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Introduction

Arivũ (*Knowledge* or *Consciousness*) – one of the earliest philosophical works composed by Nārāyaṇa Guru – a saint, mystic and social reformer of Kerala (cf. Chapters I, II, III) – considers Consciousness – the one all-underlying substance and the primeval cause of the whole universe – from an epistemological perspective. This set of 15 stanzas has been written in amazingly simple and enigmatic Malayalam, which allows the reader to interpret the text in various ways, in light of various philosophical schools and in accordance with a plethora of concepts. The entire composition may be called the most deceptive riddle ever handed down by Guru to his followers. It is a quite delicate piece of work which – each time we touch it – provides us with an ever-deeper understanding of the idea of a sole reality, which by means of the *Cit* aspect, manifests itself in the form of the abysmal universe. It is a multicoloured gem that sheds its light of wisdom from every angle of interpretation. The number of levels, aspects, concepts and systems encoded in each and every side and angle of such a jewel, depends on the reader alone.

I have selected the path of interpretation paved by Guru Himself, with the ideas included in two other philosophical works, namely *Ātmōpadēśa Śatakam* and *Darśana Mālā*. Both of these works contain the analytical exposition of the Theory of *Bhāna* – “the conditioned shining forth of one unconditioned consciousness”. A sufficient number of passages of these poems, supplemented with the commentary and explanation in light of other religious and philosophical systems (Kashmir Śaivism, *Spanda* theory, *Śaiva Siddhānta*, *Laya* or *Kuṇḍalinī Yoga*, *Vedānta* etc.), are given in Chapter IV of this work.

The concluding Chapter (Chapter V) contains a translation of *Arivũ*, supplemented with a short commentary and explanations. The commentary is based on the *Bhāna* Theory as exposed by Guru Himself, *Śaiva Siddhānta* concepts – mainly *Tirumandiram* by Tirumūlar (the English translation of relevant stanzas is based on the original Tamil text as included in a 10-volume edition by Ganapathy, and provided with a Malayalam translation of Nāyar), *Laya Yoga*, *Vedānta* etc.

I have also decided to add all the commentaries written by Guru's disciples, as well as scholars. They are presented in the following order:

1. A short commentary by T. Bhāskaran (TBH)
[The short commentary is supplemented with simple and direct references to Guru's other works]
2. A commentary given by G. Bālakṛṣṇan Nāyar, a scholar of *Vedānta* (GBN)
[An extensive commentary which contains references to Sanskrit philosophical systems]
3. A commentary with English translation prepared by Nitya Caitanya Yati, a disciple of Guru (NCY)
[An extensive commentary which unites the concepts taken from Indian philosophy (*Nyāya*, *Vedānta* etc.) with some thoughts and ideas present in Western philosophy and psychology]
4. A commentary (English and Malayalam) with an English translation by Svāmi Muni Nārāyaṇa Prasād – a disciple of the Guru's disciple Nāṭarāja Guru (MNP)
[An extensive commentary based mainly on the *Vedānta* school, with direct and penetrating references to concepts exposed by Nārāyaṇa Guru in his other works]
5. A commentary by M.H. Śāstrikaḷ, a Sanskrit scholar (MHŚ)
[An extensive commentary based on schools of Indian philosophy: *Nyāya*, *Vedānta*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Yoga* etc.]

Moreover, each stanza supplemented with all of the commentaries given above is provided with an English translation by Nāṭarāja Guru – a disciple of Nārāyaṇa Guru, and with a short English explanation by V. Jayakumar (VJK).

* * *

All pictures included in the book have been drawn up by the author of the present book.

Within the entire book, one can find inconsistency as regards the transcription of the Indian words; the reason for that is the derivation of these terms can be different. The noun “Śiva” in Sanskrit text is transcribed as *Śiva*, in Malayalam context – as *Śivan*; in the case of the Tamil tradition two versions are permissible, namely *Śivaṅ* or *Civaṅ*. Moreover, as the specificity of Malayalam language permits the Sanskrit version (Sanskrit loan-word, e.g., *suṣumnā*) or its modified Malayalam version (*suṣumna*), within one and the same text, two versions of the same term can appear within the interpretation of these texts as well. Considering an extremely complex permeation of these three literary traditions, namely Sanskrit, Malayalam and Tamil, in Guru's works, it would be impossible (and arduous for the reader) to indicate univocally the derivation of a large majority of words.