To India, when she was still *jñāna-bhūmi.*

In the 5125th year of Kali-yuga

Ferenc Buji

SRI ARULPARANANDA SWAMIGAL AND THE WISDOM OF NON-DISCRIMINATION

O Śiva, Ocean of Mercy,
who dancest the dance of endless bliss
in the spacious Hall of Pure Consciousness,
beyond the plane of thought.

*Tāyumāṉavar**

One with One, one from One, one in One, and a single One eternally.

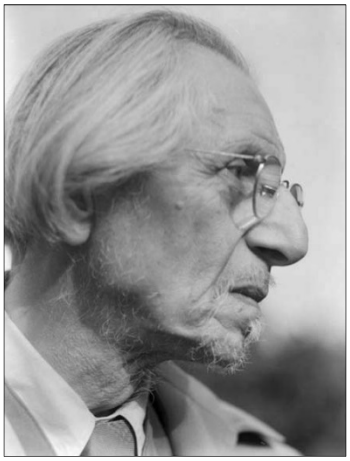
*Meister Eckhart***

I. THE COOMARASWAMYS

In his 70th birthday speech on 22 August 1947, the keeper of Indian and Muhammadan Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, speaking on that occasion, remarked that his interest in traditional sacred art had naturally led him into the field of comparative religion and metaphysics. The speaker was Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877–1947), who, even at a young age, had already se-

* The motto is a combination of two text versions. Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *Studies and Translations,* p. 94: „O God, Ocean of Mercy, that dances, the dance of bliss in the Hall of pure Consciousness beyond the plane of thought!" P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* p. 24 (in Carpenter's introduction): "O thou that dancest the dance of endless joy in the spacious halls of Pure Consciousness!"

** *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart,* p. 564.



Ananda K. Coomaraswamy

cured his place among the foremost figures of world art history with his works *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art* (1908) and *The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* (1913)—not to mention his monograph *Rajput Painting* (1916), the first scholarly account of Rajasthani art in northwest India, and *The History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (1927), in which he systematically presented the art of the Indian subcontinent and the regions under its cultural influence.[1]

Nevertheless, Coomaraswamy was originally not an art historian but a geologist, and many of his works were published in this field as well. His attention, however, quickly shifted from minerals to monuments near the geological sites, and subsequently to the metaphysical thinking behind them, which formed the deepest roots of the society. In a series of treatises and books of extraordinary erudition and profundity, he drew his readers' attention to the universality of the metaphysical layer behind each religion, a true *philosophia perennis*. According to Mircea Eliade, Coomaraswamy was "one of the most learned and creative scholars of the century", and had already published a study ("The Philosophy of Medieval and Oriental Art") in the first issue of Eliade's legendary Romanian journal *Zalmoxis*. It can hardly be doubted that Ananda K. Coomaraswamy was one of the most influential personalities in the history of Ceylon (Sri Lanka since 1972) on a global scale.

However, in his address on his 70th birthday, he not only recounted his life's journey, but also announced that he and his wife intended to move back home to India, and bade farewell to his American colleagues and friends.

> I have not remained untouched by the religious philosophies I have studied and to which I was led by way of the history of art. *Intellige ut credas!*[2] In my case, at least, understanding has involved belief; and for me the time has come to exchange the active for a more contemplative way of life in which it would be my hope to experience more immediately, more fully, at least a part of the truth of which my understanding has been so far predominantly logical.[3]

Coomaraswamy's speech was delivered on 22 August 1947—exactly on the occasion of his 70th birthday—but fate prevented his plan from coming to fruition, as he died of a heart attack on 9 September 1947, just two weeks later.

Although Coomaraswamy spoke of *returning to his homeland,* India, he was not born there, but in Ceylon (which was still part of the British Empire at the time),[4] in Kollupitiya, near the capital—now a suburb of Colombo. He did not stay long in Ceylon, however, as his English mother could not tolerate the local climate, and so the family decided that she would return to England with her child, while her husband would join them as soon as his official duties allowed. The re-

[1] His books published in Hungarian include *Hinduizmus és buddhizmus; Ākiṃcaññа: Önmegsemmisítés; Idő és örökkévalóság;* and *Keresztény és keleti művészetfilozófia.* In addition, nearly twenty of his studies were published in Hungarian (for a bibliography up to 2008 see Buji Ferenc [ed.], *Metaphysicum et politicum,* pp. 111–113). On Coomaraswamy, see Roger Lipsey (ed.), *Coomaraswamy* III: *His Life and Work.*

[2] (Latin) Understand to believe!

[3] Roger Lipsey (ed.), *Coomaraswamy* II: *Metaphysics,* pp. 434–435.

[4] Ceylon was a British Crown Colony from 1802 to 1948, and remained a member of the Commonwealth from 1948 to 1972.

union, however, never took place, for Coomaraswamy's father died shortly thereafter. Thus, little Ananda was left without a father at the age of two.

Ananda's education was initially provided by his mother and his mother's unmarried sister, and at the age of twelve he was sent to the prestigious Wycliffe College in Gloucestershire, where he studied Icelandic alongside the Classics (he later translated one of the most celebrated sections of the *Edda,* the *Völuspá,* into English).[5] Subsequently, at the age of twenty, he continued his studies at the University of London, where three years later he obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in botany and geology with distinction.

Of course, as a native of Ceylon, he would not have had such educational opportunities. However, his mother, Elizabeth Clay Beeby, was the scion of a Kentish aristocratic family with strong commercial ties to India and Ceylon. One element of Coomaraswamy's name, K.—Kentish—points precisely to this Kentish ancestry. Thus, his maternal ancestry—English and aristocratic alike—proved decisive in shaping his upbringing and education. Despite his English upbringing, Coomaraswamy did not forget his paternal Eastern heritage, and soon after graduating from university his geological research led to his appointment as head of the Ceylon Mineral Survey (1903–1906). The achievements of this period included three annual reports on the geological survey and the discovery of a new mineral with an exceptionally high density (9.7 g/cm^3). In a private letter, Marie Curie suggested to the young Coomaraswamy that he name the mineral "coomarite" after its discoverer, but he gave it the name "uraninite" (shortly afterwards the mineral was renamed "thorianite" because of its high thorium content).[6] Even this early episode clearly reveals Coomaraswamy's later characteristic attitude: the subordination of his own personality to the ideals he represented. During this period, he divided his time mainly between the subcontinent and England. In 1906, at the age of twenty-three, he became the first Ceylonese to earn a Doctor of Science degree in geology from the University of London.

However, in the course of his geological and mineralogical research, Coomaraswamy's attention, as noted earlier, turned increasingly towards traditional art. After his first work in art history, the four volumes of *Photographs of Minor Sinhalese Arts* (1903), he published a series of studies on similar subjects. Because of his extensive research in this field, he was offered the position of Keeper of Indian and Muhammadan Art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1917, which he accepted. At the age of forty, he moved to the United States and remained there for the rest of his life: he never returned to England and visited Ceylon only once thereafter.[7] The museum's Asian collection was largely formed through his efforts.

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[5] *Völuspa: Done into English out of the Icelandic of the Elder Edda.*

[6] A comprehensive chemical analysis of thorianite, discovered in 1904, was carried out in 1907 by Clare de Brereton Evans (1866–1935), who was the first woman in the British Empire to obtain the Doctor of Science degree (1897) for her pioneering research on aromatic amines. She later, under the name "C. de B. Evans", translated into English the whole of Meister Eckhart's German (Middle High German) works in two volumes (1924 and 1931), which still remains the most complete translation of Eckhart's vernacular sermons and treatises. Coomaraswamy frequently quoted Meister Eckhart in Miss Evans's translation, but there is no indication that he was aware that the researcher of the mineral he discovered had become Eckhart's translator. For many decades, owing to the distance between the two disciplines, no one realized that the chemist Clare de Brereton Evans and the translator of Eckhart, C. de B. Evans, were one and the same person.

[7] The fact that he was *persona non grata* throughout the British Empire owing to his outspoken pronouncements against colonial rule played a major role in determining his circumstances. When India gained independence on 15 August 1947, Coomaraswamy immediately declared his intention to finally return home—*to India, not Ceylon,* indeed, as Ceylon gained independence only six months after his death, on 15 February 1948.

Yet Coomaraswamy's remarkable career was due not only to his maternal lineage. His father was in no sense inferior to his wife's family: he was the first Ceylonese, and indeed the first person of Asian descent to be knighted in England (1874). Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy (1833–1879) was one of the leading political figures of his time, elected to the Ceylon Legislative Council in 1861.[8] At that time, the Legislative Council was the highest political body on the island of Ceylon, or Lanka (the Sanskrit *laṅkā* means "island"), in which local people could also participate, and which in practice exercised governmental authority. The body consisted of sixteen members, most of whom, however, were of British origin, while native Ceylonese—Sinhalese, Tamils, and Moors—formed only a minority. Mutu Coomaraswamy was a member of this body for eighteen years, until his death in 1879.

Mutu Coomaraswamy

However, Sir Mutu was not only a leading figure in Ceylonese political life, but during one of his extended stays in Europe (1862–1865) he was also admitted to the highest circles in England. He was a frequent guest of one of Victorian England's most influential politicians, Lord Palmerston, and he also maintained friendly relations with John Russell, Alfred Tennyson, and Matthew Arnold.[9] Benjamin Disraeli, the other highly influential statesman of the age,[10] personally accompanied him to the royal palace on 6 August 1874 for the knighting ceremony, and modelled one of the characters of his last, unfinished novel, *Falconet*—Kusinara—on Mutu Coomaraswamy. During his stay in Europe, Coomaraswamy gave numerous lectures on Hinduism and Vedānta philosophy. Sir Mutu was the first Asian to be admitted as a member (barrister) of one of the traditional London Inns of Court.[11]

However, Mutu Coomaraswamy was not only a politically prominent figure in British Ceylon, but also had a deep affinity for Ceylonese culture and, more broadly, for the entire Hindu–Buddhist tradition. Moreover, owing to his remarkable command of languages (English, Tamil, Sinhalese, Pāli, Greek, and Latin), he moved with ease within the realm of world culture. In this respect, it was not primarily through his own writings but through his translations that he contributed to the deepening of the understanding of Hinduism. He translated two traditional dramatic works into English: *Hariścandra* from Tamil and *Dāṭhavaṃsa* from Pāli.[12] He also translated into English and annotated one of the oldest texts of the Pāli Canon, the *Sutta Nipāta,* and rendered into English prose the 152 hymns of Tāyumāṉavar, one of the most distinguished of the Tamil poets and mystics.[13]

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[8] On Mutu Coomaraswamy, see Raja Singam, *The Life and Writings of Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy,* and M. Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan* I, pp. 107–131 (the chapter "Sri Muthucoomaraswamy").

[9] Viscount of Palmerston (1784–1865) and John Russell (1792–1878) were British prime ministers; Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892) poet; Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) poet and cultural critic.

[10] Benjamin Disraeli (sometimes written as D'Israeli / 1804–1881) was the British Prime Minister and writer of Jewish descent.

[11] In the past, only Christians and Jews were admitted to the traditional English Bar.

[12] *Arichandra: The Martyr of Truth: A Tamil Drama,* and *The Daṭhávamsa: Or the History of Tooth-Relic of Gotama Buddha.* He dedicated the former work to Queen Victoria, and the performance of the drama in London moved the Queen so deeply that she kept the book at her bedside table next to the Bible.

[13] *Sutta Nipáta: Or, Dialogues and Discourses of Gotama Buddha,* and *Táyumánavar: Or Hindu Philosophic Poems of Vedántic-Siddhántic School.*

In 1875, at the age of forty-two, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy married the twenty-three-year-old Elizabeth Clay Beeby, a scion of a wealthy aristocratic family in Kent. The ceremony was conducted by none other than the Archbishop of Canterbury, the *primus inter pares* of the Church of England. According to contemporary accounts, Elizabeth was not only of noble birth and great beauty but also highly educated. Their child, Ananda, was born two years later. Shortly afterwards, owing to Elizabeth's illness, she and little Ananda sailed to England in the hope that her husband would soon follow. However, Mutu Coomaraswamy never saw his wife and child again. After four years of marriage, at the age of forty-six, he died of kidney failure on 4 May 1879—the very day he was to have sailed from Ceylon to England.

Mutu Coomaraswamy, too, came to prominence in Ceylon's political life with a distinguished family lineage behind him. His father, Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy (1783–1846), held the "Tamil Seat" on the Legislative Council from its founding in 1833 until his death, representing the Tamil—and Moorish[14]—communities of the Island.

II. The Ponnambalams

We shall not pursue the history of the Coomaraswamy family further as it fades into the mists of time, for the purpose of this study is not genealogical. Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy had a son and a daughter by his second wife. The son was the aforementioned Mutu Coomaraswamy, while his sister, Sellachchi Coomaraswamy, married Ponnambalam Arunachalam (1814–1887), a member of the distinguished Ponnambalam family, whose lineage, like that of the Coomaraswamys, commanded great respect.

Ponnambalam Arunachalam was destined for a promising official career, yet when obstacles arose along that path, he turned to commerce. Trade, however, brought him little lasting success, and he eventually found spiritual peace in religion, becoming one of the foremost religious figures of his time. He had three sons—all of whom were to play invaluable political and cultural roles in the shaping of modern Ceylon. The brothers were Coomaraswamy, Ramanathan, and Arunachalam.[15] Their mother died when they were still children (the eldest being only six), and thus they were raised by their maternal grandmother, the mother of Mutu Coomaraswamy.[16] Mutu himself, then still childless, regarded them almost as his own sons, and they in turn saw in him a second father.

Of the three brothers, the least successful was the eldest, Ponnambalam Coomaraswamy (1849–1905). Yet contemporaries widely considered him the most gifted: a man of resolute character, remarkable intellect, and deep erudition in classical Tamil literature. From 1893 to 1898 he served as a member of the Legislative Council, representing the Tamil community of Ceylon.

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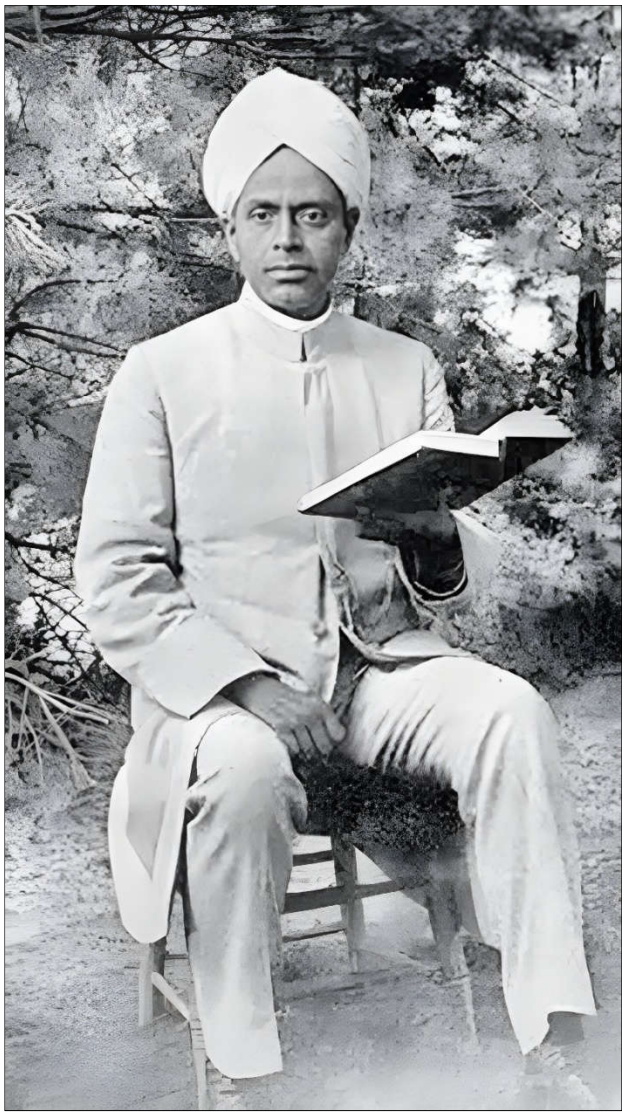
[14] About ten percent of Sri Lanka's population are Muslims, and one of the most important holy sites in the Islamic world is the island's second highest peak (2,243 m), Adam's Peak (Sri Pada, meaning "Sacred Footprint"). According to Muslim belief, the footprint-shaped depression at the summit is the footprint of Adam, who, after being expelled from Paradise, first set foot on the earth here. The mountain is likewise a holy place for Hindus, Buddhists, and Christians, who hold that the Footprint is that of St. Thomas the Apostle—or, according to another version, of a high-ranking eunuch—a "God-fearer" (i.e. a gentile sympathizer with Judaism)—named Simeon Bakhos (a post-biblical name), who was converted by the deacon Philip (*cf.* Acts 8:27ff—for reasons unknown, Hungarian translations conspicuously ignore the fact that the official was a eunuch).

[15] There was in fact another brother, Padmanaba, who died in early childhood.

[16] Arunachalam mentions (*Light from the East,* p. 69) that his grandmother, who gave Sri Lanka several culturally and politically influential personalities, "could not read or write a word of her own language".

Coomaraswamy was known for his independence and self-assurance, qualities that are discernible even in his only surviving photograph, which conveys both the dignity and firmness of his nature. Among his compatriots he earned the epithet "The Lion of Hultsdorf",[17] for within the Council he proved the most steadfast defender of Tamil interests in opposition to those of the British. This inevitably brought him into conflict with the colonial authorities, who refused to renew his membership in the Council. Due partly to his uncompromising temperament and partly to his relatively early death, he was unable to play as prominent a role in the subsequent political life of Ceylon as his brothers did.

Politically, the most influential of the three brothers was the second, Ponnambalam Ramanathan (1851–1930). He was a more balanced and conciliatory figure than his elder brother, and his achievements owed much to this temperament. While Coomaraswamy entered politics with a strongly nationalist attitude, Ramanathan was primarily a morally driven politician. He began his studies at the prestigious Royal College of Colombo and later read law at the University of Madras. From 1879 onwards, he represented the Tamil population of the Island in the Legislative Council.



Ponnambalam Ramanathan

In 1886, he and his wife embarked on a five-month study tour of Europe. During this visit he was offered *honoris causa* membership of the Inner Temple—one of London's most distinguished Inns of Court—a distinction previously conferred only upon two men: a leading American lawyer of the time and the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII. In 1892, Ramanathan resigned his seat on the Council following his appointment as Solicitor-General, the highest judicial office open to natives under the British colonial administration—a position he held until 1906. He was commissioned by the Governor, Sir James Longden, to prepare and draft papers for submission to the Legislative Council.

Ramanathan restored one of Colombo's Hindu temples, now known as the *Sri Ponnambalam Vanesar Kovil,* which remains among the city's principal landmarks. In 1881, he founded the Post Office Savings Bank, the first banking institution in Ceylon established by local initiative. Like his uncle, Sir Mutu Coomaraswamy, he was knighted in 1921. He also founded a girls' college in 1913 and a boys' college in 1921—both the first Hindu schools in Ceylon—the latter eventually forming the nucleus of the future University of Ceylon. In collaboration with his

[17] Hultsdorf (more correctly Hulftsdorp) is now a suburb of Colombo, which takes its unusual name from Gerard Pieterszoon Hulft (1621–1656), a general of the Dutch East India Company, who died a heroic death in Colombo.

younger brother, he played a decisive role in founding that university, establishing the preparatory committee responsible for its creation.

In 1922, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan was re-elected to the Legislative Council, a position he held until his death, in his second term representing the northern Tamil constituencies. His speeches were later published, and he was also the author of several works, mainly on religious themes: *The Gospel of Jesus According to St Matthew* (1898); *An Eastern Exposition of the Gospel of Jesus According to St John* (1902); *The Culture of the Soul Among Western Nations* (1906); and *The Spirit of the East Contrasted with the Spirit of the West* (1906). He also translated the *Bhagavad Gītā* from Sanskrit into Tamil, providing it with extensive commentaries (1914). Ramanathan's role in the political, cultural, and intellectual life of Ceylon was comparable, in many respects, to that of István Széchenyi in nineteenth-century Hungary.

The youngest of the three, Ponnambalam Arunachalam (1853–1924),[18] likewise began his studies at the Royal College in Colombo and continued at Presidency College, Madras, before earning his law degree as a scholarship student at the University of Cambridge. Through his uncle, Mutu Coomaraswamy—who was well acquainted with many distinguished figures in the British world of the time—Arunachalam also gained access to the highest social circles. During this period, he formed a lifelong friendship with Edward Carpenter, one of the foremost social thinkers and writers of the age.

Ponnambalam Arunachalam

Upon his return to Ceylon, he initially intended to pursue a legal career, but under the guidance of his uncle he entered the public service instead. He served as a judicial officer in several towns across the Island, and his exceptional work soon attracted the attention of the Chief Justice. From 1898 to 1902 he held the office of Registrar-General, elevating the island's system of registration to a standard said to be without precedent even in Europe.

The census of 1901, organised and conducted under his supervision, provided a comprehensive account of the ethnological, social, and economic conditions of Ceylon. He published the results in four volumes under the title *The Census of Ceylon.* Like his two brothers, he was elected to the Legislative Council, where he occupied the Tamil Seat from 1906 to 1913. For his distinguished service to the Crown, he was knighted by King George V at Buckingham Palace in 1913. From

[18] For Ponnambalam Arunachalam, see Brendon Gooneratne, *Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam;* M. Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan* II, pp. 483–548 (the chapter "Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam"); and Thalgodapitiya, Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam (1853–1924), in Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *Studies and Translations,* pp. I–XXI.

1906 he served as president of the society preparing the establishment of the University of Ceylon and as vice-president of the Agricultural Association.

In 1915, he founded the Ceylon Social Service League, becoming its first president, and in 1917 the Ceylon Reform League—the former intended to improve the general living conditions of the Ceylonese population, the latter to promote the island's socio-political self-determination. This latter goal was further advanced by the ceremonial opening of the Ceylon National Congress in 1919, of which Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam was elected the first president. In the same year he established Ceylon's first trade union. Meanwhile, in recognition of his scholarly achievements, he was elected president of the Ceylon Branch of the prestigious Royal Asiatic Society—the first Ceylonese to hold that office. He also published numerous studies and translations on various aspects of Hindu religiosity on the Island.

The three Ponnambalam brothers were among the defining figures of Ceylon's most formative period, and their memory remains surrounded by an almost cultic reverence in present-day Sri Lanka. As the biographer of the middle brother aptly observed: "Never before have three brothers risen to such eminent and commanding positions in the public life of a country as did the three sons of Mudaliyar Ponnambalam."[19]

In 1888, however, Ramanathan and Arunachalam met a man whose influence upon them was so profound that they were never again the same as before. Yet before turning to this remarkable—though, to the outside world, largely hidden—encounter, and to the exceptional person who so radically transformed the two outstanding Ceylonese statesmen, we must briefly return to Mutu Coomaraswamy, for the roots of this encounter reach back to his own political role.

III. Echoes of a Vanished Kingdom: The Historical Context

The vanguard of British colonial expansion was the East India Company. Founded by the British Crown for essentially commercial purposes—precisely on 31 December 1600—the "Honourable Company", as it was commonly called, gradually grew into a political and military power in its own right. Through a combination of treaties, economic supremacy, and warfare, it extended its domination over the whole of historic India (whose borders stretched far beyond those of present-day India).[20] In the territories brought under its control, however, the Company at first retained the existing administrative and political order: local rulers continued to exercise their authority much as before, while British power was consolidated only slowly. One of the chief instruments of this expansion was the so-called *Doctrine of Lapse*—approximately equivalent to the "Principle of Transfer"—the essence of which was that if a ruler died without a direct male heir, his kingdom, together with his personal estate, passed to the British East India Company and later to the British Crown.

The closest South Indian territory to Ceylon was held by the Tanjore Maratha Kingdom.[21] The penultimate *rāja* of the kingdom, Serfoji II, recognized the authority of the East India Company in 1799 in exchange for being restored to the throne at a critical juncture, and in 1800 the Tanjore District—already under British control—was established. Although Serfoji was forced to

[19] M. Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan* I, p. 460.

[20] To cite but one example of shifting frontiers: the birthplace of the Buddha (Kapilavastu) now lies not within India, but within the territory of Nepal.

[21] The British regarded and referred to it merely as a *principality*—that is, a duchy or petty kingdom. *Tanjore* was the anglicized form of *Thanjavur*.

Shivaji (II) of Thanjavur

give up his independent army and to pay taxes to the "Honourable Company" (as the East India Company was often called), he retained his former powers and rights within his kingdom. His successor—and at the same time son—Shivaji II, the last *rāja* of the Maratha Kingdom of Tanjore and the last royal descendant of the Bhonsle dynasty, ascended the throne in 1832.[22] The *rāja,* however, died suddenly on 29 October 1855 without leaving a direct male heir (he had only one daughter),[23] without adopting a son, and without having a brother—so there was no one to whom he could bequeath the rajaship. To avoid a vacancy on the throne, the senior widow *mahārāṇī* ("queen"), Kamakshi Bai Sahiba, adopted the late *rāja*'s grandson—born of his first daughter—as "Serfoji III" a day later, on 30 October 1855.[24] The Crown, however, did not accept the adoption and asserted its rights: on the basis of the Doctrine of Lapse, it annexed the kingdom on 16 April 1856, and a year later the private property of the late *rāja* was also confiscated, down to the regalia (coronation insignia).[25]

The widowed queen, the Mahārāṇī, sought help in her predicament—some form of contact with the English government so that the adopted boy might be accepted as the legitimate heir. She needed to find a mediator with real influence in British parliamentary circles, who would at the same time sympathize with her monarchist aspirations. She believed that the only person capable of handling such a delicate matter was the Tamil political leader of neighbouring Ceylon, Mutu Coomaraswamy. And indeed, she could hardly have found a more suitable man for the task. The Tamils of Ceylon, moreover, regarded the Tanjore District and Southeast India in general as their ancestral homeland. Only one task remained: to contact Mutu Coomaraswamy and win him over to her cause. For this purpose, she turned to the late *rāja*'s confidant and chief adviser, Ramaswami Pillai. Mutu Coomaraswamy received the envoy from the north and decided to intervene in the hope that the British would recognize the adoption and restore to the throne the young, dispossessed descendant of the Bhonsle dynasty. His attempt, however, failed for reasons beyond his control, as the younger widow of the late *rāja* also petitioned the British Parliament, arguing that the *rāja*'s second daughter—rather than the adopted boy, the child of the *rāja*'s first daughter—should inherit the throne.[26] Thus the British, exploiting the discord within the royal

[22] For the history of the Raj, see K. R. Subramanian, *The Maratha Rajas of Tanjore.*

[23] At least from his wives; for by his concubines he had six sons and eleven daughters.

[24] The *rāja* had twenty wives in all. He married his first wife before ascending the throne (1827), the second upon his accession (1832), the third a year later (1833), and the remaining seventeen three years before his death (1852), all on a single day—apparently in the hope of producing an heir.

[25] Although the British Raj (Hindi *rāj,* meaning "rule")—that is, the rule of the British Crown—officially began in 1858 (so India became a British Crown Colony only from that year onward), the preceding decades had already seen the gradual curtailment of the East India Company's powers and authority.

[26] His first daughter had already died by that time.

family, left matters as they stood.[27] In the end, Mutu Coomaraswamy succeeded only in having several of the Mahārāṇī's privileges restored, along with substantial compensation and a generous life annuity. In gratitude for his intercession, the Mahārāṇī sent Mutu Coomaraswamy a statue of Nataraja made of ivory and gold, depicting Śiva as the cosmic dancer.

Kamakshi Bai Sahiba

In 1937, E. Vinayaka Row (E. Vinayaka Rao), founder of the Mahratta Education Fund, set down his memoirs about the sorrowful history of the period following the dissolution of the Tanjore Maratha kingdom (1855). Although Vinayaka Row was born in 1891, he gives—based on his family's account—such a vivid picture of this period that it is worth quoting in full:[28]

> Some of the Maharanees, wives of the late H. H. Sivaji Maharaja, the last ruler of Tanjore, were living in seclusion in the Palace enjoying their modest pensions and decent incomes from their private properties. Several other members of the Royal Family were also living in the Palace. The good old forms were kept up, though they were only the tattered remnants of the old magnificence and splendour. A few elephants were still swaying in the outer courtyard. Morning and evening the play of Nawbat and Nagara[29] went on as usual in the front gate of the Palace. The armed sentinels stood at the main entrance leading to the inner quadrangles from day to day, looking with philosophic indifference on the covered vehicles conveying *gosha* ladies[30] related to the members of the Royal family, and moving in and out drawn by pairs of horses or pairs of bullocks. A few half-sleepy sepoys[31] were furbishing up now and then the pieces of fire-arms and military accoutrements that were left in the armoury. A few learned pandits were working in the Saraswathi Mahal Library, deciphering and copying the famous old manuscripts in palm leaves and crumbling old country paper. In another suite of rooms, dusty old record bundles were arranged and rearranged and a few clerks were leisurely examining the musty old papers and cadjans to unearth the palace copy of some ancient grant, or pedigree, or order of precedence or point of ceremonial.
>
> The Royal traditions were kept up, though on a very reduced scale. The astrologer, the doctor, the musician and the scholar each had his share of Palace patronage in such measure as the depleted finances could permit. The Palace was not then open to the mere tourist and sight-seer. The big hall containing full-size paintings of the Maharajahs of Tanjore from 1676 to 1855 was eloquent in its very silence and the pictures seemed to tell the sad story of the rise and fall of the Tanjore Raj. Day in and day out, the old watchman at the main entrance rang the hour bell with melancholy precision, announcing as it were the hourly receding into the dim past of the palmy days that were.
>
> One after another the old Ranees passed away. So did many other members of the Royal family. The end of one establishment meant the destitution of a large number of families of clerks, dependents and poor relatives and a diminution of patronage to a number of pandits, priests, doctors, musicians, painters and the fol-

[27] For details, see *Case of the Ranee of Tanjore,* and More, *Reports of Cases Heard and Determined by the Judicial Committee,* pp. 476–547 (the chapter "India, the Secretary of State in Council on, v. Kamachee Boye Sahaba").

[28] *South Indian Maharashtrians*, pp. 1–4. Introductory study by E. Vinayaka Row ("The History of The Mahratta Education Fund, Madras for its first twenty-five year", pp. 1–27. The spelling, punctuation, and terminology of the original have been retained.

[29] South Indian percussion instruments.

[30] Women who conceal themselves from the gaze of men.

[31] Cavalryman of Indian origin.

lowers of fine arts. This side of Tanjore history made a deep impression on me as I had frequent opportunities of going into the Palace and spending hours at a time within its walls.

I vividly remember with gratitude the long historical accounts which I had about Tanjore affairs from several old family friends. One of them, happily alive now, is closely related to the Royal family and gave me very faithful accounts of the last days of Sivaji and the cultural history of Tanjore after the annexation in 1855. With the decline of the fortunes of the Royal House began also the decline of the fortunes of the nobility, Brahman, Kshattriya, and others. Outside the Palace walls the story of Tanjore was not less melancholy. By temperament and equipment, the noble houses of Tanjore were not ready to change over to the new order of things which the Annexation meant. One after another, the noble houses went down, their mansions were mortgaged, their lands were alienated, and their sons and daughters were driven to a life of chill penury. It was most painful to see this slow but sure grinding of good, noble and generous men and women, whose only fault was that the new times sprang upon them with lightning speed and they were not alert enough to save themselves.

Street scene in Tanjore. Photo by Samuel Bourne, 1869.

The condition of the commoners was not so bad. But it was bad enough. A few families had already gone out of Tanjore and had obtained good situations in British service and in Indian States. Many of them won laurels as administrators and educationists. On account of their ability and high character, the Mahratta Community[32] retained the universal esteem and respect in which it had been held. They still regarded Tanjore as their headquarters and hoped to spend their last days after retirement in their dear old city. Many middle class families at Tanjore continued the cultural traditions. In most middle class homes there was music of one kind or another. In their leisure hours men loved to sing to the accompaniment of the melodious Thambur.[33] Some practiced on the Mridanga, some on the Veena, and some other on the Gotu Vadhya.[34] The Ganapathi festival, annually celebrated in West Main Street, attracted huge crowds of music lovers, when men rivalled with one another to show their skill. The love of the fine arts among the common folk gave ample opportunities to professional musician, pipers, bandsmen, the exponents of the famous art of Bharata Natya, pith workers,[35] florists, etc., to distinguish themselves. The great Maharashtrian scholars pursued their studies in Sanskrit and Marathi, largely depending upon their modest private incomes. Every year, Maharashtrians from all

[32] In the original text the older form "Mahratta" is used; modern usage prefers "Maratha".

[33] A long-necked bowed melodic instrument (as opposed to the tambura, used for drone accompaniment).

[34] The *mridangam* is a double-headed drum; the (Saraswati) *vina* is a plucked string instrument; the *gottuvadhyam* is a variant of the *vina.* All three are characteristic traditional South Indian—Carnatic—musical instruments.

[35] "Pith work": a traditional craft of Tanjore. The spongy pith from the stem of a marsh plant, the Indian waterweed *(Aeschynomene aspera),* is used to model ritual objects used in Śaiva ceremonies and other works of local religious art.

over India halted at Tanjore on their way to Rameswar.[36] At Tanjore they always had a warm welcome. Such of them as were musicians gave their performances and listened to Tanjore music with rapt attention and all had enormous cultural gains. Such of them as were Sanskrit or Marathi scholars gave and listened to many discourses, to mutual advantage. After the famous Vishnu Bava Morgaumkar[37] made his famous Kirtans at Tanjore year after year, a regular stream of Kirtankars from all over India visited Tanjore and blessed the people with their Kirtanas, and they in turn received the homage of the people and their patronage, which in terms of money continued to diminish with the decrease in the material resources of the people. Men like Rajwade[38] came and collected Marathi manuscripts of historical value. I have myself listened to many Marathi kirtans of the famous Ramachandra Bava of Benares[39] and attended some of the musical performance and Bharata Natyams of some of the celebrities in their respective arts. I saw before my eyes all this sweetness and all this grandeur passing away, with nothing worth mentioning to take its place.

In my own house where I spent most of my vacations, the morning programme included a group study of some great Marathi classic like Dasa bodha,[40] Gnaneswari,[41] Ekanathswami's Ramayana,[42] etc. Verse by verse these great books were read and explained in Marathi to a large group of listeners young and old. Every Saturday and every Ekadasi there was Marathi Bhajan.[43] The sound of the cymbal and chipri used to fill my soul with inexpressible joy.[44] My own grand-aunt, who by the way did not know to read or write, knew by heart

View of the old moat and castle walls. The rear part of the Brihadishvara temple gopuram can be seen next to the old moat. Photo by Samuel Bourne, 1869.

[36] South Indian pilgrimage site.

[37] A representative of the Gwalior kirtan dynasty who later settled in Tanjore.

[38] Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade (1863–1926), the first scholarly researcher of Maratha history.

[39] Ramchandra Bhava Morgamvkar (1812–1881).

[40] A 17th-century Maratha work summarizing the oral teachings of Samartha Ramdas Swami (c. 1608–c. 1681), representing both the paths of *jñāna* (knowledge) and *bhakti* (devotion).

[41] The *Bhagavad Gītā* commentary written in his teens by Jñāneśvar (1275–1296), a Marathi saint; one of the earliest extant works in the Marathi language.

[42] Eknath Swami (1533–1599), a poet, philosopher, and saint of Maharashtra.

[43] *Ekādaśī* is the eleventh day after each full moon and new moon, of great religious significance in Hinduism. A *bhajan* is a devotional song with musical accompaniment.

[44] The *chipli* is a pair of small handheld cymbals commonly used in *bhajan*s.

> literally hundreds of Abhang,[45] Padas,[46] Ovis,[47] Bhupalis,[48] etc., which she used to sing every morning in most delightful tunes. The cult of Pandharpur[49] was verily a living reality. In the bhajana hall, over the pictures of Rama and Krishna, there hung the portrait with only the loin cloth of Sri Samarth Ramdas Swami. The story was often repeated to me, and every time I loved to listen to it with the same joy, as to how Ramdas Swami came all the way to Tanjore, when there were no railways, to found Big Mutt at Tanjore.[50] I loved to see the copy of the great Dasabodh written or used by Ramdas himself still happily preserved by the family in-charge of the Mutt. I knew that this great saint was the spiritual guru of the great Sivaji himself.[51] I remember the occasion when the Sivaji *janmothsav*[52] was celebrated at Tanjore. The picture is unforgettable. The portrait of the great national hero was put in a howdah on a Palace elephant. There were camels, horses and uniformed retainers in front. The Palace nobles including the two grandsons of the last ruler walked in procession, along with a large crowd of Maharashtrian and non-Maharashtrian citizens. To my young mind Mahratta history and Mahratta traditions acquired a new meaning and a new fascination. The rapidly growing impoverishment of the community and the intellectual stagnation and decay that appeared to have set in had also a pathetic significance to me. A good many old families had lost all, and were leaving Tanjore for good in search of employment elsewhere.

This account makes it evident not only how profoundly Tanjore was devastated by the liquidation of the kingdom in 1855, but also how intensely traditional culture, in all its diverse aspects, remained present even in this materially and culturally diminished condition. This encompassed not only the forms of culture organised and maintained by the state, but also the surprisingly prominent role that the arts and sacred sciences played within individual households—a role almost inconceivable in modern family life. If this was the state of Tanjore's cultural, artistic, religious, and intellectual life in decline, one can only wonder what it must have been like in the days of its full splendour. In historical assessment, the Shivaji period (1832–1855) is often portrayed in rather negative colours, particularly in contrast to the preceding Serfoji period (1798–1835). While there may indeed have been substantial differences between the two, this description makes it clear that the pre-annexation Shivaji era was marked by a cultural, scholarly, and religious vibrancy that is hardly imaginable today. The protagonist of our study was raised in this period and lived through both the great rupture of 1855 and the decline that followed—yet his individual career was subsequently shaped by entirely different circumstances.

IV. Ramaswami Pillai

And this is the point at which we must return to the two Ponnambalam brothers, Ramanathan and Arunachalam, and to the man who visited them in 1888—a man whose influence brought about a profound transformation in their very being. This man was none other than Ramaswami Pillai (Rāmasvāmi Piḷḷai), who some thirty years earlier had visited Mutu Coomaraswamy as the

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[45] A devotional song dedicated to the deity Viṭṭhal, popular in the Maharashtra region.

[46] South Indian dance music.

[47] Rhythmic prose; one of the oldest South Indian song forms.

[48] A Hindustani classical *raga.*

[49] An ancient pilgrimage city in the state of Maharashtra.

[50] Mutt is the anglicized form of Sanskrit *matha;* a mutt is a multifaceted religious establishment encompassing various spiritual, educational, and social functions.

[51] (1630–1680) The greatest Maratha ruler, founder of the Maratha Empire that encompassed much of the Indian subcontinent.

[52] Birthday celebration.

mahārāṇī's envoy. By this time, however, he appeared not merely as an emissary, but as the possessor—and teacher—of the ultimate, transhuman realisation *(mokṣa)*.

The year of Ramaswami Pillai's birth is unknown, but when he reappeared in Ceylon in 1888, contemporary accounts described him as being around seventy years old, suggesting that he was born circa 1818, presumably in Tanjore. This date, however, seems somewhat early, since his teacher in literature and language, the renowned Tamil scholar and poet Minakshi Sundaram Pillai, was born in 1815, and it is unlikely that there was a mere three-year difference between master and disciple. I would therefore place Ramaswami Pillai's birth around 1825.[53]

As often happens with extraordinary people, his birth was preceded by signs. His mother first gave birth to a daughter, but the little girl fell gravely ill when she was only a few years old. Her mother nursed her devotedly, yet the child's condition did not improve—it only grew worse. One day, when the exhausted mother fell asleep, she had a dream: Murugan, the god of war and wisdom, appeared before her, clad in the ochre robes of ascetics, his hair crowned with *rudrākṣa* beads,[54] holding a spear in his hand. The mother pointed to her daughter and said, "Look, Lord, in what state she is!" The deity replied, "Foolish woman, is that what you call a child? From now on, six months hence, one of my devotees shall enter your womb. He will be your child." When the mother awoke from her dream, she found her daughter lying dead in bed. In six months, according to the words of the god Murugan, she conceived by her husband. The child was born and grew up well, and from the age of sixteen he became a fervent devotee of Murugan.

One day, while he was at the Brihadisvara Chola Temple in Tanjore, he fell asleep and, like his mother, had a dream. In his vision, the god Murugan appeared to him in ochre robes, seated on his throne, covered in sacred ash, his hair crowned with *rudrākṣa* beads, surrounded by *ṛṣi*s and *siddha*s. The young man at once approached the deity, prostrated himself before him, and the god, as is customary in the Śaiva scriptures, placed his foot upon the young man's head, anointed him with holy ash, and, after inscribing letters upon his tongue, said: "We shall come to you to initiate you." After this dream, Ramaswami Pillai effortlessly mastered the various sacred sciences—the Śaiva, Siddhānta, and Vedānta philosophies, as well as the hidden teachings of the *siddha*s. Yet sacred knowledge, *scientia sacra,* did not satisfy him. In time, a longing awoke within him for ultimate, absolute knowledge—*jñāna*.

On one occasion, while on his way to Kumbakonam,[55] about nineteen miles from Tanjore, to carry out a mundane errand,[56] Murugan kept his promise and appeared before him as his master, in the earthly form of the guru Tillainathan Swami.[57] Mature souls recognise their Master at once—and so it was with Ramaswami Pillai.

VI. Tillainathan Swami

The figure of Tillainathan Swami is rather obscure, yet some contours of his life can still be discerned. He came from a wealthy ship-owning merchant family in one of the towns along the Bay of Bengal, not far from Tanjore. Having attained *mokṣa,* or ultimate liberation, he gave up all

[53] That is, when he carried out his first mission to Ceylon in 1857, he must have been about thirty-three years old.

[54] The berry of *Eleocarpus ganitrus,* worn by mendicant monks, and also used as the beads of the Indian "rosary".

[55] Kumbakonam is one of the major pilgrimage sites and cultural centres of South India.

[56] Since Shivaji was already dead, Arulparananda's patron must have been the senior widowed *mahārāṇī*.

[57] For biographical details, see P. Arunachalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 57–60. The meeting between Ramaswami Pillai and Tillainathan Swami probably took place in the latter half of the 1850s, when Shivaji II was no longer alive.

worldly attachments, distributed his possessions, and became a forest hermit. As is often the case, his mother and siblings did everything in their power to dissuade him, but to no avail. Between 1857 and 1872 he was seen in Tanjore on several occasions, but thereafter he disappeared completely.

The single episode that throws any real light on Tillainathan's personality is bound up with a specific historical affair. In the midst of the so-called Sepoy Mutiny (the Indian Rebellion) of 1857–1859,[58] one of the rebellion's leaders—the commander of the Kanpur forces and one of India's most celebrated freedom fighters, Nana Sahib (1824–1857, year of disappearance)—went into hiding. Nana Sahib was the adopted son of the Peshwa Baji Rao II (1775–1851) and a claimant to the Maratha throne.[59] The British authorities refused to recognise the adoption, and Nana Sahib, unwilling to accept the loss of his claim, took command of the rebel forces at Kanpur. After suffering defeat, he slipped into hiding; despite exhaustive efforts by the British to capture him, he was never found. Some conjectured that, disguised as an ascetic,[60] he was hiding in India's vast forests.[61] The authorities reasonably suspected that he might have made his way towards Tanjore, which had been a Maratha kingdom, that all ascetics in the Tanjore district be brought before the authorities for inspection in the hope of discovering Nana Sahib among them. Tillainathan was among those brought before the sub-magistrate of Kumbakonam. It was immediately apparent that he could not be the wanted man; nevertheless, on seeing his austere appearance, the officials told him that, by government decree, he was henceforth required to adopt proper attire. The sub-magistrate, however, was sympathetic to Tillainathan and, suspecting the ascetic would not comply, arranged for a wealthy Tamil trader to stand bail for him in the circumstances. But when the merchant saw Tillainathan, he hesitated to act as surety, for he perceived that no one could properly call a man revered as a saint to account—least of all in a matter at odds with Hindu custom. To this the ascetic replied: "Quite right, it is no good your standing bail for me; the English government itself could not stand bail for one who creates and destroys governments.[62] I will be bail for myself." Finally, Tillainathan told Morris that he would punish him for his ignorance. "What will you do?" asked the astonished chief officer. "If you don't do justice, I will burn you", said Tillainathan. At this, the Tamil servants standing around them were terrified, for they believed that Tillainathan could indeed make good on his threat. Morris then ordered the inspector to read the Lunacy Act to Tillainathan, but the inspector's hand was trembling so badly that he could not even spell out the words. Then Tillainathan turned to him kindly and said not to be afraid, that he himself would explain the law in detail—and so he did, demonstrating to Morris that it did not apply to his case at all but, in fact, to the proceedings of the chief officer himself, who therefore ought to be declared insane. At that point, Morris had no choice but to release him.

However, as he too was reproached for his conduct, he visited the *jñānī* together with Judge George Thomas Beauchamp—who, based on prior information, had already been deeply impressed by Tillainathan's personality—at the house in Tanjore where the ascetic was staying, with the unspoken intention of taking him into custody. To that end, they brought along an ap-

[58] The word *sepoy* is a corrupted form of the Persian–Urdu *sipāhī,* meaning "cavalry soldier". The mutiny was sparked by Indian-born soldiers serving in the British army.

[59] The *pēśavā* held a rank comparable to that of a *rāja* in the Maratha kingdoms—that is, the *peshwa* was the *de facto* ruler.

[60] Indian ascetics are often virtually naked.

[61] For Nana Sahib, see Pratul Chandra Gupta, *Nana Sahib and the Rising at Cawnpore.*

[62] *Cf.* Christ's words to Pilate: "You would have no power over me if it had not been given you from above." (John 19:11).

propriate police escort. Upon their arrival, Tillainathan asked them whether they thought the English authorities had any right to take action against him. Morris replied that they did not intend to engage in a philosophical discussion on the matter, and that, if necessary, they would invoke the power of the law. Tillainathan then asked how they could possibly use force against him. "We have our own laws, and men to enforce them", Morris replied. "And I too have my own laws, and in their defence I can command forces far greater than yours", answered Tillainathan threateningly. Once again, they left him, and from that time on the British authorities thought it wiser not to interfere any further in the matter—most likely because they realized that the arrest of a revered holy man, merely for his religious defiance, could have had unforeseeable consequences.[63]

Indeed, Tillainathan Swami was a rather remarkable figure who disregarded all conventions—and for that very reason could easily appear to an English gentleman as a madman. On one occasion, for example, he lay down to sleep in the middle of the street, causing a serious obstruction to traffic; on another, he ate from a pariah's dog's bowl.[64] Perhaps his strangest trait, however, was that he so completely experienced his identity with the universe that he spoke of natural phenomena in the first person, identifying himself with the wind, the lightning, and the sunshine. Arunachalam describes him thus:

> [Tillainathan Swami] was a vigorous ascetic. He was a wealthy merchant and abandoned home in the prime of life and roamed over forest and mountain, a true child of Nature, as sentimental Europeans would call him, but I would call him Master of Nature, or rather Nature herself, for had he not become one with the God-space I was speaking of?[65] He made no difference in his way of living when he found himself in towns. He would go about unwashed and naked.[66] A king or pariah, man or dog alike to him. He would lie with equal dignity and indifference on a dust-heap or in a palace. The same to him whether he was feasted and worshipped or abused and ill-treated. A magnificent specimen, physically, of the genus *Homo;* a true king among men. To outward appearance a madman, yet when he chanced to speak in private to his favorite disciple, a flood of wisdom poured forth. It was not the man speaking, but the God within directly and in all purity, unclogged by the coarse environments which imprison us ordinary mortals.[67]

VI. Arulparananda

Ramaswami Pillai met this Tillainathan Swami on the road from Tanjore to Kumbakonam—and immediately recognized him as his master. The master initiated him into his teaching, and upon initiation he received the name Arulparananda (Aruḷparānanda). The name is composed of the Tamil *aruḷ* ("grace"), and the Sanskrit *parā* ("transcendent") and *ānanda* ("bliss"). Its approximate meaning is therefore "the transcendent bliss of grace".

Ramaswami Pillai, however, presumably did not use his initiatory name. On the one hand, he did not use it because, as we shall soon see, he kept his true identity secret from almost everyone; on the other hand, such initiatory names were borne only by those who had taken the saṃnyāsa

[63] The source of the story is Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* pp. 6–8.

[64] Such examples have been plentiful among holy men of all ages and places. For example, when Jacopone da Todi (c. 1230–1306) was invited to a celebration, he appeared, to everyone's astonishment, nearly naked and on all fours, bearing a donkey's pack-saddle on his back and a bit in his mouth, and so crawled from one guest to another among the illustrious company. See Evelyn Underhill, *Jacopone da Todi,* p. 64.

[65] *God-space*—actually *cit-ākāśa (cidākāśa)*—that is, the all-encompassing, undifferentiated Divine Reality.

[66] This is essentially the Taoist—particularly Chuang Tzu's—idea of "carefree wandering". See *Zhuangzi* I, pp. 3–14 ("Wandering in Absolute Freedom").

[67] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 44–45.

vow and, having renounced all family ties, had chosen the monastic life. All the monastic disciples of Ramakrishna, for instance, bore such names: Vivekananda (Narendranath Datta), Abhedananda (Kaliprasad Chandra), Turiyananda (Harinath Chattopadhyay), and so on, while his most famous lay disciple, who preserved for us Ramakrishna's oral teachings, was Mahendranath Gupta.

But initiation *(dīkṣā)* is only the first step in a long spiritual journey. From that time on, Arulparananda stayed with his master for three years—just as the master stayed with his disciple. They spent part of their time in Tanjore, and the rest wandering among the sacred sites of South India or living in forest seclusion, so that Arulparananda could devote himself undisturbed to the practice—that is, in the terminology of Tillainathan and Arulparananda, to yoga.[68] Regarding the latter, Arulparananda remarked: "During my initiation I often wandered about the woods all night, and many times saw wild beasts, but they never harmed me—as indeed they cannot harm the initiated."[69] When they were in Tanjore, his wife did everything she could to ensure that her husband could devote himself to yoga without disturbance—which for her naturally entailed the danger that her husband, having succeeded in the path of yoga, would sooner or later leave her, as ascetics are wont to do—and, based on the case of Tillainathan Swami, she had every reason to think so.

During this period, of course, Arulparananda withdrew from all social obligations, though he would not have been able to fulfil them anyway because of the period of silence prescribed by his master. He spent most of his time in deep introspection under the supervision of his guru.

Although Arulparananda was not as radical a personality as his master, he was unique enough to make a strong impression on more sensitive souls. Above all, he combined secular and spiritual–metaphysical learning at a very high level. Let us not forget that Arulparananda, in the employ of the last *rāja* of the Tanjore Maratha kingdom, was the confidant and adviser of the first man of a country of two million people, and that after the *rāja*'s death, the widow, the senior *mahārāṇī,* entrusted him with a most delicate political mission. The very fact that he was found worthy of such a post clearly shows that he had attained a particularly high level of education at a relatively young age, which, as we have seen, he acquired in rather exceptional ways. As an adviser to the *rāja,* he must have gained considerable expertise in such typically worldly fields as politics, administration, law, and finance. To fill such a high-ranking advisory position, however, requires not only knowledge and discernment, but also a balanced, sober, and realistic cast of mind. At the same time, Tanjore was a renowned cultural centre, and almost all the Maratha rulers were great patrons of the arts and sciences.

Tanjore stood out among the other kingdoms especially in the fields of music and dance, but its most distinctive feature was its uniquely rich library, the result of three centuries of devoted collecting. In particular, the last *rāja*'s predecessor, Serfoji II—blessed with exceptional linguistic talent and regarded as highly educated even by European standards—greatly enriched the library's holdings.[70] The roughly seventy thousand Sanskrit, Tamil, Marathi, and Telugu manuscripts preserved in the Saraswati Mahal Library began to be published in fifty-two volumes from

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[68] According to Arulparananda's terminology, the one who advances toward the ultimate goal is called a "yogi", while the one who has attained the goal is called a *"jñānī"*.

[69] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 13.

[70] Serfoji II was a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, and besides his native Tamil, he was fluent in Telugu, Sanskrit, Urdu, and Persian. During his extended stay in Europe, he also mastered Greek, Latin, English, French, German, Danish, and Dutch—all this as a South Indian *rāja* of the late 18th and early 19th centuries!

Sri Arulparananda Swamigal

1928 onwards.[71] If anyone had such access, it was Arulparananda—who, as the rāja's chief adviser, could consult the library freely. The majority of its Tamil material consisted of works on traditional medicine, and, as Edward Carpenter noted, Arulparananda was thoroughly familiar with this field as well; people around him often turned to him for medical advice.

Presumably, even before he attained *jñāna* and *mokṣa*—that is, absolute metaphysical knowledge and ultimate liberation—he had already been given by those around him the epithet Ilakkanam (Tamil *ilakkaṇam*—"grammarian", "scholar of language"). This term, however, does not so much denote the modern profession of a "linguist" as rather that of a biblical "scribe": an *ilakkanam* is one who is deeply versed in the ancient Tamil language, particularly in texts dealing with the traditional sciences and in the commentarial literature related to sacred scriptures.[72]

Carpenter remarked that being in his presence felt like being in the company of a Vedic *ṛṣi* from three thousand years ago, while Arunachalam described him as "by far the most learned and cultured man I have ever known", endowed with as fine a sense for practical affairs as for the most intricate legal question.[73]

Returning to Arulparananda's spiritual practices under his master, we find that his persistent efforts were at last rewarded:

> One day the student finds that Thought has gone; he stands for a moment in Oblivion; then that veil lifts, and there streams through his vision a vast and illumined consciousness, glorious, that fills and overflows him. [...] In this consciousness there is divine knowledge but no thought. It is *Samadhi,* the universal "I Am"

—as Carpenter presents this ultimate consummation, based on the narrative of Arulparananda.[74] Then Arulparananda's eyes were opened to a region which knew "neither day nor night", and in which he could behold "strange and wonderful things".[75] From then on, regardless of the external circumstances of his life, his inner state was, as he himself said, *"sandosham, san-*

[71] See the series of *A Descriptive Catalogue of The Sanskrit/Tamil/Marathi/Telugu Manuscripts in the Tanjore Mahārāja Serfoji's Sarasvatī Mahāl Library.*

[72] For the traditional function of *ilakkaṇam,* see Paula Richman, *Extraordinary Child,* p. 266.

[73] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. VII. and P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* p. 43.

[74] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 34.

[75] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 39.

dosham eppotham" ("happiness, uninterrupted happiness"). When he reached the ultimate goal, the supreme knowledge *(jñāna)* and supreme freedom *(mokṣa),* his master told him: "There is no difference between house and forest. You may remain in domestic life."[76] From then on, Arulparananda spent most of his time at home, surrounded by his family yet absorbed in himself, in a state of *samādhi;* but whenever anyone approached him with a problem, he was always available.

The attainment of *jñāna* may have taken place sometime in the years following the end of the rajaship, in the late 1850s or early 1860s, and thus his "official" duties also came to an end. He retained, however, a close relationship with the *rāja's* family, especially the senior *mahārāṇī,* whose spiritual guide he was, but who also employed his services in special secular matters—for example, she sent him to Mutu Coomaraswamy in the affair mentioned above.

VII. Interlude

Ramaswami Pillai's special status and qualities are well illustrated by a story preserved from the middle of the nineteenth century

Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai was a renowned poet, literary scholar, and linguist of his time, who was deemed notable enough to merit an independent entry even in the Hungarian *Világirodalmi Lexikon* (Encyclopaedia of World Literature).[77] Born in Tiruchirapalli in 1815, Sundaram Pillai was both a practitioner and a scholar of classical Tamil. He was already a renowned scholar and poet when he joined the prestigious Śaivite mutt of Thiruvaduthurai (officially Thiruvaduthurai Adheenam), founded in the fourteenth century. It functioned simultaneously as a school, monastery, research institute, publishing house, and religious centre for the entire region.[78] His biography was written by his grateful student, U. V. Swaminatha Iyer (1855–1942), whose name has even surpassed that of his master.[79]

In Chapter 19 of his book, titled "The Ambassador", Swaminatha Iyer recounts how a judge named Rangaswami Pillai—known for his incorruptibility—was transferred from Madurai to Tanjore. The judge was careful to avoid even the appearance of partiality. At the same time, he was deeply religious and a great lover of classical Tamil literature. It had long been a tradition in the mutt to invite newly appointed officials from nearby towns to a ceremonial reception, allowing the leaders of the mutt to make their acquaintance. The then head of the mutt, Ambalavana Desikar, naturally intended to do the same this time, but those who had already heard of the new judge warned him: "It would be no use. It is something that cannot be done. Who has heard of Rangaswami Pillai going anywhere on a visit? Many have tried to see him—officials as well as non-officials—but the door has remained shut in their faces. That man is quite inaccessible."

However, these reports did not dissuade the leader of the mutt; on the contrary, they only made him more curious, and he thought of finding someone to mediate between the mutt and the judge. Seeing how preoccupied his superior was with the matter, one of his subordinates advised him not to listen to those who wished to dissuade him from inviting the judge, for although the judge was indeed a difficult man, he knew someone before whom nothing was impossible. The leader's eyes lit up, but when the subordinate recommended Sundaram Pillai for this special task, he was immediately discouraged; although he knew that Sundaram Pillai was a poet and

[76] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* p. 60.

[77] *Világirodalmi Lexikon* VIII, col. 419a.

[78] Mutt is the anglicized version of the Sanskrit *maṭha.*

[79] See *Világirodalmi Lexikon* XIV. cols. 868b–869a.

scholar of repute, he thought such a delicate diplomatic task could not be entrusted to so quiet and reclusive a man. In the end, however, since no other solution presented itself, he agreed to send Sundaram Pillai to Tanjore as an emissary of sorts, saying that it was at least worth a try.

Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai

Sundaram Pillai was not happy about the task, but eventually accepted it. Along the way, he wondered who he might turn to for help first. Then he remembered his former student, Ramaswami Pillai, who had since become a distinguished literary scholar, and thought that his knowledge of the locality might prove useful. So, upon arriving in Tanjore, he went straight to his house. Although he did not find him at home, Ramaswami soon returned and was delighted to discover his venerable teacher waiting for him. He hosted his former teacher and his entourage. That evening Sundaram Pillai did not yet disclose the purpose of his visit; the next morning, however, as they walked together, he revealed his mission: to persuade the new judge to visit the Thiruvaduthurai mutt.

Ramaswami Pillai immediately understood the situation.

"What people say is true. The judge has made such a reputation wherever he is posted. He never sees, or is seen by anyone outside the strict requirements of duty and that too at court. But I am lucky. I have the privilege of studying with him in his spare time works like Tiruvilaiyadal and Peria Puranam. He has the highest regard for men of learning. As Master is here in person he is bound to succeed. I shall go to him now and inform him of Master's arrival in this town. I am sure Master will be sent for. I shall come myself or send someone on my behalf."

Of course, Sundaram Pillai was very happy at this unexpectedly favourable turn of events.

As soon as Ramaswami arrived at the judge's house, the latter instinctively reached for his book, but Ramaswami stopped him.

"I have today something important to communicate and request I may be permitted to do so."

"By all means, yes", replied the judge.

"Your Honour is sure to have heard of Mahā Vidwan Minakshisundaram Pillai. He is usually described as the Kamban of the present age. Kamban composed ten thousand stanzas.[80] Mahā Vidwan Pillai has already written several times that ten thousand and is likely to write a good deal more in the days to come. He is an inspired poet; he always composes extempore. Poetry comes to him as naturally as breathing. The Goddess of Learning surely dwells on his tongue and touches his lips as he begins to speak. He is second to none in his devotion too, for he glorifies God everyday in thought, word and deed. The number of his pupils is legion. He has taught them all freely, without taking a fee. What he has earned in other ways, he has lavished on them, feeding them and clothing them at his expense and they carved out successful careers for themselves, thanks to his help. I have never seen or heard of the like of him. I studied under him. Whenever I have doubts, I go to him to get them cleared. The Holy Mutt at Tiruvaavaduturai is fortunate to have him now as Court Poet in residence. Most part of each day he is coaching successive sets of scholars there."[81]

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[80] Kamban or Kambar was a 12th-century Tamil poet who enjoyed particular popularity in 19th- and early 20th-century Tamil Nadu, and whose name eventually became a common noun.

[81] Ramaswami was not exaggerating: to this day, Sundaram Pillai is regarded as the most celebrated figure of the mutt.

The judge had, of course, already heard of the poet—and not only heard of him, but would have liked to meet him himself—yet, as he said, his judicial office did not allow it.

It was then that Ramaswami mentioned that this eminent literary figure was currently in Tanjore, and, moreover, was staying in his own house, as he had once been his pupil. The judge was particularly surprised and delighted to learn from Ramaswami that Sundaram Pillai had heard of him and wished to make his acquaintance.

The judge immediately decided to visit Sundaram Pillai, but Ramaswami dissuaded him.

"No, please, he fully realizes the dignity of your exalted office and would not forgive me if I took you there to see him. Give me the necessary permission and I shall take him here."

But the judge felt himself unworthy to receive such a distinguished man in his own house, and instead wished to go to Ramaswami's house and wait outside to receive the blessings of Sundaram Pillai.

Ramaswami, however, insisted on his original intention.

"Your Honour has not done such a thing before and I for one, would never countenance deviation from that practice."

So the judge placed his own carriage at Ramaswami's disposal, and the latter returned home to bring Sundaram Pillai with him.

The judge received his illustrious visitor at the gate, led him inside, garlanded him, offered fruits, and prostrated himself upon the ground before him:

"I feel greatly honoured by this visit. I ought to have come and paid my respects to you where you are staying, but was prevented by our friend from doing so. I pray I may be excused for that."

"My Master is a divinely inspired poet", said Ramaswami, "and if he were to compose a verse in Your Honour's name, it would be a benediction and a harbinger of good fortune".

But the judge again protested, feeling himself unworthy to be named in verse by the greatest poet of the age, and asked that instead he should mention his native land—the kingdom of Pandya—in his poem.

Ramaswami turned to the poet and said:

"It is up to you, sir, to fulfil the wishes of both of us and pronounce a blessing on both His Honour to satisfy me and Pandya Desa to satisfy him, if possible in one and the same verse."

Ramaswami had scarcely finished speaking when the poem was ready.

Where else are found these fortunes two—
Learning and Wealth—so well combined?
Where else have God and Goddess too,
With mighty Skanda, sovereign, shined?
Where else hath Rangaswami true
Dispensed just rule with steadfast mind,
If not in this Pandyan state we woo,
Belov'd the most of all mankind?

Although Ramaswami was well aware of his master's unique powers, even he was astonished by this verse. Rangaswami stood speechless, tears of emotion in his eyes, saying that he would remember the moment for the rest of his life.

When, after the long conversation, Ramaswami and Sundaram Pillai were about to leave, Rangaswami took Ramaswami aside and quietly asked his advice: what would he say if, as a token

of gratitude, he offered Sundaram Pillai three months of his income?[82] Ramaswami, however, dissuaded him, saying that Sundaram Pillai was entirely indifferent to money; but that by evening he would try to learn his true wish and return to inform the judge. And so it happened.

"He desires only one thing", reported Ramaswami. "His spiritual preceptor is Head of the mutt at Tiruvaavaduturai. He would be happy if Your Honour would grace the occasion of the Guru Pooja there next month."

The judge was surprised that so eminent a man as Sundaram Pillai should need a spiritual master, but of course he agreed to the request. For his part, he only asked that, since many people visited the mutt during the Guru Pūjā, he might come at a quieter time.[83]

After Ramaswami conveyed the judge's request, Sundaram Pillai assured the judge through Ramaswami that his visit would always be a great honour for the mutt.

The head of the mutt, Ambalavana Desikar, was delighted to learn that the judge had agreed to visit the mutt, but made no secret of his view that he would only believe it when the judge was already there. His concern, however, proved unfounded: the visit duly took place, to the satisfaction of all, though Ramaswami himself did not take part.

The incident probably took place in 1865 (probably took place around 1865, give or take a year), two or three years after Tillainathan's trial. By 1865, Ramaswami had most certainly reached the end of his spiritual journey—that is, he had attained *jñāna,* ultimate metaphysical knowledge, and *mokṣa,* ultimate liberation. (His period of discipleship under Tillainathan Swami probably fell in the latter half of the 1850s.) This means that when his master, Sundaram Pillai, visited him, Ramaswami was already, in truth, Arulparananda. His master was, of course, only his master in the Tamil language and literature, and it is clear that neither he nor the judge had any idea who Ramaswami truly was beyond that. It is also clear that although the poet Sundaram Pillai stands at the centre of the story—originally recorded by another of his disciples, apparently from his master's account—the key figure throughout is not the famous poet but the almost anonymous Ramaswami.

The relationship between the judge and Ramaswami likely originated not with Ramaswami himself but with the judge, who had perhaps heard of him through the widowed queen of Tanjore, Kamakshi Bai Sahiba. It is quite certain that the new judge had met the queen—if only *ex officio*—who, in turn, had Ramaswami as her confidant and spiritual guide. It must have become clear, during their conversation, how much the judge loved Tamil literature, and the royal Saraswati Mahal Library of Tanjore was famous far and wide. It is easy to imagine that the judge asked the queen for permission to use the library, and that it was then that his special interest came to light. The queen may have mentioned that she knew someone who was an eminent scholar in Tamil language and letters. Naturally, the judge could hardly have undertaken to visit Ramaswami in person, and may have mentioned this to the queen, who likely resolved the difficulty by asking Ramaswami to call upon the judge. Thus was established the Tamil literary relationship that enabled Sundaram Pillai to crown his mission with success through his former disciple.

This story sheds light on many things: it shows, on the one hand, the high status of poetry and language at the time, and that doors opened readily to those who excelled in these fields. It also highlights the fact that there were judges who were absolutely incorruptible, impartial and unbiased, and who were even careful not to form connections outside their office that might give

[82] The fact that a well-paid judge was willing to offer three months' salary for such a brief poem clearly shows the high esteem in which poetry was held in India at that time.

[83] The *guru puja* is the principal festival of a particular sacred place, roughly corresponding to the patronal feast celebrated in Catholic churches in honour of their patron saint.

rise to gossip. Yet in this judge, extraordinary professional integrity was combined with a deep love for Tamil language and letters. One might say that this love was the judge's Achilles' heel, for that reason he met regularly—though surely in secret—with the city's most eminent scholar to learn from him. Naturally, it should have been the disciple who visited his teacher, but Ramaswami, seeing how much the judge valued the reputation of his office, went to him instead.

However, it is Ramaswami's figure that is of far greater importance to us. It is clear that he handled this delicate matter with exceptional diplomatic tact—to everyone's complete satisfaction. Ramaswami conducted himself both resourcefully and nobly. This story also explains why the queen entrusted the scholar Ramaswami with perhaps her most delicate secret political mission: to visit Mutu Coomaraswamy and ask him to intercede on her behalf with the British Crown. Ramaswami was therefore not only an outstanding scholar but also a man of remarkable political and diplomatic skill—all of which he exercised while remaining entirely in the background himself.

But Ramaswami remained in the background not only in worldly matters but also in spiritual ones. Apparently, not only the judge, but even his teacher, Sundaram Pillai, was unaware that in Ramaswami they were in fact revering not only a scholar but a *jñānī* as well. Ramaswami could conduct himself in such a way as to conceal his true spiritual status even from his close acquaintances, revealing it only to those in whom he recognised a receptivity to higher knowledge. This is why his two Hindu disciples, Ramanathan and Arunachalam, both kept their master's identity secret—and it was only Carpenter who later revealed that he had met such an extraordinary man in Ceylon.

VIII. The master and his students

According to Ramanathan's biographer, Vythilingam, the dowager queen was also behind Arulparananda's second recorded journey to Ceylon. He states that the royal family had reached a consensus regarding the heir, and that the *mahārāṇī* once again sent Arulparananda—this time to Mutu Coomaraswamy's nephew, Ramanathan—to intercede with the British authorities on behalf of the late *rāja*'s grandson.[84] However, this seems highly improbable, since the *mahārāṇī* died in 1885, three years before Arulparananda's second journey to Ceylon, and the heir recognised by both the family and the public was the *rāja*'s only surviving daughter.[85] Nor should we forget one very important point: thirty years had passed between the two missions. What might have had some political reality immediately after the *rāja*'s death had, thirty years later, lost all possible relevance. Moreover, Ramanathan himself never hinted that Arulparananda had visited him for any political reason—quite the opposite, in fact: he explicitly stated that it was not a political matter. We therefore do not know why, thirty years after his first mission, Arulparananda reappeared in Ceylon in 1888, unless it was precisely for what did occur: that Ceylon's two Tamil political leaders, especially Ramanathan, might be led onto the path of yoga. It is not inconceivable that even Arulparananda himself came to Ramanathan following some obscure inner prompting; for, as Arunachalam wrote to Carpenter, *"he came here to us, strangers, he knew not why"*.[86]

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[84] M. Vythilingam, *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan* I, p. 328.

[85] In this regard see William Hickey, *The Tanjore Mahratta Principality in Southern India,* pp. 138–184 (the chapter "The present Princess of Tanjore")

[86] Chamu Kuppuswamy (ed.), Edward Carpenter and Ponnambalam Arunachalam, s. p.

All we know for certain is that in 1888, in Sukhastan—the splendid residence of Ramanathan, equipped with every comfort[87]—a strange visitor suddenly appeared. Although Ramanathan had from the beginning shown interest in the deeper dimensions of religion—as had both his father and his foster-father, Mutu Coomaraswamy—he at first reacted with the typical attitude of those long accustomed to power: he demanded to know who this barefoot visitor was and how he dared to intrude upon him in his own home. But Arulparananda told him, in a tone that brooked no contradiction, that he had come to change his life. Ramanathan looked at the barefoot man with suspicion, yet there was something in his bearing, in his very presence, that filled him with awe and reverence. Suddenly realising the weight of his own transgressions, he apologised through tears for his behaviour. From that moment, he became the disciple of the Stranger. When he met his brother Arunachalam, he immediately told him about this extraordinary man, and within a few days Arunachalam too had become a disciple of Arulparananda. Arunachalam at once wrote to his close friend Edward Carpenter, saying that he had found the man who no longer groped blindly in the dark, but truly *saw*.

It was these three—Ramanathan, Arunachalam, and Carpenter—who became disciples of Arulparananda, and who, in one way or another, left written traces—directly or indirectly—of their relationship with him. It must be emphasised that this was "in one way or another", because the Ponnambalam brothers, in their public statements—contrary to Vythilingam's view[88]—did not make a single explicit reference to Arulparananda. They regarded their relationship with their master as an entirely private matter; and although they may have revealed the true source of their knowledge and devotion to friends, relatives, or later to their own students, they never did so in any of their published works.[89] This, however, should by no means be regarded as a sign of

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[87] Mutu Coomaraswamy donated a splendid residence in Colombo to each of his three nephews—and, at the same time, his foster children—and "christened" Ramanathan's *Sukhasthan* ("the Land of Happiness") and Arunachalam's *Ponklar* (the meaning of the word *ponklar* remains uncertain). Moncure Daniel Conway (1832–1907), a prominent Emersonian humanist of the time—and a former friend of Mutu Coomaraswamy (Sir Mutu delivered several lectures on Hindu philosophy at his London chapel, and it was at one of Conway's receptions that he met his future wife, Elizabeth)—visited both Ramanathan's and Arunachalam's residences in 1884. He describes them as if he had stepped into an enchanted world, fearing at any moment that a turbaned magician might appear, snap his fingers, and everything would vanish—leaving him once more in foggy London. Visiting Ramanathan's villa, he wondered whether he had found a single "good hotel [...] between San Francisco and Venice" that could compare with *Sukhasthan*; and in Arunachalam's *Ponklar* he saw the earthly realisation of what had once unfolded before his inner eye while reading Saadi's *Gulistan* ("Rose Garden")—but only until Arunachalam's young Sinhalese wife appeared on the scene, for from that moment the lovely setting served merely as a frame for someone who captivated him even more (Moncure Daniel Conway, *My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East*, pp. 143, 113).

[88] *The Life of Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan* I, p. 330: "[Ramanathan] gratefully acknowledged having learned them all at the feet of his beloved Master. The two brothers were never weary of proclaiming to the world their enormous indebtedness to [Arulparananda]."

[89] In *A Visit to a Gñani*—originally a chapter of his travel book *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta*, written during Arunachalam's lifetime—Carpenter, apparently at Arunachalam's request, does not even mention the name of the friend at whose invitation he travelled to Ceylon, and who was present at every one of the conversations between Carpenter and Arulparananda over a period of two months, acting as interlocutor and interpreter. In fact, Arunachalam conceals his personal relationship with Carpenter and Arulparananda even when referring to them directly: "A great living Englishman has written on the control and effacement of thought as practised in India, on the special value of these practices to Westerners, dominated as they are by a fever of thought, and on some of the spiritual experiences thus gained. (Edward Carpenter, *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta,* the chapter 'Methods of Attainment'). The whole book is well worth reading, being the only Western account of India that reveals a knowledge of the great but hidden undercurrents of Indian life." (Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *Studies and Translations,* p. 11; emphasis mine.)

ingratitude. On the contrary, the person of Arulparananda and their relationship with him were so sacred to them that they felt it should not be exposed to the public gaze. Even in the twentieth century, the Eastern mind retained its sensitivity to the esoteric dimension of higher knowledge. When Paul Brunton once tried to persuade a Tamil Tantric yogi to disclose his knowledge, the yogi replied:

> Does a Rajah keep his jewels on the highway for public display? No, he hides them in the treasure chambers deep down in the vaults of his palace. The knowledge of our science is one of the greatest treasures a man can have. Is he to offer it in the bazaar for all and sundry? Whoever desires to grasp this treasure—let him search for it. That is the only way, but it is the right way. Our texts enjoin secrecy again and again, while our masters will reveal the important teachings only to tested disciples who have been faithful to them for some years at least. Ours is the most secret of all the Yogas; it is full of grave dangers, not only to the disciple himself, but to others. Think you that I am allowed to reveal any but its most elementary doctrines to you, or even those without extreme discretion?[90]

So it was with the Ponnambalam brothers. As Arunachalam puts it, referring to the Gospel, *"they* [the *jñānī*s] *do not proclaim these truths from the housetops"*.[91] Nevertheless—or perhaps precisely for that reason—the influence of Arulparananda is invisibly, yet unmistakably, present in all their utterances; and this applies not only to their spiritual writings, but equally to their political activity and public speeches. When Ramanathan, in one of his works, writes about how the *jñānī*s lead hidden lives, and then adds in passing that "at times it is the saint himself who knocks at the seeker's door", he is clearly recalling his own encounter with Arulparananda.

1. *Ponnambalam Ramanathan*

It was Ramanathan who was most deeply influenced by Arulparananda, although he himself never made any direct reference to the *jñānī*. Nevertheless, he formally became Arulparananda's disciple and received from him the initiatory name "Ramanathanandar".[92] He took his master's teaching with such seriousness that, in a certain sense, even his younger brother Arunachalam came to regard him as his own teacher.[93] After his encounter with Arulparananda, Ramanathan united two extremes within a single person: on the one hand, he was one of Ceylon's leading politicians, indeed among the most distinguished statesmen in its history; and on the other, a

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At the same time, after Arunachalam's death, Carpenter, at the family's request, published Arunachalam's letters, which are filled with the most heartfelt expressions of devotion to the Master.

[90] Paul Brunton, *A Search in Secret India,* p. 53.

[91] Chamu Kuppuswamy (ed.), "Edward Carpenter and Ponnambalam Arunachalam", s. p. *Cf.* Matthew 10:27: "What is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs!"

[92] He never actually used this name in his public statements, but he published two books under the name Sri Parananda: *The Gospel of Jesus According to St. Matthew* (1898) and *An Eastern Exposition of the Gospel of Jesus According to St. John* (1902). A dedicated copy of the former, now held in the library of Cornell University, bears the following autograph: "My full name is Ponambalam Rámanáthan." The name *Paránanda* is clearly an abbreviated form of *Arulparananda* (Aruḷparānanda) and indicates that Ramanathan sought, in his works, to represent the spirit of his master. In addition to Paránanda, Ramanathan is also said to have used the name Paránátha, at least according to one of his disciples, Myron H. Phelps—although, to my knowledge, none of his writings were ever published under that name. *Paránátha,* too, is evidently a compound of *Arulparananda* (Aruḷparānanda) and *Ramanathan* (Rámanáthan).

[93] In one of his letters to Carpenter, he writes: "Blessed have I been beyond my deserts, to have the love and guidance of the Master and my brother Ramanathan, the two best and greatest of living men." In another letter—presumably also referring to his brother—he says, "I know one at least who, under our Guru's teaching, is very near [to the ultimate fulfilment]" (Chamu Kuppuswamy [ed.], Edward Carpenter and Ponnambalam Arunachalam, s. p.).

man who, walking the path of *jñāna-yoga,* was concerned only with one goal—the attainment of ultimate, absolute metaphysical knowledge. At first, he spent all his leisure hours with his master—whether in Ceylon (Colombo, Jaffna, Kurunegala) or in South India (Tanjore). After Arulparananda's death, he devoted his free time to the study of sacred scriptures and to the practice of contemplation. While engaged in the affairs of state, no one suspected that he was in communication with a hidden yogi and that what the world saw was only the outer surface of a much deeper being. Naturally, after the publication of his writings on spirituality (in which, of course, he never once mentioned Arulparananda) and after giving public lectures on the subject,[94] it became clear to his compatriots that a new element had entered his interests—though its source remained unknown. Arunachalam describes this inner transformation in a letter to Carpenter with words of admiration:

> You met my brother some years ago in England and if you saw him now you would be able to judge of the change. What a high spiritual and intellectual level he has reached! So calm and happy and wise, and of a truthfulness and courage that nothing can shake.[95]

Ramanathan was thirty-seven when he met Arulparananda. For the following forty-two years, his life moved between politics and spirituality; and, in the modern age, it was probably he—together with the Algerian Emir ʿAbd al-Kādir (1808–1883)—who practised both simultaneously and to the highest degree.[96] Until his last moment, at the age of seventy-nine, he held the highest offices of state, and until his last breath he never ceased striving for spiritual perfection. When his final illness came and he felt that the end was near, he withdrew into solitude, and for ten days, in silence and with eyes closed, he sat absorbed in meditation. When he was no longer able to remain seated, he had himself carried into his library. He remained fully conscious until the very end. The day of his passing was declared a national day of mourning; all public offices and state institutions were closed. Ramanathan's remains were taken from Colombo to Jaffna, the homeland of his ancestors, and his body was laid to rest cross-legged, in a meditative posture upon leopard skin, in a *samādhi*—a form of burial accorded only to those of the highest spiritual attainment.[97]

One of the distinctive features of Ramanathan's writings was that he applied the knowledge he had gained through Arulparananda to the interpretation of certain passages of the Christian Scriptures, demonstrating that, when viewed in the right light, these texts disclose the very es-

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[94] In 1905–1906, Ramanathan undertook an American lecture tour, during which he gave a number of talks on various aspects of Hindu spirituality, as well as on the "jnanic" interpretation of Christian spirituality. For the entire American tour, see *Līlāvati: Western Pictures for Eastern Students. Being a Description of the Chief Incidents of a Journey Made by that Distinguished Scholar, Statesman, and Sage, Śrī P. Rāmanāthan, K.C., C.M.G., from Ceylon to the United States of America in 1905–1906.* The author of the book was Ramanathan's attendant, secretary, and disciple, the Australian-born Miss R. L. Harrison—who, from 1906 onwards, became his wife under the name *Leelawathy Ramanathan*—and who, in 1942, received an *honoris causa* doctorate from the University of Ceylon for her tireless work on behalf of Hindu and Ceylonese culture, at the very institution whose founding had been initiated by her late husband.

[95] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* p. 46. Arunachalam concludes: "Come, my friend, see him, see the Master. Judge the thing by its fruits." (Chamu Kuppuswamy [ed.], Edward Carpenter and Ponnambalam Arunachalam, s. p.).

[96] On the spiritual aspect of the Emir, see Michel Chodkiewicz (ed.), *The Spiritual Writings of Amir 'Abd al-Kader*—especially Chodkiewicz's excellent introductory essay (pp. 1–24).

[97] The word *samādhi*, used to denote the tomb of a spiritually exalted person, is of course derived from *samādhi* in its primary sense of the highest state of consciousness.

sence of *jñāna*. Undoubtedly, this was a highly unorthodox approach to "scriptural exegesis", yet in his commentaries Ramanathan combined scholarly rigour with spiritual insight at a remarkably high level—without resorting to excessively esoteric explanations.[98] There is no doubt that his interpretations were only loosely aligned with the original intention of the respective books of Scripture; yet they illuminate that central element of the Bible without which it remains confined to the plane of social religiosity.

Ponnambalam Ramanathan

These commentaries were clearly written with a specific "missionary" purpose: to open for Christian readers a path towards the deeper layers of their own faith. Paradoxically, Ramanathan left only a few works that deal directly with the essence of *jñāna* itself. One of these is a short essay written in 1895 (a few years after Arulparananda's death), but published only in 1903 in the journal *Siddhanta Deepika;*[99] the other is a commentary—intended for an even more restricted circle—on Śeṣādrī Śivanar's traditional Śaiva treatise *Nānā Jīva Vāda Kaṭṭalai.*

2. *Ponnambalam Arunachalam*

While Ramanathan became, in certain circles, a kind of spiritual master (though he never regarded himself as a guru), his younger brother Arunachalam sought to conceal the impulse he had received from Arulparananda—and his own inner spiritual fervour—behind the objectivity of scholarly and religious studies.[100] It must be said, however, that he did not succeed very well, for even in his explicitly political speeches the influence of his master's teaching and values was often unmistakably felt—something his audiences probably received at times with a touch of bewilderment. Fortunately, his letters to Edward Carpenter—published only after his death—have survived, in which he spoke openly of what Arulparananda meant, and had meant, to him. Moreover, Arunachalam possessed the literary gift to express this both beautifully and with great intensity:

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[98] Rudolf Steiner's interpretations of the Gospels provide a classic example of this kind of overextended scriptural exegesis; see especially his commentary on the Gospel of John.

[99] *The Siddhanta Deepika* was a monthly journal published between 1897 and 1914, primarily devoted to the mystical philosophy of Śaiva Siddhānta, the South Indian school of Śaiva religious thought. Among its contributors were Arunachalam and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. Ramanathan's paper was later republished, in a slightly revised form and under a completely different title ("On the Key of Knowledge, or the Fundamental Experiences of the Sanctified in Spirit"), in his volume *The Culture of the Soul among Western Nations.*

[100] Thus, for example, on one occasion when he recalls the defining spiritual experiences of his life, he makes not a single reference to Arulparananda (see Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *Studies and Translations,* pp. 119 ff.).

> O that you were here to meet and commune with the only man I have known who is a seer and not one blindly groping in the dark. He has given me the priceless blessing of belief in God, which my English education had robbed me of for the last twenty years, and he has enabled me to enter the threshold of the mysteries of our religion, which in my folly begotten of arrogance and the material West, in my impatience of forms and ceremonies that I did not understand, I made light of. I never knew till now what sacred truths underlie these forms, and that the latter are but a preparation for those higher stages on the first rung of which I am now placed by God's grace and the Guru (teacher) he has sent me.[101]

Ponnambalam Arunachalam

Like Ramanathan, Arunachalam too visited his Master in Tanjore repeatedly and for extended periods in order to learn from him.

> I have come here—he writes in his next letter to Carpenter—to be alone with the Master of whom I wrote to you in my last and who first raised for me a corner of the veil that hides the mysteries of the universe. I shall have to return to Ceylon in about a fortnight to my work, but it is daily becoming more and more irksome, and I must rid myself of the bondage, for a time at least, that I may go my way at leisure and undistracted. I hope to return to Tanjore sometime next year and live near the Master for about a year.[102]

Naturally, for a statesman of Arunachalam's rank, it was by no means easy to make himself free from time to time. During those periods when his official duties kept him bound to Ceylon, Arulparananda sought to bridge the void created by his disciple's absence through letters. These letters leave no room for doubt that their author was indeed in possession of ultimate knowledge:

> One must clearly realise that the Intelligence which, shaken by the wind of desire, regards wife and children as "mine", and body, senses and intellectual organs as "I", is the *jīva* [the individual soul]; and that the unagitated Intelligence, which regards the intelligence in all manifested beings—in wife and child, in ant and elephant, and in oneself—as the one Śivam, is Śivam.[103] The space that fills all pots and houses is one. It is differentiated only by thought, according to the varieties of outer coverings—as Brahmin, outcaste, king, beggar, palace, hut. But there is no such differentiation in space itself. So in the pure, unagitated Intelligence there is likewise no differentiation. Therefore it was graciously said [by Thiruvalluvar] in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* (6th verse of the chapter on Renunciation):[104] "He who has destroyed the concept of 'I' and 'mine' will enter a world higher than that of the celestials." So Tāyumāṉavar: "When, oh when, shall I realise the truth of the teaching that to know the Knower is the true wealth!"[105] And in the Śivajñāna Siddhar (Supakṣa 8:30):[106] "Ridding thyself of

[101] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 31–32.

[102] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 34–35.

[103] In the South Indian Śaiva system, the neuter form of Śiva (*Śivam*) is frequently used.

[104] Verse 6 of the chapter on ascetic virtues in the *Tirukkural*, a didactic poem by the Tamil saint Thiruvalluvar (2nd–5th century CE), one of the most celebrated works of Tamil literature.

[105] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 52–53.

[106] The principal philosophical poem of the 14th-century Tamil poet-philosopher Aruḷnandi Śivācārya, one of the earliest comprehensive expositions of the Śaiva Siddhānta system. (References to classical texts follow a uniform system throughout this study. Numerical divisions are given in Arabic numerals separated by colons, regardless of the

knowledge and ignorance [i.e. thought and oblivion], within the Knower [the soul], knowing the Knower [Sivam] by grace—that is, in the equal state of samādhi—without differentiated knowing."[107] These texts should be carefully considered.[108]

Nothing shows Arunachalam's profound inner attachment to Arulpārananda more clearly than the void left within him by his death. Two months after the passing, he wrote to Carpenter:

> I have for some time past been most anxious to write and tell you of the great calamity that has overtaken me in the loss of our dear Master. He is of course not really lost to us but is as present and ready to help as ever. But I cannot yet realise this. The long association in my mind of him with the body in which he appeared to us, has left a void not to be filled—and I keep thinking when again I shall see that gracious face and hear those gracious words, so full of comfort and help and strength. How merciful God has been to me to bring me under the Master's influence! Alas, how unworthy I have been of Him and how far from the goal he ever kept before me and by his presence, encouragement, and advice tried to make me reach![109]

Seven years after Arulpārananda's death, the memories connected with his Master's earthly presence still stirred in him very deep feelings. On one occasion, when his official duties called him to Kurunegala (then anglicised as Kornegalle)—the city where he had spent two months in Ceylon together with Arulpārananda and Carpenter—he wrote about the flood of recollections:

> I went this morning [...] up the Great Rock behind the Kachcheri, and spent two happy hours thinking of the Master and you, and yearning for that Freedom which was Rishi Suka's (according to the extracts I sent you).[110] Being still in this prison of Time, Space and Causation, Kurunegala is very dear to me—the dearest on Earth—because the Master and you stayed there with me. [...] How shall I forget too the gracious Master and his walks along the country roads, and discourses there; and in the house, whose ceiling was such a battleground for rats and snakes; and that walk up the Rock with him and you—and we so outdistanced by him and so fatigued, and he so fresh and pouring forth living words! It is well to have such a reminiscence to treasure up, of those happy months.[111] Only one regret remains—and how keen I can—hardly tell of it. He caught there the fatal fever, and his bodily presence and inspiration were lost to us.[112]

Although Arunachalam wrote several essays that move along the frontiers of spirituality, metaphysics, and philosophy, the principal achievements of his literary work are his particularly sensitive translations of Tamil Śaiva poetry—above all those of Tāyumāṉavar. These translations reveal the profound devotion and the uniquely intimate relationship that bound him to these jewels of Śaiva spirituality.

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conventions of individual editions. Established paginations (e.g. the Stephanus numbers for Plato) are, of course, retained.)

[107] The sentence is translated by Nallaswami Pillai as follows: "Removing your ignorance born of understanding (with the bodily senses), and perceiving, without perception (by the lower manas), by the Grace of God, the Supreme Intelligence in his higher self, and seeing Him without seeing, and without the conjunction of the Antahkaranas [mental cognitive functions] and Avasthas [senses]..." (*Śivajñāna Siddhiyār of Aruḷandi Śivāchārya,* p. 236; Supaksha 8:30). This celebrated sentence discusses the relationship between lower and higher knowledge.

[108] Chamu Kuppuswamy (ed.), Edward Carpenter and Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *s. p.* The sentence from the Śivajñāna Siddhar *(Śivajñāna Siddhiyār)* was not included by Arunachalam (or Carpenter) owing to its difficult interpretation.

[109] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 49–50.

[110] One of the characters in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha.* See Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *Studies and Translations,* pp. 29–37.

[111] Carpenter also observed that, despite Arulpārananda's seventy years of age and his largely sedentary way of life (he spent most of his days motionless, absorbed in contemplation), he appeared surprisingly youthful—youthful even in his movements—as though drawing his vitality from some hidden source.

[112] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 71–73.

Like his elder brother, Arunachalam remained an active politician until the end of his life. In the winter of 1923, following his usual custom, he set out on an extended pilgrimage to visit the sacred places of South India. He passed away in the Meenakshi Temple complex at Madurai on 9 January 1924.[113]

3. *Edward Carpenter*

While Ramanathan and Arunachalam never once referred to Arulparananda in any of their public utterances, Edward Carpenter (1844–1929)—though he did not dedicate an entire book to him—nevertheless devoted a substantial four-chapter section in *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta* to him, entitled "A Visit to a Gñáni", later published separately under the same title.[114] Carpenter was a distinguished and widely respected social thinker of his time, who addressed major questions concerning civilisation, democracy, spirituality, sexuality, and homosexuality. Arunachalam formed a lifelong friendship with him during his university years in England. In 1890 Carpenter travelled to Ceylon at Arunachalam's invitation to meet Arulparananda, and, taking advantage of the occasion, visited many renowned places in Ceylon and India, later recording his experiences in a book. There can be little doubt that Arulparananda exerted a considerable influence upon him, though certainly not to the same degree as upon the Ponnambalam brothers. Paradoxically, however, it was he—the critical and sober Western writer, rather than the two "enthusiastic" Tamil brothers—who provided the most vivid and coherent portrait of Arulparananda's teaching and of the doctrinal–praxeological framework, partly Śaiva Siddhānta and partly Advaitin, within which Arulparananda formulated his thought. Our most direct and systematic source on Arulparananda is therefore precisely those four chapters of Carpenter's Ceylon–India travel narrative mentioned above. And just as Paul Brunton played a providential role in making Ramana Maharshi known to the world, so too did Edward Carpenter play his providential part in making Arulparananda known.[115] Carpenter's distinctive position is further confirmed by the fact that the young Arulparananda had been told in advance by Tillainathan Swami that he would have an *Angrezi* (English) disciple. And although Arulparananda's influence on Carpenter was by no means as profound as on the Ponnambalam brothers, it endured throughout his life; nearly thirty years later, in a lecture or essay on the Upaniṣads, he set down almost verbatim the very same ideas that he had expressed in *A Visit to a Gñáni* under Arulparananda's inspiration.[116]

Carpenter's portrayal of Arulparananda clearly reveals the depth of the impression the Master made upon him. From the very beginning he saw in him "something mysterious and superhu-

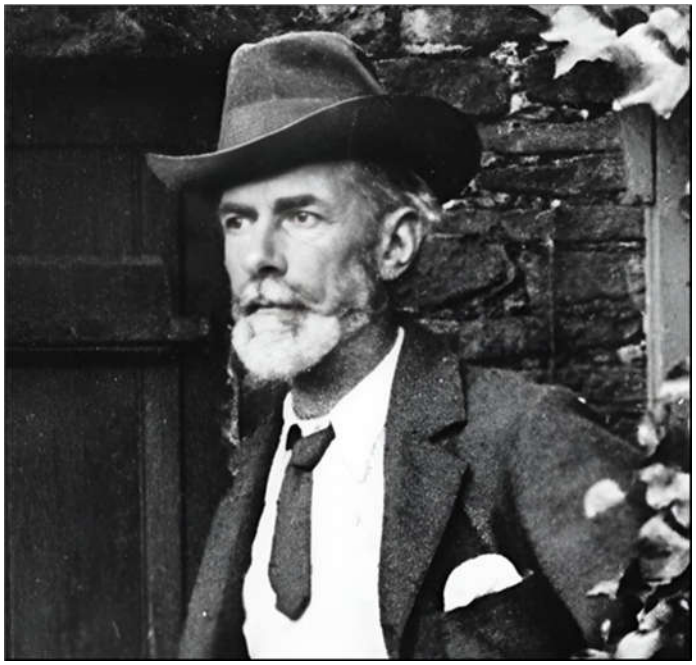
[113] Although, like his two cousins, Ananda Coomaraswamy's life was shaped by spirituality, metaphysics, and traditional art, he appears to have known nothing of Arulparananda, and—particularly during his years in America—his contact with his Ceylonese relatives seems to have been very limited. In his letters he refers to his cousin Arunachalam only once, and then in a single brief sentence, upon learning of his death (*Selected Letters of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy,* p. 377). What is even more difficult to understand is that Coomaraswamy appears to have been unaware that Ramanathan had published several works that might well have interested him.

[114] The book was first published in the United States of America, undated, in 1900, under the title *A Visit to a Gñani: From Adam's Peak to Elephanta.* This edition also includes a publisher's introduction and a short essay by Carpenter ("Have Faith") from the author's *Towards Democracy.* The first British edition of the book was published in 1911 under the title *A Visit to a Gñáni: Or Wise Man of the East.* The American and British editions contain different photographs of Arulparananda.

[115] One reason why, to our knowledge, no one sought out Arulparananda following the publication of Carpenter's book was that the *jñānī* died in 1893, the year after the book appeared (1892).

[116] Edward Carpenter, *The Teaching of the Upanishads.* On this occasion he did not mention Arulparananda by name.

man":[117] "I found it difficult to believe that I was in the end of the nineteenth century, and not three or four thousand years back among the sages of the Vedic race; and indeed the more I saw of this Guru the more I felt persuaded [...] that in general appearance, dress, mental attitude, and so forth, he probably resembled to an extraordinary degree those ancient teachers whose tradition he still handed down."[118] Carpenter singles out "the piercing intensity of his eyes" and "the profound calm and *recueillement* of his expression".[119] "His face, while showing the attributes of the seer, the externally penetrating quick eye, and the expression of illumination—the deep mystic light within—showed also the prevailing sentiment of happiness behind it."[120] Carpenter also noted that Arulparananda's "powerful, prophetic" manner was associated with a "childlike manner".[121]



Edward Carpenter

> His gentleness and kindliness, combined with evident power; and inflexibility and intensity underlying; his tense eyes, as of the seer, and gracious lips and expression, and ease and dignity of figure; his entire serenity and calm—though with lots of vigour when needed—all these were impressive. But perhaps I was most struck—as the culmination of character and manhood—by his perfect simplicity of manner. Nothing could be more unembarrassed, unselfconscious, direct to the point in hand, free from kinks of any kind. Sometimes he would sit on his sofa-couch in the little cottage, not unfrequently, as I have said, with bare feet gathered beneath him; sometimes he would sit on a chair at the table; sometimes in the animation of discourse his muslin wrap would fall from his shoulder, unnoticed, showing a still graceful figure, thin, but by no means emaciated; sometimes he would stand for a moment, a tall and dignified form; yet always with the same ease and grace and absence of self-consciousness that only the animals and a few among human beings show. It was this that made him seem very near to one, as if the ordinary barriers which divide people were done away with; and if this was non-differentiation working within, its external effect was very admirable.[122]

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[117] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 62.

[118] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 63. The "spiritual fertility" of India—unlike that of the West—was not exhausted by the twentieth century, as shown by such figures as Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), Anandamayi Ma (1896–1982), and Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897–1981). What the twenty-first century will bring we do not yet know, but according to Arulparananda—as Carpenter interprets his words—"there had never been a time when the divine knowledge had not existed", and "there had always been an India (*jñāna bhūmi,* or Land of Wisdom, in contradistinction to the Western *bhoga bhūmi,* or Land of Pleasure), and always Vedas or Upanishads (or corresponding books) brought by divine teachers" (*A Visit to a Gñáni,* pp. 51–52).

[119] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. VIII.

[120] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 15.

[121] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 2.

[122] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* pp. 49–50. In the same vein, Arunachalam likewise highlights in connection with Arulparananda "the unrivalled power of exposition", and "a purity and loftiness of character which nothing can shake"—and that "the freaks of passion which cloud the intellect of the so-called men of genius did not trouble him", so that "the divine light within shone forth pure and serene" (*Light from the East,* p. 43).

What surprised Carpenter most, however, was not Arulparananda's "extraordinary inner energy", nor his "perfect command of language", nor yet his "remarkable powers of concentration", and the fact that he could illustrate his discourses almost endlessly with examples drawn from his seemingly inexhaustible store of knowledge[123]—but rather that, as soon as he had fulfilled the task which the outer world imposed upon him, it was as though he had completely forgotten what he had been doing, and his mind at once "returned to that state of interior meditation and absorption in the contemplation of the world disclosed to the inner sense, which had apparently become his normal condition".[124] What not only surprised Carpenter but—by his own admission—also somewhat astonished him, was a feature of Arulparananda's character that appeared to stand in complete contrast to the qualities just mentioned: an almost total absence of interest in the objects and persons around him—"not that, as I have said, he was not very helpful and considerate in special cases, but evidently that part of his nature which held him to the actual world was thinning out; and the personalities of attendants and of those he might have casual dealings with, or even the scenes and changes of external nature, excited in him only the faintest response".[125] Clearly, to perceive such subtle and seemingly paradoxical traits in Arulparananda's character required the insight of a mind endowed with a writer's understanding of human nature.

IX. Paripūraṇam[126]

Arulparananda met Carpenter in 1890, and three years later—in July 1893—he passed away.

It is believed that while staying in Kurunegala he contracted a serious disease transmitted by rats and other rodents—then known as "Kurunegala fever", now identified as rat-bite fever.[127] When Arunachalam last saw him, he found him already in a rather weakened physical condition; yet, as he told him, "the fever had really not affected his true self, and that during the long and severe illness, when his wife and son were most despondent about his recovery, he was for nearly a month not conscious of his body, but remained pure consciousness".[128] In one of his last letters to Arunachalam—notable for its dispassionate and impersonal tone—he wrote:

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[123] *Cf.* Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* pp. 2–3. Let's not forget that these are the statements of a man who was himself one of the most brilliant and cultured intellectuals of his time!

[124] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 14.

[125] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 15.

[126] Ultimate, transcendent fulfilment; equivalent to *mahāsamādhi.*

[127] A Ceylon guidebook from the early twentieth century also describes the Kurunegala fever: "Kurunegala was not many years ago dreaded for its own special type of malarial fever that almost always attacked the new-comer and which greatly distressed the natives during the dry weather immediately following on the rains, when vegetation rotted in the swamps. Now that so much of the country has been cleared of its rank vegetation for cultivation great improvement is manifest, and it is hoped that in course of time Kurunegala fever will be unknown." (Henry W. Cave, *The Book of Ceylon,* p. 516). There are, in fact, two forms of rat-bite fever: one occurs mainly in North America and the other in South Asia. The latter is caused by the spirochete bacterium *Spirillum minus.* The symptoms and course of the disease are similar to those of Lyme disease, transmitted by infected ticks, or malaria ("jungle fever"), transmitted by infected mosquitoes. It is characterised by malaise and fatigue, swollen lymph nodes, headache, arthritis, myocarditis and meningitis; its most distinctive feature is the alternation of febrile and afebrile periods. Since the discovery of penicillin, it has been fully curable.

[128] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* p. 51.

> The body is a case full of the worm called diseases. Kurunegala fever is a fictitious name. We must not at all be sorry about it.[129]

If he indeed contracted his illness during his stay in Kurunegala, it must have taken an unusually long time to overcome his otherwise robust constitution. Without treatment, the disease usually claims its victim within a year. That it took three years in Arulparananda's case was due partly to his excellent constitution and partly, perhaps, to the fact that—as mentioned above—he was well versed in the field of traditional medicine.

On 16 July he was still relatively well and sat down to breakfast, but rose from the table without eating and returned to bed. Another spell of intense fever followed, and Arulparananda knew that it would be the end. Then, for the last time—yielding to the entreaties of his wife and one of his sons—he took medicine, but told them it would have no effect, and that they should not grieve, for, as before, he would remain with them.[130] Over the next two days he spoke little and remained in a state of *samādhi* almost the whole time. His heart beat for the last time at half past three in the morning on 18 July 1893.[131]

Sri Arulparananda Swamigal

Shortly before his death, he gave his family a faint hint that his illness was the result of certain causes, but did not tell them what he had in mind. Arunachalam, however, believed that he was referring to what he had mentioned to him on several occasions—namely, that communicating divine secrets to immature souls always entails a penalty. Yet, as he said, he did not believe in half-measures, and could only choose between revealing everything or nothing at all. This "immature soul" was, in all likelihood, first Carpenter and, secondly, perhaps Arunachalam.[132]

After his death,

> as usual in the case of those who attain *sat-cit-ānanda*, the body was bathed and anointed and all ceremonies performed as to Siva himself, and was carried to an underground room built for the occasion in a land adjoining the river and was placed in the attitude of *niṣṭai* (devotion or perfection) and the entrance was covered with a stone and plastered over. Cremation, usual among Hindus, is prohibited in such a case, as the vital breath is believed to remain in the body for thousands of years, rendering it exempt

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[129] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* p. 51. These words of Arulparananda clearly indicate that diseases are merely conventional phenomena. In fact, the form in which a disease manifests itself is as secondary as its direct—physical—cause *(causa efficiens),* since the latter has only instrumental significance. What may be of real importance is the factor that brings the cause itself into being (*causa formalis* or *causa finalis*). Arulparananda would probably have agreed with Claude Bernard's *dictum* that "the pathogen is nothing, the terrain is everything". For a modern articulation of the traditional interpretation of disease, see Földényi F. László, "A betegségről."

[130] It was in fact rather unusual for a *jñānī* to remain within the family circle.

[131] Unfortunately, the date of his birth is unknown.

[132] It is probable that Arulparananda would have declined to teach Carpenter, had his master not foretold that he would one day have an *Angrezi* disciple.

from corruption. It is proposed to build a temple of Śiva, placing a *Liṅgaṃ* at the spot.[133] Meanwhile daily services, as in a temple, are performed there. [...] This then is the completion of that noble life—the man has become God.[134]

X. Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

One of the cardinal elements of Arulparananda's teaching is what he called *the wisdom of non-discrimination*. Yet this distinctive "mystical virtue" is by no means confined to the Śaiva-Siddhānta tradition—or even to Hinduism as such. The first book of the Judeo-Christian Scriptures—the *Holy Bible*—links the end of man's paradisal existence to a unique event: his eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge (cf. Gen. 3:6). Although that verse refers to knowledge in general, elsewhere Scripture clearly specifies a particular form of knowledge—*the knowledge of good and evil, of right and wrong*. The Tree of Knowledge is therefore, primarily, the tree of *discriminative cognition*—and this cognition is, above all, *moral* in nature. It is not easy to explain how this paradoxical and profoundly significant symbol—*morality itself as the root cause of man's Fall*—found its way into the Hebrew Scriptures, for such an attitude is quite alien to the profoundly moral disposition of the Jewish religious genius. Obviously, Jewish theology could not present as the root of all evil the central tenet of its own doctrine—the moral faculty of distinguishing between good and evil—and indeed it did not. Strangely enough, the Jewish Scriptures—*quasi* the Christian *Old Testament*—apart from the relevant passage (Genesis 2–3), never again refer to the Tree of Knowledge. Pre-Christian Jewish theology not only failed to integrate this peculiar interpretation of the *proton pseudos* of the human race into its worldview, but virtually ignored it, just as it generally ignored the entire Fall-mythologeme:[135] neither "man" *(ha-'adam)* nor even God stood at the centre of its attention; rather, its entire horizon was filled by "the people" *(ha-'am)* and their manifold concerns.[136] The foundation of the Hebrew Bible *as a whole* was thus the *forgetting* of its original point of departure and, in effect, the implicit affirmation of the fallen state as primordial. Nor was Christian theology itself able to integrate this symbol: despite its intense preoccupation with *Genesis,* it consistently regarded as antinomian aberrations—and condemned even more severely than mortal sins—those doctrines which sought to transpose the paradisiacal transcendence of morality onto the plane of history and salvation. Although the key idea of Scripture is that the fundamental cause of human suffering lies in the discrimination between good

[133] A symbol of Śiva's divine creative power.

[134] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 55–56. When he wrote these lines, Arunachalam must surely have had in mind Plato's words on the death of Socrates: "Such was the end of our friend, Echecrates—a man, we may say, who of all those we have known was the noblest, and also the wisest and most just." (Phaedo 118a; in Plato: *Complete Works,* p. 100). This assumption is by no means unfounded, given that Arunachalam devoted a separate study to Socrates and to certain of his contemplative states (Symposium 147c–175e), as well as to their Platonic interpretation (Symposium 209e–212a): "Luminous Sleep", in Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *Studies and Translations,* pp. 1–13.

[135] This holds true even for the intertestamental Jewish apocrypha, which often returned to the mythological themes of biblical prehistory (e.g. the Book of Enoch). It was only in the first centuries of the Christian era that apocryphal works of Jewish origin appeared—preserved in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Old Church Slavonic, Armenian, and Georgian—such as the various versions of *The Apocalypse of Moses* and *The Life of Adam and Eve,* whose central theme is the Fall and the expulsion from Paradise.

[136] On Judaism as an ethnoreligion *par excellence,* see Fernando Joannes's concise monograph *A zsidó vallás,* which summarizes the essence of the Jewish religion in four points (pp. 16–29): (1) Israel, the called people; (2) Israel, the people of the One and Only God; (3) Israel, the people of the Covenant; and (4) Israel, the people of the Law. From this it is evident that the story of the Fall is a "foreign body" within the Hebrew Bible—and even more so within the *Torah*.

and evil, both Jewish and Christian theology clung to this distinction and, even in principle, did not allow for the possibility of transcending it. Only in the higher forms of spirituality—and especially in mysticism grounded in metaphysics—did the view emerge, often only implicitly, that the moral polarity of good and evil, virtue and vice, can indeed be transcended.[137]

With the "original" sin of the first parents, the primordial unity was broken, and humanity entered the world of polarities. The knowledge of good and evil—the primordial duality—became the source and seed of all further distinctions. The sexual dichotomy itself unfolded in its fullness only after the original sin; in Paradise, the relation between man and woman was not of a sexual nature: it was defined not by *eros* but by *philia.*[138] The *sexus*—the state of separation—had not yet come to dominate the two sexes with its compelling power.[139] There was duality, but not yet polarity. Only after their Fall and expulsion from Paradise did sexual polarity manifest in its double aspect—attraction (sexuality) and repulsion (shame).[140] Their children—Cain, Abel, and Seth—were conceived outside Paradise; for it was there, "east of Eden", that Adam first "knew" his wife (*cf.* Genesis 4:1). The ever-renewing generations were already a compensation for lost immortality: for since man, through original sin, had become individually subject to death, he could collectively transcend it through the succession of generations.[141] Yet it is a life permeated by death. Life and death are inextricably intertwined. Thus, when Salome asked Christ how long death would reign upon the earth, He replied: "As long as you women give birth."[142] Death is not the end of life, for what is pure life cannot end; death is rather the ultimate triumph of the "forces of death" (András László)[143] that have been present in life from the moment of birth and have ceaselessly worn it down ever since. *True life is deathless.* As one of the *friends of God,* the Sufi 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, expressed it in his enigmatic way:

> I want a death which has no life in it and a life which has no death in it.[144]

It can only be through a special manifestation of divine providence and foresight that, on the very first pages of the Scriptures of the Western world, there should appear both man's primordial experience of wholeness—preceding the emergence of morality and all dualistic thinking—and, at the same time, the impulse that has ever since been the chief driving force of Western, and especially modern Western, humanity: the desire to become, through the acquisition of knowledge, a rival to the "world of the gods".[145] Yet while the primordial experience of unity has virtually fall-

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[137] The idea of transcending morality also appeared—though, of course, in an entirely different sense—in Nietzsche's philosophy and in various currents of modern and postmodern thought.

[138] *Cf.* "I will make him a *helper* as his partner" (Genesis 2:18).

[139] The Latin *sexus* derives from the verb *seco,* "to cut" or "to divide", and according to the Platonic myth of the Golden Age, the primordial androgynes who rose up against Olympus were punished by the gods by being split into a male and a female half—"the way people cut sorb-apples before they dry them or the way they cut eggs with hairs" (Plato, Symposium 190e; *Complete Works,* p. 474)—so that from then on all their energy was bound up with finding their other half.

[140] The two—eroticism and clothing—belong together. Professional naturism is asexual.

[141] *Cf.* the lines from Plato's Symposium (207d), in which Diotima instructs Socrates: "The mortal nature seeks, as far as possible, to live forever and to be immortal. And this is possible in one way only: by reproduction, because it always leaves behind a new young one in place of the old. [...] But with the immortal", Diotima finally adds, "it is otherwise" (Plato, Symposium 207d, 208b, in *Complete Works,* pp. 490–491).

[142] Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha* I, p. 209. The Gospel of the Egyptians "a".

[143] See e.g. *Solum Ipsum,* aphs. 343 and 420.

[144] Quoted by Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality* II: *Manifestations,* p. 16.

[145] "You will be like gods" (Genesis 3:5), says the serpent to the woman.

en into oblivion—or, when not forgotten, has been relegated to the realm of the "forbidden"—since the Fall, man has continued to visit the Tree of Knowledge[146] to pluck ever more of its fruit; for the tree and its fruit remain "good for food, and [...] pleasant to the eyes, [and] to be desired to make one wise" (Genesis 3:6).

Modern man—especially when scientific education has dulled his sensitivity to subtle wisdom—can no longer understand how knowledge could ever be a "diabolical seduction". He imagines that only an evil God could wish to keep mankind in a state of ignorance. Yet when knowledge is identified with science, as modern man tends to do, it becomes evident to what extent knowledge, science, and technology have diverted man's attention away from metaphysics in general, and from his own metaphysical possibilities in particular. And this, precisely, is the essence of the "diabolical seduction". Since science is the science of this world, it binds us to the empirical realm; and even when it does not directly concern the empirical—as in the case of modern theology or of *Religionswissenschaft*—it still reproduces the same structure elaborated by the empirical sciences, whether natural or human. By its very existence, science poses a constant challenge to any worldview whose central principle is transcendence—not to mention that, as it also fulfils an ideological function, it actively works to undermine the religious vision of reality. And although science, together with technology, is indeed capable of extraordinary achievements within its own sphere, there is one thing it cannot offer: what the Tree of Life can bestow. What is at stake here is not "eternal life" in the material sense—that is, the limitless quantitative prolongation of biological existence—but a wholly qualitative category: the "fullness of life". In its narrower sense, this means the fulfilment of individual life; in its true sense, it is the omnidimensional transcendence and expansion of the limits of individuality toward universality.

The Tree of Life is the symbol of undivided and indivisible wholeness—of the Whole not yet torn apart by oppositions. Primordial man was in possession of this divine Whole, and childhood still preserves something of this paradisiacal awareness: "I seemed as one brought into the Estate of Innocence"—as Thomas Traherne describes his early childhood experience of the paradisiacal world—

> all things were spotless and pure and glorious: yea, and *infinitely mine.* [...] I was entertained like an Angel with the works of God in their splendour and glory. I saw all in the peace of Eden; Heaven and Earth did sing my Creator's praises, and could not make more melody to Adam, than to me. All Time was Eternity, and a perpetual Sabbath. Is it not strange, that an infant should be heir of *the whole World,* and see those mysteries which the books of the learned never unfold? [...] Eternity was manifest in the Light of the Day, and something infinite behind everything appeared which talked with my expectation and moved my desire. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in Heaven. The streets were mine, the temple was mine, the people were mine, their clothes and gold and silver were mine, as much as their sparkling eyes, fair skins and ruddy faces. The skies were mine, and so were the sun and moon and stars, and all the World was mine; and I the only spectator and enjoyer of it.
>
> You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars: and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world. [...] Till your spirit filleth the whole world, and the stars are your jewels; till you are as familiar with the ways of God in all Ages as with your walk and table: till you are intimately acquainted with that shady nothing out of which the world was made: till you love men so as to desire their happiness, with a thirst equal to the zeal of your own: till you delight in God for being good to all: you never enjoy the world.[147]

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[146] The cherub, with his flaming sword, guards only the way to the Tree of Life (*cf.* Genesis 3:24).

[147] Thomas Traherne, *Centuries, Poems, and Thanksgivings* I, pp. 110 and 111. On the Edenic vision of childhood, see Buji Ferenc, *Magasles,* pp. 149–190 (the chapter "Genezis. Egy gyermekrajz metafizikai tanulságai").

It was this fullness of life from which the cherub with the flaming sword barred the way of the man who had eaten from the Tree of Knowledge. It is as though this mythologem were meant to suggest that the relationship between Life and Knowledge is an either–or: either Life, or Knowledge. Yet Life and Knowledge remain inextricably bound together. Let us not forget that both trees stood in the very centre of Paradise—and that every centre bears within itself the idea of unity. Hence these two trees may truly be seen as two branches of one and the same tree—two aspects of a single principle; and thus Life and Knowledge, despite all their seeming antagonism, ultimately belong together. Yet while Life, in its actuality and wholeness, contains what man most deeply needs, Knowledge holds it only in *potentiality*—and in *fragments.*

With the knowledge of good and evil, the independent individual was born—endowed with free will and the power of autonomous choice. Thus was born the being we now call man. For this man, Life is no longer given, but merely possible. Even fallen man remains under the spell of that wholeness he once possessed in Paradise; yet he is now compelled to rely on his own knowledge and judgment in his search. This is why man keeps reaching for more and more fruit from the Tree of Knowledge—why he is never content with what he already knows—for he is trying to reassemble, from the often doubtful fragments of knowledge, that lost Wholeness he once possessed in Paradise through the Tree of Life.

For thousands of years, the pre-modern world of sacred traditions was everywhere governed by the moral distinction between good and evil—even when it was not codified into legal systems such as the Ten Commandments; indeed, all the more so![148] Yet because of its doubtful origin, morality itself is neither "categorical" nor "imperative"; what is categorical and imperative is rather the *force* behind morality—the principle that manifests itself in the various moral systems. We might say that while the content of morality is relative—since time and place constantly reshape it—morality as such is absolute, in the sense that human existence is unthinkable without it. Morality is the instrument of man expelled from Paradise—fallen from his primordial peace—by which he orders his relations with God, the world, his fellow men, and himself—and thereby makes his life outside Paradise bearable. Good, however, inevitably entails evil. Just as there is no warmth without cold, no left without right, no below without above—so too there is no good without evil.[149] *That is why not only evil owes its existence to original sin, but good as well.* Consequently, just as evil obviously cannot lead man back to the Tree of Life, neither can good serve as its means. The moral world—whether one chooses the side of good or of evil—binds man to the world outside Paradise: the world of good and evil, the world of relativity. This, of course, does not mean for a moment that there is no difference between good and evil, or that their distinction is invalid. There is most certainly a difference between them. Yet neither possesses the power to lead Man back to the Tree of Life. Paradisiacal Wholeness is "beyond good and evil"—beyond that world of Order which morality represents and creates. Good and evil belong to the realm of relativity—not only in the sense that they *define one another,* but also in the sense that it is always uncertain which is which—not merely because our knowledge is imperfect and limited, but be-

[148] *Cf.* Exodus 31:18: "When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God." Moral precepts need to be "engraved in stone" only when there is a strong inclination within a community to violate them—that is, toward immorality; otherwise, they may remain unwritten, or even unspoken.

[149] For this reason, the question of the origin of evil, which concerns Europeans so much, is inseparable from the question of the origin of good. The close relationship between these two—the "saints" and the "villains"—is of paramount importance in Taoism. See in this connection especially *Csuang Ce bölcsessége,* pp. 55–92 (the chapter "Tudomány és erkölcs")

cause the relative, *per definitionem,* cannot be absolutized. The divine command "Thou shalt not kill" (Deuteronomy 5:17) is at times replaced by the equally divine command "Thou shalt kill": "Slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (Numbers 31:3). Every book of law is but a pedagogical crystallization of the fluid world of good and evil.

The moral–religious distinction between good and evil, which was the most decisive dividing line of the pre-modern world, gradually receded in the modern age and, with the completion of modernism—that is, with postmodernism—virtually lost all significance. The terms *good* and *evil,* as they were originally used, now sound anachronistic, for they refer to sin and virtue, to right and wrong in the moral sense, and presuppose a moral order of imperative character. In today's world, even the very notion of value has been devalued—as seen especially in the philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger, and later in postmodern thought.[150] Yet even this is not the final word. The vertical distinction between good and evil is first replaced by various horizontal—or increasingly value-neutral—statements, only to clear the way for a new morality whichinverts the traditional hierarchical order of good and evil.

XI. Modern science

However, there is another aspect of Western "dead-end progress"[151] in which knowledge itself—specifically discriminative knowledge—has not lost its significance; on the contrary, it has assumedan unprecedented value. Modern Western man[152] believes ever more resolutely—and at the same time ever more desperately—that what can give him everything, grant him access to the mysteries of existence, and ultimately redeem him, is Knowledge.

A characteristic manifestation of Western-type knowledge is what Western man calls *science.* The sciences, of course, existed not only in the Western world and not only in the modern age, but also in earlier times. Yet over the past century or two, the word science has acquired a meaning markedly different from what it once had—and the only real point of continuity between premodern and modern science is, in fact, little more than the name itself. Whereas in the premodern era it was the sciences that more or less assumed the features of philosophy (see, for example, natural philosophy or its late German heir, the Romantic *Naturphilosophie*), in the modern era it is philosophy that has been shaped, more or less, in the image and likeness of the sciences.[153] Using a certain symbolism, one could say that while the pre-modern understanding of knowledge moves centripetally toward the centre of the circle—the central source of existence—in order to reach the ultimate origin—where "everything converges and is one" (Béla Hamvas)—the modern understanding moves centrifugally outward from the centre, seeking to encompass and map an ever-widening field of knowledge. It is precisely this modern conception of knowledge that is the

[150] See in this context Buji Ferenc, "Te is fiam, Nietzsche?", and "Nihilizmus metafizikai álruhában".

[151] A thought of István Bibó. *Cf.* the remark of an Eastern—Russian "heterodox Orthodox"—writer: "The Western peoples are far ahead of us, but on the wrong track." (Leo Tolstoy, quoted by Török Endre, *Lev Tolsztoj,* p. 36).

[152] By "modern Western man" I mean, in a broader sense, the man of the European post-Christian and post-medieval culture based on Jewish, Greek, Roman—and, to some extent, Germanic—foundations; and in a narrower sense, the man of that modern Western "culture" who appeared in Europe after the so-called "Enlightenment" and, having gradually lost his specifically "Western" character, has become a dominant type throughout almost the entire world. This, however, does not alter the fact that the spirit he represents is, in its essence, Western.

[153] Indeed, this holds true even for theology: modern theology strives to apply the analytical methods of the natural sciences within its own domain, whereas in the Middle Ages the sciences—the *quadrivium* of the seven liberal arts—were themselves subordinated to theology.

true heir of that knowledge whose Tree once stood in Paradise—knowledge which, in its theology, philosophy, humanities, and natural sciences, through its analytical methods, increasingly loses sight of both the Source and the Whole. It becomes ever more absorbed in details, amassing ever more peripheral fragments of understanding, and trying—ever more hopelessly—to reconstruct the Whole from ever more insignificant crumbs. The centrifugal, divergent direction of cognition drives Man into an ever-more desperate condition: the wider the circle of knowledge expands, the looser its weave and the thinner its substance becomes. It brings him no closer to Life—not even to Knowledge itself. "Knowledge implies ignorance of what lies beyond what is known. Knowledge is always limited", as Ramana Maharshi puts it.[154] "Everything that can be thought is untrue", as Arulparananda says.[155] Scientific inquiry thus guarantees the continual reproduction of ignorance.

The euphoria of the "Copernican turn" obscured a transformation far more fundamental; for it did not change the object or the result of cognition (geocentric → heliocentric worldview), but its very underlying structure. In earlier times, man was concerned with *forma* in the Aristotelian sense—or, in more modern terms, with the *Whole;* whereas what came to occupy the centre of interest in the modern age was *materia,* matter itself: structure, composition, and function—in modern language, the *Part.* Pre-modern man and the pre-modern sciences were not in the least interested in what particular things in the world were made of or how they were composed. They did not wish to investigate either their structure (the static aspect) or their mechanism of operation (the dynamic one). They were not curious in that analytical sense. Rather, they sought to discern in what way a given thing or physical phenomenon embodied that which was above it—that is, what was transcendent in relation to it. They believed that through analytical examination the very essence of a thing would slip away from their grasp. Just as a living being, once dissected into its elements, is no longer a living being, so too—when deprived of its unity—even the simplest, most ordinary object ceases to be what it is. What interested pre-modern man and his sciences, then, was the thing apprehended in its unity. It might also be said that what interested him was the intelligible aspect of the thing—that which made it to be what it is. And just as the Whole is not merely the sum of its Parts but something far greater, so too the "spirit" of things cannot be derived from their material components or from the workings of those components.

The imperceptible yet immeasurably significant turn of modern science was that it began to concern itself with the physically tangible *materia* that constitutes the "fabric" of natural things. Why did modern science turn toward the material elements within things? Because it believed that the elements of nature—whether living or inanimate—originate from them. It assumed that things arise from below: that their components, once arranged in the right structure, suddenly produce the whole. Even before explicit evolutionism (Hegel, Darwin), the modern outlook was already evolutionist—or, what is essentially the same, materialist—because it sought to understand things from the direction of the parts, from the material components. For, independent of any ideology or worldview, this is materialism itself: the passionate investigation of *materia* accompanied by the neglect of form. Materialism, as an atheistic philosophy and ideology, is merely the consequence of this deeper, more fundamental materialism. It is precisely because modern man believes that analysis will reveal the secret of things—their very essence—that he examines them with such desperate passion. Yet the secret of the whole does not lie in its details, and the whole is unintelligible through its parts. Materialism is the belief that the part—the

[154] *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharsi,* p. 235 (n. 278).

[155] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 53.

most material element possible—is the source of the whole—that is, of qualitative and intelligible form.[156]

From the distinction between good and evil, what remained in the modern age was only the distinction itself—the analytical differentiation of details. Distinction became mere differentiation—the observation of horizontal differences, as one voter differs from another, without any real difference between them in terms of political judgment or competence. Difference became mere otherness, numerical distinction. And in this sense, so-called progress is nothing but drifting ever farther from the centre of Paradise and from the Tree of Life: from unity to duality, from duality to quaternity, from quaternity to octonarity—and so on, into infinity. To divide matter endlessly, until at last only the indivisible—the *a-tomos*—remains, which is the source of all that is divisible. It is nothing but the search for the *a-tomos* in the depths of the *tomos* ("divisible", "cut").[157] While knowledge has enabled man to build around himself a material civilization beyond his wildest dreams, it has at the same time ensnared him: however much he multiplies the "props" of life (Béla Hamvas), that is, the goods of civilization, he comes no closer to the Whole, to the Fullness. On the contrary, he drifts ever farther away—driven onto increasingly peripheral orbits—until he sets out toward the "outer darkness", where there will be only "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:12).

XII. *Viveka*

Since the Fall, the knowledge of good and evil—that is, thinking in polarities and, more generally, discriminative cognition—has become such an essential feature of humankind that one might think human life to be unimaginable without it. Yet this is not entirely so. Of course, everyday life—especially in the modern world—is inconceivable without thinking in opposites and through distinctions. In the pre-modern age, however, there were always those who devoted themselves with great intensity to discovering forms of knowledge that would not drive man ever farther from the Tree of Life, but rather lead him back to it. It goes without saying that such knowledge cannot be the knowledge of good and evil—it cannot, by its nature, be discriminative cognition. On the contrary, these higher forms of knowing must rise above the polarity represented by the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—the very essence of original sin. Only by transcending the pair of opposites—good and evil—through a supra-moral and synthetic vision can one pass unscathed through the cherub's flaming sword.[158] Yet for the wisdom of non-

[156] It goes without saying that the hylomorphic approach employed here is rejected by modern science, since it acknowledges only the existence of *hyle* ("matter") while ignoring—or even outright denying—the existence of *morphe* ("form", "shape").

[157] In the meantime, let us not forget that there can, in fact, be only one *a-tomos,* for indivisibility cannot even arise logically if we are speaking of a multitude of *a-tomoi* that can be added, subtracted, multiplied, and divided. The metaphysical tradition has always known that there is only one *a-tomos*—and that is God.

[158] Symbolically, the sword is very often associated with duality—with separation, with the division between good and evil. Its general "meaning carries a peculiar duality, since it represents the opposing forces manifested in life and death, in creation and destruction", as the *Szimbólumtár* explains, adding: "In connection with justice, it separates good from evil and strikes down the guilty" (Pál József – Edit Újvári [eds.], *Szimbólumtár,* p. 239). Christ Himself declared that He had brought a sword, to set one man against another (*cf.* Matthew 10:34). And according to Hebrews 4:12, "the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning *(kritikos)* the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Greek *kritikos* literally means "one who separates" or "divides". Zsigmond Varga (*Görög–magyar szótár az Újszövetség iratai-*

discrimination to manifest, a certain form of discrimination must first be applied—one that already points beyond itself.

Traditional metaphysics—most notably Advaita Vedānta—developed a distinctive form of *discrimination (viveka)* that is incomparably more radical than any moral or sub-moral (scientific) distinction. One of Arulparananda's predecessors, the South Indian philosopher Śaṅkarācārya, placed the idea of *viveka,* or discriminative insight, at the centre of three of his works, both in title and in content: *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* ("The Crest-Jewel of Discrimination"), *Dṛg-Dṛśya Viveka* ("Discrimination between the Seer and the Seen"), and *Ātma–Anātma Viveka* ("Discrimination between the Self and the Non-Self").[159] Other Advaitic texts—for example, *Nānā Jīva Vāda Kattalai* ("Elements of the Doctrine Concerning the Multiplicity of Souls"), translated into English and extensively commented upon by Ramanathan—explicitly call the one progressing toward final liberation a *viveki,* "the discerning one".

Viveka is that unique form of discriminative cognition which transcends—and thereby essentially annuls—all other known distinctions by employing a mode of discrimination unlike any other. While all other distinctions are relative, this particular one may indeed be regarded as absolute. Horizontal discrimination operates within the world of *nāma–rūpa*—the realm of names and forms—distinguishing one name from another, one form from another.[160] According to Hindu metaphysical thought, the world of names and forms comprises everything that is delimited and individually graspable, regardless of how subtle or spiritual it may be. In theistic terms, one could say that the world of *nāma–rūpa* includes everything that is created. And discrimination within this world, however essential it may appear, can lead only from one name to another, from one form to another, from one creature to another. One variation of such discrimination is the moral distinction between good and evil. *Viveka,* however, does not mean a distinction *within* the world of names and forms, but rather a distinction *between* the entire world of names and forms and the One Reality, which cannot be bounded by either name or form. This is what gives this form of discrimination its absolute character. Viveka—the wisdom of true discrimination—is thus nothing other than distinguishing illusion from reality, or, in Śaṅkara's own words:

> A firm conviction of the mind to the effect that Brahman is real and the universe unreal, is designated as the discrimination *(viveka)* between the Real and the unreal.[161]

Ultimately, it is nothing but the discrimination of the Self—the absolute Self—from the non-Self; or, in András László's formulation, the distinction of the *auton* ("self") from the *heteron* ("other").[162] For Śaṅkara, this constitutes the very essence of *jñāna-yoga:* the discrimination of the relative and unreal from the absolute and real. *Viveka* is indispensable for the spiritual aspirant if

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hoz, col. 559) renders the verse thus: "For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating so as to divide the (natural) self and the Spirit, the joints and the marrow, and separating the thoughts and the conceptions of the heart." From this perspective, the cherub's fiery sword stands in direct analogy to the very duality it was set to punish.

[159] All three works are traditionally attributed to Śaṅkara, but recent scholarship has questioned their authenticity as genuinely Śaṅkaran. See Karl H. Potter (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies* III: *Advaita Vedānta up to Śaṅkara and His Pupils,* pp. 335–338, 344, and 328–331.

[160] The term *form* here does not refer merely to the external, spatially perceptible shape, but rather corresponds more closely to the Aristotelian–scholastic *forma*—that which makes a given entity what it is, of which the outward form is only one possible manifestation. For example, an angel (or *deva*) has no external form, yet it does possess form in the Aristotelian sense—its very "angelhood" (or "devahood").

[161] *Vivekachudamani of Sri Sankaracharya,* p. 8 (v. 20).

[162] See László András, *Solum Ipsum,* aphs. 83–90.

he is to cease seeing himself as he has seen himself until now—that is, as a delimited entity composed of material or immaterial elements—and to recognize himself instead as something that stands beyond them in the absolute sense: the ultimate Subject of existence. The wisdom of discrimination is, in a practical sense, the application of the *neti neti* principle—"neither this nor that"—by which one refuses to identify oneself with anything that can be grasped, with anything belonging to the objective world (that is, to the realm of *nāma–rūpa*). Discrimination in this sense is the gradual stripping away of all objectivity from subjectivity, until at last only the pure Subject remains, resting in itself, free from all objectivity.

XIII. The wisdom of non-discrimination

The wisdom of discrimination is thus most intimately connected with the wisdom of non-discrimination—*the* central idea of Arulparananda's teaching. Edward Carpenter writes of this:

> No word did the „Grammarian" emphasize more strongly than *Non-differentiation* [Skt. *advaita / nir-viveka*]. You must not even in thought differentiate yourself from others; you must not begin to regard yourself as separate from them. Even to speak of helping others is a mistake, tainted by the delusion that you and they are two. You must learn to live in a world in which the decisive fact is not that you differ from others, but that you are one with them and form part of their unity.[163]

Indeed, as we have seen above, Arulparananda's master, Tillainathan Swami, did not distinguish himself even from natural phenomena, and would regularly refer to the wind, the lightning, and the sunshine in the first person singular.

The Great Peace of the Golden Age (*T'ai-p'ing / Taiping*—literally "flatness" or "smoothness") in Chinese mythology is also the age of Great Equality or Great Unity (*Tatung / Datong*), when the boundaries between man and man were as easily crossed as those between man and the world.[164] In Paradise, human beings still lived in unity with one another; their selves had not yet separated them. Eve was taken from Adam's rib, which clearly indicates that Adam and Eve were not in fact two distinct persons, but were originally and essentially one; and so long as they did not commit the first sin, they preserved this consciousness of unity. But immediately after the Fall, their eyes were opened, and from then on they saw one another as truly *other:* those who had until then been "helpers" to each other (Genesis 2:20ff.) now entered into a relationship of domination (Genesis 3:16).[165] The elevation of the *I* out of its environment and its separation from the *Thou*—that is, the Fall—was a genuine Pyrrhic victory, a triumph that brought only suffering to the victor. For the confinement of universal consciousness in the Procrustean bed of the self can only be a source of pain. From prehistoric times onward, history has been one vast "process of individuation" (though not in the Jungian sense); and the more universal consciousness falls into the captivity of the individual self, the more it becomes dominated by suffering.[166] The only compensation man could find for this suffering was *pride.* This is why the Master of Nazareth could say: "Whoever would save his life (*psyche*, i.e., soul) will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Luke 9:24).

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[163] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 42.

[164] See Fabrizio Pregadio (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* II, p. 1044. The Chinese terms are given both in the older Wade–Giles romanization and in the modern pinyin system used in contemporary scholarship.

[165] And, of course, into a sexual relationship.

[166] The ultimate, supra-moral reason for the moral rejection of selfishness is to be found here. In fact, every moral rule is a consequence of an "ontometaphysical" principle.

We have seen that the foundation of non-discrimination rests, paradoxically, on a very specific form of discrimination: the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon—between the phenomenal world and reality—that is, between the world of names and forms *(nāma–rūpa)* and the underlying reality *(sat)*. The wisdom of non-discrimination therefore entails a way of seeing that refuses to overvalue the differences appearing in the world of names and forms, and, seeing through them, directs its gaze toward the nameless and formless Reality beneath. Discriminative cognition belongs to the phenomenal plane. The wisdom of non-discrimination, too, is aware of the world of names and forms, and even of the differences between individual entities and attitudes; yet for it these differences lose their weight, for it is conscious of something more essential than difference itself: their intrinsic identity. For the *jñānī* who has reached the ultimate goal of the spiritual path, such vision is a natural faculty (as we have seen in the case of Tillainathan Swami); but for one who is still advancing toward that goal, the non-discriminative perception of phenomena is a *discipline to be practiced*. The wayfarer on the spiritual path must therefore exercise precisely that capacity which will later become his spontaneous mode of being;[167] for, entangled in the web of phenomenal illusion and multiplicity, he cannot behold the crystal-clear sky of ontological Oneness. The monolithic block of underlying Reality becomes accessible only to him who frees himself from the enchantment of the phenomenal surface of the world.

XIV. The three levels of space

One of Sri Arulparananda's cardinal teachings places particular emphasis on the idea of non-differentiation—a distinctively Śaiva conception of space.

According to Śaiva thought, there are three fundamental forms of space *(ākāśa)*. Of these, the lowest order is sthūla-ākāśa or jaḍa-ākāśa—physical space. A higher grade of space is represented by manas-ākāśa, which we might perhaps call "mental space". This is not the result of a subjective experience of space, but rather the inner space of the subject, within which mental-psychic processes take place. Finally, the highest order of space is *cit-ākāśa (cidākāśa),* the space of Consciousness. In this case, however, "Consciousness" does not mean the awareness that appears within psychic processes—the consciousness of the subject that complements the object—but the underlying Consciousness that exists independently of all mental and psychic activity. In the Śaiva conception, this hierarchical structure of the three spaces also implies a hierarchy of incorporation: physical space is contained within mental space, and mental space—together with physical space—is contained within the space of Consciousness.

For modern Western man, the idea that measurable physical space could be contained within an immeasurable and non-physical space—within what, in ordinary terms, would be called "non-space"—is undoubtedly a most unusual one. He imagines instead that the infinity of physical space contains the mental space narrowly confined by the skull, and the still more constricted, point-like space of consciousness. There is no doubt that the skull is encompassed by physical space, for the skull itself is spatial and therefore measurable by physical means. But a thought, an idea, a feeling or a perception cannot be measured with a ruler: the categories of the physical world do not apply to them, and consequently they cannot be spatially localised. The head and the brain within it are in space—but thought and ideas are not. Only the physical side of man can

[167] "If the means were not of the nature of the goal, it could not bring you to the goal", as Ramana Maharshi puts it. (A. Devaraja Mudaliar [ed.], *Day by Day with Bhagavan,* p. 240).

be localised; what lies beyond corporeality is unlocalisable. Physical space can contain only that which is of a physical nature.

For a long time, Western thought held to the idea of absolute Euclidean space, which received its final formulation in Kant's philosophy: space, in the Euclidean sense, and knowledge of it, is the *a priori* foundation of all human experience and cognition. From Kant onwards, however, space gradually became more fluid—or more relative, if you will—and the idea of the relativity of space appeared first in mathematics and later in physics (and eventually in philosophy and literature). According to the standard cosmological model, quite extreme manifestations of this relativity are conceivable: if we trace backward the process of the world's unfolding, it is not only the materially tangible universe that contracts ever smaller in space, but space itself—inseparable from it—also contracts, until, at the moment of the Big Bang, both reach an infinitesimal point. The Big Bang, therefore, did not take place *in* space, for it was space itself that came into being through the Big Bang. This implies that physical space, with all its vast extension—and with the material entities for which it provides, together with time, a categorical condition—originated from something that itself had no spatial dimension. To express this more vividly, we could say that once, at the beginning of the world, the entire universe—with its billions of light-year distances, immense clusters, extra-galaxies, galaxies, and stars—could have comfortably fit into a matchbox.[168] Space emerged from the womb of non-space. Space, then, in its potentiality, was encompassed by something non-spatial, and thus has always remained within non-space—expanding infinitely within it. For those to whom it seems absurd that space can be contained by non-space, it is enough to recall that within a dream—which itself has no spatial extension—vast regions may appear, through which the dream's figures may wander at will. In such a case, physical space arises within an inner, mental space that cannot be grasped by scientific means, yet within which measurement is possible—though, of course, only with instruments that are themselves part of the dream.[169]

Arulparananda—and indeed the entire Siddhānta–Vedānta tradition—often turns to the idea of space to illuminate the spiritual "substance" which, through a very particular attitude, forms the very ground of the wisdom of non-discrimination.

First of all, space corresponds to pure Consciousness, or, in the words of Tāyumāṉavar, "the spacious Hall of Pure Consciousness".[170] South Indian Hinduism often compares the Holy of Holies—the innermost sacred space of the temple—to the innermost reality of the soul, and one of its names is *chidambaram (cit-ambara),* or "consciousness-space" (*ambaram* being a synonym for *ākāśa*). Arunachalam tells that on one occasion he had the opportunity to look into the innermost sanctum of the Chidambaram Nataraja Temple:

> In the innermost shrine is the image of Śiva in the attitude of a dancer—the Dancing God he is called here, the dance symbolising the operations of the universe. Immediately behind the sacred image hangs a curtain which screens off the Holy of Holies, the Great Mystery as it is called. It is a privilege rarely accorded to look behind the curtain. But the mercenary priests can be induced to make exceptions. I was granted the privilege some years ago after a good deal of fuss, and again on this visit. What do you think I saw behind the curtain? Emptiness—mere space. I did not understand it on my first visit nor do the priests. The thing is clear to me now as explained by the Master, and so I find it is explained in the books.[171]

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[168] Therefore, the Big Bang theory was originally known as the Primeval Atom Theory.

[169] In the same way, the spatial distances of the physical world can be measured—but only within the physical world itself. What, within physical space, is a galaxy millions of light-years across, beyond physical space is entirely devoid of extension, just as the distances within a dream are devoid of extension to the waking mind.

[170] Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *Studies and Translations,* p. 94.

[171] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* p. 40.

What lies beyond all mystery is the mystery of undifferentiated emptiness—a "homogeneity" free from all distinction. This is, in fact, *nirguṇa Brahman*—the ultimate and sole Reality, free *(nir)* from all qualities *(guṇa)*.

This boundless, homogeneous, and empty space—this pure continuity—is in fact only a metaphorical representation of that Reality which is devoid of any extension or spatiality, however many dimensions we may imagine it to have.[172] Yet this symbolic homogeneity of Reality can be apprehended not only spatially but also temporally. The absence of distinction, in a temporal sense, means that this Reality is free from all change—it always perfectly coincides with itself.[173] The infinite continuity appears here as well, but this "time" does not flow: in it, no past arises and no future remains unfulfilled. For, as has been said: "There is temporality because the experience of presence is not sufficiently intense. If the experience of the present were completely intense, the temporal present would absorb the past and the future and would disappear along with them."[174] The absence of distinction thus excludes all change, and changelessness allows no distinction. And just as freedom does not mean, in a spatial sense, that a person can move through infinite space with unimpeded and unlimited speed, but that he himself *is* the infinite space—so too, in a temporal sense, it does not mean that his time never ends, but that he himself *is* the infinite, all-encompassing Time.

It is relatively well known what role the idea of emptiness *(śūnyatā)* played in the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna schools of Buddhism. What is much less known, however, is how intensely the same idea appeared within Christianity—particularly in medieval Eckhartian mysticism—veiled beneath the symbol of the "desert" or "wilderness". One of Meister Eckhart's most eminent disciples, Johannes Tauler, describes in inspired words what lies behind the last veil, in the Holy of Holies:

> No one can imagine the solitude which reigns in this wilderness [where the soul has reached at the end of its journey], no one at all. No thought can enter here, not a word of all the learned treatises on the Holy Trinity with which people busy themselves so much. Not a single word. So inward [= immanent] is it, so infinitely remote [= transcendent], and so untouched by time and space. This ground is simple and without differentiation, and when one enters here, it will seem as if one has been here from all eternity, and as if united to God, be it only for an instant. This experience sheds light and bears witness that man was everlasting in God, before his creation in time. *When he was in Him, he was God in God* [*cf.* skt. *tat tvam asi*].[175]

And the contemporary Flemish mystic Jan van Ruusbroec, speaks in a similar sense about the same ultimate Reality:

> In the measureless solitude of the Godhead [skt. *nirguṇa Brahman*], where God possesses Himself in joy [...] in a simple seeing, beyond reason and without consideration, [...] in the Eternal Now, [...] we can speak no more of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, nor of any creature; but only of one Being [skt. *sat*], which is the very substance of the Divine Persons [skt. *saguṇa Brahman* / Trimūrti]. *There were we all one before our creation;* for this is our superessence. [...] There the Godhead is, in simple essence, without activity: Eternal Rest, Un-

[172] Increasing the number of dimensions by which today's scientifically oriented pseudo-esotericism seeks to grasp the realm of metaphysics in fact leads ever further away from it. The more dimensions we introduce, the greater the disintegration of that which is fundamentally dimensionless—and whose symbol, in the world of spatiality, is the dimensionless point.

[173] What changes is always different, that is, it exists in a state of constant—and necessary, that is, compelled—modification. *Cf.* Heraclitus' maxim: "One cannot step twice into the same river." (Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus,* p. 53).

[174] László András, *Solum Ipsum,* aph. 757.

[175] Johannes Tauler, *Sermons,* p. 148.

conditioned Dark, the Nameless Being, the Superessence of all created things, and the simple and infinite Bliss [skt. *ānanda*] of God and of all Saints.[176]

Here we are dealing with the innermost and ultimate experience, in which the point at the deepest depth of the soul—already beyond space—appears to the mystic as an infinite, undifferentiated expanse. It is a mode of awareness devoid of all thought, and consequently of any delimitation. This can be expressed only through the idea of infinite and homogeneous space—or through the image of a desert or wilderness free of all "landmarks". The innermost sanctum of South Indian temples—the Holy of Holies behind the curtain—perfectly conveys this ultimate Reality in the language of symbols. The full force of this expression can be appreciated only by one who reflects on the infinite richness of form that characterizes South Indian art, and on how deeply it is pervaded by *horror vacui:* on the walls of its temples not a single inch of empty surface is tolerated.

The deepest point of the soul—the Holy of Holies behind the last curtain, the "Dragon Castle" at the bottom of the sea (as Taoist internal alchemy puts it)[177]—is thus the metaphysical foundation of the entire Siddhānta–Vedānta spiritual orientation and practice. It is the undifferentiated, divine Totality of Being. It goes without saying that such a foundation requires that, *mutatis mutandis,* the spiritual wayfarer's relation to the world should correspond to it.

The Great Mystery—which is Emptiness itself—is therefore devoid of any distinction. Since it is not composed of parts, it admits of no distinction between part and whole. Yet if we step out of this "homogeneous" world, we find ourselves in our own, whose primary and all-pervading characteristic is inhomogeneity in every conceivable sense: change always leaves behind former states and moves toward new ones, while spatially the universe is populated in all directions by separate entities. But space is present here as well; and it is precisely the continuity of space that, for the Siddhānta–Vedānta system, represents the alternative to the discontinuous world of distinctions: "The true quality of the soul is that of space, by which it is at rest, everywhere."[178] On this level, then, discontinuity is already present with respect to entities, yet continuity still endures with respect to space. Now, according to the metaphysical symbolism of Arulparananda and of the Siddhānta–Vedānta system in general, it is not the objects within space that are essential, but rather the space in which the existence of objects takes place. This is why the Siddhānta–Vedānta system accords such great attention to space: physical space—*sthūla-ākāśa*—symbolically represents metaphysical existence within the physical world.[179] Space adheres to nothing; while it

[176] Quoted in Evelyn Underhill, *Ruysbroeck,* p. 64.

[177] *Cf. The Secret of the Golden Flower,* p. 70.

[178] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* pp. 25 and 55. Words of Arulparananda. Although the concept of space that underlies this idea has been shaken by modern physics, the notion of "curved space"—whose alleged experimental proof is the bending of light rays passing near the Sun—arises simply from modern physics' rather arbitrary decision to replace space with light as the "untouchable" and constant factor without which everything would collapse into the quagmire of relativity. The modern physical "sacrifice" of space is nothing but a kind of "revenge" on that space which completely escapes the scope of physical investigation.

[179] Space—and time—in the ordinary sense represent a reality that is physically intangible in its purity. The question, of course, is whether space is some kind of entity or merely a relation, formed only by the relationships of things to one another. In other words, is space only practically intangible, or also in principle? However we answer this question, one thing is certain: space cannot itself be spatial, and therefore multiplicity cannot be applied to it. This, however, has strict consequences: space cannot be made the object of investigations that are spatial in nature and subject to multiplicity—that is, investigations that take place in a spatial mode and are directed at spatial entities or processes. This also makes clear that space is, in principle, unknowable by scientific means or methods. Geometry itself is not the science of space, but of the "ideal bodies" defined by it (*cf. geo*-metry: "earth-measurement").

gives place to all things, nothing touches it—it is perfectly permeable and offers resistance to none. In these qualities of space is revealed the attitude of the one who seeks to transcend the world of distinctions composed of fragments of wholeness. Becoming absorbed in the discontinuous world of things, one loses sight of the continuous space without which those very objects could not exist. Therefore the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* warns: "Be free like space, which supports all and is yet unattached. Space is a lesson in renunciation."[180] Using the well-known Vedāntic "jar" analogy, Arulparananda writes in one of his letters:

> The space that fills all pots and houses is one. It is differentiated only by thought, according to the varieties of outer coverings—as Brahmin, outcaste, king, beggar, palace, hut. But there is no such differentiation in space itself. So in the pure, unagitated Intelligence there is likewise no differentiation. Therefore it was graciously said [by Thiruvalluvar] in the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* (6th verse of the chapter on Renunciation): "He who has destroyed the concept of 'I' and 'mine' will enter a world higher than that of the celestials.[181]

In another letter, Arulparananda articulates the relationship between space and pure Consciousness even more clearly:

> The pure intelligence *(arivu)* is the undivided spirit-space *(jñāna-ākāśa),* and nothing else. It becomes fettered by the thought that differentiates this body and its intellectual faculties, its experiences and spheres, as "I" and "mine"; and it is liberated when that differentiation ceases. As means to the attainment of this intelligence, which is *cit-ākāśa,* gods, shrines, streams, rituals, teachers, and so on have been established. These, however, are for those of limited understanding only. For those of higher and more powerful intelligence, the prescribed means is the study of the *Śāstra*s and the contemplation of the motionless Intelligence as God.[182]

Space, then—with its subtlety and freedom, its homogeneity and "untouchability"—serves as a model for the spiritual wayfarer. While ultimate Reality knows only perfect non-differentiation—that is, the empty space, the "Holy of Holies"—ordinary physical space already contains spatial objects, which become the objects of human attention. Yet whoever has made final liberation the supreme compass of life should attend not to the objects—that is, not to the phenomena—but to the universal spatial foundation underlying them; not to the discontinuous, discrete units but to the continuum behind them. As Ramana Maharshi put it:

> Take a sheet of paper. We see only the writing, and no one notices the paper on which the writing appears. Yet the paper is there, whether the writing is there or not. To those who regard the writing as real, you must say that it is unreal, a mere illusion, since its very existence depends upon the paper. The wise man, however, regards the paper and the writing as one. So it is with Brahman and the universe.[183]

From the undifferentiated emptiness *(nirguṇa ākāśa)* to the space differentiated by objects *(saguṇa ākāśa),* we arrive at the idea that is the very subject of our study: *the wisdom of non-discrimination.* This wisdom is, in fact, the practical application of the two preceding principles—the undifferentiated emptiness and the spatial continuity underlying the differentiated material world—applied on the supramoral plane. When Arunachalam describes his experience of the Holy of Holies (quoted above), he continues as follows:

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[180] *The World within the Mind,* p. 128.

[181] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 52–53.

[182] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 61–62.

[183] *Be As You Are,* p. 187.

> I did not understand it [= the emptiness of the Holy of Holies] on my first visit, nor did the priests. The meaning is clear to me now, as explained by the Master, and I find it confirmed in the books. The essence of Śaivam [...] is Equality. This is typified by the space behind the curtain. [...] But this Equality is not confined, as among Westerners, to human beings (or should I say white men?), but embraces all living things, as well as those called non-living, since the Divine consciousness within them is not apparent to our coarser senses.[184] Equality underlies the dance of the Universe, just as in temple worship it underlies the ritual.[185]

The supramoral manifestation of this equality is the wisdom of non-discrimination, which—according to the Jewish–Christian mythologem—was also practiced by the first human beings in the Garden of Eden. According to Edward Carpenter, "this was one of the most remarkable parts of the Guru's teaching".

> Though (for family reasons) maintaining many of the observances of caste himself, and though holding and teaching that for the mass of the people caste rules were quite necessary, he never ceased to insist that when the time came for a man (or woman) to be "emancipated", all these rules must fall away as of no importance—all distinctions of caste or class, all sense of superiority or self-righteousness, of right and wrong even—and the most absolute sense of Equality must prevail towards everyone, together with a firm determination in its expression.[186]

Carpenter emphasizes that this teaching is not unique to Arulparananda but is known throughout the entire Indian spiritual tradition. The *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* directly speaks of the fact that, following the path of the gods, the dead must cast off all burdens, *even the burden of his good deeds.* After reaching the Virajā ("Stainless") River on his otherworldly journey,

> he crosses it with his mind alone. There he shakes off his good and evil deeds. His dear relatives take over his good deeds, and those not dear to him, his evil ones. Then, just as one driving a chariot looks upon the two wheels without being touched by them, so will he look upon day and night, good and evil deeds, and all pairs of opposites. Thus, freed from good and freed from evil, the knower of Brahman goes on to Brahman.[187]

The Buddha teaches no less clearly the transcendence of the moral realm:

> Punna, there are four kinds of action declared by me after directly realizing them through my own knowledge. What are the four? There is dark action with dark result; there is bright action with bright result; there is

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[184] It refers to the idea that nothing, not even a stone, can truly be considered inanimate, because everything is permeated, sustained, and moved by the Divine Spirit. Organic—DNA/carbon-based—life is only one form of life, and there is life both above it (spiritual, mental, social, etc.) and below it. According to Far Eastern understanding, existence is always, at the same time, life. In this regard, it is enough for modern Western man to think of the "life" of atoms, whose existence is maintained by their unstoppable inner activity. This distinctive Far Eastern "animism", however, is complemented by another cardinal doctrine of the Siddhānta–Vedānta system: without exception, everything that exists is *jaḍa.* The Sanskrit word *jaḍa* means insensible, lifeless, inert. This means that every being carries the principle of its life—and thus of its existence—outside itself. Everything that exists is moved; without this motion it could neither exist nor live. One should imagine this as if everything were but a puppet, moved by the puppeteer; but if the puppeteer withdraws, the puppets are revealed as lifeless, insensible, and powerless. This sudden transformation of the human body at the moment of death makes this particularly evident. The only reality that is not *jaḍa,* and that animates all things, is God—or His Spirit.

[185] P. Arunáchalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 40–41. Emphasis mine.

[186] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* p. 26. Although this is certainly true, for Edward Carpenter—as a "romantic anti-capitalist" and "sentimental socialist" following in the footsteps of John Ruskin and William Morris—Arulparananda's teaching on equality had a special significance. Naturally, the difference between political equality and metaphysical equality—or, if you will, between *egality* and *equality*—can hardly be overstated: whereas *egality* is achieved through the destruction of hierarchy, *equality* is attained through its transcendence.

[187] S. Radhakrishnan (ed.), *The Principal Upanishads,* p. 757. Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad 1:4.

> dark-and-bright action with dark-and-bright result; and there is action that is neither dark nor bright, with neither-dark-nor-bright result—action that leads to the cessation of action. [...] And what, Punna, is that action which is neither dark nor bright, with neither-dark-nor-bright result, leading to the cessation of action? It is the volition involved in abandoning dark action with dark result, in abandoning bright action with bright result, and in abandoning dark-and-bright action with dark-and-bright result. This, Punna, is called the action that is neither dark nor bright, with neither-dark-nor-bright result—action that leads to the cessation of action.[188]

Christianity is no exception in this respect: however strong the moral element in it, however firmly it rests on the distinction between good and evil, its highest manifestations still contain an echo—however faint—of that paradisiacal state which knew nothing of good and evil. Already in the Gospel the Son of Man made it clear that God stands above the distinction between good and evil, and that from this His perfection flows; whoever strives for divine perfection must do likewise:

> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. [...] Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:44–45, 48)

In the same way, the wisdom of non-discrimination is not unknown to historical Christianity. Although the transgression of morality—or antinomianism—has always been condemned by the Church as a grave heresy, it has nevertheless found a place, in one form or another, within the higher regions of spirituality and mysticism. This is hardly surprising, since mysticism belongs to a region of spirituality already far above the level of moral dichotomies and codes, and in essence stands under the sign of unity *(unio mystica),* however one may understand it.

Although Pope John XXII, in his bull *In agro dominico,* condemned some of Meister Eckhart's teachings of an antinomian character, Juan de la Cruz—who also shared this view—was not only elevated by the Catholic Church to the rank of saints *(sancti),* but was also made a Doctor of the Church *(Doctores Ecclesiae)*. In his masterpiece *Ascent of Mount Carmel,* St John of the Cross drew a diagram showing how one might ascend to the summit of Mount Carmel, the Mountain of Perfection. According to him, there are three possible paths. The road to the left is the road of earthly goods. Those who follow it believe that by acquiring worldly possessions—pleasure, fame, comfort—they can secure for themselves perfect contentment. This, as St John says, is the way of erring souls, who never reach the mountain's summit. The road to the right is the road of heavenly goods. Those who follow it believe that they can secure perfect contentment through the acquisition of heavenly goods—glory, consolation, and tranquillity. Although they do not err, they have chosen an imperfect path—one on which perfection cannot be attained. The summit of Mount Carmel can therefore be reached neither by the left-hand road of vices nor by the right-hand road of virtues, but only by the middle road that leads straight to the top—the narrow path, the "golden middle way" of perfection—which St John of the Cross describes with these striking words: *nada, nada, nada, nada, nada, nada, aún en el monte, nada*—"nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, and even on the Mount, nothing." And as for the summit of

[188] *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,* p. 496 (Majjhima Nikāya 57:11). Of course, this "action that leads to the cessation of action" refers partly to non-acting action and partly to certain forms of contemplation. *The Secret of the Golden Flower* expresses exactly the same idea (p. 21): "The secret of the magic of life consists in using action in order to attain non-action."

Mount Carmel, "no road leads beyond it, for *the just man is under no law: he is a law unto himself.*"[189]

XV. The realm beyond distinction

The wisdom of non-discrimination—closely related to the wisdom of discrimination *(viveka)*—is an essential element of all higher spirituality. It also points back to man's primordial, Edenic state, which still lacked the knowledge of good and evil. Although the wisdom of non-discrimination belongs to a world whose very essence lies in difference, it is directed toward that which is beyond all difference: "Whatsoever a thing may be, to see in it the One Reality is true wisdom", as Thiruvalluvar says in the *Tirukkuṟaḷ*.[190] It is through the wisdom of non-discrimination that the third eye—the eye of Śiva—is opened, beholding the phenomenal world of dualities from beyond the plane on which man's two earthly eyes are fixed.[191] Only through this vision can "equanimity under all circumstances" be realized.[192] For "obviously, while the mind is full of the little desires and fears which concern the local self and is clouded over by the thought-images which such desires and fears evoke, it is impossible that it should see and understand the greater facts beyond and its own relation to them".[193] But when it is no longer shackled by the desires and fears of the local self, and has freed itself from the web of the phenomenal world which held it captive through its dualities, the way opens before it to a "world" beyond all distinctions—one that is, in every fibre of its being, pervaded by Oneness. The wisdom of non-discrimination thus opens the way to that world where the wisdom of non-discrimination is no longer needed—for it is itself the world of non-discrimination.

> That universal, pure, absolute consciousness which we call God shines everywhere—brilliantly or dimly—according to the purity or otherwise of the case in which it happens to be enclosed. It is like space: all-pervading and equal, alike in hut and palace, in outcast and Brāhmin, in Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Christ, Buddha, you, me, the meanest worm or stone. Unlike material space, the God-space is eternal *(sat),* intelligent *(cit),* blissful *(ānanda)*—or, to translate the words more precisely: pure Being, pure Consciousness, pure Bliss—bearing in mind that in it there is no difference between subject and object. Except by its illumination we are powerless to see, feel, hear, or think, even as the eye cannot see save by the light of sun, moon, or lamp of some sort. It permeates and vitalises all things, giving life and light to all—from the humblest blade of grass to the highest deity.[194]

However, the wisdom of non-discrimination—in the hands of those who seek to attain it not by transcending morality upward, but by negating values and morality itself—turns into *the foolishness of non-discrimination.* We can witness this in certain manifestations of post-Christian phi-

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[189] See *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross,* pp. 110–111. *Cf.* Galatians 5:18: "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." Of course, Paul's *nomos* ("law") and John's *ley* ("law") are not identical in meaning.

[190] Quoted by Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *Studies and Translations,* p. 80 (v. 355).

[191] The third, single eye, in contrast to the two natural eyes, symbolises not merely transcendent vision, but also the vision of the unity that underlies the phenomenal world of diversified forms. In this sense, the third eye can be seen as analogous to the *suṣumṇā-nāḍī* of Tantric yoga—the central *prāṇa* channel—while the two eyes correspond to the *iḍā* and *piṅgalā,* the solar and lunar channels that coil around or run alongside the *suṣumṇā.* The third eye, regarded as the organ for perceiving astral phenomena, is an obsession of modern Western pseudo-esotericism and, at the same time, an excellent indicator of the difference between authentic Eastern metaphysics and Western pseudo-esotericism.

[192] Ponnambalam Arunachalam, *Studies and Translations,* p. 12.

[193] Edward Carpenter, *A Visit to a Gñáni,* pp. 39–40.

[194] P. Arunachalam, *Light from the East,* pp. 35–36. Although not placed in quotation marks, these are probably Arulparananda's own words.

losophy, whose first major expression was Nietzsche's thought, and which, through Heidegger, reached its consummation in postmodern philosophy. And here it is indeed *foolishness,* for postmodern philosophy *rejects* wisdom, and therefore rejects philosophy itself; so it can no longer be called *philo-sophia,* the "love of wisdom", but only *miso-sophia,* the "hatred of wisdom".

Arulparananda was among the few who had triumphed in the greatest of all battles—the battle against one's own bounded, individual existence—and thus came into possession of that universal Being which is the rightful inheritance of every human being, yet which mankind, like the prodigal son, has abandoned, desiring in his hunger "to fill his belly with the husks that the swine did eat" (Luke 15:16). Even if Arulparananda was a teacher, he taught only in secret and remained in obscurity—just as he preserved his hiddenness as the confidant and chief counsellor of Rāja Shivaji and the widowed Mahārāṇī. He was not one of those whose vocation it was to stand before the world and become a world-teacher *(cakravartin),* like Jesus of Nazareth or the historical Buddha. For

> some are those upon whom the Primordial Grace and Lovingkindness has bestowed salvation after they were submerged in complete union and in the wave of *tawḥīd* [unification], bringing them out of the belly of the fish "Annihilation" *(fanāʾ)* onto the shore of separation and into the arena of permanent subsistence *(baqāʾ),* so that they might lead others toward salvation. Others, however, are those who remain completely submerged in the ocean of Unity and have been so utterly effaced in the belly of the fish "Annihilation" that no trace or message of them ever reaches the shore of separation or the realm of subsistence ... and the sanctity of perfecting others has not been entrusted to them.[195]

Such was Arulparananda, as was his master, Tillainathan Swami. Yet let their anonymity not mislead anyone: true human greatness depends neither on anonymity nor on fame. Even in anonymity, Arulparananda has his place among the greatest—among the victors, among those "notable nameless ones" (Béla Hamvas) who "will not live the life of the good man which civic virtue requires, but will leave that behind and choose another—the life of the gods".[196] They are the ones who have cut through the knot of human existence *(cit-jaḍa-granthi)* with the sword of knowledge *(jñāna).*[197] These are the very ones of whom the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* says (3:83–84):

> Behold the Arhats' beatitude! No wanting can be found in them; the thought "I am" *(asmi)* is cut off, the net of delusion torn apart. Unmoving, unoriginated, uncontaminated—true Persons *(sappurisā),* God-become *(brahma-bhūtā),* great heroes, natural sons of the Awake. That heartwood of the Brahma-life is their eternal reason. Unshaken in whatever plight, released from further becoming *(punarbhava),* they stand upon the ground of the conquered self. They have won their battle in the world, and they roar the Lion's Roar—incomparable are the Awakened *(arahanta).*[198]

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[195] Mawlānā ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī. Quoted by Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam,* pp. 6–7.

[196] *Plotinus* I, p. 147. Enn. 1:2:7. The quotation has been slightly modified grammatically to fit the context.

[197] Sanskrit. The link or knot between consciousness *(cit)* and inert corporeality *(jaḍa),* the cutting of which liberates the wayfarer of the spiritual path from the individualizing—and thus binding—power of corporeality in the broadest sense.

[198] Samyutta Nikāya 3:1:76. Translation of Coomaraswamy. *Cf.* Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Hinduism and Buddhism,* p. 68, and Roger Lipsey (ed.), *Coomaraswamy* II: *Metaphysics,* pp. 98–99. The present wording combines elements from both versions.

Timeline (gray dates are approximated or inferred)

1600 – Foundation of the East India Company

1783 – Birth of Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy
1799 – The Maratha Kingdom of Tanjore loses its sovereignty

1814 – Birth of (Elder) Ponnambalam Arunachalam
1815 – Birth of Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai (Arulparananda's Tamil literature teacher)
1823 – **Birth of Arulparananda (sometime between 1820 and 1825)**
1833 – Shivaji, the last Maratha ruler of Tanjore, ascends the throne
1833 – Birth of Mutu Coomaraswamy
1844 – Birth of Edward Carpenter
1846 – Death of Arumugampillai Coomaraswamy
1851 – Birth of Ponnambalam Ramanathan
1853 – Birth of Ponnambalam Arunachalam
1855 – Death of Shivaji, the last Maratha ruler of Tanjore
1856 – British annexation of the Maratha Kingdom of Tanjore
1857 – Confiscation of the private property of the royal family of Tanjore
1857 – Disappearance of Nana Sahib
1857 – **Arulparananda meets his master, Tillainathan Swami**
1857 – First appearance of Tillainathan Swami in Tanjore
1858 – First trial of Tillainathan Swami
1858 – The East India Company's rule over India ends; India becomes a British Crown Colony
1858 – **Arulparananda visits Mutu Coomaraswamy in Ceylon on behalf of the widowed *mahārāṇī***
1860 – **Under his master's guidance, Arulparananda attains the final goal of his spiritual path**
1862 – Final trial of Tillainathan Swami
1865 – **Meeting of Arulparananda and Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai in Tanjore**
1872 – Last appearance of Tillainathan Swami in Tanjore
1875 – Marriage of Mutu Coomaraswamy and Elizabeth Clay Beeby
1877 – Birth of Ananda Coomaraswamy
1877 – Death of (Elder) Ponnambalam Arunachalam
1879 – Death of Mutu Coomaraswamy
1888 – **Arulparananda visits Ponnambalam Ramanathan in Colombo (Ceylon)**
1890 – Edward Carpenter's travels in Ceylon and India
1892 – Publication of Edward Carpenter's Eastern travelogue *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta*
1893 – **Death and *paripūraṇam* (complete realization) of Arulparananda (18 July 1893)**

1900 – Publication of Edward Carpenter's *A Visit to a Gñáni* (four chapters from *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta*)
1903 – Ananda K. Coomaraswamy begins the geological survey of Ceylon
1906 – Ananda K. Coomaraswamy completes the geological survey of Ceylon
1917 – Coomaraswamy appointed Keeper of the Eastern Art Collections at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts
1924 – Death of Ponnambalam Arunachalam
1929 – Death of Edward Carpenter
1930 – Death of Ponnambalam Ramanathan
1947 – India gains independence
1947 – Death of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy
1948 – Ceylon gains independence
1972 – Ceylon renamed Sri Lanka

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