# DANCING IN THE SKY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

*The Aesthetics of Power in Medieval Cidambaram*

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## *The Aesthetics of Power in Medieval Cidambaram*

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# INTRODUCTION

## Naṭarāja and Kālī
### Doctrinal Identities in Flux

Cidambaram, as it is known today, is a famous place of worship dedicated to the cult of Dancing Śiva, called Naṭeśa or Naṭarāja.[1] Scholars have long debated over his peculiar iconographical representation shrouded in the mystery of 'ecstatic' self-transcendence, richly paradoxical, figurative and poetical in his embodiment of dynamic stillness. Yet, throughout many investigatory pursuits, one thing became clear, as it revealed the most patent aspect of Naṭeśa's dance congruent with the five cosmic activities of creation (*sṛṣṭi*), preservation (*sthiti*), destruction (*saṃhāra*), concealment (*tirodhāna*) and grace (*anugraha*). Equally important to its cosmic function is the location where the dance is performed: it is the ritual space of wisdom, immaterial, but instead, composed of consciousness. This ritual space of wisdom is referred to as *cidambaram*, the 'Sky of Consciousness' (*cit*—consciousness, *ambaram* -sky).

[1] There are different names of Naṭarāja. In central and north India he was known under the name Naṭyeśvara, in South India, Naṭeśa or Naṭarāja, in East Bengal Narteśvara, in Orissa Naṭāmbara, in Cambodia Nṛtiyeśvara and Śrī Nāṭakeśvara, C. Shivaramamurti*, Nataraja in Art, Thought, and, Literature*, National Museum, Delhi, 1974, pp. 142-143, p. 154. Narteśvara is also worshipped in Nepal; he is the counterpart of the Naṭarāja, he is very common among tantric Kaula Newars of Nepal who call him Nasa Deva, the patron of music and dance. Cf. Majupurias, *Hindu, Buddhist and Tantric Gods and Goddesses*, p. 30

Scholars who attempted to account for the origin of the present cult of Naṭarāja in Cidambaram maintain that there was an independent goddess cult of Kālī predating the arrival of Śiva. Indeed, the early traditions in Cidambaram seem to combine Kālī worship with Śiva worship. This combination is evident in the locally popular myth of dance contest, and in the architectural arrangements for worship in which two shrines, one for each deity, were set up facing each other. Padma Kaimal summarizes it in the following words: [2]

> The placement of structures at Chidambaram implies that an interaction between a dancing male god and a goddess may have been an early part of religious practice there. A goddess shrine, the nṛtta-sabhā, stands just south of Naṭarāja's cid-sabhā and kanaka-sabhā and opens toward them. Younger argues that in eleventh-century inscriptions the Tamil name for the nṛtta-sabhā was "the opposite hall" (etirampalam), stressing the significance of its juxtaposition with the cid-sabhā. This would suggest that the innermost precinct wall, which now cuts between the nṛtta-sabhā and the cid-sabhā, was introduced deliberately to establish Naṭarāja's independent significance by disguising an earlier architectural dialogue between his shrine and this goddess shrine.

The textual evidence of probably 8th century *Tirumantriam*[3] composed by Tirumular[4], the first literary figure in the Tamil Siddha tradition, (who happened to be a north Indian yogī residing in the south)[5] seems to point out towards similar doctrinal blend

[2] Padma Kaimal, 'Shiva Nataraja: Shifting Meaning of an Icon', *Art Bulletin*, Sep 99, vol. 81 Issue 3.

[3] According to J. Soundararajan, it is in Tirumular's *Tirumantrian* that the concept of Dancing Śiva reaches apogee. The dance theme is philosophized and the symbols of the Lord thematized to signify the concept of *pañcakṛtya*. Cf. J. Soundararajan, *Nataraja in South Indian Art*, Sharada Publishing House, Delhi, 2004, p. 29.

[4] Tirumular (originally known as Sundaranātha) was a Tamil Śaivite mystic and writer, considered one of the sixty-three Nayanars and one of the 18 Siddhars. His main work, the *Tirumantiram* (also sometimes written *Tirumanthiram*, *Tirumandhiram*, etc.) consists of over 3000 verses.

[5] Paul Younger, *The Home of Dancing Śivan*, p. 192.

combining the goddess worship with the Śiva worship. Thus, according to the *Tirumantriam*:

> Everywhere is Śiva's divine form; everywhere is Śiva-Śakti; everywhere is Cidambaram; everywhere is the divine dance; because the process of becoming Śivan is everywhere — at every place and everywhere is present Śiva's grace in its divine play.[6]

Moreover, Tirumular interprets this divine dance along the lines that are, in origin, tantric insofar as he identifies it with Śiva-Śakti's sexual union which is further explicated as the dance of bodily pleasure.[7] R. Nagaswamy holds that *Tirumantriam* shares many concepts with tantric Śaiva traditions of the so-called Kashmiri Śaivism.[8] Both archeological and textual evidences seem to support the view about the early tantric tendencies in the Naṭarāja's cult in which the worship of Kālī assumed a prominent position. It was only in the middle of the thirteenth century that the local ruler Kopperuñcinkan, a leader of the Kaudava feudatory family, built a separate temple for Kālī outside the town boundary and in this way expelled her worship from the sacred territory of Cidambaram where the exclusive cult of Naṭarāja subsequently grew into prominence.[9] J. Soundararajan justifies to this statement by referring to the Kopperuñcinkan's inscription (*Inscription Arsie* 1903, 401 dated 1250 CE.)[10] which records the existence

[6] *Tirumanatriam* of Tirumular 674 quoted in: Kamil V. Zvelebil, *Ānanda-taṇḍava of Śiva-Sadānṛttamūrti*, p. 50.

[7] *Tirumanatriam* of Tirumular 9.8.31, quoted in: J. Soundararajan, *Naṭarāja in South Indian Art*, p. 131.

[8] R. Nagaswamy summarizes these conceptual similarities in *Facets of South Indian Art and Architecture,* vol. I, Aryan Book International, 2003 pp. 131-138.

[9] J. Soundararajan suggested that it was after Kopperuñcinkan's reign that the temple of Kālī was removed from the territory of Cidambaram. Cf. J. Soundararajan, *Naṭarāja in South Indian Art*, p. 50. Kaimal clarifies by saying that this inscription contains records of a sale of land for construction of the Kālī temple sanctioned by Kopperuñcinkan. Cf. Padma Kaimal, 'Shiva Nataraja: Shifting Meaning of an Icon', *Art Bulletin*, Sep 99, vol. 81 Issue 3, n. 95.

[10] Cf. Paul Younger, *Home of Dancing Śivan*, p. 168.

of Kālī temple inside the Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple. This official banishing of Kālī seemed to yawn a fatefully unbridgeable abyss that terminated forever their ceremonial bond. An edifice of ritual that once had strengthened their tie was forgotten. The middle of the twelfth century witnessed an important event that left significant literary evidence proving that the worship of Kālī and Naṭarāja were interrelated. This event happened to be the book called *Mahārthamañjarī* composed and commented upon by Maheśvarānanda, a Kashmiri Śaivite who was a denizen of Cidambaram at the time of the Cōḻa kings. The *Mahārthamañjarī* is a work that deals with non-dualistic Śaiva systems of Kashmir, most prominently with the ritualistic tradition of the Krama and the philosophical system of Pratyabhijñā and attempts to synthesize them. Moreover, at the centre of this doctrinal abundance stands Naṭarāja whose elusive dance is confirmed as the conceptual and ritualistic core of the esoteric tantric non-dualism. It is surprising that Maheśvarānanda identifies Naṭarāja as the main deity of his tantric system. In the following words he avers: 'Out of affection for his pupils he (Maheśvarānanda) composed his book so that, O wonder! Like the lord dancing in the middle of the golden hall (*kanakasadas*), Śiva who is reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) is easily here before our eyes.'[11] The cultic adaptation of Naṭarāja in Maheśvarānanda's tantric system is complemented by the worship of the goddess Kālī, or more precisely, Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī, the main deity of the Krama school of tantric Śaivism.

Philosophy and ritual are two methodological approaches developed in Maheśvarānanda's narrative, each of which attested, in its own way, to provide a theoretical framework for conceptualizing the main theme of his book: The Dancing Śiva. Within this conceptual schema the two distinct non-dualistic systems of Kashmir take a stand: 1) Pratyabhijñā, representing

[11] *kanakasadaso madhye nṛtyanniva prabhuradbhutam* |
*yadiha sulabhaḥ sākṣātkartuṃ vimarśamayaḥ śivaḥ* ||
*Mahārthamañjarī* with *Parimala,* p. 195.
trans. D.Smith

philosophy and, 2) Krama, embodying ritual. In the opening verses of his book, Maheśvarānanda refers to these two traditions in the context of his intellectual and spiritual heredity, thus:

> I have understood the *Śivadṛṣṭi* - the true meaning of the Pratyabhijñā (school); I am the knower of the Self, of the entire playful esotericism of the Krama path. I who am the solid mass of consciousness and the cleverness that worships the master's feet, shall explain the [nature of] emptiness within the heart, which is also an impenetrable darkness.[12]

The *Mahārthamañjarī* presents a balanced, just equilibrium between these two methodological approaches mentioned above with a remarkably precise calculation. Among the seventy stanzas (*ślokas*), the first half consisting of thirty-three stanzas is dedicated to the exposition of philosophical concepts heavily supported by Pratyabhijñā argumentation. The second half of the book opening the esoteric depths of the Krama is almost entirely rooted in the ritual and yogic praxis. Pratyabhijñā can be said to have primarily Śaiva orientation, as it continuously vivifies logical argumentation for Śiva-Consciousness, understood not in theological but in philosophical terms as the Lord (*Īśvara*). On the contrary, the Krama shows tantric tendency to accentuate female power of the goddess Kālī in her form of Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī (The Enchantress of Time). In accordance with this preliminary distinction, Pratyabhijñā is a non-tantric system of the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition: it is theoretically and philosophically oriented. Krama is tantric, praxis-oriented propagating engaged *sādhana.* By comparative juxtaposition of these two methods, Maheśvarānanda makes a link between philosophy and ritual explicit. In doing so, he wants to establish the premises for interchangeability of these two perspectives valid in approaching Naṭarāja, the main deity of his system. Moreover, Maheśvarānanda is entirely clear that what he wishes to accomplish by this methodological maneuver is to ascertain the fluid boundary between the Pratyabhijñā and the Krama present. The inbuilt fluidity of

[12] *MMP* p. 2.

methods, its intrinsic reversibility allows Śiva to merge into Śakti, or, more precisely, allows Naṭarāja to merge into Kālī.

A large body of quotations from the Krama textual sources in Maheśvarānanda's book justifies to the existence of a powerful Krama presence in medieval Cidambaram. Maheśvarānanda rightly says that the Krama system is esoteric (*rahasyam*), for it deals with 'impenetrable darkness of emptiness within the heart'. Here the ultimate goal of worship of the temple-body concentrates on reaching the space of pure consciousness expressed by terms such as *vyoman*, *kha* and *ambara*; these terms are employed to designate spatial vastness, unbounded emptiness, open sky. It is then, the inexplicable sky of consciousness that underlines the Krama's envisioning of the final limit of yogic experience. This idea of gaining entry into the sky of consciousness is associated primarily with the practices that rely on the sensory experience. The *Cidgaganacandrikā*, the Krama text which most probably belongs to the Cidambaram textual tradition and which interestingly adheres to the lineage of the gurus beginning with Patañjali (most probably referring to the mythical Patañjali, who is responsible for establishing a ritual canon (*Patañjali-paddhati*) as accepted today by the priestly authorities of Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple) speaks of the goddess Kālī in the following words:

> O Mother, you who are emptiness, are said to be light. You are perpetually manifest here in the emptiness of consciousness from whence you emit the divine tradition….[13]

> O goddess, your body is the Great Arising within the Sky of Consciousness.[14]

> O Śiva, that supreme goddess of the Sky of Consciousness who by her very nature is free of imperfections…before whom the realized souls who wander in the Sky of Consciousness prostrate, manifests along with You when one reaches the supreme vibration of consciousness.[15]

[13] *CGC*, v. 103
[14] *CGC,* v.43
[15] *CGC*, v. 104

One of the most intriguing and characteristic features of this description is Kālī's association with the sky, with the abyss, with the secret place, with the cave of the emptiness of space, which itself constitutes a doctrinal core of Cidambaram culture at large. However, like Kālī, Śiva too is associated with the Sky of Consciousness, as in the following verses,

O Mother, reveal Śiva's nature in the supreme Sky of Consciousness, on the uppermost peak of existence.[16]

In another verse, we find Śiva embedded in the Krama praxis that associates the Sky of Consciousness with sensory experiences,

O Śiva, your energies, the senses, move in your Sky of Pure Consciousness, free of the exertion which extends to the outer world, while you abide on the plane beyond them.[17]

These verses clearly attest to the existence of inter-changeability of doctrinal identities of Śiva and Kālī who equally justify their adherence to the same metaphysical concept of the Sky of Consciousness. In medieval Cidambaram, Śiva and Kālī merge into one another; their doctrinal identities are in flux. It seems, therefore, that the Sky of Consciousness, the major theme of the Cidambaram culture, was firmly embedded in the doctrinal identities of these two gendered deities.

Yet one tentative conclusion that one may draw is that at some point in history, the cult of Naṭarāja underwent drastic changes, when some of its doctrinal formulation had been forgotten. Interestingly, with the work of Maheśvarānanda came a revival of this 'lost' tantric dimension in Naṭarāja's cult. For the reasons that unfortunately always escape us, Maheśvarānanda wrote his book and, in doing so he succeeded in blending the North and the South in a rich cultural synthesis. This synthesis had led to the emergence of a totally new conceptual framework in which the image of Naṭarāja is meditated. This book will try to show

[16] *CGC*, v.32
[17] *CGC*, v.28

that the cultural encounters between northern Kashmir and southern Cidambaram, as they are seen confronting each other in the specific textual representations of the *Mahārthamañjarī* and related texts, is the arena of a positive engagement with the "other", when the doctrinal elements belonging to two different cultural realms are clashed, fused and assimilated, when they assume a new life of its own. This is certainly not an arena of conflict, but rather, of a quiet reconciliation when seemingly contested cultural spheres are reconfigured, allowing them to embrace ideological differences that activate a new meaning. I argue in these pages that Maheśvarānanda developed a unique approach to the understanding of Dancing Śiva in which Kashmiri Śaiva doctrinal components drawn mainly from the Pratyabhijñā and the Krama were creatively paralleled to give a new interpretative setting for comprehending Naṭarāja.

## Naṭarāja and Kashmir Śaivism in Scholarly Debate

It should be noted that the present research is not intended to deconstruct the commonly agreed standpoint of Naṭarāja's Vedic ancestry. The fact that the worship in Cidambaram temple follows *vaidika pūjā*, following the ritual manual popularly known as *Patañjalī-paddhati* promulgated by the sage Patañjali in his *Śrī Cidambareśvara-nityā-pūjā-sūtram* is well-known to all and the bulk of literature has been written on this topic. What I want to prove is rather an alternative model for comprehending Naṭarāja's cult that did exist and had its followers in medieval Cidambaram. This encounter can benefit our understanding of religious images such as Dancing Śiva which are open systems, there is no limit to find ever new meanings in them. The dance of Naṭarāja, including its historical, doctrinal and symbolic dimensions, has been treated at length according to the Vedic tradition. However, little or no attempt was made to shed light on its Kashmiri Śaiva doctrinal formulations. Certainly it was Ananda Ketish Coomaraswamy's groundbreaking essay, 'The Dance of Śiva' (1917) which has contributed significantly to an understanding of Indian art. The enduring appeal of his work

displaying Vedantic theory of knowledge has been regarded as constituting the first important philosophical analysis of Śiva's dance. Commaraswamy's conceptual framework became the basis for Śiva's dance theory. Since 'The Dance of Śiva' was published, the scientific tradition of Indology led to many conceptual reorientations. This is especially true with tantric lore which has been recognized as specialized field of study. The critical edition of tantric texts studied in the historical context presented much evidence for the unusual geographical extent of Tantrism that has long been suspected. Alexis Sanderson, whose pioneering research on South Indian Tantric source materials has thrown a new light on the development and spread of Kashmir Śaivism in south India, has argued very convincingly that the traditions of the Krama and the Trika were practiced in Cidambaram, as well as in other important south-Indian temple-cities, such as, for example, Kañcipuram.[18] The textual evidence for the support of this view is entirely conclusive. In the case of Naṭarāja we have a demonstrable textual basis of three texts to make assertions of this type. Two of these texts, the *Pāratrīśikātātparyadīpikā* and the *Mahārthamañjarī* of Maheśvarānanda have remained to our times, the third, entitled *Ānandataṇḍavavilāsastora* written by Maheśvarānanda's guru Mahāprakāśa[19] is known only from the references. Interestingly, the *Pāratrīśikātātparyadīpikā* was written in the 'City of the Lord of the Hall of Consciousness' (*pure citpariṣatpateḥ*), by which the author means Cidambaram. In the beginning of his exposition, he mentions Cidambaram along with Kailash, Kashmir, Kashi

[18] Kañcipuram, the temple-city linked to the cult of the goddess Kamakshi/Lalita/ Tripurasundari. In the passage of the Lalitopākhyāya of the south Indian *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* investigated by Sanderson, Kamakshi of Kañci becomes identified with Āpara, one of the three goddesses of the Trika pantheon.

[19] Rastogi, *The Krama Tantricism of Kashmir,* p. 207 gives the following chronology:

Śivānanda II (1125 - 1175 A.D.)
Mahāprakāśa (1150 - 1200 A.D.)
Maheśvarānanda (1175 - 1225 A.D.)

(Varanasi) as one of the four existing centres of the Trika.[20] The interest of the *Pāratrīśikātātparyadīpikā* for our present purpose lies not in its doctrinal details but in the basic claim it involves. Naṭarāja is presented there as epitomizing the Trika non-duality of consciousness. The same doctrinal fusion occurs also in the *Mahārthamañjarī*. In this case, it is the Krama mingling with the cult of Naṭarāja. In explaining the nature of this blend, Sanderson draws an analogy of the assimilation process in which the doctrinally-centered identity blends with the Trika or the Krama to achieve, presumably, supra-universality of the religious image. His argument may be paraphrased in the following words: 'what we have, then, is not simply a case of the Trika of the Krama colonizing and subordinating a local cult, but a case of a local cult incorporating the Trika or the Krama and superimposing identity of Naṭarāja upon the Trika or the Krama āgamic pantheon'.[21] It seems that Sanderson's discovery had provided proof for B.G.L. Swamy's much earlier intuitions about the alleged relationship between Naṭarāja and the esoteric Kashmir Śaivism which he developed in his book: 'Chidambaram and Nataraja, problems and rationalization' published in 1979. Swamy raises several doctrinally interesting issues. One is that Cidambaram was a place dedicated to the yogic practices based on Pratyabhijñā school of Kashmir Śaivism.[22] Paul Younger in his 'Home of Dancing Śivan' agrees with Swamy's interpretative hypothesis that Cidambaram was a home for the esoteric community but raises objection to his assertion about identifying this community with Kashmiri Śaiva

[20] *Pāratrīśikātātparyadīpikā* 3.
*śrīmatkailāsakaśmīrakāśīvyāghrapurīsthitam |*
*trikārthadarśinaṃ vande devaṃ somāṃśabhūṣaṇam* || 3 ||
Cidambaram has alternative, legendary Tamil names that were sanskrtized by Brahmin elite. Therefore, 'Tillai' ('Forest of Tillai Trees') > Tillavana; 'Puliyuur' ('Tiger-town') > Vyāghrapurī.

[21] Alexis Sanderson, 'The Visualization of the Deities of the Trika' , *L' Image Divine Culte et Meditation Dans l'Hindouisme,* Editions du CNRS, Paris, 1990, pp. 33, 53-55.

[22] Cf. Swamy, B.G.L., *Chidambaram and Nataraja, problems and rationalization*, Gheeta Book House, Mysore, 1979.

yogis by arguing that it is hard to find any convincing evidence for it.[23] Kamil Zvelebil, the author of the 'Ānanda-taṇḍava of Śiva-Sādanṛttamūrti' advocates a similar view, when he avers thus: 'in fact, the Northern, sanskritic contribution to the concept of Dancing Śiva is apparently of little significance, albeit future research may show whether or not the *taṇḍava* concept and icon were in some way influenced by Pratyabhijñā school of Kashmir Śaivism'.[24]

What these authors failed to recognize is that the Pratyabhijñā school of Kashmir Śaivism was not the only tradition that might have influenced the cult of Naṭarāja in Cidambaram, but also the Krama. This went unnoticed for simple reason. When these authors wrote their books, the knowledge of the Krama was virtually non-existent, and still is. The intellectual engagement with the Krama has been attested by a very few scholars, just to mention: Navjivan Rastogi, Lilian Silburn and Alexis Sanderson, Mark Dyczkowski. Naṭarāja's association with the Krama is established on the ground of the fundamental premise. The Krama system, unlike any other school of so-called Kashmir Śaivism, deals with the sensory experience, with the temple-body inhabited by the deities of the senses, and with the aestheticism of liberation through the senses which culminates in dynamic soteriology. The central motif of the *Mahārthamañjarī* is an image of Naṭarāja-the Dancer whose dance embodied in the deified sensory movement is performed in the temple-body of the worshipper. At this point, the aesthetic dimension is a linkage between the spheres of the body and the ritual.

The importance of the *Mahārthamañjarī* as the composition written in medieval Cidambaram is accounted for by two facts. First, it evidentially proves that the Kashmiri Śaiva traditions, which originated in the north, found their way down to the south where they were not only well-known, but also practiced. Second, in addressing the questions of Naṭarāja's origin in Cidambaram we had come to understand that the cult of Naṭarāja was, at least

[23] Paul Younger, *Home of Dancing Śivan*, pp. 86-87.

[24] Zvelebil, *Ānanda-taṇḍava of Śiva-Sadānṛttamūrti*, p. 2.

before Kopperuñcinkan, a syncretistic and complex amalgam of doctrinal trends that combined Kālī worship with Śiva worship.

## Wilhelm Dilthey's 'Hermeneutical Historicism': Notes on Methodology

The methodological perspective I shall adopt throughout my discussion will be based primarily on the hermeneutical analysis of the *Mahārthamañjarī* of Maheśvarānanda along with the commentary (*Parimala*). Apart from the *Mahārthamañjarī*, I shall be using mostly the Śaiva tantric texts (the 9th-10th centuries) quoted by Maheśvarānanda and Kashmiri Śaiva commentaries on the root-texts (9th-14th century). Hermeneutics (derived from the Greek work 'hermeneuien' 'to interpret') is an intellectual discipline concerned with methodology of interpretation and textual analysis. It is associated with a Greek god Hermes, the mythical investor of language and script. One of the most important functions of hermeneutics is that it enables to preserve the tradition, or, at least, to revive intellectual heritage. As Ernst Steinkellner writes in his article on *Tantric Hermeneutics*:

> Religious contents, beliefs, are subject to history. They stagnate and die as soon as they become unresponsive to new needs and questions arising in the societies harboring them, but they also lose their religious value when they deviate from tradition by such changes. Hermeneutics works against such deviation. Its methods have been established in order to separate, via an act of interpretation, the various forms of religious contents within a tradition in such a way that the unity with revelation is preserved in each case and that freedom is created at the same time for a rational foundation of the differences. While the possibilities of change in this way guarantees the survival of a religious tradition, it is hermeneutics which guarantees the continuity of this tradition as such.[25]

[25] Ernst Steinkellner, 'Remarks on Tantristic Hermeneutics', in: Csoma de Koros Memorial Symposium, ed. L. Ligeti, Budapest (Akademia Kiado) 1978, pp. 445-46. Quoted in: B. Baumer, *Abhinavagupta's Hermeneutics of the Absolute: Anuttaraprakriyā*, IIAS, D.K. Printworld, 2011, p. 27.

The use of the term 'hermeneutics' in reference to a general understanding of the text is ascribed to Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) for whom 'hermeneutics' was more than method of interpretation, it was an act of understanding itself taking place within language. Another turning point in the history of hermeneutic theory came with Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey's approach to hermeneutics includes historicism that places the subject in the historical context to which the author and the text belongs.[26] Following Dilthey's concept of 'hermeneutical historicism' I want to locate Maheśvarānanda's ideas in the broader socio-religio-political realm of Cōḻa Cidambaram in which the conceptual framework of Maheśvarānanda's tantric system can be seen as reflecting the specific intellectual underpinnings of a particular historical and cultural milieu. The methodological approach I am describing here remains responsive to the specifics of history and is thus contingent on understanding the influences of religio-political factors that shape dogmatic theories and practices. In order to accomplish this task, my narrative will be oscillating between the two worlds: inner and outer, constantly shifting from the internal, abstract and 'invisible' domain of dogmatic revelation to the external, socio-political, 'visible' realm of cultural interactions. In this way, I make an attempt to bring together the two apparently dissociate dimensions and view them in the mirror of reciprocal reflections without making them lose their intrinsic identity. One of the ways in which we could expose the historicity of Maheśvarānanda's text is to throw some light on the intellectual climate during the Cōḻa reign in which the plethora of different Śaiva sects played an important role in constructing their 'version' of Dancing Śiva. Situating Maheśvarānanda's text at the intersection of leading dogmatic discourses of his time affords us a view of the points of dispute between Maheśvarānanda and his opponents, particularly the prominent Śaiva Siddhānta masters who lived in Cidambaram prior to Maheśvarānanda. This philosophical debate among

[26] Rita Sherma, Arvind Sharma (eds.) *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought, Toward a Fusion of Horizons*, Springer 2008, pp. 3-4.

the competing systems of Śaiva thought is significant primarily because it focuses on establishing the definition of what constitutes Śiva's dance, which both systems identify with Śiva's five cosmic acts (*pañcakṛtya*).

Apart from this 'internal' world of dogmatic revelation, Maheśvarānanda's text could also be interpreted in ways that are 'external' insofar as they address social and political dimensions of power-relations. Maheśvarānanda is explicit in his opinion that the atmosphere of constant festivity had prevailed in the Cōḻa country (*colās te satatotsavā janapadāḥ*).[27] In the first place, this statement serves to mark out considerable importance given to festivity, entertainment and enjoyment that must have animated the Cōḻa Cidambaram on a daily basis. Places and people are mutually constitutive, so are the gods, in this case Naṭarāja, who demarcates the very festive nature of the sacred space he represents. But the full significance of this statement can be understood only via an examination of a socio-religious and political dimension of festival as a rationale for a cultural practice. A meaningful interpretation of any text should involve focusing on its historical context and inter-relationships between religious ideas and cultural forms and practices as they affect social space. A glimpse into a socio-religious history of Cōḻa Cidambaram reveals a great importance given to public festivals and ceremonies in honour of gods and kings. The idea of the divine kingship provided a strong affiliation between religious and political spheres. Thus, the public procession of gods carried out during these festivals were often accompanied by royal processions. In this way, religious festivals could be seen as a political propaganda which, through this powerful display of royal magnificence, used to legitimize sacredness of the royal power and the divine status of the king. The cultural practice of festival rooted in the aesthetics of submission to the auratic presences of the performers flourished under the patronage of the Cōḻas developing into a new cultural practice that evolved simultaneously with a consolidation of a political cult forms

[27] *MMP,* stanza 70.

forcing the audience "to the knees" in an act of obedience to the Cōḻa kings. Maheśvarānanda provides us with a radical re-conception of spectatorship by showing a movement from being a spectator to being a performer/dancer as a path to be followed. Basing his argument in the Kashmiri Śaiva concept of the agency of consciousness, he encourages his disciples to discover one's own status as the performer and to acknowledge Naṭarāja—the embodiment of sovereignty, freedom and lordship at the core of the individual self. I intend to portray Maheśvarānanda in a dialogue with a socio-religio-political reality in which he lived and taught, and as someone who provided a spiritual alternative for people who lived there with him.

## "Internal" World of Dogmatic Revelation: Kashmiri Śaivism vis-à-vis Śaiva Siddhānta

The existence of different Śaiva sects, such as the Kāpālikas, Kālamukhas, Pāśupatas, Saiddhāntikas, Kashmiri Śaivites, Tamil Śaiva Saints (sixty-three nāyānmars), and Tamil Siddhas (with sage Agastya regarded as their first promulgator) existing together on the Tamil soil attested to the diverse views of Śiva, showing the possibility of alternative dogmatic discourses in viewing Dancing Śiva. The town of Tiruvorriyūr near Tiruvālaṅkātu was a reputed Pāśupata centre.[28] The historical evidences record the existence of the Kālamukhas who were given royal donations during the rule of Āditya Cōḻa I (9th century).[29] During the reign of Parāntaka Cōḻa I (10th century), a gift of village was granted to a certain person called Dasapuriyaṅ who was a Kālamukha ascetic.[30] The medieval Tamilnadu witnessed also the presence of the Kāpālika sects.[31] Still, the most important among them was the dualist Āgamic sect of the Śaiva Siddhānta, which became the dominant

[28] *ARE* 168 of 1912 quoted in Swaminathan 1998:142.

[29] *SII,* vol.23. no.129 quoted in Swaminathan 1998:142.

[30] *ARE* 85 of 1908 quoted in Swaminathan 1998:142.

[31] Lorenzen, N. David, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas,* New Delhi: Thomson Press, 1972.

Śaiva order in India from the tenth through thirteenth centuries. The Śaiva Siddhānta priests often assumed the role of the royal preceptor (*rājaguru*) with an authority to give a Śaiva initiation (*dīkṣā*) to the monarch. Textual and epigraphic evidences justify to the fact that the Cōḻa kings were initiated by the Śaiva Siddhānta gurus. Īśānaśiva, the royal preceptor of Rājarāja I (985-1014) and presiding priest of his royal temple at Tañjāvūr was a Śaiva Siddhāntin. He authored the liturgical manual, the *Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati.* Īśānaśiva's successor, Sarvaśiva, also a Śaiva Siddhāntin, was the royal preceptor of Rājendra Cōḻa I. The initiation of the king by a Śaiva Siddhāntin had important consequences for the construction of kingship. According to Alexis Sanderson (2005:233), it legitimized dynasty's power by officiating in the founding of Śaiva temples "in which the new Śivas that they enshrined bore as the individuating first half of their names that of the royal founder or, where complexes of royal Śiva temples were established, those of the founder and any kin that he might designate for this purpose". The royal preceptors also made "the provision of a repertoire of protective, therapeutic and aggressive rites for the benefit of the monarch and his kingdom". As Sanderson (2005:223-224) writes further:

> An inscription of the fifth year of the reign of the Cōḻa emperor Rājādhirāja II (r. 1163–79 or 1166–82) tells us that when an army from Sri Lanka had invaded the mainland, removed the door of the Rāmeśvaram temple, obstructed the worship, and carried away all the temple's treasures, a certain Jñānaśiva, whose name shows him to have been a Saiddhāntika Śaiva officiant, was engaged by the emperor to perform a ritual that would bring destruction on those responsible for this desecration. According to the inscription the ceremony was continued for twenty-eight days and at its end the invading army was indeed defeated.

Sanderson says further that the Cōḻa support of Śaiva Siddhānta should not be considered as a result of 'religious intolerance'. The pre-eminence of Śaiva Siddhānta was predicated on a contingent and dialectical hierarchization of other disciplinary orders. Not only were Smārta Brahmins included within this

hierarchy, but also other Śaiva orders (Kālamukhas, Pāśupatas, etc.) and even the theistic sects such as the Vaiṣṇavas as well.[32] Perhaps the best example of this dialectical interconnectedness between the Śaiva Siddhānta and the Smārta Brahmins is attested in the cult of Naṭarāja of Cidambaram whose doctrinal background exposes the interface between 'Āgamic Śaivism' and 'Vedic Śaivism'. An intriguing aspect of the Naṭarāja Cidambaram cult is that it provides the sacred ground in which these two contested ritual, doctrinal, and social spheres came to terms with each other. These are the 'classic' form of Śaiva Siddhānta, represented by the Sanskritic tradition of Āgamas and *utsavavidhi*s, and the so-called 'Vedic Śaivism', i.e. a Saiddhāntika tradition that sees itself as being closer to, in terms of being the 'crème' or essence, rather than the antithesis of, the Vedas, and by extension of orthodox (*smārta*) Brahmanic milieu.[33] Historically, the 'Vedicization' or appropriation of Vedic/mainstream Brahmanical discourse into Śaiva discourse represents a tendency to move towards, or make an alliance with, mainstream orthodoxy by the Śaiva Siddhānta, which itself constitutes the 'most orthodox', and mainstream, of all Śaiva systems. Davis (1998:103) notes that by the day of Umāpati Śivācārya, the celebrated Śaiva author who flourished in 14th century South India,

> there had been several centuries of development of Śaiva thought, development fostered by royal patronage over much of India. The Siddhānta had become an all-embracing system, encompassing temple worship and architecture. There was an increasing readiness on the part of that system to compromise with what was originally the alien thought of the Vedas.

[32] See for example the Cōḻas' claim to be in line of a direct descent from god Viṣṇu as his 'partial incarnations'(*vaṃśāvatāra*).

[33] Cf. Brünner 's (1980–81) discussion of the Āgamic statement *siddhānto vedasāras syāt*, and similar ones, regarding Saiddhāntika Āgamas as the real essence or crème of the Veda. This view individuates an opposition between the Vedas, defined as common scriptures (*sāmānyaśāstra*), and the Āgamas, defined as special scriptures (*viśeṣaśāstra*); the latter purportedly reveal the 'real meaning' of the Vedas.

It is arguable that the Śaiva Siddhānta had developed strategies for coming to terms with Brahmanical conservative and orthodox forces that were deeply woven within the fabric of South Indian society, especially in view of securing the royal patronage that was vital for its survival. This development seems to have occurred in parallel with another shift in emphasis from individual practice (yogic, ritual, or otherwise) to temple-rituals. Whereas the earlier strata of the Saiddhāntika corpus focused on individual practice and private worship (both internalized or in the form of external rituals) of the *sādhaka*s or married householders, the later stage of fully-blown Āgamas compiled in South India increasingly focused towards temple-rituals and festivals, carried out exclusively by priestly specialists (*ācārya*). As claimed by Brunner (1975–76: 110–14), in both public and private ritual the influence of the Āgamas is real: for instance, a Saiddhāntika manual like Aghoraśiva's *paddhati*, the *Kriyākramadyotikā*, which is based on the Āgamic corpus, is followed to the letter by most priests even in modern Tamil Nadu (cf. Brunner 1975–76: 110). These manuals, however, eminently, and in most cases exclusively, focus on the practical dimension of ritual, and pass over in silence the doctrinal and theological. It is the Āgamas that provide those aspects, along with the Śaiva philosophical and ontological basis upon which Śaiva ritual lies.

Generally, the Cidambaram temple follows *vaidikapūjā* codified in the *Patañjalipūjāsūtra,* or *Patañjalipaddhati*. Unlike any other Śaiva temple of Tamil Nadu, which normally follows Aghoraśiva's Śaiva Saiddhāntika canon, the Naṭarāja temple of Cidambaram constitutes an example of 'Vedic Śaivism', insofar as it traces its ancestry to the mythological figure of Patañjali, the snake-bodied sage whose myth is narrated in the *Cidambaramāhātmya* (cf. Davis 1998: 31–45), and to whom authorship of the festival manual known as the *Citsabheśotsava* is attributed. An entanglement between 'canonical Āgamic' and 'Vedic' *smārta* elements is especially detectable in the *Citsabheśotsava,* which constitutes a perfect example of festival manual comprised of elements from both traditions. Given what has been just said, it is interesting to observe that the religious practice in Cidambaram

was exposed to influences from authoritative scriptures of varied communities, and owes to both the Saiddhāntika and Vaidika traditions. For instance, some authors (i.e. Loud 2004:7) mention the Śaiva Siddhāntika *Makuṭāgama* as the original scriptural source for the Cidambaram Naṭarāja festival practice. The 'Vedic' character of the *Citsabheśotsavasūtra* is further visible, for example, in its treatment of the Vājapeya sacrifices that must be performed by *dīkṣita*s during the festival. However, in some instances, the priests incorporate into their ritual scenario also Āgamic injunctions. It happens so especially in regard to the sequence of rules (*vidhikrama*), the rite of attraction (*karṣaṇa*), ritual establishment (*pratiṣṭhā*), festival order (*utsavakrama*) and expiatory acts (*prāyaścitta*).[34] Some scripturally prescribed elements narrated in the *Citsabheśotsavasūtra*, such as the ritual installation of breath (*prāṇapratiṣṭhā*) that is believed to 'animate' icons of the deities (*mūrti*), belong to the classical Āgamic repertoire.[35] Perhaps even more important in this regard is the "Festival of Black Paste" (*kṛṣṇa-gandha-utsava*), also called the "Festival of Dancing Śiva" (*nṛtta-mūrti-utsava*) - a typically Āgamic ritual, which was one of the most commonly celebrated festivals in Śaiva temples in Tamil Nadu, perhaps even before the eleventh century.[36] This is performed during the last day of the festival, which symbolizes destruction of impurity covering human soul (Nagaswamy 2003:86).

It is arguable that at some point in history the festival practices of Cidambaram and of the temple worship in general, underwent important changes. No doubt, it is significant that the double identity of the *Citsabheśotsavasūtra*, comprised of both 'Vedic' and 'Āgamic' elements, is the one aspect most immediately visible to a careful reader. This observation advocates the historical plausibility of these two distinctive Sanskritic traditions existing side by side in Cidambaram, and shaping in their own

[34] Cf. Laud 2004: 2.

[35] Cf., for example, the rules concerning the ablution of the bull (*vṛṣasnapanavidhi*), *Citsabheśotsava*, p. 59.

[36] Cf. Nagaswamy 2003: 86.

right the outlook of festival praxis and ritual in general. It may be suggested that the emphasis on the Veda, regarded by prominent priests of contemporary Cidambaram as the authoritative source of 'Śaiva' ritual knowledge and praxis, does not merely amount to paying lip-service to the atavic and ultimate source of Brahmanic legitimacy, but is due to complex historical dynamics that shaped the relationship between Śaivism and *smārta* Brahmanism over a long period of time in South India. On these doctrinal premises that integrated the competing paradigms of 'Vedic' and 'Āgamic' elements in Naṭarāja's cult, Maheśvarānanda saw his chance to suggest an alternative approach of viewing Dancing Śiva, in which explanatory and interpretative procedures derived from the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition were intended to provide a critique of mainstream ideology of the Śaiva Siddhānta. Maheśvarānanda's own position should be, therefore, perceived as a result of a critical encounter with Śaiva Siddhānta in general and with Aghoraśiva, Maheśvarānanda's contemporary in particular. Aghoraśiva, who lived in Cidambaram in the twelfth century and whose ritual manual entitled the *Kriyākramadyotikā* is believed to shape the outlook of temple ritual acts in Tamil Nadu until today, was one of the most influential exponents of the Sanskritic Śaiva Siddhānta, and a prolific commentator of Saiddhāntika Āgamas. He shared with Oṭṭakkūtar royal affiliation with the Cōḷas, and especially with the Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple. According to Davis (2009: 21), in one of his work Aghoraśiva refers to himself as "a teacher who adorns the Cōḷa region". Aghoraśiva's presence in Cidambaram is a well-established fact. References to Cidambaram Śiva (Naṭarāja) are mentioned in the *Kriyākramadyotikā* as well as in his commentary on Sadyojyoti's *Tattvasaṃgraha*. Moreover, as Cox (2006) observed, a contemporary tradition of *gotrasantati* or 'lineage of the teachers' acknowledges Aghoraśiva as the founder of the monastery (*maṭha*) at the outskirts of Cidambaram that received a support from the Cōḷa rulers. Given this widespread popularity of Aghoraśiva and his unquestionable impact on the codification of temple practices in the Cōḷa region, it seems plausible to hold that by engaging in the polemic with him, Maheśvarānanda hoped to make his literary

mark on the intellectual climate of medieval Cidambaram. Thus, according to Cox (2006:37) Maheśvarānanda's exposition of the thirty-six levels of reality (*tattva*s) based on the Pratyabhijñā philosophy given in the first part of his book might be interpreted as a polemic against the interpretation of the *tattva*s given in the *Tattvaprakāśavṛtti* of Aghoraśiva, the leading Saiddhāntika theologian residing in Cidambaram prior to Maheśvarānanda. Implicitly polemicizing against the basic outlines of the theology of the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta, Maheśvarānanda engaged in a subtle critique of the contemporary worldview of those who were in a dominant position. Maheśvarānanda argued strenuously against Saiddhāntika dualism, undertaking to show that the Kashmiri Śaiva doctrine of 'all is in all' (*sarvaṃ sarvātmakam*) in relation to the interrelatedness of all levels of reality (*tattva*s) threaded together by means of a strengthening tie of śivahood[37] could overcome the difficulties to which Śaiva Siddhānta dualism gave rise. He believed that through this ardent engagement in a continuing polemic against dominant worldview of Śaiva Siddhānta, he could provide both philosophical foundations for a nascent Kashmiri Śaiva movement in South India and polemical defense of its doctrinal integrity. One of the most basic and existentially engaging of all theological issues discussed by Maheśvarānanda was the question of the meaning of Śiva's

[37] The universal application of '*sarvaṃ sarvātmakam*' theory includes the total vision of the cosmos embedded in the thirty-six *tattvas* conscientiously harmonized with each other. Maheśvarānanda introduces the idea of 'all is in all' to justify the inherence of the tattvas in each other. On the assumption that 'every part reflects the whole, every element is contained in every other element', he wants to establish a philosophical ground for the interrelatedness and oneness of all levels of reality threaded together by means of a strengthening tie of Śivahood bestowing unity within the multiplicity. Thus, quoting from Somānanda's *Śivadṛṣṭi* (1.48) he says: 'In this way, in all the categories of existence (*tattva*s) Śivahood is maintained equally. If we distinguish between higher and lower, that is due to wrong conviction.' Another quotation from the *Tantrāloka* follows the same line of reasoning, in the following words: 'In each and every element there are thirty-six elements (*tattva*s).'

dance and the possibilities for the human to become Śiva-the Dancer by performing the Five Acts (*pañcakṛtya*). This question was meaningful not only because it offered a new resolution of *pañcakṛtya* of Śiva which was a distinctive feature of a widely popular Śaiva Siddhānta but also because of the historical moment that inspired and shaped it, when the Cōḻa kings actually vested Naṭarāja of Cidambaram, their family-deity (*kula-devatā*) with a political power officiating his status as the royal god. I argue that the adoption of Naṭarāja by Maheśvarānanda stemmed to a considerable extent from these two facts; it was motivated by the encounter with a dominant ideology represented, on the one hand by the Cōḻas, and the leading Śaiva Siddhānta masters, on the other, that prompted Maheśvarānanda to find his place in this alien South Indian world. Maheśvarānanda's concept of the playful agent, the dancer was also written as the critique of the Advaita Vedānta and Sāṃkhya systems (see Chapter Four).

## *Pañcakṛtya*: Defining Śiva's Dance

The earliest textual reference to *pañcakṛtya* of Śiva is given in the 8th century *Tirumantiram* of Tamil Siddha Tirumular, in which the five limbs of Naṭarāja's icon are compared with the Five Cosmic Acts he performs. Thus, according to *Tirumantiram*,

Hara's drum is creation,
Hara's hand gesturing protection is preservation;
Hara's fire is dissolution;
Hara's foot planted down is concealment
Hara's foot, raised in dance, is grace abiding.[38]

Tirumular's *Tirumantiram* is important not only because it is 'the earliest exposition of Śaiva Siddhānta in its metaphysical, moral, and mystical aspects',[39] but also because it is here that

[38] *Tirumantiram* 2799, Trans. By B. Natarajan (slightly altered by Smith), *Tirumantiram* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1991), p. 430. quoted in David Smith, p. 17

[39] Sivaraman, K. *Śaivism in Philosophical Perspective*, p. 31.

Śiva's dance is philosophized for the first time to signify the concept of *pañcakṛtya*.[40] Much later, probably around 14th century, Śiva's dance comprised of Five Acts was set down in writing by a prominent Śaiva Siddhānta author, Umapāti Śivācārya who lived in Cidambaram. In his *Kuñcitāṅghristava*, he writes thus:

In the beginning He Whose form is the self
created Brahma for the creation of the worlds,
Hari for their protection,
and the form of Rudra for their destruction,
and then Maheśa for concealing everything,
the form of Sadaśiva with Parvati beside Him
to show favour to those worlds.
He performs the Dance of Bliss in the Hall.[41]

The concept of *pañcakṛtya* was adopted into doctrinal formulation of Naṭarāja's icon from the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta theology providing philosophical explanation of his dance. According to Sivaraman,

the validation of the central reality of the Śaiva Siddhānta, namely, Śiva, is contained in the notion of cause applied to it. The defining characteristic feature of Śiva as the Lord of all cosmic operations is a logical extension of the same idea…(Reality) considered in further relation to the exigence of the 'cosmic' functions of creation, maintenance and dissolution, together with the two 'microcosmic' operations of self-concealment and self-revelation, is the Lord or the Sovereign (*pati*).[42]

Although the non-dualist Kashmiri Śaivites prior to Abhinavagupta knew about *pañcakṛtya* of Śiva, they were not concerned with it.[43] A major shift in developing Kashmiri Śaiva

[40] Cf. J. Soundararajan, *Nataraja in South Indian Art*, Sharada Publishing House, Delhi, 2004, p. 29.

[41] The *Kuñcitāṅghristava* of Umapāti Śivācarya, verse 102, in Smith, p. 18

[42] Sivaraman, K. *Śaivism in Philosophical Perspective*, p. 127.

[43] Somānanda (9th century), one of the first Kashmiri Śaiva authors who wrote *Śivadṛṣṭi* ('Vision of Śiva'), the first treatise to furnish a philosophical foundation of the Pratyabhijñā school ('Recognition [of

version of *pañcakṛtya* came with Abhinavagupta's disciple, Kṣemāraja (11th century) who placed the Five Acts at the centre of the Kashmiri Śaiva soteriology. As we shall see, it was Kṣemāraja who exercised a considerable influence on Maheśvarānanda's reformulation of Śiva's dance. Given the intertwined complexity of the concepts entering into formulations of *pañcakṛtya* of Śiva, it is difficult to identify the reasons for the conceptual shift that occurred within the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition, beginning with Kṣemāraja. Perhaps it was a growing popularity of Śaiva Siddhānta āgamas that influenced this choice. Maheśvarānanda's intentions are easier to decipher. One of his motives for identifying *pañcakṛtya* with Śiva's dance was that he thought such a view would lend force to his individual effort of establishing visibility of Kashmiri Śaivism in Cidambaram and that it would enable him to compete with the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta who already held in its grip the entire temple-culture in Tamil Nadu.

The transition from the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta to the non-dualist Kashmiri Śaivism view brought about some changes in the way these Five Acts of Śiva were conceived. The Siddhāntin conforms to the view that these Five Acts have their parallels at the individual level and that agency at this level is ultimately due to Śiva's omnipotence, but this does not necessarily mean that Śiva and the individual being have an equal ontological status. According to the Śaiva Siddhānta, the reason for Śiva's Five Acts is that the karman and other impurities of the bound soul pertaining to the individual being may mature and fall from him (*karma-sāmya*, *mala-paripāka*). Although, Kashmiri Śaivites adhere to the view about the impurities (*mala*s) responsible for effecting primordial bondage, they do not consider them as material substances, as does the Śaiva Siddhānta, for them these impurities abide in thought only. Moreover, Kashmiri Śaivites

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the Lord]') refers to Śiva's Five Acts in the following words: 'Śiva is what He is, in that He performs the Five Acts. This activity is proper to his nature. What reason is there, then, to look for motives (which cause Him to act in this way)?'. *Śivadṛṣṭti* 1.12-13, trans. M. Dyczkowski in *Stanzas on Vibration,* p. 379.

are mostly concerned with the possibility of realization of these Five Acts of Śiva in one's own individual being. As Gavin Flood explains:

> The basic difference between Saiddhāntika and Kashmiri Śaiva understanding of the Five Acts of Śiva lies in the fact that in the case of the dualist Saiddhāntika tradition, it is the transcendent Lord in his aspect of Sadāśiva who performs the Five Acts, not the individual self. Sadāśiva is totally distinct from māyā, from which the material and mental universe is generated. Bondage, according to the Śaiva Siddhānta, is a result of the unconscious material universe of māyā and only Śiva's grace and ritual action is able to remove it. Liberation is thought to occur to Saiddhātin at death, which means he becomes omniscient and omnipotent like Śiva, but ontologically distinct from him.[44]

On the contrary, in the non-dualist Kashmiri Śaivism, the individual self or being is ontologically the same as Śiva himself, but he is ignorant about his real status because of the impurity of thought-constructs generated by dichotomizing tendency that establishes duality between the subject and the object. Liberation-while-living occurs prominently in the Kashmiri Śaiva thought in which the individual self recognizes himself as Śiva by performing the Five Acts. Thus, for example, Maheśvarānanda tends to focus on showing that identification between Śiva and individual self (*puruṣa*) becomes established on the ground of sharing a uniform nature of the Dancer who performs the Five Acts (*pañcakṛtya*). This identification takes place in the sphere of epistemic practice that is based on the procedure in which one pays attention (*āvadhāna*) to the relationship between subject and object that aims at forsaking the notion of duality normally underlying them: 'The awareness of subject and object is common to all embodied beings, what distinguishes yogīs (from the others is their) attention to their relationship (V.B. v.106)". The centre between subject and object marks the point of interaction between the infinite and the finite. Thus, as Abhinavagupta indicates, it is here that the yogī must exert his awareness to diminish the formation of thought-constructs and so ultimately attain the liberated

[44] Flood, G. *An Introduction to Hinduism*, pp. 163-164.

state of pure consciousness unconditioned by the limitation imposed upon it by thought patterns generated by ignorance of ultimate reality.[45] The characteristic terminology and the specific style in presenting the argument in support of the Five Acts performed by *puruṣa* indicates that Maheśvarānanda's thesis was ostensibly modeled on a set of premises given in Kṣemarāja's *Spandasaṃdoha* and *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*. The final goal of Kṣemarāja's reinstatement of *pañcakṛtya* and Maheśvarānanda as well appears to be a discovery of what is called the agency, where an agent is an enduring subject with the capacity for cognitive activity. The Kashmiri Śaiva masters agree that an agent and his agency of performing the Five Acts are imperishable.[46] Kṣemarāja elucidates on this topic in the following words:

> The Supreme Lord, who is the light of consciousness is also the agent of these five cosmic operations at the microcosmic level of the individual subject. However, only one who knows how to attend carefully to that relationship between subject and object can be aware of it fully. While the color 'blue' passes through the phases of its manifestation, the blessed one who is such as described above acts as the agent of emission when 'blue' appears associated with a specific locus in space at a certain time. He is the cause of its persistence when, once emitted, the manifestation of 'blue' remains unaltered. It is destroyed when a doubt arises as to whether its spatial, temporal or formal configuration differs from that which it is thought to possess. He brings about the obscuration—vilāya of objectivity when the subject, who is the undivided aspect of perception, is emitted and completely takes over the field of objectivity. All this should be applied equally to the manifestation of yellow or indeed anything else. Similarly, when the subject shifts his attention from blue to yellow, the Lord implements all five operations. He implements withdrawal in relation to the blue which manifests at present along with its subject and persistence in terms of the manifestation of their specific individual forms. He obscures the perceiver in relation to the manifestation of inner residual impressions generated in his mind and

[45] *MVV* 1/990-1

[46] *Spandakārikā* 14:
*avasthāyugalaṃ cātra kāryakartṛtva śabditam/*
*kāryatā kṣayiṇī tatra kartṛtvam punarkṣayaṃ//*

in terms of the manifestation of destruction of the potential state of bondage, engendered by memory and the rest, which has become one with pure consciousness. In this way the five operations of the great lord unfold perpetually everywhere in every state of being as one.[47]

Much of the power of Kṣemarāja's argument lies in the premise that the *pañcakṛtya* performed in our cognitive sphere commands us to achieve a total identity with Śiva. If we compare Kṣemarāja's account with that of Maheśvarānanda (given in Chapter Four), we will quickly noticed that the similarity between his conception of agency comprised of the Five Acts of Śiva taking place in the individual self and the later pronouncements by Maheśvarānanda is unmistakable. One important element they bring out here is that if agency involves performing the Five Acts of Śiva, then on account of this agency the individual self does necessarily possess freedom. The equation of freedom with agency was adopted by the Kashmiri Śaivites from Pāṇini 1.4.54, *svatantraḥ kartā*, 'the free one is the agent' and developed further in a philosophical school of Pratyabhijñā. The whole philosophical analysis of this school is a reflection on agency. In the words of Utpaladeva: 'That one succeeds, who places his feet on this [path of the Pratyabhijñā], and, contemplating the status of the Agent (*kartṛ*) of the world belongs to himself, submerges himself incessantly in the state of Śiva'.[48]

If for the dualist Śaiva Siddhāntin, the main goal of Śiva performing his *pañcakṛtya* is the possibility of the divine grace for the finite self in which this very act of grace becomes instrumental for ripening the source of self's finitude so that it becomes fit for removal,[49] then, for the Kashmiri Śaivites, this goal is accomplished not through passive reception of the divine grace but through the discovery of the agency of Śiva that belongs to the finite self. Moreover, in the Kashmiri Śaivism, the performance of

[47] *Spandasaṃdoha* of Kṣemarāja, p. 12, translated in Dyczkowski M., *The Stanzas on Vibration*, p. 66.

[48] *IPK* 4.1.16, quoted in: David Lawrence, 'The Mythico-Ritual Syntax of Omnipotence', *Philosophy East & West,* vol. 48, no.4, 1998, p. 605.

[49] Sivaraman, p. 192.

the Five Acts provides the conditions upon which the individual self becomes elevated to the position of a free, playful agent. With Śaiva Siddhānta, *pañcakṛtya* came to emphasize the removal of human bondage through the transformative power of grace in which "divine grace ripens the source of finitude (that belongs to the human) so that it becomes fit for removal" (Sivaraman 1973:192). As Sivaraman (ibidem) specifies: "In this way, Śaiva Saiddhāntika theology of grace permitted them to disengage grace from human control and to return its meaning to Śiva alone. Out of Five Acts of Śiva, only two relate to the individual self, namely concealment through which Śiva veils the true reality from bound soul and grace that liberates".

On the other hand, in the Kashmiri Śaivism, *pañcakṛtya* of Śiva came to represent the active engagement of the individual self in the performative ontology of Śiva through which one could become omnipotent Śiva himself by performing his Five Acts. Here *pañcakṛtya* is no longer viewed as exclusive prerogative of Śiva in which he veils and bestows grace, but as the agency taking place within the cognitive sphere in which one attains the status of the free agent and becomes Śiva-the Dancer.

On the previous pages, I have tried to show the extent to which Maheśvarānanda's construction of dance is the result of the 'internal', dogmatic dispute over the concept of *pañcakṛtya* that took place between the competing systems of Śaiva thought in medieval Cidambaram, namely the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta, the most influential Śaiva tradition in medieval South India, and the Kashmiri Śaivism at the margins of the dominant world. In the next pages, I intend to portray Maheśvarānanda's teachings in the context of the 'external' world by focusing on a different set of meanings to which the construction of dance in medieval Cidambaram adheres.

## "External" World of Power Relations: Kashmiri Śaivism vis-à-vis Cōḻa Cidambaram

For Maheśvarānanda, as well as for a number of other thinkers of Cōḻa Cidambaram, 'dance' became a means of designating where

the power was and also the means of its appropriation. The construction of dance in Cōḻa Cidambaram can be, thus, envisioned as having many different levels of meaning unified in their implications of sovereignty. Thus, 'dance' becomes reconfigured within the conceptual frame that includes: 1) contestation of space; 2) allegory of emotional subjugation of the feminine; 3) political conquest. Such a reconfiguration of dance theme in the Cōḻa Cidambaram becomes attested in the popular myth of the dance contest narrated both in the textual and oral traditions of Cidambaram. The myth portrays dance as an important process of establishing sovereignty of the male god over feminine psyche that is accomplished through the contestation of territorial space from which the goddess becomes eventually excluded. One of the most cited versions of this myth is found in Shulman (1980:192):

> Before the creation of the shrine of Naṭarāja, there was a shrine to Kālī in the Tillai forest. Śiva, moved by the worship of Vyāghrapāda and Patañjali, wished to show them his ānandatāṇḍava, the dance of bliss. Then, Kālī was filled with pride (cerukurru) and challenged the lord to a dance contest. Śiva wished to suppress her pride, so he laid down the following terms of the contest: whoever won would become lord of Tillai; whoever lost must leave the bounds of that site. While the gods and sages watched, Kālī and Śiva began to dance. Kālī saw Śiva perform the ūrdhvatāṇḍava (with one foot thrust into the sky) and, ashamed that she could not perform that dance, bowed her head and acknowledged defeat. Therefore, she was forced to leave her shrine in the heart of the Tillai forest and go to the boundary of the town. Kālī in order to remove her fault in challenging Śiva to a contest, bathed in the Śivaprīyā tank and worshipped the god. Her fierce form departed and she received a tranquil form (canta uruvam) as Tillaivanamutaiyaparamecuvari ("the great goddess who possesses the Tillai forest").

The myth surely reflects the idea that dance becomes the appropriate means for the contestation of space and territorial control which is accomplished by suppression of the goddess. This suppression takes on a distinct psychological cast in which dance is the metaphor for the emotional subjugation of the feminine who is portrayed in the negative terms as the embodiment of deeply pejorative emotional states of anger

and pride.[50] Kālī is traditionally regarded as hypostatization of emotion of anger. For example, in the *Devīmāhātmya*, v.283, Kālī is said to be born from the fire of Gaurī's anger and her face becomes black with rage.[51] The demonic goddess who represents powerful violent emotions is suppressed through expulsion from the sacred space of Cidambaram where she assumes the benign form: Śivakāmasundarī, 'the Beloved of Śiva'. The construct of the feminine is conceptualized within the framework of masculine definition. She is the 'Beloved of Śiva' because she does not challenge him through dance contest as angry Kālī does, and so she assumes the powerless position of a spectator. Umapāti Śivācārya, the prominent Śaiva Siddhānta teacher who lived in Cidambaram explicitly justifies Śivakāmasundarī's spectator status when he says that "she stands leaning slightly to one side, as the principal witness of the dance".[52] Emotional subjugation of the powerful goddess is attained through dance in which she becomes the consort of omnipotent Śiva. The spectator position signifies weakness and passivity that naturally belongs to the feminine. Spectator is a powerless position represented by the feminine when dominant position of a performer is portrayed as masculine. It is within the context of this popular narrative of the dance contest that the construction of dance as sovereignty emerges most clearly. I argue that popularity of this myth appealed to the Cōḻa rulers who adopted it as the major inspiration for their political propaganda. The dance myth presented here exposes the major tendencies of the Cōḻa politics of power based on the psychological subjugation of the feminine, the control of the visual field through promotion of the culture of spectators and the dialectics of the power position represented by the binary opposition of the performer-spectator in which the performer was identified with power and the spectator

[50] In another version of the same myth, Kālī is the embodiment of anger who destroys everything that stands on her way. Seeing her fury, Śiva challenge her to the dance contest, see Shulman 1980:220.

[51] See Smith, p. 152.

[52] See Smith, pp. 135-136.

with powerlessness. The Cōḻas' adoption of Dancing Śiva, the divine sovereign and performer *par excellence,* as their family deity and a symbolic representation of their religio--political power, the divine sovereign can be seen in this context as an explicit statement of supremacy over the popular psyche often represented by the feminine principle. In yet another sense, dance as the contestation of space assumes a purely political dimension insofar as it is associated with the political conquest in which the woman is a metaphor for a conquered powerless subject, the mere spectator. The Cōḻas were attracted to the totality of power ascribed to Naṭarāja's image and to his performative capacity to dance that was articulated in the context of territorial annexation that portrayed Naṭarāja as a successful warrior, and therefore, they took recourse to the practices of legitimating royal power by establishing control over the visual field of perception that aimed at creating parallels between the king and the god, in which both acquired the status of the performer. In one of the royal eulogies, for example, Rājarāja I's destruction of rival armies was compared to Śiva's act of destruction, annihilating the souls at the end of the eon. Recurrent festivals (*satatotsavā*), which, as Maheśvarānanda tells us, were often taking place in Cōḻa Cidambaram[53] contributed to a crystalization of the powerful performer position in the popular psyche in which the god and the king danced together in the political conquest of *digvijaya*. Such an elevation of a relatively localized community to the position of spectators had strong religious and metaphysical grounding in the Naṭarāja—the Great Dancer, the hometown deity who must have been perceived by the locals as the ultimate sanction of their socio-cultural practice. Naṭarāja—the Great Performer, with his double-identity comprised of simultaneously religious and political personas, was a sovereign in a true sense of this word, a king endowed with absolute freedom whose dance performance or, if you like, a powerful demonstration of absolute sovereignty was being watched by spectators-devotees. This parallelism and complementarity between the king and the god made them both

[53] *colās te satatotsavā janapadāḥ*

to be viewed as the embodiment of the royal sovereign power. The spectators were placed in relation to god, the performer, but also in relation to the king whose cult was directly linked to god. In confrontation with the dominant worldview of the Cōḻa Cidambaram where the performer/sovereign was equated with power and the spectator with powerlessness, Maheśvarānanda's project of discovery of one's own status as performer/Naṭarāja capturing the essential features of the Kashmiri Śaiva ideology and praxis appears as a powerful critique of existing power structures in Cōḻa Cidambaram. For Maheśvarānanda, the dance of Śiva is seen as the metaphor signifying connective force that, in a most captivating and enchanting way, provides a linkage between godhead and humanity. God dances the world, but more importantly, the dance of men is seen as an act of ritual and epistemic transformation offering the sacred passage to a new mode of existence, that of freedom exemplified by the fact that one becomes 'Śiva-the Dancer' in liberation. For Maheśvarānanda, the dance of Śiva represents a characteristic feature of a free agent. To view the entire universe as a mere sport of the divine has important soteriological consequences. As Banerjea pointed out, when the human being is thoroughly attuned to the playful personality of the Absolute, the whole universe becomes a work of art or play to it, and the human being becomes a free participator in the cosmic and supra-cosmic play of the Absolute artist-player or the sportive Absolute.[54]

## Overview of the Contents

This book deals with the aesthetics of power in medieval Cidambaram, viewed from two different perspectives, the Cōḻa kings and the Kashmiri Śaivism represented by Maheśvarānanda, both incorporating the image of Dancing Śiva as the symbol of the supreme aesthetic power. The guiding thread of our discussion stresses the fact that both the Cōḻa rulers and the Kashmiri Śaiva

[54] Akshaya Kumar Banerjea, 'The Conception of the Sportive Absolute', [in:] *Prabuddha Bharata* vol. LVI 1951, p. 296.

tantric masters of medieval Cidambaram regarded 'power' as being essentially derived from its aesthetic capacity. This means that aesthetics was at the centre of the concept of power and cultural imagining of that period.

In Part 1, *Naṭarāja and the Visual Power: The Making of the Cōḻa History*, dealing with the Cōḻa kings, we see the extent in which the religious symbol of Dancing Śiva was appropriated as the political agenda of the rulers whose political power of absolute sovereignty he was made to convey. The Dancing Śiva, the performer, becomes the power position identified with the supreme position of the ruler located within the hierarchy of relationships to his subjects who assume the subordinated position of the spectators.

In Part 2, *Naṭarāja and the Textual Power: Scribbling in History's Margins*, dealing with the Kashmiri Śaivite Maheśvarānanda, Dancing Śiva conveys the absolute power but of exclusively spiritual order, the power discovered in one's own body and consciousness. Here, Dancing Śiva ushers the arousal of the aesthetic power, which is enacted in the ritual, yogic and epistemic transformation of the individual being. Along these lines are various attempts to provide an account of qualities embedded in the aesthetic ideology of power built upon the notions of sovereignty, lordship and absolute agency. There is a high degree of overlap and juxtaposition in defining aesthetic power present in both perspectives. For example the notion of 'play' or 'sport' (*krīḍā, khela*) as a defining feature of sovereignty of the Cōḻa kings becomes reformulated by Maheśvarānanda as an attribute of agency leading to the gradual discovery of one's own status as the performer, Śiva-the dancer. In a critique directed against the notion of playfulness as an exclusive prerogative of the king that constituted a behavioral component in the royal technology of the self, Maheśvarānanda presents the view in which he approaches dance from two perspectives: as the dynamic ontology of a dancer that relates to the concept of play and freedom and as the sensory movement constructing the temple-body. Maheśvarānanda adopts the image of Naṭarāja to expound certain ideas of the non-dual Kashmiri Śaiva tradition.

Thus, in Maheśvarānanda's narrative, the Dancing Śiva has been constructed and defined in accordance with specific ideological avenues of knowledge and practice. To look at these various ways of philosophical and ritualistic reflection in the context of dance phenomenon will help us in shaping a primary understanding of the universe, Maheśvarānanda sought to elucidate.

In Part 3, *Performance as the Cultural Paradigm of Indian Religious and Philosophical Traditions*, we are dealing with the theme of performance in the wider context of Indian philosophical and religious tradition arguing that the specific feature of Indian traditions is a high degree of performativity in constructing *knowledge.* At the same time, we discuss these different knowledge systems of India in comparison with Kashmiri Śaivism whose originality of thinking and uniqueness of argument we try to expose.

# PART 1

## *Naṭarāja and the Visual Power: Making of the Cōḻa History*

The political structure of an early medieval South India was primarily constituted by a monarchy with a king occupying a central place in a governmental scheme. In a monarchial system of government, the centrality of 'sovereignty' and 'authority' as the locus of the highest and legally independent agency becomes obvious. If one accepts Stein's[1] concept of the 'segmentary state', in which the self-regulating system of *nāḍu*-localities or macro-regions are governed by 'little kings' or local chiefs with different levels of executive authority who remain in relation of 'ritual sovereignty' to the central authority of the great Cōḻa king,[2]

[1] cf. Stein, B. 'The Segmentary State in South Indian History', *Realm and Region in Traditional India* ed. Richard. G. Fox, Vikas Publishing House, Calcutta 1977, pp. 3-52.

[2] Stein's view is nicely summarized by James Heitzman, thus: "Although earlier scholars tended to stress the centralized, bureaucratic aspects of the Cōḻa empire (e.g. Sastri's 'Byzantine monarchy'), recent research has concentrated on the ritual integration achieved by overlords of a 'segmentary state'. According to the latter approach the kings engaged in ostentatious gift-giving to religious institutions, posing as chief devotees within an encompassing royal cult that attempted to integrate more localized region for loyalty to the Cōḻa overlord, and the manifestation of more parochial authority, depended on display of piety through religious gift-giving. In this way, the unification of the Cōḻas spread throughout Tamil Nadu a political system in which religious donations were a means toward political integration and the

then one will also contend with the view that various forms of active endorsement as well as associated claims of authority were needed for a continuous sustenance of a political order and alleged sovereignty of the great kings. In this view, the observation made by Spencer becomes relevant:

> Hindu kings systematically enlarged their effect on sphere of political action through mobilization and rationalization of power for the implementation of societal goals, those connected with religion in such a way that royal authority and prestige were automatically enhanced.[3]

In Part 1, I argue that for the Cōḻas, 'aesthetics' had primarily synthesizing function that made it possible to permanently seal various schisms derived from a governmental structure of a 'segmentary state'. The principles of aesthetic politics had also played a central role in adapting Naṭarāja—the Dancing Śiva of Cidambaram as the family deity of the Cōḻas ancestral lineage. The visualist regime of the Cōḻas sought to confirm its own legitimating power through the spectacular return of the gaze emanating from the cosmic temples, from the bronze images of Naṭarāja, from the festival processions. The visual was, therefore, an important, all-encompassing element in the construction of royal sovereignty. In Part 1, I try to show that the Cōḻas' first priority was a "rule of sight" coded with cultural values of *bhakti* ideology and linked in chains and hierarchies of meaning that seem designed to manipulate emotions. Such a politicizing of aesthetics was itself an agent of domination that aimed at meditated subjection of people to the aesthetic powers that constitutively concealed their modes of mastery. The history of the Cōḻas as a history of the dominance of vision is a primarly area of investigation in Part 1. It offers a glimpse at the fertile

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establishment of local power." Heitzman, James "Temple Urbanism in Medieval South India", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46 (4), 1987, pp. 792-93.

[3] Spencer, W. George, "Royal Initiative under Rajaraja I'', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 7 (4), 1970, p. 433.

visual landscape that flourished under the Cōḻa rule with the aim of discovering the ways in which the organization of visual perception served as a basic paradigm for legitimating political authority.

# ONE

# Recasting Naṭarāja

## Religion, Art, and Politics During the Cōla Dynasty: A Historical Overview

> I would believe only in a god
> who could dance.
>
> —F. NIETZSCHE, 'Thus spake Zarathustra.'

A fairly large body of literature has been devoted to Naṭarāja and Cidambaram in last twenty years (see Smith: 1996, Younger: 1995). Most of it has to do with textual analysis of a particular text (e.g. Smith's analysis of the *Kuñcitāṅghristava* of Umāpati Śivācārya, Kulke's *Cidambaramāhātmya*) or with reconstruction of Cidambaram past and present using myths and inscriptions (e.g. Younger:1995). Very little has been written about the reasons behind the Cōḻas apparent interest in the royal adoption of Naṭarāja that led to recasting of Naṭarāja's identity to serve royal interests. Even less has been written about historical circumstances and ideological preferences that led to this adoption. In this respect, the work of Padma Kaimal is an exception. This chapter will hopefully enlarge the scope of inquiry and intensify some of the problems already addressed by Kaimal.

During the Cōḻa reign, religion, arts, and politics were inextricably intertwined. The incorporation of different religious images and a progressive change in the architectural design of the temples served as "a metaphor for a royal power

[…] and also as an ideological tool for the Cōḻa monarchy."[1] As R. Champakalaksmi (2009:465) rightly pointed out, art as a disseminator of ideological ideas and 'a transmitter of messages to the audience' is 'constructed by and it constructs cultural and political perceptions'. Political power of the Cōḻas shaped the evolution of religious art in the Kāvērī river delta to a great extent. The artistic achievements of that period resonate particularly deeply with a language of political domination and sovereign authority. Some religious icons, such as the image of dancing Śiva received special attention by the Cōḻa rulers. Beginning with the Cōḻa king Parāntaka I, the cult of Naṭarāja had in fact been growing steadily in the Cōḻa family for over three centuries, until the empire's decline by the end of 13th century. The strict subordination of Naṭarāja to the realm of a political practice is apparent in a sudden elevation of dancing Śiva to the position of a royal god. As Kulke and Rothermund emphasized:

> Many scholars have written about the deification of kings, but for medieval India the converse evolution of a 'royalisation of gods' is as important. The legitimacy of a ruler was enhanced in this way. The more 'royal' the cult of the territorial god, the more legitimate the claim of the king—represented as the deity's temporal embodiment—to rule that territory on behalf of the god.[2]

As has been pointed out by these scholars, the relationship between the 'royal god' and the divine kings was founded on the idea of a divine kingship in which a 'royal god' adopted by a monarch was able to legitimize the dynasty's power. In other words, the 'royal god' was used as a political agenda of a ruler who was using theology to rule his subjects.[3] The royalization of Naṭarāja had profound consequences for the Cōḻa's concept of

[1] Champakalakshmi, R., *Religion, Tradition, and Ideology*, p. 488.

[2] Hermann Kulke, Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India*, Manohar, 1991, p. 146.

[3] Inden Ronald, *Imagining India*, Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 170.; Inden Ronald, *Text & Practice: Essays on South Asian History*, Oxford University Press 2006, pp. 134-155.; Sanderson Alexis, *Religion and the State: Śaiva Officiants in the Territory of the King's Brahmanical Chaplain*, p. 233.

kingship that had a number of implications for the symbology and ethos of royal authority.

This chapter consists largely of a historical overview which is intended to show how the cult of Naṭarāja flourished over time under the Cōḻa reign, how it changed, how it was assigned to new causes, what role it came to play in the imperial formation of the Cōḻas. I argue, after Richard Davis (2006) that visual images "live" in a sense in which they are appropriated, relocated and redisplayed in historically altered contexts that, in turn, significantly change their meaning for new audiences. Davis uses the term 'dispensation' to refer to the changeability of epistemic frame constructed in conformity with predominant ideological beliefs in which different communities, located in different historical periods, act toward particular visual objects. The alteration in visual perception is compatible with historical determinism. The visual image, such as Naṭarāja is, therefore, controlled by its own historicity, which, in turn, leads to the 'historicity of perception itself' (Davis 2006:37). In the words of Walter Benjamin,

> During long periods of history the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well'.[4]

The 'historicity of visual perception' presented in this chapter distinguishes three different modes of perception of viewing Naṭarāja that are compatible with three historical periods of the Cōḻa empire. During each period the act of viewing Naṭarāja was relocated or reassigned to different means in the inherently intertwined realms of religion, arts and politics.

[4] Benjamin, Walter, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, 1985:222, quoted in Davis 200?:37.

## Why Dancing Śiva?

Scholars (e.g. Younger: 1995, Kaimal: 1999, Zvelebil: 1985) who attempted to understand the reasons behind the Cōḻas' intense fascination with Naṭarāja suggested several explanations. Younger (1995:95-6) postulated that the Cōḻa's initial loyalty to dancing Śiva and Cidambaram temple was related to the miraculous birth of their ancestor Kōccengāṇan, the Cōḻa ruler of Caṅkam period—who became canonized as the Tamil Śaiva saint—and who, as the story recounts, was conceived after his parents prayed at Cidambaram temple.[5] This early legend, allegedly, left behind the most imposing legacy that forged an everlasting link between the Cōḻa rulers and Cidambaram that proved itself strong enough to guarantee its historical sustenance in the years to come. Undoubtedly, the legend associated with the name of Kōccengāṇan contributed directly to the shaping of this lasting relationship. Other authors (e.g. Zvelebil) propose that the Cōḻa's interest in Naṭarāja arouse out of the impact of influences from the Tamil tradition, particularly from the important ideological meaning attached to dance epitomized by Naṭarāja himself. In ancient Tamil cultural context, dancing was always enacted at times of war and victory. Among the most popular dancing deities of Tamil religion is Koṟṟavai, the goddess of war and victory living in the forest, who is additionally described as 'the lovely goddess of the *tuṇankai*[6] victory dance.'[7] Frenzied dancing occupies also an important place in the worship of Śiva's son, Murukan. In the ritualistic scenario of worship, dancing is a sign of possession enabling a direct contact with a deity. Of significance is to notice that in Tamil religion, dance is regarded as a highly ordered activity that keeps under control the forces

[5] The story is narrated in the *Periya Pūraṇam* (4203-6), the epic recounting lives of Tamil Śaiva saints (*nāyanmār*s) composed by Sēkkilār at Cidambaram during reign of Kullotuṅga II.

[6] Tamil dictionary derives *tuṇankai* from '*tulanku*' meaning 'to sway from side to side', 'to move'.

[7] George L. Hart, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and their Sanskrit Counterparts,* University of California Press, 1975, p. 22.

of disorder.[8] Following this line of argument, Kaimal (1999:405) suggested that the Cōḻas' attraction to Naṭarāja was triggered by his association with victorious dance. Kaimal argues that the Cōḻa rulers might have viewed Naṭarāja as the manifestation of a successful warrior and, thus as the symbolic emblem for the Cōḻas' imperial aspirations. The association of Naṭarāja with the ethos of war is probable especially taking into account the extent to which a literary genre of *puram* (war poetry) of the classical Tamil literature informed diverse social, aesthetic, and religious spheres.

A comprehensive survey of the iconography provides us with some indications of the ways in which the Naṭarāja icon has developed. Coomaraswamy (1957:89) argued in favour of close historical links between the gracious pose of Naṭarāja and the wild dance of Śiva in the cremation grounds found in the temples at Ellora, Elephanta, and Bhubaneśvar three centuries before the origins of the Naṭarāja icon.[9] According to Soundararajan, Coomaraswamy's argument about a linear development model seems to be too far-fetched. Soundarajan claims that there were probably two different traditions incorporating an image of dancing Śiva into its metaphysical scheme, namely, 1) Deccan tradition of Ellora and Elephanta, and, 2) Tamil Śaiva tradition. Even if it is true that the elegant pose of Naṭarāja can be traced

[8] George L. Hart, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and their Sanskrit Counterparts,* University of California Press, 1975, p. 135.

[9] Jose Pereira in his criticism of Coomaraswamy's one-sided interpretation of Naṭarāja icon pointed out to the fact that there were at least two different traditions incorporating an image of Dancing Śiva into its metaphysical and symbolic scheme, namely: 1) Deccan tradition of Ellora and Elephanta and, 2) Tamil South Indian Tradition. He argued that the development of these two different dancing icons of Śiva belongs to two independent traditions that rest on different presuppositions. Cf. Jose Pereira, 'The Naṭarāja Theme: A New Interpretation', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay,* vol. 30. (1955), pp. 71-86. On a similar critique against Coomaraswamy's argument about a linear development of the Naṭarāja icon following Ellora and Elephanta tradition, see Kaimal, Padma, "Shiva Nataraja: Shifting Meaning of an Icon", *Art Bulletin*, Sep 99, vol. 81 Issue 3, pp. 34-36.

in a straight line from Śiva's dance in the cremation ground, still, insofar as the tradition-embedded origins of this wild dance are concerned, it is more credible to associate it, after David Smith (1996:186), with the Bhairava cult. An early Tamil literature of *Tēvarām* gives a special importance to ecstatic, Bhairava-type of dancing which has always been a part of Tamil worship. Śiva dances savagely in the cremation grounds surrounded by a troupe of unrestrained goblins:[10] this frenzied mode of dancing in a whirling circle of fire[11] is associated with a notion of possession. The Tamil Śaiva saints such as Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār (6th century) and Appar (7th century) refer to Śiva's dance in the cremation ground in the following words:

…on this big cremation ground You take your stage,
You make the *bhūta*s come to worship You.
O Meritorious One with the tightly worn hero's anklets,[12]
lifting Your leg, You perform the dance.[13]
See the god!
See the Lord, see him who dances, holding fire,
in the wilderness of the burning-ground […].[14]

Śiva's dance in the cremation ground is sometimes referred to as a dance of a skull-bearer (*kāpālin*) that justifies the earliest association of dancing Śiva with the sect of Śaiva ascetics, the Kāpālikas.[15] Among the most interesting dancing figures that had retained this characteristic are Śiva's form as Vīrabhadra,

[10] *Tirumantriam* of Tirumular (originally known as Sundaranātha was a Tamil Śaivite mystic and writer, considered one of the sixty-three nāyānars) gives numerous references to Śiva's dance in the crematorium. Cf. J. Soundararajan, *Naṭarāja in South Indian Art*, p. 130.

[11] See Naṭarāja bronze dancing in a wheel of fire.

[12] Kāraikkāl refers here to war-anklet (*kaḷal*) which symbolizes victory over enemies, thus the dancing Śiva comes here to fit into the imagery of the victorious warrior.

[13] *Tiruviraṭṭai Maṇimālai* of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, v. 15, in Craddock, p. 53.

[14] Appar VI.301.1 in Peterson, p. 112.

[15] See Chapter Three.

dancing with Sati, his dead wife and Kālāntaka, who dances on the body of Death, demonstrating the conquest of time.[16] A number of iconographical details in the Naṭarāja icon, such as a dwarf beneath Śiva's foot (originally a part of Śiva's troupe of goblins—*śivagaṇa*), an encircling wheel of fire (originally a symbol of encompassing burial grounds), the cobras twisted around his arms and waist, the skull on his forehead (found in the earliest Naṭarāja representations) strongly suggest the possibility of dancing Śiva's association with a tantric culture of the cremation ground and the symbolism of death. In addition, Younger (1998:90) narrates the legend according to which the present site of the Hall of Dance (*nṛtta-sabhā*), located just opposite to the Hall of Consciousness (*cit-sabhā*) where Naṭarāja resides, was a cremation ground. In other words, the early layout of the Cidambaram temple was facing the cremation ground, that would indicate that Naṭarāja originally presided over the realm of death, dancing. This would imply that the Cidambaram temple was a center of a rather esoteric ritual[17] dedicated to yogic and tantric practices.[18] As Zimmer suggested: "In India, dance flourished side by side with the terrific austerities of the meditation grove—fasting, breathing, exercises, absolute introversion".[19] The bas-reliefs displayed in the niches of *kanakā-sabhā* in the present-day Cidambaram portray numerous sage-like figures in various yogic poses which would support arguments made by Nagaswamy and Zimmer.

Historically speaking, the introduction and development of the image of Śiva as the Lord of Dance (Naṭeśa) begins in Tondaimaṇḍalam under the Pallava rule in the 7th century. However, it was not before the tenth century, in large part due to the extended efforts of Cōḻa queen Semibyan Mahādevī, that

[16] Anne-Marie Gatson, *Śiva in Dance, Myth and Iconography*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990, p. 47.

[17] Younger 96-97.

[18] Cf. About early śakta/tantric tendencies in Naṭarāja's cult, see Nagaswamy, R. *Facets of South Indian Art and Architecture,* vol. I, Aryan Book International, 2003 pp. 131-138.

[19] Zimmer, H., *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization,* p. 151.

the image of a classical Naṭarāja in a graceful *ānanda-taṇḍava* pose was created. The bronze image of a classical Naṭarāja, as it is known today, is the invention of the Cōḻa dynasty (9th-13th century) who, in order to legitimize the sacredness of the royal power embodied in their family-deity perfected Naṭarāja's dancing pose and made it to fit into a gracious, cultivated posture of a royal god. As has been pointed out by many scholars (Smith, Younger), Śiva's dancing pose before the tenth century is significantly different from a classical Naṭarāja. According to Smith (1996:6), the sophisticated and graceful Cōḻa bronzes came into being because of the Cōḻa's "aesthetic sublimation" in which "Dionysian power of nature symbolized by Rudra dance in the burial grounds was overcome by Apollonian cultural sublimation exemplified in a classical Naṭarāja". Nowadays only an epithet of *tāṇḍava*[20] 'frantic dancing'[21] given to Naṭarāja's 'dance of bliss' (*ānanda-tāṇḍava*) reminds us of Śiva's early association with the destructive, violent dancing in the cremation grounds. The structural transformation of Śiva's dance has been summarized by Smith (1996:3) thus: "In Naṭarāja, the state of possession [...] is transmuted into the inwardly concentrated, enstatic bliss of Upaniṣads. The possessed shaman is transmuted into the perfect mastery of movement."

[20] Hart summarizes the Tamil fascination with '*tāṇḍava*' 'frantic dance of destruction' in the following words: 'the disposition of the Tamils to see the return to the chaos that precedes creation in situations of danger and death led them to give great importance to the '*tāṇḍava*', Śiva's dance of destruction at the end of the world. Indeed, the '*tāṇḍava*' is of Dravidian origin'. Cf. George L. Hart, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and their Sanskrit Counterparts,* University of California Press, 1975, p. 40. Bose, basing his description on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* gives a different explanation of the *tāṇḍava,* according to which it is the form of dance that aims at *devastuti,* 'praise offerings to the gods'. This form of dancing is like any other beautiful offering made to gods, such as flowers, etc. Cf. Mandakranta Bose, *Speaking of Dance*, D.K. Printworld, 2001, p. 16.

[21] Cf. Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary translates *tāṇḍava* as 'a type of dancing accompanied by violent gesticulation', 'frantic dance of Śiva and his votaries'.

The beginnings of this transmutation that eventually led to the emergence of a fully-fledged icon of Naṭarāja exemplified in a classical *ānanda-tāṇḍava* pose may be traced back to the extensive influence of 'Sanskritization' (Kulke) that took place at temples across medieval India. According to Kulke, from the tenth century onward the priestly community at Tillai temple (later Cidambaram) began the process of 'Sanskritization' of autochthonous cult through which a local god was placed within the context of the 'great tradition' (*māhātmya*) of pan-Indic significance.[22] Translation of Tamil names into Sanskrit synonyms, compilation of local god's myths and stories into a *mahātmya* (e.g. *Cidambaramāhātmya*) was a common procedure throughout India that sought to promote a 'new' god of a geo-political area as the pilgrimage center. In this process of 'Sanskritization', Tamil 'Puliyur' meaning 'Land of the Tiger' was converted into Sanskrit 'Vyaghrapūra' meaning 'The Town of the Tiger'. In a similar fashion, Tamil 'Adavalan' or 'Kuttaperumanadigal' meaning 'Lord of Dance' was converted into Sanskrit 'Naṭeśa'[23] 'Lord of Dance'; Tamil 'Citrambalam' meaning 'Little Hall' was converted into Sanskrit 'Cidambaram' 'The Sky of Consciousness'. Through the process of 'Sanskritization', the Tillai priests sought to reestablish dancing Śiva's identity within a larger context of pan-Indic tradition, and dissociate him from a fierce and crematory framework of a local tradition.[24] According to Kulke, the Cōḻa rulers' adoption of dancing Śiva as a family deity of their royal lineage initiated this doctrinal reinstatement that led to the redaction of the *Cidambaramāhātmya*—the 'official' compendium of Cidambaram myths and legends extoling Naṭarāja's virtues—that had a particular appeal to the pilgrims.[25]

[22] Hermann Kulke, Dietmar Rothermund, *A History of India*, p. 144.

[23] According to Dehejia (2002:105) Sanskrit term 'Naṭarāja', 'King of Dance' is a late addition to Tamil lexicon that took place in the thirteenth century. Cf. *The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from the South*, ed. V. Dehejia, p. 105, fn. 4.

[24] Kaimal 1999:406.

[25] Cf. Kulke, Hermann, *Cidambaramahatmya: Eine Untersuchung der religions geschichtlichen und histotischen hintergrunde fur die*

The *Cidambaramāhātmya* reconfigured a popular Pine Forest Myth[26] to justify the iconographical representation of Naṭarāja. In Kulke's opinion, the Pine Forest Myth was inserted into the text in the tenth century, and, thus, it constitutes "the earliest textual reference to Naṭarāja's dance in its fully canonic form."[27] The redacted version of the Pine Forest Myth that was included into the 'official' canon of the *Cidambaramāhātmya* relates Śiva's and Viṣṇu's trip to a pine forest (*dārukāvana*) to educate the sages about the rules for leading a truly devotional life that, in turn, exposes the sages' own misconducts. Śiva and Viṣṇu come to the forest in the disguise of a naked beggar Bhikṣatana and beautiful, seductive woman Mohini, respectively, who sexually provokes the sages and succeeds in distracting them from their *sādhana.* When, they come to realize that Bhikṣatana conned and embarrassed them, humiliated sages threw weapons at him: a tiger, a skull, a drum, snakes, fire, and demon (*apasmāra*). Śiva in the form of Bhikṣatana responded to this violent attack by taking hold of the weapons thrown at him and turning them into trophies as the ornaments to beautify his body. Then, he began his ecstatic dance of victory that assumed cosmic dimensions.[28] Kaimal summarizes the myth in the following words:

> The *Chidambaramahatmya* thus attaches a mythological explanation, as it were, to Nataraja images, adapting them both to a narrative of conquest, supremacy, and absorption. The Myth of the Pine Forest rationalizes Nataraja's iconographic markers as the sages' futile threats: the skull in his hair, the snakes around his arm and in his hair, and the dwarf under his foot. Fine stripes incised in the little garment around Shiva's hips depict the remnants of the attacking tiger. Shiva catches the

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*entstehung her tradition einer sundinischen templestadt*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970.

[26] For a psychoanalytical interpretation of the Pine Forest Myth, see Shulman, David & Handelman Don, *Shiva in the Forest of Pines: An Essay on Sorcery and Self-knowledge,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004. and Doniger, Wendy, *Sexual Metaphors and Animal Symbols in Indian Mythology,* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981, pp. 139-140.

[27] Kulke 1970:46-50, in Kaimal 1990:406.

[28] Kaimal 1990:406.

fire calmly in his hand and permits it to envelop his entire body as the aureole. He uses the drum to beat the rhythm of his victory dance. In all these ways, he safely absorbs their weapons into his body and meets the sages' challenges in unruffled triumph.[29]

According to Kaimal, "this new 'rationalized' rendition of the Pine Forest Myth provided an appropriate version of the meanings inhered in the icon that intended to dissociate him with a heavy and unappealing context of the cremation ground."[30] Kaimal develops her argument even further, stating that this new, victorious dance that assumed cosmic dimensions became appealing to the imperial ambitions of the Cōḻa rulers aspiring for the royal conquest of four directions (*digvijaya*). In other words, "the courageous, dancing god capable to transform abusive threats into trophies of victory embodied certain regal principles that seemed to akin with imperial claims of domination" (Kaimal 1990:407). Even though, Kulke's textual analysis of Naṭarāja icon detected in the *Cidambaramāhātmya* on which Kaimal based her observations seems to have much to offer for the understanding of the reasons behind the Cōḻa's fascination with Naṭarāja, still, it cannot, in my view, provide a fully satisfactory explanation of its immediate causes. Kaimal's 'political motivation' thesis is correct only if it locates Cōḻa's imperialistic motives within a larger perspective of the 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis' indiscriminately funded on the aesthetic ideology. To explain why the dancing Śiva captivated the minds and feelings of the Cōḻa rulers, becoming a royal deity and a symbolic emblem of their three-century-long reign, we must first examine various cultural and ideological factors, which had, in large part, been tied to, what Pollock called the 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis' of the medieval period. The adoption of Naṭarāja as the dynasty's hereditary god becomes understandable if we realize that the Cōḻas tightly embraced the trend of 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis'. In the cosmopolis whose ideology rested on the conviction that "[political] power was derived from

[29] Kaimal 1990:406.
[30] Kaimal 1990:406-7.

aesthetic capacity"[31] Naṭarāja became a spiritual and political asset reckoned as a mysterious symbol of the aesthetic power. Nothing could more perfectly embody the elegance, majesty, and charismatic presence of the royal authority than Śiva dancing in the aureole of the sun.

## Early Cōḻa Period: From Heroic to Incorporative Kingship. Naṭarāja and the Creation of a New Aesthetic Paradigm

In the evolutionary model of the divine kingship[32] of medieval South India,[33] a radical shift from heroic to incorporative style of kingship has been detected.[34] In the heroic style of kingship celebrated in the Caṅkam *puram* poetry, the legitimacy of the

[31] Pollock, Sheldon "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular", *The Journal of Asian Studies,* vol. 57, no.1. 1998, p. 13.

[32] On the connection between Sacredotium (*brahma*) and Regnum (*kṣatra*)—the constitutive principles of the Brahmanical notion of the ritual kingship, See Coomaraswamy, Ananda, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government,* American Oriental Series, Volume 22, New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1942.

[33] In early medieval South India, at least three different types of legitimacy of the kingly authority took a stand: 1) the royal sacrifice, 2) the divine genealogies, and 3) the royal gift (*dāna*). During the early Pallava reign (4th-6th century), the source of the legitimacy of the kingly authority was primarily constituted through the royal sacrifice (*rājasūya*). The king assumed a position of the 'sacrificer' that effected the rite of purification through symbolic death and rebirth. cf. Gonda, Jan, *Ancient Indian Kingship from the Religious Point of View*, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1966. And Heesterman, J.C. *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*, Mouton: S-Gravenhage, 1957. and Heesterman, J.C. *The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993. Epigraphic inscriptions from the Pallava period (4th–9th century) justify the statement that the kings proclaimed their supreme sovereignty by means of the sacrifices they performed. cf. Dirks 1976:139.

[34] For discussion on 'heroic kingship' and 'incorporative kingship', see Stein, Burton, "All the King's Mana: Perspectives on Kingship in Medieval South India", *Authority and Kingship in South Asia,* ed. J.F. Richards, pp. 133-188.

kingly authority is conveyed in heroic imagery dominated by the motif of the courageous king-warrior glorified by his military virtues. In this model, the authority of the warrior is sanctioned both by military expansion and protection of autochthonous land. The most visible symbol of the heroic kingship is found in the construction of memorial stone (*naṭukal*) built on the remains of a dead king-warrior. The heroic style of kingship was founded on the ritual core of Vedic sacrifices, such as the *rājasūya* or *aśvamēdha*.[35] On the other hand, in the incorporative style of kingship, the legitimacy of the kingly authority is obtained and sustained through the king's association with institutionalized forms of religiosity (temples) and ritual specialists (priests). Moreover, in the incorporative style of kingship, the royal gift (*dāna*) becomes the most popular means of the legitimacy of political power. The gift had a strongly political implication insofar as it was a vivid instrument of prestige and power.[36] In the words of Firth: "gifts are often judged not primarily as a contribution to resources, but as an index to the attitude of the giver".[37] During the Cōḻa reign, the value of royal gift was reinforced: the gift was no longer an essential part of the sacrifice, as it was during the reign of the Pallavas, but rather "an autonomous arena for the proclamation and expression of authority."[38] Moreover, the status of the recipients, to whom these gifts were granted, was enhanced. In a sense, the endowed persons and institutions shared the donor's authority, as they became the 'actualized expression of his sovereignty'.[39] The royal gift, typical for the incorporative kingship, was practically formalized in the building of the new temple-complexes, replacing existing brick temples with stone

[35] See Dirks, Nicholas, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 28-34.

[36] Spencer, W. George, "When Queens Bore Gifts: Women as Temple Donors in the Chola Period", *Śrīnidhiḥ: Perspectives in Indian Archaeology, Art and Culture,* Madras: New Era Publications, 1983, pp. 361-373.

[37] Firth, Raymond, *Symbols: Public and Private,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973, p. 372, in: Spencer 1983:362.

[38] Dirks 1976:133.

[39] Dirks 1976:145.

temples, and land endowments to the Brāhmaṇas (*brahmādeya-dēvadāna*). The large-scale settlements of Brāhmaṇas who were gifted land endowments were taking place in the village areas of *nāḍu*-localities characterized by sustainable agriculture and developed irrigation system. Both of these types of gifts offered by the ruling dynasty can be seen as a clever political maneuver designed to legitimize the Cōḷa's sovereign authority in the context of the sacred order or 'ritual sovereignty'. The royal gifts had "self-publicizing character" (Spencer 1983:366) and a high-degree of formality intended to reflect authority. Both, the temples and land endowments to the Brāhmaṇas, were regarded as bringing considerable merit (*puṇya*) for the donor, but as Stein (1998:171) has argued, they also "created a context in which the reigning king was eulogized". The eulogy (*praśasti, meykīrtti*) praising the glory and achievements of the ruling kings was one of the most efficient means for creating justification for the kingly authority.[40] The eulogy as a literary genre traced the royal ancestry back to divine genealogies in order to lend divine legitimacy to their rule. In the words of Dirks (1976:132): "the divine genealogies began to posit the base of sovereignty for the family of kings". The rising importance of genealogy contributed to the elevation of the particular elite families, on the one hand, and perpetuated genealogical awareness of hereditary divine kingship, on the other. The claim of kings to be in divine descent from gods was mainly influenced by the increasing popularity of Pūraṇic tradition that laid emphasis on the genealogy of the gods and sages (*vaṃśa*). Thus, the Pallavas, as well as the Cōḷas, claimed themselves to be in line of a direct descent from god Viṣṇu (*vaṃśāvatāra*) as his 'partial incarnations'. Additionally,

[40] As Balasubrahmanyam 1966:32 observed: "from the time of Rājarāja I, the *praśasti* with a distinct historical introduction was a concomitant prelude to descriptions of grants and endowments. It was not a mere static formula of any one achievement but a brief record of the king's reign year after year".

the Cōḻas also traced the dynasty's origin to the divine genealogy of Sūryavaṃśa or Solar Dynasty.[41]

Recent scholarship on the history of medieval South India found in the work of Nicholas Dirks (1976) and Burton Stein (1998) has suggested that the shift from heroic to incorporative type of kingship in the Kaverī river delta occurred by the late eighth century during the reign of the Pallavas.[42] The ruler responsible for setting the tone for this significant change in the very nature of kingship was Nandivarman II Pallavamalla (r.731-96). The successor dynasty of the Pallavas were the Cōḻas who, as it was argued by Stein[43] (1980), directly inherited the Pallava style of incorporative kingship in the course of time. Vijayālaya Cōḻa is, perhaps, the most famous warrior-king of the Cōḻa dynasty, known for his conquest of Tañjāvūr in 848 from the Muttaraiyar chieftains which was made into the imperial capital of the re-established Cōḻa dynasty. His contribution in the field of temple construction is rather modest. The only documented temple built under his patronage is Niśumbhasudani image of

[41] Veluthat, Kesavan, *The Political Structure of Early Medieval South India*, Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993, p. 60.

[42] cf. Dirks, Nicholas, "Political Authority and Structural Change in Indian Economic and Social History", *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 13, no.2. 1976, pp. 125-157. and Stein, Burton, "All the King's Mana: Perspectives on Kingship in Medieval South India", *Kingship and Authority in South Asia,* 1998, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 133-188.

[43] In a critique directed against Stein's premise Padma Kaimal (1996:35) put forward a new argument which claims that the evolutionary shift from heroic to incorporative kingship took place for the Cōḻas independently, regardless of the Pallava influence. In support of the argument, Kaimal has analyzed inscriptions scattered throughout the Kaverī region dealing with imperial patronage of the temples. She came to the conclusion that the key to successful rulership for the early Cōḻa kings: Vijayālaya Cōḻa (r. 850-871) and Āditya I (r.871-908) laid in demonstration of military prowess and heroic ambitions and certainly not in building of the temples. Kaimal, Padma, "Early Cōḻa Kings and 'Early Cōḻa Temples': Art and the Evolution of Kingship", *Artibus Asiae,* vol. 56, no. 1/2 (1996), p. 35.

Durgā.[44] Āditya I—Vijayālaya Cōḻa's son and successor—reflected his father's zeal for military expansion that resulted in large-scale military campaigns against the Pallavas and Muttaraiyars. Āditya's vengeance brought military aggression to the west into the Koṅgumaṇḍalam. He expanded the Cōḻa territory by annexing Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam, thereby, putting an end to the Pallava reign.[45] In Kaimal's opinion, Āditya I is wrongly regarded as the most active ruler in patronizing the temple constructions.[46] Most probably, he did not build any temple.

The first Cōḻa king with well-documented records of temple constructions is Parāntaka I (r.907-54),[47] the son of Āditya I who is known for the installment of the Ādityeśvara temple at Toṇḍaimanād,[48] the completion of the Gomuktīśvara temple in Tiruvāduturai hosting a big (103 cm) free-standing image of Naṭarāja in the *ānanda-taṇḍava* dancing pose, and the gilding of the Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple with golden roof. Two copper

[44] The Trivālaṅgāḍu plates of Rajendra Cōḻa explicitly state that Vijayālaya Cōḻa consecrated the image of Niśumbhasudani "whose lotus feet are worshipped by gods and demons and by whose grace he [Vijayālaya Cōḻa] bore as easily as a garland the weight of the whole earth resplendent with the garment of the four oceans". cf. Balasubrahmanyam, S.R., *Early Chola Art, Part I,* Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1966, p. 43.

[45] Sastri, N. *The Colas,* p. 113.

[46] Kaimal has argued that the Aṉbil plates of year fourth of Sundara Cōḻa (r.956-73) documenting Āditya's engagement in the temple construction is anachronistic insofar as they were written fifty years after Āditya's reign. cf. Kaimal, Padma, "Early Cōḻa Kings and 'Early Cōḻa Temples': Art and the Evolution of Kingship", *Artibus Asiae,* vol. 56, no. 1/2 (1996), p. 54. For discussion on this topic, see also Barrett, Douglas, *Early Cola Architecture and Sculpture 866-1014 A.D,* London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1974, p. 49. Balasubrahmanyam, S.R., *Early Chola Art, Part I,* Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1966, pp. 81-82.

[47] For a study dedicated exclusively to Parāntaka I, see Swaminathan, S. *The Early Cholas: History, Art and Culture,* Delhi: Sharada Publishing House, 1998.

[48] The temple was an example of a sepulchral monument (*paḷḷipaṭai*) dedicated to Parāntaka's father—Āditya I. The *paḷḷipaṭai* was constructed as a hero-stone a deceased warrior.

inscriptions (Tiruvālaṅgāḍu plates, and Udayēndiram plates) commemorate Parāntaka 's royal gift to Cidambaram temple in the following words:

> With pure gold brought from all the quarters which were subdued by the prowess of his own arm, this banner of solar race [i.e. Parāntaka] covered the mansion of Indramauli [Śiva] at Vyāghrāgrahāra [Cidambaram].[49]

> He [Parāntaka] built for Purāri [Śiva], who was before this on the silver mountain [Kailāsa], a golden house called Dabhra-Sabhā and thus put to shame his [Śiva's] friend, the lord of wealth [Kubera], by his immense riches.[50]

The progressive shift in the rhetoric of kingship is reflected in this inscription in which the heroic act of *digvijaya* necessary to establish Cōḻa's sovereignty over tributary kings subordinate to them became an economic means that facilitated gold donation to the Naṭarāja's temple. In this way, *digvijaya* as the most crucial aspect in the imperial formation of the Cōḻas is placed in a new context through which the royal gift, as a new basis for conferring political authority, is communicated. During Parāntaka I, the shift in emphasis from king-the victor to king-the donor took place in the anchoring authority of the king. At the same time, this royal act of gold donation acquired as a booty from war brought about a sudden elevation of Naṭarāja who, thus, came into a central position. The golden roof covered the inner sanctum, known as the Hall of Consciousness (*cit-sabhā*) where Naṭarāja resides. Most probably it was Parāntaka I who established Cidambaram Naṭarāja as the family deity (*kula-devatā*) of the Cōḻa ancestral lineage.[51] He also participated in the settlements and land donations to Brahmiṇs. Despite his engagement in the temple projects, Parāntaka I continued the heroic zeal of his forefathers invading the entire Paṇḍya kingdom in 910. In many ways, Parāntaka I can be seen as a 'transitional figure' (Kaimal 1996:56), continuing the warrior legacy of the heroic kingship,

[49] *EI* 22, # 34, verse 17, 256. Cf. Kaimal 1996:58.
[50] *SII* 3.3, # 205, verse 53, Kaimal 1996:58.
[51] cf. Swaminathan 1998:133.

and also setting for himself the task of establishing the divine decree of the kingly authority through affiliation with sacred places, most notably with Cidambaram. The strong dynastic ties with temple culture typical for the incorporative style of kingship were slowly evolving during the reign of subsequent Cōḷa rulers: Rājāditya (r.947-49) who might have sponsored construction of the Tirutoṇḍīśvara temple at Tirunāmanallūr and Gaṇḍarāditya Cōḷa (r.949-58), Parāntaka's son, famous for his devotion to Naṭarāja. Gaṇḍarāditya Cōḷa is an especially interesting figure. His ten-verse devotional poem *Tiruviśaippa* dedicated to dancing Śiva gave him a lasting place among the sixty-three Nāyanārs—Tamil poet-saints. In a typically devotional fashion, distinctive for *bhakti* poetry, the poem of Gaṇḍarāditya expresses a deep longing to see Naṭarāja and witness his dance: "When am I to reach him? When am I to go and see Him? When am I to go and see His dance?"[52]

The decisive shift to the fully incorporative style of kingship characterized by large scale temple constructions began unexpectedly with a controversial accession of Uttama Cōḷa (r.971-88) to the throne in 971. The Umāmaheśvara temple in Konerirājapuram hosting the largest four-armed statue of Naṭarāja in the classical *ānanda-taṇḍava* pose was built during his reign. However, the inscriptions mention his mother Sembiyan Mahādevī (10th century) as the patron of the temple. The Umāmaheśvara temple was also known for an annual festival celebrated in honour of Sembiyan Mahādevī's natal star, Jyeṣṭhā.[53] She also ordered to carve a panel on the south wall of

[52] cf. Arunachalam M. "Ganaraditta and His Tiru-isaippa", *Śrīnidhiḥ: Perspectives in Indian Archaeology, Art and Culture,* Madras: New Era Publications, 1983, pp. 229-232.

[53] "As many as 4,151 kalam of paddy and lands, whose measurements are given in great detail, were provided for, in order to maintain the regular service in the temple, such as the śribali-ceremony held on the natal star Jyeṣṭha of queen Sembiyan-Madeviyar, feeding of brahmaṇas[...]." in: Mahalingam, T. V. *A Topographical List of Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu and Kerala states: Thanjavur District,* Indian Council of Historical Research, 1989, p. 239.

the central shrine picturing her late husband Gaṇḍarāditya Cōḻa worshipping Śiva.[54] Sembiyan Mahādevī was one of the most important queens of the Cōḻa empire, the single most powerful donor of temple constructions,[55] and a particularly avid patron of arts who over the span of sixty years from the early years of Uttama's reign to the later years of Rājarāja Cōḻa (r. 985-1014) constructed numerous temples of architectural consistency which have become the representative style of early Cōḻa art.[56] In the context of the present discussion, Sembiyan Mahādevī played a very important role in the codification of the artistic canon of Naṭarāja in bronze and stone sculptures. The temples built under her patronage are the first to "present Naṭarāja as a full-scale figure in a large and elaborately framed niche".[57] The visual and ritual presence of Naṭarāja was made actualized in the flanking niches in the numerous temples at Konerirājapuram, Ānāngūr, Tirukkodikāval,[58] and finally assumed a dominant position in a central niche in the Kailāsanāthaswamin temple at Sembiyan Mahādevī village, Tañjāvūr district. She also initiated the construction of sepulchral temples (*paḷḷipaṭai*) erected over the remains of dead kings-warriors, embellished with a sculpture of Naṭarāja on its south entranceway.[59] These were primarily the grand Śiva temples acting as the important centres of identification of the Cōḻa king with Śiva that gave rise to the

[54] *SII* no.450 of 1908, cf. Spencer 1983:365.

[55] For discussion on Sembiyan Mahādevī's role as the temple donor, see Spencer, W. George, "When Queens Bore Gifts: Women as Temple Donors in the Chola Period", *Śrīnidhiḥ: Perspectives in Indian Archaeology, Art and Culture,* Madras: New Era Publications, 1983, pp. 361-373. and Venkataraman, B. *Temple Art under the Chola Queens,* Fadirabad: Thomson Press India, 1976.

[56] Kaimal, Padma, "Early Cōḻa Kings and 'Early Cōḻa Temples': Art and the Evolution of Kingship", *Artibus Asiae,* vol. 56, no. 1/2 (1996), p. 61.

[57] Kaimal 1996:61.

[58] For a full list of the temples built by Sembiyam Mahādevī, see Barrett Douglas, Early Cola Bronzes, Bombay: Bhulbhai Memorial Institute, 1965, pp. 14-18. Barrett, Douglas, *Early Cola Architecture and Sculpture 866-1014 A.D,* London: Faber and Faber Limited, pp. 90-120.

[59] Hall 2008:90.

posthumous cult of the great ruler. Here again, the early motif of Naṭarāja's association with the heroic dance of a successful king-warrior, typical for a heroic style of kingship recurs in a new context of the temple worship. The specific architectural style initiated by Sembiyan Mahādevī actually formalized in massive temple constructions proliferating in small towns away from the lavish Cōḻa capitals. That can be seen as a strategy meant to ensure respect for a political-cum-aesthetic power across the Kāverī region. Naṭarāja played a significant part in the dissemination of this new religious mentality that patronized a cult of sovereigns, quickly becoming a signature-motif of the Cōḻa power. As Kaimal stated:

> disseminating his [Naṭarāja] image as a large, prominent stone figure on the many temples she built, and in bronze to other temples, she promulgated him as the deity of the entire Kāverī area and the Toṇḍaimaṇḍalam, a symbol around which a sense of a unified identity, focused upon the Cōḻas, might coalesce".[60]

As a result of these efforts assisted by a brilliant visual propaganda campaign in which Naṭarāja began to feature on the outer and the inner walls of every Śaiva temple, the dynasty's political authority and prestige was, from now on, conveyed by a symbol of dancing Śiva—the embodiment of a successful warrior and sovereign agency.

While the choice of Naṭarāja attributed to the Cōḻa name certainly had a political component, in order to be effective it required a constant dramatization with the immediate aim of arousing emotions in others by exposure to a divinely human, both sensuous and majestic figure, of Naṭarāja. It was mostly due to Sembiyan Mahādevī's extended efforts towards developing emotional sensibilities in people that the so-called Cōḻa bronzes—one of the most exquisite art objects in modern world—had flourished. The most famous and obsessively duplicated was, again, Naṭarāja whose statues adorn exhibition halls in all major museums around the world. The Cōḻa bronzes—

[60] Kaimal 1998:63.

unlike the abstract and intangible statues of the Pallavas—are characterized by realism and "intensity of human quality with a particular treatment of facial expression, especially the eyes and the mouth".[61] In the words of Vidya Dehejia, '[the Cōḻa bronzes] arouse in the watcher a sense of remote dignity and ethereal majesty. They are sensuous, but at the same time, evoke a majesty that alerts the viewer to their sacred status'.[62] The proliferation of sensuous, yet elegant bronzes represent the Cōḻa inclination to create a new aesthetic paradigm that have a psychological function of arousing strong emotions in others. The image of Naṭarāja was circulated in Tamil Nadu by the tradition of bronze-casting that made use of a lost wax technique. The processional icons (*utsava-mūrtis*) of Naṭarāja were donated to almost every Śaiva temple in the region. During the festival, they were brought out to the public space outside of the temple enclosure and took part in the festival processions. In the words of R. Champakalakshmi (2010:482),

> It is well know that the *utsava-mūrtis* used in the festive procession are invariably bronze images. In the Cōḻa period, this visual metaphor acquired a more powerful symbolism when the *utsava-mūrtis* 'festival images of bronze' were used for festive processions amidst the devout populace. Naṭarāja, in the form of *utsava-mūrti*, became the focus of the devotion of the Shaivite world, and, therefore, an allegory for Cōḻa sovereignty.

Festival processions were structured upon a deliberative orchestration of sense perception of sight that placed Naṭarāja in the epistemic frame to advance political agenda of a ruler which, in turn, engendered a submissive and highly conformist spectator position characterized by emotional subjugation. We will come back to this topic in Chapter II.

Surveying the history of early Cōḻa kings, it is clear that a shift from heroic to incorporative kingship introduced changes in the base of authority through which the kingly legitimacy was

[61] Sastri, *The Colas*, p. 725.

[62] Dehejia, Vidya, "Chola Bronzes: How, When, and Why", *The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India,* New York: American Federation of Arts, pp. 22-4.

conveyed. It was no longer the heroic ethos but the praxis of royal gift: the temples and settlements of Brāhmaṇas that acted as the legitimizing agents of the kingly authority. The assignment of *brahāmdeya*s and *dēvadāna*s placed the Brāhmaṇas in relation of ritual sovereignty to the ruling dynasty that "bound each locality to the Cōḻas through a well-defined ceremonies marking ritual sovereignty" (Stein 1977:16). In both instances, the royal gift became increasingly politicized along religious lines. Yet, the transition from heroic to incorporative kingship offered a more sophisticated version of politicized religion, i.e. one that sought to incorporate the important religious symbol of dancing Śiva into a many-coloured fabric of aesthetic politics. The dancing Śiva—the royal god, cast in bronze and sculptured in stone played a critical role in laying down the visual foundations for aesthetic politics insofar as he came to embody a spectacular self-representation of the Cōḻa monarchial authority.

## The Middle Period: The Royal Temples of Rājarājeśvara and Gangaikoṇḍacōḻapuram

Sembiyan Mahādevī's son—Uttama Cōḻa was succeeded by Rājarāja Cōḻa I (r. 985-1014), the son of Parāntaka Sundara Cōḻa II. Rājarāja Cōḻa I is regarded as one of the greatest kings of the Cōḻa dynasty who gave rise to the fully-fledged imperial phase of the Cōḻa empire. During the reign of Rājarāja Cōḻa I and his son and successor Rājendra Cōḻa I (r. 1012-1044), the Cōḻa territory stretched from the island of Sri Lanka in the south to the Godavari basin in the north (Sastri 1955:194). At the height of their power, the Cōḻas ruled the trade routes along the maritime Silk Roads, and extended their power in the Śrīvijayan empire in the Malay Peninsula and along the South China Sea.[63] The Cōḻas expanded

[63] On the overseas expeditions of the Cōḻas as a part of an intellectual trend of a 'royal mystique', see Thomas R. Trautmann, 'Traditions of Statecraft in Ancient India', *Tradition and Politics in South Asia*, ed. R.J. Moore, Vikas Publishing House, Calcutta, 1979, pp. 86-102. and Sinsena W.M. *Sri Lanka and the South-East Asia*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978.

their political power not only in terms of foreign invasions and annexation of territory, but also in cultural expansionism. The pursuit of warfare fuelled by a powerful desire for hegemony and imperial ambitions brought into existence a change in the political visibility of the Cōḻa monarchy which was reinforced by the aesthetics of power: "architecture, sculpture, and other arts served as metaphors for conveying different levels of meaning […] and interrelationships between religious and political functions".[64] By the end of ninth century, mutually inclusive processes of politicization of religion and aestheticization of politics reached its peak in the construction of royal temples in Tañjāvūr and Gangaikoṇḍacōḻapuram. The royal temples became the centres of aesthetic politics in which "the sacred and secular spheres of royal functions became almost indistinguishable."[65] Rājarāja I was the first Cōḻa king to practically formalize the idea of political expansionism by constructing the royal temple, the Rājarājeśvara, also known as the Bṛhadīśvara in the capital city of Tañjāvūr. The temple was completed during the 25th year of his reign, around 1000 and it was bigger than anything built anywhere in India in Rājarāja's time.[66]

The ethos of politicized religion was firmly entrenched in the paradigmatic nature of divine kingship[67] in which the temporal power of the king was legitimized through the ruler's identification with the divinity enshrined in the temple.[68] In this

[64] Champakalakshmi, R. *Religion, Tradition, and Ideology: Pre-colonial South India,* Delhi: Oxford University Press 2011, p. 557.

[65] Champakalakshmi, R. *Religion, Tradition, and Ideology: Pre-colonial South India,* Delhi: Oxford University Press 2011, p. 554.

[66] See Balasubrahmanyam, S.R., *Middle Chola Temples,* Faridabad: Thomson Press, 1975, p. 17.

[67] On the connection between Sacredotium (*brahma*) and Regnum (*kṣatra*)—the constitutive principles of the Brahmanical notion of the divine kingship, See Coomaraswamy, Ananda, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government,* American Oriental Series, Volume 22, New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1942.

[68] Chattopadhyaya, B. *The Making of Early Medieval India,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 199.

process, the king was raised to the status of the divinity, and his temporal power acquired an uncontested, spiritual authority. This form of divine legitimacy of the kingly authority was initially sanctioned by the Pallavas, however, it was during the Cōḻas that this type of justification of monarchial authority became a standardized form of a new political practice, quite similar to the cult of the god-king (*devarāja*) in the Angkorian kingdom of Cambodia.[69] Epigraphic credentials acknowledge the fact that the coronation names of the Cōḻa kings had an added suffix '*deva*' meaning 'god', for example, Rājarāja-deva. In a similar way, the titles used for the kings had a striking resemblance to the titles used for the contemporary deities.[70] The Tamil names *kō* and *perumāḻ* were used to denote both the king and god. The word '*kōyil*' was employed in the meaning of the 'temple' and 'palace'.[71] The temples were the platforms for political events, such as royal coronation. Another means of legitimation of the kingly authority in the sacred order was attested in various ritual services offered to the king. The 12th century hagiology of the Cōḻa kings, the *Periyapurāṇam* of Sēkkiḻar gives an account of certain rituals normally performed in honour of gods that were offered to the presiding ruler. These ritual ceremonies included the bath, the garlanding, the body anointment, the incense smoke, the waving of oil lamps, and food offerings.[72] The ritual sequence was concluded with a dance performance enacted by a professional dancer (*kuttar*) before the king which could be seen as the symbolic display of the royal sovereignty. Another example

[69] Cf. Mabbett, I.W. 'Devarāja', *Journal of Southeast Asian History,* vol. 10, no. 2. 1969, pp. 202-223.

[70] Inscription SII VOL.XVII, no. 599, in: Y. Subbarayalu, *South India Under Cholas*, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 212.

[71] Veluthat, Kesavan, 'Royalty and Divinity: Legitimisation of Monarchial Power in South India', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Hyderabad, 1978, pp.

[72] Veluthat, Kesvan, 'The Status of the Monarch: A Note on the Rituals Pertaining to Kingship and their Significance in Tamil Country (A.D. 600-1200)', *Proceedings of the Indian Historical Congress*, Kurukshetra, 1982, p. 150.

of the politicization of religion was seen in the practice of setting up images of deceased Cōḻa kings in the temple niches normally reserved for deities. This practice was initiated by Kundavai, elder sister of Rājarāja who used to set up the images of their parents: Parāntaka II Sundara Cōḻa, and the mother in the temple niches while referring to them as *tirumēṇi* ('idol' or 'sacred body'), the term normally used for naming temple idols.[73]

In the Rājarāja's construct of the royal temple, politics and religion were intertwined: the king's affiliation with a deity was exclusively a royal prerogative followed by an attempt at centralization of the royal power under the royal temple. The success of Rājarāja's new political practice centered around the god-king and royal temple was facilitated in large part by the Brahmin oligarchy who were continuously propagandizing the sacred power of the king. As has been mentioned by Chattopadhyaya (1994:200), "the apparent interdependence between political and sacred authority required the assignment of such ritual specialists for they acted as the legitimating agents of the kingly authority".[74] The royal temple became the institutional base for establishing mutual interdependence of royal authority supported by the Brahmin oligarchy. It is necessary now to discuss here the various ways in which the sacred authority of the god-king became anchored in people. These mechanisms all involved the implanting of ideology, which relied almost exclusively on the emotional subjugation. Once one comprehends the nature of religious emotion, it becomes clear why there is no match for the most powerful type of religiosity on which the mass-psychological influence of the Cōḻa's sacred authority was based: *bhakti*. Some scholars hold an opinion that the ostentatious parallelism between the god and the king was not structured on royal hierarchy but on the feudalistic hierarchy instituted during the medieval period. The lord-servant relationship existing

[73] Champakalakshmi, R. *Religion, Tradition, and Ideology: Pre-colonial South India,* Delhi: Oxford University Press 2011, p. 999.

[74] See, also Kulke, Hermann, *Kings and Cults: State Formation and Legitimation in Indian and Southeast Asia*, p. 14.

at the nucleus of feudal society was reduplicated in the deity-devotee relationship in *bhakti* tradition. In the *bhakti* tradition, the devotee very often addresses the deity as the lord or master placing himself in the relation of affective subordination to the lord-deity, in the position of a slave. The recurrent theme of *bhakti* poetry was 'bondage' understood as the highest objective in life, more desirable than wealth or liberation. Thus, viewed through the prism of *bhakti* ideology, the feudalistic hierarchy of the medieval period became idealized and romanticized. The slavery and servitude became sublimated through the emotional appeal of *bhakti*.[75] When the actual state of bondage and surrender typical for the feudal society is interpreted within the context of *bhakti* symbolism, it instigates the form of emotional subjugation that becomes endowed with mystical significance. This form of emotional subjugation shrouded in the poetical language of *bhakti* ideology of total surrender to the feet of God was a necessary tool for the Cōḻas' political project of consolidation of their monarchial authority. With a strategy of the 'royal temple', the boundaries between secular and sacred were constantly shifting. The king and the divinity shared sovereignty and were mutually interdependent;[76] at these times, the border between transcendental god and the earth-bound king became blurred. An emotional surrender to the divinity was a coveted form of the actual surrender to an earthly king himself.

The reign of Rājarāja is regarded by scholars as the period of time when the consolidation of the literary *bhakti* canon and the adaptation of *bhakti* ideology by the Cōḻa rulers took place. *Bhakti* as a socio-religious movement associated with temples and lives of the saints was potentially disruptive and could lead to a number of destabilizing social effects, but it could also act as

[75] cf. Narayanan, MGS, Kesavan, Veluthat, "Bhakti Movement in South India", *Indian Movements: Some Aspects of Dissent Protests and Reform*, ed. S.C. Malik, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, 1978, pp. 51-54.

[76] Kenneth R. Hall, 'Merchants, Rulers, and Priests in an Early South Indian Sacred Centre: Cidambaram at the Age of the Cōḻas', in: *Structure and Society in Early South India*, ed. Kenneth R. Hall, Oxford University Press, 2004, 115.

an instigator of socio-religious integration, increasing the chance of enhancing monarchial power. Rājarāja saw in a growing popularity of *bhakti* an opportunity to boost his own power and prestige. The royal patronization of *bhakti* led to the integration of popular beliefs and localized traditions into the official royal cult. In this new setting, the king became the deity's most ardent devotee. In the words of R. Champakalakshmi (2010:483),

> The royal temples were understood as a statement of political power. More than any other temple, the Tañjāvūr example is a monument which stands as the most powerful expression of the political authority of its royal patron, Rājarāja I, the creator of this temple. This was based on the *bhakti* ideology that was consciously fostered by the Cōḷas to make the temple the focus of the underlying socio-cultural processes of an art tradition, which reached its maturity in the highly stylized visual and verbal representation of the dominant image of the god and king. The Cōḷas built up this political imagery, and consolidated their power, thereby, they transcended the micro-level monarchial systems and integrating the whole Tamilakam into a cohesive politico-cultural region, with a Pūraṇic world view and the vernacular idiom of *bhakti* as ideology.

The iconography of Tañjāvūr temple offers an insight into visual communication placing the king in the position of a devotee of Naṭarāja. The narrative panels on the western wall of the Rājarājeśvara temple depict Naṭarāja in enormous, almost man-size proportion dancing in *cit-sabhā* (Hall of Consciousness). The scene is dominated by a majestic figure of Naṭarāja who is offered homage by the king and the royals standing in *kanaka-sabhā* (Golden Hall).[77] The royal retinue and the Golden Hall are significantly smaller than Naṭarāja in the *cit-sabhā*. Rājarāja and his queens depicted with folded hands evoke a reverential submission to Naṭarāja that aimed at promoting the basic message of *bhakti*—devotion. Rājarāja conferred to himself a title: Śivapādaśekhara, which means 'one (who has) the feet of

[77] Balasubrahmanyam, S.R., *Middle Chola Temples*, Faridabad: Thomson Press, 1975, p. 33.

Śiva as (his) crest'.[78] Moreover, the selection of iconographical leitmotifs portraying Naṭarāja in the light of a new religious vision of *bhakti*, in the company of the Tamil Śaiva saint Sundaramūrti and the kingly sage Cēramān Perumāḷ—depicted on the narrative panels in chambers 7 and 9—indicates that these themes were deliberately chosen to glorify the royal centre of Tañjāvūr through its association with a spiritual authority of a cosmic dancer.[79] It is around this time that the legend of Rājarāja's recovery of the lost *Tevāram* hymns[80] (also known as the *Tirumurai*) in the secret chamber of Cidambaram temple was launched into circulation.[81] Both Naṭarāja and Cidambaram temple became reevaluated as the center of *bhakti* tradition, and the most sacred Śaiva temple in Tamil Nadu. The singing of *Tevāram* hymns became an important part of the temple ritual in the capital temple of Tañjāvūr. Rājarāja is said to appointed forty-eight singers specializing in hymnal singing (later known as *oduvārs*), two drummers to play on the kettle drum, and the big drum to keep the beat as others sang.[82] Singing of the *Tevāram* devotional songs was quickly introduced in other temples, becoming a widespread religious practice all over Tamil Nadu that continues to our times. Rājarāja I was assigned with the epithet *Tirumurai Kanda Colan* meaning 'the one who saved the *Tirumurai*'.[83]

[78] *SII* vol. II, 91.

[79] Champakalakshmi, R. *Religion, Tradition, and Ideology: Pre-colonial South India,* Delhi: Oxford University Press 2011, p. 561.

[80] *Tevāram* (Tamil *teva* 'god', *aram* 'garland') is a collection of first seven volumes of the *Tirumurai,* the twelve volume anthology of Tamil Śaiva devotional songs dedicated to three poets (*nayanars*) of 7th century, namely: Cuntaramūrti, Appar, Cēramān.

[81] For a detailed description of this legend, see Balasubrahmanyam, S.R., *Middle Chola Temples*, pp. 77-81.

[82] *SII,* vol. II, 65, in Balasubrahmanyam, S.R., *Middle Chola Temples*, p. 80.

[83] Vasudevan, Geetha (2003), *The Royal Temple of Rajaraja: An Instrument of Imperial Cola Power*, New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, pp. 109-110.

The image that emerges from our analysis illustrates the two paradoxical yet complementary aspects of the king who was, at the same time, being elevated to the glorified position of the god, and also assumed the subordinate role of a god's most ardent devotee. One is tempted to ask, after Shulman: "Can the king be, at once, divine and the abject servant of a god?"[84] The answer to this question is a 'yes', if we take into account that the space of medieval Tamil Nadu was constituted by, at least, two social realities of different orders: the royal-cum-sacred realm which was continuously being aligned with absolute sacred authority, and the feudal reality which was dependent on it. The royal realm was the sole arena of a sovereign king whose divinity was sanctioned by elaborate ritual services offered to him in the same manner as it was offered to the royal god.[85] The feudal reality was constituted by a social pyramid with the king at the top, followed by great lords, magnates, priests, merchants, servants, and slaves at the base. Feudalism was marked by dependence in which undervalued individuals at the bottom of the hierarchy were obliged to serve those above them. Influenced by the ideology promoted by *bhakti*, the feudal reality underwent a significant reconstruction of its social hierarchy. As a result, the divinized king was replaced by the royal god and the king established himself in a relationship of a dedicated service to god, becoming the deity's most ardent devotee. The change in hierarchy was purely symbolic, nevertheless it created a desirable public image, i.e. an image that reflected the feudal mentality, of the king who shared the royal sovereignty of the god as his servant.[86] Rājarāja's

[84] Shulman, David, "Poets and Patrons in Tamil Literature and Literary Legend", *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture,* ed. B. Stoler Miller Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 109.

[85] In the words of Singh: "The deity of an early medieval temple can be compared to a feudal lord (king) who was provided with all the amenities and pleasures of life that were needed by a feudal lord. The amenities included a big and comfortable house, a host of servants, best of food, choicest jewelry, attractive garments […]."cf. Singh, A.K. *Devadasi System in Ancient India*, H.K. Publishers, Delhi, 1990, p. 30.

[86] cf. Peterson, V. Indira, "In Praise of the Lord: The Image of the

supreme authority was, from now on, derived from his association with the spiritual force. Rājarāja's portrayal as Naṭarāja's devotee was a neatly constructed persona or a self-projected public image that had a great appeal to the masses, for it created an image of the king in a feudal relationship of submission to the god. This inclusion of the king into the feudal pyramid served to impart a sensation of a spiritual community that did not live under the authority of the person, that is the king, but under the rule of a spiritual force, the god himself. That it was a public image, rather than a true representation of the king's attitude, deliberately created by means of a political calculation and out of fear of a potentially disruptive *bhakti* movement is clearly apparent in the language of hostility towards kingly patronage expressed in the *bhakti* poems.[87] As David Shulman (1992:89-119) has argued, the relationship between the Cōḻa king and the poet expressed in *bhakti* literature is characterized by a visible tension and mutual dependencies between the crown and the poet. The poems evoke a sense of rivalry between the god and the king and between the king and the poet conveyed in a language of satirical pomposity. After all, the poet was the one who was employed to justify the king's positive public image through his literary undertakings.

Rājarāja I was succeeded by his only son Rājendra Cōḻa I (r.1012-1044) who appointed his eldest son, Rājadhirāja (r. 1018-1044) as a co-regent in a joined rule that lasted twenty-six years. Rājendra I shared the imperialistic ideal of his father that resulted in many trans-oceanic conquests in Southeast Asia and military campaigns against the Ceras, Pāṇṭiyas, and Cālukyas. He is best known for his Gaṅgā-capture expedition probably around 1023 where he defeated the king Mahipāla I (r. 988-1038) of the Pāla Dynasty of Bengal and Bihar. The capture of rivers affirmed territorial claim and validated the sovereignty

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Royal Patron in the Songs of Saint Cuntaramūrtii and the Composer Tyāgarāja", *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture,* ed. B. Stoler Miller Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 120-23.

[87] cf. Shulman, David, "Poets and Patrons in Tamil Literature and Literary Legend", *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture,* ed. B. Stoler Miller Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 89-119.

of kingship. For the Cōḻas—ardent worshippers of Śiva—Gaṅgā was especially important because of her special relationship with Śiva. The mythological theme picturing Śiva as Gaṅgādhara, 'The Bearer of the Gaṅgā' is a popular leitmotif in the Cōḻa temples. What is certain is that Rājendra, following the steps of his father Rājarāja, focused on political visibility of his imperial power. The waters of Gaṅgā carried in pots were brought to a new capital sixty kilometers to the north-west of Tañjavur where Rājendra constructed the royal temple of his own, shaped as the Kailāsa (the mythical mountain of Śiva), and named after successful Gaṅgā-capture as the Gangaikoṇḍacōḻapuram 'the town of the Cōḻa who conquered the Gaṅgā'. The Gaṅgā waters were emptied into a new lake designated as the Cōḻa-Gaṅgā that made a "Pillar of Victory in the Form of Water". The architecture of Gangaikoṇḍacōḻapuram royal temple was designed to set a proper framework through which imperial topography mirroring the symbolism of sacred geography was visibly pronounced. The Kailāsa mountain and Gaṅgā river—the epitomes of sacred geography associated with Śiva distinctly represented "the symbolic contours of imperial topography that acquired a political visibility serving as the aesthetic foundation in the imperial formation of the Cōḻa empire" (Davis 1993:27)[88]. Scholars have noticed[89] that Rājendra endowed the temple with sacred idols seized as war-trophies during his military campaigns: the Sun-idol and eight-armed image of Durgā from the Cālukyas; three images of Bhairava and Bhairavī and Kālī from the Kaliṅgas of Orissa; a ten-armed Bengali-version of Naṭarāja dancing on the bull from the Pālas of Bengal and Bihar.[90]

The royal temples in Tañjavūr and Gangaikoṇḍacōḻapuram were reflecting mirrors of imperial mindset and visual memorials of the greatest imperialistic expansion that took place in medieval South India. The temples were envisioned to make a political

[88] Davis H. Richard, "Indian Art Objects as Loot", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 52. no. 1, 1993, p. 27.

[89] Davis 1993:42, Balasubrahmnayam 1975:253-4.

[90] On other commodities seized by Rājendra, see Davis 1993:41-42.

statement expressed in a language of a military conquest and booty from wars. It is certainly true that the "royal temple cults" promoted by Rājarāja and Rājendra initiated a different style of kingship. [91] The difference laid in a more pronounced declaration of personal military achievements and glory (the case of Rājendra) as well as in a personal declaration of a spiritual devotion and personal prestige derived from the association with a spiritual force (the case of Rājarāja). The supremely "self-promotional religious policies of Rājarāja and Rājendra"[92] revolving around the royal temple were about to be changed with the accession of Kulōttuṅga I to the throne in 1070. Kulōttuṅga I started the next phase of the Cōḻa rule, known as the period of the late Cōḻas. This phase was marked by a consistent effort to restore the dignity of the Cidambaram temple that aimed at reversing the self-promoting trajectory of kingship advocated by Rājarāja and Rājendra.

## Late Cōḻa Period: The Rise of Cidambaram

The period of the late Cōḻas that lasted approximately two centuries (1070-1270) saw the rising importance of Cidambaram as the principal centre of the Cōḻa dynasty. This was the time when the royal temples of Tañjavūr and Gangaikoṇḍacōḻapuram lost their former glory, which had developed under the auspices of the previous Cōḻa kings. In Rājarāja's time, the Cidambaram temple was already a very prominent sacred centre, usually referred to as the "Temple of Temples". It certainly held the highest rank among all other Śaiva temples in Tamil Nadu, because it was chosen as the coronation place of the Cōḻa rulers. The Tillai Brāhmaṇas—the officiating priests of the Cidambaram temple—who held a special status in the *Tēvaram* hymns[93] must have stimulated this

[91] cf. Hall, R. Kenneth, 'Merchants, Rulers, and Priests in an Early South Indian Sacred Centre: Cidambaram in the Age of the Colas', *Structure and Society in Early South India,* ed. Kenneth R. Hall, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 91.

[92] Hall 2001:92 after Younger 1995:100

[93] cf. Loud, Alden, John, *The Dikshitars of Cidambaram: A Community*

decision. Due to lack of any historical records, it is difficult to account for Rājarāja's frequent visits to Cidambaram. It is more likely that he barely stayed in Cidambaram, since he actually had his private Cidambaram shrine depicted on the frescos in the secondary sanctuary in his own temple of Tañjāvūr where the icon of Naṭarāja received daily worship. [94] However, after the foundation of a new capital in the Gangaikoṇḍacōḻapuram built in the vicinity of Cidambaram guaranteed frequent royal visits to Cidambaram.[95] Rājendra's successor Vīrarājendra[96] (r. 1063-1069) acknowledged the importance of the Cidambaram temple as the royal coronation site when he mentioned his gift of a ruby fixed in the crown of Cidambaram Naṭarāja, suggesting that this gift-giving safeguarded his accession to the Cōḻa throne in 1063.[97] Nevertheless, a real change in the perceived significance of Cidambaram did not take place until the reign of Kulōttuṅga I (r. 1070-1125). It was none other than Kulōttuṅga himself—a Cāḻukya-Cōḻa who contributed significantly to the restoration of the Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple to its place of prominence. This is the period when "the history of Cidambaram is the history of the Cōḻas."[98] Kulōttuṅga I and his general Naralōkavīran, who was successively elevated to the rank of his and his successor's chief minister, commenced extensive implementation of royally-initiated development projects in the Cidambaram temple. Kulōttuṅga's encouraged efforts to reestablish the royal status of Cidambaram are evident in his decision to emphasize the association of the Cidamabaram temple with the Hiraṇya-varman legend preserved in the *Cidambaramāhātmya*, the 'official' collection of Cidambaram myths rewritten by a priestly

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*of Ritual Specialists in a South Indian Temple,* Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1990 (unpublished).

[94] Spencer, W. George "Royal Initiative under Rajaraja I", *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 7(4), 1970 a, p. 431-42.

[95] Sastri, Nilkantha, *The Colas,* p. 344.

[96] On Vīrarājendra's extensive 'looting practice', see Davis 1993:26-7.

[97] *SII* 371 of 1901; 173 of 194, in Hall 2001:91.

[98] Balasubrahmanyam, S.R. "The Oldest Chidambaram Inscriptions", *Journal of Annamalai University,* vol. 13, 1944, pp. 55-91. P.64.

community of Cidambaram appointed by Kulōttuṅga I to propagate a new religious center which would have a considerable appeal to pilgrims and would legitimize Kulōttuṅga's monarchial power. According to Kulke, the procedure of collecting and compiling local god's myths and stories into a *māhātmya* was a common feature of the "promotion technique" throughout India that sought to promote the 'new' god of a geo-political area as the pilgrimage center. Accordingly, *māhātmya* can be understood as a different genre of literature developed to propagate a new religious center, which would have considerable appeal for the pilgrims and royal patrons.[99] The *Cidambaramāhātmya* is a "politically influenced religious text" and the Hiraṇyavarman legend narrated in the text[100] is an example of a "political claim transformed into a new legendary reality."[101] In the words of Hall:

> Since a number of Smārta Brahmans owed their appointments at Cidambaram to Kulōttuṅga's reassignments from temples in his Cāḷukya homeland, it is assumed that this chronicle poem was partially intended to validate Kulōttuṅga's role as the patronizing Cōḷa monarch, the

[99] Wangu summarized *māhātmya,* thus:

*Māhātmya*s are Hindu sacred texts that narrate myths and legends of important deities of a particular geographic area. They extol attributes and characteristics of a particular deity, eulogize the deity's pilgrimage center, and prescribe the rites to be observed by the pilgrims. These scriptures are used as handbooks by the local priests who work as the guides of a pilgrimage center, reciting verses from these sacred books for the benefit of the pilgrims. More importantly, *mahātmyās* reflect the ethos and the worldview of the community and are therefore highly cherished by the local population. They belong to the same genre of literature as the *Purāṇas*. Like the *Purāṇas, mahātmyās* incorporate in their literary maze mythology, sacred symbols, rituals, *itihāsa* - political history [...]. Madhu Bazaz Wangu, 'Hermeneutics of a Kashmiri Māhatmyā Text in Context' In: *Texts in Contexts: Traditional Hermeneutics in South* Asia, ed. J.R. Timm, SUNY, 1992, p. 162.

[100] For a critique of Kulke's functionalistic reconstruction of the *Cidambaram-mahātmya*, see Cox, Whitney, *Making a Tantra in Medieval India,* pp. 70-2.

[101] Cf. Kulke Hermann, *Kings and Cults*, p. 202.

previously entrenched Dikṣitars priests as the paramount ritualists at the Naṭarāja temple, and the Naṭarāja temple itself as the symbol of Kulōttuṅga's legitimacy.[102]

The growing prominence of Cidambaram and Kulōttuṅga's personal association with the temple complex reactualized in the mythological story promoted by Dikṣitars priests coincided with extensive developments in the realm of arts, architecture, and classical Sanskrit literature. Nagaswamy (2002:29) has argued that the refined style of the bronzes commissioned by Kulōttuṅga I, predominantly of Naṭarāja and his consort Umā bear a personal touch of the emperor and may imply the existence of a royal school of art. The political use of Naṭarāja by Kulōttuṅga who sought to reestablish the authority of Cidambaram as the most important royal and ritual center might have been the reason for the growth of royal patronage of artworks using Naṭarāja as the main theme. Details on Kulōttuṅga's donations of Naṭarāja bronzes are preserved in many temples across the Kāvērī region at Tirumaṅgalakuḍi, Uttaramerur, Tirupalaivanam, Tiruvavaduturai.[103] Kulōttuṅga I showed a personal interest in the cultivation and spread of Sanskrit. Inscriptions dating to his reign record the establishment of villages of Sanskrit paṇḍits. The compilation of Sanskrit lexicons was directed by Kulōttuṅga himself.[104] Kulōttuṅga I also initiated a change in the architectural design of the temples, which began to be shaped as a chariot with wheels drawn by prancing horses. The earliest example of this new architectural style is the Amṛtaghaṭeśvara Temple[105] at

[102] Hall 2001: 92.

[103] cf. Nagaswamy, R. "The Bronzes of Emperor Kulottunga and his Successors", Dehejia, Vidya (ed.) *The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India,* New York: American Federation of Arts, 2002, pp. 28-45.

[104] Sastri, Nilkantha, *The Colas,* p. 686.

[105] The origin of the temple dedicated to Śiva can be traced back to the Tamil Śaiva saint Appar (7th century) who used to sing about this ancient temple with the name of Karakkōyil (stone-temple). No architectural remains of original shrine have persisted to our times. Epigraphic inscriptions found on the main south wall indicate that the

Melakkadambur[106] rebuilt by Kulōttuṅga I. The temple hosts the ten-armed bronze status of Śiva dancing on the bull surrounded by eight devotees. The same chariot-shaped design is attested in the Hall of Dance (*nṛtta-sabhā*) in the Naṭarāja temple in Cidmabaram, in the second wall of enclosure opposite to the main shrine of Naṭarāja. Most probably, the hall was built by Kulōttuṅga I.[107] According to Champakalakshmi (2011), architectural and artistic motifs convey social, political, and ideological messages, and therefore, it is possible to track the ideological, and political changes and cultural developments of thought and practice in the material records of arts and architecture.[108] We have already seen the way in which the imperial ambitions of Rājarāja and Rājendra had led to the construction of the royal temples communicating military achievements, prestige, and spiritual power of the ruler. The 12th century construction of the temple-chariots initiated by Kulōttuṅga I became a fashion with the Cōḻas and they were intended to convey a totally different message of kingship, i.e. one that placed the cultural practice of festival at the center of affairs. Besides Cidambaram and Melakkadambur, the chariot-shaped temples are found in Dārāsuram, Tribhuvanam, Tiruvārūr (Tāñjāvūr District), and so on.[109] Art historians who studied the chariot-temples of the medieval Tamil Nadu present us with a coherent view about the meaning behind these constructions. Some authors (e.g. Lorenzetti 2008, Kalidos 1984) conform to the view that the temple-chariots were conceived as the processional chariots (*ratha, tēr*). This explanation is a reasonable one, if we take into account that the chariot processions constitute

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temple was renovated during 43rd year of Kulōttuṅga I, around 1113. Balasubrahmnayam, S.R. *Four Chola Temples,* Bombay: N.M. Tripathi Private, 1963, p. 48.

[106] cf. Lorenzetti, Tiziana, "The Amṛtaghaṭeśvara Temple in Tamil Nadu: A Complex Example of Cōḻa Architecture", *East and West,* vol. 58, no. 1/4 2008, pp. 185-212.

[107] Balasubrahmnayam, S.R. *Four Chola Temples,* Bombay: N.M. Tripathi Private, 1963, p. 54-5.

[108] cf. R. Champakalakshmi 2001:465-470

[109] cf. Kalidos, Raju "Stone Cara and Rathamaṇḍapas", *East and West*, vol. 34. no. 1/3 1984, p. 160.

an important aspect of the festival practice in Tamil Nadu. Nevertheless, it was in Cidambaram that this form of cultural practice achieved its apogee. Epigraphic evidences present us with much evidence for the increasing festival practice during the reign of Kulōttuṅga I and his son and successor Vikrama Cōḻa (r. 1118-35). Naralōkavīran, the commander and chief minister of both rulers upheld sponsorship of Naṭarāja festivals by providing lamps on the processional routes, watering the streets during festivals, donating several bronze icons meant for processions, a 'bull vehicle' for the deity during Bhikṣatana procession, a trumpet made of gold to herald the arrival of Śiva.[110] In order to make available a ritual bath of Naṭarāja and his consort Umā at the seaside in Kiḷḷai, he built an eight-mile road connecting Cidambaram with the ocean, a coastline pavilion, and a water tank.[111] In this view, the temple-chariots could be seen as a visual declaration of a new cultural practice that informed interrelationships between religious ideas and cultural forms and practices that affected social space. A glimpse into a socio-religious history of Cōḻa Cidambaram reveals a great importance given to public festivals and ceremonies in honour of gods and kings. The idea of the divine kingship provided a strong affiliation between religious and political spheres. Thus, the public procession of gods, carried out during these festivals, was often accompanied by royal processions. In this way, religious festivals could be seen as a political propaganda that, through this powerful display of royal magnificence, were used to legitimize the sacredness of the royal power and the divine status of the king. As Hermann Kulke writes:

> ...it is beyond doubt that the daily performance of rituals and the great annual festivals of the 'royal deities'—with all their royal paraphernalia and exuberant wealth—became the best and most visible legitimation of royal power and wealth of the 'divine kings' on the earth.[112]

[110] Richard H. Davis, *A Priest's Guide for the Great Festival Aghoraśiva's Mahotsavavidhi*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 19.

[111] Hall 2008:92.

[112] Kulke Hermann, *Kings and Cults: State Formation and Legitimation in Indian and Southeast Asia*, p. 11.

Kulōttuṅga I was succeeded by his son Vikrama Cōḻa (r.1118-35) who appointed Naralōkavīran as a superintendent responsible for building activities throughout the Cōḻa realm. The temple of Cidambaram was enlarged with two inner walls of enclosure, the gateways of the towers (*gopurams*). He also supposedly set an image of a dancing child-saint Sambandar (7th century), one of the sixty-three nāyānars who received a daily worship in the adjacent shrine built for him where the recitation of Sambandar's hymns was taking place.[113] In 1128, the 11th year of Vikrama Cōḻa's rule, the king offered expensive gifts to Cidambaram which were recorded in the inscription in the following words:

Out of the heap of pure gold which had been brought and poured out before him by kings as tribute due for the tenth year (after the time) when a gold leaf (set with) royal gems was engraved (with the words): 'May the King live long and protect this great earth', (he) covered with fine gold the enclosure, the gate towers, halls and buildings surrounding the shrine of pure gold where his family God (Naṭeśa) practices the taṇḍava dance, as if the splendid circular mountain surrounding the earth were combined with the Eastern mountain; covered with splendid gold the altar on which offerings abound, so that the light of heaven was reflected by it; covered with pure gold and adorned numerous strings of large round pearls the sacred car-temple, in order that, conferring long life on the delighted people, the miraculous dancer (Naṭeśa) who occupies the golden hall might be drawn in procession at the great festival called 'the festival of the great name' (Perum-peyar-viḻā) of the great days of Pūraṭṭadi and Uttiraṭṭadi, so as to cause prosperity on the great earth and joys to the Gods; was pleased to build a long temple street of mansions covered with jewels and called it after his royal prosperous name; and made numberless splendid insignia, beginning with dishes cut of fine gold together with a Kalpaka tree of pure gold. Having been pleased to make gladly many such gifts in the tenth year of his reign, in the month of Śittirai, on Sunday which corresponded to

[113] cf. Nagaswamy, R. "The Bronzes of Emperor Kulottunga and his Successors", Dehejia, Vidya (ed.) *The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India,* New York: American Federation of Arts, 2002, p. 32.

Hasta, on the thirteenth tithi of the fortnight of the auspicious waxing moon, he covered the whole earth under the shade of a single parasol.[114]

In 1130, two years after this generous donation, Vikrama Cōḻa moved his kingly residence to Cidambaram,[115] where he used to spend most of his time in between constant travels across the Cōḻa empire. The extensive renovations and gifts to Cidambaram continued during the reign of Vikrama Cōḻa's son, co-regent, and successor Kulōttuṅga II (r.1133-1150) described as 'the king who wore the crown in such wise as to add lustre to Tillainagar [Cidambaram]'[116], who assumed the throne in 1133. Among his biggest contributions to the development of Cidambaram complex commissioned by Kulōttuṅga II were: 1) the construction of storeys towers (*gopurams*); 2) the Coronation Hall (*raja-sabhā*), known as the One Thousand Pillar Hall; 3) the goddess shrine. With the establishment of the Coronation Hall, the dancing Śiva and his ritual center at Cidambaram became sanctioning agents of the royal power. The installation ceremony of the Cōḻa kings was enacted in Cidambaram under the auspiciousness of Naṭarāja himself. The royal coronation, performed by the ritual of ablution (*abhiṣeka*), was considered as one of the most important 'royal rituals' (*rāja-karma*) of medieval India. The performance of *abhiṣeka* was taking place during the accession of each king in a dynasty. The nature of this ritual was transformative; the royal heir was literally 'affused' (*abhiṣikta*) in kingship (*rājya*), that changed a man into a king. In the words of Inden:

…the *rājyābhiṣeka* was, thus, not considered simply a public act of affirmation or confirmation, a symbolic display of royal pomp and power. It was, to the contrary, held to be an 'effective' or 'constitutive' ritual, the universally performed act by which men were transformed into kings.[117]

[114] Sastri, Nilkantha, *The Colas,* p. 344.

[115] *SII* 163 of 1902, in Sastri 1955:346.

[116] *SII* 1155 of 1902, in Sastri 1955:348-9.

[117] Inden, Ronald 'Ritual, Authority, and Cyclic Time in Hindu Kingship' *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* ed. J.F. Richards, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 54.

During the coronation ritual, the newly acclaimed king was invested with the insignia of royalty: an umbrella and yak-tail fly whisk.[118] In this new setting, Naṭarāja and the Cidambaram temple were endowed with the ritual power to confer royalty on a newly acclaimed king. The *Kulōttuṅgacōḻanulā*, a poetic tribute to the ruler lists among his biggest contributions the gilding of the roof and city with gold. The extensive rebuilding that took place during his reign renewed economic prosperity in Cidambaram. Cidambaram came to be known as the 'Kailāsa on earth'.[119] Following the steps of his father, Kulōttuṅga II preferred to live in Cidambaram, rather than in the capital city of Gangaikoṇḍacolapuram. Despite the claims of well-being and prosperity, the rule of Kulōttuṅga II saw the beginning of religious intolerance and sectarian division between Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects. Kulōttuṅga II, "a bigoted Śaivite" removed the image of Viṣṇu (Govindarāja) from the Cidambaram temple, reportedly throwing it into the sea, and thus "put an end to the mischief of a small god."[120] With the accession of Kulōttuṅga's son Rājarāja II (r. 1146-1173) to the throne in 1150, the Cōḻa empire began to progressively decline that eventually brought an end to the Cōḻa dynasty. In spite of difficulties Rājarāja II continued to give vitality to the cultural blossoming of the region. He is best known for the construction of the royal temple, the Airavateśvara at Dārāsuram. The temple is stylized on the model of the chariot-temple drawn by horses. The pre-eminent iconographical theme of the temple is dance and music; the temple is a homage paid to the aesthetic norms of 'perpetual entertainment' (*nitya-vinoda*) that played a central role in the Cōḻa's implementation of aesthetic politics that will be discussed in chapter II. The last Cōḻa ruler who made a significant contribution to the realm of arts and architecture was Kulōttuṅga III (r.1178-1218). Kulōttuṅga's coronation was held

[118] cf. Inden, Ronald 'Ritual, Authority, and Cyclic Time in Hindu Kingship' *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* ed. J.F. Richards, Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 53-60.

[119] Balasubrahmnayam, S.R. *Four Chola Temples,* Bombay: N.M. Tripathi Private, 1963, p. 55.

[120] 363 of 1907, in Hall 2008:93.

in Cidambaram. His successful campaigns against the Paṇḍya kingdom provided necessary funds needed to finance renovation works at Cidambaram.[121] He built a third wall of enclosure in the temple complex, and extensions to the goddess shrine. He also introduced a new festival practice in the Cidambaram temple.[122]

The period of the late Cōḻas was characterized by renewed relationship with Cidambaram that manifested in extensive development projects of the Naṭarāja temple complex, as well as in the creation of a "new legendary reality" narrated in the 'official' text of the *Cidambaramāhātmya* that placed the Cōḻa king within the context of a purely mythological story of the temple site, through which both the king and the temple acquired a new epically potent identity. Through royal patronization, and through reclaimed association with an officially endorsed legendary reality, the Cōḻas revivified their link with Cidambaram as the most prominent royal and ritual center in the 12th century Tamil Nadu. Not only did Cidambaram become the place of a royal coronation, it was also the actual residence of the Cōḻa kings, eg. Vikrama Cōḻa, Kulōttuṅga II. The preeminent status of the Cidambaram temple which increased spatially six times to its previous size overlapped with a revival of bronze casting of Naṭarāja and Umā that reached its height since the times of Sembiyan Mahādevī. Along with the policies of temple construction projects carried out on a massive scale in Cidambaram, and other cities, the festival practice increased in popularity that inspired a new architectural design of the temple-chariots. All these innovative projects affecting socio-religious and political space of Cōḻamaṇḍalam were deeply rooted in the ideological predilections of the 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis' that in a major way influenced the way in which the aesthetic politics of the Cōḻa kings had flourished.

[121] Sastri, Nilkantha, *The Colas,* p. 381-2.
[122] Ibidem

TWO

# Constructing the Gaze
## Aesthetic Politics of the Cōḻa Kings

Seeing is a position of a will-less subject.

—ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER,
'World as Will and Representation'

This chapter makes an attempt to establish the conceptual framework for the aesthetic politics of the Cōḻa kings. At the same time, it seeks to place the aesthetic politics in a larger cultural, historical, and social context in order to understand its various ramifications. Before turning to this issue in more depth, however, it is necessary to frame a definition of aesthetic politics so as to limit the context in which it may be applied. My definition of aesthetic politics follows Martin Jay's[1] description in which he identifies three aesthetic incursions upon the political. First is *epistemological fallacy* in which political actions are evaluated in accordance with truly aesthetic notions of beauty, enjoyment, and the like. Second is *pragmatic fallacy* that induces a projected image of a politician as a divine being that validates a mythical construal of political events. Third is *representational fallacy* in which the political meanings are encoded in the visual display and self-representation of power. Here, the proliferation of visual images acts as a tool of legitimation of a political action. The aesthetic politics practiced by the Cōḻa kings was deeply rooted

[1] Jay, Martin "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology: Or, What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?", *Cultural Critique,* no.21, 1992, pp. 41-61.

in two different literary traditions of India: Sanskrit and Tamil. Insofar as the Sanskrit literary culture is concerned, the Cōḻas simply borrowed the cosmopolitan trend of Sanskrit Cosmopolis that had been already known for centuries and across half the world as the generally accepted principle of the representation of power (Pollock). The Cōḻa kings faithfully imitated the norms of *kāvya*-based aesthetic politics as universally true, fashionable and traditional style of political conduct. The trajectory of aesthetic politics based on the Tamil literary culture was somewhat different. Here the Cōḻas took their own initiative. Inspired to find alternative parallels of aesthetic politics in their native Tamil culture they effectively stimulated the revitalization of the literary genre of the processional poems written in Tamil, known as *ulā* which served as a model and a direct inspiration for the great festivals (*mahotsava*) performed in honour of gods and kings. The festivals were constituted by the procession of gods and kings, and thus they established a contingent way of stage-managing of political action. These were grand visual spectacles situated on the corrosive boundaries of religion and politics. Both forms of aesthetic politics were structured upon a deliberative orchestration of sense perception of sight and both engendered submissive and highly conformist spectator position. The aim of aesthetic politics was to construct the societal culture of spectators controlled from within through emotional manipulation. This was accomplished by constructing the gaze through textual and visual imagery of naïve beliefs engraved upon the heart of people through confused emotions.

## Sanskrit Cosmopolis

'Sanskrit Cosmopolis'[2] was a global cultural formation that extended over a vast territory of South and Southeast Asia from

[2] Cf. Pollock, Sheldon, "The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, 300-1300 CE: Transculturation, Vernacularization, and the Question of Ideology," *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language,* ed. Jan E.M. Houben, New York: E.J. Brill, 1996, pp.

the fourth to the thirteenth centuries. It was deeply rooted in the transregional literary culture of Sanskrit of which two literary genres: *kāvya* (poetic drama), and *praśasti* (eulogy) assumed a privileged mode of political expression. The most important aspect of 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis' was that Sanskrit became a "public political language" that played a fundamental role in formulation of imperial polity whether in Java, Cambodia, or Gaṅgaikoṇḍacōḻapuram.[3] In other words, Sanskrit's function was properly assigned to political symbols of imperial sovereignty.[4] In this respect, as Pollock continues, not only was Sanskrit a language of articulated politics, but, more importantly, the political authority was communicated through aesthetic power. Sheldon Pollock who developed this concept points out that Sanskrit was not a lingua franca, in the sense in which Latin and Greek were lingua francas of the Roman empire. Sanskrit was not used for governmental, commercial, or simply communicative purposes intended to articulate a legal and political administrative apparatus. For this purpose, vernacular languages were in use. Sanskrit's 'articulated politics' rested exclusively on its aesthetic power. The salient feature of 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis' was, thus, a "common aesthetics of political culture."[5]At the root of this 'sudden' emergence of Sanskrit literary culture that took place simultaneously in different locales of Asia were intellectuals and religious specialists who carried out a broad dissemination of this uniquely aesthetic culture. The dissemination of the transregional, global Sanskrit culture throughout the vast geographical expanse resulted in the formation of 'ecumene' characterized by a shared understanding of the basis of power. In the words of Sheldon Pollock (1996:230):

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197-248. & Pollock, Sheldon, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*, University of California Press, 2006.

[3] Pollock 1996:234

[4] Pollock 1996:245

[5] Pollock 1996:199.

For a millennium and across half the world, elites participated in a peculiar supralocal ecumene. This was a form of a shared life very different from that produced by common subjecthood or fealty to a central power, even by shared religious liturgy or credo. It was symbolic network, created in the first instance by the presence of a similar kind of discourse in a similar language deployed by a similar idiom and style to much similar claims about the nature and aesthetic polity.

The adoption of Sanskrit by the royal courts across Asia embraced Sanskrit language and aesthetic paradigm at its core as the represention of power. The dynamics of pan-Asian adaptation of Sanskrit language practice gave rise to the "highly imitative repertory of culture" based on publicly shared symbolic forms, namely: 1) a sophisticated code of Sanskrit *kāvya*; 2) public political poems or eulogies (*praśasti*) engraved on copper plates or carved on stone pillars in the royal temples that created a political visibility of a royal-cum-cosmic power. This pan-Asian Sanskrit language practice was based on rhetorical conventions and formulaic devices derived from a symbolic matrix of the "same language practice" that constituted the norms of the aesthetic politics throughout South and Southeast Asia. The medieval trend of global Sanskrit Cosmopolis had a considerable impact on the Cōḻa's political praxis. During the Cōḻa rule, the aesthetics of political practice grew to gigantic proportions. This can be seen both in the sphere of art and architecture which have been already discussed in chapter I, as well as in the sphere of literary traditions. The Sanskrit language with aesthetic power with in-built ornamented figurations of speech (*alaṃkāra*) gave rise to the ornamented technology of self-hood and power (Ali). Moreover, finding themselves in the equally sophisticated literary culture of Tamil, the Cōḻa kings introduced a number of important changes that influenced the way in which the regional version of the aesthetic politics in Cōḻamaṇḍalam was conducted. These changes allowed for the development of a grand-scale festival processions that gave rise to a revitalization of the literary genre of processional poems written in Tamil, known as *ulā*. *Ulā*s were political texts that promoted the idea of Cōḻa authority and governance through procession. The performance

of *ulā*s praising royal glory, beauty, and power used to accompany king going in procession (Wentworth).

## Constructing the Gaze: Royal Eulogy and Poetic Drama

The proliferation of royal eulogies (Skt. *praśasti,* Tamil *meykīrtti*) comprised of historiographical records dressed in ornate abundance of rhetorical figures was part of the aesthetic politics that utilized Sanskrit as a "political-cultural idiom".[6] The royal eulogies were written by court poets employed to write a sophisticated poetry intended to create a beautified vision of history that would portray a king as a hero of destiny set forth by his position as a ruler. The eulogies inscribed on the copper plates in the Anbil plates of Sundara Cōḻa Parāntaka II, the Tiruvalangadu plates of Rājendra Cōḻa I, the Larger Leyden plates of Rājarāja I and the Kanyakumari inscription of Vīrarajendra have a standardized form which includes two parts: the Sanskrit part written in a poetic form eulogizing the glory of the king, and the Tamil part which is more of an administrative document that records, for example, the gift-giving granted by the king.[7] Unlike the part of eulogy written in Tamil, the Sanskrit part is written in accordance with rhetoric devices that are linked to the linguistic framework of the aesthetic politics. As a literary genre, the eulogy was a syncretic blend of various literary sources in which the Epics, the Pūraṇas, and ancient Tamil literature were interwoven; it also contained a very complex genealogical material that traced the Cōḻa rulers back to Solar Dynasty.[8] In most simple terms, the eulogy was a collage of different literary sources intended to reconstruct imperial mythology of the Cōḻa rulers and their ancestors reflecting the new mythologized version of history in

[6] Pollock 1996:209.

[7] Cf. Menon, A.G. "The Use of Sanskrit in South Indian Bilingual Inscriptions: Social, Political, and Religious Implications", *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language,* ed. Jan E.M. Houben, New York: E.J. Brill, 1996, pp.

[8] Cf. Spencer W. George, "Sons of the Sun: The Solar Genealogy of a Chola King", *Asian Profile,* vol. 10, no. 1. 1982, pp. 81-95.

which the Cōḻa kings played the role of rescuers that are saving the world from the destruction of the Dark Age. As Spencer (1984) puts it:

> The eulogy was an important instrument for the implementation of the aesthetic politics in a sense in which it was a device for imparting significance to the values and symbols embodied in the Sanskrit code language that was not merely a literary form but was rather a means of experiencing reality.[9]

Another salient feature of eulogy was that it was mostly concerned with a portrayal of the royal self in such a way that the people gradually learn but never comprehend its magnificence and significance. This was primarily done by attaching to the ruler the theme of mythic origins in order to legitimize the ruler's privileged place in history. As Spencer (1984) pointed out, the eulogy defined politics as destiny and politician as savior. The myth evoked a sense of continuity with the past and also served as a tool of validation of the present political action.[10] A political strategy of legitimization hinged upon the divine charisma of the ruler who was homologized to God himself. The juxtaposition of the king and the god was taking place in the sphere of textual imagery of a certain culturally constituted set of beliefs in a way in which the king was literally made into facsimile of the order this imagery defined. Take, for example, Rājarāja's homologization to Viṣṇu[11] or Vīrarājendra's heroic virtues invoked in the context of

[9] Spencer, W. George, "Heirs Apparent: Fiction and Function in Chola Mythical Genealogy", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review,* vol. 21 no. 4. 1984, p. 81-2.

[10] Spencer, W. George, "Heirs Apparent: Fiction and Function in Chola Mythical Genealogy", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review,* vol. 21 no. 4. 1984, pp. 415-34, p. 428.

[11] Leyden Plates of Rājarāja I, v.70. says that "Rājarāja is said to have displayed on the palms of his hands the conch (*śaṅkha*) and disc (*cakra*)—emblems of Viṣṇu." The poet claims that Rājarāja's predecessor Uttama Cōḻa appointed him as his descendent after having realized by this auspicious sign that Rājarāja was none other than the lotus-eyed Viṣṇu himself. Cf. Spencer 1982:92.

the epic hero Rāma destroying the demon Rāvaṇa.[12] The sense of politics as destiny was very strongly articulated by situating the political action of the Cōḷas in the Pūraṇic concept of history retelling the order of cosmos proceeding through four cosmic aeons (*yuga*s). In the eulogy of Rājarāja, the king is depicted as the 'chosen one' who washes away impurity of the Age of Strife (*kali-yuga*).[13] The narrative is structured to portray dark and wicked times of the Age of Strife that are dispelled by the luminosity of the Solar dynasty (*ravivaṃsi*)[14] embodied in Rājarāja. The impurities are washed away by Rājarāja's ritual affusion (*abhiṣeka*) taking place during royal coronation. The eulogy stylized Rājarāja on the form of Viṣṇu, who appears in his incarnations, each ushering in one of the four cosmic ages, thus, Rājarāja appears as a messianic figure who comes to protect the entire mankind from darkness of the *kali-yuga.* This dramatic turn away from the darkness of the *kali-yuga* to the prosperous times of the new Golden Age is

[12] Kanyakumari Inscription of Vīrarajendra, v.80-81 in Spencer 1984:422.

[13] "Aruṇmoḷivarmaṉ (the epithet of Rājarāja) was himself then installed in the administration of the kingdom (as if) to wash away the stain of the earth caused by the Kali age of his body (bathed by the water during the ceremony of installation); and the ends of the quarters heavily roared with the tumultuous sounds of the war-drums, rows of bells and bugles, kettle-drums, tambourines and conches." The Trivalangadu plates of the sixth year of Rājendra Cōḷa's reign speaking of Rājarāja in Balasubrahmanyam, *Middle Chola Temples*, p. 11. "As long as the moon-crested deity (i.e. Śiva) sports with His consort on the Kailāsa mountain, as long as Hari (Viṣṇu) performs meditative sleep (yoga-nidrā) on the serpent-couch on the ocean of milk, and as long as the sole light of all the world dispels the dense darkness of the world, so long may the Cōḷa family protect from danger the circle of the whole world. The Cōḷas belonged to the Solar race, and to Rājarāja I was attributed the virtue of dispelling the dense darkness of the world and protecting his subjects from danger". Leyden Plates of Rājarāja I in Balasubrahmanyam, *Middle Chola Temples*, pp. 7-8.

[14] Ali, Daud, "Royal Eulogy as World History", *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia,* ed. Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, Daud Ali, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 265-229.

illustrated in the next paragraph of Rājarāja's eulogy in which "the milky ocean of abundance formed itself into a circle in the shape of his parasol in the sky and came to see its own daughter Śrī (Lakṣmī) resting on the chest of this king."[15] The parasol is the symbol of royal sovereignty personified in the form of the goddess of Fortune (Śrī) who was believed to be attached to the kings.[16] Śrī is the name of Lakṣmī—the consort of Viṣṇu; as the epitome of beauty, grace, and prosperity, she is inherently attached to the kings. The king's ontological homogeneity with Viṣṇu naturally endowed him with the implicit right to prosperity, which was in itself a sign of sovereignty. As Spencer (1982) says, this highly mythologized self-presentation of the royal glory that revealed to the world the inalienable right of the king to govern the world was supplemented with more down-to-earth record of the king's military achievements and piety. This intrinsic dichotomy of medieval kingship simultaneously transcendent and immanent clearly exposing the dilemma at the very foundation of royal power is what Jan Heestermann conspicuously called 'the conundrum of the king's authority'. The core of the king's dilemma arose out of the contradictions between transcendent power of the king constituted by vertical relationships with a series of divine genealogies, and immanent necessity for repetitive validation of his royal power through military achievements that placed the king in the horizontal relationships with rivals he was supposed to challenge.[17] The royal eulogy served to reconcile this 'conundrum' through the unceasing propensity towards mythmaking that located the king's political action in the grand vision of mythic history attaching to it truly epic significance. The eulogies were the most perfect illustrations of the royal self-presentation insofar as they propagated the king's fame across the vast territory of his kingdom in a manner in which they

[15] The Trivalangadu plates of the sixth year of Rājendra Cōḻa's reign speaking of Rājarāja in Balasubrahmanyam, *Middle Chola Temples*, p. 11.

[16] Ali, Daud, *Courtly Culture in Early Medieval India,* p. 249.

[17] Spencer W. George, "Sons of the Sun: The Solar Genealogy of a Chola King", *Asian Profile,* vol. 10, no. 1. 1982, pp. 93-4.

provided a prelude to "the appearance of his auspicious face (*tirumukham*)".[18] Before actually seeing the king, the audience was familiarized with the projected image of the king conveyed by his eulogy. The eulogy provided a mythic context for understanding the relationship of the ruler's politically-motivated actions and transcendent order. As a result, the eulogy provided a patterned ways of seeing and announcing the political actions of the king in which the sense of wonder was generated and sustained in the audience. The royal eulogy was an essential constituent of poetic drama (*kāvya*)[19]—the literary genre at the nucleus of medieval political life in Sanskrit Cosmopolis.

Another short example of the construction of the textual imagery that served to implement the principles of the aesthetic politics promoted by the Cōḷas comes from *kāvya*. The rise of *kāvya* as a literary culture of royal courts was a part of the cultural formation in the Sanskrit Cosmopolis milieu. *Kāvya* either as the 'ornate poetry' recited by the court poets or a 'drama' performed by actors, was at the centre of the medieval courtly life. According to Bühler, 'to occupy oneself with *kāvya* was a custom at Indian courts'.[20] As Ali (2000) informs us, the political elites and people at court were committed to implement the elaborated codes of conduct delineated in Sanskrit poetry in every area of life. Not only was *kāvya* the epitome of the aesthetic politics, it also had a truly formative role in shaping a controlled aesthetic environment dominated by the experience of the aesthetic emotions or *rasa*s.[21]

[18] Ali, Daud, "Royal Eulogy as World History", *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia,* ed. Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, Daud Ali, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 224.

[19] Smith, David, *Ratṇākara's Haravijaya: An Introduction to the Sanskrit Court Epic,* Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 55-102.

[20] Bühler, George, "The Indian Inscriptions and the Antiquity of Indian Artificial Poetry", *Indian Antiquary,* no.42, 1913, pp. 192-3.

[21] The Cōḷas' acquaintance with the aesthetic theories of Bharata and other aestheticians, such as Daṇḍin (7th century) is attested by architectural and literary evidences. We know that Daṇḍin's work on the *alaṃkāra* entitled the *Kāvyādarśa* which is considered to be one of the earliest systematic treatment of Sanskrit poetics was translated

Scholars have generally agreed[22] that among the eight *rasa*s listed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the aesthetic emotion of erotic love (*śṛṅgāra rasa*) had the most profound significance for the people at court in medieval times. *Śṛṅgāra rasa* became a dominant theme of

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into Tamil as the Taṇṭiyalaṃkāram during the rule of Kullotuṅga II. The architectural evidences are even more exciting. The inside wall passages through all the four entry gates (*gopuram*s) in the Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple are decorated with one hundred and eight dancing poses (*karaṇa*s) described in chapter fourth of Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Each dancing figure is accompanied by two drummers standing on the both sides of the dancer. Below each cubicle, the Sanskrit verse of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* labeling the specific dancing pose is carved on the stone in Grāntha script. Moreover, each set of one hundred and eight *karaṇa*s on each of the four entry gates is additionally supplemented with the carved figures of the king and his queen located on each side of the gate. Cf. Introduction to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharatamuni, Vol. I, edited by M. Ramakrishna Kavi, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1956, pp. 32-39. According to the chronology given by Harle, the West *gopuram* could have been built during the reign of Vikrama Cōḻa (r. 1118-1135); the East *gopuram* was erected during the reign of Kullotuṅga III (r.1178-1218), and the South *gopuram* was constructed in the 13th century during the reign of Kōpperuñjiṅga. Insofar as the North *gopuram* is concerned, it was most probably built some time during the Vijayanāgara rule. Cf. Harle, C. James, *Temple Gateways in South India*: *The Architecture and Iconography of the Cidambaram Gopuras,* Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1963, pp. 66-7. The same dancing poses depicting the *karaṇa*s from the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are also carved in the Rājarājeśvāra temple at Tāñjāvūr built by Rājarāja I and the Sarangapani temple at Kumbhakonam. The Tāñjāvūr temple is the earliest temple that made sculptural representations of these *karaṇa*s anywhere in India. It has a provision for one hundred and eight bas reliefs portraying dancing poses, but only eighty-two have been completed. cf. Balasubrahmanyam, *The Middle Chola Temples,* p. 20. Among other temples built under the Cōḻa reign that have retained this 'obsession' with dance is the Airāvateśvara temple in Dārāsuram—the royal temple built by Rājarāja II (r. 1146-1173) and to somewhat lesser extent, the Amṛtaghaṭeśvara Temple at Melakkadambur rebuilt by Kulōttuṅga I (r. 1070-1125). These temples are replete with sculptures depicting sensuous and beautifully ornamented girls dancing to the music played by drummers, flute-players and tambourine-players.

[22] Ali (2004), Goodwin (1998).

every court drama or literary work[23] from the fourth to thirteenth century.[24] In the words of Daud Ali:

> By the eleventh century, the sentiment of *śṛṅgāra* had become so important that the king Bhoja (r. 1011-55) in his *summa poetica,* the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* or 'Light on Passion', made it the basis of a superordinate experiential 'sense of the self' which encompassed not only erotic love, but all the emotions and sentiments of an exalted life.[25]

The theme of erotic love made itself felt in both the social and political arenas of life. The conquest of Tāñjāvūr by Vijayalāya Cōḻa narrated in the Trivalangadu plates of Rājendra Cōḻa accommodates the metaphor of erotic love "in which the whitewash of the town's mansion is compared to scented cosmetic and Vijayalāya is said to have captured the town just as he would seize his own wife who has beautiful eyes, graceful curls, a cloth covering her body, and sandal paste as white as lime, in order to sport with her".[26] The capture of the city is compared to the sexual seizure of a woman whose description is eroticized. This example shows how popular sentiment of *kāvya* literature—erotic sentiment or *śṛṅgāra rasa* was employed to convey the aesthetics of a political action. In our analysis, however, of particular interest is the influence of *kāvya* on the construction of the 'technology of the self' understood in terms of Foucault as the capacity to effect a number of operations on

[23] *Kāvya* was a court poetry dominated by one particular theme, that of erotic love conveyed by the aesthetic term, *śṛṅgāra*. Cf. Robert E. Goodwin, *The Playworld of Sanskrit Drama,* Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1998, p. 9.

[24] Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*, p. 209.

[25] Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*, p. 209. See also Sheldon Pollock, 'Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* and the Problem of Rasa: A Historical Introduction and Annotated Translation', *Asiatische Studien* 52.1 (1998): 117-92.

[26] The Trivalangadu plates of Rājendra Cōḻa, v.45. quoted in Spencer W. George, "Sons of the Sun: The Solar Genealogy of a Chola King", *Asian Profile,* vol. 10, no. 1. 1982, p. 92.

one's own body, thoughts, and conduct so as to transform oneself into something else[27] which Ali (2006:179) called "a capacity to act upon oneself". With this in mind, it is important to throw some light on the notion of 'ornamentation' (*alaṃkāra, śṛṅgāra*) that lived something of a 'double life' existing simultaneously in the realm of the socio-political and literary practice. The term '*alaṃkāra*'[28] is usually employed in reference to a poetic drama (*kāvya*) of ancient India that deals with figures of speech, secondary denotations, metaphors, and the like. Hence, the *alaṃkāraśāstra*—the science of poetic art is dedicated to stylistic figures of speech intended to make the poetry attractive.[29] The aspect of 'stylistic embellishment', 'beautification' was inherently present in the very notion of *alaṃkāra,* however it was not confined to a specific domain of the poetic drama, the *kāvya*. The 'ornamentation' had also an impact on the social practice. One of the most famous aesthetic theoreticians, Ānandavardhana (9th century) in his acclaimed work on the aesthetics entitled the *Dhāvanyaloka* claims that "just as the figures of speech are purely ornaments that enhance the inherent beauty of poetry, so do the golden ornaments set off the beauty of a person."[30] However 'ornamentation' as a social practice was not only related to the external beautification of the body adorned with jewelry, decoration, and the like. In the scenario of courtly life where people engaged themselves in mastering a sophisticated code of Sanskrit *kāvya*, the practice of 'ornamentation' involved the whole psycho-physical organism. It was a holistic enterprise congruent with a metaphysical notion of sovereignty that involved a physical beauty, graceful bodily movements, playful behaviour, exquisite

[27] *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michael Foucault,* ed. Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, p. 17.

[28] For a detailed etymological analysis of the word '*alaṃkāra*' see J. Gonda, 'The meaning of the word *alaṃkāra*', *Selected Studies Vol. II Sanskrit Word Studies,* Leiden, Brill 1975, pp. 258-76.

[29] J. Gonda, 'The meaning of the word *alaṃkāra*', *Selected Studies Vol. II Sanskrit Word Studies,* Leiden, Brill 1975, p. 269.

[30] *Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana,* II.7. in Gonda 1978:269.

garments and jewelry, charming eloquence, and refinement of speech.[31] Thus, in the social sphere of royal court, the practice of 'ornamentation' was linked up with the 'technology of the self' where external beautification and internal refinement of speech and thought bore an ideological impact of *kāvya* and *alaṃkāra* whose refined stylization it tried to reproduce.

The historical records provide us with the evidence for an increasingly larger role played by 'ornamentation' during the Cōḻa reign. The 11th and 12th centuries inscriptions attest to the royal orders issuing bathing and dressing pavilions at the palaces in Gaṅgaikoṇḍacōḻapuram and Kañcipuram.[32] Epigraphic credentials from Tāñjāvūr temple record extensive architectural developments around the palace intended to accommodate the bathing and adornment additions for the royal family.[33] The 'ornamentation' required a rich variety of things, including bodily oils, perfumes, make-up, garments and hair stylization, but more importantly, bodily ornamentation was also a simile for a higher 'ornamental order'. As Ali pointed out: "the ornamented body [of the king] became the great metaphor for the aesthetic-moral order".[34] In the context of the aesthetic politics, the ornamented body of the king was the actual embodiment of sovereignty in a sense in which "his sovereignty itself was conceived as adhering to his person like a vast array of ornamentations."[35] A noteworthy example of this 'ornamental order' worldview is given in the 12th century processional poem (*ulā*) of Vikrama Cōḻa:

> On his face, where the goddess of Eloquence resided, glittered *makara* earrings like bees hovering about a bloomed flower. On his shoulders, where the broad-breasted lady of the Earth resided, were epaulets brilliant with jewels. On his hand, the place of the unsteady goddess of Fame, sparkled a bracelet of gems. On his chest, where Prosperity

[31] Cf. Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*, pp. 143-182.

[32] Ali 2008:166.

[33] Ali 2008:166.

[34] Ali 2008:178.

[35] Ali 2008:177.

embraced him with desire, shone with increasing splendour a sea-jewel. On his hip, where the beautiful goddess of Victory resided undistressed, was a beautiful sword.[36]

Each ornament on the king's body becomes divinized as the goddess representing royal virtue: Eloquence, Fertility or Strength (Earth), Fame, Prosperity, and Victory. In this way, the royal sovereignty was celebrated as the aesthetic beauty embodying primary virtues that formed the ethical norms of medieval courtly life (See Ali 2008:179).

## Performer as a Power Position

Before coming to terms with the theatricality of a political action exemplified in a popular cultural practice of festival that rose into prominence during the Colas, let us, once again, take a quick look at different levels of resemblances that created an ontological and metaphysical parallelism between the god and the king. The convergence of political and religious dimensions in the construction of medieval lordship is summarized by Daud Ali in the following words:

> The evidence for the origin of early medieval religious ideas points instead to significant interactions with contemporary practices and conceptions of lordship, and the rise and proliferation of many important ideas in both contexts seems to have been broadly contemporaneous. In fact, religious and political notions of lordship differed more in degree than in kind. They formed part of a continuous and homologously structured 'chain of being' that linked the entire cosmos. This, on one hand meant that the king's authority and mystique resembled and participated in that of the temple god, giving a theological dimension to relationships at court. On the other hand, however, it meant that the life of the gods, housed in their sumptuous palaces, shared striking resemblances to those of princes.[37]

[36] *Vikkirimacoḻaṉulā* 45-9, in Ali 2008:178.
[37] Ali 2004:104.

The king and the god were homologized not only with regard to material amenities available to both which constituted of services, entertainments, attractive robes, exquisite ornaments made of gold and silver, etc. but also with regard to their status as performers which placed others in the position of spectators. The entire life of the royal court was structured upon deliberative orchestration of the sense perception of sight: the king was a performer and his subjects—the spectators. As Daud Ali emphasized, "the ambition of a man at court was not to receive the king's audience, but to gain a viewing (*darśana*) of him".[38] It is striking how the aspiration of 'viewing the king' was consistent with an ideal of spectatorship promoted by *kāvya* literature: "being a spectator was one of the qualities of a noble man".[39] The king's status as a performer was acknowledged insofar as his political actions were dramatized and idealized to fit into an overarching sentiment evoking the *śṛṅgara rasa.* The ideal of being a spectator entailed a distance between the viewer and the performer. Here it was only eyesight that guaranteed contact. Modern performance theories promoted by Kenneth Burke and others acknowledge the fact that the maintenance of distance is one of the most efficient ways through which the sense of wonder can be generated in the audience. The effective homologization between the god and the king with regard to their status as performers placed all those who accepted their power in the subservient position of spectators. This arrangement of hierarchically constructed set of relationships was mostly apparent during the festivals centered upon the god and the king going in procession.

## Festival: The Stage-Managing of a Political Action

Scholars specializing in medieval South Indian history generally agree that in the face of a governmental structure "grounded in a segmented social system whose natural tendency was towards

[38] Ali 2006:134.
[39] Ali 2006:189.

fragmentation in the hands of chiefs and other notables" (Stein 1977), the Cōḻas ought to find the ways for cultural unification of power and effective centralization of the kingly authority. For the Cōḻas, 'festival' had primarily synthesizing function that made it possible to permanently seal various schisms derived from the governmental structure of a 'segmentary state'[40] for it allowed to control peoples' experience by controlling the field of visual perception that led to the emotional subjugation to the feet of the master. A glimpse into a socio-religious history of the Cōḻas reveals a great importance given to public festivals and ceremonies in honour of gods and kings, known as *mahotsava, brahmotsava* or simply *utsava*. The Cōḻas ensured some kind of uniformity of the festival practice. As Paul Younger has observed,

> almost all are 10-day festivals; they begin with the raising of the temple flag and the cutting of a sapling or the planting of a variety of grains in a pot of carefully mixed soils". In fact, many of the festivals in contemporary Tamilnadu can be traced back to the Cōḻa times.[41]

Implementation of the festival practice provided an alternative to the existing framework of aesthetic politics and its foundations based on Sanskrit literary culture that was inclusive enough to gain its access to diverse public and a larger strata of Tamil society not only aristocratic but also bourgeois (*nāgarika*) and plebeian. Festival was the form of the aesthetic politics that rested on two presuppositions which included: 1) identification of the king and god that privileged cultic forms and production of submissive spectatorship; 2) the stage-managing of political action that redefined politics as the spectacle directed towards emotional subjugation of the community.

The identification of the king and the god that privileged cultic forms rested on the idea of lordship that homologized

[40] Spencer, W. George, "Heirs Apparent: Fiction and Function in Chola Mythical Genealogy", *The Indian Economic and Social Review,* vol. 21, no.4. 1984, p. 427.

[41] Cf. Paul Younger, *Playing Host to Deity: Festival Religion in the South Indian Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 60.

king to the god. This homologization system provided a strong affiliation between religious and political spheres. Festival was the most effective tool for staging of royal selfhood that used to schematize the political and the religious to the same format of image making that relied on cosmic parallelism. The recorded history of the Cōḻa period justify to the fact that the 10-days festivals performed monthly in the temples were directly linked with the personal asterism of the ruler: either with the day of the king's accession or the day of his natal star.[42] Through sharing the same natal star, the identity of the king was connected to that of the deity and through this connection the king's persona acquired both cosmic and divine identity. The Tiruvalangadu plates refer to the monthly festival celebrated in the temples during Sadayam asterism (known also as Śatabhiṣā)—the natal star of king Rājarāja I.[43] The asterism of Rājendra Cōḻa was Ārdra, known also as Ārudra (for the presiding deity of this asterism was Rudra), it was also a natal star of Naṭarāja. During this festival, drama, dance and singing of the *Tiruvempāvai*, a *bhakti* hymn of the 9th century saint-poet Māṇikkavācakar, were performed. Since both the ruler and the god shared the same asterism, the festival called "Rājendra Cōḻaṉ Tirunaḷ" ("The Sacred Day of Rājendra Cōḻa") was organized in honour of the king.[44] Even though, glorious times of the Cōḻa kings are long gone, the annual festival known as the *Ārdra Darśanam Mahotsava* celebrated

[42] Swaminathan, A. "Festivals After the Asterism of the Chola Kings", *Proceedings of the Indian Historical Congress,* Hyderabad, 1978, pp. 270-74.

[43] Swaminathan 1978:271.

[44] *ARE* 104 of 1913, Swaminathan 1978:274. It is interesting to note that the celebration of Rājendra Cōḻaṉ Tirunaḷ was not limited only to Cidambaram. Epigraphic records from Ullaganallur in the South Arcot district mention the names of women appointed to perform dance and song on this day in the local Śiva temple. cf. *ARE* 176 of 1940-41, Swaminathan 1978:272. The recorded history of Rājendra Cōḻa preserved in inscriptions of Karkotakeśvara temple at Kamarasavalli in Trichy district gives account of the 'half-woman/half-man' *ārdhanārīśvara* dance performance staged on each day of the festival during Margali Tiruvadan and Vaikasi. cf. Swaminathan 1978:272-3.

as Naṭarāja's birthday is still observed today. Similarly, the second annual Naṭarāja festival, known as *Āṉi Mahotsava*, still performed today in Cidambaram, was initially associated with the asterism of Uttiraṭṭādi or Uttara Bhādrapāda, the natal star of Vikrama Cōḻa.[45] The asterism of Vīrarājendra Cōḻa was Ayilyam and festivals were performed in Śiva temples especially on that occasion.[46] The asterism of Kulōttuṅga I was Puṣam and festivals were taking place monthly.[47] The natal star of Kulōttuṅga III was Citra; epigraphic inscriptions record the festivals celebrated on this occasion in the temple of Alavay.[48] Even though the festivals in honour of gods and Cōḻa kings were celebrated at least since the time of Rājarāja I, still history presents us with much evidence for the increment in the festival practice during the reign of Vikrama Cōḻa who sought to promote the Naṭarāja temple at Cidambaram as the most important Śaiva center in South India.[49] During the reign of Vikrama Cōḻa and Kulōttuṅga II, Cidambaram increased spatially six times to its previous size. The extensive rebuilding that took place during their reign renewed economic prosperity in Cidambaram. Cidambaram came to be known as the 'Kailāsa on earth'.[50] Along with the policies of temple construction projects carried out on a massive scale in Cidambaram, the Cōḻa kings launched their political spectacles that inspired a revitalization of the literary genre of the processional poems written in Tamil, known as *ulā*.

## Procession

The emergence of *ulā* as a literary genre was originally associated with Tamil Śaivism in which Śiva was stylized as a hero going in

[45] Swaminathan 1978:273.

[46] *ARE* 136 of 1912, *SII* vol. V. no.976. in Swaminathan 1978:271.

[47] *SII* vol. VI. no. 167, Swaminathan 1978:272.

[48] Inscription of Paddukkottai State no.166, Swaminathan 1978:273.

[49] Richard H. Davis, *A Priest's Guide for the Great Festival Aghoraśiva's Mahotsavavidhi*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 19.

[50] Balasubrahmnayam, S.R. *Four Chola Temples,* Bombay: N.M. Tripathi Private, 1963, p. 55.

procession. *Ulā*s were inspired by two literary worlds: Sanskrit and Tamil. The theme of procession as a declaration of power was stylized on the Sanskrit *māhakāvya*s (Wentworth 2008). The trope of heroic glory enhanced by descriptions of the emotional reaction of onlookers staring at the hero in wonder was located at the crossroads of *puram* and *akam* literary forms aroused from Tamil literary culture. The poems of *puram* ("outside") are focused on war and public life, and *akam* ("inside") on love and emotional response. In reality, the juxtaposition of these two thematic sections is often found in poems. This is certainly the case with the *ulā*s of which the first part is dedicated to the portrayal of the hero's glory, and the second part focuses exclusively on the emotional response of the audience viewing the hero's march (Wentworth 2008). The parallels between the king and the god with regard to lordship gave rise to a similar conception of sovereignty ascribed to both. The sovereignty was conveyed by procession of the king and the god performed during the festivals which acted as "a visual declaration of power" (Wentworth). According to Blake Wentworth (2008:132) who did a study on this theme, the 12th century saw a rapid proliferation of *ulā*s that emerged as a celebrated expression of royal power. Ottakuttar, a court poet for three successive generations of Cōḻa kings: Vikrama Cōḻa, Kulōttuṅga II, and Rājarāja II brought the *ulā*, until then confined to the Śiva's world, into the open and assigned to it a new feature of a declaration of power, meant to enhance their political status. Three *ulā*s written for Vikrama Cōḻa, Kulōttuṅga II, and Rājarāja II were known as the *Mūvar Ulā* (Procession of the Three); recitation of these lyrics used to accompany the kings going in procession. Wentworth says further that *ulā*s commissioned by the Cōḻa kings were directly influenced by the royal temple culture of *bhakti* period characterized by its intense devotion to Śiva. *Bhakti* period established festivals at the center of temple worship. During the festival, the festival icon (*utsavamūrti*) of the deity was taken out into the public space outside the enclosure of the temple to circulate the quarters of the streets in a clockwise direction (*pradakṣiṇa*). The deity rode

atop different vehicles (*vāhanas*) such as lion, bull, elephant or in lavishly decorated chariots. As Jacobsen has pointed out:

> One of the common explanations of the functions of processions in India is that they are statements of devotion that make a claim on territory, the gods circle their realm, which also means the site of the procession is the borderline of their area and is public space that no single deity can claim.[51]

This was, in itself, rooted in the idea of the power subordinated to the ordering of sacred territory. Just as the power of gods emanates within certain spatial boundaries, which are regarded as the sacred seat (*pīṭha*) or site (*kṣetra*); likewise the territorial dominance of medieval kings, including the Cōḻas, was delineated within the frontiers of occupied land. The idea of the king as the embodiment of territorial and cosmic power was best conveyed by the image of *cakravartin* (emperor whose chariot rolls everywhere without obstruction)[52] synonymous to the royal conquest of four directions (*digvijaya*). Thus, the 'claim over the territory' at the core of the procession of gods was easily applicable to the political practices of the medieval kings, in which the king's procession was equated with the royal conquest of the four directions (*digvijaya*). Seen through the prism of politics, *digvijaya* was an act of giving over or yielding to the power or authority to a superior force by lesser kings. In the peculiar sphere of the festival procession in which the god and the king marched together, *digvijaya* was a powerful symbol of emotional surrender to a single agent comprised of the two mutually inclusive personas, the divine and the earth-bound. This was possible because the king as the performer acted in

[51] Jacobsen, Knut, 'Hindu Processions,' 165, referring to Joanne Punzo Waghorne, 'Chariots of the God/s: Riding the Line between Hindu and Christian,' in Selva J. Raj and Corrine C. Dempsey (eds.) *Popular Christianity in India: Reading between the Lines* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) 11- 37.

[52] Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary

between identities, at the point of liminality that suggested other ways of looking at the person. Especially in India where the concept of reincarnation is a culturally constituted belief, a possibility of the multiplicity of impersonations is a commonly accepted fact. *Digvijaya* was a solemn performance of an elaborate ceremony of submission that encompassed within its powerful range both the outer, geographically defined space, and the inner realm of emotions and feelings. The king riding on a stunningly decorated elephant marched through the quarter consisting of parallel streets regularly centered around the royal temple or palace. The claim of dominion over territorial space was conveyed through *movement* which was homologized to the conquest of four directions.[53] Once this ritualized performance of the 'claim over the territory' was finished, the king came back to the point of departure, to the royal temple or palace at the centre wherefrom he governed his kingdom. In the context of aesthetic politics, the festival parade was the most spectacular means for the declaration of royal power, populated by large crowds, it was nothing else than a stage made for asserting the boundaries of royal power as a sacred order that is beyond question (Wentworth 2008:222). The attributes of the king such as the parasol, conch, chowries, elephant, royal banners were the signs of that sacred order (Wentworth 2008: 218). The festival parade subjugated the aesthetic to the demands of domination: it conflated political action with principles of religious experience and aesthetic mode of sense perception in order to consecrate expressions of power as auratic presences and aesthetic attractions.

## Submissive Spectatorship

The Cōḻa political practice rested on the spectacular enactment of monarchial authority in the public realm, on the total visibility of power. The most distinctive feature of the festival parade was marked by 'self-presentation of god or king'. During king's

[53] Sax S. William, "Conquering the Quarters: Religion and Politics in Hinduism", *International Journal of Hindu Studies,* vol. 4 no.1 2000, p. 43.

procession, the visual field was carefully organized to display hierarchy in order to induce wonder and admiration towards power. This mode of political visibility employed auratic gaze that uploaded epistemologically and adorned aesthetically in order to celebrate powers of mythic significance. The visual field was carefully organized in such a way, so that the whole attention was focused on the adorned body of the king dressed in ornaments and weapons as the display of heroic beauty that captivated women's gaze awakening their desires (Wentworth 2008:220). The king's persona requires constant dramatization and symbolization that mesmerized the viewing masses with a construction of royal sovereignty. The procession of gods around the temple too "centered around moments of divine appearances, when the Supreme Lord becomes most accessible, when a temple icon emerges from the innermost sanctum of its palatial temple to see and be seen by all worshippers".[54] Self-presentation of God in the public sphere implied the special accessibility of the divine power. The *utsava-darśan* was the most powerful visual apprehension of the divine image that can be experienced by a devotee.[55] The act of seeing is believed to be reciprocal: the god looks back. The act of seeing and being seen, thus, mutually complement each other. In the royal parade, however, this reciprocity of visual perception is lost. The Cōḻa rulers incorporated religious mode of spectatorship turning it into a mechanism of domination. The power asserted in the act of beholding subjugated lives to the mastery of the strong ruler; through the act of gazing, the viewers were involuntarily yielding to the superior power allowing themselves to be dominated by it. To view the king was the greatest honour one could imagine. Being in proximity of the king had an intoxicating effect on the viewers' minds, the mere glance of the passing king meant

[54] Richard H. Davis, 'Chola Bronzes in Procession', [in:] Vidya Dehejia, *The Sensuous and the Sacred: Chola Bronzes from South India*, p. 61.

[55] John M. Stanley, 'Special Time, Special Power: The Fluidity of Power in a Popular Hindu Festival', *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. XXXVII, no. 1., 1977, pp. 27-43.

everything to the women awaiting him with excitement. However, the king never broke from his unmoved, dispassionate calm; he was immensely powerful as the center of the spectacle, but ultimately distant. He remained aloof from his surroundings and mute.[56] The political spectacle played exclusively on the affective register of the spectator that located political submission in the very structure of visual perception and spectatorial response. Here again, the interaction between *akam* and *puram* poetic genre is blurred. This is visible, for example, in the 12th century processional poem (*ulā*) of Vikrama Cōḻa summarized by J. Howes in the following words,

> The *akam* imagery of a poem becomes powerfully apparent when one realizes that besides the king, all the participants in the procession (i.e. all the viewers of the procession) are women. The magnificence of the procession is described through the eyes of these female viewers. Despite their differing ages and stations in life (they are not all described as young and beautiful), all of them experience a love sickness brought on by the sight of the king. In this way, the *puram* theme of the procession is described through the *akam* emotions of the women who watch it… The identification of the listener with the procession's female participants not only suggests the use of *akam* imagery in a *puram* situation, but also shows an importance that women held in constructing the king's identity. Relations between the king and his subjects are articulated in terms of devotional love, in much the same way that the theme of *virāha* (pain of separation from the beloved) became popular within the *bhakti* movement, particularly with the stories of Krishna with the *gopīs* from the *Bhagavata-Pūraṇa*.[57]

To be in love with the Cōḻa king, whose capacity to arouse emotions in women gazing at him is stylistically comparable with *gopīs*' love for Kṛṣṇa, could be understood as stylized conventions for rendering an ideal of *bhakti*. 'Love' is certainly a characteristic pattern of behavior that recurs in both contexts.

[56] Wentworth 2008:222

[57] Jennifer Howes, *The Courts of Pre-Colonial South India: Material Culture and Kingship,* Routledge Curzon. London and New York, 2003, p. 112.

But it is more than that; there is a complex of feelings involved, formulated in a language that illustrates men's ability to exert an actual domination over woman by being an object of her desire. What is the relation between desire and gazing? To answer this question we must take a closer look at the instances in which desire and gaze come together.[58] The very nature of desire is 'wanting something', 'longing for something', 'being anxious for something'. This thirst (*tṛṣṇā*) for the objects of perception is inherently present in desire. Thus, 'desire' which implies 'thirst', the latter being semantically connected with longing and anxiety, is at the very centre of *bhakti* ideology. These affective responses were inherently presupposed in the act of gazing at Kṛṣṇa that concentrated on his physical, sensual appearance with a special emphasis on his enchanting beauty that stimulated an arousal of desire in the women watching him. Thus, 'thirst' or 'craving' for the object of desire was connected with the impressions conveyed by the senses, particularly, the eyes. The eyes, as the visual recipients of Kṛṣṇa's sensuous, physical form acted as the actual trigger for an arousal of desire to be united with him fully. One of the most frequent metaphors used in reference to 'thirst', understood along with explicitly sensuous overtones, is 'drinking' of Kṛṣṇā's beauty with the eyes.[59] Here, thirst and gaze coalesce into each other. But, gazing at Kṛṣṇa implies a whole plethora of emotional, conative and cognitive states, which clearly illustrate emotional domination over female psyche. In effect, the mind and heart[60] of the woman who concentrates her attention on Kṛṣṇa is often expressed in the language of military conquest in which

[58] According to the *Kāmasūtra* V.1.5., desire (*kāma*) begins with the pleasure with the eyes (*cakṣuprītiḥ*) and moves on to mind. If one does not fulfil her desire, she experiences a wide range of psychophysical anxieties that lead to deprivation of sleep and finally death. In other words, the arousal of desire starts with a pleasurable experience located in the eye, whereupon the mind receives and organizes this sensation into an overarching desire. Cf. Ali 1996:73.

[59] *Viraha-Bhakti: The Early History of Krsna Devotion in South India*, Friedhelm Hardy, pp. 75-76.

[60] As Karen Pechilis Prentiss (1999:53) clarifies, in Tamil *bhakti*

she is seized, caught, overpowered (*gṛhīta*), snatched away, stolen (*apahṛta*), pained, heated (*tapta*), seized, overcome…etc.[61] Among other psychological states that resonate with emotional crisis are those who among the ten stages of 'love in separation' (*virāha*) list: mental confusion (*unmāda*), swooning (*mūrchā*), depression (*udvega*) and death (*maraṇa*). To this list the so-called negative affective expressions consisting of horripilation, weeping, sweating, swooning should be added. Generally, they are meant to evoke severe emotional tension constituting 'love experience'. Now if we look at the female gaze described in the *ulā*s of the Cōḻa kings, we are struck to find deliberate parallels between the emotional response aroused in women seeing Kṛṣṇa and the Cōḻa king going in procession. As the *ulā* of Vikrama Cōḻa (vv.97-99) informs us, women 'arrive in haste', with 'eyes roaming everywhere, thoughts roaming too' and with 'heads bent low in reverence'.[62] These verses clearly point out towards mental and emotional disturbance accompanying 'seeing' which, however, does not exclude the attitude of devotional surrender. In the next verses (vv.159-160, v.168), the relation between seeing the king and the arousal of desire is explicitly drawn again in the context of worship: 'The woman could not bring back her eyes, could not free hands cupped in worship she had no way to rescue her mind from obsession. A passion she had never known before arose, and bewildered–braid slipping, garland slipping…filled with desire, she sees nothing else but him'.[63] Her sight is arrested, captured in the vision of the passing king; this image perpetuates the arousal of insatiable desire that makes her loosen the garments adorning her body. What is this mighty vision of the king like? The verses (vv.258-259) call upon the amorphous nature of light, glaring and bedazzling that cannot be captured by any visible form insofar

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tradition, the 'mind' and 'heart' are linguistically expressed by the same Sanskrit-derived word in Tamil, *maṉam*.

[61] Hardy: 1990:533

[62] *Vikkirama Cōḻaṉ Ulā of Oṭṭakkūttar*, v. 97-99, cf. Wentworth, Blake, *Yearning for a Dreamed Real.*

[63] *Vikkirama Cōḻaṉ Ulā of Oṭṭakkūttar*, vv.159-160, v.168, cf. Wentworth, Blake, *Yearning for a Dreamed Real.*

as the king 'seemed to be like the sun to her when she saw him pass by, body filled with light'. The king is the gilded monarch, resplendent in the sun's divine light. The woman react to the vision of passing king as though she has come face to face with a divine being. She reacts with a powerful sense of reverence and awe, and these feelings play a significant role in governing her behavior.

The metaphor of quenching the thirst of desire through 'drinking' the Cōḻa king with the eyes, similar to the one that occurs in the love for Kṛṣṇa, appears again in the poetic verses of the *ulā* where 'women with long honeyed braids called out to him, so staring with blossoming eyes as if drinking him in…'. An effect of this 'ocular drink' on women's psyche is surely intoxicating, since, as we learn from the next verse, 'women grew weak and faded'.[64] This is a classic example of the psychology of affect, which normally accompanies a psychological crisis. Seeing the Cōḻa king is an overwhelming experience, 'approaching him, she worshiped—her strength failed—she trembled—she swooned—she wept—she was entirely alone'.[65] Here we notice a wide range of psychophysical states that clearly expose woman's essential weakness and vulnerability; she ultimately collapses at the weight of this ocular experience. This emotional anxiety is expressed further by the metaphor of 'melting' in which 'she loses all sense of balance, melting in the fire that flares from the arrows of the bodiless god, who carries a sugarcane bow' [that is the God of Love 'Kāmadeva'].[66] 'Melting in the fire' suggests pain and anguish arising from a destabilizing love experience that debilitates the psycho-physical mind-body complex resulting in a total breakdown.

Surveying the verses of the *ulā*s that describe emotional responses of women viewing the Cōḻa kings going in procession, one can identify a certain logical pattern which bestows on us an understanding of the ways in which the Cōḻas seek to control

[64] *Vikkirama Cōḻaṉ Ulā of Oṭṭakkūttar*, vv.120-123.
[65] *Kulōttuṅka Cōḻaṉ Ulā of Oṭṭakkūttar*, v. 218.
[66] *Kulōttuṅka Cōḻaṉ Ulā of Oṭṭakkūttar*, v. 246.

their community by controlling the inner self. The ideologies of power were ascribed to the very mode of visual perception and, even more importantly, to the emotional response that yielded affective submission to the authority of the king. The Cōḻas made use of *bhakti* ideology, which involved beliefs, attitudes and practices. Foremost among these was the idea of love relationship that relegated human beings to the position of love-sickened admirers existing in the state of emotional dependency upon the object of desire. According to Solomon,

> the world defined by love–or what we shall call the *loveworld*– is a world woven around a single relationship, with all else pushed to the periphery. To understand love is to understand the specifics of this relationship and the world woven around it'.[67]

By establishing parallels between the god and the king and by displaying mechanisms of image formation and projection of desire as a way of personally relating to the authority, the Cōḻas harnessed the power of the emotion of love into the tool of psychological domination. Love became a relational bond of surrender to the supernatural agency of the king, which relegated others to the subservient position of spectators, leaving their inner self empty of independent existence, as relationally defined, helpless, and vulnerable.

## God Must Be Perceived

To properly understand the notion of submissive spectatorship that binds the masses by appealing to their optical capacity we must first take a quick detour and look at the ways in which the visual perception has been treated in religious traditions of India. An 'act of beholding' plays an important role in the sphere of religious experience.[68] In the celebrated account of the eleventh chapter of the *Bhagavadgītā*, Arjuna is given the

[67] Solomon, C. Robert*, Love: Emotion, Myth, and Metaphor*, Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1981, p. 126

[68] Cf. Eck Diane, *Darshan,* Motilal Banarasidass, 2007.

'divine eye' (*divyaṃ cakṣuḥ*) that guarantees religious visionary experience. Arjuna asks Kṛṣṇa to grant him a true vision of God; at the center of this request is a 'desire to see' (*dṛṣṭum icchā*): "O Lord, if you consider me capable of perceiving that divine form of yours, then reveal to me your imperishable self, O Lord of Yoga".[69] Kṛṣṇa replies saying: "But you are unable to perceive Me with your ordinary eyes; I give to you the divine eye. Behold My divine form".[70] Kṛṣṇa, then, discloses to Arjuna his divine form as the omniscient and omnipresent Time. The act of revelation is structured upon the series of visual perceptions in which Arjuna confirms that a special perceptual ability has been, indeed, conferred on him, saying: "I see (*paśyāmi*) you having many arms, bellies, faces and eyes […]"; "I see you, who are hard to see…"; "I see that you are without beginning, middle or end…".[71] Arjuna assumes the position of a spectator (*drāṣṭṛ*); he is the eye-witness (*sākṣin*) to the astonishing event of the divine self-revelation. It is in this religious context of spectatorship aspiring for visual presence of God that we should situate religio-cultural history of Tamilnadu during the Caṅkam period. During that time, the strengthening of the sectarian groups resulted in religious syncretism, which in turn precipitated the emergence of the Tamil *bhakti* movement represented by poet-saints—*nāyaṉmār*s or 'leaders' whose lives became canonized in the twelfth century hagiography of Cēkkiḻār, the *Periya Purāṇam*. In terms of religious observance, the Tamil poet-saints apparently entertained the notions of pilgrimage and praise propagating Śiva's cult in the form of a local god of a particular area. The *nāyaṉmār*'s songs were, thus, more pertinent in drawing the spatial contours that delimited sacred geography of the Kāvēri river delta.[72] The Cōḻa kings adopted the outline of sacred geography praised by *bhakti* poets through official institutionalization of local cults

[69] *BhG* 11.4. trans. Boris Marjanovic, p. 239.

[70] *BhG* 11.8. trans. Boris Marjanovic, p. 239.

[71] *BhG.* 11.16, 17, 19, p. 242-3.

[72] Cf. Spencer, W. George, "Sacred Geography of the Tamil Shaivite Saints", *Numen*, Vol.17, no.3., 1970, pp. 232-44.

that resulted in an extensive imperial building program. Prentiss writes thus: by building temples on sites sung by the *mūvar*s (the three Tamil saints of *Tēvāram*), the early Cōḻa rulers were just acknowledging the poets' insistence that "Śiva lives here"; they were also providing Śiva with an appropriately glorious home. The *mūvar* spoke of Śiva's constant presence, the Cōḻa enshrined him in permanently endowed temples across the Tamil lands."[73] The Tamil *bhakti* poems stimulated their audience to embark on pilgrimage from town to town[74] "to 'see' Lord Śiva there…".[75] As a result, the narrative recorded in their poems was often "framed in the perspective of the devotional vision"[76] which necessitated that *God must be perceived.* There were, of course, different ways of perceiving the divine, one could perceive God in prayer, or in one's own heart, still the most popular seemed to be an active visual engagement with a temple image or an iconographic sculpture.[77]

> The poets of the Tamil hymns seek to help their fellow devotees to see (*kāṇ-*) Śiva, to approach him (*naṇṇu-, nāṭu-, aṇuku-, cēr-*), and to melt in love for him (*uruku-, neku-/nekku-, kaci-*). Their description of Śiva focuses on visual images and the act of seeing […]. The poet-saint acts as the "seeing eye", recording the vision or image of Śiva for readers "to see" for themselves.[78]

An emphasis on the act of spectating is by far the most dominant in the worship of Naṭarāja portrayed in *bhakti* poems of Tamil Śaivism. It was in the cult of Naṭarāja-the dancer where an emphasis on 'seeing Śiva' as constituting a mode of religious spectatorship acquired the stature of an infallible and undeniable pronouncement: 'the faculties of perception, all converge on the

[73] *The Embodiment of Bhakti*, p. 96.

[74] Cf. Peterson, V. Indira, "Singing of a Place: Pilgrimage as Metaphor and Motif in the Tēvāram Songs of the Tamil Śaivite Saints", *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* vol. 102, no.1, 1982, pp. 69-90.

[75] *Embodiment of Bhakti*, p. 44.

[76] Peterson, *Poems of Śiva,* p. 31.

[77] Cutler, *Songs of Experience*, p. 34.

[78] Peterson, *Poems of Śiva*, p. 32.

eyes, to behold the charm of the Dancing Lord. Even as the mind is drowned in the waves of joy the very acme of immeasurable delight'.[79]

## 'Seeing' in the Cult of Naṭarāja: Constructing 'Auratic Gaze'

The textual tradition dealing with the cult of Naṭarāja of Cidambaram shows us clearly that the cultic practices involved in this cult were primarily organized around the act of spectating. The kings, gods, saints and mortals pledged their total loyalty and devotion to dancing Śiva by situating themselves in the position of spectators viewing his dance-performance. The cult of Naṭarāja was firmly articulated by dialectical relationship between devotee and god envisaged as the process of witnessing ascribed to the spectator/devotee viewing the performer/ Naṭarāja that had important implications for the imagery of power and the nature of worship. As a philosophical category, 'witnessing' is often conceived in the context of testimony which involves epistemological problems and understanding of power relations between self and the other, subject and object, agency and non-agency, and their modes of interactions. 'Witnessing' logically presupposes distance as the opposite of nearness. In the cult of Naṭarāja, as we shall see, 'witnessing' assumes a central place in the construction of religiosity by engaging 'auratic gaze'. Moreover, 'witnessing' becomes synonymous with religious experience that, in a typical convention of *bhakti*, is essentially rooted in the emotional surrender to the feet of the super-agent, the dancer. I argue that 'auratic gaze' represents nothing more than a formulation of the cult value in the categories of spatiotemporal perception, which defines aesthetic immersion in the aesthetic object of perception. As a matter of fact, 'auratic gaze' implies our voluntary engagement in the play of presence and absence, which is both physical and emotional. I argue further that Naṭarāja was

[79] *Periyapuranam*, chapter 6, verse 105 (Chennai: Saiva Siddhanta Maha Samajam, 1950), in R. Nagaswamy, p. 36.

the image of power reduced to the symbol of dancing body that had extremely high aesthetic value, therefore, alongside being a religious icon he was also an aesthetic object. This argument rests on three assumptions: 1) religious identity of Naṭarāja was constituted through his dance-performance, 2) the culture of festival practice making use of the processional icons (*utsava-mūrtis*) defined the mode of religious experience to a large extent that resulted in the formation of religious spectatorship, and 3) the poems of Tamil saint-poets were concentrated mostly on iconic worship of images, in other words, the poetry of *bhakti* was often supplemented by the audience's active visual engagement with the temple image.

The prototypical example of religious spectatorship is illustrated in the story of the 6th century female Tamil saint-poetess Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār who, out of her intense devotion to dancing Śiva, requested him to grace her with the body of a ghost (*pēy*) in order to eternally witness Naṭarāja's dance in the cremation ground. She describes her ghostly form in the following words:

Body shrinking, nerves bulging, eyes sunk
White teeth projecting, stomach hollow
Red hair, long feet—in this form made of bones
In the form of demoness I shout in glee
***having seen God's dance*** with ghosts surrounding.[80]

Kāraikkāl's ghostly body enables her to situate herself in the role of the spectator whose unwavering devotion became sanctioned through the very act of beholding focused on Śiva's dancing performance. Elaine Craddock (2000:52) pointed out that Kāraikkāl's decision to live her life in the cremation ground witnessing Śiva's dance is an example of ritualization that suggests tantric orientation of her path. Even though, unlike the members of the extreme Śaiva sect of the Kāpālikas, she does not engage

[80] *Mūttatirupatikam* of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, v.70, in Sasivalli, S., *Karaikkal Ammaiyar,* International Institute for Tamil Studies, Madras, 1984, p. 64.

herself in obscure tantric practices, still by assuming a ghostly body and by voluntarily accepting her dwelling in the cremation ground, she transgresses the social norms of 'order'. Among the most important characteristics of tantric transgression was the one that encouraged rediscovery of desire, positively appropriated for liberation's sake.[81] Kāraikkāl too locates desire as a distinct kind of devotional attitude that is linked to the act of spectating:

O Lord! I have one very great desire
That will not lessen—show Thy dancing posture!
With Thy hair looking like spreading fire
The dancing in dark night—***seeing is my desire***.[82]

Thus every act of devotion induces desire to see Śiva's dancing figure, and this act of seeing triggers liberation. As Prentiss rightly suggests, "the poems of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār speak of her undying love for the Lord in the context of her gaining release and watching the Lord dance at Tiruvālaṅkāṭu".[83] For Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, desire is relocated to the immediacy of visual perception through which she ritualizes her devotional life dedicated entirely to watching Śiva's crematory dance. The theme of religious spectatorship is also prominent in the poetry of other Tamil saints, such as Appar (7th century), one of the earliest of Tamil Śaiva saints, who claims in his poems that seeing Naṭarāja's dance is a sufficient and sole criterion for devotional life. He writes thus:

If there are men who ***want to see*** anything in the world
other than the dance of Aran (Naṭarāja), whose feet we serve,
in Cirrambalam (Cidambaram) shrine of Tillai,
where the areca tree with broad fronds grows tall,
the streets are lines with great mansions,

[81] Cf. Craddock, Elaine, *Śiva's Demon Devotee*

[82] *Aṛputat-tiruvantati* of Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, v.70, in Sasivalli, S., *Karaikkal Ammaiyar,* International Institute for Tamil Studies, Madras, 1984, p. 55.

[83] *The Embodiment of Bhakti*, p. 55.

and all the fields are watered
by streams of *valai* fish
then they are but devil-devotees,
seeing worthless things with rheumy eyes.[84]

In another poem, Appar writes thus:

The moral life too is worth living
***If only I could behold***, Oh Lord of Dance
The enchanting smile on your face![85]

Appar's poems are didactic insofar as they address important questions of true devotion and morality. In the first poem, Appar makes a clear distinction between the true devotees and the devil-devotees who are divided in accordance with a specific object of perception they engage with. The true devotion implies a total focus on the image of dancing Śiva to the exclusion of everything else. Even a small alteration or diversion from this practice is compared to evil and disease. In the second poem, the inherent anxiety of the devotee to see Naṭarāja recurs in the context of humane morality justifying it as a metaphysical necessity if the longing of the heart is fulfilled. An intense yearning for the vision of Śiva is also documented in the poetry of the 9th century Tamil poet saint Māṇikkavācakkar whose *Tiruvācakam* was included into the twelve books of the Tamil Śaivite canon.

When will I ***see you***,
Lord who eludes the thoughts
Of gods in heaven,
Beautiful Lord, Dancer—who rules me—
you are the earth and the heavens
and time
that comes and goes.[86]

[84] Appar IV.80.1, in: I.V. Peterson, *The Poems of Śiva,* p. 120.
[85] Appar IV.81, v.4. trans. R. Nagaswamy, p. 36.
[86] *Tiruccatakam* of Māṇikkavācakkar, stanza 43, in Cutler, Norman, *Songs of Experience,* p. 164.

At the center of devotion in the cult of dancing Śiva lies the act of seeing. The spectator/devotee partakes in a particular attitude towards the aesthetically constructed reality of religious experience, an attitude that he is encouraged to embrace in his emotional response. Within the structural taxonomy of lordship that homologized king to god, the same 'sight' was directed upon the king:

> The Cōḷa mounted his royal horse and rode in procession
> the leaves of his spear gleaming bright
> as women with fresh gold bangles watched.
> Every eye at the latticed windows stayed bound to him
> like *kayal* fish sparkling in a dark net.[87]

The spectators were placed in relation to god, the performer, but also in relation to the king whose cult was directly linked to the god. The aesthetic politics of the Cōḷa kings transfigured given structures of power grounded in the religious and metaphysical understanding of Naṭarāja through a strategic appeal to sense perception, through an affective rhetoric of immediacy and total presence. Naṭarāja, with his dynamic form of the sovereign dancer, engendered the very form of perception through which the Cōḷa monarch wanted to be and was seen. This was accomplished by situating both in the context of festival procession that belonged to the category of performance which suggested other ways of looking at time and space, and actors. Festival performance gave entry into suspended temporality, into monumental time, which had a massive presence insofar as eyewitnesses were enticed to participate in the sacred event unfolding before their eyes. The unique presence of performance created a radical shift in cognitive presumptions, for whereas the past could be analyzed, the present could only be experienced. A performance was 'present' in the spatial sense too: it was happening here. That 'here' was, however, a liminal field, for it established a relational axis itself that could collapse the two into one identity. Performance, by denying the distinction between

[87] *Muttoḷḷāyiram* quoted in Wenthworth 2009:107.

appearance and essence, presentation and re-presentation, made it possible to merge meanings so that the relation between the king and the god was derived from their interdependent semiosis and not from ascription to objective referent.[88] Finally, the festival performance rested on the conscious manipulation of visual perception in which external appearance took hold of the inner self. At the center of the act of seeing directed towards the king and Naṭarāja going in procession was a dialectical interplay of proximity and distance. This peculiar mode of aesthetic perception has been conceptualized by Walter Benjamin as the 'auratic gaze'. In the *Work of Art*, he defines the 'auratic gaze' as "the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be".[89] The 'auratic gaze' presupposes metaphysical distance from the object of perception even if the object itself is physically close. In other words, the 'auratic gaze' is a unique form of spectatorship, which invests the objects of perception with an aura of dignity and glory. It is important to notice that aura is not inherent in the object itself, it is rather built up around the object unintentionally through the ideological framework that clearly influences the beholder's perception. As a result, the aura is conducive to a special psychological effect. According to a definition given by Benjamin in his *Arcade Project,* the "aura takes possession of us."[90] Overwhelmed by a mighty magnetism that surrounds the object of perception, the spectator temporarily freezes. Here, we are, once again, reminded of the Tamil saint Appar who acknowledges the fact that the 'auratic gaze' cast by him upon the dancing Śiva is indeed associated with a notion of possession. He writes thus:

Father, who dances in Tillai's Ampalam hall!
I, your servant,
have come to see your dance.[91]

[88] Feral, J. "Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified", in *Modern Drama*, vol. xxv, No.1, 1982, p. 173 p. 17.

[89] *SW* II.518.

[90] *AP*, 447.

[91] Appar IV.23, in Peterson: 232

Have we not been born to serve him,
to be possessed
by the dancer of Tillai's Ampalam hall…?[92]

The concept of aura has striking similarities to a classic definition of the sacred set forth in Rudolf Otto's epochal book 'The Idea of the Holy' (1917) in which he avers that "the sacred is the mystery that causes both threat and fascination" (*mysterium tremendum et fascinosum*).

> The holy is set apart from us; it is 'wholly other', just as aura institutes "a unique apparition of a distance". Yet […], humans desire to get closer to it, for "it is no less something that allures with a potent charm" […]. And just as the aura "takes possession of us", so does the mysterious presence of the holy entrance those who perceive it: "he feels a something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication.[93]

This form of ocular perception specified as the 'auratic gaze' endorsed aesthetics of submission to the charismatic personality of the performer, which transformed politics into the spectacle of religious revelation. The Cōḻas' campaign towards a spectator-conscious citizenship was a political game favouring unequal power relations between the king-god-performer and citizen-being-ruled, the passive spectator. The 'auratic gaze' which was apparently enjoying a pleasant and stimulating time engaging people in a wonderful plethora of 'ocular practices' through official institutionalization of public forms of entertainment, such as the grand-scale festival processions in honour of the god and the king, was no more than a disguised form of political restraint that forced the audience into speechless, submissive form of spectatorship. The auratic play of proximity and distance was controlled by the ruling monarchy, the Cōḻa kings, for they controlled a hierarchy of auratic values of objects of perception. Through the utilizing strategies of appropriation and

[92] Appar IV.81.5. in Peterson: 255.

[93] Plate, S. Brent, Walter Benjamin, *Religion, and Aesthetics: Rethinking Religion Through the Arts*, Routledge: New York/London, 2005, pp. 88-9.

juxtaposition between the god and the king, the Cōḻa's shaped society's perception that ushered a visual transference of the 'auratic gaze' from the god to the king, conveyed by a motto: 'king is perceived as the deity' (*rājā pratyakṣa daivatam*). Cuntarar (8-9th century), one of the Tamil Śaiva saints of *Tēvāram*, justifies in one of his hymns to this transference when he says: "whenever the woman sees the kings of royal wealth, she says she sees the Lord God (*tiruvuṭai maṉṉaraikkāṇil tirumalaikkaṇṭēṉē eṉṉum*)."[94] We are dealing here with the moral character of projections in which 'sight' is framed within the subset of cultural propositions, which are both normative and descriptive. According to Erving Goffman,[95] projections are 'framed' as they relate to, transpose, cancel out other frames. In consequence, when a king projects himself as a divine being, he makes explicit and implicit claims to be divine, he automatically exerts a moral demand upon others, obliging them to value and treat him in the manner the divine being has a right to expect, i.e. with awe and reverence. Moreover, implicit in these framed projections, pervading the space of festival performance is an emotional intensity with which one is obliged to 'see' which is, again, culturally framed. That is to say, when cultural propositions, such 'King-Śiva' or 'God-King', are internalized, they become personal beliefs that acquire moral and emotional urgency that affect the manner in which the spectators 'view' things.

The festival parade relied heavily on the visual aesthetics, and thus, played exclusively on the affective register of the spectator. Unlike verbal language, visual forms are capable of articulation, which is not discursive. According to Langer, there is a distinction between the meanings conveyed through verbal language and those expressed through visual forms. She says that while the meanings given through verbal language are understood

[94] Cuntarar, hymn 90.4. in Rangaswamy, Dorai, *The Religion and Philosophy of Tēvāram*, Madras: University of Madras, 1958, p. 112.

[95] Erving Goffman, "Introduction in the Presentation of Self in Everyday Life", in Philip Auslander, *Performance*, Vol. I. Routledge, London and New York, pp. 97-107

successively, those given through visual forms are grasped in one act of vision. Susanne Langer, who argues for such a division in her *Philosophy in a New Key* (1951, pp. 79–102), calls this kind of semantics "presentational symbolism," indicating that the visual objects are grasped not by reasoning but by feeling.[96] The emotional stimulation of the audience viewing the parade of the king and the god was inherent in the very semantics of the word *utsava*[97] derived from the verbal root '*utsū*' meaning 'to agitate', 'to stir up', 'to excite'. The festival parade centered on the auratic presences of the god and the king certainly appealed to powerful emotions of the audience in such a way as to overwhelm the participant. The festivals were capable of opening up startling new areas of experiences that included emotional states of ecstasy, awe and terror, enthusiasm and vision. The Tamil Śaiva saint Appar, gives us a vivid eyewitness testimony of celebration of the Tituvātirai festival in Cidambaram during which the devotees "sob and tremble, stare and shout, frighten others, forget themselves, and go wild. Dashing their heads, they cry, 'My Lord, God! Elder kinsman! O Father!".[98] The festivals have an enormous psychological impact on the onlookers, which was akin to madness. In the words of Appar: "Desiring to see him (dancing Śiva), I melt; melting, I waste away."[99] The Tamil bhakti poems develop a deep sense of yearning for a vision of Śiva resulting in outbursts of frenzied emotionalism that causes pain. A similar portrayal of emotional upheaval experienced by women awaiting the royal procession is narrated in Ottakuttar's *ulā*s in which the audience is held in wonder captivated by the aesthetic beauty of the adorned body of the king clothed in ornaments and weapons.[100] When the Cōḻa king advanced before them, the women

[96] Langer, Susanne, *Philosophy in a New Key*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961, pp. 79-102.

[97] For a complete analysis of the etymology of *utsava*, see J. Gonda, 'Skt. *Utsava*—festival', *Selected Studies, Vol. II Sanskrit Word Studies,* Leiden, Brill 1975, pp. 276-87.

[98] Appar IV.21.6. p. 185.

[99] Appar IV.75. in Peterson, p. 227

[100] Wenthworth: 224.

cry out with the realization that the weapons he carries summons mythic time. The 'auratic gaze' cast upon the king results in the experience of deep pain replacing rational participation with emotional synchronization (Wentworth). The aura of beauty surrounding the object of perception "takes possession" of the spectators that consequently yields the aesthetics of submission and obedience forcing the audience to the knees. The procession of gods and kings with a powerful display of aesthetic perfection converts the recipients into a ritualistic community. The aesthetic politics based on a deliberative orchestration of the sense perception of sight tends to control the beholder's perception through the cocoons of overwhelming power that brings about control through emotional effects. This, in turn, issues in a paralyzing submission to the charismatic personality of the ruler that renders the audience even less capable of retaining any autonomous agency for itself.

# PART 2

## *Naṭarāja and the Textual Power: Scribbling in History's Margins*

In medieval Cidambaram, the production of the text was synonymous with acquiring power, be it political, social or spiritual. The relationship between textual power and social or political power can be attested by a sudden explosion of royal eulogies (*praśasti*) and processional poems (*ulā*) that began to emerge in the 12 century Cidambaram. These texts had the physical temple, i.e. the Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple as their point of reference that allowed them to construct the divine charisma of the king or religious specialists who were typically the subjects of these texts. An important textual example of this type is the 12th century *Cidambaramāhātmya* composed at the time when the priests of the Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple needed a handbook reflecting the ethos of the community associated with Naṭarāja. In order to promote Cidambaram as the sacred power center and an important place of pilgrimage, the priests needed textual legitimacy in concord with ancient Pūraṇic worldview. The production of the *Cidambaramāhātmya* meant that the importance of Cidambaram was since then derived from the textual source of the uncontested scriptural authority (*māhātmya*).

The creation of the *Mahārthamañjarī* of Maheśvarānanda must be located in the same conception of the text developed out of the claim of the social power inherently present in the textual power. Nevertheless, unlike the texts commissioned by the kings and, therefore, belonging to the mainstream history of

the Cola world, scribbling of *Mahārthamañjarī* seems to be an individual effort of a single author in the margins of the dominant world. In order to identify a trajectory that could be associated with the creation of the *Mahārthamañjarī*, one must consider macrohistorical events that led to the movement of people, texts and ideas from northern Kashmir to southern Cidambaram. So far, the transmission of cults and scriptures from the north to the south was always reductively justified as a result of Turkish power in northern India. Even though, the existence of Kashmir Śaivism in south India is a topic only beginning to be explored, what we know for sure is that when viewed in terms of cultural exchanges between the south and the north, the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition shows an unbelievable degree of fluidity, stemming from its adaptability to different doctrinal identities. Moreover, an adoption of Naṭarāja into the tantric system of Kashmir Śaivism defines the cultural space 'in between', the intercultural space of contacts, exchanges and relations. From the disjunctive temporalities of a specific Kashmiri Śaiva community settled in far south, a new 'reading' of Naṭarāja emerges which generates, in turn, alternative modes of knowledge exercised on the margins of society.

In Part 2, I will focus on Naṭarāja perceived through the eyes of the minority in which one is continuously confronted with an on-going negotiation to seek to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. In the words of Homi K. Bhabha (1994:2), 'the 'right' to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is resourced by the power of tradition to be reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are in the minority'. Thus, in incorporating Naṭarāja—the symbol of the Cola's sovereign power—into his tantric system, Maheśvarānanda does not only reinvent the tradition, but also writes an "alternative history of the excluded".

# THREE

# "Entangled Histories"
## Kashmiri Śaiva Encounter with Naṭarāja

> This book is as sweet as the Kāverī (river),
> as fragrant as the water lily,
> its importance is like that of Naṭeśa's dance.
>
> —MAHEŚVARĀNANDA

Since the last few years of the twenty-first century, the methods of approach to human history in general have undergone a paradigm shift. Historians became aware of the 'loops of historical processes'[1] that contested a generally valid paradigm of continual and linear development in history. Recent discussions have concentrated also on the problems of contingency and randomness as alternative methods in historiography.[2] Both, the evolutionary progress of history and teleological thinking in historiography were challenged by the "entangled histories" perspective stipulating the venture into the multi-faceted realities of historical narratives. Although the notion "entangled histories" was originally applied to 'the relation between the "West" and the "Rest" in colonial and postcolonial times'[3] highlighting uneven power-relations between the two that aimed at tackling

[1] Kurt Rotttgers, 'Time as a Basic Concept of the Theory of Historians', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie,* nr.2, 1977, p. 267.

[2] Juliane Scheil, 'Crossing Paths between East and West. The Use of Counterfactual Thinking for the Concept of "Entangled Histories"', *Historical Social Research* vol. 34, no. 2 (128), 161-183.

[3] Ibidem, p. 164.

the problem of the 'histories of absence', it has since acquired a broader meaning that included all cultural exchanges.[4] The notion of "entangled histories" became a very popular tool of theorization in all fields of humanities dealing with the issues of historicism and the complex nature of cultural interactions. In this essay, I apply the notion of "entangled histories" to describe the process of fluid cultural interactions between Kashmir in the north and Cidambaram in the south.

From the early medieval times down to the 14th century, the Kashmir region was a place of the intellectual elite, a famous center of learning dedicated to Hindu and Buddhist studies. Archaeological and textual evidence suggests that the Buddhist schools of the Mahāyana, Madhyāmika and Yogācāra established their legitimacy in Kashmir. Moreover, the pioneers of Buddhist epistemology, Dignāga (480-540) and Dharmakīrti (600-670) were residents of Kashmir. Their influence there is clearly attested by the historical records. The Kashmir region was also a veritable cradle of both Buddhist and Hindu Tantras. The most influential Buddhist and Hindu Tantric teachers such as Nāropa (956-1040), Padmasambhava (8th century), Abhinavagupta (10-11th century) lived and taught in Kashmir.[5] In this fertile intellectual atmosphere, one of the most fascinating systems of Indian thought, the so-called non-dual Kashmir Śaivism was brought to life. Kashmir Śaivism is an 'umbrella term' used in reference to various systems of the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition, such as the Pratyabhijñā[6]

[4] Ibidem, p. 164.

[5] Dyczkowski M., *The Doctrine of Vibration,* p. 2.

[6] The *Śivadṛṣṭi* ('Vision of Śiva') written by Somānanda (9-10th century) is regarded as the first treatise to furnish a philosophical foundation of the Pratyabhijñā school ('Recognition [of the Lord]'). The Pratyabhijñā reached its apogee in the work of Somānanda's disciple Utpaladeva whose *Îśvārapratyabhijñākārika* 'Stanzas on the Recognition of the Lord' (with his two commentaries *Vṛtti* and *Vṛtti-Vimarśini*) built on the germinal ideas of the *Śivadṛṣṭi* represents a full-fledged edifice of Pratyabhijñā philosophy. The importance of the Pratyabhijñā is connoted with the fact that it provides a theoretical basis for all Śaiva tantric traditions of Kashmir. It flourished at the time

(Recognition School), the Spanda[7] (Vibration School), the Trika[8]

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when certain transgressive practices connected with the tantric culture of the cremation grounds became symbolically internalized, to subsist in thought alone. Cf. R. Torella, *The Philosophical Traditions of India. An Appraisal*, Indica, Varanasi, 2011. This inward-reorientation developed highly gnoselogical attitude directed toward cognitive grasping of the Light of Śiva in a whole objective phenomena. The aim of a human being is precisely 'recognition' (*pratyabhijñā*) of one's own nature (*ātman*) to be identical with Śiva. This implies recognition of Śiva's essential nature manifesting everywhere and at all times. Pratyabhijñā belongs to the non-tantric systems of Kashmir Śaivism, it is philosophically oriented.

[7] The Spanda school took its name from the scripture exploring doctrinal foundation of this system: the *Spandakārikā* or the *Stanzas on Vibration* are regarded as the masterpiece of the 9th century Vasugupta, others prove authorship to Kallatabhaṭṭa. Kallatabhaṭṭa is certainly the author of the commentary (*vṛttī*) on the *Spandakārikā*, or more precisely, one of the series of commentaries analyzing the theory of vibration in depth. Two of these commentaries were written by Abhinavagupta's disciple Kṣemarāja: *The Essence of* Vibration (*Spandasaṃdoha*) and the *Exposition of Vibration* (*Spandanirṇaya*). Among other commentaries we find: *The Light of Spanda* by Bhagavatopala and the extended commentary (*vivṛttī*) by Rājanaka Rama. On the other hand, Vasugupta is the sage to whom eighty verses of the *Spandakārikā* were revealed by Śiva himself. The doctrine of vibration puts emphasis on the experience of *spanda*—the pulsating vibration of consciousness. Every activity in the universe, and every manifestation, perception, sensation or emotion in the microcosm arrives and departs as the particle of the universal rhythm of one unique reality, who is Śiva-Śakti. Sadhaka can realize his innate true nature identical with Śiva while experiencing *spanda*, a dynamic, recurrent and creative activity of the absolute.

[8] The Trika system invented by the great polymath Abhinavagupta (10-11th century) and complied in his *magnum opus*, the *Light on the Tantras* (*Tantrāloka*) is a kind of synthesis of all other schools of so-called Kashmir Śaivism (Pratyabhijñā, Krama, Kula, Spanda). According to the Trika system, the reality consists of the Triad of the Goddesses, called the Supreme (Parā), the Intermediate (Parāpara) and the Lower (Āpara). These are correlated with the threefold cognitive processes of the will (*icchā*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and activity (*kriyā*), respectively. The triad also consists of Śiva, Śakti and the individual soul (*nara*).

(Trinity School), the Kula[9] (Family School), and the Krama[10] (Sequence School) that originated in Kashmir in early medieval period. Cidambaram in the south, situated on the northern edge of the Kaverī river delta in Tamil Nadu played a different role in history. Cidambaram rose into prominence in the region between the ninth and thirteenth centuries, during the rule of the Colas, becoming a "sacred dynastic centre".[11] As Hall pointed out,

> [Cidambaram] combined dynastic political authority with the prestige it derived from the presence of a major temple. Cidambaram played a continuous and critical role in the South Indian Śaivite tradition as a

[9] The origins of Kula or Kaula tradition is shrouded in mystery. There are some scant information about the first protagonists of the Kaulas found in the *Tantrāloka.* However, traditionally, it is Matsyendranātha who emerges as a founder of the Kula. Matsyendranātha known also as Mīnanātha and Macchanda (5th-6th century) is said to transmit the secret Kaula doctrine to his six disciples belonging to different royal houses. The names of these disciples are given as: Ānanda, Āvali, Bodhi, Prabhu and Yogi. They established the line of transmission known as *ovallī*. In this period, different Kaula influences permeated into Buddhism. Moreover, the tradition of the Nāthas and Siddhas acknowledge Matsyendranātha as their first preceptor. The Kaula tradition constitutes the essential ritualistic or tantric background of the non-dual Kashmir Śaivism, as well as Śrīvidyā tradition. These were the Kaulas who put emphasis on the meaning of union between Śiva and Śakti (*yamala*) and the importance of the individual body (*kula*).

[10] The Krama system is one of the earliest among Śaiva Tantric traditions of Kashmir, elaborated in the first half of the ninth century in Uḍḍiyāna. Principal feature which distinguishes the Krama from other schools of Kashmir Śaivism is the notion of the sequence (*krama*) which brings into prominence the inherent dynamism of the reality itself. The term *krama* is used in reference to the goddess Kālī, or more precisely Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī 'The Enchantress of Time', and her emanations who are worshipped in the sequence (*krama*). The first preceptor of the Krama system is Jñānanetra, also known as Śivānandanātha. He is the author of the *Yonigahvaratantra* and *Kālīkāstotra.*

[11] Kenneth R. Hall, 'Merchants, Rulers, and Priests in an Early South Indian Sacred Centre: Cidambaram in the Age of the Colas', *Structure and Society in Early South India,* ed. Kenneth R. Hall, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 85.

centre for the worship of the Naṭarāja, the dancing Śiva, which was the patron deity of Cola kings.[12]

These two distinct locations with distinctive cultural and geographical heritages became "entangled" together inextricably in the work of Maheśvarānanda (12th-13th century), entitled the *Mahārthamañjarī* (The Flower-Bouquet of the Supreme Meaning). The process of "entanglement", as envisioned here, is a result of a specific hermeneutical moment of the author situated in a particular space and time. The *Mahārthamañjarī* is dedicated to the exposition of different theories and practices of Kashmir Śaivism, but its author, Maheśvarānanda, was a resident of Cidambaram at the times of Cola dynasty. As a consequence, the *Mahārthamañjarī* assumes a peculiar placing at the crossroads of Kashmir Śaivism and South Indian Śaivism practiced in Cidambaram. The scant autobiographical information presented in his book lead us to believe that he was a South Indian Brahmin, a son of Madhāva, initiated into the practices of Kashmir Śaivism, most notably, the Pratyabhijñā and the Krama.

For the "entangled histories", the importance of the *Mahārthamañjarī* as the composition written in medieval Cidambaram lies in the positioning of two distinct cultural realms, one northern and the other southern, in a radically new arrangement, evoking inherent interchangeability of their doctrinal elements. The famous Śiva, the 'King of Dancers' (Naṭarāja) becomes enshrined as a symbol of the Kashmiri Śaiva pantheon. In other words, he becomes entangled with a new conceptual paradigm in which doctrinal components drawn from the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition were creatively paralleled to give a new interpretative setting for comprehending the dancing Śiva. In this process, Naṭarāja acquires a new doctrinal identity formed by a novel theoretical and religious context. Perhaps, the most fundamental conception in the "entangled histories" perspective is the category of the

[12] Kenneth R. Hall, 'Merchants, Rulers, and Priests in an Early South Indian Sacred Centre: Cidambaram in the Age of the Colas', *Structure and Society in Early South India,* ed. Kenneth R. Hall, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 85.

'encounter' when one tradition opens itself to an encounter with another tradition accentuating interaction between two cross-cultures. It is in the context of the Kashmiri Śaiva 'encounter' with Naṭarāja that the significance of "entangled histories" understood as the process of cultural exchanges, doctrinal adaptations and philosophical interpretations, emerges most clearly. Maheśvarānanda's adaptation of Naṭarāja into his tantric system, which he calls *auttarāmnāya* rests on two assumptions. First is epistemic/aesthetic assumption where Naṭarāja becomes the symbol of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) or reflective awareness (*vimarśa*); the second is ontological where uniformity between individual self (*puruṣa*) and Śiva becomes established on the ground of sharing the nature of the Dancer (*nartaka*). The Dancer is additionally described as the playful agent performing the Five Acts (*pañcakṛtya*). Insofar as the first assumption is concerned, Naṭarāja—the theological marker of recognition or reflective awareness is introduced on the epistemic grounds when a discovery of one's own true identity summoned in a statement 'I am Śiva' is a mere 'recognition' of an already attained state. In the āgamic textual culture, the process of 'recognition' is triggered by reading a scripture, in this case, the *Mahārthamañjarī.* Maheśvarānanda goes so far as to say that 'recognition of the Supreme Lord is the scripture'.[13] Moreover, 'recognition' is a process of complete aesthetical transformation that implies, among other things, construction of the temple-body in which the Five Acts of Śiva (*pañcakṛtya*) assume the form of *pañcavāha*, the five sensory flows or movements. Here, dance movement is metonymical with sensory movement in a sense in which the ritualist comes to know himself as Naṭarāja through the recognition that allows him to acknowledge his body as inhabited by the divine powers of the senses.

[13] *parameśvaraḥ parāmarśa eva hy āgama iti// MMP*, stanza 7, p. 22.

## The Mahārthamañjarī: The Text of Revelation and Recognition

This part touches upon the category of a scripture constituting a chief means for understanding a particular tradition, and this tradition's textual self-projection. The *Mahārthamañjarī* is a fascinating example of a scholastic innovation and exegesis. It clearly demonstrates the process of creativity within a tradition of Kashmiri Śaivism arguing for a more nuanced and complex understanding of its theories and practices (Cox). And this itself shows that at some point in the history of south India, Kashmir Śaivism and South Indian Śaivism lived and thrived together with a mutual interchangeability of their doctrinal elements.

The *Mahārthamañjarī* is the result of a dreamlike vision that happened to Maheśvarānanda (12th-13th century) (the name given to him in initiation), also known as Gorakṣa, a son of Mādhava by a *siddhayoginī* who materalized before him one night. She was ornamented with a patched garment (*kanthā*), a trident (*triśūla*) and an inverted human skull, and Maheśvarānanda recognized her as the goddess Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī 'Enchantress of Time', the supreme deity of the Krama system.[14] The transmission of esoteric teachings in dreams by yoginīs is a common feature of tantric traditions, both Buddhist and Hindu.[15] *Siddhayoginī* spoke seventy verses of the *Mahārthamañjarī* in Māhārṣrī (Prākrit). After this nocturnal revelation, Maheśvarānanda consulted his guru Mahāprakāśa, who also lived in Cidambaram, who told him to write a Sanskrit commentary on the seventy verses spoken by the *siddhayoginī* in Prākrit. The commentary is entitled the 'Fragrance' (*parimala*). The *Mahārthamañjarī* along with the commentary is a tantra or *āgama*',[16] a particular class of scripture, composed as a result of the divine revelation. The revelatory status of the scripture is acknowledged in all tantric

[14] *MMP*, commentary on verse 71.

[15] Hatley, Shaman: *Brahmayāmalatantra and the Early Śaiva Cult of the Yoginīs*, Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania, 2007, (unpublished), p. 28.

[16] For a discussion on different literary genres woven into the literary structure of the *Mahārthamañjarī*, see Cox.

traditions, whether dualistic Śaiva Siddhānta or non-dualistic Kashmiri Śaiva. According to this view, 'it is God Sadāśiva himself that utters the scriptures. He has five faces[17] from which all the different categories of scriptures are said to originate.[18] The Goddess whose nature is consciousness is also said to manifest in all scriptures.[19] This simply means that the contents of the scripture are revered, uncontested and true. Of significance is that in Maheśvarānanda's case, composition of a tantra is instigated by a personal encounter with the *siddhayoginī*, and thus, through this encounter, the authority of the tantra becomes additionally legitimated. At the first glance, we can receive the impression that for Maheśvarānanda, a scripture (*śāstra, āgama),* is merely one of the means of knowledge (*upāya*).[20] Indeed it is. In the opening verse, he enumerates a scripture, along with a teacher (*guru*) and the Self as the three-fold knowledge (*tripratyaya idaṃ jñānam*)[21]. In addition, he warns against cheated scriptures written by unrealized teachers. Quoting from the *Śrīhaṃsabheda*[22], he says thus:

> People worship and serve the guru radiant with consciousness. O Goddess, it is hard to find a master who upon achieving liberation from the ego is capable of liberating another ego. By studying scriptures with him one is liberated from the ego and the recognition of one's own [true] Self happens by itself.

What he means by this statement is that a scripture can be the means of knowledge, only if it is directed from a teacher who has Self-realization. In other words, the scripture has a capacity to bestow grace through the act of penetration (*āveśa*), when the

[17] The five faces of Śiva from which all the *śāstra*s have come out are: Īśāna, Tatpuruṣa, Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, Aghora.

[18] *Tantrāloka* 35.26-7 with reference to *Svacchandatantra* 8.28-31.

[19] *Tantrāloka* 1.277.

[20] The term *upāya* is derived from the root '*upa-'* in a meaning 'to go near', 'to approach' and thus it bears a semantics of a journey towards the ideal of knowledge (*jñāna*).

[21] Quoting from the *Niśāṭanatantra*, comm. on stanza 1.

[22] *Śrīhaṃsabheda*, quoted in commentary on stanza 1.

author has purified his Self in the playfulness of the Lord.[23] The immediacy or pervasive quality of this purification can be directly felt in the epistemic realization conferring the accompanying experience: 'I am Śiva'. Maheśvarānanda admits that the actual attainment to this coveted status became accessible to him. In the process of revealing his theistic identity, he explains thus:

> Maheśvarānanda is the name of Paramaśivabhaṭṭāraka who is the supreme reality, freedom, bliss, consciousness and unlimited eternity, who encompasses [within himself] the entire chain of pure and impure subjects, up to [the level of] Sadāśiva. I am identified with this entity.

Such a straightforward declaration coming from Maheśvarānanda's lips appears unsurprising, when we realize that in accordance with the fundamental premise of the Pratyabhijñā school, of which Maheśvarānanda is an eager exponent, a discovery of one's own true identity summoned in a statement 'I am Śiva' is a mere 'recognition' of an already attained state. Therefore, 'recognition' is 'about removal of the false conception of being not aware of one's own identity with Śiva'.[24] To have recognition of one's own true identity as being Śiva is a sign of an enlightened guru. The feet of such a guru are ever pure (*nityaśuddhau*) [...], pure with the total recognition of the world and himself perceived as the manifestation of the divine.[25] The enlightened guru is, so to say, naturally committed to composing a scripture of outstanding quality, which would trigger the process of 'recognition' in a disciple. Maheśvarānanda goes so far as to say that 'recognition of the Supreme Lord is the scripture'.[26] This statement is justified by a strong epistemic support that is held by a scripture among the *pramāṇas*. Indian philosophy accepts certain means of acquiring knowledge referred to as *pramāṇa* (a derivate of *pra-mā* 'to apprehend'). At least three *pramāṇas* are generally accepted: direct perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference

[23] *MMP* comm. on verse 1. p. 6.
[24] Lawrence, p. 47.
[25] *MMP*, p. 5.
[26] *parameśvaraḥ parāmarśa eva hy āgama iti// MMP*, stanza 7, p. 22.

(*anumāna*), and a verbal transmission/scripture (*śabda, āgama*). In the course of his discussion on *pramāṇas*, Maheśvarānanda sharply distinguishes between the limitation of *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* which he tries to refute by formulating a series of objections and the unlimitedness of *āgama*. The legitimacy of the scripture (*āgama*) is accepted on the ground that 'it is alone capable of illuminating the unlimited essence of the Self, revealing one's own glory made of the Light of Consciousness'.[27] At the heart of Maheśvarānanda's understanding of 'recognition' is a scripture reflecting the alleged luminosity of the Self. Following the Pratyabhijñā terminology, Maheśvarānanda equates a scripture with luminosity (*prakāśa*) and reflective awareness (*vimarśa*). *Prakāśa* stands for a pure, unchanging aspect of the universal consciousness. *Vimarśa* denotes power that impels the 'awakening' of self-awareness or reflection. These two are never separated. As Torella pointed out:

> *Prakāśa* is the motionless cognitive light that constitutes the basic fabric, the founding structure of reality, of the 'given', while *vimarśa* is the spark that causes this luminous structure to pulsate by introducing self-awareness, dynamism and freedom of intervention.[28]

The same theme of luminosity and reflective awareness constituting a center of 'recognition' is taken up in Maheśvarānanda's description of the scripture: 'the scripture is the reflective awareness of the supreme knowing subject, the unlimited consciousness which is the Supreme Lord'.[29] Finally, scripture is the shining lamp that illumines the greatness of the Self.[30] 'Light' and 'reflective awareness' are intrinsic qualities that render a scripture into a tool of recognition. Maheśvarānanda enumerates three aims of his book.[31] He says that the *prayojana*

[27] *MM*, stanza 5.

[28] Torella, 2002, xxiii.

[29] *āgamastav anavacchinnaprakāśātmaka māheśvaravimarśaparamamārthaḥ*// unidentified quotation from Abhinavagupta, *MMP*, stanza 5, p. 19.

[30] *MM*, stanza 5.

[31] As with all *āgama*s, there are certain conditions that must

of the *Mahārthamañjarī* is a discriminating knowledge (*parijñāna*) about the sensory perception (sound, touch, smell, vision and taste) leading toward transcendental experience (*mahānubhava*) that is synonymous with (the experience) of the Supreme Luminosity (*mahāprakāśa*). Moreover, the *prayojana* is also the achievement of the reflective awareness of one's own Self (*vimarśasvarūpasiddhi*). Finally, the *prayojana* is the enjoyment (*bhoga*) of one's own liberating state characterized as a mere playfulness of the Supreme Lord (*māheśvaryollāsa*).[32] Etymologically, the word '*ullāsa*' in a meaning of 'playfulness' is derived from the verbal root '*las*': 'to play', 'to sport joyfully', 'to shine through spontaneity'. It also means 'to reverberate', 'to move', 'to dance', 'to be happy'. Here, this word is employed to denote a certain behavioral pattern of the absolute, which may be distinguished from other behaviors by a distinctive feature of enjoyment. To summarize, we may say that *Mahārthamañjarī* aims at 1) supra-sensory experience, 2) reflective awareness, 3) enjoyment and liberation. The enjoyment and liberation are accentuated in the context of Śiva's play. This formulation of purpose that unifies the conceptual framework of the Krama-Mahārtha (sensory experience), the Pratyabhijñā (reflective awareness) and the Kaula (enjoyment and liberation) may be regarded as adequately representing doctrinal foundations of Maheśvarānanda's system at large. Maheśvarānanda's declared purposes are better understood as meaning to access ciphers veiling doctrinal premise. With the words of deliberate exuberance, he says:

> Out of affection for his pupils he (Maheśvarānanda) composed his book so that, oh wonder! Like the lord dancing in the middle of the golden hall

necessary be fulfilled for the creation of the scripture. These conditions might be characterized as 'deterministic', for they determine the internal structure of the scripture. These are (1) the *prayojana* or purpose or aim, (2) the *adhikāri,* one who is competent for the study of the particular scripture, (3) *abhidheya* or *ārtha,* the subject-matter of the scripture, (4) *sambandha* or relation. Here we will limit our discussion to *prayojana.*

[32] *MMP* pp. 7-8.

(*kanakasadas*), Śiva who is reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) is easily here before our eyes.[33]

These glosses show that the main purpose of Maheśvarānanda's literary undertaking is to activate religious experience, which includes the vision of the Dancing Śiva experienced through the ceaseless flow of the senses enlivened by the infinite transparency of Light. This is the state of liberation and enjoyment that makes man divine, bearing limits away and that allow that divine man to play (recognizing himself) in the overwhelming freedom of his nature. Maheśvarānanda's primarily objective for writing his book was to make Naṭarāja present. Maheśvarānanda uses here important word '*sākṣātkāra*', 'direct perception'. *Sākṣātkāra* is ablative form of *sākṣāt* which is derived from *sa* and *akṣa*, literally "with eye", and means "with the eyes, through the eyes" (MW 3). "Eye" represents here all the senses. In a figurative sense, the word means "evident, clear, direct, and immediate". *Sākṣātkāra* denotes "an evident perception". The background of this use of the word is the commonsensical conviction that sensual perception guarantees direct, immediate contact with outer reality and represents a doubtless ground for its cognition. This pre-philosophical view is epistemologically represented and philosophically defended by the "naive" or "direct" realism, and in the Indian context by Nyāya-realism: we see, we touch the physical, three-dimensional objects comprised in part by their visual (*rūpatanmātra*) and tactile (*sparśatanmātra*) qualities, which are viewed as a part of physical reality, in a direct way. The question of direct perception forms the central issue in the twelve-century long dispute between Nyāya and Buddhism.[34] Here, Maheśvarānanda uses *sākṣātkāra* having in mind a traditional meaning of this word associated with the spiritual vision in which a devotee stands 'face to face' with god. At the first sight we receive an impression that Maheśvarānanda's understanding of Naṭarāja-devotee

[33] *Mahārthamañjarī* with *Parimala,* p. 195. trans. D. Smith

[34] Cf. Motilal, *Perception*.

relationship follows the paradigm of religious spectatorship discussed in Chapter II. However, unlike in the descriptions given in the poems of Tamil Śaiva saints, here it is not a temple that acts as a stage for Śiva's dancing performance, but a scripture. We can see that Maheśvarānanda adopted this idea as a focal point of his exposition of the scriptural revelation that culminates in the precise moment of spectatorship, when dancing Śiva becomes present before our eyes. Maheśvarānanda certainly retains the religious character of spectatorship typical for the Naṭarāja's cult, but raises it to a whole new level. Naṭarāja's self-revelation takes place through the aesthetic and sensory experience triggered by reading a scripture, and not through a visual engagement with the temple worship, typical for the *bhakti* ideology taken up by the Cōḻa rulers as the instrument of domination and power. Here, the scripture itself is viewed as a powerful tool for activating religious experience, which is aesthetic in nature. Scripture, so conceived is an example of poetic theology, a work serving a particular soteriological end through literary means. In this approach, the fabric of the text and its contents became the very medium for the meeting with dancing Śiva. Thus, we are dealing here with a reality of scriptural revelation that brings forth the moment of 'recognition', which, according to Maheśvarānanda, makes dancing Śiva present before our eyes. In order to understand how the scripture becomes a trigger for recognition or reflective awareness, we should turn to the summary given by Dwivedi:

> Every living being is endowed with the power to know and to act, therefore, it has sovereignty (pertaining to the Lord, Īśvāra); difficulty arises from the fact that being under the influence of covering (āvarṇa) created by wondrous power of māyā, it has forgotten about its total sovereignty (Īśvāra). The first purpose of the scripture is to remove the covering created by māyā in such a way as to establish identification of oneself with the Lord. This process of identification is known as the 'recognition' (pratyabhijñā).[35]

[35] Dwivedi 2000: 432

Recognition (*pratyabhijñā*)[36] consists of bringing about the notice of the powers of the Self: knowledge (*jñāna*) and action (*kriyā*) that constitute total sovereignty of Śiva which takes place simply by the removal of ignorance (*mohāpasāratamātra*).[37] Following Maheśvarānanda's argument we shall see that this recognition of the innate powers of knowledge and action constitutes the nature of playful agent, the dancer or Naṭarāja himself, the symbol of sovereignty available to everyone, equally.

Who were the recipients of Naṭarāja's scriptural self-revelation? In the historically-determined space and time of Cidambaram, the readers of Maheśvarānanda's book were most probably a small (or maybe not so small) Kashmiri Śaiva community of *sādhaka*s settled down in Cidambaram who were entitled to view the dancing Śiva through the lens of their non-dualistic tradition which was predominantly recognitive, understood as the praxis of liberating knowledge, ('the holy place is the mind where perfection is felt') and senso-corporeal based on the tantric divinization of the body ('deities existing in

[36] The term 'pratyabhijñā' is one of the three cluster-concepts constituting the theory of recognition. 'Pratyabhijñā' means 'shining as facing oneself of what was forgotten'. '*Prati*'—towards, *abhi*—face to face, *jñā*—knowledge. Moreover, pratyabhijñā means cognition through the unification of past and present experiences expressed in judgment: 'This is the same Caitra'. In the event of recognition both memory (*smṛti*) and direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) are important. This standpoint was against Vijñānavādins' theory which rejected memory and against Vedāntins who did not affirm any value to perception. The second cluster-concept consists of mere derivatives from the verbal root '*mrś*', such as *vimarśa, parāmarśa, pratyavamarśa*. Semantically, all these words are employed to denote reflective awareness, consideration, reasoning, and, as Lawrence emphasized, 'all of them have a recognitive structure'. Implicit in reflective awareness is its aesthetic evaluation (IŚV 5.13). The third cluster-concept is based on the term '*anusaṃdhāna*' denoting an act of cognitive unification. In this case, recognition through synthesis is implied. As Torella pointed out: *pratyavamarśa* and *anusaṃdhāna* are two concepts on which Utpaladeva's *Vṛtti* on the *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārika* is centered, see Torella, p. 126.

[37] *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārika-vimarśinī 1.2., p. 13.*

the body are sense-organs able to collect smell, etc.'). Naṭarāja becomes the epitome of reflective awareness and sensory experience. But Maheśvarānanda provides us also with a radical reformulation of spectatorship by showing a movement from being a spectator to being a performer/dancer as a path to be followed. Following the Kashmiri Śaiva argument of the agency of consciousness, Maheśvarānanda encourages his disciples to discover one's own status as the performer and to acknowledge Naṭarāja—the embodiment of sovereignty, freedom and lordship at the core of individual self.[38] In his emphasis on performer as a power position there was something strong and committed, a clever strategy to achieve power and liberty in times of autocracy. Was it a sign of Maheśvarānanda's slow-burning rebellion against the Cōḻa's hegemonic oppression cleverly hiding under the disguise of *bhakti* ideology of mute spectators, controlled from within? Was it an intelligent tactic used to attract a large group of followers to his highly humanistic vision that preached spiritual liberty for everyone, equally? Or was it just a sign of ambition enclosing his own hegemonic aspirations for revolutionary tantric movement that aimed at abolishing the Tillai Brahmin priests at Cidambaram temple—mere puppets in the hands of the Cōḻa kings? Or was it out of the need to rival the Śaiva Saiddhāntika provenance, which became extremely popular with the Cōḻa rulers receiving royal patronage? For lack of historical evidences, these questions may never be answered. Even then, a question about the intended audience of his masterpiece and intention behind its creation seems to be important insofar as it allows us to testify to the existence of the Kashmiri Śaiva community in medieval Cidambaram. Maheśvarānanda's incorporation of a large body of quotations from the canonical Kashmiri Śaiva authors into his literary creation points out to the fact that there was a massive presence of the Kashmiri Śaiva texts in Cidambaram in Maheśvarānanda's days which is further justified by the fact that these texts were in Maheśvarānanda's possession. Maheśvarānanda is explicit that his teachings are

[38] See Chapter Two

addressed to his colleagues-*yogī*s, who are additionally described in purely aesthetic terms as *sahṛdaya*s or those sensitive readers who were able to understand its highly sophisticated meaning. That being said, Maheśvarānanda is pretty clear that the primary recipients; those who are competent to receive his teachings (*adhikāri*s) are his disciples, however he adds quickly that this does not exclude[39] humble worshippers of Śiva[40], as well as, the whole humanity. Nothing could be more profoundly indicative of a genuine affection for humankind, than a notion of the spiritual uplifting of mankind which he advances quoting from the *Spandakarikā*, thus: 'Having achieved this difficult knowledge and having preserved it in the cave of the heart, treasure of it will be good for all'.[41]

Maheśvarānanda's work represents the high culture of the Cōḻas that recognizes aesthetic representation of power where the icons of Naṭarāja, cosmic temples, royal eulogies and vast array of the aesthetic media of communication reached its peak (Cox). Maheśvarānanda wrote his treatise from the heart of the high culture of the Cōḻa world, but it was neither meant for the Cōḻa establishment, nor was it subsumable within the culture of the Cōḻamaṇḍalam as generally conceived. As Cox (2007:123) pointed out when we look at his work both as a product of the Cōḻa world and as an attempt to imagine that the world differently serves as a new window through which to reorder the existing understanding of the Cōḻa culture. As a result, Maheśvarānanda provides us with a history viewed from the margins. Through incorporation of Naṭarāja into his tantric system, Maheśvarānanda actively engaged in the polemics with the Cōḻa world in the ways that have shown what it meant to be a Kashmiri Śaivite in medieval Cidambaram. Maheśvarānanda treatise can be seen as an attempt to stand up against the prevailing understanding of 'play' as being a prerogative of royalty. As Inden pointed out, 'play' was typically attributed to the king-

[39] *MM*, p. 8.
[40] *MMP*, p. 5.
[41] *Spandakarikā* quoted in *MMP*, stanza 1.

like 'sovereignty'. The play-sovereignty fitted imagery complying with movement, e.g. the movement of absolute, free will that implied acting according to one's own desire. The semantics of the word for desire or wish (*kāma*) was broad enough to include the meanings of pleasure or enjoyment. Kings by definition were those who accumulated merit in previous lives, through royal entertainment (*rājakrīḍā*) a king could hope to consume his merit by the end of his life.[42] 'Play', constructed upon the notion of sovereignty that stressed the import of free will and a capacity to maximize pleasure must be taken into account in an effort to understand the conceptual ramifications of 'play' that constituted a behavioral component in the royal technology of the self. On the contrary, for Maheśvarānanda, 'play' involves an exercise of autonomy and freedom that is available to everyone, regardless of caste and social status. Maheśvarānanda's construct of play as an essential quality of the dancer is formulated within the framework of the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition that authoritatively provides tantric adepts with a tool of self-realization. Similarly, Maheśvarānanda's concept of the temple-body as the only object of worship and the ritual action founded on the satisfaction of one's senses enjoying themselves may be perceived as an open critique of "irenic" conception of lordship in which the king "fructified" and "enjoyed" his realm' through his engagement in sensorial practices.[43]

[42] p. 101. Ronald Inden, "Hierarchy of Kings in Medieval India", *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 1981, vol. 15, pp. 99-126.

[43] Daud Ali, 'Gardens in Early Indian Court Life', *Studies in History,* vol. 19, no. 2, 2003, p. 224.

FOUR

# The Dancer
## The Playful Agent

> The Dancer of this cosmic drama is Śambhu, the pure consciousness and it is He who is the individual self (*puruṣa*), (for) His indescribable state consists of assuming (all) the roles.[1]

Maheśvarānanda's concept of the Dancer proves to have structural complexity entering into alternative formulations of the problem of agency of consciousness. Moreover, this implicit complexity is additionally complicated by the existence of an all-encompassing metaphysical axiom of play presupposed in the Dancer's ontology. Play offers a site to performative reality that watches constantly the character of Dancer's own transformation. This is the play of bondage and liberation understood as the self-given laws of acting dance. In Maheśvarānanda's understanding, play is suggestive of theatricalization of the reality in which the identity of the Dancer is ascertained by his capability of assuming all the roles. Thus, the Dancer is simultaneously the Actor displaying the cosmic drama that presupposes the capacity to enact or perform diversity. Given what has just been said, it would be difficult if not impossible to draw a clear demarcating line between instrumentality of dancing and acting. However, for the sake of consistency of this exposition, we will continue to refer to Śiva's act of dancing. Maheśvarānanda begins his exposition of play of

[1] *MM*, stanza 19. *ya eṣa viśvanāṭakaśailūṣaḥ śuddhasaṃvicchambhuḥ | varṇakaparigrahamayī tasya daśā kāpi puruṣo bhavati* || 19 ||

bondage and liberation with the depiction of the Dancer who constitutes the essential nature of both Śiva and the individual self (*puruṣa*). To help thematize one of the trajectories within the discussion of the Dancer, something must be said first about the schools of thought that have influenced Maheśvarānanda's theoretical formulation. Thus, Maheśvarānanda's concept of a Dancer can be said to have developed on the basis of the two different theoretical standpoints: Kashmiri Śaiva represented by Pratyabhijñā and Krama-Mahārtha, and Sāṃkhya. From a purely Kashmiri Śaiva standpoint Maheśvarānanda drew the theory of a free agent who exists as the substratum for the constituent cognitive processes of the Five Acts. Maheśvarānanda advocates the view that Śiva/puruṣa is a Dancer, a free agent because of his agency to constantly perform the Five Acts. Insofar as the philosophical school of Sāṃkhya is concerned, it is clear that Maheśvarānanda's notion of the Puruṣa-the Dancer and *prakṛti*-the stage has been constructed on the basis and in response to the already known Sāṃkhya standpoint of the "theatre of the world" in which *prakṛti* displays the creation before the *puruṣa* as the Dancer before the audience. One of the main objections that Maheśvarānanda raised against the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* creed was the passivity of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*'s dependence on *puruṣa*. In Maheśvarānanda's view *puruṣa* is always omnipotent and omniscient and *prakṛti* is interdependent of *puruṣa*. In this way, Maheśvarānanda contributes to a significant critique of Sāṃkhya doctrine.

**What Does It Mean To Be the Playful Agent?**

The problem of agency is logically associated with an agent. Agency is the power exercised by an agent. Traditionally, to be an agent, it is necessary to be the Self or the subject and not an object that is acted upon. In the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition, the problem of an agent and its agency is best formulated in the concept of the possessor of power (*śaktiman*) and his power (*śakti*). *Śaktiman* is never bereft of his *śakti*. Their ontological interdependence is evoked in the formulations that express

mutual consent: sweetness in sugar, heat in fire, whiteness in milk. In the Kashmiri Śaiva understanding, agency belongs to the agent who is endowed with the attributes of sovereignty (*aiśvarya*) and freedom (*svatantrya*). While agent is free and sovereign, his agency is constituted by the powers of knowledge (*jñāna-śakti*) and action (*kriyā-śakti*). Agency and its agent are always reduced to will (*icchā*). Will itself is the cause, the agent and the agency.[2] Of particular significance is the fact that it is the agency of knowledge and action that constitutes a defining feature of the playful agent, the Dancer. Moreover, to say that an agent is the one who exercises the powers of knowledge and action is to accept an agent to whom sovereignty is ascribed.[3] Abhinavagupta justifies this statement when he refers to the powers of knowledge and action as constituting a defining feature of the Lord's playfulness. He describes it thus:

> The being of great Lord consists in His eternal Self-consciousness, unrestrained freedom, perfect independence of others and in being essentially pure bliss. This very freedom which is identical with self-consciousness, constitutes the pure and ultimately real powers of knowledge and action of the Playful Lord (*devasya kṛḍādimayasya*). The power of knowledge is essentially the light of consciousness (*prakāśarūpatva*) and the power of action is nothing but *vimarśa*, which is essentially freedom and which has its being in *prakāśa*. And freedom (*vimarśa*) is the essence of the light of consciousness (*prakāśa*). The powers of knowledge and action, therefore, at the transcendental level, are nothing more than a free will.[4]

Here, the playfulness of Śiva is depended on his sovereignty and freedom to exercise the powers of knowledge and action. Maheśvarānanda advocates a very similar argument when he explains thus:

[2] *IŚV*, 2.4.21.

[3] *IŚV* I.1.3. says: sovereignty (*aiśvarya*) is essentially nothing else than possession of the powers of knowledge (*jñāna*) and action (*kriyā*).

[4] *IŚV*, I, pp. 423-424. Maheśvarānanda seems to borrow the distinction associating *prakaśa* with *jñāna* and *vimarśa* with *kriyā* from Abhinavagupta. Cf. *MMP*, stanza 20.

This is the sovereignty of Paramaśiva, the Great Lord, who animates the entire *universal play* reflected in knowledge and action, in and out. Therefore, he is named in different āgamas, as freedom (*svātantrya*), vibration (*spanda*), vibrating radiance (*sphurattā*), exertion (*udyama*), etc.[5]

In this explanation, the *universal playfulness* points towards Śiva's agency characterized as the cosmological power that unfolds multiplicity within the fundamental unity with the divine. Here, the *universal playfulness* is indicative of the synthetical structure that includes, rather than excludes bipolar reality, inner and outer, cognition and action, and the like. The synthesis of the opposites provides common foundation both for unity and difference or change. This is best exemplified in another passage dealing with the problem of the world's diversity, which although based in division is not conditioned by actual distinction (*pṛthaktvopādhika*). The text says thus: 'The various categories of existence (*padārtha*), though different in [their outer] form are not separated unity [of consciousness]. This is indeed what people call non-differentiation (*ābheda*); so there is nothing unreasonable in stating that this non-differentiation is the actual true nature of the *universal playfulness*.[6]

The same powers of knowledge and action evidentially realizable in play are responsible for calling Śiva 'God' (*deva*). Interestingly, for Abhinavagupta, the very act of play makes Śiva to be God. Following the traditional semantic analysis (*nirvacana*)[7], Abhinavagupta traces etymology of the word '*deva*' (God) to

[5] *MMP* 1, p. 5.

[6] *MMP* 17, p. 47.

[7] Mishra summarizes the notion of *nirvacana* as 'basicaly a synchronic study of a morphological construction. It studies the phonetic, morphemic and the corresponding semantic structure of a word. It is a device to explicate the full semantic range of a word on the basis of its textual and general usages'. Cf. R. Mishra, 'Nirvacana as Signification', *Śabda: Text and Interpretation in Indian Thought,* eds. S.K. Sareen & M. Paranjapee, Mantra Books, 2004, Delhi, p. 168. For the most comprehensive study on *nirvacana*, see Ervind Kahrs, *Indian Semantic Analysis: The Nirvacana Tradition,* Cambridge University Press, 1998.

the verbal root '*div*' meaning 'play', 'sport', 'fun' (*dīvyati* means *krīḍati iti devaḥ*).[8] Here again, play-centered ontology of God is defined in terms of agency to exercise the powers of knowledge and action. He says thus: 'Deva also indicates that Being who is everywhere—as He is qualified by knowledge (*jñāna*) and action (*kriyā*) and who is thus omniscient and omnipotent. This is His movement (*gati*).'[9] In the commentary of these verses, Jayaratha explains thus: '(His) movement, even in the midst of all goal-oriented activity (*kartavya*) is of the nature of enlightened consciousness consisting of the Universal Dancer whose quality is knowledge and action.'[10] In discussing Abhinavagupta's thought it is crucial to emphasize that the powers of knowledge and action identifying God's playfulness are always necessary connected with the movement of the Universal Dancer. This implies that the playful agent is in motion. His kinetic energy unfolds in the movement of knowledge and action.

The powers of knowledge and action are inseparable, because action is nothing but free consciousness, manifesting itself both externally and internally, in accordance with the temporal order and as such it belongs to the subject.[11] For the Kashmiri Śaivites, only Consciousness (*cit*) can assume a position of the agent (*kartā*) because only consciousness is capable of assuming different forms without affecting its essential oneness, and in this way, it is capable of effecting the power of action.[12] Moreover, the capacity of exercising the power of action and the act of assuming different forms is possible under one necessary condition: that is freedom whose essential nature is a will or desire to do. In the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition, nothing happens unintentionally. Intentionality (*apekṣa*) or *telos* is a necessary prerequisite on the part of the agent for the action to take place.[13] So far the notion of agency has been exhibited within a

[8] *Tā* I.103. tr. M.Dyczkowski
[9] *Tā* I. 100. tr. M. Dyczkowski
[10] *TāV.* 101-103.
[11] *IŚV*, II.1.1.
[12] *IŚV* II.4.19.
[13] *IŚV*, II.4.20.; *IŚV*, II.4.16.

single intentional act of will of the agent. On the soteriological level, the notion of agency combining with itself the powers of knowledge and action represents a typical Kashmiri Śaiva pursuit of the 'path of power'. As Sanderson pointed out, the Kashmiri Śaivites follow the 'path of power' which is effectively contrasted with the orthodox Brāhmaṇical 'path of purity'. The 'path of power' is based on the recognition of a state of self-imposed bondage arising from ignorance (forged by impurity) with regards to one's own essential nature'[14] or, more precisely, with regard to the unawareness of innate powers of knowledge and action constituting a characteristic feature of the playful agent. In contrast with the dualistic Śaivasiddhāntika notion of the impurity regarded as a material substance, Kashmiri Śaivites consider impurity to be abiding in thought only. Thus, impurity is associated with the three *mala*s (stains) effective in generating a wrong perception of one's own true Self. Two of these stains, *āṇava malam* and *karman malam*, are understood respectively as an incomplete realization of one's own omniscient power of knowledge (*jñāna-śakti*) and as an incomplete realization of one's own omnipotent power of action (*kriyā-śakti*). The 'path of power' is a realization of one's own innate agency, in which ordinary contracted and impure consciousness is transformed into omnipotence and omniscience.[15] Maheśvarānanda seems to follow this line of reasoning when he introduces an image of the Dancer to represent the fullest realization of the inherent

[14] *Tā* 4.213-77. in: Sanderson, Alexis, *Purity and Power among the Brahmans of Kashmir*, in: Michael Carrithers/Steven Collins/Steven Lukes (eds.), *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, op. cit., p. 199.

[15] Rastogi summarizes it as follows: 'that power in this context is knowledge and action, or subjectivity and agency to be precise. Thus the final equation that emerges is: Power is equal to autonomy is equal to knowing and acting. The individual self and the Supreme Self are both Śaktiman and divine in their respective domain, the dividing line being non-recognition and recognition of powers as belonging to them'. [in:] Rastogi, N., *The Notion of Śakti in Kashmir Śaivism*, (unpublished) pp. 29-30.

agency consisting of the powers of knowledge and action and constituting the nature of Śiva, the playful agent. In examining these issues, we will first turn to the epistemic-cum-aesthetic aspect of the Dancer with an intention to show an intimate connection between aesthetics and epistemology fortifying Kashmiri Śaiva metaphysical discourse at large. Second, we will turn to the concept of the play of bondage and liberation. The play of bondage and liberation is nothing else but the Self's capacity to act and to assume all the roles or multiplicity without affecting the Self's essential oneness.

## Aesthetic/Epistemic Nature of the Dancer

In the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition, epistemology has a privileged place insofar as it is knowledge itself that leads to liberation. Liberating knowledge is connoted with purity and expansion of consciousness (*vikāsa*), and it exists as an exact opposition of ignorance, associated with the impurity of doubt and contraction of consciousness (*saṃkoca*). Maheśvarānanda's notion of the Dancer is fundamentally organized within the framework of these dichotomies. The Dancer is equated with the purity of consciousness, expansion and freedom; he is effectively contrasted with the impurity of doubt, contraction and bondage. As a matter of fact, the experience pertaining to the Dancer is expressed by the following gloss: 'I am verily everything, the world is me'—this initial experience of the aesthetic wonder (*camatkāra*) that has arisen from the identification with the expanded universe and realization of the essential freedom is pure awareness free from the doubt of the stain of limitation, that is what determines the nature of the Dancer performing the dance that is the world.[16] Thus, the aesthetic realization of the essential identity with everything (*viśvātmya*) is what constitutes the nature of 'the Dancer' performing universal dance. This is implied by the stanza of the *Śivasūtra*: 'The Self is

[16] *MMP*, comm. on stanza 19.

the Dancer' (*nartaka ātma*).[17] Maheśvarānanda holds that God is called 'the Dancer' because he continuously experiences the 'awareness' (of his own essential freedom) that is 'pure' (free from the doubt and stain of limitation). This very experience (*anubhāva*) that brings forth the realization of His identity with the universe is characterized by the aesthetic wonder (*camatkāra*). This language deliberately echoes Pratyabhijñā's concept of the reflective awareness (*pratyavamarśa*) described in purely aesthetic terms as experience of wonder that belongs to the agential activity of consciousness.[18] Aesthetic wonder (*camatkāra*) arising from the realization of Śiva's identity with the universe constitutes an experiential dimension of the Dancer that posits important aesthetic implications. The notion of *pratyavamarśa* is described in terms of Self-relishing (*svātma-camatkāra*). Rastogi summarizes the aesthetic aspect of *vimarśa* in the following words:

> *Camatkāra* is nothing but *vimarśa* in its aestheticizing role standing for relishing activity in the nature of self-repose of the aesthete, who is identified as the one actively involved in the act of relishing (hence called *bhuñjāna*) to the utter subordination of the objective aspect.[19]

The term *camatkāra* has a much more extended application in the Kashmiri Śaiva metaphysics where it becomes synonymous with the aestheticism of the spiritual experience: enjoyment (*nirveśa*), relish (*rasanā*), taste (*āsvāda*), eating (*bhoga*), completion (*samāpatti*), rest (*laya*), repose (*viśrānti*).

## Play of Bondage and Liberation

The play of bondage and liberation is a central theme in Maheśvarānanda's exposition of the Dancer, through which he

[17] *Śivasūtra* 3.9. quoted in *MMP,* stanza 19.

[18] *Cetayati ityatra yā cittiḥ cittikriyā tasyāḥ pratyavamarśaḥ svātmacamatkāralakṣaṇa ātmā svabhāvaḥ* / *IPV,* I, 250. 1.5.13.

[19] Navjivan Rastogi, *Kashmir Śaivaite Perspective on Liberation* (unpublished), p. 7.

attempts to approach the metaphysical problem of absolute autonomy within the Kashmiri Śaiva non-dualistic framework. What characterizes the Dancer is clearly a play, which he enacts as a sign of his total freedom. This is a play of bondage and liberation. If bondage and liberation are both taken to signify the highest degree of freedom, a uniformity of the absolute being is affirmed. The same thought has led Maheśvarānanda to the adaptation of the concept of play (*kṛḍā, vilāsa, khela*) that aimed at demonstrating the pleasure of self-veiling (bondage) and revelation (liberation) as the self-given laws of acting dance. In this context, Maheśvarānanda follows Abhinavagupta who elucidates on this topic in the following verse of his *Paramārthasāra*, thus:

> And as he veils and reveals his Self, the supreme Śiva displays his wonderful play (*krīḍā*), his sporting (*khela*) of servitude and deliverance.[20]

Śiva's play appears here as the frivolous faculty to perform the drama of self-veiling and revelation. The same idea is expressed in the *Sāraśāstra* quoted by Maheśvarānanda:

> The Sovereign of Gods himself binds and liberates. He himself is the subject who experiences (enjoyment and pain), and he himself cognizes. So does he examine himself.[21]

The play of bondage and liberation is related to the two cosmological acts of Śiva: concealment (*tirodhāna*) and grace (*anugraha*) that seems to operate at the intersection of the eternal dichotomies. Bondage is a necessary criterion for the availability of grace. But, Śiva's play of bondage and liberation also signals the enactment of the universal performance. Śiva-the Dancer represents the main character in this play acting out multiple roles. The specific feature of Śiva-the Dancer, defined as an 'indescribable state' is his ability to assume all the roles. A basic principle of this performative competency is its universality,

[20] *PS* 33.

[21] *Svayaṃ badhnāti deveśaḥ svayaṃ caiva vimukyati/svayaṃ bhoktā svayaṃ jñātā svayaṃ caivopalakṣayet// Sāraśāstra* quoted in the *MM* stanza 19.

a certain universal egalitarianism that reflects the view that Śiva is equally present in all states and conditions, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Yet another trait accentuated in this discussion is his intrinsic attitude of a frolicsome mood. Śiva is credited with playfulness when he engages himself in role-playing. His ability to play multiple roles is a sign of his reflective Self. This topic is repeated constantly in various Kashmiri Śaiva scriptures. Two examples of this kind taken from the Śivadṛṣṭi and quoted by Maheśvarānanda are given below:

> Just as a king (ruling) over the whole earth, in the joyful intoxication of his supremacy can act out as being a simple soldier, imitating his behavior, so, in His supreme happiness, the Lord amuses himself by assuming the manifold forms of the totality.[22]
>
> Due to his playfulness, the Lord assumes different forms of the bodies that reside in the darkness of the inferno-ocean, vessels for suffering, agents that have yet to pay the bill of their deeds.[23]

The necessity of examining the reasons behind Śiva's play of bondage and liberation led Kashmiri Śaivites to the ascertainment of Śiva's total freedom characterized by his ability to 'do the impossible'. Maheśvarānanda says: 'The Lord is skilled in the play of veiling his own Self. Because of His freedom and His purity he can do this what is extremely difficult.'[24] As has been pointed out by Bäumer, the self-veiling (*tirodhāna*) of the Lord under the disguise of the individual self is a very mysterious trait of Śiva[25] where freedom (*svatantrya*) and play (*krīḍā*) serve as the only possible explanation for an incomprehensibility of the divine action. Here again, Abhinavagupta compares Śiva's capacity of self-veiling in the individual souls with his activity of dancing. He refers to this theme in the following words: 'O You Togetherness of Beings, You Who forcefully laying hold of the hearts of men, with (Your)

[22] *Śivadṛṣṭi* by Somānanda quoted in *MMP*, stanza 8.

[23] *Śivadṛṣṭi* by Somānanda I.36-7. quoted in *MMP*, stanza 19.

[24] *Tantrāloka* IV. 10, quoted in *MMP*, stanza 19.

[25] Bettina Bäumer, 'The Play of the Three Worlds: The Trika Concept of Līlā' [in:] *The Gods at Play. Līlā in South Asia*, ed. William Sax, Oxford University Press, London, p. 45.

many modes of acting dance, You, concealing Your own Heart, play!'[26] For Maheśvarānanda, these stanzas of the *Tantrāloka* prove that Śiva, as a part of his inexplicable play, descends on the path of māyā to assume the role of the individual self (*puruṣa*). His argument that assigns to the Dancer a constitutive, essential nature of both Śiva and the individual self (*puruṣa*) comes in two steps. The first step is intended to rule out that idea that puruṣa is different from Śiva. This step proceeds by showing that: first, *puruṣa* is a concealed form of Śiva; second, *puruṣa* and Śiva are identical because of their ability to perform the Five Acts. The second step in Maheśvarānanda's argument points out towards *puruṣa*'s powerlessness to recognize Śiva/Self as the agent of his actions. This powerlessness occurs due to a false association with the psycho-physical organism governed by a sense of egoity as expressed in the statement: 'I am healthy', 'I am thin', 'I love', 'I enjoy', 'I respire', 'I am void'. In these six stages, egoity is seen'.[27] The powerlessness can be converted into omnipotence under one condition. What is essential is precisely the recognition that it is the agent, the Self that stands behind the various operations of the psycho-physical organism. Maheśvarānanda supports this idea in the following paragraph: 'The body and the senses must have an agent [driving them], and this agent is certainly the Self. What other justification is approved with regards to the agent of all the variety of worldly phenomena?'[28] Discovery of one's Self as being the agent of all actions is, above all, a discovery of the autonomous agency to perform the Five Acts. To the exposition of this agency we will now turn.

## The Dance of Śiva, Dance of Puruṣa: Discovery of the Autonomous Agency of the Five Acts

Maheśvarānanda tends to focus on showing that identification between Śiva and the individual self (*puruṣa*) becomes established

[26] *Tā* I.332.tr. M. Dyczkowski
[27] *Laghuvṛtti* of Abhinavagupta, quoted in the *MMP*, stanza 19.
[28] *MMP,* p. 54.

on the ground of sharing the uniform nature of the Dancer. The Dancer is the one who dances. His dance is identified with the autonomous agency to perform the Five Acts (*pañcakṛtya*) of creation (*sṛṣṭi*), maintenance (*sthiti*), withdrawal (*saṃhāra*), concealment (*tirodhāna*) and grace (*anugraha*). Rastogi says that *pañcakṛtya* is 'the discovery of the essential identity between the agenthood of the empirical subject and that of the Absolute'.[29] *Pañcakṛtya* of Śiva is one of the basic precepts of Śaiva tradition, whether Śaiva Siddhānta or Kashmiri Śaiva. Śiva incessantly performs his Five Acts in the transcendent and immanent realm. These Five Acts are always linked to his playful spontaneity.[30] The Dancer is never bereft of his agency to perform the Five Acts; in this sense dancing is a paradigm of dynamic ontology.

While discussing the problem of agency Maheśvarānanda offers a unique analysis of the dance movement performed by Śiva, basing his description in the Five Acts unfolding in two different spheres of manifestation: macrocosmic and microcosmic. In other words, dance has the outer and the inner dimension. The outer, macrocosmic form of acting dance is exemplified in the cosmological display of the thirty-six categories of existence (*tattva*s) ranging from Śiva up to Earth. Quoting from the *Śrīnaiśvāsa*, Maheśvarānanda says: 'You, by your own innermost Self are the Dancer, the protector of this globe'.[31] Here, the idea of Śiva's agency is grounded in a general conception of the transcendental causation consisting of the Five Acts of creation, maintenance, and the like. The inner microcosmic form of acting dance takes place in the individual self (*puruṣa*). Śiva dances the individual self (*puruṣa*) insofar as he performs the five acts in the drama of human life: 'By enacting the drama of being an individual being—through each and every act of the dramatic junctures—birth, childhood, youth, maturity, and death-at the final act of the

[29] Rastogi, p. 48.

[30] Bäumer, *The Play of the Three Worlds*, p. 35.

[31] *Yaduktaṃ śrīnaiśvāse*

*tvamekāṃ śenāntarātmā nartakaḥ kośarakṣitā iti* | *Śrīnaiśvāsa* quoted in *MMP*, stanza 19.

drama - I am Śiva, the best of dancers.' Birth, childhood, youth, maturity, death; these are the five moments of time imitating the Play of the Dancer. Therefore, a specific 'temporality' belongs equally to the experience of life and the experience of play. The temporality of playing a part in a cosmic drama. However fleeting and transient is a nature of these stages, there is no breach in the absolute non-dualism, in which Śiva-the Great Dancer acts out all and at all times.

With the intention to prove the ontological uniformity between Śiva and *puruṣa* Maheśvarānanda argued that possession of the autonomous agency of the Five Acts belongs equally to both. On the level of the individual self, the Five Acts constituting Śiva's transcendental causation assume a form of the five-fold cognitive process. Thus, the cosmological agency of Śiva (*pañcakṛtya*) becomes transferred into an agency of a purely cognitive type. He characterizes this agency in terms of the Krama-Mahārtha five-fold cognitive act. His argument has two stages. In the first, he argues that *puruṣa* is actually being consubstantial with God but he remains ignorant about his real status due to deficiency of the descent of power (*śaktipāta*).[32] To use his example, 'even the

[32] The descent of power (*śaktipāta*) comes as a part of the initiation (*dīkṣa*). Initiation (*dīkṣa*) has two constituting parts, for, it destroys (*kṣana*) and gives (*dāna*). Cf. *Tantrāloka* I. 43. What is destroyed is bondage and a wrong discernment of things according to their unreal nature. What is given is liberation and a true knowledge. Initiation is closely connected with the descent of power (*śaktipāta*) and grace (*anugraha*). Out of five cosmic functions of Śiva, grace (*anugraha*) is said to be the highest. Śiva is eternally penetrated by the highest energy which is said to be grace (*anugraha*). Cf. *Parā-tri-śika*, p. 6. In reality, the very essence of Śiva is grace, therefore it should be never conceived as separate from him. In the Pūraṇas, the word *prasāda*-the divine favour was applied to designate the blessing bestowed on the devotee who had access to the supreme Reality, however, in the Tantras, the term *prasāda* was changed into *anugraha*, which etymologically evokes the dynamic movement in favour of someone. Cf. Abhinavagupta, *La Luminere sur les Tantras*, p. 44. The grace of Śiva is portrayed as the descent of energy (*śaktipāta*) which again emphasizes the inseparable relation of Śiva and Śakti. *Dīkṣa* is always a manifestation of the descent of power (*śaktipāta*),

potter possesses the state of being of the all-powerful Śiva while making a pot, but failing to realize it, he remains only a potter.' This example echoes Pratyabhijñā's notion of the omnipotent agent in which a potter erroneously identifies himself to be the agent of his action. What he should realize is that it is the Lord himself who is the agent of his actions, therefore the potter is not a limited but a universal creator.[33] In the second, he sharpens his argument by saying that even while existing in the domain of *māyā*, *puruṣa* possesses the autonomous agency of consciousness identified with the Five Acts. He elaborates on this topic, thus:

> Therefore, freedom of consciousness (*saṃvit-svatāntrya*) constitutes the essence [of *puruṣa*] so in the actual process of perceiving something, for example, a pillar, when [*puruṣa*] is intentionally directed towards perceiving the pillar, that is called creation (*sṛṣṭi*). That is to say, by perceiving disparity [of the pillar] from the jar, etc. creation takes place. Once this remains steady for two or three moments, that is called maintenance (*sthiti*) since maintenance is yoked to the continuity of the [specific meaning] maintained by the material objects. When the [object] of intentionally directed awareness [shifts] and penetrates the other object (a jar), then, the pillar is dissolved (*saṃhāra*) and a jar is created. But when there is an intermediate state in between abandonment of the pillar and penetration of the jar, [this state] is called the Fourth (*turīya*), which is [the state] of pure consciousness,

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the difference is laid upon the intensity of this very descent. The descent of energy or power constitutes the nature of *dīkṣa* or initiation. One can even say that there is no *dīkṣa* without the descent of energy, just to exemplify their essential interrelatedness. The descent of energy has a dynamic nature, it is always unpredictable, unexpected, spontaneous, free and is the outcome of grace bestowed by Śiva on a human being. The grace is the initiative of Śiva but it is the energy or Śakti which falls on the human being. Although, this energy descends from the outside, it occurs due to the profoundness of the heart which suddenly flourishes filled with awareness about its identity with the divine essence of the supreme consciousness. There are different degrees of the descent of energy which are dependent on the intensity in which this very energy falls onto the disciple. For more explanation, Cf. *La Luminere sur les Tantras*, pp. 44-7.

[33] *IŚV* II. 4. 9.

free from the cognizable objects. As I said in the *Śrīkomalavallistotra*: 'The intermediary state suspended between the object left and that one which hasn't yet attained there, O Mother is that which *yogī*s consider to be your non-dual reality.' Threaded through this entire (four-fold) sequence and yet able to transcend it is the power of consciousness that exists within the Self, called Luminosity (*bhāsā*). Or else, during the act of mental unification of some a pillar, etc. by a knower, when the attention fixes on its pillar-ness, then its [quality] of wood-ness is suppressed. [On the other hand], when the attention fixes on its wood-ness, then its [quality] of pillar-ness is suppressed. Therefore, every time, there is a creation of something then there is a destruction of the other, this is clearly noticed. But when the qualities of pillar-ness and wood-ness are cognized at once, there is maintenance (*sthiti*) as both cognitions are present. And when these two are perceived without thought-construct of pillar-ness, [wood-ness], etc. then, there is [the state] called the Inexplicable (*anākhya*). When one reflects upon the radiance of the Self, there is Luminosity (*bhāsā*)—thus the [different] kinds of creation [permanence, dissolution, the inexplicable and luminosity] are to be perceived there. In the same way, when [the *puruṣa*] beholds a pillar in correlation with time, space and form, he is not [merely] the creator of its partial manifestation. Nor is he [merely] the destructor of its partial manifestation when it is not delimited by space, time, etc. And, [the *puruṣa*] is not [merely] the sustainer of universal properties, for example 'pillar-ness'. [The *puruṣa*] does experience the Fourth state when he perceives without thought-constructs and also [he] is the bestower of grace when he reveals [the phenomena] to be one with the light of consciousness. In this regard, *puruṣa*'s true being of the heart is established in the sovereignty (*aiśvarya*) that is simultaneously performing the Five Acts.[34]

The notion of the autonomous agency defined in terms of the *pañcakṛtya* is certainly not a novel feature in Maheśvarānanda's system. What is innovative about Maheśvarānanda's reformulation of the *pañcakṛtya* was his emphasis on the simultaneity of this process characterized as an ongoing movement. To express *pañcakṛtya* in terms of simultaneity Maheśvarānanda uses the image of the rotating fire-brand (*alātacakra*). The *pañcakṛtya* is compared to the rotating fire-brand of the Five Acts of creation,

[34] *MMP*, stanza 19, trans. W. Cox, slightly modified.

permanence, etc. turning perpetually, without interruption.[35] The concept of the Five Acts has been definitely known to the Pratyabhijñā and to Kṣemarāja who in his commentary on the *Pratybhijñāhṛdaya* equates the praxis of *pañcakṛtya* with a typically Krama notion of the destruction of thought-constructs (*vikalpa-kṣaya*). For, the destruction of thought-constructs, he advises meditation on the Five Acts performed by the individual self and Śiva. He writes thus: 'Those who ponder over the five-fold activity of the Lord become liberated in this life.'[36] The reflection on the Five Acts aims at realization of the autonomous universal agency that belongs to the individual self. In this regard, Kṣemarāja provides us with the following explanation: When the total knowledge of the agency of the Five Acts of the individual self is realized, *citta* (individual consciousness) itself becomes *citi* (universal consciousness) by turning within, due to its rise to the status of *cetana* (the perfect or uncontracted consciousness) of a knowing subject.[37]

The ultimate identity of Śiva and *puruṣa* can be discovered in the realm of the cognitive process. The macrocosmic set of five cosmological acts has its equivalent in the inner, microcosmic dimension of the cognitive process. This is a liberating dance of consciousness based in the sovereignty of the individual self. By attending to the inherent five-fold dynamism of the cognitive process that emerges and subsides in the course of perception and seeing it as a universal process, the agent realizes his autonomous agency, and thus, his śivahood. Rastogi says: 'those who always reflect upon this pendatic activity of the Godhead, knowing the universe as an unfolding and expression of the essential nature of awareness never fail to attain perfection and realize their true self in this very life.'[38]

[35] *MMP*, stanza 41.
[36] Kṣemarāja, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, stanza 10.
[37] Kṣemarāja, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, stanza 13, trans. J. Singh
[38] Rastogi, pp. 11-2.

## The Theatric Universe:[39] Maheśvarānanda's Critique of Sāṃkhya

The system of Sāṃkhya occupies an important position in shaping the doctrinal bedrock of the Kashmiri Śaiva metaphysics. The whole process of manifestation or evolution of the absolute Śiva-consciousness embodied in the thirty-six categories of existence (*tattva*s) has been inherited from the Sāṃkhya metaphysical scheme. Kashmiri Śaivites borrowed from Sāṃkhya twenty-five lower *tattva*s: from puruṣa to Earth, but they added the other eleven *tattva*s. Of these, the first five represent the pure categories and they correspond to the five powers of the Absolute: Śiva, Śakti, Īśvara, Sadāśiva and Śuddhāvidyā. The other six *tattva*s represent the impure categories entangling the individual self in the cycle of transmigration; these are *māyā* and the five 'coverings' (*kañcukas*).

The basic text of the philosophical system of Sāṃkhya is the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa (4th century C.E). Among the commentaries on the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, the most frequently studied is the *Tattvakaumudī* (940) written by Vācaspati Miśra. A few independent works were composed over the centuries. The most popular is anonymous *Yuktidīpīka* written about 680-720 C.E.[40] The very term '*sāṃkhya*' refers primarily to the idea of 'enumeration', 'number' but it implies the systematic analysis of the twenty-five categories of existence (*tattva*s).[41] The metaphysical scheme of the Sāṃkhya system is constituted by the dyad tattvas: *puruṣa-prakṛti* whose inexplicable relation is effective in giving rise to the world of the phenomenal existence. The most common distinction between these two lies in considering *puruṣa* as consciousness and *prakṛti* as matter or nature. The whole world embodied in the remaining twenty-three tattvas is derived in some way from the 'combination' or 'conjunction' (*saṃyoga*) of these two grounding principles.

[39] This phrase is borrowed from Pramod Kale's book entitled *The Theatric Universe.*

[40] *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 4, p. 626.

[41] Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya,* p. 3.

It is in the Sāṃkhya system that the notion of spectator as the metaphysical ultimacy and spiritual ideal is more fully articulated.[42] For the Sāṃkhya philosopher, the most interesting topic of investigation was analysis of perception that arises from the premise that the world consists of objects, which are perceived by subjects (spectators). In the Sāṃkhya system, the objective aspect of perception becomes feminine *prakṛti*—the 'seen' or the non-conscious (*acetana*), and the subjective aspect of perception becomes masculine *puruṣa*—the spectator, the pure consciousness (*cetana*) characterized by his dispassionate, non-reactive look. The relation between the two has been described metaphorically as the "theatric universe" in which *prakṛti*-dancer dances in front of *puruṣa*-spectator. The dancer moves only because of the spectator's mute presence, once he loses his interest, she stops her dance. Paradoxically, what stirs or stimulates the objects of perceptions to manifest in the playful display of manifestation is actually the presence of the spectator casting mystical shadow "which albeit inactive and intrinsically alien to any real involvement with the objects of perceptions, nevertheless acts as its indispensable catalyst"(Torella 2009:83). The *Sāṃkhyakārikā* describes it in the following words:

> Like a dancer who withdraws from the scene once the play has been performed before the audience, so *prakṛti* withdraws after manifesting herself to the *puruṣa.* Lavish with help of various kinds and endowed with qualities (*guṇas*), she operates without minding her own interest in the interest of the *puruṣa*-spectator, who for his own part is lacking in qualities (*aguṇa*) and is concerned with nothing and no one. There is nothing more delicate than *prakṛti*, I deem, who knowing that she has been seen, no longer shows herself to the eye of *puruṣa*-observer.

Īśvarakṛṣṇa's main contention was that the objective aspect of perception is presented to the spectator only to make him recognize that he, himself, the inactive, pure consciousness, is completely isolated from the external world of perceptible objects. The moment of liberation is constituted by an 'isolating

[42] See Chapter seven.

vision' (*viveka*) when the spectator realizes the fact that he has been entangled in the world's drama and that there has never been any link between them. The ideal of inactive, dispassionate spectator, the mere witness to the events playfully manifested in the world outside the province of pure consciousness had important consequences for the entire mainstream Brahmanical traditions firmly rooted in the Sāṃkhya subject-object dualism which promoted the spiritual ideal that presupposed turning away from the objects of desires, promulgating purity and renunciation (*vairāgya*).[43]

*Puruṣa*, the seat of pure consciousness without content, the inactive spectator possessed of isolation or freedom (*kaivalya*) from experience has not been given any meaning in the theory of causation since it is only *prakṛti* who is the real cause of real effects, from which the twenty-three *tattva*s called 'evolutes' or 'transformations' spring forth when the equilibrium of the three artistic talents or qualities guṇas (the three-fold constitution of prakṛti: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*) is reached.[44] *Puruṣa's* role in a cosmological process is that of the inactive spectator, casting a mystical shadow. Having been in some mysterious way 'stimulated', 'catalyzed', 'intelligized', or 'vitalized' by *puruṣa's* mute presence,[45] *prakṛti* begins to dance her 'world performance'. Her 'world performance' displays a psycho-physical organism of macrocosmic and microcosmic type consisting of a different modes of awareness, emotions, sensations, physicality and the senses.

Maheśvarānanda took over Sāṃkhya's idea of the theatric universe with the intention of a polemic reformulation of this concept. His notion of the *puruṣa*-the Dancer and *prakṛti*[46]-

[43] cf. *Sāṃkhyakārikā* v.59-61, in Torella, p. 83.

[44] Burley Mikel, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, p. 91.

[45] Sen Gupta, A., *Classical Sāṃkhya. A Critical Study*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982, p. 84. [in:] Burley Mikel, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga,* p. 91.

[46] In Maheśvarānanda's view, *prakṛti* has to consist both of transformation and non-transformation and the three qualities (guṇa*s*). At the same time, he seems to authorize a novel understanding of

the stage upon which the manifestation of the five varieties of I-cognition (the void, intellect, vital breaths, the body and sense-perceptions) takes place is the amended version of the Sāṃkhya standpoint: *puruṣa*-the Spectator and *prakṛti*-the Dancer. This illustrative portrayal is enough to notice the relations of entailment and detachment operating in both instances. In the first case, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* exist in a close relationship insomuch as the stage is the means by which individual soul (*puruṣa*) comes into direct contact with a qualitatively rich and variegated nature or this-ness of objective manifestation. In the second case, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* exist in an abstract isolation from one another. *Prakṛti* is acting at some distance away from *puruṣa*. This distance separates them. Maheśvarānanda begins with a critique of Sāṃkhya account that aspires to make *puruṣa* the inactive agent. He tends to establish the incomprehensibility of the Sāṃkhya conclusion by teasing out the internal contradictions in the opponent's position. Maheśvarānanda argues to reject the opponent's view on the following basis:

1) The objection put to the opponent's position: How it is possible that an entity said to be totally passive can exert any influence on the world? How can one even assume that it exists at all?
2) The opponent's response: The entity that is both conscious and passive instigates *prakṛti*, so that she begins to move. Otherwise, creation would not have been possible. This is the only reason why one conforms with the view that the conscious entity really exists establishing an evidence for that.

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*prakṛti* emphasizing its pentadic structure, namely, *prakṛti* being a support for the manifestation of the five varieties of I-cognition (the void, intellect, vital breaths, the body and sense-perceptions). This pentadic structure laying down the psycho-physical foundation for the biological human person is inherited from the Krama-Mahārtha. It appears in the anonymous *Mahānayaprakāśa* of Trivandrum, the text which Maheśvarānanda quotes in the second half of his narrative, in the exposition dedicated to the esoteric teachings of the Krama-Mahārtha.

3) Refutation: The passive uninvolvement of the entity cannot then be established. Because it triggers a series of other actions, it must itself be active, even if only slightly. Even admitting this slight degree of action, however, falsifies the opponent's assertion.[47]

In this way, Maheśvarānanda criticizes Sāṃkhya's concept of the unmoved mover who in some mysterious way impels *prakṛti* to act by proving the logical impossibility of any action to be instigated by the inactive *puruṣa.* Even the subtle action requires the active agent. To summarize different positions held by both systems, we should turn to the following quote:

[Kashmir Śaivism] is based on the activistic metaphysics where the self or consciousness is conceived not as a silent spectator but as spontaneous agent; consciousness is conceived as force of energy experiencing itself in spontaneous activity. The goal [of this process] is not the inactive state of a seer but spontaneous activity.[48]

## Playful Agent: Śiva as Magician and Puppet

In the *Mahārthamañjarī*, Śiva, as the cosmogonic agent is constantly at play, thus, the created universe is characterized as the unfolding of the universal playfulness (*viśvavilāsa*). The theme of god's playfulness becomes vividly manifested in Maheśvarānanda's narrative decisively shaping the plot of his exposition. The figures of the magician and the puppet are introduced to define ontological complexity of Śiva, the playful agent. In the first example, Śiva becomes a magician, whose magic show is the whole world. He conjures up the net of illusion (*māyā*), the most deluding of all his powers. Paradoxically, it is precisely this spell of *māyā* that proves the highest degree of Śiva's essential freedom. In the second example, Śiva is simultaneously

[47] Cox 2011:154.

[48] *Hindu Tantricism and Śakta Literature*, Sanjukta Gupta, pp. 140-1.

the puppet master animating and controlling the movements of puppet and the puppet itself whose actual existence depends upon the agent controlling its movements. The image of the puppet is employed to demonstrate the playful machinery of the cosmos brought to existence by Śiva's supreme energy of the reflective awareness.

## Śiva-magician and his Deception of Māyā

The concept of a magician-god creating the world through the act of magic can be traced back to the *Ṛgveda* (3.53.8; 7.94.7), where Indra by a touch of his magician-wand—'lightning' and by a magic spell—'thunder' conjures up the cosmic illusion to deceive the people and gods. This illusory trick is known as Indra's net (*indrajāla*),[49] the powerful device for expressing the hocus-pocus of human entanglement:

'Indra's net is vast, as big as this world, and with Indra's net-this magic-I enmesh, entrap, those people with darkness'.[50]

Another notable example of world-magic is given in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.9-10, where: 'Nature is an illusion and the Lord is the illusionist; the things of this world are but elements of him'.[51] Similarly, in the *Bhagavadgītā* 4.8, God announces that he comes into being through magic: 'The world is my divine magic, hard to figure out'. Commenting on the verse, Rāmanuja explains that God is appropriately envisioned as a magician (*māyāvin*) "tricking the world, staging a cosmic version of the street magic performance during which the magician, by his devices, creates not a reality but an idea or illusion of a reality, a meaningless image that is thought to have meaning, significance, palpability".[52] This early notion of the magical illusion had been developed further in the philosophical concept of *māyā* implying

[49] Mahadeva's *Adhbutadarpaṇa* 4.8 'Know that this world is like a wondrous magic show of a magician, the wielder of Indra's net.'

[50] *Atharvaveda* 8.8.5-8.

[51] *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* quoted in: L. Siegel, *Net of Magic: Wonders and Deceptions in India*, p. 4.

[52] L. Siegel, *Net of Magic: Wonders and Deceptions in India*, p. 432.

a mysterious, bewildering power of creation. Etymologically, the word '*māyā'* is derived from the Sanskrit *mā* 'to measure out', 'to show', but it came to denote the phenomenal world emanating from the Absolute (Brahman, Śiva, and the like). As Gonda has noted, '*māyā* is an incomprehensible wisdom and power enabling its possessor, or being able itself, to create, devise, contrive, effect, or do something.'[53] Undoubtedly this example calls our attention to the efficacious power of creation entrenched in *māyā*. However, it should be noted that this creative power is set in motion to fabricate, to conceal, to disguise the truth lurking behind the masquerade. Thus, another characteristic feature of *māyā* is that it binds humans in the world of transmigration by projecting an illusory world, the magical craft of appearances. As Goudriaan puts it: 'The cosmic action [of māyā] which permeates the world and human life is the cause of cosmic delusion which holds all creatures in its grip. '[54]

In the field of Indian philosophy, *māyā* became an important epistemological and metaphysical concept in the Advaita Vedānta promulgated by Gauḍapāda (7th century) and Śaṅkara (8th century). In this system, the epistemological status of *māyā* predicates erroneous perception that deludes self-consciousness of the individual (*ātman*).[55] In explaining the deceptive power of *māyā*, the Advaitin turns into a famous story of a magician and a trick. When a magician performs a trick of turning a rope into a snake, people are fooled by it, people take deception for the actual reality, but the magician does not. The deception is caused by erroneous perception and ignorance, while a magician remains unaffected by his trick. Similarly, Brahman conjures up a magic-show of the empirical world that vanishes with the boon of knowledge. Metaphysically, *māyā* is the enigmatic power of Brahman that fools us into believing that the empirical world

[53] Jan Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, p. 219.

[54] *Māyā: Divine and Human*, Teun Goudriaan, Motilal Banarsidass, 1978, p. 253.

[55] T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Philosophy of Advaita Vedānta*, Delhi 1987, p. 111.

is real, when it is not. Epistemologically, *māyā* is ignorance (*avidyā*). It has the power of concealing reality (*āvaraṇa śakti*) and also of distorting reality (*vikṣepa śakti*)[56] that makes a rope to be mistakenly perceived as a snake. Brahman is the only real, unchanging and true entity, except for him, everything else including the empirical world is just an illusion (*māyā*) and deception. To disentangle the interlaced cords of the illusory net of *māyā* is to go behind appearances, to unveil the curtain of ignorance, to understand that the fiction lays no claim of being true. Once it is accomplished, the spell of *māyā* disappears and thus, automatically, the reality of Brahman stands revealed. Although the Kashmiri Śaiva masters agree with Advaita Vedānta's notion of *māyā* as comprising with itself the powers of concealment (*āvaraṇa*), delusion (*moha*) and obscuration (*tirodhāna*)[57] still a distinction between these two systems is perhaps best seen as advocating different ideas regarding the relation between *māyā* and Brahman. In accordance with the Advaita Vedāntic fundamental premise, *māyā* is effectively contrasted with Brahman, who is alone real and true, whereas from the Śaiva point of view, *māyā* is Śiva's supreme power of freedom (*svātantrya śakti*) generating the most wonderful spectacle of phenomenal existence. For Maheśvarānanda, *māyā* is alone the proof for Śiva's freedom. He writes thus:

> [Māyā] is alone the elevated summit of His [Śiva's] freedom: since He is skilled in generating the manifold variety of divisions and subdivions regardless of the fact that the world which normally exists is identical with the manifestation of His Self, on which account the Lord is said to be the one who does the most difficult [things]. For this very reason, He is the Lord of the World, the Lord who causes to manifest the variety of [things as] bodies, senses, world-systems, etc. In the absence of *māyā*, the manifestation of the variety [of things], that, in the ultimate

[56] Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: Philosophical Reconstruction*, East-West Center Press, Honolulu, 1969, pp. 30-31.

[57] For explanation of the power of *māyā* as comprising within itself the powers of delusion, concealment and obscuration, see *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-vimarśinī,* pp. 196-9.

sense, are [nothing but] the expansion of difference, would be lost. In the absence [of *māyā*], the sovereignty of the supreme Lord would have been lost, and also nothing whatsoever could manifest. Therefore, this what is called *māyā* is His [Śiva's] supreme freedom.[58]

The aforementioned passage equates *māyā* with the essential agency of Śiva where an agent is the Creator endowed with the capacity for deliberative creative action. One important concern he brings up here is that agency involves what is called a freedom to perform the most difficult things. It is precisely this capacity to 'do the impossible' that constitutes a defining feature of *māyā*.[59] However, *māyā* is not only Śiva's power of freedom (*svātantrya śakti*). In an attempt to develop an adequate understanding of *māyā*, yet another aspect has to be taken into consideration. In this regard, *māyā* is also the power of delusion (*mohani śakti*). The capacity 'to confound even the liberated man with the fear of bondage and confound even the bound man with the mistaken notion of liberation' is the power of *māyā*.[60] These two aspects of *māyā*[61]: freedom and delusion are not to be considered in isolation from one another, for they exist in the process of constant interplay, emphasizing, perhaps, the most important feature of Śiva's agency, its playfulness. *Māyā* is the Lord's own disguise, through which he expresses his total freedom.[62] *Māyā* is Śiva's capacity to experience his freedom in a wonderful variety

[58] *MMP* 17, p. 44.

[59] In the *Śacīmatam*:
You are my power of autonomy, the accomplisher of the most difficult of tasks, you are
renowned as Māyā, the one who makes me, your Lord, appear as the universe. *MMP* 17.

[60] *MMP* 17, p. 44.

[61] *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-vimarśinī* provides us with the definition of *māyā* in which 'the cause of obscuration of pure Consciousness (*saṃvid*) is that power called *māyā*. It is the power of freedom of the Highest Lord. It is freedom to bring about the obscuration of unity, which is of the nature of illusion (*bhrānti-rūpā*). It is simply his Will to conceal Himself'. *IPVV*, p. 90.

[62] And as in the *Paramārthasaṃgraha*: The Lord's greatest

of manifestation; he plays out of the joyful and vibrating delight of his own nature, experiencing astonishing diversity in His being.[63] There seems to be no other reason for the existence of *māyā* than play.[64] Moreover, the playful disposition of Śiva seems to assign to his unique nature a double role, one superior and transcendent, and another inferior present in the realm of *māyā* and the individual self (*puruṣa*). Maheśvarānanda points out that Śiva's ability to assume the double role of Śiva and *puruṣa* is executed by the figure of a magician. Śiva is called the magician (*aindrajālika*), though he tricks the entire world (by assuming the role of the individual self, a subject to *māyā*) he himself is not tricked by anything.[65] There is the same 'deceiving' pattern discernible within the realm of cognitive process. Śiva is called the deceiver or a cheater (*dhūrtā*), for he disguises himself assuming the triple nature of the cognizer, cognition and cognizable.[66] All these various illusionistic tricks performed by Śiva have a single purpose that is freedom. Śiva's total freedom is ascertained by this ability to experience himself in a variety of manifestations. Ultimately, everything is the manifestation of pure consciousness, the mere sport of Śiva's own conscious nature; as a result nothing is unreal since both real and unreal belong to the content of Śiva-consciousness that pervades all. On this assumption, Śiva's capacity to disguise himself under the veil of *māyā* and fool others

autonomy, which accomplishes the most difficult of tasks, is the goddess Māyāśakti: this is the Lord's own disguise. *MMP* 17.

[63] *kṛḍati harṣānusāreṇa spandate | svasvātantraym upadarśayatī iti yāvat// MMP* 24.

[64] *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-vimarśinī* associates *māyā* with the freedom of the Lord to accomplish the most difficult of things. Moreover, this capacity to accomplish the most difficult is conveyed by the word '*vijṛmbhate'* (lit. 'yawning') in a sense of expansive inclusion of the objective reality. The same '*vijṛmbhataṃ*' appears also in the context of the Lord's power of action (*kriyā-śakti*) which is endowed with the capacity to show wonderful playful movements of different kinds (*kṛḍā-vijṛmbhataṃ*). See *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-vimarśinī*, p. 197 and p. 119.

[65] *aindrajālikadṛṣṭāntasya atra prāpratvasaratvāt/ sa khalu svayam akhilam api lokaḥ vyāmohayan na kenacid vyāmohyate* | *MMP* 19.

[66] *MMP* 24.

is the outcome of his playful nature. Moreover, to understand *māyā* as the play of Śiva and to become fully engaged in his game of hide and seek is the path to liberation. As Eliade puts it:

> To rear the veil of māyā and pierce the secret of cosmic illusion amounts primarily to understanding its character as 'play'—that is to say free, spontaneous activity of the divine—and consequently to imitating the divine action and attaining liberty.[67]

To summarize, we may say that Vedānta and Kashmiri Śaivism advocate two distinctive approaches to the understanding of *māyā.* In the Advaita Vedānta an understanding of *māyā* is based upon an exclusive or absolute separation of the real and unreal.[68] As a consequence, unreal *māyā*—the source of falsity exists in diametrical opposition to the real Brahman. To free oneself from the illusionistic shackles of *māyā* is to cancel the illusory, empirical world. It is only upon the cancellation of the illusory that the real, eternal Brahman can be reached. Potter[69] points out that from the premises about the illusionistic character of the empirical world represented by *māyā*, negative freedom (also called 'freedom from') is implied; it refers to freedom in the sense of not being constrained by another. On the other hand, Kashmir Śaivism advocates the view that presupposes a positive attitude toward the empirical world of *māyā*, everything is real, even the unreal is real,[70] and thus, this approach can be characterized as 'freedom to'. Freedom to know, to experience, to act belongs to Śiva, the playful agent who actively participates in the world of *māyā,* in the affirmative dance of appearances.

[67] Mircea Eliade, *Mephistopheles and Androgyne: Studies in Religious Myth and Symbol*, pp. 30-37.

[68] L.N Sharma, *Kashmir Śaivism*, p. 16.

[69] M.S.G. Dyczkowski, *Doctrine of Vibration*, p. 39.; Karl Potter, *Presupposition of Indian Philosophy*, p. 48.

[70] L.N. Sharma, *Kashmir Śaivism*, p. 16.

# FIVE

# Dancing in the Sky of Consciousness

## Construction of the Temple-Body in Medieval Cidambaram

> At the still point of the turning world.
> Neither flesh nor fleshless;
> Neither from nor towards;
> at the still point, there the dance is….
> There would be no dance,
> and there is only the dance.
>
> —T.S. Eliot, 'Four Quartets- Burnt Norton'

Maheśvarānanda's construction of the temple-body is an interesting example of doctrinal intermesh offered by the inevitable projection of motifs belonging to Cidambaram Śaiva tradition into the conceptual framework of the Kashmiri Śaivism. This cultural fusion, as it were, was the process of mutual absorption and permeability between the doctrinal elements belonging to two different Śaiva traditions that shaped a varied and manifold formulation of certain metaphysical concepts paramount to the Cidambaram culture. The word *cidambaram*, the Sky of Consciousness appears to be a single and most important concept from this list insofar as it semantically embeds the entire metaphysical and theological framework of the Cidambaram culture. First, let's take a closer look at the classic formulation of the word *cidambaram* promulgated by the *Cidambaramāhātmya*—the

'official' compendium of Cidambaram myths and legends. The *Cidambaramāhātmya* argues that *cidambaram* is the heart of the universe and the centre of consciousness symbolized by infinite spatial expansion. Typically, this teachings, widely known as *dahara-vidyā* or 'heart teaching', integrated philosophical ideas of the Upaniṣads that put emphasis on the inner divinity (*ātman*). The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* refers to the 'heart teaching' in the following words:

> Now, what is here in this city of Brahman, is an abode, a small (*daharaṃ*) lotus-flower (*puṇḍarīkaṃ*). Within that is a small space (*daharo ... ākāśaḥ*). What is within that, should be searched out; that, assuredly, is what one should desire to understand.
>
> …As far verily, as this world-space (*ākāśa*) extends, so far extends the space within the heart. Within it, indeed, are contained both heaven and earth, both fire and wind, both sun and moon, lighting and the stars, both what one possesses here and what one does not possess; everything here is contained within it.[1]

These enigmatic verses reflect the fundamental doctrinal formulation of *cidambaram* whose symbolic representation is expressed by the image of the heart. This heart is the void of transcendence, the centre of infinite spatial expansion encompassing the whole cosmos that resides in the abode of one's own heart. The unique character of 'heart teaching', thus, lies in this convergence between the transcendent Brahman and immanent *ātman* that occurs at the junction of the heart. This emptiness unfolding in the lotus of the heart expands into the infinite firmament of consciousness (*cidambaram*). This space of the heart was drawn into the physical space within the sacred boundaries of the Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple and was, thus revealed as the *cit-sabhā*, or 'the Hall of Consciousness'. The *Cidambaramāhātmya* refers to it in the following words:

[1] *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.1.1 and 5. Trans. Robert Ernest Hume, p. 262f. quoted in Smith 1996:80.

There is a hall (*sabhā*) called 'sky' (*ambara*) which is the abode of all good. In it, I constantly dance in happiness. It is known as Chidambaram, and consequently it is revered by all.[2]

The *cit-sabhā* is the most sacred shrine of the Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple. It hosts the icon of Dancing Śiva as well as the invisible *liṅga* of space (*ākaśa-liṅga*) located in the small room on the left side of *cit-sabhā.* This room enclosing only empty space, is known as *cidambaram-rahasya*, the 'secret' of *cidambaram*. In this place, it is useful to quote observations made by Sivaramamurti:

It is very interesting that there is a hall beyond, all empty, to suggest space, *ākaśa.* A screen here, when pulled aside, reveals just space, with no real image in it except what fancy may imagine as present in the sky….This representation of ether, space or void, represents the *rahasya* of *chidambara,* or the mystery".[3]

The sanctity and importance of this place thought to represent the infinite space or void of consciousness is contained in its inbuilt esotericism. It is a *rahasya*, or the 'secret' that is meant to protect the power of the hidden inner meaning of doctrinal formulation as opposed to its external exoteric dimension. Esotericism is an ideology behind all 'secret teachings' linked to the idea that the access to these teachings is granted only to those who are initiated. Thus, the esoteric teachings make the exclusive claim of allegiance that takes place through the act of initiation that makes an adept an inmate of esoteric community. In the next pages I will try to reconstruct the secret of Cidambaram, as it was presented to the Kashmiri Śaiva *yogīs* living in Cidambaram basing my explanation on the textual analysis of the *Mahārthamañjari* and related texts.

Even though *cidambaram* is the epitome of emptiness and infinite spatial expansion, still, something important does happen here: the dance of Śiva, the movement, the flow of energy, as it is expressed in the verses of the *Cidambaramāhātmya*: "There…

[2] *Cidambaramāhātmya* canto 15, published by J.M. Somasundaram Pillai, Chidambaram 1970.

[3] Shivaramamurti, *Nataraja*, p. 383. quoted in Smith:84.

(in this) sky (*ambara*) […], I constantly dance in happiness (therefore), it is known as Cidambaram…". Thus, this empty space ensures possibility for a playful space where the dance of Śiva takes place. His dance is congruent with the five cosmic acts: creation (*sṛṣṭi*), maintenance (*sthiti*), destruction (*saṃhāra*), concealment (*tirodhāna*) and grace (*anugraha*). These Five Acts are always linked to his playful spontaneity. Although Maheśvarānanda retained the specific understanding of *cidambaram* as the seat or void of the heart, the infinite space from the Cidambaram culture, the use he made of it was highly original. In his reformulation of *cidambaram*, he placed the 'sky of consciousness' as the sole purpose and final stage of the sensory movement. In addition, the five-fold dance movement was substituted by five-fold sensory movement in a sense in which an adept comes to know himself as Dancing Śiva through the recognition of five-fold sensory movement 'dancing' in his own body. The aim of this sensory dance is to reach the sky of consciousness, the emptiness at the centre of the heart. Maheśvarānanda's exposition of the sensory movement was derived from the esoteric teachings of the Krama, one of the earliest schools of the Kashmiri Śaivism. Throughout his book, Maheśvarānanda, repeatedly says that Krama system is esoteric (*rahasyam*) because it is concerned with the worship of one's own body inhabited by the deities of the senses. In addition, he emphasizes that the Krama system is dedicated to 'the analysis of the impenetrable void which lies within the heart', a direct hint to *cidambaram*. Maheśvarānanda's exposition of the sensory dance is mainly derived from two textual sources: the *Mahanāyaprakāśa* of Arṇasiṃha and the *Cidgaganacandrikā* of Śrīvatsa. The latter is of particular importance insofar as it is likely to be a product of the Cidambaram textual culture. The word *cidgagana* in the title is a synonym of *cidambara*, both denoting the sky of consciousness. The text traces its lineage to the sage Patañjalī,[4] the first in the line of teachers, most probably

[4] Cf. *Cidgaganacandrikā* v.9 reads as follows: 'we revere those great souls, beginning with Patañjalī, whose minds were dedicated with reverence to the Lord, the true Self and the abode of the universe [...]'.

referring to Patañjalī—the snake-bodied sage and mythological ancestor of the Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple who is believed to be responsible for establishing a ritual canon of Naṭarāja worship (*Patañjalī-paddhati*) as it is accepted today by the temple authorities. So what is this sensory dance-movement performed in one's own body that leads to the sky of consciousness? In order to answer this question, we shall now take a closer look at a larger concept of the 'temple-body' given by Maheśvarānanda.

## The Temple-Body

At first worship the body as the throne (*pīṭha*)
It is in the centre, in the void of the heart (*MM*, stanza 36).

With these words Maheśvarānanda tries to lay the foundation for the concept of the temple-body inextricably tied to the ideologies of space, kingship and ritual. There is a variety of conceptual threads woven together into the fabric of Maheśvarānanda's exposition that will hopefully become clearer in the course of our explanation. In most general terms, Maheśvarānanda's construction of the temple-body is set up in support of the divinization of the body, which constitutes "the hallmark of tantric culture" (Flood 2004:4). The divine status of the body is communicated through the discourse of regal power; the body becomes the throne (*pīṭha*). In the typical temple layout, *pīṭha* is the centre, the pedestal, located in the inner sanctum of most of Śaiva temples housing an aniconic emblem of Śiva (*liṅga*) who is offered daily worship. The sanctum sanctorum, covered by a huge roof (*vimāna*) is typically surrounded by attendant deities who should "entertain" the lord sited on the throne. According to Daud Ali (1996:151-152), this ordering of divine beings around the central sanctum resembled the arrangement of lesser lords at the king's court. In this way, the special status of the king was understood within the conceptual framework paralleled with the feudalization of the gods. As a result, divinization became reformulated as royalty. This was visible also in the domain of temple worship where 'courtly spatialization was replicated in

the daily ritual performed within the sanctum' (Ali 1996:152). For Maheśvarānanda too, divinization of the body is linked to the traditional power structures, to the royal and divine authority expressed by 'throne'. Here, 'throne' is indicative of the power-relations between the lord at the centre and those who are subservient to him. In Maheśvarānanda's understanding, however, the meaning of 'throne' in reference to the authoritative sacredness of the body is further rarified insofar as it is employed to convey the point of condensed energy expressed by a technical term '*piṇḍa*'. *Piṇḍa*—the condensed energy-core - is often used by the Kashmiri Śaiva masters to convey the structural identification of the individual body with the cosmic body.[5] Maheśvarānanda makes this correlation even stronger by juxtaposing '*piṇḍa*' with '*brahmāṇḍa*'—the cosmic egg,[6] thus making the relational bond

[5] According to Kashmiri Śaivism, the body is a condensed form of Śiva, pure consciousness. For Maheśvarānanda too consciousness is both fluid (*cid-rasa*) and solid (*cid-ghana*). The qualities of fluidity and solidity attributed to consciousness are employed to designate the processes of cosmic evolution (beginning with Śiva tattva and ending with Earth tattva) and involution (beginning with Earth tattva and ending with Śiva tattva). The progressive development from fluidity to solidity is described in terms of 'solidification', 'coagulation', 'thickening' designated by a technical term '*āśyāna*'. *Āśyāna* is the process by means of which the subtle energy of consciousness assumes the solid form of matter, but even in that thickened mass of matter, consciousness does not lose its nature […].This process is illustrated by a famous simile of the juice of sugarcane thickening into solid sugar without losing its sweetness. Cf. *MM*, comm. on verse 25.

[6] The 'brahmaṇḍa' designates four spheres or cosmic eggs, dividing universe into four planes or stages of existence ruled respectively by Īśvara, Rudra, Viṣṇu and Brahmā. These have descendants, the Egg of Energy (*śaktyaṇḍa*) corresponding to pure tattva: Sadāśiva to Śuddhavidyā; that of māyā (tattva of māyā to puruṣa), of prakṛti (tattva of prakṛti to water—āp), and finishes with earth, pṛthvi corresponding to tattva of earth. The whole cosmos (below śakti) is thus included. Four-fold, the egg of Brahma represents the energy, illusion (māyā), nature (prakṛti) and earth (pṛthvi) and thus represents the entire universe. Commentary on stanza 4.133. in Silburn & Padoux, *Lumienere de tantras* p. 227-228.

between the microcosm of the human body and macrocosm of the universe explicit at the start. With structural correlation existing between temple/cosmos/palace, it seems plausible that the tantric temple-body too is a replica of the cosmos.[7] In addition, the body-temple is the throne (*pīṭha*) because of the deities of the senses that are said to occupy the body. Just as in the Cola world, the 'throne' is considered to be the spatial abode of power occupied by a powerful king or deity attended by lesser deities, so the body too is regarded as the throne insofar as it is attended by the deities of the senses (*karaṇadevatā*).[8]

> The deities of the senses shine in the throne (*pīṭha*) of one's own body, which is identical to the cosmic egg (*brahmāṇḍa*). In the midst of them, the Supreme Lord manifests who is the source of (all) knowledge.[9]

Maheśvarānanda's construction of the temple-body was directly influenced by Kaulism, one of the schools within the Kashmiri Śaivism initiated by Matsyendranātha. Kaulism emerged from within the Yoginī cults who were typically grouped into eight families or lineages (*kula*) belonging to the eight sacred seats of power (*pīṭhas*) located in different parts of India. The person initiated into this Kaula cult sought the company of the powerful female beings—*yoginīs* in these places, for they were believed to grant him special powers (*siddhis*). In medieval India, *kula* was a clan or a lineage of the specific topocosmic locality indicating a determinative sense of place specificity. Unlike the *yoginī* cult before it, Kaulism was mostly concerned with internalization of the *yoginīs* and reevaluation of the importance of the body, which was, from now on, regarded as the sacred seat of power or, in the regal terms, the throne. Thus, "In Kaulism, says Sanderson:

[7] *Pratyabhijñahṛdayam*, quoted by Maheśvarānanda. "As the Lord (Śiva) has the entire universe as his (cosmic) body, so the individual embodied subject also, in whom consciousness is contracted has the universe as his body in contracted form even as the tree exists in a contracted form in its seed". PHr, Singh, p. 55.

[8] *MP* (Ś) 7.1.

[9] *MM*, stanza 34.

the *yoginī*s became the deities of the senses (*karaṇeśvarīs),* reveling in the (practitioner's) sensations….. The eight mothers of the families (belonging to the eight sacred seats of power) were made internally accessible by being identified with the eight constituents of the individual worshipper's 'subtle body' (*pūryāṣṭaka*), these being sound, sensation, visual form, taste, smell, volition, judgment and ego. The worshipper was therefore the temple of his deities […].[10]

The manner in which the bodily experience is formulated in this system correlates the gross, physical body (*sthūla-śārira*) comprised of eight sense-organs: ear, skin, eye, tongue, nose, intellect, mind, ego with the subtle factors of sense perceptions (*pūryāṣṭaka*): sound, sensation, visual form, taste, smell, volition, judgment and ego-feeling. In developing his own 'hermeneutics of the senses', Maheśvarānanda agrees with this view and adds that the energies manifested as sense organs are the seats or the little thrones for dwelling in them the deities of the senses. Moreover, in an attempt to theorize about the causal process that generates the sensory perception, Maheśvarānanda says that there is an agency assigned to the senses insofar as the sense organs are believed to move toward an object of perception, stay there (for the time being), and then withdraw. Thus, with regard to the debate that existed between the Buddhists and the Nyāyaikas, on the question whether the sense organ and the sense object must come into contact to produce sense perception, Maheśvarānanda conforms with the view of the Nyāyaikas in that the contact between the sense organ and the sense object is a necessary precondition for any sense-perception to be produced. This moment of 'contact' is designated by the term 'union' or 'fusion' (*melāpa*) in which the sense organs fuse in pulsating union with the objects of perception, and then, extract from the objective sphere the essence, the subtle portion like fragrance, color, sound, etc. described in purely aesthetic terms as the liquid essence (*rasa*)[11] which serves as a means leading to the intimate

[10] Sanderson, *Śaivism*, p. 679-680.

[11] There is also a ritual dimension of *melāpa* practice related to tantric practices based on Kaula teachings. According to which the

union with Śiva at the centre of the heart who is nourished by the sense-perceptions offered to him.[12] The 13th century Krama author Śitikaṇṭha describes this process in the following words:

> the object of perception is the favorite place of the deities of the senses who delight in consuming it (*upabhoga*). When these deities of the senses have relished the field of objectivity, they offer it to the Bhairava, who is Consciousness (*Cidbhairava*) until offering themselves, they abandon it and come to rest.[13]

The act of worship is portrayed here as the sensory involvement represented by the act of relishing that ultimately leads to the final sacrifice in which the senses offer themselves finding blissful repose in the Absolute, Bhairava himself. Abhinavagupta specifies this process in the following words:

> …the deities of consciousness [the senses] eat the universe that has become the nectar of immortality. These deities now satisfied take rest in God, no different from [Him] who is Bhairava, the Sky of Consciousness, dwelling in the secret space at the heart of the Self.[14]

The analysis of the sensory experience as delineated by these authors depends on two fundamental principles which have been explained by Maheśvarānanda as the process of extraction of this-ness, followed by the replenishment of 'this-ness' with 'I-ness'. First is the process of extraction of this-ness which means "letting internal experience of the externally apprehended objects of perceptions take place"[15] which happens when the sense organs extract from objectivity the essence of sense perception, such as fragrance, colour, etc. that results in internal experience of relishing *rasa*. Second is the process

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adepts initiated into Kaula tradition, the *siddhas* and yoginīs unite sexually (*melāpa*) in order to produce 'nectar' or sexual discharge which is the primarily offering during the *kulayāga.*

[12] Gnoli Raniero: *Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, p. 45.

[13] *Mahānayaprakāśa* of Śitikaṇṭha 12.4-6.

[14] Abhinavagupta, *Tā* 3.262a-264b. quoted in Skora, p. 435.

[15] *MMP,* stanza 20, quoted by Rastogi, senses paper, p. 11.

of replenishment of this-ness with I-ness which takes place when the sense organs, fully satisfied, offer this *rasa* (internal experience of externally apprehended objects of perception) to the Bhairava, and thus discover their identity with I-ness located in the sky of consciousness.

Maheśvarānanda appropriates this model of the heart as the orientational locus of the entire sensory experience into his own exposition, but with a slight modification. According to him, the deities of the senses are said to occupy the body, therefore it is the body that becomes the throne (*pīṭha*) that should be offered worship. Quoting from the anonymous source, he says thus: "Deities existing in the body are the [sense] organs able to collect smell, etc. They should be worshipped according to their nature, one who knows it, this is a great sacrifice." Every sense-organ is related to the deity that offers worship consisting of the sense-perceptions to the main deity, Śiva/Bhairava, the pure consciousness (*cinmaya*), at the centre of the heart. These sense-perceptions are metaphorically called 'flowers' for they have the ability to nourish (*poṣaka*) the heart (of the worshipper).[16] Maheśvarānanda specifies saying that the flower (*puṣpa*) which is offered to the cave of the heart, goes to the center of the heart and fills it with nourishment (*poṣaka*).[17] Thus, Brāhmaṇī who is intellect (*buddhi*) worships Bhairava at the centre of the heart with the flowers of certitude (*niścaya-kusumaiḥ*). Śambhavī who is egoity (*ahaṃkṛti*) worships Bhairava with the flowers of ego-feeling (*abhimāna*). Kaumarī who is mind (*manas*) worships Bhairava with flowers of thought-constructs (*vikalpa-kusumaiḥ*). Vaiṣṇavī, who is speech (*śabdarūpā*) worships Bhairava with flowers of speech (*śabda-kusumaiḥ*). Vārāhī who is skin worships Bhairava with flowers of touch (*sparśa-kusumaiḥ*). Indraṇī who embodies sight (*dṛktanum*) worships Bhairava with flowers of most beautiful colors. Camuṇḍa who is tongue worships Bhairava with a variety of six delightful tastes. Mahālakṣmī who

[16] *MMP*, stanza 45.
[17] *MMP*, stanza 45.

is nose worships Bhairava with different fragrances.[18]Here also the entire purpose of worship performed by the deities who are 'our' senses is concentrated upon the central locus of the heart where Bhairava resides in the supreme sky of consciousness. Thus, Maheśvarānanda rightly points out: "at first worship the body as the throne, it is in the centre, in the void of the heart". The purpose of sensory worship of the temple-body has, as its final goal, reaching out to this infinite space at the center of the heart. This is the moment when consciousness which is normally contracted in the individual bodies reaches expansion. As it is said by the Krama teacher Nāga:

> What kind of worship is it if in it one does not experience the surge of expanded consciousness within each and every movement of cognition, taking hold of the trance of sudden enlightenment, flooded with radiant, pure awareness? What kind of worship is it in which one does not let go of the travails of one's unliberated existence by gazing directly at the dynamism that, beautiful in the unfolding of the heart, pervades the Sky [of Consciousness]...?[19]

Such a model of worship with the Bhairava occupying the ritual throne and attended by the deities of the senses can be understood chiefly in the light of medieval feudalism promoted by Ronald Davidson who has argued that the major metaphor for esoteric Buddhism was that of kingship exercising dominion over a circle of divinities (*maṇḍala*) of different families (*kula*) similar to the dominion of feudal lord over a circle of vassals of different lineages. He says further that gods were modeled on feudal lords and devotees worshipped the lords just like they worshipped the gods. At the same time, lesser divinities became understood as representatives of the imperial divinity, who protected them in a complex exchange of divine services, just as the vassals owed allegiance and loyal to the monarch through the exchanges of

[18] *Dehasthādevatācakrastotra* of Abhinavagupta

[19] This is quotation from the *Paramārcana-triśikā* of Nāga (vv.6-7) who belonged to Krama lineage. Cf. Alexis Sanderson, 'Śaiva Exegesis of Kashmir', *Tantric Studies in Memory of Helene Brunner,* ed. Goodall, Padoux, Institut Francais de Pondichery, 2007, p. 296.

goods, services, land, and booty.[20] The overlap between royal god and divine king were visible not only in terms of theology, but especially at the level of ritual where ritual worship (*pūjā*) consisted mainly of sensual offerings. The king or the deity were ritually honoured by offerings of the finest representations of five sense faculties. The linkage here between elements offered internally and particular substances offered externally suggests one way to understand the set of ritual services as a whole. The elements taken as cosmic supports represent a comprehensive set, the bases of all material substances. Immanent within the five elements are all perceptible qualities (the five *tanmātra*s), which are in turn the domains in which the five perceptual faculties—*jñānendriaya*s act. The services offered to Śiva or to the king partake of all five material elements, they present to Śiva all five perceptible qualities; and they engage the five sense-organs of Śiva's body.

| *Bhūta* | *Tanmātra* | *Upacāra* |
|---|---|---|
| Earth | Odor | Perfume |
| Water | Taste | Drink |
| Fire | Form | Lamps |
| Wind | Touch | Fanning |
| Ether | Sound | Music |

The primary purpose of worship was, thus, the sensual satisfaction of the Lord enjoying his realm in conformity with the irenic concept of lordship. [21] Based on this 'feudal' scheme of power derived from personal relationships with vassals or families of the Buddhas we may now have a better understanding of Maheśvarānanda's model of worship in which Bhairava or Śiva, the Lord at the centre is attended by different families of *yoginī*s belonging to different topocosmic localities and he is offered worship consisting of sense perceptions. Here also, the primary goal of worship is the sensual enjoyment of the Lord, at the center

[20] Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism* p. 72
[21] Ali, p. 170

of the heart. Needless to say, with tantric divinization of the body it was the heart, the sky of consciousness that became the actual goal of all ritual worship consisting of sensory offerings of vision, taste, smell, touch and sound. The unifying theme of worship in this cultural model is 'aesthetic' in the sense in which it refers to the aesthetic engagement with the world procured by the senses. Maheśvarānanda provides us with a very daring vision of the world experienced by the senses. The natural qualities of the senses are not to be suppressed or denied but employed in the fullest apotheosis of their expansive nature. In this profound image, there is nothing else except for these energies of the senses vibrating inside one's own body, concentrated upon Śiva/Bhairava, the pure consciousness, who is the nucleus of energy nourished by the sense perceptions offered by the sense organs. Worship is able to expand one's own awareness precisely because it is sensual. In Maheśvarānanda's understanding worship as the sensual and aesthetic intensity engaging the senses is embedded in the potential of ensuring playful space, insofar as it is referred to as the 'great festival' (*mahotsava*). *Mahotsava* stands for a core of sensorial excess established at the centre of worship. For Maheśvarānanda, the festival of worship is the place of joy and play 'where flowers and thick sandal paste are offered, where family has gathered and liquor feast takes place, where lovely ladies are dancing and people drinking'.[22] Festival can serve as a form of meditation practice: 'when one is filled with joy arising from the pleasure of eating and drinking, one should meditate on the state of fullness. Then the great bliss will arise.'[23]*Mahotsava* is also a time of purely aesthetic experience characterized as a 'joyful delight which one experiences while enjoying the melody of *vīna*'.[24] All these various aspects constituting Maheśvarānanda's version of *mahotsava* are characterized by the outpouring of the energies of the senses saturating and permeating the world of phenomenal existences from within and without. In this way,

[22] *Saṃvid-ullasa of Maheśvarānanda* quoted in *MMP,* stanza *58.*
[23] *Vijñānabhairava* 72, quoted in *MMP*, stanza 58.
[24] *Viṣayapañcaśikā*, quoted in *MMP*, stanza 58.

*mahotsava* is a code for sensorial excess, stimulating sensuous and aesthetic intensity, resulting in the energetic fusion (*melāpa*) between the deities of sense organs and the objects of senses fused in the pulsating union that activates the unfolding of the nectar of bliss (*rasa*). In the words of Maheśvarānanda:

> This nectar is a place of fusion, sweetness of immanent and transcendent; this is a drink of the supreme sovereignty of the Self, a total recognition resulting in freedom from doubts. The great festival is a sacrifice in the form of oblation [...] when the relish of the self is directly experienced.[25]

Generally speaking, the term *utsava* conveys the meanings of elation, joy experienced collectively, cheerfulness of the crowd, universal festivity, which explodes and spreads out without constraint because it is qualified as *niṣkalā* (free from differentiating energies that normally promote division between 'mine' and 'not-mine'). The defining feature of the festival is, thus, constituted by its universality that goes beyond duality, subject and object.[26] Maheśvarānanda avers thus: 'enjoyment experienced during festival is free of division'.[27] This statement has a clear social overtone that deliberately echoes the role of festival in erasing class divisions and social boundaries. However, Maheśvarānanda's assertion goes far beyond the social context. He expands his explanation incorporating the aesthetic dimension when he avers that the essence of the festival is to savour or relish (*āsvāda*) the non-duality of consciousness obtained by the senses. It is the pleasure, the relish of the heart, the self-repose in one's own nature.[28]

Maheśvarānanda endowed the concept of the festival of worship with paradigmatic meaning for his whole aesthetics of liberation. The notion of the festival of worship appears in the context of aestheticizing the role of the senses that bestow the

[25] *MMP,* stanza 58.
[26] *MMP,* stanza 52.
[27] *MMP,* stanza 52.
[28] *sukham svaviśrānti svabhāvaḥ svahṛdayāhlādaḥ, sa evotsavaḥ*

pleasure of relish which is ultimately directed towards self-repose, in the heart, in the sky of consciousness.

## *Pañcavāha*: Sensory Dance Performed in the Temple-Body

The most important premise of the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition repeated consistently in its deliberation on the body is the fact of its being the sole object of worship. As it is said by Kṣemaraja in his *Vimarśinī* on *Śivasūtra* III.26 "Living in the body: this is the religious observance" (*śarīravṛttir vratam*); "the compenetration with Śiva is achieved *only* by the yogin who resides in the body, the *prāṇa*, etc." (p. 54 *dehaprāṇāvasthitasyaiva śivasamāviṣṭatvam uktam*). In the previous pages, we have seen how the body assumes the prominent position of the temple or the throne through the process of divinization of the senses that offer worship to Bhairava residing in the sky of consciousness, at the center of the heart. This is the type of homology based on the central locus model in which the entire purpose of worship that consists of offering the 'sensations' is directed upon reaching the point of the heart. In the system of homologies based on the vertical model, the body is regarded as sacred because the powers that belong to Śiva are present in the human body in the form of five sensory movements (*pañcavāha*). Maheśvaranada calls this type of body, the supreme, and adds further: "the throne of one's own body is known as the supreme (body), for the Supreme Lord (Śiva) resides there in five sensory movements". Therefore, "worshipping one's own body one worships Parameśvara". The five powers of Śiva correspond to five-fold sensory movement 'dancing' in the mind-body complex, these, in turn, are compatible with the cosmic dance of Śiva comprised of five cosmic acts. Naṭarāja's adaptation of dance into Maheśvarānanda's tantric system is about the icon of the deity becoming a performative tool that represents a specific technique of experience. As Gavin Flood (2004:4) rightly remarks,

> Representations (particularly icons of deities) are not simply passive texts but are performative, used in 'life transforming practices', and,

conversely, techniques of the body themselves entail representations of it, especially in ritual where the body becomes the deity or icon. Indeed, both representation and technique come together in the divinisation of the body….

In Maheśvarānanda's tantric system too, an emphasis is laid on incorporating Naṭarāja's icon in a transformative praxis or a technique of experience that comes along with the realization of Śiva's dance performed in one's own body. Once the person throws off his empirical personality and submerges in the flow of this movement he is not to reappear again. This is the unique character of the five-fold sensory movement 'dancing' in the temple-body and an outcome of supernatural grace.[29]

**Fig. 1. Dance of Śiva**

| Five Powers of Śiva | Cit | Ānanda | Icchā | Jñāna | Kriyā |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Five Sensory Movements | Vyomeśvarī or Cidgaganacarī | Khecarī | Dikcarī | Gocarī | Bhūcarī |
| Five Cosmic Acts | Bhāsa/ Anugraha | Anākhya/ Tirodhāna | Saṃhāra | Sthiti | Srṣṭi |

Thus, through the five-fold sensory movement operating in one's own psycho-physical body characterized as the flow of cognitive energy, one is given the powers that belong to Śiva in accordance with the dictum 'everything is of the nature of everything else'. The only difference between the two is that on the level of individual self, or at the stage of *paśu* or bound subject, these powers are the source of ignorance, they alone are to be blamed for the incessant transmigration of the soul from one body to the other. According to the verses of the *Pratyabhijñahṛdayam* (stanza 12), thus: "to be a *saṃsārin* means being deluded by one's own powers because of the ignorance of that authorship of the five acts". Despite its negative effect on the individual self, these powers can also become the effective tools for transcendence

[29] *MP*, Trivandrum in Rastogi, p. 677.

of *saṃsāra* and eventual liberation. Thus, with regard to the ambiguous nature of these five-fold sensory movements allowing movement in two opposite directions: towards bondage and liberation, it is important to quote the *Mālinivijayottaratantra* (XV.44) which says: "The cause of both bondage and liberation are the senses: this is what the wise said. Fettered they lead to bonds, freed they lead to liberation".

In Maheśvarananda's exposition of the five-fold sensory movement which he has borrowed from the esoteric teachings of the Krama system, Vyomavameśvarī stands for the void of pure consciousness (*cit*) who represents the total freedom of Śiva, his omnipotence (*sarvakartṛtva*). On that level, she is understood as the cosmic, unbounded movement, therefore she is called *cidgaganacarī*, the one who moves in the sky of consciousness. When Vyomavameśvarī enters the path of the senses, she forgets about her supreme form as *cidgaganacarī*, therefore, she is called 'vameśvarī' because she is the one who 'vomits' i.e. emanates or brings out of herself the variety of [sensory] perceptions in having as her background, the sky (of pure consciousness). She assumes the form of the bound soul (*paśu*), and adopts the form of empirical subject (*khecarī*) who moves in the sky (*khe*) of limited awareness. When Vyomavameśvarī adopts the form of *dikcarī,* she begins to move in space (*dik*) on the plane of the inner mental organs (*antaḥkaraṇa*) whose main function is to ascertain the difference (*bheda-niścaya*) of things in its aspect of the intellect (*buddhi*); to mentally construct things as different (*bheda-vikalpana*) in its aspect of mind (*manas*), and to egoistically identify with different things (*bheda-abhimāna*) in its aspect of egoity (*ahaṃkāra*). When Vyomavameśvarī assumes the form of *gocarī* she moves on the plane of outer organs, like eye, etc. who are inclined toward the objective sphere and perception of difference. At last, Vyomavameśvarī appears as *bhūcarī* when she moves on the level of gross, knowable objects. By *khecarī*, the individual self is reduced from the position of the omnipotent subject to limited experient; by *dikcarī*, he becomes endowed with inner mental organs; by *gocarī*, he becomes endowed with outer senses; by *bhūcarī,* he becomes

confined to the external objects.[30] We are dealing here with progressive degradation of powers typical for the bound individual (*paśu*) who is a slave of his senses. On the stage of the lord (*patí*), however, these five-fold sensory movement becomes reversed insofar as they are identified with absolute powers of omnipotence, omniscience, fullness, eternity and pervasiveness. Moreover, at this stage, limited subject represented by *khecarī* becomes transformed into universal agency represented by *cidgaganacarī*; as *dikcarī*, one ascertains identity of non-difference; as *gocarī*, one acquires perception of non-difference; as *bhūcarī*, one gains revelation of external objects as identical with the Self.

**Fig. 2. "Feudal" Vocabulary of Bondage and Liberation**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Slave** (paśu) | **Vāmeśvarī**: emanation of sensory perceptions in the sky of consciousness | **Khecarī**: limited experient | **Dikcarī**: inner mental organs and ascertainment of difference | **Gocarī**: outer sense organs and perception of difference | **Bhūcarī**: confinement to the external objects |
| **Lord** (pati) | **Cidgagana-cārī**: cosmic motion in the sky of consciousness | **Khecarī**: universal agency | **Dikcarī**: ascertainment of non-difference | **Gocarī**: perception of non-difference | **Bhūcarī**: external and internal are equal to the self |

These two levels of the slave and the lord corresponding to bondage and liberation, respectively, mimic feudally grounded mentality operative on all levels of medieval discourse, whether that of polity or religion. Moreover, a central and defining metaphor for spiritual exaltation in this context appears to be that of lordship and dominion over subdued powers of the senses expressed by the term *cakreśvara* (the lord of the wheel),

[30] *Pratyabhijñahṛdayam*, Singh, pp. 120-122.

which is synonymous with the semantic meaning ascribed to the universal ruler (*cakravartin*) exerting dominion over the group of lesser kingdoms. Thus, when the *yogī* becomes the lord of the wheel of the collective energies of the senses, he attains the universal mastery over the body, for he has attained freedom. He is the master of the wheel of the energies endowed with omniscience embodying the cosmic motion performed in the sky of consciousness. His body is the only temple where he worships with every sensory movement concentrated on reaching the final repose in the heart, in the sky of consciousness.

## 'Dancing' through the Five Enclosure Walls of Naṭarāja Temple

In her celebrated work on 'Hindu Temples', Stella Kramrich has argued that the temple experience in which a devotee performs the rite of circumambulation (*pradākṣiṇa*) is a concrete objectivization of bodily movement which has also cosmological significance embedded in it. The ritual of circumambulation is structured to accommodate and enable sensory and cognitive experience which Jan Peiper (1980) usefully calls "haptic experience". This is a somatic and kinesthetic understanding of space, known by physical movements in and around structured environment, such as the temple. Peiper says further that especially the architecture of the temples is desgined in such a way so that the sharply defined boundaries are forsaken and in their place, the centers of power that unfold, lotus-like, in all directions, are established. Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple is a paradigmatic example of "haptic experience" in which cosmic and bodily experience of the devotee, who ritually circumambulate the temple, come together. The relation of sanctum, the Hall of Consciousness (*cit-sabhā*) to the *gopuram*s marks the centripetal movement from the inner ritualized bodily movement that stretches from the outer body to the heart or sky of consciousness within. But there is also a centrifugal movement, proceeding from the interiority of the Hall of Consciousness located in the heart to the most external Coronation Hall situated outside the premises

of Naṭarāja temple *per se*. If we look at Maheśvarānanda's exposition of the temple-body we will soon notice that there is the same ritualized movement, but of slightly different type. This is the sensory movement, which proceeds from the most interior space of the heart or the sky of consciousness to the most external realm of objects of perception. In both the cases, whether in the real temple or the temple-body, the movement is centrifugal, enveloping totality in its ongoing movement in order to merge with metaphysical totality. The devotee circumambulating the temple, and the Krama *yogī* worshipping his body, both surrender to the process of the inner dance that overtakes them from within, from the inner space of the sky of consciousness. This "dance" is measured according to the five beats during which all peripheries finally merge in the center of the heart.

**Fig.3. "Haptic Experience" in the Naṭarāja Cidambaram Temple Correlated with the Temple-Body in Maheśvarānanda's System**

| Bodily Movement of the Devotee in Naṭarāja Temple | Cit-Sabhā | Kanaka-Sabhā | Nṛtta-Sabhā | Deva-Sabhā | Rāja-Sabhā |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sensory Movement in the Temple-Body | Cidgaganacārī | Khecarī | Dikcarī | Gocarī | Bhūcarī |
| Five Cosmic Acts of Śiva Constituting his Dance | Bhāsa/ Anugraha | Anākhya/ Tirodhāna | Saṃhāra | Sthiti | Sṛṣṭi |

The movement through the five enclosure walls and five halls of the Cidambaram Naṭarāja temple undertaken by a devotee can be, thus, envisaged through an analogy of the sensory dance movement performed in the temple of one's own body, as the means by which one can become divine. The sensory dance

movement is correlated with the ritual act of circumambulation and, thus, it can be seen as an act of ritual transformation offering a passage to the new mode of existence, that of being Dancing Śiva. This realization of dance performance enacted by the senses takes place *in* the body and *through* the body; the body, thus, acts as an effective tool of this realization.

## The Sky of Consciousness

A large body of quotations from the Krama textual sources in Maheśvarānanda's book justifies to the existence of a powerful Krama presence in medieval Cidambaram. Maheśvarānanda rightly says that the Krama system is esoteric (*rahasyam*), for it deals with 'impenetrable void, which lies within the heart'. Here the ultimate goal of worship of the temple-body concentrates on reaching the space of pure consciousness expressed by terms such as *vyoman*, *kha* and *ambara*; these terms are employed to designate spatial vastness, unbounded emptiness, the open sky. It is then, the inexplicable sky of consciousness that underlines the Krama's envisioning of the final limit of yogic experience. This idea of gaining entry into the sky of consciousness is associated primarily with the practices that take support of the sensory experience. The rays of cognitive energy that abide externally and internally as the senses are mounted on the simultaneous activity of expansion and contraction. When the senses are led with force towards expansion, reaching the abodeless sky of consciousness, they are[31] called "the rays" because they are in a state of expansion, like the rays of the sun. Similarly, when the senses are forcefully withdrawn from the objects of the senses, they also reach the sky of consciousness: 'once withdrawn through the force of consciousness (*sāhasa*), that group of twelve (senses) become tranquil, and in the state of energized union, reside in the wheel of the fourth state, in the form of the vast, waveless sky of consciousness.[32] The senses, thus, operate in

[31] *MP* (A) 85, trans. M. Dyczkowski

[32] *yastaṃ saṃhṛtya sahasā praśāntā dīptayogagāḥ [-yogamāḥ] |*

two ways: internal and external. While they are extrovert, they are engaged in comprehension of the external objectivity; and while introvert, they return back to the subjective consciousness turning away from objectivity. In both instances, the senses provide the ground for the experience of the supreme 'fourth state' (*turya*) characterized by the sky of consciousness.

In Maheśvarānanda's exposition, this yogic praxis whose intended purpose is to reach the sky of consciousness involves construction of the "gestural bodies" or "postures" (*mūdra*s). *Mudrā* is considered to be the corporeal 'sign' or 'stamp' denoting a particular state of consciousness associated with practices that involve the body postures, hand gestures and mental techniques. In his definition of '*mudrā*' Abhinavagupta avers: it is this that bestows '*ra*' happiness or joy '*mud*'. *Mudrā* is a tool by means of which an adept attains the fourth state (*turya*) of the supreme sky of consciousness. *Mudrā* literally 'seals' the acts of the organs of senses, feet and hands to reach a single, archetypal, iconographic posture that is an expression of the supreme reality. Among the *mudrā*s that lead to the immersion in the sky of consciousness described by Maheśvarānanda is the "Skeleton Posture" (Karaṅkiṇī). The name stems from the word *karaṅka* in a meaning of the 'skeleton'. This gestural body is suitable for casting off the sense of duality caused by the senses and the body. Quoting from the *Cidgaganacandrikā*, the Krama text, which most probably belongs to the Cidambaram textual tradition, Maheśvarānanda writes, thus:

> O Mother, these rays of consciousness internal and external, are your sensory bodies. Together they constitute the gross body. You are Karaṅkiṇī you lead this, along with the second subtle body beyond, to the sky of consciousness.

The passage clearly points out towards the technique of experience that makes use of the inner mental organs (*jñānendriya*) and outer organs of action (*karmendriya*)

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*nistaraṅgamahāvyomarūpiṇyas turyacakragāḥ* || *MP* (A) 213 || trans. M. Dyczkowski.

constituting the "gross body" to reach "subtle body" located "beyond" in the sky of consciousness. How such "subtle body" predicated by its ethereal constitution is accomplished? In order to answer this question, we must look at Maheśvarānanda's 'yogic manual' that provides us with a concrete yogic technique of experience (which he borrows from the *Vijñānabhairava*) that aims at dissolving the distinction between one's own body-senses apparatus and the self in order to reach the void or the sky of consciousness.

(1) Sitting on a soft seat one should hold one's hands and feet without support. By maintaining this position the individual mind will reach a state of supreme fullness of consciousness.
(2) Sitting on a seat one should place the arms in a curved position, and fixing the mind on the void under the arm—pits, it will merge in that <void> and attain peace.
(3) Fixing one's gaze without blinking on an external <beautiful> form, and making the mind supportless in a short time, one will attain Shiva.
(4) Keeping the tongue in the centre of the wide open mouth one should fix the mind there. Uttering the letter 'h' mentally, one will be dissolved in peace.
(5) Either sitting on a seat or lying on bed one should meditate on the body as being supportless, within the moment one is liberated from mental dispositions.[33]

The "Skeleton Posture" engages outer organs of action and inner mental organs in the practice that aims at reaching the state of being supportless that simultaneously marks the point of immersion into the void of the sky of consciousness. Yet another important *mudrā* whose intended purpose is congruent with reaching the sky of consciousness is *bhairavīmudrā*, known also as the *kramamudrā*. This importance of this *mudrā* is justified by its inbuilt esotericism insofar as according to Maheśvarānanda, 'it

[33] *VBh*, v. 78-82, trans. Swami Lakshmanjoo

is hidden in all the Tantras'. Quoting from the *Cidgaganacandrikā*, Maheśvarānanda says:

> O Uma, she who bears the six knots and is on the unobscured plane, the sky of consciousness is you Bhairavī. She who divided up all things and whose form is the vibration of consciousness sustains the mass of duality. It plays the manifestation, opening up the universe.

The *bhairavīmudrā* or the *kramamudrā* is a condition in which all phenomena are seen to arise from and fall back into the sky of consciousness (*cidākāśa*) like reflections (*pratibimba*) appearing and disappearing in a mirror. It is empirically realized by a *yogī* who whether gazing outwards or inwards, perceives all to be only consciousness. In the *kramamudrā*, a *yogī* first enters into the introverted state and enters into the outer external cycle of consciousness, first from outside he goes in, from inside he goes outside, and this movement of going in and out takes the position by the strength of absorption (*samāveśa*) and not by the effort of a *yogī*. The one who experiences this state of *samāveśa* experiences this whole universe melting into nothingness in the great sky of god-consciousness (*cid gaganam saṃlīyate*). Although he opens his eyes and perceives that everything is melting into that state of emptiness. This is the state when the great body of Bhairava is accomplished.

Similar yogic practice concentrated on reaching the great sky of consciousness is described by Kṣemarāja in his commentary on the *Spandakarikā* where it marks the accomplishment of a fully awakened *yogī.* When the incoming breath and the ongoing breath meet at the centre of the heart and being merged in the central channel of *suṣumnā*, they start the upward movement, they finally get to the point when upon abandoning the sphere of the body, they get dissolved in the great sky of consciousness which transcends the entire range of the body and in which the entire objective reality is completely dissolved. The *yogī* who has attained to the state of the great sky of consciousness, if he is slack, he experiences it like a deep sleep and thus remains stupefied, or he is called the deluded one (*muḍha*). However, a *yogī* who is not slack and he does not tilt back from the great sky

of consciousness, is called fully enlightened (*prabuddha*) and he is not overcome by the darkness of delusion.

## Conclusion

Maheśvarānanda project of discovering dancing Śiva in the ritual sphere comprised of one's own temple-body, captures a tone of Kashmiri Śaiva argument in which effectiveness of the ritual is proved when the worshipper experiences everything within and without as Śiva's dancing performance. Thus, as Abhinavagupta, Maheśvarānanda's guru, says, the worshipper has an understanding that he, God, worships God, on God, by means of God, for the sake of God (Sanderson 1995: 49 citing Abhinavagupta). The ostensible purpose of the ritual action is to experience and evoke in the worshipper a salvatory awareness of reality as he performs it (Sanderson 1995: 24-25). The correctness and adequacy of this view is asserted in the textual example taken from, Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka* which equates dancing with the liberating experience of becoming Śiva. The result of worship culminates in the unfolding and expansion of Śiva's power experienced in the cosmos as well as in the adept's mind and body as he identifies with it. The *Tantrāloka* says thus:

> Anyone who devotes himself entirely to the practice of unity (through the constant repetition of the act of worship ceases to see himself as separate) and will experience this universe suddenly and overwhelmingly revealing itself in its true nature, seeming to dance ecstatically in the violent impact of penetration by its unbounded Śiva's nature. What further goal remains for those who offer worship only to attain this trance in which they penetrate the universe as Śiva in his fullest expansion? They are already fulfilled. They are already Śivas.[34]

Several topics can be delimited in due, thus:

[34] *Tantrāloka* 15.148-51, 153-55b, quoted in Sanderson A., 'Meaning in Tantric Ritual', *Essais sur le Rituel III*, ed. Blondeau A.M., Shipper K., Louvain Paris, 1996, p. 49.

a) worship as a practice of unity: worshipper becoming Śiva
b) sudden, unexpected 'insight' into true reality of a dancing universe
c) dancing as a goal of worship which induces trance, forceful penetration and fullest expansion

Worship, so conceived, creates a vivid parallelism between ritual and Śiva that culminates in the ontological uniformity of 'being dance'. The transformative effect of the ritual is to become Śiva and, thus, to have an experience of a dancing universe from within and without. In this euphoric trance resulting in an all-inclusive expansion, the realization comes that everything is always 'now'.

# PART 3

## *Performance as the Cultural Paradigm of Indian Religious and Philosophical Traditions*

Part 3 of this book is a reflection on ways in which the religious and philosophical traditions of India is informed by a performance paradigm. Situating Indian religion and philosophy in the realm of performance, I refer to the fact that in India one *experiences* one's religion and philosophy not conceptualizes it. Religious worship of *bhakti* is the best example of this kind insofar as people do and experience *bhakti* through their sense organs. *Bhakti* is enacted because it puts the sense organs into actions that results in the ritual performance, when the tongue is singing hymns praising the Lord, and the eyes are engaged in the visual icon though the act of spectating. The devotee experiences the ecstasy of the deity's touch while drinking the nectar of immortality. *Bhakti* is performative in a sense in which it takes place at the juncture of the material culture (icons of the deities, places of pilgrimage) and the bodily experience (feelings, thoughts, emotions). *Bhakti* worship is also enacted through the performative behavior of the devotees who dance, sing, weep, etc. worshipping the deity.

On the other hand, Indian philosophy, when perceived through the lens of performance metaphor is recognized as a theory of spectator open to a variety of subject positioning vis-à-vis the empricial world. In the field of Indian philosophy, performance paradigm rests upon a conceptual system that sees the enacted or performative form of knowledge which is both

internally accessible in one's own experience as *jīva* and which is itself a part of a larger metaphysical entity, Brahman or Śiva. The Brāhmaṇical philosophies of Advaita Vedānta and Sāṃkhya account for the ironic distance that separates the spectator from the phenomenal world of experience. The Brāhmaṇical spectator (*sākṣin*) is the ascetic, solitary, immobile and desireless seer that installs the theory of a purely passive spectator and its metaphysical unrelatedness to the phenomenal world. Here, an event of saving knowledge or liberation is equated with the isolation and authority of a spectator position. By contrast, Kashmiri Śaivism displaces spectator-consciousness with dancer-body-consciousness in which agency as a performative modality of life-experience is recognized. For Kashmiri Śaivites, the one who attained the coveted status of liberation-while-alive dances the world and this dance is conveyed by the image of Śiva-the dancer. Within these competing discourses of Indian philosophy, we encounter the third alternative of the performative mode of knowledge-process namely, the aesthetic theories of Bharata and Abhinavagupta which offer new ways of spiritual and aesthetic exaltation of the spectator that remained at the core of medieval courtly life. The aesthetic spectatorship presupposed theoretical shift from a passive *sākṣin* embedded in disinterested looking to a pluralistic, changing and interactive *rasika* who relishes transpersonal identification with the spectacle in a plenitude of beatific repose.

# SIX

# Performing *Bhakti*
# From Cidambaram to Kashmir

> Homage to the one wearing as raiment
> His own lustrous halo of radiant beams,
> Bedecked with a glittering garland of skulls
> For the festival of dance at the end of the world.
>
> —Utpaladeva, 'Śivastotrāvallī'

The Bhakti Movement had its origins in the works espoused by Vaiṣṇava Āḻvārs[1] 'those immersed in God' (6th-9th century CE) and Śaiva Nāyaṇārs (5th-10th century CE) and rose into importance in medieval Tamil Nadu wherefrom it began to spread quickly to the north. Bhakti protagonists 'elaborated egalitarian doctrine that transcended the Brāhmaṇical caste system and encouraged individuals to seek personal union with the divine' (Bentley 1993:120). Karen Pechilis Prentiss (1999:6) defines *bhakti* as a 'theology of embodiment', which implies participation in God (*bhakti*, derived from Sanskrit verbal root '*bhaj*' meaning 'to participate'). Such participation in God is meant to include all aspects of human activity in the world, in a sense in which, a *bhakta* is expected to devote his whole being to God, reflecting upon Him with his mind and heart. In its emphasis on the 'theology of embodiment', the Bhakti Movement reacted against 'cold' traditions of Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism that

[1] For the exposition of the *bhakti* poetry of the Vaiṣṇava Āḻvārs, see Hardy 2001.

propagated the ascetic ideal of world-renouncer. In the words of Kamil Zvelebil (1973:199):

> ....in comparison with the decayed, deteriorated Southern Buddhism and Jainism we see in the Tamil Hindu revival [of bhakti] the triumph of emotion over intellect, of the concrete over the abstract, of the acceptance of life over its ascetic denial, of something near and homely against something alien and distant, and, above all, the acceptance of positive love against cold morality or intellectually coloured compassion.

The Bhakti Movement's disagreement with the ascetic traditions of Buddhism and Jainism had two grounds. First, metaphysical attitude towards reality, which was no longer to be denied, but rather appreciated as the manifestation of a theistic God enshrined in a concrete temple. Second, worship of God had an ecstatic character that clearly contrasted with 'cold' practices of self-denial embedded in the spiritual ideal of world-renouncer. To a great extent, the ecstatic type of *bhakti* worship relied upon a total psychophysical engagement of a *bhakta* expressed in his singing, dancing, and weeping which Indira Peterson has called 'spontaneous, unstructured ways of worship' (Peterson 1991:42-43). The motifs of ecstatic dancing, singing, and weeping recur in *bhakti* poems in the context of the *bhakta*'s 'emotional outpouring of love to God' (Yocum 1973:4). The emotional response signified by feeling of love towards God became the central motif of *bhakti* poetry. This total psychophysical engagement of a *bhakta* points out toward the performative dimension of devotional worship.

This chapter examines performative strategies of *bhakti* by focusing on the two different Śaiva traditions: Tamil and Kashmiri. Performative practices are embedded in both traditions, both possessing discrete ontologies generated by different concepts of the self and of the ultimate reality. By juxtaposing these two Śaiva traditions, I wish to analyze ideological and experiential similarities and differences in the devotion to Śiva, thereby illustrating diversity within the Śiva *bhakti* model. In my exposition of the Tamil Śaiva *bhakti*, I limit myself to the earliest Tamil Śaiva saints (*nāyaṉār*), known as 'the three' (*mūvar*), Tiruñāṉacampantar (Campantar), Tirunāvukkaracar (Appar),

and Cuntaramūrti (Nampi Ārūrar) who are dated to 7th-9th century. Their works, collectively called the *Tēvāram* (Tamil *teva* 'god', *aram* 'garland') is a collection of first seven volumes of the *Tirumurai*—the twelve volume anthology of the Tamil Śaiva devotional songs which were defined as a canon during the reign of Rājarāja I. In our exposition of the Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti*, we will take recourse to the 9th century Kashmiri Śaiva philosopher Utpaladeva[2] whose *Śivastotrāvalī* is perhaps the most beautifully executed employment of *bhakti* in the Kashmiri Śaiva literature. The *Śivastotrāvalī* was commented upon by Kṣemarāja (11th century). The choice of Utpaladeva's *Śivastotrāvalī* as an exemplary model for the Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti* is determined by the use of this text by Maheśvarānanda. Maheśvarānanda often uses quotations from the *Śivastotrāvalī* thus it appears that this text had remained in circulation among the Kashmiri Śaivites of Cidambaram.

**Bhakti Poems: Spontaneity of Religious Utterance**

Looking at *bhakti* poems in terms of a specific technique of literary composition, it becomes clear that they developed a special communicative style for religious expression that distinguished it from prior literary genres. In the devotional hymns of Śaiva preceptors, subjectivity, visibly foregrounded in the first-person narrator has taken on increasing importance. In the words of Harris (2009:14), "For the first time in the history of Indian religious literature, do we witness authors revealing for their audiences their personal, subjective experiences on the quest for spiritual realization". The first person narrations are very personal accounts firmly grounded in the experiential and emotional hardships of daily life. Since the poems were written from the standpoint of existential troubles of a *bhakta*, they

[2] Utpaladeva (9th century) whose *Īśvārapratyabhijñākārika* 'Stanzas on the Recognition of the Lord' built on the germinal ideas of Somānanda's *Śivadṛṣṭi* represents a full-fledged edifice of Pratyabhijñā philosophy.

could be more instructive and accessible to the wider Tamil Śaiva community because they taught about the human condition, providing stories and images from daily life. Often, the tone of these poems is bitter as it arises from an emphasis on the 'human inadequacy' (Prentiss 1999:50). Because a primary goal of religious *bhakti* was cultivation of personal relation between the worshipper and the worshipped gods, often the oral transmission of these poems would occur through singing. Singing was accompanied by dancing. Dancing occupied a prominent position in a subjective sphere of *bhakti* as it purported to negotiate a non-entropic space of a deeply personal religious experience: 'I will come to you, dancing and singing, at your command'[3], 'Singing of the Lord, I came smiling for joy, dancing,'[4] says Appar in his devotional hymns to Naṭarāja.

*Bhakti* poems, at their core, were supposed to be composed spontaneously, not crafted. In terms of literary standards, this purported spontaneity was revolutionary, creating a distinct genre of literature. Indeed, as we learn from the commentary of Kṣemarāja, the verses of the *Śivastotrāvalī* are spontaneous utterances (*muktakā*) collected by Utpaladeva's disciples: Śrīrāma, Ādityarāja and Śrīviśvāvartta after Utpaladeva's death. His disciples give us a direct access to the emotionally trying spiritual life of Utapaldeva evoking emotions of longing, love, and anxiety. These deeply emotional images of inner struggle interwined with the images of supreme ecstasy became famous among the Kashmiri Śaivites. Singing of Utpaladeva's poems was regarded as a type of purification that helped a devotee to reach Śiva (Bailly 1990:5). According to Madhurāja-yogin, a disciple of Abhinavagupta, *stotrāvalī* metaphorized as the celestial river purifies the soul of man "as soon as it passes through the *tīrtha* of the ear and flows on to the throat"[5] where Śiva himself resides. In

[3] *Tevaram*, IV. 23 Appar, tr. John Loud, in: *A Gift of Tamil: Translations from Tamil Literature in Honor of K. Paramasivam*, ed. Norman Cutler and Paula Richman, Manohar 1992, American Institute of Indian Studies, pp. 87-89

[4] Appar IV.3. in Peterson, p. 300

[5] Bailly, p. 25.

the Tamil Śaiva tradition, on the other hand, the *bhakti* poems put emphasis on singing and making pilgrimage to the many Śaiva temples across the Tamil country. As Peterson (p. 331) pointed out, each song of praise (Tamil: *tōttiram*, Skt. *stotra*) was a core offering of worship inextricably intertwined with a direct visual engagement with the temple icon.

One of the most important integral components of *bhakti* is Śiva's grace (Tamil: *aruḷ*, Skt. *śaktipāta*). Out of five cosmic acts of Śiva, *bhakti* focuses on the last of Śiva's acts, the act of grace (*anugraha*). The act of becoming servant or a devotee is an act of Śiva's grace. Without seeking to minimize the differences between Tamil and Kashmiri positions on grace, it may be noted that representatives of these two traditions frame 'grace' in very similar ways. In the Tamil Śiva bhakti, a poet usually complains to the god that he still awaits his grace to descend upon him. For the Tamil Śaiva poets, grace exists, but it exists only in the future tense; it is something yet to be attained: 'Father, you have not given me your grace…', 'Master, still you have not graced me', 'You don't grant grace to your devotees', 'Lord, favor me with your unfailing grace', occur often in Tamil bhakti poems. In a similar manner, the Kashmiri Śaiva emphasis on the gift of grace or the descent of power (*śaktipāta*) is framed against the anguish of the mystic in which the poet addresses Śiva in the following words: 'what happened that you delay in bestowing grace on me?'.[6] In the *Tantrāloka* (chap. 13), Abhinavagupta discusses the concept of grace (*śaktipāta*, *anugraha*) saying that grace is hard to receive (*durlabha*) and that God is not obliged to bestow grace, he is independent. Moreover, *śaktipāta* is an unmerited grace, it does not depend on one's own *karman*. Grace is something spontaneous, it can happen at all times and in all places. Intrinsic possibility of being graced by Śiva remains at the core of the *bhakti* poems.

[6] *Śivastotravāllī,* 13.11, trans. Bailly.

## Serving the Lord: Performative Acts of Bondage in Tamil Śiva Bhakti

One of the interesting trends of Śiva-*bhakti* poems is the one in which the *bhakta* is portrayed as a slave or a servant (Tamil: *toṇṭar*, Skt. *dāsa*) of Śiva. Some scholars hold an opinion that it was, in fact, the lord-servant relationship existing at the nucleus of medieval feudal society that became reduplicated into the deity-devotee relationship in *bhakti* tradition. The devotee very often addresses the deity as the lord or the master placing himself in relation of affective subordination to the feet of the lord-deity, in the position of a slave, or a lowly dog.[7] Still, the theme of bondage seems to entail different implications for each of these Śaiva traditions. Central to the Śaiva conception of bondage is a distinction between the bondage that presupposes ontological dualism between the devotee and the Lord typical of the Tamil Śaivism, and the bondage based on non-dualistic presuppositions characteristic to Kashmiri Śaivism. While the former type of bondage extorts servile obedience to the feet of the Lord, the latter portrays servitude as a form of freedom that is acquired through a total absorption into Śiva.

In the Tamil Śaiva tradition, the recurrent theme of *bhakti* poetry is bondage understood as the highest objective in life, more desirable than wealth or liberation. A poet often adopts the tone of plaintiveness to indicate that he is totally dependent in his existence on the act of service: In the words of Cuntarar, "when I can fearlessly serve you, what more could I want?".[8] 'Bondage' alone is understood as the bestowal of Śiva's grace: "Father, you have not given me your grace or made me your bonded slave unwavering in my thoughts. What can I do?"[9] The *mūvar* poems

[7] For example, Appar addresses himself in terms of a slave, a lowly dog. Cf. Appar IV.113.6. in Peterson, p. 209.

[8] Cuntarar VII.15. in Peterson, p. 229.

[9] *Tevaram*, IV. 23 Appar, tr. John Loud, in: *A Gift of Tamil: Translations from Tamil Literature in Honor of K. Paramasivam*, ed. Norman Cutler and Paula Richman, Manohar 1992, American Institute of Indian Studies, p. 87-89.

oscillate between a dialectical tension of serving the Lord and of being saved by his grace, the latter marked off as the exclusive prerogative of Śiva: "his task is to save even this lowly servant. My task is only to serve".[10] The idea of bondage portrayed as the outcome of Śiva's grace is especially visible in the legend of Cuntarar who, as the story recounts, was approached by Śiva himself and claimed by him to become god's slave. Cuntarar recalls this event in which Śiva cries, "Be my slave'".[11] Bondage ties the person to the master in an act of enslavement that presupposes the sole reliance upon the Lord who has enslaved him, 'in everlasting bondage to you, I became your slave spurning out all masters'.[12] Serving the divine rests on a strictly theistic concern that presupposes an act of total subjection to the master, but it also offers collective representations of normative assumptions about religious praxis. In this regard, serving the divine can be seen as a performative act, for it presupposes 'doing' which involves the whole plethora of performative practices, such as dancing, singing, accompanied by a strong emotional component that is melting in love which drives affectionate expressions, e.g. shedding tears. The description of the servants "who dance, and sing songs to the proper beat, who weep and melt in love for God and gather to worship him in every way" often occurs in *bhakti* poems. These performative acts pervaded by emotional intensity provide an excellent mechanism for demonstrating rich and varied ways in which the body-mind apparatus may be used to articulate and activate a complex system of religious service to the master that implicitly entails bondage.

The devotees who know how to weep,
to dance and sing and rise again,
fall at the father's feet to worship,
they are worthy servants of the Lord.[13]
Dance, lovers of Śiva,

[10] Appar V.133.9, in Peterson, p. 239,
[11] Cuntarar VII.62.5, in Peterson, p. 303.
[12] Cuntarar VII.95. in Peterson, p. 311
[13] Campantar I.35.3, in Peterson, p. 257.

become devotees of the Lord,
crown yourselves with dust from his feet![14]

In both examples, performative acts of service appear in the context of paying homage to the Lord's feet. Beginning with *Ṛgveda* 10.90, the famous Vedic hymn of creation, the feet were used to illustrate the lowest class of social stratification, the class of servants. Especially in Indian cultural context, touching the feet is an act of humility and obedience, but here it is also a form of the *bhakta*'s empowerment dressed in the rhetoric of kingship, 'crown yourselves with dust from his feet' urges Cuntarar, thereby pointing out to the implicit paradox of *bhakti* ideology. By serving the Lord, the slave becomes the king and, thus, he gains access to rank and to superior force, to dignity and power. Perhaps even more pronounced and forceful in drawing a distinction between the feudal bondage to the earthly king and religious bondage to the theistic god is given in the passage in which the poet rejects his feudal bondage to the king in favour of the religious bondage to the king-god 'who graciously rules his servants'.

Tears, welling from our eyes like monsoon rains,
proclaim the melting of our stony hearts.
Why need we obey the commands of kings
who ride on elephants?
We are free from bonds.
Our sole duty is joyfully sing
the glory of him who manifests himself
as the moving and the still,
as earth, water, wind, and sky, as the small and the great…
He is the King who rules us, you see!
We are not servants of the king
who commands you and all his troops—we are free from all bonds![15]

'Kingship' was both the pivot and the foundation of social order in medieval times and the king who ruled his subjects was his personification. The Tamil poets inherited ideological focus

[14] Cuntarar VII.22.3. in Peterson, p. 258.
[15] Cuntarar VII.67.5, Peterson, p. 324

of kingship as the symbol of sovereignty but shifted its emphasis from the earthly to sacral domain. In doing so, they retained the recurrent motif of regime but furnished it with a theistic core that replaced the King/God with God/King. The image of feet also suggests other ways of thinking about obedient service, the one that has intense emotional significance. *Bhakti* poems are performative because they concentrate on inner sensations directing emotions, feelings and desires towards an ideal object of love: 'melting in love' is recognized as the highest excellence of *bhakti* ethos and they do it in a way that promotes the power of personal attachment conveyed by images of clinging to the feet of the master or being possessed by the lord's feet. If you won't be attached to me, I will cling to you,[16] says Cuntarar. 'The men…who lift their hands in worship crying, 'possess me' those whose hearts rest in the shade of the feet of your lord…will no longer be perplexed'.[17] Thus, we see in *bhakti* poems blind and overpowering attachment to the master's feet as something more powerful than any of the world's troubles. Here too, the dynamics of attachment emphasizes the primacy of affective and emotional bonds as formative for it is complemented by the notion of possession: Śiva takes possession of devotees subjugating and directing them as he pleases. It also presents us with a complete picture of emotional dependency: 'Melting in a stream of love, run to join him, O heart, perform his loving service every day!'[18] There is a strong formulation of emotional dependency detected in Tamil Śaivism that is captured by a thesis of one-sided love affection that cannot be reciprocated.

Though you won't love me,
I will love you still,
for did I not once become your slave
so that I might melt in love for you?[19]

[16] Cuntarar VII.15. Peterson, p. 229.
[17] Campantar I.86.7, Peterson, p. 257
[18] Cuntarar VII.14 Peterson, p. 237
[19] Cuntarar VII.15. in Peterson, p. 229.

Being a slave, therefore, presupposes not only a service dedicated to non-human agency expressed by performative acts of services connected with the involvement of the body, dancing, singing, weeping, etc. but also an evocative and emotional attachment that stresses the necessity of emotional surrender that calls upon the performative aspect of the interior structure of the human being. 'Melting in love' is a performative act of inner surrender insofar as it is an affective tie that fastens devotees in emotional bondage and encourages other devotees to conform their behavior to this ideal by showing the way of religious life that is an idealized version of feudally embedded mentality fixed in social arrangements of hierarchy as it actually existed. Performative and emotional acts of service: 'clinging to the feet' or 'melting in love' express obedient submission, both ontological and emotional as a means of acknowledging the superior power, while simultaneously showing one's subservient position of a slave or a servant. Implicit in the conceptualization of bondage or slavery is a theoretical framework of dualism that informs the writings of Tamil Śiva *bhakti* poets. The *bhakta* never becomes Śiva, he can only be possessed by Śiva or be his servant.

The Tamil Śiva *bhakti* poems were committed to investigating the nature of religious self that focused on the idea that human existence is pervaded by anxiety and anguish. Related to anxiety was a pessimistic outlook on the human condition in general. In this sense alone, *bhakti* poems can be said to be existential. The *bhakta*'s spin on existentialism is a visible pronouncement of conflicting forces present in the individual being, the purity of the heart "melts in love for a handsome god"[20] on the one hand, and, the foul body inhabited by enemies-senses, which block such love, on the other. The *bhakti* poems present us with a notion of the body as something impure, represented in derogatory terms as filthy and diseased. This prompts the understanding of the world based on the sensory experience as illusion. As a result, the Lord's grace and the phenomenal world available to the human being are portrayed as total opposites. The only way to escape

[20] Appar V.128, in Peterson, p. 210

the world's illusion is to engage in worship and pilgrimage to the sacred places.

Life is an illusion, all things end in dust.
The sea of birth is a waste,
the body is a trap made of hunger and disease.
Go bathe in holy places, plunge in the Godavari,
reach enlightenment in the holy hills.[21]
You are my mother and my father.
O Śankara, I want to love you forever.
The heart is willing, but the five enemies
who dwell in this burdensome body won't let me join you.
I fear there is nothing left for me,
but the illusion that is the world.[22]

The rigid separation of the heart and the body as utterly distinct kinds of being, prominent in some *bhakti* poems as well as the metaphysical dichotomy reinforcing the ontological status of the world in negative terms, as an illusion, urges us to define the religious self of the *bhakta* as the self that authorizes disappointment with the limitations of human existence. To use existential terms, human existence cannot be abstracted from its being-in-the-world because the fact of being situated in the world is a part of the ontological structure of that existence. The *bhakta* is continuously confronted with his own limitations arising from being situated in the body and there is a gap between the purity of the heart that yearns for union with God and the impurity of the body-senses that prevents such union. What is striking in these poems is the religious attitude of *bhakti* that allows for this heavy existential realization through which the *bhakta's* affective life becomes more pronounced. When the *bhakta* stands face-to-face with his own limitations as the human being situated in the body, the apparent reality of 'human inadequacy' is revealed. Especially, in Appar, the display of human inadequacy is represented by the use of emotions. He says thus:

[21] Cuntarar VII.78. in Peterson, p. 158,
[22] Campantar I.50.7, in Peterson, p. 251,

When I consider this vile human life,
wasted in filling up the stomach
which is like the bottomless pit of the sea,
I cry out in pain. Five fools dwell inside me,
driving me to despair—I, your servant, cannot live with these….
There is nothing to hold together,
this worm-infested frame covered with skin, with nine leaky holes.
Five rogues sit within and torment me.
Utterly ruined, I cannot live with them anymore.[23]

Appar's description of a human body as the "worm-infested frame" equipped with five sense organs represented as the fools heightens the drama of the inner conflict filled with deeply negative emotional states of pain, disgust, fear and despair that stand in opposition to grace. Appar consistently intensifies this inner conflict between the need to reject his body-senses and his inability or weakness to do it, saying that the five (senses) 'destroy the refuge I have found in you'[24] and 'I have failed to subdue the five senses'.[25] 'I am mere offal, a base dog, filthy rogue who clings to this foul body full of holes, unaware of my true refuge. What shall I, a blind man who can't see the light, grasp for support?'.[26] These are emotional states that keep him stuck in his own situatedness of the human body subjected to death. There is only one way to escape the anguish of the human condition: grace. Yet, don't be afraid, (says Campantar), faint from the world's illusion, for you will be saved if you worship Arur'.[27] Grace that is alone capable of releasing the human being from the anguish of taking birth in the human body, accomplished through the practices that transform the body into the vehicle for worship. This idea is given in the following poem:

I beg you, good hear, if you seek release,
think only of my Lord's holy feet.

[23] Appar IV.52, in Peterson, p. 253.
[24] Appar IV.97.3. in Peterson, p. 252.
[25] Appar IV.54. in Peterson, p. 254.
[26] Appar IV.69.1. in Peterson, p. 252.
[27] Campantar II.215, in Peterson, p. 252.

Mouth, always sing the good fame
of the sweet ambrosia.
Eyes, always look upon the Lord alone
that he might show his grace.
O Mind, offer fresh flowers
only to the majestic holy feet of the King
who helps us to overcome the fear of Death.
Tongue, speak the praise….[28]

The internal engagement of the body is particularly noticeable in this passage. The body is capable of being engaged in worshipping Śiva through mental and sensory concentration. Eyes, mind and tongue performing their respective functions of looking, thinking and speaking seem to place the idea of worship at the extreme level of embodiment that is so paradoxically inconsistent with the previous derogatory description of bodily existence. Here, the poet finally recognizes that worship is embodied in a sense in which it actively engages the sensory functions to the dedicated service to God. Still, the most important among the sense organs in the worship of Śiva, except for the tongue singing devotional hymns, is the eye. At the centre of *bhakti* is the act of seeing. A devotee enters into a 'ritualized visuality' in which profane modes of viewing are substituated by religious spectatorship. The Śiva *bhakti* poets consciously equate the devotee viewer's status with the spectatorial gaze for which Naṭarāja performs, thus locating the event of religious worship within a performative space:

When shall I see the glorious dance
he performs in the great hall of Tillai city,
the mighty axe, the fire blazing in his hand,
the sound of cymbals played
by devotees singing his praise?[29]

Lord, favor me with your unfailing grace!
Open the door, let me see you with my eyes![30]

[28] Campantar II.176. in Peterson, p. 254.
[29] Cuntarar VII.84 in Peterson, p. 106
[30] Appar V.124. in Peterson, p. 297

An act of spectating is rooted in the actual religious experience of grace that gives assurance about God's actual presence and validity to one's spiritual practice. Within the religious hierarchy of sense perceptions, the act of spectating that focuses on Naṭarāja's dancing body is placed at the center of worship. The one who sees God feels that he has been blessed with the favour of grace. In this context, to seize Naṭarāja's dancing feet is equated with the gift of grace that will never depart again:

To see you was my only thought.
You entered my heart,
and I seized your dancing feet,
you cannot leave me now…[31]

The prominence given to the eyes in the Tamil Śiva *bhakti* points out to the fact that the primary sense organs through which the transmission of grace could occur are the eyes. The eyes are the vehicle through which the divine force operates in a sense in which grace is transmitted through the eyes. The spectatorial gaze, so conceived, fractures the illusion of selfhood, and collapses the rigid division between spectator and spectacle. In the process of disallowing the illusion of selfhood, the spectatorial gaze opens up subjectivity of a devotee to other possible agencies. Rather than being passively sutured into the spectatorial gaze of ironic detachment typical for the Advaita Vedānta and Sāṃkhya (see chap. 7), the devotee becomes possessed, infiltrated with the divine power that brings into play the world of madness. If the eyes are the transmitter of the divine power, the heart is its actual dwelling place, therefore, the poet says, 'having gone mad, I babble like a fool. I cannot hold in my heart the god who is all the goodness that dwells in me'.[32]

## Abiding in the Body of God in the Kashmiri Śaiva Bhakti

If in the Tamil Śaiva *bhakti*, god dwells in the heart of a devotee, in the Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti*, the devotee abides in the body of

[31] Appar IV.20.1. in Peterson, p. 227
[32] Appar IV.79. in Peterson, p. 224

god. The fundamental difference between the two traditions lies, therefore, in the point of access to the transcendent reality that implicitly suggests different perspectives and contexts. For the Tamil Śaiva *bhakti*, the heart is the place of purity, while the body-senses complex is the place of impurity.[33] In many instances, the God enters the devotee's heart making it *his* dwelling place. The God, then, melts the stony heart of the devotee and subsequently possesses him. From now on, the devotee is ruled by Śiva; their relationship is based on reworkings of the feudal pattern: the master-slave relationship. By contrast, in the Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti*, the devotee merges into the body of Śiva. The aim of *bhakti* is precisely the realization of one's own essential identity with Śiva that takes place *in* the body and *through* the body. Ontologically, the body of a devotee is a structural duplication of the cosmic body that belongs to Śiva himself. To properly understand the ways in which the *bhakta* abides in the cosmic body of Śiva, we must first provide a conceptual structure of the body teachings delineated by the Kashmiri Śaiva philosophers, especially Maheśvarānanda. It will give us a theoretical background for a spiritual model of *bhakti* explored in the later part of this chapter.

## Cosmic Body of Śiva

The problem of embodiment viewed in the context of the alleged relationship between the body and mind, matter and spirit, substance and the self, spurred one of the most fundamental philosophical debates that dominated the scene in the intellectual history of the world. At the outset, it is important to mention that this philosophical debate rested on different presuppositions in the culturally determined traditions of India and the West. In the

[33] This negative attitude towards the body raises the question about the influence from adjacent religious traditions, probably, mostly from the ascetic traditions of Buddhism and Jainism, which promoted devaluation of the body. One could also consider the influence from the Upaniṣads, especially with regard to the 'heart teaching' (*dahara-vidyā*) that made heart the locus of communion between the deeper self (*ātman*) and the transcendent absolute (*brahman).*

West, the discussion was deeply rooted in the Cartesian mind-body split that afforded a secure footing for the distinctively dualistic orientation that separated the body from the mind. In India, on the other hand, the idea that the mind is distinct from the body was never really entertained. Indian thinkers seemed to aspire for a more lofty vision in which the mind-body complex conceived as the unitary psycho-physical aggregate was positioned against the true, universal self, variously termed as Ātman, Puruṣa, Brahman, etc. As a matter of fact, Indian traditions drew "an ontological line between the body-mind, which has both physical and mental characteristics, and the self, which transcends both the physical and the mental."[34] Perhaps, the paradigmatic example of this ontological dualism is found in Sāṃkhya where *puruṣa* (self-consciousness) and *prakṛti* (phenomenal realm of matter that includes the mind-body complex) belong to the two different ontological realms.[35] Unlike the dualistic systems before that propounded a sharp distinction between the mind-body complex and the Self, Kashmiri Śaivites adopt a non-dualistic approach justifying the homology between the two. Kashmiri Śaiva originality stands out in perceiving the self-consciousness and the mind-body complex as consubstantial. In an attempt to resolve the contradiction between the realm of the embodied existence comprised of matter and the immaterial, formless self, the Kashmiri Śaiva writers, like our Maheśvarānanda postulate that there is only one reality identified with universal self-consciousness, which exists also as the material substance of the objective world. On the basis of this premise the matter that constitutes all embodied existence is regarded as a condensed form of the universal self-consciousness. In the Kashmiri Śaiva outlook, the materiality of the universal self-consciousness,

[34] Koller, John, "Human Embodiment: Indian Perspective", In: Thomas P. Kasulis, with Roger T. Ames and Wimal Dissanayake eds. *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice*, 45-68, Albany: SUNY 1993, pp. 46-7.

[35] On the problem of embodiment in Sāṃkhya, see Larson, Gerald James, "Āyurveda and the Hindu Philosophical Systems", In: Thomas P. Kasulis, with Roger T. Ames and Wimal Dissanayake eds. *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice*, 103-21. SUNY 1993.

known in theological terms, as Śiva, is woven into the fabric of a metaphysical non-dualism that constitutes the sole basis of the objective world. This overarching view brought Kashmiri Śaiva masters into a closer contact with macro- and micro-design and gave them a new understanding of the psycho-physical cosmos and the human body. To confer material attributes upon self-consciousness appears, at first, paradoxical, since it sharply opposes the traditional Sāṃkhya dichotomy between the principle of immaterial *puruṣa* and material *prakṛti* denying its very possibility. However, the perspective rapidly changes if we follow Maheśvarānanda's argumentation according to which self-consciousness is both fluid (*cid-rasa*) and solid (*cid-ghana*). The qualities of fluidity and solidity attributed to self-consciousness are employed to designate the processes of cosmic evolution (beginning with Śiva *tattva* and ending with Earth *tattva*) and involution (beginning with Earth *tattva* and ending with Śiva *tattva*). The progressive development from fluidity to solidity is described in terms of 'solidification', 'coagulation', 'thickening' designated by a technical term '*āśyāna*'. *Āśyāna* is the process by means of which the subtle energy of self-consciousness assumes the solid form of matter, but even in that thickened mass of matter, self-consciousness does not lose its nature […].[36] This process is illustrated by a famous simile of the juice of sugarcane thickening into solid sugar without losing its sweetness.

> Just as sugarcane when successively solidified to form a treacle has the same sweetness of sugarcane, so are [different] manifested things just different forms of Śiva's consciousness.[37]
>
> My real form is certainly self-consciousness (*saṃvit*)—transparent, depending on its own.
> That too is just like juice ever associated with thickness of sugar.
> If investigated properly, the most solid thing reaches consciousness.[38]

[36] *PTV*, p. 35.
[37] *PS* 26 quoted in MM, comm. on verse 25.
[38] *Lakṣmitantra* quoted in MM, comm. on verse 25.

The leading premise of Maheśvarānanda's argument in support of materiality of self-consciousness is based on the assertion that self-consciousness is both fluid (*cid-rasa*) and solid (*cid-ghana*). In Maheśvarānanda's understanding, thus, the self-consciousness *is* the cosmic body of Śiva insofar as it is the same self-consciousness that, through the process of progressive solidification acquires the material form that constitutes the cosmos comprised of thirty-six elements (*tattvas*).[39] The *Devīkakrama* refers to this process in the following words: "the nature of that one (universal) self-consciousness is the condensed form (*saṃpiṇḍa*) of thirty-six elements. This is in accord with the dictum: the perceptible is his (Śiva's) body". That means that the whole manifested cosmos is Śiva's body. Similar idea is conveyed by the following verses of the *Śivadṛṣṭi*: "In this way there are 36 elements. He (Śiva) assumes the multitude of heavy forms for the sake of worldly practice. As far as he appears as inert and gross, the mass of earth is constituted".[40] In macrocosmic perspective, therefore, Earth *tattva*, the grossest of all the elements, represents the apogee of the solidification of consciousness (*āśyāna*).[41] In accordance with this view, the entire

[39] Quoting from *Virupakṣapañcaśikā*, Maheśvarānanda says: *I - infinite one, consider my body to be the universe which spreads from Void to Earth through variety of forms and colors.* MM, comm. on verse 29.

[40] *Śivadṛṣṭi* I.32-33. Quoted in MM, comm. on verse 25.

[41] Upon closer examination, however, the above considerations do show that the process of solidification of consciousness has also an experiential, yogic dimension. Maheśvarānanda employs the term *āśyāna* in reference to the yogic practice of *kramamudrā* in which a yogi 'who affects the penetration to external through internal, affects penetration to internal through external.' This statement is not necessarily tautological in character, for, as Kṣemarāja explains in the *Pratyabhijñahṛdaya*: 'in this process there occurs, through assimilation (lit. devouring) of the totality of the external sense-objects into the internal into the highest *citti* plane penetration into the inner or *samaveśa* by the very process of assimilation. Again, there occurs, through the internal a penetration into the external, into the totality of sense objects appearing as 'this' (*idānta*), by the process of externalization (*vāmana*). This penetration --- *praveśa* or *samaveśa* is of the nature of solidification of the essence of *cit*

psycho-physical cosmos, including the human body—is a result of the progressive solidification of consciousness.[42]

In describing the nature of the solidification process, Maheśvarānanda adopts Sāṃkhya's theory of causality (*satkāryavāda*),[43] in conformity with which 'the effect is pre-existent in the cause'.[44] The theory of causality advocates a view about intrinsic connectedness between the creative source-material (*prakṛti*) and its created evolutes (*vikṛti*), even if the properties assigned to the evolutes and the source-material, differ. The *satkāryavāda* was instrumental in bringing about the fact of inherence validating metaphysical uniformity. Needless to say, Maheśvarānanda's reinterpretation of *satkāryavāda* gives rise to a novel feature, inconceivable to the atheistic Sāṃkhya. What is innovative about Maheśvarānanda's reformulation of *satkāryavāda* is the principle of the sentient agent (*kartṛ*) on whom a whole cosmology depends. This sentient agent is precisely Śiva unfolding and pervading each act of the cosmic drama.

> Thus, all worldly practice is connected and it ultimately depends on the causal relation, which is simply the cause and effect. The ultimate cause is Parameśvara, he is a sentient agent (*kartṛ*), it should be accepted [...]. Therefore, the universe is an effect of the creative activity of the Parameśvara, who is a sentient agent (*kartṛ*), this (statement) is dividable into the cause and effect implementing a true meaning of activity and sentient agent.[45]

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(universal consciousness). *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam,* comm. by Kṣemarāja, verse 19, trans. Jaideva Singh, pp. 104-105.

[42] Śiva unfolds himself in the totality of manifestations, principles (*tattvas*), worlds (*bhuvanas*), entities (*bhāvas*) and their respective experients (*pramātras*) that are only a solidified form (*āśyānatārūpa*) of consciousness. Cf. *PHṛ* commentary on v.4 in Singh, p. 55.

[43] *śivatattve pṛthivyādīni sarvāṇyapi satkāryavādamaryādayā 'vatiṣṭhante*

[44] *Saṃkhyakārika* 14: *kāraṇaguṇātmakatvāt* [...] 'The effect has the qualities of the cause'.

[45] *MM* 12, pp. 35.

With respect to the notion of the first and ultimate cause assuming the form of the sentient agent, Maheśvarānanda effected a considerable modification of the traditional Sāṃkhya doctrine of *satkāryavāda*, which denies any possibility of any action on the part of the agent (*puruṣa*), the first cause. Similarly, he argues against the Nyāyā view of the insentient causes by contesting their opinion that in the creation of a pot, the insentient things like a clay, stick and the wheel cannot act as causes, if the potter remains indifferent.[46] It is only the potter who can comprehend and unite all these elements (secondary causes, such as the clay, stick, etc.) for the sake of making a pot. Thus, the first cause *per se* is consciousness, Śiva. For Maheśvarānanda, the variegated plethora of the material world is set in the network of connections pertaining to sentient Śiva. Consequently, the causal relation between the cause and effect is ascertained on the basis of the luminosity of self-consciousness constituting the very nature of both.[47] With regard to the theory of *satkāryavāda*, two different models have emerged: 1) *pariṇāmavāda*—in which the effect is a real transformation of the cause, and, 2) *vivartavāda*—in which the effect is the outward projection of the cause which is not real. The *vivartavāda* model was adopted by Advaita Vedānta that resulted in the illusory world, conceived almost as a mistake on the part of the absolute. The *pariṇāmavāda* was taken up by the Kashmiri Śaivism and resulted in the real world of *māyā.* Thus, according to the Kashmiri Śaiva adoption of *pariṇamāvāda*, the sentient Śiva is both instrumental (*nimitta*) and material (*upadana*) cause of the universe. As a consequence, the entire cosmological process is the evolution of effect from the cause (*pariṇamāvāda*). We have already seen how the subtle self-consciousness, through the progressive solidification, assumes the solid form of matter that results in the cosmic body of Śiva

[46] *IŚP* 2.4.9. therefore, the sovereignty of the potter is the settlement of clay etc. and the process of refinement makes the pot.

[47] 'Therefore, self—luminosity existing internally certainly radiantly dazzles in the luminosity of outer manifestation, it should be accepted. MM, commentary on verse 12.

represented by thirty-six elements. Now we shall explore the ways in which the body of a devotee is a structural duplication the cosmic body that belongs to/is Śiva himself.

## Cosmic Body of a Devotee

According to the verses of the *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*, quoted by Maheśvarānanda:

> As the Lord (Śiva) has the entire universe as his (cosmic) body, so the individual embodied subject also, in whom consciousness is contracted has the universe as his body in contracted form even as the tree exists in a contracted form in its seed.[48]

It is only due to contraction of consciousness in the individual self that the body of the universe becomes also contracted. The power that sets to underpin the event of contraction is *māyā. Māyā* is deliberately set out by Śiva to conceal his own true nature, that results in the contraction (*saṃkoca*) of consciousness and the beginning of the "impure path" of limited experience (*aśuddhādhvan*). The individual embodied subject (*puruṣa*) is a direct "product" of the *māyā-tattva*, therefore also in him the consciousness is contracted. One of the means through which the consciousness assumes the contracted form in *puruṣa* are the three impurities (*mala*s). An interesting example of these impurities is given in Kṣemarāja's commentary (*nirṇaya*) on the *Spandakarikā* in which he distinguishes the "pure path" of the universal experience containing three powers of Śiva and the level of the "impure path" of limited experience in which the same powers of Śiva assume the form of three impurities (*mala*s) through which Śiva contracts himself for the sake of worldly existence associated with the objects of experience. These impurities become contracted further on the level of the individual embodied subject (*puruṣa*) assuming the form of the inner mental organs (*buddhīndriya*) and outer organs of action (*karmendriya*). Kṣemarāja describes this gradual process of contraction of consciousness in the following words:

[48] *PHṛ*, Singh, p. 55.

the power of knowledge (jñāna-śakti) that belongs to the "pure path" on the level of Śiva gradually becomes limited in differentiation (*bheda*) and its omniscience (sarvajñānatva) becomes limited knowledge. Following the attainment of that it acquires excessive contraction (saṃkoca) by taking on the forms of the inner mental organs (antaḥkaraṇa) and the senses of awareness (*buddhīndriya*). This is the impurity of objectivity (*māyīyamala*) which arises in consciousness as the sense of differentiation that divides the objects of perception and conceives the objectivity of phenomenal existences in opposition to the true Self. On the level of the contracted embodied subject, *māyīyamala* gives rise to the experience of difference. Similarly, Śiva's power of activity (*kriyā-śakti*) gradually becomes limited in differentiation and its omnipotence (*sarvakārtṛtva*) becomes limited agency (*kartṛtva*). This excessive limitation is obtained with the acquiring of contraction in the form of the organs of action (karmendriya) by which the experient performs good and bad acts. This is the impurity of activity (*kārmamala).* Finally, the impurity of individuality (*āṇavamala*) is contraction of Śiva's total freedom due to which the individual imagines himself to be finite and imperfect.[49]

**Fig. 2. The process of contraction of Śiva's consciousness in the individual self (puruṣa)**

| Levels of the Cosmos | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| "Pure Path" (śuddhādhvan) of Universal Experience: Śiva's experience | Icchā - Will→ Freedom | Jñāna – Knowledge→ Omniscience | Kriyā- Activity→ Omnipotence |
| *Māyā-tattva*: "Impure Path" (*aśuddhādhvan*) of Limited Individual Experience | *Āṇavamala*- Impurity of Individuality | *Māyīyamala*- Impurity of Objectivity | *Kārmamala*- Impurity of Activity |
| "Individual Self" (*puruṣa-tattva*) | | Antaḥkaraṇa + Buddhīndriya | Karmendriya |

[49] Cf. *SK,* pp. 61-62.

This table illustrates the manner in which the cosmic levels that belong to the universal experience of Śiva or the "Pure Path" become gradually contracted in the lower *tattva*s (*māyā-tattva, puruṣa-tattva*) or the "Impure Path" that belongs to the limited experience of the individual self. Thus, both *māyā-tattva, puruṣa* are a result of a cosmological process insofar as they are directly derived from the supreme consciousness of Śiva. As a consequence, desires, thoughts and actions of the individual self are just a contracted form of the universal powers of freedom, omniscience, and omnipotence that belong to Śiva. The concept of embodiment that is expounded in this system is, in fact, extensible in so far as the "the boundaries of the body are not fixed" but seen as a part of a higher cosmos. From the ontological perspective, the human body and pure consciousness that belongs to Śiva are identical. Because the human body contains within itself the universal powers of Śiva in a contracted form, that body which seems to bind the individual self in the cycle of transmigration is an actual tool of liberation. Once a person sheds away the sense of duality by purification of the impurities (*mala*s) and recognizes his essential identity with Śiva, he becomes free, and it is thus, liberated.

On the previous pages we laid the foundation for the Kashmiri Śaiva theory of the cosmic body of Śiva that becomes structurally reduplicated in the body of a devotee. In the next pages, we will focus on showing how this theory becomes realized in the praxis of *bhakti*.

## Becoming the Lord: Performative Acts of Freedom in the Kashmiri Śaiva Bhakti

'May I worship you constantly in your imperishable body that embraces the whole world and consists of the blissful essence of consciousness (*cidśudharasamaya*),'[50] says Utpaladeva in the *Stotravālī* putting emphasis on the cosmic body of Śiva as the only object of worship and the central image of Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti*.

[50] *Śivastotravālī*, 13.3. in Bailly

Unlike in the Tamil Śaivism, this type of *bhakti* does not depend on the offering of flowers, incense and lamps to the iconic image of the deity installed in the temple, so vivaciously advertised by Tamil poets. In fact, Utpaladeva strongly rejects ceremonial worship and pilgrimage to the sacred places[51] in favor of *bhakti* which allows for a total immersion in the flow of bliss resulting in union with Śiva who manifests everywhere, at all times and in all conditions, whether pleasurable or otherwise. Utpaladeva encourages the devotee to merge into the body of Śiva; this initiates the experience of *being a body*, not having a body. This experience has a strong aesthetic component expressed by the term *rasa* translated here as 'blissful essence'. And such a theory of *bhakti* seems all the more desirable than Tamil *bhakti* since it increasingly employs the devotee's body in a way in which it seems to merge into, or penetrate into the cosmic body of Śiva consisting of blissful essence (*rasa*) of consciousness. At the core of this type of *bhakti* lies the theoretical framework of non-dualism according to which there is no ontological difference between Śiva and the world, Śiva and the devotee, the devotee and the world, etc. All purpose of worship is to remove the cloud of duality that obscures the true nature of non-duality that is the cosmic body of Śiva, in which everything, including the body of a devotee, abides. It is within the context of non-duality that constitutes the foundation of the Kashmiri Śaiva metaphysics that worship takes on new import and meaning for Utpaladeva's concept of *bhakti*.

"One should worship Śiva by becoming Śiva",
is the old saying. But the devotees say,
"One should worship Śiva by becoming a devotee".
For they can recognize your essence as nondual.
Even when it is in bodily form.[52]

Utpaladeva refers here to the famous saying repeated constantly in the *Śaivāgamas*: "*Śivo bhūtvā śivam yajet*", "One

[51] *Śivastotravālī*, 1.16, 1.18. in Bailly
[52] Ibid. 1.14.

should worship Śiva by becoming Śiva" substituting 'Śiva' with 'devotee'. This change in terminology is sufficient to bring into sharper focus the notion of embodiment as a primary aspect of the Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti*. This idea is emphasized by Kṣemarāja's commentary on this verse that explicitly states that it is in one's own body that a devotee undergoes immersion into Śiva who is identified with one's own true nature. Therefore, even when existing in the body, one is able to recognize his identity with Śiva. This moment of recognition of being Śiva as a prerogative of a servant or a devotee is explicated in another verse which says:

For a servant of Śiva who has identified himself with Śiva,
what happiness is there that cannot be attained?
Therefore even the heads of the gods
serve me the wine of immortality.[53]

In Utpaladeva's concept of a servant the idea of the ontological non-duality between a devotee and Śiva emerges most clearly: the devotee is not different from Śiva. Thus, unlike in the Tamil Śaivism, which promotes *bhakti* based on asymmetrical relation of master-slave that inheres dependence, Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti* presupposes recognition of oneself as a master, which simultaneously implies forsaking being a slave. This brings us to Utpaladeva's understanding of *bhakti* as a medium of transition from being a slave (*paśu*) to being a master (*pati*). *Paśu* is an epitome for a bound soul who, on account of being a subject to *mala*s, deems himself finite. For Utpaladeva, the shift from *paśu* to *pati* fundamentally comprises of 'setting free' that is communicated through the series of metaphors. Utpaladeva asks *bhakta* to free oneself from self-imposed slavery, for bondage is nothing else but an incorrect assumption (based on the duality of thought-constructs) that one is bound. Narrating his spiritual longing of becoming free, Utpaladeva writes:

I toss within the egg
Of the world infested with false attachments.

[53] Ibid. 10.25.

Like a mother, may the devotional sentiment
Nourish me with the sweet essence of bliss
So that I may develop into a bird
With mighty wings.[54]

The metaphor employed in this image is that of a bird which exists in its potential form inside the egg of the world, the world of *māyā* polluted with false attachments. The praxis of *bhakti* (*bhakti-bhāvanā*) is metaphorized as the mother-bird who hatches the egg and who feeds it with the essence of bliss (*apyayat rasayana*). Utpaladeva uses *bhakti-bhāvanā* to mean man's personal, devoted and committed effort to reach the ultimate experienceable horizon. In other words, *paśu*, when nourished with devotion, is able to break the shackles of *māyā*, the egg-shell made of attachment, hatred, etc. and rise into the unfettered state of *pati*. The "bird with the wings" is the symbol of this unfettered state of *pati*, the symbol of freedom that allows *pati* to move in the space of pure consciousness (*nirmala cidgagana gatir bhavami*). In yet another image, Utpaladeva situates the project of setting oneself free within the human body. He employs the metaphor of fortress-city bolted by barred gates to refer to the human body locked up in the ignorance of non-recognition of one's own body as the cosmic body of Śiva. Thus, the breakthrough to freedom that is to be realized within the body is metaphorized by tearing open the great door latch in order to arrive in Śiva's presence.

When shall my mind
Indifferent to all else through love's intensity
Tear open the great door latch
With a loud bang
And finally arrive in your presence, O Lord?[55]

The etymology of the word "*puruṣa*" is derived from the word "*pura*" in the meaning of the city. Maheśvarānanda says that *puruṣa* is so called because he "dwells in the city" (*pure vasatīti*). Quoting from *Haṃsabheda*, he clarifies saying: "On the account

[54] Ibid. 7.4.
[55] Ibid. 9.3.

of ego, the self dwells in the three cities called Intellect, Breath, and Body, it is known as *puruṣa*…". This very body is a residence of Śiva too insofar as there is no ontological difference between the human body and the cosmic body of Śiva. By untying the knots that bind *puruṣa* with misconception (*vikalpa*) of bondage, he begins to lose his sense of duality, he breaks open the latch to the gate of the city where Śiva resides in his very body. The devotee faces the task of letting the *vikalpa*s to dissolve. Only by freeing oneself from binding *vikalpa*s, the heart of the devotee can flash forth with freedom. Utpaladeva uses the term '*nirgala*' meaning 'unbolt' to refer to the sense of freedom flashing forth in the heart of the devotee.[56] In this way, Utpaladeva evokes the ideal of *bhakti* within the context of freedom or liberation from knots, binds and shells of attachment, hatred and ignorance that belong to the world of *māyā*. The imagery of 'setting free' allows a devotee to explore a freedom of movement in aerial space, which gains its force through an apparent flying act. The image of the body imprisoned in the fortress city or the bird locked up in the egg of *māyā* represents a condition of man's inhabited bondage that must be inverted in order to reach Śiva. Here bondage as the existential mode of devotional attitude is categorically denied. The servant is not the one who remains in a reverential condition of allegiance to the feet of the master, but the one personifies freedom in performance. 'In this three-fold universe of bondage, unfree, those sages and gods are free who live out of your freedom', says Utpaladeva pointing out to the ideal of freedom that arises out of merging in Śiva's omnipotence. To understand what does it mean to personify Śiva's freedom in performance, we must first take a look at the different types of spiritual practices sanctioned in Utpaladeva's *bhakti*.

Utpaladeva views *bhakti* as something that must be practiced,[57] as love that must be nurtured. Even though *bhakti* itself

[56] Ibid. 7.3.

[57] In verse 13.12, Utpaladeva explicitly states that the great knowledge of *bhakti* needs to be practiced (*abhyasamagata*).

was classified under the rubric of non-means (*anupāya*)[58], still Utpaladeva's *Śivastotrāvalī* contains references to all four types of spiritual praxis (*upāyas*) that are allowed or even endorsed on the path of devotion. Perhaps the reason for this inclusion is implicit in the same goal advertised by all—the supreme state of divine immersion (*samāveśa*). In most general terms, the four *upāyas* are different types of spiritual praxis suiting different types of people who are differentiated in accordance with a varying degree of spiritual awareness they possess. Typically, the individual means (*āṇavopāya*) is regarded as the lowest of all, for it related to relatively gross level of spiritual awareness when the division (*bheda*) between the subject and object is still present; therefore this method of spiritual realization makes use of the external supports. The means of power (*śāktopāya*) pertains to the intermediate level of spiritual awareness that corresponds to the level of the mental process (*citti*) only. The divine means (*śāmbhavopāya*) represents the highest degree of spiritual awareness, the level of unity (*ābheda*) corresponding to the intuitive insight (*pratibhā*). Utpaladeva's disciple Abhinavagupta, quoting from the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra,* explains that these three methods of spiritual realization constitute the diverse modes of penetration (*āveśa*) into the supreme state of divine union (*samāveśa*).[59] In Abhinavagupta's interpretation, *samāveśa* is the goal of all methods of spiritual practice that enables an adept a total realization of his or her identity with the ultimate principle. The non-means (*anupāya*) transcends all three *upāyas* because it does not depend on any spiritual practice, being exclusively the outcome of a very intense bestowal of grace (*tivra śaktipāta*) that results in the divine infiltration or *samāveśa*. As Utpaladeva says in the context of *bhakti*, division (*bheda*) is a state of separation from the Lord, which constitutes suffering, while joy is felt in union with the Lord which is the state of immersion (*samāveśa*).[60] Etymological derivation of the word *aveśa* meaning

[58] Ibid. 1.18.
[59] *Tantrāloka* I.167., trans. Dyczkowski M.
[60] 13.1.

'possession' suggests the act of entering '*aviś*' which in this context can be taken to signify identification with the absolute. In this case, the immersion into the body of Śiva is precisely the condition in which one has become *coextensive* with the deity. One of the *upāya*s prescribed by Utpaladeva in his *bhakti* is the divine means (*śāmbhovopāya*). *Śāmbhovopāya* constitutes the best example of the ideal of freedom that arises out of merging in Śiva's omnipotence. As we have already mentioned before, the impurity of individuality (*āṇavamala*) is contraction of Śiva's power of will (*icchā-śakti*) which is responsible for his total freedom due to which the individual imagines himself to be finite and imperfect.[61] *Śāmbhovopāya* as the spiritual praxis that aims at *samāveśa* advocates merging one's will with the will of Śiva, therefore, this type of spiritual praxis is also known as the means of will (*icchopāya*). Once this is accomplished, the impurity of individuality that manifests as a loss of freedom due to which an individual imagines himself as powerless becomes eradicated which results in a renewed sense of freedom. It is in the context of *śāmbhovopāya* that one should interpret the following verses:

> Not a thought arises in me that does not constitute Thy will,
> all actions, meritorious or otherwise
> are being performed by the Lord himself.
> Thus abiding in Thee, I live unfettered
> roaming through the world with nothing to frustrate
> the festival of worshipping Thy stainless feet.[62]

These verses illustrate that causal efficiency resides in God; what appears as causes and effects are in reality concomitant events created directly by Śiva. All actions, meritorious or not proceed only from a willing, powerful agent. Merging one's will with the divine will triggers the process of immersion which is, at the same time, an act of freeing oneself from bondage imposed by the impurity of *āṇavamala.* Here also Utpaladeva draws on the imagery of freedom by employing the metaphor of 'roaming',

[61] Cf. *SK*, p. 3.
[62] Ibid. 12.22.

which, like 'flying' suggests free movement and spatial expansion. Roaming through the world implies freedom from bondage conveyed by the word '*abodhita*' meaning 'without bondage'. In a related verse, he says, 'being absorbed in you, may I perceive everything as consisting of your being, may I roam about without any desire, free from all'.[63] By merging his will with Śiva's will, a devotee rises above knots, constraints and bonds of *āṇavamala* and enjoys perfect freedom. Thus, as Utpaladeva reminds us, 'in this threefold universe of bondage, which is essentially unfree, those sages and gods are free who live out of your freedom'.[64]

Another great disparity between the Tamil and the Kashmiri Śiva *bhakti* was incorporation of the senses at the center of worship. Utpaladeva uses the sense organs as a framework for his eulogy of devotional experience in a way that their most exalted commitment is the fullness of their realization. *Bhakti* commands the experience through the senses, generating the magnetic field of blissful elation, which grows in intensity as religious passion increases: 'While incessantly drinking in through the senses the heady wine of your worship from the overflowing goblets of all objects. Let madness overtake me'.[65] Perhaps more striking, authenticity of devotion is provable by the sensory rapture that permeates the subjective and objective contents of the cognitive process. As Utpaladeva tells us: 'those only are your true devotees who experience the subject and object through an expanded fund of sensation'.[66] The entire spectrum of sensorial intensity embedded in the devotional 'methodology' brings forth a constitutive evaluation of the sensory experience permitting a divine absorption (*samāveśa*) into Śiva. Utpaladeva equates devotion (*bhakti*) with possession[67] (*āveśa*) and divine absorption

[63] Ibid. 6.5.
[64] Ibid. 3.2.
[65] Ibid. 13.8
[66] ŚSĀ 16.27.
[67] Ibid. 16.6. Also Abhinavagupta in his commentary on the *Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana* describes *bhakti* as 'absorption (*āveśa*) in that Lord whose nature is the highest form of the self', in: *The*

(*samāveśa*)[68] in a way in which devotional commitment of the senses is highlighted in the perspective of the sensory involvement that leads naturally to immersion in exalted moods (*rasa*) resulting in union with Śiva. At this stage, the sense organs unfold in accord with their innate spontaneity extracting from the objective sphere the essence, the subtle portion, as fragrance, color, sound, etc. which serves as a means leading to intimate union with pure consciousness, represented by the relishing of taste (*rasa*). This savoury awareness of the senses is indicated by the usage of such terms as: the bliss of tasting (*rasana*), relish (*carvaṇa*), enjoying a flavor (*āsvāda*). Even more importantly, the senses are our best means of worshipping Śiva: 'Immersed in your worship, O Lord, the absolute treasure of all worship. Oh, what unearthly splendor radiates from the senses'.[69] In the Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti*, worship assumes the inner dimension during which devotees enjoy the sweet bliss of union with Śiva.[70] Worship produces ever new stages of absorption (*navanavasamāveśyaḥ*) that generate the sense of wonder (*camatkāra*) which also gives rise to the outlet of the senses by which an adept apprehends the beauty of the sensory world (*subhaga*) in the form of sound, touch, etc.[71] When this absorption is total, one perceives Śiva everywhere, in all objects and states of being. Therefore, as Utpaladeva says, 'I worship the blade of grass as I worship Śiva and myself, is the highest experience of non-duality'.[72] In the Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti,* worship induces an epistemic shift in which a devotee abandons the ordinary mode of perception in favor of the aesthetic mode of perception. In the ordinary mode of perception, the devotee considers the sense-perceptions as existing outside of consciousness; this is the state of bondage. In the aesthetic mode of perception, the devotee recognizes the

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*Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana with the Locana of Abhinavagupta* [ed. Ingalls, Masson, Patwardhan 1990] quoted in: Smith 2009:346.

[68] *ŚSĀ*-K 5.13.

[69] 17.44.

[70] 17.40.

[71] 13.14.

[72] 5.15.

sense-perceptions as mere emanations of the pure, luminous consciousness; this is the state of freedom. Therefore, Utpaladeva expresses his longing for a deep and transforming sensory experience, saying:

> May my desire for the objects of the senses be intense, O Blessed One, like that of all other men, but may I see them as though they were my own body, with the thought of differentiation gone.[73]

In the aesthetic mode of perception, the senses are the means leading to the experience of wonder (*camatkāra*) with the sense of duality that differentiates between 'me' and the 'other' gone. Among the sense experience most frequently evoked by Utpaladeva are the sense perception of taste (*rasa*) and the sense perception of touch (*sparśa*). The Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti*, thus, precipitates a shift from a visual aesthetics of the Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* that relied heavily on the sense perception of sight employed in the worship of temple icons to the tactile and savory aesthetics that allows for a total immersion into Śiva. Thus, we read: 'Some people's perceptions become dulled because of duality. But others taste immediately the brilliant, unbroken body that is free of duality'.[74] Here, an emphasis is put on 'tasting' the cosmic body of Śiva. In another verse, 'taste' is combined with 'touch': 'O Lord of the Gods! Without the taste of nectar (*amṛta-rasa*) from touching your feet, even gaining sovereignty in the three worlds holds for me no savor at all'.[75] Ernst Furlinger summarizes this apparent combination of sense perceptions of 'taste' and 'touch' in Utpaladeva's *bhakti* in the following words:

> …here it becomes clear that the "touch" of that reality whose nature is described by Utpaladeva as the "essence of the highest joy" denotes a higher stage in the spiritual ascension than does "seeing" the Highest. Touch consists of an immediate contact, while seeing still implies a distance. … Again Utpaladeva uses the word *sparśa* in connection with the expression *rasa* (lit. "juice", "liquid"). Maybe he wants to indicate

[73] Ibid. 8.3. Torella's translation, p. 36.
[74] Ibid. 4.7.
[75] Ibid. 4.23.

that the spiritual process leads to a "liquefaction", "becoming liquid", a fluidity of the stiff and rigid I-identity of the "solidifed" self in the form of body, breath, etc. of the borders between self and other—up to the experience of pervasion (*vyāpti*) of the self by all, and of the all by the self.[76]

Thus, Utpaladeva's aesthetics of *bhakti* makes use of sense perceptions of 'touch' and 'taste' and in this way, he sets the Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti* apart from the visual aesthetics typical for Tamil *Śaiva bhakti.* Utpaladeva clearly establishes 'touch' on the highest level[77] in the progressive stages of worship, certainly higher than 'sight'.

Let there be that great festival of worship
Where the Supreme Lord himself
Is meditated upon, seen, and touched.
Be always mind through your grace.[78]

In these verses, Utpaladeva distinguishes three stages of worship. First is meditation (*dhyāna*), second is vision (*darśana*), and third is touch (*sparśa*); touch is characterized by Kṣemarāja as becoming one with a deeper and deeper union with Śiva (*gādhagādhasamāśleṣeṇaikī*). Here touch is derived directly from prior vision of Śiva but in many instances, this tactile sensation appears independently of sight. As Utpaladeva says, 'With my eyes closed, at the touch of your lotus feet, may I rejoice reeling with drunkenness from the wine of your devotion'.[79] Here, the blissful tactile sensation occurs when the eyes are closed and sight directed inwards, beyond the realm of physical senses. As Furlinger has already mentioned, 'touch' appears often in

[76] Ernst Furlinger, *The Touch of Śakti*, pp. 114-115.

[77] Also Abhinavagupta considers 'touch' the highest of all sense perceptions insofar as it is itself the form of the sky of consciousness (*cidvyoma*). *Tā* 11.29a-31b. See also Skora, K.M. "The Pulsating Heart and its Divine Sense Energies: Body and Touch in Abhinavagupta's Trika Śaivism", *Numen* 54 (2007):420-458.

[78] Ibid. 13.6.

[79] Ibid. 5.5.

connection with liquid nectar of rasa, which may suggest that experiences narrated by Utpaladeva may be identified with the spiritual process of 'becoming liquid'. If we look, once again, at the theory of the cosmic body of Śiva discussed on previous pages, Furlinger's argument is proved valid. If the human body as well as the entire world comes into being through the process of a progressive solidification of Śiva's self-consciousness that induces contraction of self-consciousness in the individual beings, subject to *māyā*, then merging into Śiva logically stimulates 'loosening up the bonds' or 'untying the knots' (in the context of acquiring freedom) and 'liquefaction' or 'melting' (in the context of spiritual experience). Thus, Utpaladeva says, 'So cool is the nectar from the touch of your feet! May that always stream through me, within and without. Plunging into the ambrosia-lake of touching your feet is ever for me a pleasure beyond all pleasures?'.[80] Touching the Lord involves 'becoming liquid' that enables merging into Śiva, becoming one with the highest pleasure of bliss.

## Conclusion: Ecstatic Bhakti

The theological and cultural lenses through which Tamil Śaiva poets and Utpaladeva view the world determine the differences in their respective understanding of spiritual process and *bhakti* itself, that includes:

Slave-master relationship typical for Tamil Śaiva bhakti *which* is categorically denied in favor of the devotee-Śiva equation actually realized in the devotee's attainment of total freedom;

1) Negative (or at least ambivalent) attitude towards the body-senses amplified by representing the body as disgusting typical for Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* (which might have been influenced by ascetic traditions of Buddhism and Jainism) and positive attitude towards the body-senses in the Kashmiri Śaivism, i.e. the cosmic body of Śiva and the

[80] Ibid. 5.11.-12.

notion of worship procured primarily through relish of the senses;

2) 'Visual aesthetics' of Tamil Śiva *bhakti* pronounced in the concept of iconic worship in the temple scenario vis-à-vis 'tactile and savory aesthetics' of Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti*.

However differently is *bhakti* conceived and described in these respective traditions, there are also recognizable features common to both. In particular we find that Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* and Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti* converge on the issue of ecstasy that has some characteristic features present in both *bhakti* traditions, such as 'becoming liquid', 'dancing', 'weeping' and 'possession'. 'Becoming liquid' is the characteristic feature of religious ecstasy of *bhakti*, which is often described in the terms of fluidity. 'Melting in love for God', typical for Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* or 'making heart liquid (*taralīkṛtahṛdaya*) by dissolving its hardness'[81] prominent in the Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti* points out towards shared ecstatic practices of *bhakti* tradition in general. Moreover, 'liquefaction' as the form of religious ecstasy of *bhakti* is closely related to the notion of possession expressed by dancing, weeping, singing, etc. Especially, dancing seems to be closely associated with a notion of possession (*samāveśa*) understood as the infiltration, permeation, interpenetration of the energy that seizes from within and overflows. This influx of energy cannot be contained or constrained, therefore, the only manner to negotiate its surplus is to dance. In words of David Shulman:

> In the whirling movement of the dance, an agent appears to be surrendering to the process that has overtaken him for within. This process has, at its culminating stage, a fullness of presence. Dance is the medium through which the energy of a Dancer can flow and move. The movement of dance accelerates to the point where a Dancer and dance are one; this is the cosmos in movement closing all gaps, the very ontology of a living moment.[82]

[81] Ibid. 5.21.

[82] *Śiva in the Forest of Pines, an Essay on Sorcery and Self-*

To dance means to experience intensified fullness, deepened in the rapture of ecstatic joy. Dance is the expression of the accumulated energy, empowerment and freedom, perpetuated by ontological completeness. Thus, we learn from Utpaladeva that when a devotee becomes touched by Śiva, he begins to dance in ecstasy, 'let me cry and dance'[83] says Utpaladeva and this state of ecstatic dancing is characterized by tasting undivided sweetness (*svādo - avicchinnamādhurya*) Ecstatic dancing is the experience of great pervasion (*māhavyāpti*) characterized as vibration of consciousness (*ghūrṇī*),[84] it happens when one realizes to be all things. In Tamil Śiva *bhakti* too, devotees dance, weep, worship, and sing Lord's feet.[85] Both possession and ecstasy display symptoms of loss of self control expressed in uncoordinated gestures expressed in *bhakti* by images of dancing, roaming and the uncontrolled expressions like laughter, crying, etc. 'Triumphant, they laugh, and vanquished, they laugh even more—those select few who are maddened with the immortal wine of your devotion'.[86] Both uncontrolled gestures and uncontrolled expressions are present in both traditions. As Appar reminds us, those who weep for love of Śiva are his favourite devotees.[87] Ecstasy is also related to the sensual experience of 'tasting' or 'touching' the divine that points towards synaesthetic character of *bhakti*.

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*knowledge*, Don Handelman, David Shulman, Oxford University Press, Delhi 2004.

[83] *ŚSv* 5.4. in Bailly

[84] *ŚSv* 5.5. in Bailly

[85] Appar V.177.8 , Peterson, p. 258.

[86] *ŚSv* 16.3. in Bailly

[87] Appar V.135.8 , in Peterson, p. 258.

SEVEN

# From Spectator to Dancer

## Performance Metaphor and the Quest for Knowledge in India

> I am a spectator, so to speak, of the molecular whirlwind which men call individual life; I am conscious of an incessant metamorphosis, an irresistible movement of existence, which is going on within me—and this phenomenology of myself serves as a window opened upon the mystery of the world. I am, or rather my sensible consciousness is, concentrated upon this ideal standing-point, this invisible threshold, as it were, whence one hears the impetuous passage of time, rushing and foaming as it flows out into the changeless ocean of eternity.
>
> —Henri Frederic Amiel

Reflecting on systems of Indian religio-philosophical speculation vis-à-vis Kashmiri Śaivism and pursuing this reflection within the conceptual framework that appropriates "performance metaphor", we may notice two different directions within which such contemplation takes us, that of spectator and that of dancer. These two paths, which can be classified further as Brāhmaṇical (adhering to Vedic revelation) and non-Brāhmaṇical (rejecting authority of the Vedas) hardly ever intersect and therefore they conform to different epistemological and ontological conditions. The 'spectator' and the 'dancer', thus, come to represent the

competing paradigms of Indian quest for knowledge. With regard to 'spectator', Indian tradition classifies two different adaptations of 'seeing'. First, represented by philosophical schools of Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Advaita Vedānta, locates the act of bearing witness in the context of a solitary disengagement from the world, as the contemplative stasis, as the non-agential passivity, and finally as the desirelessness of disinterested spectator (*sākṣin*), which is founded on a larger Brāhmaṇical paradigm of restraint and ascetic denial. As opposed to *sākṣin*, one finds a second type of spectator, the *prekṣaka*, which in the context of aesthetic observance tries to incorporate exactly this what was rejected in the Brāhmaṇical tradition: desire, emotion, agency of the embodied individual setting up a new paradigm of *mokṣa*, one that insures 'freedom-in-feeling'. The model of spectator that became appropriated in the epistemology of religious experience both in philosophical and aesthetic contexts is posed against the second model, that of a dancer. Thus, on the other end of a spectrum is the tradition of Kashmir Śaivism, which brings into vivid focus an acute critique of Brāhmaṇical concept of passive spectator and puts forward a more dynamic model of a 'dancer' whose conceptualization is largely influenced by aesthetic theories.

## 'Sight' in Indian Culture: General Remarks

Visual perception has always occupied an important place in major philosophical and religious traditions of India. Indian thinkers seem to have always attached to one's own perceptual ability some kind of credibility that ensured a direct cognitive access to reality and offered the prospect of determining whether something is, or fails to be, true. The concept of 'seeing' *darśana* (derived from Sanskrit verbal root *drś-* 'to see') employed in reference to six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy clearly shows that 'sight' is central to knowing things; similarly, to cite an example from non-philosophical discourse, we find the 'act of beholding' (*darśan*) at the nucleus of temple worship in contemporary Hinduism. *Darśan* is characterized by its reciprocity that entails 'seeing' and 'being seen by the deity'.

The alleged extraordinary potency of eyesight that belongs to temple icons is ensured through the ritual consecration in which the deity becomes enlivened, literally 'infused with breath' (*prāṇapratiṣṭhā*) that takes place along with the ritual opening of the icon's eyes with a golden needle.[1] Virtually all of the pursuit of knowledge or truth in Indian context, beginning with Vedic *ṛṣi*s, through Sāṃkhya-Yoga and ending with Advaita Vedānta is derived from a testimony of the spectator, the true knower. Spectatorship, thus, in a constitutive manner, informs the entire trajectory of the quest for knowledge in most Indian thought-systems. 'Sight' has been appropriated both in the externalist perspective, i.e. the outer sight, as well as in the internalist perspective, i.e. the inner sight. Externalist perspective asserts that empirical knowledge is dependent on the external factors, i.e. the sense organ of sight coming into contact with the object of experience, such as the 'jar'. Internalist perspective, on the other hand, pays heed to the inner sight which sets up the ground for the "epistemology of religious experience" explicated in the concept of "saving knowledge" (Forsthoefel 2002:35). Insofar as the outer sight is concerned, we have an example from Indian philosophy where *pratyakṣa*[2] often translated as the 'ocular evidence' or 'direct perception' tends to hold the key position as one of the valid means of knowledge and it is referred to as *pramāṇa* (a derivate of *pra-mā* 'to apprehend'). *Pratyakṣa*'s association with the proof of *pramāṇa* implies that it is "an authoritative source for making a knowledge-claim" (Matilal 2002:36). The strong epistemic status held by perception in Indian theories of knowledge is particularly ancient and can be traced back to the Vedic times. The *Yajurveda*'s *Śatapatha-brāhmaṇa* and the *Atharvaveda* conclusively justify to the transparency of visual perception following the analogy with the sun. The 'eye' is said to illumine

[1] Cf. Eck Diane, *Darshan,* Motilal Banarasidass, 2007. See also, Babb A. Lawrence, Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism, *Journal of Anthropological Research* 34 (4), 1981: 381-401.

[2] According to B.K. Matilal (2002:226), *pratyakṣa* is etymologically derived from *akṣa* meaning 'sensory faculty' or 'sense-organ' which implies "the sensory core" of perception.

the objects of perceptions, therefore it is declared 'to shine', 'to be luminous' (*dīpyate*).[3] The 'eye' is directly managed by the Sun (*sūrya*) himself who as 'all-seeing' (*viśvacakṣas*)[4] appears as an overlord of all visual perceptions.[5] In this setting, 'eyesight' has been appropriated as the axiom of self-evident truth. This idea is elucidated in the following passage of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*: "if two persons were to come disputing with each other, we should believe him who says; 'I have seen it', not him who says 'I have heard it'".[6] In epistemic evaluation, therefore, 'eyesight', unlike the other sense perceptions, such as the auditory, is regarded as a sole truth-bearer that ensures credibility. Insofar as the 'inner sight' is concerned, it suffices to mention the great Vedic seers (*ṛṣi*s). Yāska in his *Nirukta* (2.11) connects the word '*ṛṣi*' with the faculty of seeing (*ṛṣir darśanāt, stomān dadarśa*). Similarly, Sāyana in his *Sāyanabhāṣya*, a commentary on the *Ṛgveda*, derives the word '*ṛṣi*' from –*drś*, 'to see' specifying that Veda was originally inaccessible to sense perceptions and was, thus, first revealed to the seers (*ṛṣi*s) who were the first beholders of the Vedas, for this reason, they are known as *ṛṣi*s.[7] As J. Gonda explains further, "The *ṛṣi*s are, in traditional view, said to have visualized the mystic form of Speech (*vāc*) which is the sacred speech".[8] In this regard, the true knowledge (*veda*) acquired by *ṛṣi*s is based on an underlying vision that expresses itself through Speech. Even though here the emphasis on the 'inner sight' points towards knowledge gained through subjective experience, still the tradition accepts the Vedas with objective validity. Halbfass (1990:388) makes an interesting point when he says, "the

[3] *ŚB* 1.4.3.7, 6.2.1.5.

[4] *RV* 1.50, 2.7.

[5] *AV* 12.1.33, 5.24.9.

[6] Gonda, Jan, *Eye and Gaze in the Veda*, p. 9.

[7] *tathāt īndriyasya vedasya parameśvarānugraheṇa prathamato darśanāt ṛṣitvamabhipratyaya smaryate "yugānte 'ntarhitān vedān setihāsān mahaṛṣayaḥ/* Cf. V.G. Rahurkar, "The Word 'ṛṣi' in the Veda", *Bulletin of Deccan College Research Institute* 18, 1967, pp. 55-57.

[8] Gonda, J., *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, Mouton & Co. The Hauge 1963, p. 42.

Vedas are not documentation of subjective experiences, but an objective structure which guides, controls and gives room to legitimate experience". Given the truth of this statement, there is a great epistemic value attached to the inward perception of the Vedic seers that became transformed into the textual testimony assuming the propensity of objectivity and validity of the sacred scripture.

## Solitary Spectator as the Soteriological Goal in Indian Philosophy

The philosophical speculation of the Upaniṣads, of which the earliest texts were composed between 700 and 300 BCE, saw renewed interest in the theme of 'seeing'. For example, in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (IV.1.5), Yajñavalkya confers to 'sight' the truth-value when he tells to Janaka: "Sight is 'being truth'—its quality of being truth (*satyatā*) is shown by the fact that when they say to the one who sees 'Have you seen' and he says 'I have seen'—that is truth".[9] Yajñavalkya defines truth in terms of the justification of linguistic credibility, which holds that all truth must sit on the foundation stones of visual perception. This 'sight' has nothing to do with outer sight of naïve realism expounded by Nyāya, which makes the sense-object-contact (*sannikarṣa*) central to perception. On the contrary, Upaniṣads' special emphasis is on the supra-sensory character of 'seeing' which belongs to the self (*ātman*). The *ātman*, conceived of as an indwelling intelligence, immortal, inner controller beyond the cognizance of the senses, is the Seer. The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (IV.2) makes an even stronger claim of this 'inner sight' located beyond the cognizance of the senses when it declares:

> It has no sound or touch, no appearance, taste, or smell; it is without beginning or end, undecaying and eternal. When a man perceives it, fixed and beyond the immense, he is freed from the jaws of death. Hidden in all beings, this self is not visibly displayed. Yet people of keen vision see him (*darśibhiḥ*), with eminent and sharp minds (*sukṣmaya buddhaya*). The

[9] Cf. Witz, G. Klaus, *The Supreme Wisdom of the Upanisads*, p. 230.

self-existent One pierced the apertures outward, therefore, one looks out, and not into oneself. A certain wise men in search of immortality, turned his sight inward and saw the self within'.[10]

The most significant element in the Upaniṣadic description of the self is insistence on its secret invisibility inaccessible to the ordinary sense faculties. This view avoids the simplistic claim of naïve realism that things reveal themselves directly in perception. The vision described here is more profound as it is situated 'within'. This inward [in]sight is granted only to those whose intellects are refined (*sukṣma*). Examples of Vedic *dhī*—'vision' as the property of the refined intellect, may be invoked at this point to contextualize the above remarks.[11] With this introspective character of perception, a fresh start has been made in locating an event of acquiring knowledge by 'turning within', regardless of the sense data given in the external perception procured by the sense organs. In the words of *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* (III.2.2):

It is right here within those who see, hidden within the cave of their heart. Not by sight, not by speech, nor by any other sense; nor by austerities or rites is he grasped. Rather the partless one is seen by a man, as he meditates. When his being has become pure, through the lucidity of knowledge.[12]

Such emphasis on introspection that stressed meditation on the heart formulated in the concept of 'heart knowledge' (*dahara vidyā*) was congruent with a wider spiritual pattern of ascetic denial that flourished in the Upaniṣads. It is generally agreed that the emergence of Upaniṣadic teachings marked the beginning of a concept of world-renouncer[13] (*saṃnyāsin*, *parivrājaka, bhikṣu*), a spiritual ideal that presupposed turning away from impurity of the material body and the senses to inner purity of the heart

[10] *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 4.2., tr. P. Olivelle

[11] For more explanation of *dhī* in its connection with the intellect, see Cf. Gonda, J., *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*.

[12] *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* III.2.2, tr. P. Olivelle

[13] Black, Brian, *The Character of the Self in Ancient India*, SUNY Press, New York 2007, p. 95.

where 'seeing' with inner eye took place. This inner vision promoted by the Upaniṣads became the soteriological goal not only of Brāhmaṇism, but also of Indian philosophy as a whole insofar as it laid the foundation for the 'epistemology of religious experience' (Forsthoefel 2002) which was firmly rooted in self-realization of [in]sight. In the words of Bina Gupta (1995:28),

> In Indian philosophy the final goal of liberation is articulated on the model of visual perception rather than on a process of thinking or reflection. Thinking or thought is subordinated as a means to the end of perception….

Even though this statement applies universally to Indian philosophy as a whole, nevertheless, the theme of inward perception has been highly developed in the soteriological metaphysics as in the Advaita Vedānta promulgated primarily by Śaṅkara (8th century), its greatest exponent. It was in the Advaita Vedānta (the system which is typically regarded as the most direct continuation of Upaniṣadic thought) that still nascent ideas concerning 'inner seeing' recorded in the Upaniṣads were developed further as the key theoretical concept of 'witness' or 'observer' (*sākṣin*). For classical Advaita Vedānta, which is a form of idealist monism, the supreme principle, *brahman/ātman*,[14] is defined as existence, pure consciousness and bliss. *Brahman/ātman* is eternal, one without a second, therefore it transcends the empirical level of existence and is free from change, regardless of being non-different from the embodied individual (*jīva*). *Brahman/ātman* is further characterized as pure and immobile as it exists for and in itself, free from any direct involvement or relationship with the empirical level of experience. The ontological status of utter disengagement from the world of ignorance (*avidyā*) and false appearance (*māyā*) makes *brahman/ātman* a non-agent and a non-experiencer, a mere witness. *Brahman/ātman*'s presence is, thus, attested

[14] In the Advaita Vedānta, *brahman* is the supreme reality, the universal consciousness-spirit, while *ātman* is the pure self, identical with *brahman.*

by the fact that it possesses the characteristic of all-witness (*sarvasākṣin*), which is a 'form of reflexivity, that is neutral to the event occurrence'.[15] In the words of Śaṅkara,

> The seer of the seeing is actually the seeing [itself]; it perpetually sees the seeing, for never is seeing not seen by the seer. Here the seeing of the seer must be perpetual. If the seeing of the seer were transitory, then the seeing which is [the object] seen, might sometimes not be seen; just as something like a pot would not [always] be [seen] by transitory vision. But the seer of the seeing never ceases to see the seeing like that….'[16]

As Bina Gupta explains,

> etymologically "*sākṣin*" refers to a witness in the sense of the phenomenologically pure observer, the observer who observes without bringing anything to the observation. It signifies seeing without being the agent of the act under consideration. Its interests are not involved in what occurs. It signifies the self, which though not itself involved in the cognitive process, functions as a disinterested, uninvolved onlooker or witness-consciousness'.[17]

The embodied individual (*jīva*) who is further characterized as the agent, the experiencer and a subject, is affected by 'reflexive occurrence' as the *brahman/ātman* is. When the same self (who forms an ontological basis of both *jīva* and *brahman/ātman*) removes the individuated experience of *jīva*, it becomes *brahman/ātman*. The soteriological goal of *jīva* is to attain the status of a pure observer who is characterized by 'unconditioned reflexivity that remains at the end of stripping away of contingent individuation'.[18] It takes place by cancelling epistemic failure (*avidyā*). As Gupta explains further,

[15] Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Knowledge and Liberation in Classical Indian Thought*, London: Palgrave 2001, p. 166.

[16] Śaṅkara, *Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣadbhāṣya* I.4.10, Anandashrama Sanskrit Series, Poona 1914 I.4.10, PP.161-6, quoted in Ram Prasad 2001:171.

[17] Gupta, Bina, *The Disinterested Witness: A Fragment of Advaita Vedānta Phenomenology*, p. 4.

[18] Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, *Knowledge and Liberation in Classical Indian Thought*, London: Palgrave 2001, p. 168.

regardless of whether we are involved in sensation, cognitive efforts, or any other modality of experience, there is always a level of consciousness within each one of us where we stand apart at a certain distance and simply observe our experiences without getting involved in those experiences…all this amounts to arguing that consciousness in its entirety is not involved in or engaged in the world; that there is always a level of consciousness deep within each of us that stands apart and observes what the rest of our conscious life undergoes—pleasure or pain, knowledge or ignorance.[19]

Central to this account is the concept of "disinterested witness" (Gupta), which is explicated in terms of the non-agency of the self assuming the form of a passive spectator. In the Advaita Vedānta, the notion of 'agency' is confined to the manner in which the embodied individual (*jīva*) engages himself in the sensory experience, stimulating the arousal of desire and attachment that leads to suffering (*duḥkha*). However, this suffering is not implicitly presupposed in the ontological status of the embodied individual that undermines its value as a person (for according to the monistic view of Advaita Vedānta there is no ontological difference between *jīva* and *brahman/ātman*), but in epistemic failure that causes erroneous identification of the *jīva* with the psychophysical mind-body apparatus. Due to this epistemic failure, the *jīva* identifies itself with contingent features of individuated experiences that exist in conformity with the primary axiom of 'agency'. On account of being an agent the *jīva* is held in bondage and ignorance. Śaṅkara's 'saving knowledge' of a spectator is clearly located outside the body and the senses, in the realm of solitary, disembodied awareness (*aśārīracit*), static and desireless. Śaṇkara follows Gauḍapāda when he holds that bondage arises out of association with the agency of the body. The supreme state entails freedom from individuated experience of bodily, cognitive and sensory type. The liberated one says: "I am without mind and pure…Freedom from mind and freedom from change belong to Me, who am bodiless and all-pervading"

[19] Gupta, Bina, *The Disinterested Witness: A Fragment of Advaita Vedānta Phenomenology*, p. 6.

(Mayeda 1992:133 quoted in Forsthoefel 2002: 54).[20] According to this line of reasoning, the self is not an enjoyer of experience, for, as Śaṅkara informs us, self's 'being an enjoyer [of experience] comes only through the functioning (or performance) of contingent adjuncts like the intellect and so on'.[21] The idea of liberation promoted here in fact replaces the agency pertaining to the embodied individual (*jīva*) with the non-agency of the true self (*brahman/ātman*) assuming the form of a static witness. For Śaṅkara, the greatest exponent of Advaita Vedānta, the true self is without action and the realization of the non-agency of the self is a goal of an ascetic practice. This takes place through the process of 'deindividuation' (cf. Ram-Prasad 2001:188), which comes about by freeing oneself from the contingent features of psychophysical mind-body complex. Śaṅkara's position has been summarized by Flood (2004:68-9) in the following words,

> As action pertains only to the body and senses, it is really non-existent in the self (*ātmani karmābhāva*), as has been taught in primary and secondary revelation and in logic (*śruti, smṛti* and *nyāya*). Action is falsely attributed to the self, and should anyone think 'I am the agent' (*ahaṃ kartā*) or 'I act' (*ahaṃ karomi*), he or she would be mistaken in attributing qualities to the immutable self that do not belong to it. The person who understands this is a controlled yogi (*yukto yogī*), wise, free, and whose purpose has been achieved. Liberating knowledge means the realization that the self is passive. The true self for Śaṅkara is the immutable, passive witness (*sākṣin*) who in reality is untouched by action and ignorance or by the coverings (*upādhi*) that appear to separate the self from true, reflexive knowledge. This undifferentiated self is not individual, but universal consciousness or spirit (*brahman*).

Chief among the philosophies which influenced the concept of passive witness within monistic Advaita Vedānta was the dualistic system of Sāṃkhya-Yoga. These two systems featuring among

[20] Thomas A. Forsthoefel, *Knowing Beyond Knowledge: Epistemologies of Religious Experience in Classical and Modern Advāita,* Ashgate, Aldershot, 2002.

[21] Śaṅkara, *Katha Upanisadbhāṣya* I.3.4/487, in Ram-Prasad 2001: 168, Anandashrama Sanskrit Series, Poona 1913. *Nahi kevalasyātmano bhoktṛtvam asti buddhyādyupādhikṛtammeva tasya bhoktṛtvam/*

the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy (*darśanas*) are usually treated as equally justified aspects of a unitary thought-system. On this account, Sāṃkhya[22] is understood to provide the metaphysical framework or the theory of the system, while Yoga[23] furnishes this theory with practice. The fundamental metaphysical premise of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga is the absolute distinction between the consciousness-self (*puruṣa*) and matter or nature (*prakṛti*). *Puruṣa* is the seat of pure consciousness (*cetana*) without content, the inactive spectator, dissociated from any empirical experience, while *prakṛti* is the real cause of real effects responsible for bringing forth the psychophysical organism of macrocosmic (nature) and microcosmic (mind-body complex) type consisting of a different modes of awareness, emotions, sensations, physicality and the senses; *prakṛti*, therefore, is accounted for everything that constitutes the world of our empirical existence. According to the precepts of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* (v. 1) and *Yogasūtra* (v. 2.16), the empirical experience given to us is a result of our embodiment. It is negatively evaluated as the source of distress or suffering (*duḥkha*) which is rooted in ignorance (*avidyā*) and, thus, 'the utter relinquishment of experience and of the embodied personality' is said to be the precondition (*SK* 68, see Burley 2007:20) of liberation (*kaivalya*). The ultimate soteriological goal of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga is the attainment of the state of the *puruṣa* who is additionally characterised as the seer (*drāṣṭṛ*) and witness (*sākṣin*).[24] The movement in the direction of *puruṣa* implies, on the metaphysical level, the return of the manifest *prakṛti* into its unmanifest source (*prakṛtilaya*)[25] which,

[22] The basic text of the Sāṃkhya system is the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa (4th century CE). Among the commentaries on the *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, the most frequently studied is the *Tattvakaumudī* (940 CE) written by Vācaspati Miśra.

[23] The classical Yoga system is represented by the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali (200 CE). The most important commentary on the *Yogasūtra* is the *Vyāsabhaṣya* attributed to Vyāsa (650-850 CE).

[24] *SK* 19; YS 2.20 in Burley 2007:77.

[25] On detailed description of the *prakṛtilaya*, see Jacobsen 2002: 273-308.

in turn, on the individual level, implies 'forsaking everything that marks one out as a person in the first place including body, mind, memory, etc.' (see Burley 2007:133). In effect, as Georg Feuerstein (1989:74) pointed out, 'emancipation … abolishes man's false organismic identity and re-locates him into the Self', the *puruṣa*. The central aim of the Sāṃkhya-Yoga is pragmatic, namely freeing oneself from the entanglement of embodiment caused by *prakṛti* that naturally leads to the eradication of future suffering and ignorance (see *YS* 2.16). Yoga suggests methods for its elimination from the human scene which are missing in theory-oriented Sāṃkhya. These methods, comprised of a closely connected set of disciplines that include 'practice' (*abhyāsa*) and 'detachment' (*vairāgya*), developed out of the Brāhmaṇical 'obsession' with control and purification. The etymology of the word '*yoga*' is derived from the verbal root '*yuj*' meaning 'to control', 'to yoke'. The proper sense of '*yoga*', thus, predicates 'mastery' and 'subjugation' (see Tola & Dragonetti 1987:1). Employment of the word '*yoga*' to denote 'restraint' or 'control' was already known in the Upaniṣads where its linguistic usage was applied to the control of the senses. In the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (II.6.11), 'the firm holding back of the senses is called Yoga' (see Dasgupta 1979:44). Such a controlling predicate of the term '*yoga*' was certainly retained in the restraining disciplines of *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* that aimed at 'immobilising the continual fluctuation of the individual body-emotions-mind complex' (*citta-vṛtti-nirodha*) through suppression of bodily and mental instability (Torella 2011:92-94). Practice (*abhyāsa*) is defined as a continuous effort to acquire stability (*sthiti*) of *citta* (*YS* 1.13), which is characterised by its peaceful flow (*praśāntavāhitā*) (*YS* 3.10). Detachment (*vairāgya*) involves forsaking the thirst (*tṛṣṇā*) for worldly objects (*YS* 1.15).*Vairāgya* translated by Monier-Williams as the 'freedom from worldly desires', whose semantics includes also the meaning of 'dispassion' puts emphasis on the renunciation of the objects of desire and as such it can be said to be the main spiritual attitude of an adept aspiring for liberation in the Brāhmaṇical context.

In the precise meaning of this term given in the *Yogasūtra*, *yoga* as a technique of spiritual discipline involves the cessation of the activity of body-emotions-mind complex (*yogaś-citta-vṛtti-nirodha*) by engaging oneself in the practices that aim at reversing the tendency for the outward flow of the mind and the senses directed towards the objects of perception. By 'turning within', a yogin induces the reversal process that attempts, in Sāṃkhya terms, to free *puruṣa* from the shackles of *prakṛti*. That is achieved by *puruṣa*'s 'split with the body' (*śārira-bheda*) and by *prakṛti*'s withdrawal to the dormant state (*SK* 65). As Mikel Burley (2007:134) says, 'Not only, then, does the mind (*citta*) cease to operate, but the entire world of ostensibly physical objects dissolves, leaving only an unmanifest and dormant *prakṛti*, plus, of course the now solitary *puruṣa*, who abides in purely its own nature (*svarūpa*)'. The salvific goal of Sāṃkhya-Yoga is the same state of perfect isolation (*kaivalya*) of *puruṣa* which entails a termination of *puruṣa*'s false identification with that which is not self (*anātman*),[26] namely *prakṛti*. As Mikel Burley (2007:140-1) has demonstrated, from the premises stated above, it, then, appears that liberation (*kaivalya*) in Sāṃkhya-Yoga is considered to be a disembodied state and mindless state in a sense in which yogin's body and mind, as being a part of a wider psychophysical nature (*prakṛti*), get dissolved into the unmanifest state upon *prakṛti*'s return to inactivity. In the words of *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, ''then *puruṣa*, abiding [in itself] like a spectator, sees *prakṛti*, who has returned to inactivity".[27] Thus, upon the total cessation of *citta* that is the body-emotions-mind complex only the solitary *puruṣa* remains who is pure consciousness of spectator beyond empirical experience. This is the condition of liberation (*kaivalya*), which is identified with witnessing (*sākṣitva*), seer-ness (*drāṣṭṛtva*) and inactivity (*akrtṛbhāva*)[28] that marks an epistemic shift in which the cessation of ignorance (*avidyā*) occurs. *Avidyā* equated with

[26] *YS* 2.5. in Burley 2007:131.
[27] *SK* 65 in Burley 2007:47.
[28] *SK* 19.

the aloneness of seeing (*dṛśeḥ kaivalyam YS* 2.25)[29] is defined as 'seeing the eternal, pure, delightful, and essential in [that which is] temporal, impure, distressing, and inessential' (*YS* 2.5).

An idea attended to clearly in the Advaita Vedānta and Sāṃkhya-Yoga purposefully holds human body-emotions-mind complex as the domain of bondage and suffering and presents a framework for its suppression, control, or its realization of being the form of ignorance (*avidyā*) that stands in opposition to the pure consciousness of *puruṣa*, the solitary witness and the seer. In the Advaita Vedānta this duality is inherently presupposed in the epistemic failure that causes the self's erroneous identification with contingent features of individuated experience; on the contrary in the Sāṃkhya-Yoga, this duality is real as it is presumed in the ontological gap between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti.* Nevertheless, the general view presented in both systems sees the self as a solitary, inactive spectator and sees the core of suffering and ignorance in the agency attributed to the embodied individual where change is equated with imperfection. In both systems, the metaphysics is indexed with soteriological quest for 'saving knowledge' which involves "translocation of one's own identity, away from the mutable structures of experience towards the immutable and essential self" (Burley 2007:6), the passive observer. This solitary spectator abides outside the body-mind-senses and the empirical level of experience where it persists through change by enduring. This model of liberation has directly influenced the way in which Brāhmaṇical orthopraxy thought of *mokṣa*.

**The Societal Culture of Spectators: The Rise of Sanskrit *Kāvya***

With the cultural milieu of Sanskrit *kāvya* and flourishing of aesthetic theories came a different type of spectatorship, one that allowed for the experience of refined emotions (*rasa*s). Aesthetic theories represented by Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* and Kashmiri aestheticians such as Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta,

[29] See Burley 2007:145.

Daṇḍin (7th century), Bhaṭṭa Lolaṭṭa (9th century), Śaṅkuka (9th century), Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka (9-10th century) advanced the notion of spectator (*prekṣaka*)[30] that unfolded against the background of ascetic denial, Brāhmaṇical renunciation of desire (*vairāgya*) and solipsistic spectatorship of Advaita Vedānta and Sāṃkhya-Yoga. Taking as their point of departure Brāhmaṇical notion of spectator indexed with metaphysic soteriology, aesthetic theoreticians built on its basis the entire framework of their own version of spectatorship that quickly became a basic cultural pattern of medieval courtly life in India (cf. Ali 2004). As Daud Ali informs us, 'seeing was arguably the most developed sense of courtly circles, and the act of looking and viewing was imbued with heavily coded meaning' (Ali 2004:133). He writes further,

> aesthetic theories were highly scholastic exercises, there are several reasons to assume that both authors and audiences were generally aware of the theoretical framework of aesthetics as set down in the manuals like the *Nāṭyaśāstra* that they together formed part of an interpretative community […]. The first and perhaps most important reason is that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* spends considerable time thinking about spectators, aesthetic appreciation (Ibid. 189).

The notion of spectator as a cultural trend of urbane and courtly life was positioned against the Brāhmaṇical 'disinterested spectator' obsessed with taboos of purity and detachment. Unlike the spectatorship of solipsistic detachment from any cognitive faculties pertaining to the embodied individual, the type of spectatorship promoted by aesthetic theories allowed for a person's involvement in certain psychological processes that encouraged emotional engagement. We cannot hope to do justice to the depth and complexity of the arguments of the major thinkers here, but will limit ourselves to introducing briefly the key issues of the argument that are fundamental to

[30] The very etymology of the word *prekṣaka* was derived from the verbal root *īkṣ*, 'to see' with added suffix *pra* became *pra+ īkṣ* , 'to behold or look in front' (as the spectator of a drama or *prekṣaka*). Cf. Ali 2004:198.

the understanding of the notion of spectatorship we are dealing herewith. Aesthetic theoreticians, most notably Abhinavagupta in his widely acclaimed *Locana* and *Abhinavabhāratī*, highlights three interrelated psychological processes that should be, preferably, taking place in the 'ideal spectator', namely: 1) 'consonance with the heart' (*sahṛdaya*), 2) 'generalization' or 'universalization'(*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*), and 3) 'identification' (*tanmayībhavana* or *tanmayībhāva*). First is a kind of aesthetic sensibility, which is the ability to appreciate artistic expression that transforms a spectator into the man 'with the heart' (*sahṛdaya*). *Sahṛdaya* is characterized by inner openness that results in the sympathetic response (*hṛdayasaṃvāda*) to the work of art. The aesthetic sensibility requires an acute, receptive observer whose heart and mind are pure, resembling a mirror, and therefore, capable to receive all the images reflected in them (*vimalamukurakalpībhūtanijahṛdayaḥ*).[31] Since its inception, the consonance of the heart was being closely related with an attitude of passionate-*cum*-emotional engagement in the world of art. An earliest example of a passionate spectator (*anurāgin*) is given in Bharata's *Naṭyaśāstra* (27.53-55) when he says that, 'one who feels happiness at the portrayal of happiness, grief at the portrayal of grief, misery at the portrayal of misery: such is the spectator of drama'. This passage shows that the possession of 'emotional temperament' (Goodwin 1998:xi) was the most necessary quality of an ideal spectator. Similar emphasis on passionate character as an intrinsic feature of a good poet is given by Ānandavardhana in the *Dhvanyāloka* (3.42), 'If the poet is a man of passion (*śṛṅgārin*), the world in poetry is full of *rasa*. But if he is passionless (*vītarāga*), that world is devoid of *rasa* altogether'. Here again, 'passion' in a sense of emotional sensibility of a poet is a determining factor responsible for endowing the poetry or drama with an aesthetic delight (*rasa*). The implementation of 'aestheticized passion'[32] into the aesthetic framework of *rasa*-

[31] *Abh*, p. 37, Gnoli, p. xliv.

[32] The aestheticised passion (*śṛṅgāra rasa*) figured prominently among the eight *rasa*s listed in the *Naṭyaśāstra*. The *śṛṅgāra rasa* became

aesthetics was not the only example of Brāhmaṇical influence on the development of aesthetic theory. On the other side of a spectrum we see in the aesthetic theories of medieval period an attempt to reconcile with the Brāhmaṇical ideal of ascetic denial. As Robert E. Goodwin (1998) pointed out *kāvya* (but also the aesthetic theories that emerged from the Sanskrit *kāvya* milieu) were the reflection of conflicting tendencies of paradigmatic worldview of Indian culture eternally torn between a desire for sensual pleasure that led to emotional fulfilment and an ascetic ideal of a complete detachment from emotions (*vairāgya*).[33] He elaborates on it in the following words,

> the *rasika* (the poet or spectator of the *kāvya*) was genuinely aware of a fundamental powerlessness vis-à-vis the transcendental authority figurally represented by the ascetic sage but diffusely present throughout Indian culture in *guru*-reverence, the *vairāgya* ideal, etc. There is a deep-rooted conviction in the Indian worldview that power and insight come only through self-restraint, i.e., through the denial of the emotional life (Goodwin 1998:154).

Perhaps the best example of an attempt to reconcile this conflict between emotionalism and ascetic denial within the aesthetic theory is the concept of *śānta rasa*.[34]

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a dominant theme of every court drama or literary work from the 4th to 13th century. In the words of Daud Ali (2006:209), 'By the eleventh century, the sentiment of *śṛṅgāra* had become so important that the king Bhoja (r. 1011-55) in his *summa poetica,* the *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* or 'Light on Passion', made it the basis of a superordinate experiential 'sense of the self' which encompassed not only erotic love, but all the emotions and sentiments of an exalted life' (see Pollock 1998:117-92). In this way, we can see how 'desire' avoided in the Brāhmaṇical orthopraxy became relegated to the aesthetic domain where it assumed a prominent place.

[33] Goodwin (1998:xvi-xvii) says that the hero of *kāvya* myth which 'functions as a narrative paradigm of a worldview, depicting essential areas of conflict' is, above all, 'the portrait of the sentimental hero in his struggle with cultural norms that attach a low value to emotion and individual autonomy'.

[34] The *śānta rasa*, 'the state of tranquility or calmness' as the source of all other *rasa*s was introduced by Abhinavagupta as a ninth *rasa*

The second attribute of an ideal spectator is the experience of the 'universalized' emotions[35] shared equally by the entire audience. As Cuneo summarizes:

> […] the emotions represented in art are felt by the enjoyers of art as 'generalized' or 'universalized', namely as deprived of any spatial or temporal qualifications as well as non-belonging to any specific individual [...].The emotion, so experienced, is therefore felt as if it were undifferentiated or 'transpersonal', devoid of any reference to personal characterization such as 'I am the one who is feeling so-and-so' [...]. Emotions felt in such a position of unrelatedness are, so to say, hoisted

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to a classical list of the eight *rasa*s. In holding that the culmination of aesthetic experience results in tranquility, Abhinavagupta, a tantric master *par excellence* surprisingly echoes the views of the mainstream ascetic and Brāhmaṇical milieu of emotionlessness. However, his explanation shows greater originality, even if it still exhibits the same dialectical struggle for the reconciliation of opposites that takes place between affirmation of the emotional life and the *vairāgya* ideal. In his exposition of the *śānta rasa* (given in Chapter 7 of the *Abhinavabhārati*), Abhinavagupta is very conscious of the *pūrvapakṣa* position that is held by Ānandavardhana: *śānti* which has *śama* (the absence of passion) as its *sthāyibhāva* (stable emotion) is an attitude of disgust (*nirveda*) towards worldly enjoyment; in the absence of passion which is the meaning of *tṛṣṇā-kṣaya-sukha* ['pleasure is (derived from) destruction of desire'], *śānti* is the state of a complete emotional detachment (*vairāgya*) that leads to *mokṣa.* Abhinavagupta refutes the *pūrvapakṣa* position by showing that 'since the state *śānti*, as a goal of the *virāgin*, involves renunciation of emotional attachment, the *rasa śānta* would appear to be capable of being focused on any *bhāva* whatsoever, but a purely negative content, and would in effect become the emotional awareness of the absence of emotion!' (Aklujkar & Gerow 1972:82). The only way to avoid the pitfalls of depriving *śānta rasa* of its emotional component was to relegate its *sthāyibhāva* to another ontological dimension. In this view, the *sthāyibhāva* of *śānta rasa* became *ātman* itself or, in other words, the aesthetic experience of the pure Self.

[35] The concept of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* is the original contribution of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka to Indian aesthetics, elucidated in his *Hṛdayadarpaṇa* (the text now lost), later borrowed by Abhinavagupta.

up to a different plane of reality, removed from the ordinary world of pleasure and pain, freed from individuation and limitation.[36]

The most important function of 'universalization' is that it shatters limited individuality of human consciousness and is thus contingent on abolishing anxieties, expectations and cravings dependent upon it. There is yet another purpose of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, more metaphysical, that aims at suspending spatiotemporal continuum. The spectator experiencing 'universalized' emotions remains unaffected, as it were, by limiting agents of time, space and knowing subject. To illustrate this argument, we might turn to the following example. For instance, in the ordinary reality, a potentially dangerous situations, such as an approaching tiger causes fear and anxiety in the subject that shape intervention decisions, in this case 'running away'. In other words, in the real everyday world emotional factors often determine conative responses. However, in the fictional reality created by art, the arousal of emotions, such as fear would not urge an impulse to run away, even though emotions experienced at that time might affect bodily reactions (sweat, horripilation). It happens so because the emotion of fear arising in the spectator viewing a play is not delimited by restriction of time, space and subjectivity. This disengagement from the bounds of spatiotemporal limitations and confines of individuality that results in 'universalization' directly leads to the aesthetic experience. But 'universalization' poses yet another problem for a spectator, that of a peculiar ontological status of the fictional world, existing at the least noticeable border of reality and unreality. To tackle this problem, we should try to find an answer to the pertinent question about the nature of perception encountered in the reception of artwork. Abhinavagupta is fairly clear that it is a perception of different order that stands in relation to direct perception (*pratyakṣa, sākṣātkāra*), while retaining its fictional character. In this case, Abhinavagupta uses the compound *pratyakṣakalpa, sākṣātkārakalpa* in reference to

[36] Cuneo, pp. 66-7.

the fictional world, which even though devoid of any association with the real-world of actual events is 'like' a direct perception.

Both *sahṛdaya* and *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* are strengthened by a third constituent element of the 'ideal spectator' that involves identification (*tanmayībhāva*) with emotional situation depicted by the *dramatis personae* that is so strong that the distinction between experiencing subject and experienced object becomes blurred. Such a complete emotional involvement on the part of the spectator facilitates aesthetic experience *sui generis* that culminates in savouring of *rasa* (*rasāsvāda*). Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka puts forward this precise moment of identification at the core of his description of aesthetic experience. He writes thus:

> dramatic performances and the music accompanying them feed the *rasa* in all its fullness; hence the spectator, absorbed in the tasting of it, turning inward, feels pleasure through the whole performance. Sunk into his own being, he forgets everything (pertaining to practical life). There is manifested in him that flow of inborn pleasure, from which the yogis draw their satisfaction.[37]

Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka was the first author to associate aesthetic experience (*rasāsvāda*) with mystical experience (*brahmāsvāda*). Abhinavagupta accepts Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's position, in a famous passage of his commentary (*locana*) on Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka*, he deliberately emphasizes a close experiential affinity between the two: *parabrahmāsvādasabrahmacāritvaṃ cāstav asya rasāvādasya*.[38]

What becomes immediately clear here is that it is the act of tasting (*āsvāda*) that loads itself with aesthetic and mystical meaning. In defining 'tasting' as the aesthetic perception *per se* Abhinavagupta maintains that *aesthetic tasting* differs from *gustatory taste*, the latter depended on the palate's experience.

[37] These passages certainly from Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka are quoted by Mahimabhaṭṭa in his *Vyaktiviveka.* Cf. Gnoli, Raniero, *An Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, Chowkhamba Publications 1968, p. XXIV, p. 48.

[38] *DhvĀ* 2.4.

An aesthetic tasting is, foremost, a mental act;[39] the mind of the one who tastes is totally engrossed in the object of the tasting (*ekāgra* 'with undivided attention') to the exclusion of everything else (*vigalitavedyāntaratayā*). In this moment, the mind of the spectator reaches the state free of obstacles (*vighna*) pervaded by the feeling of enjoyment (*bhoga*) and beatitude (*ānanda*), which is extra-ordinary (*alaukika*). Such a total immersion in the object of enjoyment (*bhogāveśa*) culminates in aesthetic delight (*camatkāra* 'delectation'[40]). According to the etymological analysis, *camatkāra* means 'the action being made by tasting subject (*camataḥ karaṇa*)'.[41] As such, it is thought of as an enjoying subject immersed in the vibration (*spanda*) of a wonderful enjoyment (*adbhutabhoga*). There are different words that are used by Abhinavagupta synonymously with *camatkāra*[42] that seem to frame two different, but complementary dimensions of aesthetic experience: an enjoyable relish that requires from a spectator a total surrender to the object of the tasting, on the one hand, and a kind of serenity or tranquility of repose (*viśrānti*) suddenly enveloping the spectator with the feeling of beatitude and marvelous wonder, on the other. One important conclusion that can be drawn here is that *viśrānti* is certainly not envisioned as a state of abatement resulting from the spectator's indifferent attitude but, on the contrary, it characterizes his fullest absorption in the aesthetic object. The term *camatkāra* posits an enjoyer (*bhoktṛ*), who is totally suffused with the wonder of enjoyment or aesthetic delight (*rasa*), at the centre of the cognitive process. As Goodwin (1998:7) remarks, 'In the philosophical understanding of aesthetic delight (*rasāsvāda*, *camatkāra*, etc.) every emotional response, though engendered by an imaginative engagement in a

[39] *rasanavyāpārād bhojanād adhiko yo mānaso vyāpāraḥ sa evāsvādanam/*

[40] On the etymological origins of the word *camatkāra* and its association with gastronomic taste, see p. 65.

[41] Gnoli, Raniero, *An Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, Chowkhamba Publications 1968, p. 59.

[42] See page 66.

virtual world, becomes nothing but the spectator's own blissful self-savouring'.

Against the general trend of liberation pointing towards ascetic denial explicated in the concept of the solitary spectator, the Kashmiri aestheticians promoted the societal culture of spectators as a spiritual collective for whom the "freedom-in-feeling" was a path of liberation. It was certainly not a culture made up of single individuals (contemplating 'inner vision' in caves and forests or monastic institutions), but rather the cultural community engaging 'the outer sight' which was enjoyed and shared by people and, therefore, societal in a sense in which the members of this society were united in sharing the status of the spectators. If we want to grasp the deeper, philosophical meaning of this social practice, we have to turn again to the great polymath. According to Abhinavagupta and his commentator Jayaratha, a spectacle attended by a group of people who consciously share their status as spectators generate far greater pleasure than the one attended by individuals uninterested in viewing. This type of communal participation gives rise to the uniformity in consciousness that embraces all spectators collectively, as well as individually. For this reason, the collective viewing generates 'perception of a full and perfect bliss' that brings about a very high *camatkāra.* This idea is elucidated in the following verses of the *Tantrāloka*:

> The spectators who watch, absorbed, a performance of dancing, of singing, and the like, feel that it is a real sea of nectar (Jayaratha comments: 'anyone in fact, can observe that spectacles seen by many people at the same time, generate a greater pleasure than those which are seen by single individual'). It is for this reason that those who teach the true nature of performances of wrestling and acting, say that in these a real state of identity of all knowing subjects takes place; this state generates a perception of a full and perfect bliss. If the mere consciousness of what they see on the stage (without, that is, the realization that the performance is seen by other people) were sufficient to satisfy the spectators taken one by one, how then can the different state of consciousness, which arises when they are together, be explained? And how could it still be sustained by a state of identity of

the knowing subjects that exists? When, instead, the spectator is aware that the spectacle is seen at the same time by all others also, one can say with reason that it appears in a different form from the arid aspect it has before (this spectacle then, observes Jayaratha takes on another nature which generates a very high *camatkāra*).[43]

The same argument is developed further by Abhinavagupta in the context of the dual scheme: *saṃkoca-vikāsa* which represent the moments of contraction and expansion of consciousness, respectively. In the most general terms, *saṃkoca* stands for differentiation of consciousness in the individual bodies[44] imposed by five coverings (*kañcukas*)[45] derived directly from *māyā*, while *vikāsa* corresponds to the expansion of consciousness that results in the perfect fullness of I-ness (*pūrṇahambhāva*). The aim of all Kashmiri Śaiva practices focuses on reducing contraction of consciousness that creates limited, artificial I-ness and reaching the state of the expansion of consciousness, the state of śivahood. Abhinavagupta argues in this case that during the spectacle attended by receptive spectators or *sahṛdaya*s, the consciousness which is normally contracted in the individual bodies reaches expansion, characterized by the state of unity and bliss which is perfect and full. However, here again, he emphasizes the

[43] *Tā* 10, v.85. Gnoli, p. 57.

[44] *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* v. 4 says: 'the individual experiment also in whom consciousness is contracted has the universe as his body in contracted form', Cf. Singh Jaideva, p. 55

[45] Each of these coverings represents limitation of one of Śiva's unlimited powers.

The correspondence between the five coverings (*kañcuka*s) of the bounded soul (*paśu*) pertaining to *māyā* and the unlimited powers of Śiva is given as follows:

| The powers of Śiva: | The *kañcuka*s: |
|---|---|
| Omnipotence | kalā (limited efficacy) that covers sarvakartṛtva |
| Omniscience | vidyā (limited knowledge) that covers sarvajñātva |
| Perfect fullness | rāga (attachment) that covers pūrṇatva |
| Eternity | kāla (time) |
| Omnipresence | niyati (destiny) that covers omnipresence |

importance of the collective viewing that engages all spectators. Abhinavagupta strengthens his argument by saying that even one unresponsive observer is enough to demolish the state of beatitude. This passage is especially relevant to our present discussion on the societal culture of spectators, therefore it is worth quoting it at length:

> The consciousness, which consists of and is animated by all things, on account of difference of bodies, enters into a state of contraction. But, in public celebrations, it returns to a state of expansion—since all the components are reflected in each other. The radiance of one's own consciousness in ebullition (when it is tending to pour out of itself) is reflected in the consciousness by all the spectators, as if in so many mirrors, and, inflamed by these, it abandons without effort its state of individual contraction. For this very reason, in meetings of many people (at a performance of dancers, singers, etc.), fullness of joy occurs when every spectator, not only one of them, is identified with spectacle. The consciousness, which, considered separately also is innately made of bliss, attains, in these circumstances—during the execution of dances, etc.—a state of unity, and so enters into a state of bliss which is full and perfect. In virtue of absence of any cause for contraction, jealousy, envy etc. the consciousness finds itself, in these circumstances, in a state of expansion, free of obstacles and pervaded by bliss. When, on the other hand, even one only of the spectators does not concentrate on the spectacle he is looking at, and does not share, therefore, the form of consciousness in which the other spectators are immersed, this consciousness is disturbed, as at the touch of an uneven surface.[46]

These philosophical ideas exploring a deeper meaning of collective viewing had a potentially high ethical value because they cut egocentrism at its root. On this assumption, the participation in performances of dancers and singers stressed the value of community that brought with itself a high level of personal responsibility for all the members of the cultural society of spectators. Despite the communal character of spectatorship, there is yet another, much more personal feature of viewing that entails sensory experience. The spectators brought to the

[46] *Tā* 28 vv.373. Gnoli, pp. XXXVIII-XXXIX.

performance the power of their senses, not only sight and taste, the most important aesthetic senses, but also nose and ear. The sense perception of sound and smell had, in principal, exactly the same impact on spectators as sight and metaphorically conceived taste, granting them an access to an aesthetic-cum-mystical experience. Abhinavagupta would say thus:

> when the ears are filled with the sound of sweet song or the nostrils with the scent of sandalwood, and the like, the state of indifference (non-participation) disappears and the heart is invaded by a state of vibration (*spandamānatā*). Such a state is precisely the so-called power of bliss, thanks to which man is 'in consent with the heart' (*sahṛdaya*).[47]

The propositions of aesthetic theories could 'work' only in social reality where aesthetic patterns of thought and behaviour were taken for granted and where they have come to represent the intersubjective common core of reality in which people lived. The social reality of people at court was primarily aesthetic. The elaborated protocols of behaviour derived from Sanskrit poetry were generally regarded as the accepted norms of right conduct. The distinctive aesthetic lifestyle of the royal court was one conducive to generating the experience of pleasure and enjoyment where the aesthetic media of communication such as dance and drama served a broader purpose in the society's orientation directed towards 'ethics of pleasure'.[48]

[47] Tā 3.200. *tathā hi madhure gīte sparśe vā candanādike/ mādhyasthyavigame yāsau hṛdaye spandamānatā// ānandaśaktiḥ saivoktā yataḥ sahṛdayo janaḥ/* Cf. Gnoli, Raniero, *An Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*, Chowkhamba Publications 1968, p. XLIV.

[48] The erotic pleasure (*kāma*) as the 'ethical' and not 'aesthetic' value appears to dominate urban space of the Indian medieval city. Kaul in her detailed analysis of urbanism based on the courtly literature of *kāvya* argues that the medieval city was the centre of erotic pleasure (*kāma*) inhabited by beautiful courtesans attended by men in pleasure groves (*kṛīḍavāna*) where drinking, gambling, music and dance were found among the most favourite occupations. The city was also depicted as the place of constant festival (*sattato utsavam*) where sex was celebrated as the festival in the honour of god of love (*Kāmadeva*). Kaul's analysis of

## 'Dancer' as Jīvanmukta: An Example of Kashmir Śaivism

In large part the study of religion depends on the interpretation of symbols, metaphors, and images which Ninian Smart (1969) has called "symbolic analysis". The main reason for this endeavour arises from the very structure of religious experience, which is often expressed through symbolic language that involves metaphors. Unlike ordinary language which "can capture only the foam on the surface of life",[49] symbols and metaphors have the ability to spread out multiplicity of meanings beyond the conventional.[50] Because of its inherent "inexhaustible depth",[51] symbols can far more easily communicate the incomprehensible paradox of religious experience that can be expressed in no other way.[52]

A rather different approach to the great potentiality of metaphors was adopted by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) who have argued for the conceptual metaphors which are dependent on the cultural and social practices and which are ultimately experiential in a sense in which they are a part of our embodied experience.[53] According to Lakoff's famous definition, thus: *the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one thing in terms of another.*[54] He argues further that metaphors have a

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the medieval urban 'reality' places this hedonistic picture in the larger framework of the 'ethics of pleasure' which she relates to one of the goals of the human life (*puruṣārthas*). cf. Kaul, Shonaleeka, *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and the City in Early India*, Permanent Black, 2010.

[49] Ricoeur Paul, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and Surplus of Meaning*, p. 63.

[50] Ricoeur Paul, 'The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection' in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricouer: An Antology of His Work* p. 38.

[51] Ricoeur Paul, 'The Hermeneutics of Symbols and Philosophical Reflection' in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricouer: An Anthology of His Work* p. 38.

[52] Eliade M., *Mephistopheles and the Androgyne*, p. 205.

[53] Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago University Press.

[54] Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago University

particular knowledge content whose understanding is culturally circumscribed and grounded within our world-experience. The logical consequences of this point of view are that every change in our culturally determined conceptual framework would, in turn, involve the change in the meaning of metaphors. In other words, each moment in human history is governed by different conceptual framework, which does have repercussions for understanding and experiencing the meaning of the metaphors and symbols. In view of a general analysis of symbolic and metaphorical language delineated by these theories, let's now take a closer look at the specific meaning of 'dance metaphor'. At the very outset, one realizes that the 'dance metaphor' has a multivalent meaning whose conceptual content changed in the course of time. Moreover, viewed from the perspective of religious experience, 'dance metaphor' refers to other level(s) of meaning than its presumed denotation. A standard definition of 'dancing' adhered by those who employ this term is the following: 'dancing is the kinetic energy engaging physical body'. However, employed as the metaphor within the particular conceptual framework of Indian religious and philosophical traditions, 'dancing' acquires additional meaning(s). A telling illustration of these differences is given in the following table:

| **Conceptual Framework** | **Multivalent Meaning of 'Dance Metaphor'** |
|---|---|
| Upaniṣads | 'Dance is Death' |
| Kashmiri Śaivism | 'Dance(r) is Liberation-while-Living' |
| Sāṃkhya | 'Dance(r) is Nature (prakṛti)' |

This table shows how the meaning of the 'dance metaphor' changed in the course of time in accordance with a certain conceptual framework in which it was formulated. This conceptual framework is closely connected with general theoretical assumptions regarding 'the body' developed in these traditions. The ontological split between the mind-body complex and the

Press, p. 5.

Self does set its mark on the evaluation of 'dance metaphor'. The dualistic systems like Sāṃkhya or the philosophical asceticism of the Upaniṣads, which defined the true Self as exclusive of psycho-physical mind-body complex are compatible with negative evaluation of the dance phenomenon. In this regard, the most extreme position comes from the Upaniṣads, which totally denounces 'dance' by associating it with death and aging. The *Kaṭhopaniṣad* narrates the story of Naciketas, who in his quest for knowledge about dying visits Yama and the world of death. Death seduces him with beautiful girls playing on musical instruments, but Naciketas remains unperturbed and refuses to accept them. He says to Death: "Dance and song are yours" pointing out to the ephemeral nature of worldly enjoyments that wear away the vigour of a man.[55] In this context, dance becomes associated with aging and transient character of human existence. As Doniger observed: "the association of the dance not only with aging but with death persists in many later texts, where Indra sends dancing girls instead of Death to destroy would be immortals".[56] It appears then that in the period of the Upaniṣads in which the cultivation of the ascetic body reached its peak, the 'dance metaphor' acquired deeply pejorative meaning insofar as it implied psycho-physical engagement with the phenomenal world that was against Upaniṣadic version of spirituality promulgating contemplative stasis of the inner vision that belonged to the Seer which we have already discussed. Situated within these conceptual premises, the metaphorical meaning of dance was inevitably bound to the realm of death and impermanence.

This manner of formulating 'dance metaphor' within the broader conceptual framework within which it exists occurs also in Sāṃkhya formally developed in the 3rd century *Sāṃkhyakārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa. The Sāṃkhya philosopher was interested in the analysis of perception that takes place between the subject (spectator) and object. In the Sāṃkhya system, the

[55] *Kaṭhopaniṣad* 1.25-26.

[56] O'Flaherty Wendy Doniger, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*, 1973, pp. 87-9.

objective aspect of experience becomes feminine *prakṛti*—the 'seen' or the non-conscious (*acetana*), and the subjective aspect of experience becomes masculine *puruṣa*—the spectator, the pure consciousness (*cetana*) characterized by his dispassionate, non-reactive look. The relation between the two has been described metaphorically as the theatric universe in which *prakṛti*-dancer dances in front of *puruṣa*-spectator. The dancer moves only because of the spectator's mute presence, once he loses his interest, she stops her dance. What stirs the objects of perceptions to manifest in the playful display is actually the presence of the spectator casting mystical shadow, "which albeit inactive and intrinsically alien to any real involvement with the objects of perceptions, nevertheless acts as its indispensable catalyst" (Torella 2009:83). The *Sāṃkhyakārikā* describes it in the following words:

> Like a dancer who withdraws from the scene once the play has been performed before the audience, so *prakṛti* withdraws after manifesting herself to the *puruṣa.* Lavish with help of various kinds and endowed with qualities (*guṇas*), she operates without minding her own interest in the interest of the *puruṣa*-spectator, who for his own part is lacking in qualities (*aguṇa*) and is concerned with nothing and no one. There is nothing more delicate than *prakṛti*, I deem, who knowing that she has been seen, no longer shows herself to the eye of *puruṣa*-observer.

Īśvarakṛṣṇa's main contention was that the objective aspect of experience is presented to the spectator only to make him recognize that he, himself, the inactive, pure consciousness, is completely isolated from the external world of perceptible objects. The moment of liberation is constituted by an 'isolating vision' (*viveka*) when the spectator realizes the fact that he has been involuntarily entangled in the world's dance and that there has never been any link between them. The ideal of the inactive, dispassionate spectator, the mere witness to the events playfully manifested in the world outside the province of pure consciousness had important consequences for the entire mainstream Brahmāṇical traditions firmly rooted in the Sāṃkhya's subject-object dualism which promoted the spiritual

ideal that presupposed turning away from the enchanting dance of phenomenal existence, promulgating purity and renunciation (*vairāgya*).[57] Here, like in the Upaniṣads, the 'dance-metaphor' is employed as characterizing the negative value of world-experience. What is at issue, here, roughly speaking, is that 'seeing dancing *prakṛti* embodied in manifested world' makes *puruṣa* realize his metaphysical ultimacy as the static spectator. In this way, the spiritual ideal of the Self beyond all forms of embodiment is most fully articulated.

Kashmiri Śaiva adaptation of the 'dance metaphor' shows to what extent the conceptual framework determines the distinctive semantic value of metaphors. Unlike the systems listed above which based their views on the body upon the dualistic presuppositions, Kashmiri Śaiva thinkers proposed monistic conclusion. Thus, the 'dance metaphor' is used to propound the ideal of structural homogeny between the universal Self and the individual mind-body complex. It is no longer the ascetic body of the Renunciant, but the aesthetic body of the Dancer that directly reflects the highest degree of spiritual fulfillment, the state of a *jīvanmukta*. In the celebrated passage of the *Śivasūtras*,[58] it is said, thus:

The Self is the Dancer.
The stage (which is the body) is the inner Self.
The senses are the spectators (of his dancing).
The cognition (of such a yogī) is pure.

[57] cf. *Sāṃkhyakārikā* v.59-61, in Torella, p. 83.

[58] The *Śivasūtras* are believed to be taught by Śiva himself to Vasugupta who instructed him in a dream to go to Mahādeva Mountain in order to find a particular rock where the secret doctrine (Śivasūtra) has been inscribed. The rock still exists today near Śrinagar in Kashmir and is known as Śaṇkara-pala. The *Śivasūtras* appeared in the 9th century and have at least two important commentaries: the 11th century '*vārtika*' of Bhāskara and 10th century '*vimarśini*' of Kṣemarāja. The *Śivasūtras* are best described as a philosophical and practical treatise that expounds the whole metaphysics of Kashmiri Śaivism. This is a standard reference book, a scriptural authority held in high esteem and, therefore, quoted extensively by the Kashmiri Śaiva exegetes.

Therefore, the State of Being Totally Free (*svatantrabhāva*) is achieved. As he can manifest Freedom in his own body, so can he elsewhere.

By the adaptation of the 'dance metaphor' to refer to the highest degree of spiritual fulfillment, Kashmiri Śaivites pass beyond the dichotomy of the Self and the body, as well as the antonyms of the transcendent and the immanent. Thus, unlike earlier traditions that stressed liberation at the expense of the body, Kashmiri Śaivism attempts to override the stereotype of world-denial and understand liberation as life and as the process of living, which is essentially aesthetic in nature. The 'dance metaphor' perfectly supports this new model of understanding, for it epitomizes the centrality of the playful Self, existing in intricate unity with the aesthetic body. The principle strength of the Kashmiri Śaiva argument is the idea that the body is ontologically identical with the Self. This argument is reinforced by Kṣemarāja (11th century) who in his commentary (*vimarśinī*) on the verses of the *Śivasūtra*s says:

the place where the Self-the Dancer takes delight with the intention of performing the world-dance is the stage […]. The stage which consists of subtle and gross body is the inner Self. Having planted his feet on that stage of the inner Self, this Dancer (the Self) displays the world-dance by means of the active movements of his sense-organs.[59]

The distinction between the Self-the Dancer and the body-the stage is avoided by situating the body as the place of the inner Self. In this manner, the body holds the same ontological status as the Self. So far the employment of 'dance metaphor' in the Kashmiri Śaiva texts has been explained as an 'original' attempt to reinforce the ontological unity between the playful Self and the aesthetic body that appears in the context of liberation. But there are also other meanings this metaphor implies. One of the most important is founded on the implementation of the classical *rasa* theory expounded in the works of the legendary Bharata and other aestheticians, such as Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa (9th century), Bhaṭṭa

[59] Singh, *Śivasūtra*s, p. 155.

Nāyaka (10th century), and Abhinavagupta. The meaning and role of *rasa* theory is crucial for understanding Kashmiri Śaiva construction of the aesthetic body of the Dancer. Thus, the appeal to the Kashmiri Śaiva alleged *rasa* heritage is carefully explicated by Bhāskara who in his commentary (*vārtika*) on the stanza: "the Self is the Dancer", explains thus:

> The experienced dancer, who knows about (the forms) of aesthetic emotions (*rasas*), emotive states (*bhāvas*) and dancing and who possesses the correct state of mind (*sattva*), speech, physical appearance and dress is said to act his part well. Similarly, the Self manifests itself in accord with its own inherent nature everywhere (as every living being) by penetrating into the aesthetic emotion (*rasa*) of each emotive state (*bhāva* it expresses) and playfully behaving accordingly. (Thus the Self) is said to be the dancer because it assumes every state of being.[60]

What we have here is the analogy between the Dancer and the *jīvanmukta* founded on the adaptation of Bharata's *rasa* theory as exposed in his *Naṭyaśāstra*. Bharata distinguished between the ordinary, personal emotive states (*bhāvas*) and universalized, transpersonal aesthetic emotions (*rasas*). *Rasa* literally 'flavour', 'savour', 'liquid essence', 'sentiment' is a technical term in aesthetic theory,[61] depicting transpersonal aesthetic emotion, however, the Kashmiri Śaiva masters often adopt aesthetic terminology for description of the spiritual experience.[62] *Rasa* is one of these aesthetic terms most frequently used for depiction of the liquid essence of pure consciousness (*cid-rasa*), savoured by a *jīvanmukta*. In case of an experienced dancer, *rasa* is the outcome of the developed artistic skills through which he projects the specific kind of transpersonal emotion or the essence of

[60] *ŚS* 3.9, Bhāskara's commentary, tr. M. Dyczkowski with minor changes, p. 105.

[61] Ruth Katz; Arvind Sharma, 'The Aesthetics of Abhinavagupta', *British Journal of Aesthetics* 17 (3): 259-265, 1977.

[62] For relation between aesthetic savouring (*rasāsvāda*) and mystical experience (*brahmāsvāda*), see Gerow E., *Indian Poetics*, Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977.

feelings related to particular situation he creates.[63] In case of a *jīvanmukta*, the experience of *rasa* is brought out in the spiritual experience in which he extracts the aesthetic emotion (*rasa*) from each emotive state (*bhāva*) he encounters. This capacity to extract the essence of emotion (*rasa*) is connected with the ability to assume every state of being. In addition, the ability to extract *rasa* is tightly linked to the proclivities of the senses. It is again the psycho-physical mind-body complex inhabited by the sensory faculties that becomes the only warrant of aesthetic-cum-religious experience. Thus, in the commentary on the stanza: "the senses are the spectators (of his dancing)," Kṣemarāja explains, thus:

> the senses, like the eye, etc. are the spectators, for they actively view the cosmic dance of the Self, savouring aesthetic emotions (*rasa*) of the pure consciousness that pours through the vision of universal oneness. They provide *jīvanmukta* with fullness of aesthetic wonder (*camatkāra*)[64] in which the sense of difference has disappeared.[65]

[63] Bhāskara's argument that locates the experience of rasa in the dancer seems to follow the main thesis of Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa (9th century) who was the first commentator on Bharata's Naṭyaśāstra. According to Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa "*rasa* is located in both the original character (*anukārya*) and also in the performer (*anukartarī*), due to the power of congruous connection (*anusandhāna*)". Due to *anusandhāna* the performer becomes emotionally identified with the role. This argument is against Abhinavagupta's contention in which he argues that the performer is too involved in imitating the character to have the experience of *rasa*. According to Abhinavagupta, *rasa* requires the proper "artistic distance" that is possible only for the spectator. Cf. Haberman L. David, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, p. 23-4.

[64] *Rasa* and *camatkāra* are closely related. These two technical terms borrowed from Indian aesthetics are the warp and woof of Kashmiri Śaiva spiritual experience. The term *camatkāra* has much more extended application in the Kashmiri Śaiva metaphysics where it becomes synonymous with the aestheticism of the spiritual experience conveyed by terms such as: enjoyment (*nirveśa*), relish (*rasanā*), taste (*āsvāda*), eating (*bhoga*), completion (*samāpatti*), rest (*laya*), repose (*viśrānti*).

[65] *Śivasūtras* with Kṣemarāja's commentary, p. 157.

The 10th century Kashmiri writer, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka was the first author who argued for the religious or spiritual dimension of aesthetic experience by saying that the aesthetic experience of *rasa* is similar, though not identical, to the tasting (*āsvāda*) of the supreme Absolute (*brahman*). This tasting, he explains, is the form of tranquil repose (*viśrānti*). Abhinavagupta developed this view, arguing that aesthetic experience (*rasāsvāda*) is similar to the religious experience (*brahmāsvāda*) insofar as both are extraordinary (*alaukika*) experiences in which the ego is suspended and both result in bliss (*ānānda*).[66] In addition, he equates both the aesthetic experience and the religious experience with the Sanskrit term *camatkāra* employed in reference to 'wonder', 'astonishment' that implies "cessation of a world—the ordinary, historical world, the *saṃsāra*—and its sudden replacement by a new dimension of reality" characterized by its mysterious delight (*camatkāra*). The term *camatkāra*[67]

[66] He discusses this issue in the following words:

Watching a play or reading a poem for the sensitive reader (*sahṛdaya*) entails a loss of the sense of present time and space. All worldly considerations for the time being cease. Since we are not indifferent to what is taking place, our involvement must be of a purer variety than we normally experience. We are not directly and personally involved, so the usual medley of desires and anxieties dissolve. Our hearts respond sympathetically (*hṛdayasaṃvāda*) but not selfishly. Finally, the response becomes total, all-engrossing, and we identify with the situation depicted (*tanmayībhavana*). The ego is transcended and for the duration of the aesthetic experience, the normal waking 'I' is suspended. Once this actually happens, we suddenly find that our responses are not like anything we have hitherto experienced, for now that all normal emotions are gone, now that the hard knot of "selfness" has been untied, we find ourselves in an unprecendented state of mental and emotional calm. The purity of our emotion and the intensity of it takes us to a higher level of pleasure than we could know before—we experience sheer undifferentiated bliss. Inadvertently, says Abhinavagupta, we have arrived at the same inner terrain as that occupied by the mystic, though our aim was very different than him.

[67] Both *rasa* and *camatkāra* are said to be derived from the gastronomic taste. V. Raghavan traces the origin of *camatkāra* to 'an onomatopoeic word referring to the clicking sound we make with our

posits an enjoyer (*bhoktṛ*), who is totally suffused with the wonder of enjoyment or aesthetic emotion (*rasa*) at the centre of the cognitive process. He is the enjoyer who experiences through the expanded fund of the senses -- the spectators of his dancing.

The amazing success of *rasa*[68] as the theoretical construct that profoundly permeated Kashmiri Śaiva conceptual framework cannot be easily explained. It suffices to notice after Donna M. Wulff (1999)[69] that the "convergence of the aesthetic

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tongue when we taste something snappy, and in the course of its semantic enlargements, *camatkāra* came to mean a sudden fillip relating to any feeling of a pleasurable type.' Cf. Raghavan V., *Studies on Some Concepts of the Alaṃkāra Śāstra,* Adyar Library and Research Centre, Madras, 1942, op. cit., p. 269. Similarly 'rasa' has its analogy with ingestive processes. Bharata, the author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* gives an analogy of enjoyment of food in explaining the experience of the aesthetic delight (*rasa*). Just as a well-disposed person, whose mind is free from other thoughts and thus centered on the act of eating, relishes the flavours while eating food to which various spices are added, and in this relish gets satisfaction, so also the spectator whose mind is engrossed in the spectacle relishes the latent permanent states (*sthāyibhāva*s) aroused by the presentation of the various emotions with the help of verbal, physical and mental gesticulation and gets joy in this experience. Hence, these *rasa*s are called *nāṭyarasa*s (the sentiments in the dramatic spectacle. Cf. G.H. Tarlekar, *Studies in the Nāṭyaśāstra*, Motilal Banarsidass, 1975, p. 56.

[68] During its long history dating back to the Vedic *soma*—the nectar of immortality and Upaniṣadic '*raso vai saḥ*' '*rasa* as the essence of Brahman and liberation', the concept of taste has admittedly been subjected to a number of widely differing interpretations, ranging from the gastronomic, astronomic or medical to the aesthetic, alchemical (*rasāyana*) and spiritual. Etymologically, the term *rasa* stands for 'the sap', 'juice', 'fluid', 'essence', 'nectar', 'drink', 'essential constituent juice of the body (called chyle)', 'seminal fluid', 'quicksilver', 'taste', 'flavour', 'object of taste', 'delight', 'aesthetic sentiment'. Any attempt to provide adequate explanation of this concept, covering its multi-layered semantic referents is beyond the scope of this book. Undoubtedly, Kashmiri Śaivites were aware of tremendous conceptual potency yielded by this concept to give to *rasa* a prominent place in their metaphysical scheme.

[69] Wulff M. Donna, "Religion in a New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India", *Journal of the American*

and the religious" was not an isolated phenomenon, but rather an extrapolating trend that had a considerable impact on the formulation of religious doctrines in medieval India (e.g. 9th-10th century Kashmiri Śaivism, 16th century Bengali Vaiṣṇavism of Rūpa Gosvāmi). However, popularity of aesthetics was not limited to the religious dogma. Aesthetics, more than any other cultural trend of medieval times, exerted profound influence on virtually all spheres of life, including social and political. Thus, in an attempt to answer the question 'why the aesthetic body of the Dancer was appropriated by the Kashmiri Śaivites as a symbol of the highest spiritual fulfillment, the sign of liberation-while-living, it is important to point out that all modes of rhetoric, including those concerned with religious credo, are formulated in a language that 'speaks' to particular audiences situated in a specific ideological and historical milieus. One of the most common misunderstandings in interpreting the emergence of Kashmiri Śaivism is offered by an account in which it is perceived as a new socio-religious movement that has arisen in opposition to the Brāhmaṇical tradition. The principal criticism of this position consists in pointing out that the Kashmiri Śaivism was a 'product' of the Brāhmaṇical tradition. Most of the Kashmiri Śaiva masters were learned Brahmins,[70] the educated elite with hegemonic ambitions whose public lives were primarily orthodox. Their 'new' teachings were addressed to the noble elite families and royalty.[71] As Sanderson pointed out: "for several centuries after the sixth [Śaivism] was the principal faith of the elites in large part of Indian subcontinent".[72] If the 'Kashmiri

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*Academy of Religion*, pp. 673-688. & Haberman L. David, *Acting as a Way of Salvation*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2001.

[70] Cf. Dyczkowski Mark, *The Aphorisms of Śiva with a Commentary by Bhāskarācārya*, Dilip Kumar Publishers, Varanasi, 1991, p. vi.

[71] Cf. Alexis Sanderson, 'Ritual for Oneself, Ritual for Others' in: *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual* vol. 2, (ed. Axel Michaels), Harrassowitz Verlag, Weisbaden, 2010, pp. 9-21.

[72] Sanderson, Alexis, "Religion and the State: Śaiva Officiants in the Territory of the King's Brahmanical Chaplain", *Indo-Iranian Journal*, no. 47, 2004, p. 231.

Śaiva' argument was to appeal to the interests of the royals, then, it was crucial to formulate it in language more appropriate to Sanskrit *kāvya* milieu that would measure up to the elite's deepest aspirations and that would articulate the basic principles and values of distinctively aesthetic culture of Sanskrit *kāvya,* namely sovereignty, emotionalism, and, playfulness. In his interesting study, Daud Ali provided enough evidences for the enormous impact of *kāvya* aesthetics on the formation of medieval courtly life. He argues that *kāvya* had a truly formative role in shaping a controlled aesthetic environment dominated by the experience of the aesthetic emotions or *rasa*s. The ideal courtier (*dākṣiṇya*) was supposed to be an aesthete (*rasika*), someone who 'savours' the rarified emotions "aroused by stimulating images" (Goodwin 1998: 14) of beauty and refinement, a man of the heart (*sahṛdaya*) endowed with aesthetic sensibility. Similarly, the principles of *kāvya* aesthetics that dealt with the practice of ornamentation (*alaṃkāra*) had a great influence upon the construction of royal technology of self-hood in which "the ornamented body [of the king] became the great metaphor for the aesthetic-moral order".[73] Among other *kāvya* motifs that profoundly affected life at court was the category of 'playfulness' or 'sportiveness' expressed by words such as: *vilāsa, ramaṇa, lalita, līlā* and *krīḍā*[74] which constituted a prominent behavioral component articulating the affective life of people at court. Given what has been just said, it seems historically plausible to claim that the ideal of the Dancer as a promise of spiritual sovereignty would appeal to the rarified 'tastes' of the elites. The Kashmiri Śaiva masters promoted the new concept of liberation-while-living (*jīvanmukti*) identifying *mokṣa* with the playful worldly experience (*krīḍā*) and enjoyment (*bhoga*) empowering the body and the senses. The adept was encouraged to emotionally engage himself in the world instead of

[73] Ali 2008:178.

[74] The words for playfulness or sportiveness are derived from the verbal roots: √*kṛḍ*, to play; √*lal*, to play;

√*ram*, to rejoice to play; (vi+)√*las*, to shine, glitter or frolic, Cf. Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India,* p. 156.

negating it, which Goodwin called "freedom-in-feeling". This very freedom of aesthetic sphere was designed to offer a spirituality that would cohere with courtly practices of *kāvya* aesthetics. Kashmiri Śaivites emphasized spirituality based on aesthetic experience felt in the body that offered the assurance of freedom.

Thus, the last metaphorical meaning of 'dance' that becomes explicitly clear in the Kashmiri Śaiva construction of the aesthetic body is the notion of freedom. Only in the aesthetic body of the Dancer, the state of being totally free (*svatantrabhāva*) is achieved. This is the state that marks the cessation of false identification with the karmic body, and hence freedom from the conditioned non-pervasive state of corporeal and mental bondage. Abhinava explains:

> Then, established on the plane of truth, the *yogī* intuits that consciousness is in all things […]. The presumption that the Self is what the Self is not, and that being so, the presumption that what is not the Self, the body and the rest is the Self, is bondage while the cessation of <these notions> is liberation.[75]

The state of liberation is referred to here as the great pervasion (*mahāvyāpti*) with the aesthetic body situated at the centre of universal transactions according to the stanza of the *Śivasūtras*: "as he can manifest Freedom in his body so he can elsewhere." As a matter of fact, says Maheśvarānanda, the experience pertaining to the Dancer is expressed by the following gloss: 'I am verily everything, world is me'—this initial experience of the aesthetic wonder (*camatkāra*) that has arisen from the identification with the expanded universe and realization of the essential freedom is what determines the nature of the Dancer performing the dance that is the world.[76] In this context, 'dance metaphor' conveys ontological completeness that results in the aesthetic realization of one's own body as a cosmic body.

[75] *Tā* 5.104-106. Tr. M. Dyczkowski

[76] *parameśvaro hi ahameva sarvamiti vaiśvātmyaprathānubhūti-sphāra-camatkārottaratayā śuddhāṃ saṃkocakalaṅkaśaṅkāśūnyāṃ saṃvidaṃ svasvātantryasvabhāvavidyāmayīmanubhavannanenaiva* [...] *MMP*, comm. on stanza 19.

## Conclusion

Kashmiri Śaivism integrates the theory of *rasa* and the notion of enjoyment (*bhoga*) into a systematic account of embodied liberation (*jīvanmukti*) characterized as the ultimate form of empowerment (*parasiddhi*). In doing so, Kashmiri Śaiva masters argue that embodied liberation depends on the process of aesthetic transformation in which the entire psycho-physical mind-body complex becomes metaphorically transformed into fundamental components of dance-performance: Self becomes the Dancer, the body converts into the stage, and the senses turn into the spectators. Moreover, all these components partake as fully as possible in bringing about the aesthetic experience (*rasa*) characterized by wonder. The *jīvanmukta* dances on the stage of his own body savouring aesthetic emotions (*rasa*) through the expanded fund of his own senses. This total transformation of the ordinary body into its aesthetic equivalent results in total freedom, which is nothing else but realization of one's own body as the cosmic body. Liberation in Kashmiri Śaivism, then, can be seen as a recognition of one's own ordinary, karmic body as the aesthetic body of the Dancer that involves expanding one's own body to include the whole universe. For such a *yogī*, everything appears as Śiva's play, according to the stanza of the *Spandakarikā*:

> he who has this realization (of his identity with the whole universe), being constantly united with the Divine, views the entire world as the play (*krīḍā*) of the Self identical with Śiva, and is liberated while alive.[77]

In a highly original formulation of embodied liberation, Kashmiri Śaivites incorporated the principle of enjoyment (*bhoga*) to constitute the essence of freedom.[78] It was, in part, an effort to lend a conceptual specificity to the experiential dimension of liberation advocating blissful adoration of life

[77] *SK*, 2.2.

[78] According to the view of the *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, quoted by Maheśvarānanda in his *Mahārthamañjarī,* a direct experience of fusion of both enjoyment (*bhoga*) and liberation (*mokṣa*) is the condition of liberation while living. *MMP,* stanza 52.

engaging the body. As a result, enjoyment came to be exalted as concomitant with spiritual perfection, and sensual pleasure—though filtered through aesthetic discourse of rasa theory—was inexorably equated with religious experience.

CONCLUSION

# The Aesthetics of Power

I have shown in the previous chapters that aesthetics conveyed by the icon of Dancing Śiva was at the centre of the cultural imagining of power in medieval Cidambaram. This aesthetic power was conceived of as having political, spiritual or epistemic dimension (see Part 1, 2, and 3, respectively). In Part I, I have discussed that the Cōḻas saw in the Dancing Śiva an asset that could be adapted to the aesthetic reality of Sanskrit Cosmopolis. Following the global trend of aesthetic refinement they perfected Śiva's dancing pose to make it fit for the supremely refined taste of aesthetic imagining of that period. Naṭarāja came to embody the power of aesthetic politics in which the Cōḻa rulers fully participated. Particularly, for the Cōḻas, aesthetics and Naṭarāja had primarily a synthesizing function that made it possible to permanently seal various schisms derived from a governmental structure of a 'segmentary state'. Scholars specializing in medieval South Indian history generally agree that in the face of a governmental structure "grounded in a segmented social system whose natural tendency was towards fragmentation in the hands of chiefs and other notables",[1] the Cōḻas sought to find the ways for cultural unification of power and effective centralization of the kingly authority. Even though, the 'functionalist legitimation theory' that in large part undergirds academic writing on the Cōḻas (e.g.

[1] Spencer, W. George, "Heirs Apparent: Fiction and Function in Chola Mythical Genealogy", *The Indian Economic and Social Review,* vol. 21, no.4. 1984, p.427.

Kulke, Spencer, Kaimal) was strongly criticized by subsequent scholars (e.g. Ali, Cox, Pollock), still the relationship between power and legitimacy is of crucial importance for assessing how far the power relations can be justified in terms of people's beliefs, how far they conform to their values or standards, how far they satisfy the normative expectations they have of it. David Beetham (1991:17), one of the greatest exponents of legitimation theory defines the relationship between power and legitimacy in the following words:

> Power is legitimate to the extent that the rules of power can be justified in terms of beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate. To be justified, power has to be derived from a valid source of authority; the rules must provide that those who come to hold power have the qualities to appropriate to its exercise, and the structure of power must be seen to serve a recognizably general interest. Yet without the minimum of the appropriate beliefs defined above being shared between the dominant and the subordinate, and indeed among the subordinate themselves, there can be no basis on which justification for the rules of power can find a purchase.

If we look at the Cōḻa world, we see that here it was the ideology of *bhakti* that became both the source of authority and belief through which the power of the kings became legitimate. *Bhakti* was an important ideological tool that justified the power structures founded on beliefs shared both by the dominant and the subordinate. The king was often portrayed as the god's dearest devotee, in this way, he justified his power in conformity with underlying beliefs accepted by society. As David Beetham (1991:35) says,

> the main way in which the powerful will maintain their legitimacy is by respecting the intrinsic limits set to their power by the rules and the underlying principles on which they are grounded. Legitimate power, that is to say, is limited power; and one of the ways in which it loses legitimacy is when powerful fail to observe its inherent limits.

The Cōḻa kings were well aware of the fact that by placing themselves in the position of a devotee, they would be able to

retain their position as the powerful. By assuming the position of a devotee they created a desirable public image i.e. an image that reflected both the feudal mentality and *bhakti* ideology of the king, who shared in the royal sovereignty of the god as his servant.[2] The mechanism of *bhakti* was involved in implanting the type of ideology that relied almost exclusively on the emotional subjugation of the individual in which bondage and slavery became attached to mystical contents (see Chapter One, Two and Six). Even though, *bhakti* certainly acted as the valid source of authority that provided an ideological background of power structures, there was yet another element that played a crucial role in the legitimation of power, an element that provided a necessary condition for a public expression of consent that acknowledged the position of the powerful. David Beetham (1991:13) clarifies:

> What is important are actions that confer legitimacy, they contribute to making power legitimate. They do this both through the public demonstration of people's consent to the power relationship, and through the resulting obligations that derive from them on the part of both subordinate and dominant alike. They possess simultaneously a symbolic and a normative force. There is the legal validity of the acquisition and exercise of power; there is the justifiability of the rules governing a power relationship in terms of the beliefs and values current in the given society; there is the evidence of consent derived from actions expressive of it. These factors, successively and cumulatively are what make power legitimate.

In the case of the Cōḻas, the actions expressive of consent were structured upon the performer-spectator relationship in which the processions of gods and kings during the festivals had a publicly symbolic or declaratory force. The spectators watching these processions were at the same time expressing acknowledgment on the part of the subordinate of the position of the powerful, in

[2] cf. Peterson, V. Indira, "In Praise of the Lord: The Image of the Royal Patron in the Songs of Saint Cuntaramūrtii and the Composer Tyāgarāja", *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture,* ed. B. Stoler Miller Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 120-23.

this way legitimating the royal power and acknowledging their own powerlessness. The role of the imperial temple as the actual centre of a political and social life centered around recreation and mass entertainment had grown rapidly during the Cōḻa rule. Music, dancing, dramatic performances, and other forms of popular entertainment were an integral part of the reality of the daily temple routine. The construction of stage-platforms (*naṭa-kaśala*) built inside the temple complexes especially for the purpose of public amusement clearly shows the Cōḻa's conscious effort to extend the visual aesthetics to everyday socio-religio-political life. The imperial temple providing wholesome entertainment with a divine kingship theme—was the most expedient means of legitimacy of the king's authority. Hence, the large-scale campaigns that focused on satisfying people's needs for social life and enjoyment were a part of the ruler's tactic to create a society of spectators sharing the same public awareness and aesthetic values. Through a gradual amelioration of artistic events, the Cōḻa rulers managed to bring people together under the banner of aesthetic living. The Cōḻas patronage over dancers, musicians, and singers who were given land endowments near the temples, as well as their sponsorship of spectacular festivals were effective methods for establishing the utopia of aesthetic life that lured the citizens with the notion of 'freedom-in-feeling' (the cliché of medieval urban life) and ethical value of an ideal spectatorship (*prekṣaka*) derived from the aesthetic theories of Bharata, Ānandavardhana, Abhinavagupta and others (discussed in Chapter Seven). The Cōḻas' policy toward the promotion of an aesthetic worldview firmly entrenched in the society of spectators was, in fact, a hidden form of hegemonic control formed in circumstances that allowed an enjoyable lifestyle. The picture that emerges here is that the Cōḻas' campaign towards a spectator-conscious citizenship was a political game favouring an unequal power relations between the king-god-performer and citizen-devotee-being-ruled, the passive spectator. The public gaze which was apparently enjoying a pleasant and stimulating time engaging people in a wonderful plethora of 'sensorial practices' through institutionized public forms of

entertainment was no more than a disguised form of political restraint that refused to give ordinary people any real voice. The aim of aesthetic politics was to construct the society of spectators controlled from within through emotional manipulation (see Chapter Two). This was accomplished through the deliberate construction of gaze, discussed in Chapter Two, in which the beholder was subsequently robbed of his freedom, and brought under the influence of the powers that dwelled in the auratic presences of the aesthetic objects and spectacles. The visual field appealed to the people's desires controlling their inner self. The Cōḻas' aesthetic politics was rooted almost exclusively in the visual power that located the political submission of spectators in the very structure of visual perception and spectatorial response that led to the submissive spectatorship.

Maheśvarānanda certainly did not have the Cōḻas' resources for building the impressive temple-palaces, for sponsoring the grand festivals or for reduplicating the icons of Dancing Śiva. He lived in the world lacking in the resources available to the Cōḻa kings, resources that could have enabled him to control the visual field harnessing the visual power. Lacking in these, however, he was not entirely powerless. Maheśvarānanda had access to the equally potent source of aesthetic power in medieval South India, the textual power. This 'other' type of power allowed him to enter into relationship with a dominant worldview of Cōḻa Cidambaram within which he could position himself against the 'internal' world of dogmatic revelation, constituted primarily by a dominant theology of Śaiva Siddhānta, but also Advaita Vedānta and Sāṃkhya systems, widely popular in South India, and the 'external' world of power relations (see Introduction). Part 2 focuses on Maheśvarānanda's adoption of Naṭarāja and his intrinsic aesthetic power as the epitome of the textual power. Cōḻa Cidambaram is a perfect example of a specific coexistence of textual and social power in which inscriptions, eulogies, genealogies and collections of stories and myths, and poems of Tamil Śaiva saints acquired authoritative power through a register of language that made an explicit claim over the public space. These texts propagate the set of beliefs and practices that

placed Cidambaram at the centre of social power. Similarily, Maheśvarānanda's individual project should be understood within the context that endows the text with certain social power. Not only did he seek social power for a nascent Kashmiri Śaiva movement in South India, but also tried to establish the text at the centre of spiritual experience. For Maheśvarānanda, textuality is reimagined as a channel for a certain kind of aesthetic and epistemic transformation characterized by its transfiguring charge through which one encounters Dancing Śiva (see Chapter Three). This involvement with the text changes the way in which the text should be understood. The text becomes primarily the channel for 'recognition' of one's own true identity as Śiva. Here, it is not the icon of Naṭarāja enshrined in the temple that offers this transfiguring experience, but the very text itself as the medium of meeting with the divine. The main purpose of Maheśvarānanda's literary undertaking is activation of the religious experience, which includes the vision of the Dancing Śiva experienced through the ceaseless flow of the senses enlivened by the infinite transparency of light. This is the state of liberation and enjoyment that makes man divine, bearing limits away and playing (recognizing himself) in the overwhelming freedom of his nature. Maheśvarānanda's primary objective for writing his book was to make Naṭarāja present. One may ask the question, how scripture can activate the religious experience? The answer would be, through internalization of the text, in which the text is used as a technique of experience. The text, embedded within a certain metaphysical framework of *āgamic* tradition, and the icon of Naṭarāja both become internalized in a sense in which an adept comes to know himself as Dancing Śiva through the recognition of the five-fold sensory movement 'dancing' in his own body. As Gavin Flood (2004: 75) remarks, "the body becomes an index of tradition-specific subjectivity and the primacy of revelation" which is rooted in the internalization of the scriptural revelation that constitutes a very basis for an understanding of tantric culture. The body becomes an icon of the deity, the Dancing Śiva, through an internalization of the text that ushers the moment of 'recognition' of being Śiva-the Dancer

in liberation (see Chapter 3). Flood (2004:5) explains this process in the following words, "body becomes inscribed by the text, what we can call as entextualization of the body, the body is moulded within the constraints of the particular (āgamic) tradition".

The body becomes a representation of the world structured by a text and tradition. What is even more remarkable is the fact that tantric ideology of power, with the body structured by a textual tradition and occupying a central place in this ideology, was deeply embedded in the medieval idea of kingship. In Chapter 5, we have examined the extent to which the concept of the temple-body exposed by Maheśvarānanda is inextricably tied to the ideologies of space, kingship and ritual typical for medieval discourse of aesthetic power. The tantric body is conceived of as a political realm and ritual empowerment is structured upon the regal model of sensory enjoyment concomitant with an "irenic" conception of lordship in which the king "fructified" and "enjoyed" his realm through engagement in sensorial practices. The body becomes a temple, an analogue of the temple as the palace of the deity and the ritual empowerment becomes a legitimation of the regime mirroring the dominion of the feudal lord over his subordinate vassals. Moreover, the body, especially the heart at the center, also becomes the location of the empty space, of an abyss, of the Sky of Consciousness where Śiva eternally performs his dance. The Sky of Consciousness marks the final point of yogic experience, which is attained through sensory dance movement.

Finally, in Part 3, I focus on showing that aesthetics of power represented by a dialectics of spectator-performer relation penetrated with an equal force to the philosophical and religious traditions of India. Part 3 is structured in such a way as to expose distinctive features of the Kashmiri Śaiva tradition by confronting it with the Tamil Śiva *bhakti* and with the classical systems of Indian philosophy. The most important distinction between Tamil Śiva *bhakti* and Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti* represented by the 9th century Utpaladeva is the notion of bondage that seems to entail different implications for each of these Śaiva traditions. While in some poems of the Tamil Śiva *bhakti*, 'bondage' extorts servile obedience to the feet of the Lord, Kashmiri Śaivism, on the other

hand, portrays servitude as a form of freedom that is acquired through a total absorption into Śiva. The difference between the ways in which these two traditions conceptualize *bhakti* is related to the concept of the body and sensory engagement in worshipping Śiva. The description of a human body in a negative terms as the "worm-infested frame" equipped with five sense organs represented as the fools that stand in opposition to the light of knowledge and a true refuge occur often, but not always, in Tamil *bhakti* poems. By contrast, in the Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti*, the devotee merges into the body of Śiva. The aim of *bhakti* is precisely the realization of one's own essential identity with Śiva that takes place *in* the body and *through* the body. Ontologically, the body of a devotee is a structural duplication of the cosmic body that belongs to Śiva himself. The difference between these two forms of *bhakti* are also explicated in the field of sensory experience. The prominence given to the evidence of the eyes in the Tamil Śiva *bhakti* points out to the fact that the primary sense organs through which the transmission of grace could occur are the eyes. The eyes are the vehicle through which the divine force operates in a sense in which grace is transmitted through the eyes. The spectatorial gaze, so conceived, fractures the illusion of selfhood, and collapses the rigid division between spectator and spectacle. Rather than being passively sutured into the spectatorial gaze of ironic detachment typical for the Advaita Vedānta and Sāṃkhya, the devotee becomes possessed, infiltrated with the divine power that brings into play the world of madness. By contrast, among the sense experience most frequently evoked by Kashmiri Śaivite Utpaladeva are the sense perception of taste (*rasa*) and the sense perception of touch (*sparśa*). The Kashmiri Śaiva *bhakti*, thus, precipitates a shift from a visual aesthetics of Tamil Śaiva *bhakti* that relied heavily on the sense perception of sight employed in the worship of temple icons to the tactile and savory aesthetics that allows for a total immersion into the body of Śiva.

Insofar as the Kashmiri Śaiva confrontation with classical Indian philosophy is concerned, the difference becomes manifest in the spectator-dancer distinction as representing competing paradigms of the Indian quest for knowledge. The model of the

spectator became appropriated in the epistemology of religious experience both in purely philosophical (Sāṃkhya-Yoga and Advaita Vedānta's concept of *sākṣin*) and aesthetic contexts (the concept of *prekṣaka*) and is posed against the second model, that of a dancer, represented by Kashmiri Śaivism. The philosophical overview of different conceptual models gives us a detailed picture of the cultural milieu in which the aesthetics of power had emerged.

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