Some Fundamental Questions Regarding The Nature And Operation Of Consciousness-Power

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Abstract: The present study presents a multi-faceted understanding of consciousness-power (*cicchakti*), both from epistemological as well as metaphysical standpoints. From an epistemological standpoint, it (*cicchakti*) has been diversely portrayed, viz., 1) as the means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*), 2) as the valid cognition (*pramā*), and 3) as the knower (*pramātā*). On the one hand, *cicchakti*, with reference to Śiva, is the fundamental force behind the manifestation of all the thirty-six *tattva*s, which results in the setting forth of the metaphysical foundation of the entire creation. On the other hand, *cicchakti*, with reference to the realm of an individual soul, is the primordial *śakti* who bestows both the ability to act and the fruits corresponding to those actions as well. This study will conclude that *cicchakti* is of the nature of omniscience and omnipotence, and is present in both Śiva and *jīva*.

Index Terms - *Cicchakti, Consciousness-power, Epistemology, Śaivaparibhāṣā, Śaiva Siddhānta.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Śaiva Siddhānta, with reference to the *summum bonum* of human life (*parama-puruṣārtha*), emphasizes the meticulous exploration of three fundamental categories (*padārtha*s), viz., God (*Pati*/Śiva), individual self (*paśu*/*jīva*), and bondage (*pāśa*).[1] To understand the true nature of the metaphysical categories, this analytical approach underscores the pivotal role of epistemological discussion, which serves a dual purpose within the tradition. Firstly, epistemological discussion facilitates the validation of the truths expounded in scriptures with the help of logical reasoning.[2] Secondly, rather than debunking various incomplete philosophical concepts put forward by rival philosophical traditions, epistemology also presents a systematic analysis of the foundational principles of Śaiva Siddhānta, which is the primary precondition for liberation. Any kind of epistemological discussion pertains to Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy, always presupposes or is even founded on the understanding of the nature and function of *cicchakti*, which operates as all the three factors of knowledge, viz., knower (*pramāta*), means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*), and the object to be known (*prameya*). Further, the same *cicchakti* itself illuminates in the form of knowledge, obtained through the operation of the above-stated factors (Sivaraman, 1973, p. 99).

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[1] Even though the fundamental categories of Śaiva Siddhānta, *viz.*, *Pati*/Śiva, *paśu*/*jīva*, and *pāśa*, have been generally translated as the Lord, individual self, and bondage respectively, the present author prefers to retain the Sanskrit terms to ensure both conceptual accuracy along with originality.

[2] This point is particularly catering to individuals with limited intellectual capacity who may grapple with alternative teachings, presented in the scriptures of other traditions such as Sāṃkhya, Advaita Vedānta, etc., or even other sects of Śaivism itself, such as Kāpālika, Pāśupata, and Bhairava, etc., and those who find it very difficult to grasp the essence of Śaiva Siddhānta teachings.

Philosophical inquiry into the nature and operation of *cicchakti*, especially in the context of the Śaiva Siddhānta theory of knowledge, is intricately connected to its realistic[3] attitude towards phenomenal reality. Now, what is the nature of *cicchakti*, which operates both in the phenomenal as well as transcendental realms; how do two different notions, *viz.*, consciousness (*cit/citi*), power (*śakti*), constitute a separate singular existence, called *cicchakti*? Is *cicchakti* a quality (*guṇa*), located in fundamental categories (*padārtha*s), construed in Śaiva Siddhānta? If it is a quality, then whose quality is *cicchakti*: whether it is the quality of the *Pati* or the quality of individual selves (*paśu*s)? Is it, i.e., *cicchakti*, a separate category altogether? These questions should be answered to understand the nature and functionality of *cicchakti* within the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. Therefore, let us dive into the examination of *cicchakti*.

It should be noted that, though scholars like Sivaraman (1973), Soni (2018), Ponniah (1952), Siddalingaiah (1979), Devasenapati (1974), Paranjoti (1954), and Pillai (2023), etc., all these studies do not provide any extensive discussion on the nature and functionality of cicchakti. However, they have elucidated some or the other aspects of *cicchakti*. Thus, the present study intends to analyze *cicchakti* by postulating some fundamental questions. With reference to the methodology of the present study, I should specify that the paper follows interpretive-cum-analytical method to understand certain epistemological tensions within Śaiva Siddhānta philosophy.

II. EXAMINATION OF DIFFERENT DISPOSITIONS OF *CICCHAKTI*

Śaiva Siddhānta adopts a realistic attitude towards the objective existence of the material world; thus, the reality is nameable and knowable (*prameya*). To logically justify its subscription to *satkārya-vāda*, where the effect is conceived as something pre-existing in its cause, theory without losing the idea of an all-encompassing divine entity, Śaiva Siddhānta presupposes the existence of a dynamic, but non-different, aspect of the absolute consciousness principle (cit) as its own power (*śakti*). This is how two different notions, *viz.*, consciousness (*cit/citi*), power (*śakti*), constitute a compound, called *cicchakti*. Therefore, it is not wrong to argue that Śaiva Siddhānta, which aligns with Nyāya philosophy, maintains much more importance to an existential aspect of epistemological function. In other words, Śaiva Siddhānta, unlike other philosophical traditions such as Advaita Vedānta, which are concerned with the experience of some transcendental reality, does not conceive phenomenal reality as something completely alienated from that of the transcendental. However, both of them are conceived as two dimensions or dispositions of the same absolute entity called Śiva. Therefore, the *cicchakti*, which is indifferent from Śiva, functions with reference to both phenomenological as well as transcendental realms. Moreover, the function of cognition, according to the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition, is concerned with the *cicchakti* through the sensory organs cognize/perceive external objects (Sastri, 1982, p. 17), and the same *cicchakti* facilitates the attainment of the absolute knowledge (*śivajñāna*), when the *paśu* is ready to receive the same.

According to the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition, the *cicchakti* has a twofold nature: both as the knower (*pramātā*) and the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*)[4] and each cognitive event presupposes a transactional relationship between the *cicchakti* and the objective world. The inquiry into whether *cicchakti* comprises means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) or the soul/knower (*pramātā*) leads to assertion that the *cicchakti* of *paśu*, tainted by impurity, and possesses intentionality towards the objective world, denotes *pramāṇa* (Devasenapati, 1974, p. 19). In other words, if the Siddhāntins were asked about the difference between the knower (*pramātā*), where the *cicchakti* functions as the very essence of the capacity of *jīva* to cognize things, without which one cannot cognize objects. Thus, *cicchakti* is the precondition of being in the state of a knower. From another aspect, the same *cicchakti* functions as the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). Therefore, *cicchakti* is not just an inner

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[3] Realistic in the sense of acceptance of mind-independent reality of the phenomenal world, contrary to its realistic attitude, Śaiva Siddhānta receives criticisms from the Yogācāra-buddhist tradition of Vasubandhu (4th or 5th CE) and Dharmakīrti (*fl.* c. 600–670 CE).

[4] The *Pauṣkarāgama*, 7.78. states: *ebhir-vihīnā cicchaktiḥ pramāṇatvena sammatā | cicchaktiśca parāpekṣo bodha eva na cāparaḥ || na tasyābhimukhaṁ jñānaṁ mātā mānaṁ paronmukham | pare prameya-bhāvādi-vyāpāraḥ phalamiṣyate ||* which means, the consciousness which is in the form knower (*mātā*) is not turned or intent towards the objects (of cognition); whereas, the consciousness, which is in the form of means of knowledge (*māna*) is intent towards them, i.e., the objects of cognition. The *Pauṣkarāgama* uses the term 'para' (literally, 'other') to denote the externality. Umāpati-śivācārya (14th CE), while glossing the word 'param' of the compound-word 'paronmukham,' used to indicate external intended consciousness, states that the word, 'param' indicates anything or everything other than the *paśu*, the knower of objects that belongs to the phenomenal world. Another important point to note here, with respect to *cicchakti*, as a means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), is that Śaiva Siddhānta posits *cicchakti* as the sole *pramāṇa*, and other faculties such as senses and mind, merely serving as conduits through which *cicchakti* operates (See Colas-Chauhan, 2007, pp. 89-91).

faculty, like the intellect (*buddhi*), mind (*manas*), etc., or a self-contained quality of *paśu*, but it is always in the nature of external orientation, which is always in relation with objects.

From the above discussion, it is clear that *cicchakti* has two different aspects: with respect to the relation with the objects, as being *pramāṇa*, and as the quality of *paśu*/*jīva*. But it is important to ask whether the function of *cicchakti* is restricted to the realm of the *paśu* or not? If not, then how does *cicchakti* function with respect to the other two fundamental categories of Śaiva Siddhānta, namely, the *Pati* and the bondage (*pāśa*)? Soni (2018, p. 9) argues that both *cicchakti* and the power/potentiality (*śakti*) are the same; the latter is only an abbreviation of the former. Further, Śaiva Siddhānta posits the inseparability of *Pati* and His potentiality, like in the case of light and luminosity (*prakāśa* & *vimarśa*). Therefore, it is not wrong to argue that the functionality of *cicchakti* is not only limited to the realm of *paśu*, but it is also inherent in *Pati* and acts as the potentiality or power of the *Pati*. So, the *cicchakti* functions as an instrument of the pure consciousness, and his five-fold cosmic functions, *viz*., creation (*sṛṣṭi*), preservation (*sthiti*), destruction (*saṁhāra*), etc., are possible through the *cicchakti* only.[5] Therefore, it is clear that the functionality of the *cicchakti* is not restricted to the realm of cognition only; rather, it, i.e., the *cicchakti*, has an operational aspect as well.

III. EXAMINATION INTO THE FUNCTIONALITY(S) OF *CICCHAKTI*

The functionality of *cicchakti* with reference to bondage (*pāśa*) can be understood in terms of cognition. As stated in the *Śaivaparibhāṣā* (1.3),[6] the valid cognition (*pramā*) is nothing but the *cicchakti* itself. But at the same time, cognition, being the outcome of the modification of intellect (*buddhivritti*), cannot take place through *cicchakti* per se, but only through a fettered *cicchakti*, which is delimited by the intellect (Soni, 2018, p. 61). Therefore, it is clear that *cicchakti* is not beyond the limitation (*pāśa*) at least with reference to its cognitive functionality as far as the realm of *jīva* is concerned.

The *cicchakti* of *paśu* has been illuminated by the *Pati*, without being affected by the *karma*s of *paśu*s. Thenceforth, the illuminated *cicchakti* cognizes the objects through the sensory organs. However, a question may arise: if the *jīva* is always illuminated by the *Pati*/Śiva whenever the f objective perception takes place, then what is the difference between objective cognition, facilitated by the intellect (*buddhi*), and the intuitive revelation granted by *Pati*? To answer this question, Śaiva Siddhānta distinguishes both of these impartations of knowledge by the *Pati*. In the case of illumination granted by *Pati*, towards the *cicchakti* of *jīva* (*atma-cit-śakti*), to take the initiative for objective cognition depends on the *karma* of that particular *paśu*/*jīva*, and such an illumination, meant for objective cognition, never brings the intuitive experience of *Pati*. On the other hand, the intuitive revelation does not depend upon the results of the *karma*s of a *paśu*, because the intuitive experience of the *Pati* can be possible only when all the impurities are matured and removed. In other words, the first illumination, meant for objective cognition, happens within the realm of mediate knowledge (*pāśajñāna*). In contrast, there is no mediation in the intuitive revelation of the *Pati* (*patijñāna*).

The relationship between *cicchakti* and the bondage (*pāśa*) suffers a twofold problem: firstly, if the Śiva, who is unaffected and beyond any bondage/limitation (*pāśa*), and *cicchakti* are not separate categories, as stated before; now, if there is identity between *Pati* and *cicchakti*, how can the *cicchakti* become affected by any kind of limitation (*pāśa*)? The second problem is that we cannot presuppose two kinds of *cicchakti*s, namely, the consciousness per se, and the *cicchakti* which is delimited/fettered, because the *Mṛgendrāgama* has already stated (Soni, 2018, p. 9). Here, the second problem can be dismissed on the basis of the authority of the *Mṛgendrāgama* itself, where it is stated that, even though the *cicchakti* is one, it manifolds as many with reference to cognition and action. But with reference to the first problem, there is no direct solution; though we can postulate to possibilities. Either we have to accept that the *cicchakti*, being an instrument of the Śiva, is different from the pure consciousness (Śiva); otherwise, the Śaiva Siddhānta should be forced to accept that even the Śiva is not completely free from limitation, which will be a crucial turn. Apart from the two possibilities, the only possibility, which will be suicidal far as the philosophy of Śaiva Siddhānta dualism is concerned with; that is we can argue that all these changes, he two-fold classification of *cicchakti, viz*., *cicchakti* per se, and delimited *cicchakti*, and its affiliation with limitation/impurity (*mala*), is only a

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[5] Soni (2018, p. 9) quotes the *Mṛgendrāgama* (3.4) to convey this idea, where it has been stated that: the instrument which is intelligent, and even if it is one, the *cicchakti* appears as many with respect to cognition and action, in relation to various objects.

[6] *tatra pramāṇa-sāmānya-lakṣaṇaṁ tu saṁśaya-viparyaya-smṛti-vyatiriktā pramāpara-paryāyā ātma-cicchakti-iti* | which Sastri (1982, p. 3) translates as follows: "As for the definition of the general nature of pramāṇā, it is the soul's intelligence-energy which is different from doubt, error, and remembrance and is otherwise called valid knowledge (pramā)."

superimposition and not real; this idea is not different from the Advaita Vedantic view of superimposition of the world on Brahman as a result of nescience (*avidyā*). A Śaiva Siddhāntin has to suffer two philosophical tensions if he proceeds with the idea of superimposition. Firstly, we should be forced to reject the validity of all cognitions, which is impossible without the affiliation between the *cicchakti* and the modification of intellect.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present study has estimated the nature and function of consciousness-power (*cicchakti*) by analyzing different layers of it. *Cicchakti* of jīvas, i.e., *ātma-cicchakti*, which is not different, but an illumination of the *śakti* of *Pati*. Further, the relation between the *cicchakti* of Śiva and *jīva* can be understood as follows: the cicchakti of Śiva and jīva are not different, but it is the same metaphysico-epistemological principle that operates in two different realms. The five-fold cosmic functions of Śiva, executed through cicchakti, also have epistemological implications when it comes to the realm of jīvas, where the cognition, etc., of jīvas are equated with the five-fold cosmic functions of Śiva.

Still, several questions remain as a barrier to understanding the notion called *cicchakt*, which I am unable to deal with in this study. Some of them are as follows: Is the *cicchakti* a singular entity with two different aspects, or are there two different *cicchakti* with two different functions? Again, Śaiva Siddhānta, as a realistic tradition, accepts the reality of *jīva*s, both bounded and liberated, so there must be numerous *cicchakti*s that exist, corresponding to the number of *paśu*s that exist? What is the functionality of *cicchakti* with respect to the other two fundamental categories of Śaiva Siddhānta, namely, the *Pati* and the *pāśa*? Last but not least, the most fundamental question is that if the *cicchakti*, in its *pramāṇa* sense, functions with respect to the external objects only how will we be able to understand the true nature of one's own self, without employing any means of knowledge, etc.?

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