

The project concerns the medico-alchemical literature of the Tamil Siddha tradition, associated closely with South Indian region of Tamil Nadu, which is one of the most fascinating branches of pan-Indian Siddha movement. The appellation “Siddha” (in Tamil: *cittan*) which refers to the authors of the tradition, derives from Sanskrit word *siddha*, i.e. “fulfilled”, “perfected”. The appellation is associated with another Sanskrit term, *siddhi* (tam. *citti*), i.e. “superpower”. In this connection, the Tamil Siddhas are commonly considered to be venerable sages, possessing a substantial knowledge in traditional sciences, who as a result of certain practices associated also with the use of alchemical preparations attained liberation and extraordinary powers, often associated with achievement of bodily immortality. The tradition of the Tamil Siddhas has been tentatively classified into several streams, each of which produced a number of texts composed in Tamil.

The general goal of the project is to explore critically several texts of the medico-alchemical stream of the Tamil Siddha tradition ascribed to Siddha Yākōpu (ca. 17 c.) from the perspective of material ecocriticism, i.e. a new approach in literary studies, which introduces innovative paths to the considerations on matter and different aspects of materiality (e.g. Iovino and Oppermann 2012). I intend to prepare an insightful study on the selected works of one of the prominent Tamil Siddha authors, that have not been yet subjected to profound academic investigation, in order to gain better understanding of Tamil Siddha tradition and its literary production, and contribute to filling of an important lacuna in the field of the research on early modern Tamil literature. Furthermore, another target is to provide significant contribution to the studies on traditional Tamil Siddha alchemy, which still remains one of the most neglected by the contemporary scholarship areas of traditional Indian systems of knowledge.

My research in its outline will be divided into two main paths. The first one will concern the role and status of mercury (tam. *iracam*) in the Tamil Siddha alchemy represented in the chosen texts of Yākōpu, also in relation with the doctrines and practices of alchemy described in Sanskrit treatises. In Sanskrit sources mercury (sansk. *rasa*) is often imaged as an extraordinary substance identified with semen of god Śiva. Its consumption is necessary to achieve alchemical goal, i.e. the bodily immortality. I intend to investigate the imaging of mercury in Yākōpu’s texts in reference to the material ecocriticism, which aims to expand the interpretative perspectives for textual representations of variously conceived materiality.

The second path will be concentrated on the discourses of the alchemical teachings, which are interlaced with the passages concerning the religious and yogic practices and experiences. This line of research will complement the previous one, as it will investigate whether also the parts of Yākōpu’s works which are associated with the spiritual sphere reveal elements relevant to the analysis from the perspective of material ecocriticism. In particular I will explore the way in which the lifeless matter is presented in the context of spiritual practices and experiences described in the texts. I will investigate the Siddha’s views on the dichotomies connected with the concept of materiality, such as the oppositions between that what is human and non-human, dead - alive, material - spiritual, that may be read from the texts. Moreover, I will analyse the passages of esoteric character examining the strategies of intensifying the obscurity of the discourse employed by the author. I also intend to consult the texts ascribed to the authors of other branches of Tamil Siddha tradition, tracking the common idioms across the different streams of Tamil Siddha literature.

The results of the philological analysis of the texts will be reflected upon with application of the research perspective related especially with the theory of material ecocriticism (e.g. Iovino and Oppermann 2012, Iovino and Oppermann 2014). Moreover, taking into consideration the multi-faceted character of the Tamil Siddha literature, the study will require trans-disciplinary approach associated with the pluralist methodology proposed by the cultural theory of literature (Burzyńska 2012: 74). The textual analysis will be supplemented with field studies in South India, that will involve interviews with the contemporary practitioners of Tamil Siddha tradition and observations of the medico-alchemical procedures performed by them.

The main reason for undertaking the studies on the literature of Yākōpu is a lack of sufficient scholarly analyses of Tamil Siddha medico-alchemical literature, which constitutes rich and fascinating field of research. Therefore, the proposed research project is expected to contribute to the filling of a significant gap in the studies on the Tamil literature of the early modern period. Moreover, it will provide the researchers who are unfamiliar with relatively less known Tamil language with certain access to the content of this multifaceted literature and therefore it may trigger a broader interdisciplinary study on the Tamil Siddha tradition in order to acquire better understanding of this fascinating and yet still unstudied element of Indian culture. Finally, the project may also contribute to the innovative research projects related to the digitization of the Tamil manuscripts and making them available on the Internet, undertaken recently by international teams of scholars in India and Europe.