

The proposed project refers to the culture of South India, mostly to the region of historical, pre-modern Tamil Nadu. The region was and still is very rich in many differentiated cultural traditions which, on the one hand are very deeply grounded in the local culture, but on the other hand, they also refer to and influence pan-Indian culture.

Our purpose is to contextualize the cultural phenomena of this region as seen in hitherto unstudied, locally produced texts that represent various domains of its realities. We will study the culture of the region from the perspective of the cultural ecology of literature, namely viewed as a space of the mutual relations between nature and culture which gave rise to literary texts and other products of culture seen as ecological phenomena, i.e. as grounded in two axioms of ecological thought: interconnectedness and diversity. The chosen examples are religious traditions of Pāñcarātra and Śrīvaiṣṇava as well as the medico-alchemical Tamil Siddha tradition. The religious traditions and their literature, acknowledging the role of the nature and using environment for its needs, refer to sacred geography. Tamil Siddha medicine uses the specific natural features of Tamil Nadu to create original, though referring to Ayurveda, medico-alchemical tradition, widely exploring and applying natural substance specific to the region.

Interpretation and contextualization of the differentiated data will imply a broad approach. Issues concerning nature have been important for scholars working in the field of *kāvya* (Indian classical) literature (for example Pandanus Project). Nevertheless, one of the few indologists who intuitively acknowledged the role of nature in shaping South Indian culture from a perspective close to our was Sontheimer (see concept of inhabited or arable space called *kṣetra* and uninhabited, wild and dangerous space called *vana* which complement each other in Sontheimer 1987). However, our attempt is to enrich this approach by the outcome of Western methodology. Thus we will refer to the methods of the cultural ecology of literature as applied in the literary studies (Zapf 2016) and to the cultural theory of literature (transdisciplinary and transtextual approach; Markowski/Nycz 2012), as well as geopoetics (Rybicka 2014).

The research which is based on original and hardly studied sources in Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu languages (the eulogies praising the sacred places – *māhātmyas* from present Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh as well as Tamil Siddha literature) will be complemented by oral testimonies of devotees/practitioners and the analysis of temple art, the ideas presented by which, as our attempt is to show, are rooted in, shaped or transformed by the unique natural surrounding comprising such elements as a specific landscape, fauna, flora, minerals or indigenous inhabitants.

Thus, apart from conducting our research partially in European indological academic institutions, the project assumes also cooperation with Indian scholars and academic institutions as well as field research in India in the religious and traditional medicinal centres.

The reason to undertake the subject is the important role of the South India in shaping the culture of the whole Subcontinent. Being hitherto insufficiently studied, the religious traditions of the region, religious art being its integral part, as well as the Tamil Siddhas' system of the knowledge concerning medicine that provides the spiritual and physical well-being of the region's inhabitants deserve more attention, especially for they display many interesting, hitherto unnoticed features and ideas, interconnected and distinct. In addition, the rapid progress of modernity threatens Indian traditional systems of the knowledge, hence collecting, studying, interpret the elements of the traditional South Indian culture appear even more reasoned.