam* (PP 10,178; PP 1970: 130). Then he saw that the second eye is bleeding and he again was about to pluck out his own one but Śiva intervened and stopped him saying “Stop, *Kaṅṅappa*” (*kaṅṅappa nirka* PP 183, 5) and gave him his eye back. At the same time he gave him a new name (something like “father-eye”) which in this context means that Śiva accepted his devotion and consecrated him into his *bhakta*.

Constructing the image of *Kaṅṅapaṅ* Cēkkilār certainly had in mind some typical characteristics of a hero borrowed from Indian epic tradition.<sup>12</sup> He did not use them on a large scale but

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<sup>11</sup> The motive of feeding god (Śiva in this case) is worked out well by D. Shulman in Shulman 1993 in connection with another story from PP (see further).

<sup>12</sup> The list of the hero-traits in Indo-European tradition proposed by Jan de Vries (Vries, Jan de. *Heroic Songs and Heroic Legend* [translated by B. J. Timmer], London and Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1963, pp.211-218) was discussed by Brenda Beck in [Beck 1978]

selected very expressive and meaningful moments: the hero's father is a king (a chief of a hunters' tribe); his birth is miraculous (it came by blessing of the god Murugaṅ, who in a way can be considered as his father); he shows his strength in childhood; altogether he is strong, brave and skillful in using weapons; he heads the "wild hunt" which equals a battle; he fights a wild and dangerous animal (a boar in this case, semantically corresponding to a dragon or a monster in other epic tales); he achieves a high goal (meets Śiva) or wins some precious object (the same).

All these points reveal the heroic character of Tiṅṅaṅ/Kaṅṅapaṅ quite convincingly. But the last one deserves special comments. In Jan de Vries's list there is one hero's trait that reads as: "The hero wins a maiden after overcoming great dangers" (Beck 1978: 28). This motive is known and spread in different epic and folk traditions and well represented in the *Mahābhārata*<sup>13</sup> where the hero usually comes across a maiden during a hunt in a remote place. The girl who is of double identity (often she is an impersonification of some animal) and of a high lineage (a daughter of a king or a god etc.) agrees to the union with him but puts some condition (sometimes in the form of a forbiddance to ask questions) [Алиханова 2012: 67].

This motive as such is absent from the story of Kaṅṅappaṅ but the story contains some details typical for it and shows some similarity with it: the hero goes to hunt, gets lost in woods (his army is left behind), finds a beautiful sacred place, meets Śiva there and wins his grace. Interestingly enough, the story does preserve erotic component of the situation and has definite sexual overtones in it (the scene of Tiṅṅaṅ encountering Śiva – described earlier – reveals them very expressively). Taking in

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and applied by her to the heroes of the medieval Tamil folk epic "The Story of the Brothers" (*aṅṅamār katai*).

<sup>13</sup> Russian scholar Julia Alikhanova who paid special attention to this motive and analyzed it in connection with "The tail of Śakuntala" points out the following episodes (apart of the Śakuntala-story): the story of the Marriage of Yayāti to Devayānī (I.73,76); the story of Śantanu's marriage to Gaṅgā (I. 92,94.21-39); the story of Tapatī and Samvaraṅa (I.160-163); the first part of "The story about a frog" (III.190.1-42) (Алиханова 2012: 65-66).

consideration a specific character of the *bhakti* type of religion there is nothing unusual in the fact. It is known that emotions closely connected with eroticism constitute a common and strong feature of *bhakti* religion and the attitude of a *bhakta* to his god is similar to that of a woman towards her lover, that is feminine in its inner essence.<sup>14</sup>

So, Kaṇṇappaṇ fully surrenders to Śiva demonstrating a high degree of devotion and readiness for self-sacrifice which, indeed, can be called heroic. But his deed seems to be surpassed by another hero from PP, a devotee who sacrificed to Śiva the flesh of his own son. It is a story of a pious man Parañcōti who made a daily habit to feed people devoted to Śiva and was named Cīruttoṅṭar, “A humble servant,” for that. Once he invited a Śaiva ascetic into his house and intended to give him food. The latter (being, naturally, Śiva himself) demanded that the food should be human flesh and the flesh of a five year-old boy at that. Cīruttoṅṭar and his wife decided to make a meat-curry from the body of their boy and did it, as Cēkkiḷār several times repeated, joyfully.<sup>15</sup>

Both stories end happily. On seeing the overwhelming devotion of his adepts Śiva restores what was previously sacrificed to him, which means that he not only awards them for their deeds but initiates and accepts them as his *bhaktas* who have successfully undergone a severe (sometimes even cruel or even sadistic) test for a pure and disinterested love for the god.

The same goes for another story from PP (PP 3; PP1970: 66-72) in which a person named the Iyaṅpakaiyār, famous for his generosity (never said ‘no’ when asked to give something) was tested by Śiva who came as a Vedic *muṇi* (*maraimuṇi*). This time Śiva demanded that his devotee would give him his wife and accompany him out of the town of Pukār. Iyaṅpakaiyār

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<sup>14</sup> One detail can be added to the picture drawn by Cēkkiḷār. It seems plausible to suggest that the act of self-mutilation committed by Tiṇṇaṅ/Kaṇṇappaṇ, that is plucking out his eye, semantically is equal to tearing off a breast by women in stories mentioned above. It is, perhaps, meaningful in this connection that the nipple of the breast is signified in Tamil by the word *kaṅ* (*mulaikkaṅ*) ‘eye’.

<sup>15</sup> *cīruttoṅṭa nāyaṅār purāṇam* (PP 36, pp. 572-585). The story, its implications and variants are analyzed in detail in Shulman 1993.

being sure that the wife's and his own relatives would try to prevent such a disgraceful act promised that he would defend the *muṇi* and got armed with a sword. Indeed, a fierce battle occurred at the gates of the town: "When those who came (tried) to stop (him) Iyarpakaiār (showed) his anger and went (on them) with his sword, his strong help, waving it in all directions; he resolutely cut off hands, legs and heads; he was in the war-play, like a belligerent tiger."

*ceṅravar taṭutta pōtil iyarpakai yārmuṇ cīri*  
*vaṅruṇai vāle yākac carikai mārivantu*  
*tuṅriṇar tōlum tālum talaikahum tuṅittu vīttu*  
*veṅraṭu puliyē reṅṅa amarviḷai yāṭṭil mikkār* (PP 3, 21;  
 PP 1970: 69).

Behaving like a real hero of war he did not hesitate even to massacre his relatives to prove his devotion to the Vedic *muṇi*, that is Śiva, who in the end appreciated his deed, praised him and appeared before him in his celestial form, together with Umā. Then he invited him and his wife to join them and live with them eternally. The relatives who perished in the battle were also taken to the heaven. As in previous cases Śiva restores the normal state of things and elevates his devotees to the status of paragons of Śaiva faith, or saints.

PP contains some more stories with a marked martial element in them,<sup>16</sup> which makes the heroic behavior of Śiva's devotees much more expressive. Generally speaking, violence and aggression, often combined with blood-shed seem to constitute a prominent part of this pattern of heroism (along with a motive of sacrifice), typical for South Indian culture, whether it can be explained by its linkage to the land and agriculture (perceived as 'inherently violent'<sup>17</sup>), or by specific features of the figure of Śiva himself and his mythological

<sup>16</sup> For instance, there is a story of a Śaiva *bhakta* Eṅippattār (PP 8; PP 1970: 89-97) who killed the elephant which destroyed a basket of flowers prepared for Śiva in the temple. Felling down an elephant during the battle is a characteristic feature of martial heroism in Tamil (and Indian in general) military tradition.

<sup>17</sup> Shulman 1993: 20.

milieu. However it might be, these features, quite noticeable in Tamil Śaivism, were borrowed, underwent, so to say, a process of distillation and were put forward by a group of *nāyanār*'s heirs (who, however, rejected many cultic elements important for Tamil *bhaktas* such as icons, temples, rituals etc.) in medieval Karnatak, Andhra and Maharashtra. They were called *Lingayats* (for the only image of Śiva they venerated was *liṅgam*) and *Vīraśaivas* ("Heroic Śaivas"), because their universe was, in brief, characterized as "iconoclastic, rebellious, angry, with a pronounced fondness of violent tones" (Shulman 1993: 49). Or in other words: "A strong proclivity toward violence is characteristic of many of the stories of *jaṅgamas* in BP [*Basava purāṇa*<sup>18</sup>- A.D.]. By killing, hurting, abusing and destroying, the *jaṅgamas* express a steadfast allegiance to their religion. Violence is directed not only against nonbelievers but also against other devotees as punishment for accidental offences against Śiva or his devotees. Moreover, it is also a way of exhibiting one's faith in Śiva. Devotees commit acts of self-mutilation or suicide with the same ease as they hurt others. They demonstrate their faith by decapitating themselves and then regaining life by getting their heads back onto their bodies" (Narayana Rao- Roghair 1990: 12).

Further presentation of this movement lies outside the scope of this paper and in the end I shall touch on one more figure of *nāyanār*, the so called *Tiruñānacampantār* (or, in short, *Campantār*).<sup>19</sup>

"At the time when the sun and all other planets were standing powerfully in congregation, at the well calculated hour of the lucky day of *ātirai*,<sup>20</sup> when the cardinal points were shining,

in order that other religions perish, but Vedic, beginning with Śaivism flourish...

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<sup>18</sup> *Basava purāṇa* is an hagiographic text, an analogue of PP, composed in Telugu by Pāḷkuriki Somanātha probably in 13-th century. It describes the life and deeds of Basava (or Basaveśvara), the founder of *Vīraśaiva* movement, the first leader of *jaṅgamas* ('mobile') as the adepts of the movement called themselves.

<sup>19</sup> This nickname means "United with sacred wisdom" and refers to the episode of his life when Umā appeared before the child and gave him milk from her breast.

<sup>20</sup> The sixth *nakṣatra* (*ārdrā*) presided over by Śiva.

In order that false, increasing fruitlessness ways of Jainas and others who increase evil, perish,

in Caṅpai, which increases *tapas* from era to era, Piḷḷaiyār who increases *Śivam*<sup>21</sup> within all moving and unmoving objects made his *avatāra*.”

*arukkaṅmutarkōḷaṅaittum aḷakiyauc caṅkaḷilē  
perukkavali yuṭaṅṅirkaṅ pēṅiyanaḷ lōraiyeḷat  
tirukkiḷarum ātiraināḷ ticaiviḷaṅkaṅ paracamayat  
tirukkoḷiyac caivamutal vaiṭikamum taḷaitṭōṅka  
avarkaḷāl veḷiyiṭapperratu  
avamperukkum pullaṅriṅṅ amaṅmutalām paracamayap  
pavamperukkum puraiṅerikal paḷpaṅanaḷ lūḷitorum  
tavamperukkum caṅpaiyilē tāvilcaracarankaḷelām  
civamperukkum piḷḷaiyār tiruavatā raṅceyṭār (PP 28,  
22...26; PP 1970: 302-303).*

The whole fragment of Campantār’s hagiography (PP 28, 21-26; PP 1970: 302-303) includes many other brilliant perspectives for Tamil land and Tamil culture in connection with the poet’s birth and clearly shows its special messianic character. The aim of his life, thus definitely outlined, was to propagate Śaiva faith, to defend it from the influence and attacks of ‘other religions’ (Buddhism and Jainism first of all) and to fight them. In spite of the fact that Campantār according to traditional views reflected by Cēkkiḷār was a child (he left the world at the age of 16 entering together with his prospective wife the *liṅgam* of fire which appeared during the marriage ceremony), but he was a heroic child by definition, because he was the incarnation of Skanda.<sup>22</sup> His deeds took place neither in battlefields nor in physical fights. His was an ideological field, so to say, and he fought with his hymns (*patikams*) and also with miracles that he produced singing *patikams* in which he addressed Śiva asking for help. In this way he cured one king’s daughter (PP 319; PP 1970:348), resurrected a youth bit by

<sup>21</sup> *Śivam* – the noun signifying an abstract notion of “the essence of Śiva”.

<sup>22</sup> The word Piḷḷaiyār means ‘child’ and here simultaneously signifies Tamil warrior-god Murukaṅ identified with Skanda.

snake (PP 28, 483; PP1970: 374), handed to his father thousand gold coins brought by one of Śiva's *bhūtas* (PP 28, 426; PP 1970:364) etc. But his main deed is a famous dispute with Jainas held at the Madurai court of Pāṇṭiya king. He was summoned to Madurai by the queen Maṅkaiyarkkaraci, who was a Śiva devotee and was in distress because her husband was under the influence of Jainas. Campantār's contest with Jainas began when he cured the king from an illness applying to him the sacred ashes (*tirunīru*). Jainas's medical efforts failed. Then there was 'a dispute' which Campantār won by a new miracle. Jainas produced palm-leaves with their texts, Campantār produced his *patikams* and they were brought to a trial by fire and water. Jaina texts were burnt, others were gone with the flow of the river Vaikai but all Campantār manuscripts survived. The king was disappointed in Jainas and Jainism and ordered his minister to put Jainas on spikes: *toluvil ēra murai ceyka* (PP 28, 853; PP 1970: 431). Eight thousands Jainas were executed and Campantār approved of it – "because of what was done by unworthy Jainas, (he) said 'It will do' and did not oppose to the act of merciless king" *takavilāc camaṅar ceyta taṅmaiṅāl cālum eṅrē mikaiṅilā vēntaṅ ceykai vilakkiṅā tirunta vēlai* (PP 28, 854, 3-4; PP 1970: 431).

Campantār conducted his fight against 'other religions' and their representatives incessantly and vigorously. As Maria Pavlova noted he mentions Buddhist and Jainas almost in every *patikam* exactly in the tenth strophe (Павлова 2014:145). Very rarely he touches on conceptual matters but usually just scorns them fiercely calling them scoundrels, fools, unworthy, dirty, ignorant etc. He criticizes their ways of life, dress, eating habits, language, names. Strictly speaking this behavior cannot be defined as heroic and, consequently, developing this motive as well as the theme of the controversy between the religions, would mean a deviation from the theme of this article which anyway deserves a special separate treatment. But there is no doubt that the tradition considered Campantār as a hero and Cēkkiṅār constructing his image kept it in mind. It is not just a chance that he devoted the biggest part of his *purāṅa* to his life and clearly stressed his affinity to Skanda. Though his weapons

were his deep religious feelings and devotion, the ability to make miracles and his outstanding poetic gift, the violence as we have seen took place in the story of his life too. So, even in this case the characteristic features of South Indian pattern of heroic behavior were preserved.

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