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Māyā, Āṇava Mala and Original Sin:

A Comparative Study

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Introduction

“The longing for grace in Hinduism,” argues Bishop Sabapathy Kulandran, “springs more often from the desire to solve a metaphysical problem than from an agony tearing at one’s inmost being.”¹ For this reason, a Hindu seeks liberation from a metaphysical situation, a feeling of impurity, rather than redemption from sin.² Yet as Christian thinking on the doctrine of original sin has developed, it has more and more come to understand original sin as denoting first and foremost a cosmic reality, a metaphysical situation, in some ways very similar to the metaphysical impurity of the Śaiva Siddhānta notion of *āṇava mala*. And so Klaus K. Klostermaier states concerning *āṇava*: “*Āṇava*, beginningless and eternal, is the primal bondage of the souls; it is something like an ‘original sin.’”³ There is thus a certain point of contact – alongside clear points of distinction and differentiation – between the Christian doctrine of original sin and the Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine of *āṇava mala*. This essay will trace those points of contact, beginning with a discussion of *māyā* and *āṇava mala* and

concluding with a comparative analysis of original sin. For explication of the Śaiva Siddhānta teaching, this essay will look primarily to the philosophical explanations of K. Sivaraman.⁴ It will then employ briefly the thought of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and, in particular, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in order to discuss those points of contact with *āṇava mala* found in more contemporary discussions of original sin.

Two important points may be made at the outset of this project. The first is on the nature of the comparison, the second on its purpose. First, the comparison that will be made in this essay will look at the metaphysically similar functionality of the concepts of original sin and *āṇava mala*. In other words, while for Śaiva Siddhānta *malam* represents a metaphysical and structural concept, in the Christian tradition original sin has had primarily a personal moral connotation. Yet within the Christian tradition, there is also found a cosmic metaphysical meaning for the doctrine of original sin. It is for this purpose that I have selected the particular authors used in this essay, to highlight how original sin has

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represented cosmically the limited and finite reality in which human beings find themselves.

Second, the purpose of such a comparison is not only to line up confessional beliefs, but also to allow for a mutual illumination of ideas between the two systems. Francis Clooney has argued that comparative theology that remains confessional is most productive when it focuses on particular examples: “Theology becomes interreligious when we actually take examples seriously.”⁵ In such cases, the discussion can no longer remain in the realm of vague ideas but must engage with particular doctrines. For this reason I have chosen the particular doctrine of original sin and juxtaposed it with the doctrine of *āṇava mala* in order to observe how “new words and ideas begin to flow back and forth across established boundaries in a creative (and untidy) way.”⁶ My conclusions will be very provisional. The main goal is to begin to juxtapose the language found in two traditions on a particular doctrine so that readers can become acquainted with this language and the possibilities for mutual illumination between two traditions and two sets of beliefs.

I. The Doctrine of *Pāśa: Māyā* and *Āṇava Mala*

Śaiva Siddhānta teaching speaks of three fundamental realities: *pati*, *paśu*, *pāśa* – the Lord, Man, and Bonds. This is its fundamental doctrine: “Śaiva Siddhānta teaches belief in three eternal entities known as Pati (God), Paśu (Soul), and Pāśam (Principle of Ignorance and Matter).”⁷ Each of these, together called the Tripardartas, is eternal and beginningless. *Pāśa* encompasses three principles: *mala*, *māyā*, and *karma*. Each of these is “evil,” though *mala* is the only one that is evil absolutely. Both *māyā* and *karma* are more paradoxical, since they can

be both the occasions of sin and of grace depending on how they are used. The universe is created in order to offer souls an opportunity through their bodies to escape from the bondage of *āṇava mala*, or primordial impurity. Without a body, souls would never have the means necessary to escape from the covering of impurity and egoism that surrounds them. G. Subramanya Pillai explains: “This creation has a purpose underlying it. Of course, the Lord has no affections or aversions. But out of His abundant Grace He performs this function to release the souls from bondage. If they were left to rot and ruse in eternal chaotic darkness, their Karma will not fructify and they cannot shake off their Mala.”⁸

The human soul is both eternal and uncreated and also completely dependent upon God. Souls are self-existent, but “self-existence does not imply absolute existence; it is eternal and yet dependent.”⁹ Since souls are eternal and not created in time, God cannot be implicated in evil. Yet souls are made to be dependent upon God.¹⁰ They are not always aware of this dependence since they are caught between two realities: *sat* and *asat*. Capable of knowledge like God, the soul is *sat*. However, the soul is also encased in matter, and in this state of attachment to matter, the soul is *asat*: “It is a *sat* and an *asat*. It has a soul that is *sat* and it has a body that is *asat*, and therefore the human being is called *sat-asat*, spirit and non-spirit.”¹¹ Neither completely one nor the other, the soul resides in an intermediate state. It can either completely immerse itself into non-spirit, *māyā*, and so lose track of its ultimate goal, or it can use *māyā* as an instrument towards attaining to *sat*, pure spirit. Śaiva Siddhānta emphasizes one particular quality of the soul: “One primary quality of the soul is to

get itself completely drowned in the thing it comes in contact with.”¹² In its intermediary evolutionary state, the soul is *sat-asat* and as such is in the dangerous position of losing itself to the world of matter rather than the world of spirit. Situated between “Śiva and *aruḷ* [peace, reconciliation, compassion¹³] on the one side and Tirodhayi and *āṇava* on the other”¹⁴ souls tend to cling to whatever they are closest to. This is precisely why the doctrine of grace is so central to Śiva Siddhānta theology. Without grace, a soul would never be able to free itself, nor even to know that it needs to escape, from its state of bondage. That is why it would not be an understatement to say: “More than any other form of Hinduism, Śaiva Siddhānta proclaims itself to be a religion of grace.... The universe is run in grace. The soul is under the never-failing guidance of grace and finally attains to union with the Deity because of grace.”¹⁵

Māyā

The Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine of *māyā* is paradoxical to its core. On the one hand, *māyā* is a grace offered by Siva for the overcoming of *mala*. This is in contrast to the Vaiṣṇava doctrine of *māyā* as pure illusion: “The Śiddhāntin uses the word ‘Māyā’ not in the sense of ‘illusion.’ No illusions are admissible in Śiddhānta.”¹⁶ *Māyā* is the material cause of the universe, the very “substrate” of the universe.¹⁷ Thus, God is the efficient cause of the universe, *śakti* is the instrumental cause of the universe, and *māyā* is the material cause of the universe.¹⁸ *Māyā* is an “identity of opposites.”¹⁹ It both reveals and deludes. In one sense it allows the *mala*-veiled soul to begin to work out its own liberation. In another sense it provides a distraction for the soul so that it remains veiled

from true knowledge. It is important to examine these two aspects of *māyā*.

First, *māyā* is grace and “‘gracious’ in intention.”²⁰ Sivaraman explains:

Not being spirit it is not itself a value, but it exemplifies all values of spirit and serves as a lamp unto the way of one blinded by darkness and a vehicle for ascending to a life of spirit. It is the supreme antidote provided by the gracious Lord to counteract the effects of the congenital Ignorance and Impurity of *mala*. It is an expression of Divine grace itself, though a disguised expression.²¹

In this first sense, *māyā* is the material substrate of the universe and the playground of *śakti*, the instrumental principle of creation and the “supreme antidote” to *āṇava mala*. *Māyā* is typically spoken of as being of two kinds. The first is *śuddha māyā* or “*māyā* in the primordial state.”²² The second is *aśuddha māyā* or “*māyā* mingled with *mala* and *karma*.”²³ *Māyā* of itself is blind and neutral. It is only when it becomes mixed in with *karma* and *mala* that it becomes a principle of delusion for human beings. Of itself, *māyā* is a pure medium, since it is through *māyā* that the soul comes to possess knowledge. It is the very condition of the possibility of knowledge for the soul at all: “It functions as a manifesting medium of knowledge like a lamp that pierces the encircling gloom of night.”²⁴ In this sense, although it is still an “impurity” and still a form of bondage, it is quite different from *āṇava*. It is through material *māyā* that the soul receives a body. As V.A. Devasenapathi explains: “Without body, organs etc., the souls do not have cognition, conation and affection. So, while *āṇava* obscures, *māyā* illumines; while *āṇava* thwarts, *māyā* helps. *Āṇava* and *māyā*

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differ from each other in respect of their function as much as light differs from darkness.”²⁵ It is a bond “binding man already bound.”²⁶ It is only evil to the extent that a bound person finds it a distraction, as something that deludes from the ultimate end.

Yet precisely because the soul is primordially bound by *āṇava* – which will be discussed later in more detail – *māyā* functions to delude the soul and to distract it from its ultimate end of love and worship of Śiva. Because the body is made of the same “stuff” of the material world, it wants to seek its pleasure in that world. As it becomes more attracted to the world, it becomes bound to it and more distant from the liberation that it requires. The world of *māyā* is thus both the necessary occasion of liberation and the proximate occasion of further bondage. As the soul begins to seek the pleasure offered by *māyā*, a further problem occurs. The soul begins to identify itself with the world, with *māyā*, and to “forget” that it is eternal and not meant to be bound to this world. Yet paradoxically, as has already been pointed out, it is precisely through this process of over-identifying with the world that the soul eventually reaches maturity and realizes that it is not the same as the world and must transcend the world: “The same bodily organs that proved a snare to the soul are now channels of knowledge. They bring knowledge of the true nature of the world and of the body as different from the soul. *Māyā* helps the soul to see and thereby disentangle itself from the world.”²⁷ Ultimately, by means of *māyā*, the soul can achieve salvation.

Āṇava Mala

The beginningless and mysterious nature of the doctrine of *āṇava mala* or impurity that covers the soul is everywhere attested in Śaiva Siddhānta theology. And the tension that this creates for a religion that is so deeply founded upon grace is palpable in Śaiva texts:

We are slaves, never leaving You – our Lord; but by

What deed did we put on *āṇavam* – you tell me.²⁸

Devasenapathi explains:

How the soul which is essentially intelligent like the Lord came to be associated with impurity is a question to which no answer can be given. All that can be said is that the soul has been beginninglessly associated with impurity even as verdigris is with copper.²⁹

The soul prior to birth is in its *kevala* state, a state in which it is impure.³⁰ In its embodied or *sakala* state the soul is fitted with a body made from *māyā* so that it can achieve liberation from its primordial, beginningless impurity. The soul’s impurity is an intrinsic part of itself that it always has. There was never a time when the soul did not have this impurity.³¹ From the very beginning “man’s true nature is hidden. This individuality is even called a state of ‘sinfulness.’”³² The soul is not impure of itself, but from the very beginning it is bound in sinfulness or impurity or individuality to *mala*.³³ The soul is in “primordial bondage.”³⁴

Two aspects of this bondage seem particularly important to the discussion of this essay. The first is the method by which the doctrine of *āṇava* is deduced. Jayandra Soni explains:

Whereas Śaiva Siddhānta scripture is the final authority as regards the view of the

three-fold structure of ultimate reality, there can be no contradiction in arguing, particularly with reference to *malam*, that its existence is derived from the analysis of the human predicament. It is man's finitude, limitedness, and involvement in the throes of the oscillation between experiences of joy and suffering – alien to man's essential nature when it can manifest itself fully, once it is liberated from these factors – that point to this predicament.³⁵

Sivaraman lays out the steps of argumentation following a negative method, beginning with the reality of liberation itself: “The liberated man (*mukta*) is one who is liberated from something.”³⁶ This is the first step in the negative argument that works from the conclusion – the need for liberation – back to the premise – the fact of primordial bondage. Sivaraman then goes through a method of elimination, dismissing all those things that man is *not* liberated from until he arrives at the core of the meaning of *āṇava*: “A primordial non-manifestness of the experience of Bliss constitutive of one's very Being.”³⁷

But how does one arrive at the conclusion of this “primordial non-manifestness?” Sivaraman explains:

The will to live and enjoy which underlies a life of affirmation (*pravṛtti*) characterizing all living beings proceeds from a state of primordial privation and obscurity. It is the latter state of deprivation that drives or impels one into activity. From this experience of felt impulsion we infer an antecedent state of obscurity and arrest. The rise of this impulsion to act will be unaccountable.³⁸

The very desire for experience; the very drive that everyone has to act and experience *implies* a prior state of deprivation. This state of deprivation, ignorance or non-manifestness of bliss is *mala*. It is an “unconditioned condition obstructing unconditionally again the unbroken continuity of bliss-experience.”³⁹ So while the doctrine of *mala* may seem superfluous to some, to Śaiva Siddhānta it is nothing more than the obvious expression of the veiled nature of existence. The soul is experienced as deprived, as yearning for knowledge and experience, and as desiring bliss. By non-manifest Sivaraman means “what is present and yet not felt to be present or manifest.”⁴⁰ No further argument can be made. For Sivaraman it is clear that human souls experience themselves *as veiled*. They lack a bliss that they feel they should have; they lack a knowledge that they feel they should have. *Mala* explains this privation or absence: “*Mala* is derived as the causal factor which secures the presence of the veil and a consequent non-presence of *cit-śakti* [dynamic self-consciousness] *qua* characterized by the absence of the veil.”⁴¹

Āṇava mala is the causal factor of the presence of the impurity that surrounds the soul. It is a primordial bondage. But what kind of bondage is it? What does it do and how does it affect the soul? Tiru T.S. Kandaswami Mudaliar explains *āṇava mala* as

that attitude of the soul in which it says that it is the author of all actions, that the things around it belong to it, that it feels proud of the pleasures it enjoys and so on. In short it is that frame of mind in which we find the very large majority in the world – an absolutely rigid materialistic selfish attitude.⁴²

Āṇava mala could thus be summarized as a privation of the soul that manifests itself as selfishness and egotism. Because the soul experiences itself as lacking, it becomes greedy and egotistic, seeking only for itself and not for others. According to Śaiva Siddhānta then *āṇava mala* is viewed as “the cause of re-birth, cause of sin, cause of everything that is not godly in the world.”⁴³ It is the “seed of the other Malas” since it is *āṇava mala* that causes the soul to be deluded by *māyā* and entrapped by *karma*.⁴⁴ Salvation consists in rejecting the egotism of *mala* that entraps the soul. The soul, by experiencing the material world, eventually comes to recognize that it is not material but spiritual and, in this recognition, acknowledges in love its dependence upon Śiva. The soul then achieves liberation.

When the soul finally achieves liberation, is *āṇava mala* destroyed? Since *malam* is one of the eternal components of the universe, *malam* will never be destroyed. Rather, to some degree, *malam* only remains a reality to the degree that the consciousness of the soul allows itself to be fettered. As a privation of the grace of God that enlightens the soul, its reality always remains a possibility to the degree that the soul allows itself to remain united with it. In this sense, *āṇava mala* is like darkness; as soon as the light appears, darkness disappears. It remains, however, a potential reality only when the light dims. When *śivam* is fully present, *malam* does not cease to exist, but it is kept at bay by the brilliance of *śivam* which leaves no room for darkness. The soul then “regains” its original self,⁴⁵ and the *āṇava mala*, while not destroyed, is neutralized in its power:

When it is said that *āṇavamala* is removed from the self, what is meant is not the removal of *āṇavamala* or its destruction but

the neutralisation of its power and its effects over the self. In other words, the power of *āṇavamala* over the self is nullified by some other greater power, namely, the grace of God.⁴⁶

II. The Christian Doctrine of Original Sin in the Light of *Māyā* and *Āṇava Mala*

At the outset of this section, it must first be firmly admitted that there are at least two foundational differences between the Christian doctrine of original sin and the Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine of *māyā* and *āṇava mala*. First, there is a profound dualism at the heart of the Śaiva Siddhānta. *Māyā* can never be redeemed. It exists eternally for the sake of souls who seek their liberation by means of it, but *māyā* itself can never be liberated. In Śaivite thought, there is a rift between what constitutes the essence of human nature and what constitutes the essence of *māyā*.⁴⁷ Likewise, there is a profound and eternal disjunct between *śivam* or God and *malam*, of which *māyā* is one. They are “exclusive categories with absolutely no relation between them.”⁴⁸ The human soul alone shares the nature of both and so can experience both. *Māyā* shares not at all in the nature of *śivam*, God. And so when the soul achieves liberation, *malam* is eternally neutralized, but never redeemed and transformed. As has been noted: “Even in the *suddha* state, the *malas* do not completely cease to be; only their effect and capacity are nullified... No sooner has the self been liberated or has washed away the *mala*, then *āṇava*’s capacity to prevent the self from reveling in the grace and bliss of God is neutralized.”⁴⁹

This belief is in profound contradistinction to the Judeo-Christian teaching about the created world. While the created world is

indeed “fallen,” it can yet be redeemed, and indeed longs for the moment of its redemption, for the “new heavens and the new earth” (Is 66:22; 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:21). It is precisely by means of the liberation of human beings that the created order will itself be liberated from its current bondage to corruption and share in the glory of the children of God (Rom 8:19-23).

Second, according to the Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine of creation, *māyā* is created because of *āṇava mala*. In other words, because souls needed a means of liberation, the world was created to equip them with the required bodies to achieve the knowledge that would ultimately liberate them from their own impurity. As Bramwell Christopher Devaratnam Mather explains, “Āṇava occasions Māyā and Māyā performs its functions by means of Karma.”⁵⁰ Here is a profound difference. In Judeo-Christian teaching, God creates the world, not because of the reality of impurity, but out of pure love. Śiva creates, graciously, but because impurity exists. The Judeo-Christian God creates, not because any impurity exists, but out of unprovoked love. So it is important at the outset to emphasize these two different starting points. From there, this essay will now examine points of convergence between the Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine and the Christian doctrine.

Suddya Māyā, Contingency and Metaphysical Evil

The Christian doctrine of original sin, like the Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine of *āṇava mala* works backwards, starting from grace. Just as it was pointed out that the Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine begins from the fact of liberation and then asks what it is that human beings are liberated from, so too Paul in Romans 5:1

begins with the fact of salvation in Christ, of “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,” and from there asks what it is that human beings are saved from: “The doctrine of original sin is, so to speak, the ‘reverse side’ of the Good News that Jesus is the Savior of all men, that all need salvation, and that salvation is offered to all through Christ.”⁵¹ Philosophical and theological speculation has always begun with the reality of grace and then moved from there to a discussion of sin.

Since the time of Augustine, the question of the origins of sin and evil in the world have centered upon God’s creation. If God is an all-good God, then how could such a good God create a world that allows for evil? And how could a good God’s good creation possibly commit evil? The answer for Augustine centered on the reality of contingency. Augustine formulates the problem in the *Enchiridion* as follows: “All things that exist, therefore, seeing that the Creator of them is supremely good, are themselves good. But because they are not, like their Creator, supremely and unchangeably good, their good may be diminished and increased. But for good to be diminished is an evil.”⁵² He likewise explains in *City of God*:

Now the person who talks of man making his own will evil must ask why the man made his will evil, whether because he is a nature or because he is nature made out of nothing? He will learn that the evil arises not from the fact that the man is a nature, but from the fact that the nature was made out of nothing.⁵³

It is the foundationless “nothingness” of contingent being that gives rise to the possibility of evil in the world.

Aquinas continues this explanation by pointing out first that it is appropriate that God would create contingent beings: “Now the completeness of the universe demands that some things should be contingent, else not all the degrees of being would be contained in the universe. Therefore God wills some things to be contingent.”⁵⁴ However, since some things are contingent, their operation upon one another may cause evil because of the very nature of their contingency:

Again, the best thing in any government is to provide for the things governed according to their own mode, for the justice of a regime consists in this. Therefore, as it would be contrary to the rational character of a human regime for men to be prevented by the governor from acting in accord with their own duties – except, perhaps, on occasion, due to the need of the moment – so, too, would it be contrary to the rational character of the divine regime to refuse permission for created things to act according to the mode of their nature. Now, as a result of this fact, that creatures do act in this way, corruption and evil result in things, because, due to the contrariety and incompatibility present in things, one may be a source of corruption for another. Therefore, it does not pertain to divine providence to exclude evil entirely from the things that are governed.⁵⁵

The point of quoting this long passage is to note that for Aquinas, it is the fact of contingency itself that is the cause of evil in the world. When things act according to the contingent “mode of their nature,” subsequently “corruption and evil result in things.” This is simply the nature of contingent

reality that is made from nothing: “In every motion there is some generation and corruption, for, in a thing that is moved, something begins and something ceases to be.”⁵⁶ Contingency itself leads to corruption. Due to the incompatibility among contingent things and due to the very nature of contingency itself, things are the cause of evil for other things. In *De Malo* Aquinas distinguishes between privation and negation. Privation is the absence of something that belongs to the due perfection of a thing while negation is the absence of perfection that belongs to the due perfection, not of oneself, but of another: “Hence, fire is not of itself evil but is evil to water.”⁵⁷ Evil is the result then both of the fact of contingency itself and of the fact that contingent things operating in conjunction with other contingent things bring about negations.

Like *suddya māyā*, *māyā* untouched by *mala*, the created order is good in itself but is also potentially, insofar as it is contingent, the cause of evil for other things. Evil in some sense has been a part of creation from the very beginning. From the very first moment of the Big Bang, stars were dying, plants were dying, and animals were dying. As Teilhard de Chardin explains: “Thousands of centuries before a thinking being appeared on our earth, life swarmed on it, with its instincts and its passions, its sufferings and deaths.”⁵⁸ The universe has always been in some sense “good” and in some sense “evil” insofar as it is contingent. Just like *māyā*, the created contingent universe is a cause of both good and evil. Theories of evolution have only further emphasized this reality: that the universe is in a constant state of motion, in the Christian vision, towards greater and greater perfection.

Yet in the process of motion, corruption takes place, since this universe is imperfect. In this sense, “original sin” analogically understood as the law of imperfection and suffering in a contingent world has existed from the first moment of creation. As Teilhard de Chardin further explains:

It [original sin] simply symbolizes the inevitable chance of evil (*necesse es ut eveniant scandala*) which accompanies the existence of all participated being. Wherever being in fieri is produced, suffering and wrong immediately appear as its shadow. ... Original sin is the essential reaction of the finite to the creative act... It is the reverse side of all creation.⁵⁹

Like *māyā*, the created world was never perfect. It has always been a cause both of grace and delusion. It will always be, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expresses it “in a state of journeying’ towards its ultimate perfection.”⁶⁰ As a result of this “journeying,” evil will occur.

Āṇava Mala and Original Sin

For Christians, the doctrine of original sin expresses the full actualizing of the reality of metaphysical evil in the world by means of its contact with human freedom. With the advent of freedom, evil as such was now possible. Human beings could now experience their own privation *as privation*. States Teilhard de Chardin: “The specifically human Fall is no more than the (broadly speaking, collective and eternal) actualizing of this ‘fomes peccati’ [kindling, stimulus] which was infused, long before us, into the whole of the universe.”⁶¹ When contingency came into contact with freedom, “sin” now became a possibility, and evil took on a whole new dimension. Evil in the form of sin

became “specially individualized on earth simultaneously with the appearance of responsible human ‘I’s’.”⁶²

There is a close similarity between Sivaraman’s explanation of *āṇava mala* as a privation of a good that should be present to the soul and the doctrine of original sin. According to the doctrine, the first human populations experienced their privation as privation and so wanted more. They realized that they were contingent beings lacking a perfection that was due to them. True, God was ultimately going to provide satisfaction for this longing, but they wanted it immediately. They were not satisfied with waiting for the fulfillment of their own imperfect, privative state.

To summarize thus far: Like the doctrine of *āṇava mala*, the doctrine of original sin teaches that human souls, created good, recognized their own privation as privation. Seeing that they were not perfect and were lacking a perfection that was due to them, they turned to *māyā*/the created world for fulfillment instead of to Śiva/God. By turning to created reality, they sinned. Now, turning to the created world was not evil as such. But when they turned to it to fulfill what was missing in their own privative state, they asked it to do something that only Śiva/God could actually do, since the world too was created from nothing and so also exists in a state of metaphysical privation. And so by turning to the created world to satisfy what only Śiva/God could satisfy, egotism/sin was born into the world.

With sin came further corruption. Here there is a difference between the Christian doctrine and the Śaiva doctrine. For Śaiva Siddhānta, when the pre-existent soul, already infected with *āṇava mala* touched *śuddya māyā*,

śuddya māyā became *asuddya māyā*, impure *māyā*. For Christians, there are no pre-existent souls and so souls cannot corrupt the created world simply by coming into being. However, there is again an analogous similarity between the two doctrines on this point. Just as Śaiva Siddhānta teaches that the whole world becomes corrupted by the touch of *āṇava mala*, whether understood as privation or egotism, so too the Christian doctrine teaches that the effect of human sin on the world was disastrous. The already imperfect world – *śuddya māyā* – now was further corrupted and placed in bondage – *asuddya māyā* – because of human sin. Although death, corruption and suffering already existed in the world, they were enkindled, set on fire in a whole new and disastrous way by free human sinfulness. As original sin was “transmitted” by human mediation, the whole world was affected by its touch. Piet Schoonenberg gives an excellent description of this transmission:

First, each contact by which a person communicates his interior life to another person is, explicitly or not, a testimony about his relation to grace. Next, on account of our being human and especially on account of the humanity of God’s Word there is no granting of God’s grace in which the world and one’s fellow man do not have a part. These facts show that divine grace is always connected with human mediation. Whence it follows that the refusal of that grace by a man, which is sin, exerts an influence upon one’s fellow man, depriving him of grace and bring him in some way into a situation of lack of grace.⁶³

Just as Mudaliar explained above, that *āṇava mala* is that “frame of mind in which we find the very large majority in the world – an

absolutely rigid materialistic selfish attitude,” so too Schoonenberg echoes. Such a “frame of mind” cannot help but diminish the mediation of grace that is owed to one’s fellow human being. And so sin is transmitted throughout the whole human family, and from the human family to the physical world in which the human family makes its home.

Finally, together the Śaiva Siddhānta teaching on *āṇava mala* and the Christian teaching of original sin look, not backwards towards a previous non-existent paradise, but forward towards a future time of liberation and salvation. Sivaraman is clear on the Śaiva Siddhānta perspective: “Even though in theory self is infinite and is identical with consciousness its existence and knowledge unmediated by the operation of material accessories are as good as non-existent.”⁶⁴ The soul is originally lost in mythical “eternal chaotic darkness.”⁶⁵ There is no moment when the soul existed in a state of liberated purity. As we have seen, according to Śaiva Siddhānta the soul is always eternally connected with *āṇava mala* and only comes to know God and its own liberation through the medium of *māyā* and the material world.

While there are many differences with the Christian doctrine here, and while the Śaiva Siddhānta teaching in some ways shares more in common with early gnostic Christian teaching, yet there are also some points of convergence. While souls are created good, at the moment of their creation they are a part of a world of privation and are imperfect. Modern and contemporary scholars have for the most part rejected the idea that there was an actual historical Paradise or Garden of Eden. Rather, Paradise represents God’s plan for the *future*, for what *ought to be*. As Schoonenberg explains,

“Paradise lies not at the beginning, but at the end, so that sin and Redemption, too, should be measured in their deepest meaning against that fulfillment.”⁶⁶ The earthly Paradise, explains Teilhard de Chardin, “never existed, since it represents above all a promise.”⁶⁷ It is “the salvation constantly offered to all, but rejected by many, and so arranged that nobody can succeed in obtaining it except by unification of his being in our Lord.”⁶⁸ From the very beginning, the human soul has been enmeshed in contingency and privation, existing as it does in a world of contingency and privation. With the advent of human freedom, privation became “sin” proper. That original “sin” has been transmitted through human mediation such that all souls come to exist in a situation of privation and must work towards salvation by journeying through this world. Paradise never existed in the past. It is the goal of human salvation, the goal towards which the resurrection of Christ as the firstborn of God’s creation points us (Col 1:15). The “new heavens and the new earth” exist in the future, not the past, but they can only be achieved by working in and through the heaven and earth as they are now, the contingent and imperfect reality as it is present to us. They are part of God’s plan for the future where, as portrayed in the great hymn of Colossians 1:15-20, Christ will bring all things into one in him.

Conclusion

The Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine of *āṇava mala* and the Christian doctrine of original sin share a similar understanding of the privation discovered at the center of human experience. For a Śaivite, this privation is eternal, as is the soul, and can only be removed through immersion into the material world of *māyā*,

which paradoxically, can also be the occasion for even further bondage. The soul, by identifying itself with the world, is tempted to pursue egotism and pleasure, and so subsequently loses sight of its ultimate spiritual destiny. Through many cycles of immersion, the soul can eventually come to recognize that is it not *asat* but rather *sat*, spirit rather than matter. This knowledge, by the grace of Śiva, ultimately leads to metaphysical liberation. For a Christian too, by the fact that he is a creature created as a contingent being *ex nihilo*, existing in a contingent universe that is radically imperfect, there is a certain privation at the core of his being. From the earliest moments of his life, he experiences this privation *as such* and attempts to overcome it through egotism and pride, looking to himself rather than to God his Creator. This act of pride called “original sin” only serves to further intensify the experience of privation already at the core of his being. And so he turns to the world, itself also contingent, and attempts to fill this privation with material forms of satisfaction. In both Śaiva Siddhānta and Christianity, only the grace of Śiva/God can fully satisfy the soul, and so it is only by turning away from *āṇava mala*/original sin that the soul can be truly free.

Notes

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¹² Pillai, "Introduction," 49.

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¹⁵ Kulandran, Grace, 216.

¹⁶ Pillai, "Introduction," 17.

¹⁷ Ramanujachari, "Śaiva Siddhānta," 45.

¹⁸ Ibid, 44.

¹⁹ Sivaraman, *Śaivism in Philosophical Perspective*, 214.

²⁰ Ibid, 212.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ramanujachari, "Śaiva Siddhānta," 46.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Sivaraman, *Śaivism in Philosophical Perspective*, 214.

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³⁹ Ibid, 267.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 271.

⁴¹ Ibid, 271.

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⁴³ Ibid, 48.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

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