

## THE ŚIVA-TĀNḌAVA STOTRA OF RĀVAṆA

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The शिवताण्डवस्तोत्र of Rāvaṇa is a sublime lyric full of great devotion and composed in a vigorous style. The magic power of its resonant words is very gripping. We propose to analyse its iconographic motifs and to arrive at the date of its composition.

The Stotra consists of 12 verses which were recited by रावण to glorify शिव as the finale of worship offered to Him.

The first verse gives a word picture of the गंगाधरमूर्ति of the Deity—

जटाकटाह संभ्रमभ्रमन्त्रिलिम्पनिर्झरी—  
विलोलवीचिवह्वरीविराजमान मूर्धनि ।

It also praises the third eye in the forehead of the God burning with the fierce flame of Fire. Śive is three-eyed ( त्र्यम्बकदेव ) सूर्य-चन्द्र-अग्नि being those three Eyes; they comprise in their symbolism the entire त्रिक doctrine.

The verse makes reference to the new moon on the forehead of the God, whence he is called चन्द्रशेखर. Who is this चंद्र on the head? अग्निर्वै रुद्रः—this is the Vedic definition. Rudra is fierce अग्नि, hungry to devour its food. This अग्नि is fed by सोम, also called चन्द्र and अमृत. Again, चन्द्र represents the cosmic mind ( चन्द्रमा मनसो जातः Ṛgveda ) and the principle of mind is the supreme aspect of the Deity, shining on the top of his head.

Verse 2 refers to the उमा-महेश्वर form of Śiva. The Daughter of the mountain ( धराधरेन्द्रनन्दिनी ) remains in eternal blissful enjoyment with her Lord. It is the union of प्रकृति with पुरुष, of सोम with अग्नि, as the Liṅga Purāṇa explains :

अहमग्निर्महातेजाः सोमश्चैषा महाभिवका ।  
अहमग्निश्च सोमश्च प्रकृत्या पुरुषः स्वयम् ॥ लिङ्ग० ३४ । ७ ।

Śiva is praised as चिदंबर *i.e.* चिदाकाश, the one source of चितितत्त्व, the principle of consciousness, also called प्रज्ञात्मकप्राण. It was the highest doctrine of the Vedantic Śaiva philosophy in which Śiva and Self are one.

Verse 3 consists of two motifs, *viz.*, the serpents coiled in the matted locks, and the elephants' skin worn like a canopy to mark the beginning of the ताण्डव dance. The matted locks symbolise the प्रवर्ग्य part of the Divinity who is himself ब्रह्मादन. The cosmos is the tangled mass of those locks.

The elephant is the principle of अहम्, or individuation, same as महत् manifesting at a point. The चर्म or कृत्ति is the container, the finitising unit for अहं, which begins the dance that creates the world and also withdraws it.

Verse 4 refers to the numerous gods headed by the सहस्रलेचन Indra paying homage at the feet of Śiva who is महादेव, the Supreme Divinity. In the Veda इन्द्र and रुद्र are the same as Sūrya who has a thousand rays.

Verse 5 paints a picture of the Fire from Śiva's third eye consuming the God of the five arrows. It is the कामान्तक मूर्ति of शिव. The five objects of enjoyment of the senses are completely subdued by the तपःसमाधि of शिव.

Verse 6 repeats in still more artistic terms the कामान्तक motif :

करालभाल पट्टिका धगद्गद्गद्गज्ज्वलद्  
धनञ्जयाधरीकृतप्रचण्डपद्मसायके ।

It is the third eye of wisdom which obtains perfect control over the senses and the mind lusting for sensuous pleasures.

Verse 7 recounts the dark colour of the throat, *i.e.* the नीलकंठ form, and the गंगाधर, गजान्तक and the चन्द्रशेखर forms. The throat symbolises the element of आकाश with the quality of sound and आकाश is in Vedic terminology equivalent of the पंचभूत or वाक्. The poison in the throat stands for the tāmasic nature of the Five Elements. The पंचभूत are created by the तमोगुण form of शक्ति, प्राण by the रजोगुण and मनस्तत्त्व by the सतोगुण, and thus मनःप्राणवाक् are the manifestation of त्रैगुण्य.

Verse 8 describes again the sombre effects of the deep and dark colour of the throat shining like a mass of blue lotuses.

The second half of this verse is highly important as giving a string of शिव-लीला motifs :

स्मरच्छिदं पुरच्छिदं भवच्छिदं मखच्छिदं  
गजच्छिदाधिकच्छिदं तमन्तकच्छिदं भजे ।

The words are of incomparable charm in Stotra literature, and in utmost concise form paint a picture of the major exploits of शिवलीला. They are repeated in an altered vocabulary in verse 9.

The स्मरच्छिद form is the स्मरान्तक or कामान्तक मूर्ति, of which the मदनदहन theme is described at length by Kālidāsa and in some of the Purāṇas.

The पुरच्छिद or पुरान्तक form relates to the vanquishing of त्रिपुरासुर, 'the Demon of the Three Cities' of gold, silver and copper. Who is this त्रिपुर? It is our own body or ourselves comprised of जाग्रत्-स्वप्न-सुषुप्ति which are the three states of the Self and the result of the three Guṇas. Mind ( मनः ) is the city of gold, प्राण of silver and भूतग्राम of copper or iron. Śiva is the supreme controller of these three states and the demoniac nature of the lower self should be dedicated at his feet.

The भवच्छिद or भवान्तक form refers to the annihilation of संसार, the cessation of भवचक्र or the revolving wheel of the world of माया or काल.

The मखच्छिद or मखान्तक form reminds of the episode of दक्षयज्ञविध्वंस. The Purāṇas relate the story of दक्षप्रजापति having performed a यज्ञ to which शिव was not

invited and so his शक्ति स्ती. The यज्ञ ended in disaster. What is the significance of this लीला? It is the same as the छिन्नशीर्ष मख of the Brāhmaṇas. यज्ञ has two aspects, one the cosmic (अधिदैवत) and the other in the individual (अध्यात्म). The latter must be linked to the former, the mortal derives its energy from the immortal source of the Divine eternal. If दक्ष breaks off from that source because of his अहंकार, the individual यज्ञ is doomed. दक्ष invites all his daughters, excepting स्ती or महाशक्ति who alone can deliver the goods.

The गजच्छिद or गजान्तक or गजामुरसंहारमूर्ति has been mentioned above.

The अंधकच्छिद or अंधकान्तक मूर्ति refers to the defeat and death of अंधकासुर at the hands of शिव. The blind prāṇic energy as divorced from the mind symbolises the Andhaka demon who must submit to the authority of Mahādeva.

The अन्तकच्छिद or अन्तकान्तक मूर्ति refers to the terrific form of शिव as conquering the god of Death. Śiva is महाकाल and कालरि; He has triumphed over यम or मृत्यु; and poison, the symbol of मृत्यु has been assimilated in his throat.

Verse 9 refers to शिव as the Lord of रसप्रवाहमाधुरी or आनन्दलहरी, Waves of Bliss, or sweet mead, or रस (= सोम, and अमृत) which is his true nature. It also repeats the iconographic forms of verse 8.

Verse 10 besides repeating the motif of the Fire from the third eye, adds the significant motif of the Tāṇḍava dance performed with the rhythmic sounds of the Ḍamaru-mṛdaṅga.

Verses 11 and 12 refer to the eternally poised nature of the Lord, for whom rough stone and kingly bed, serpent and pearl garland, gem and clod of earth, friend and foe, grass and lotus, king and toiling peasant are all equal; they end with the supplication of the devotee to spend his last days on the Gaṅgā in a quiet retreat and merged in the blissful nature of the Divine, while muttering His sweet name.

For a Stotra of only 12 verses, the above is a perfect record of motifs and a model of high literary art. It is overflowing with devout inspiration and the realisation of the ineffable bliss of the Divine in the heart of the Bhakta.

The Stotra does not form part of any Purāṇa, so far as I can see, but its date is indicated by the recounted motifs fairly closely.

The ताण्डव dance began to be portrayed in Indian art about the Gupta period. But the त्रिपुरान्तक as well as the यमान्तक forms are depicted in Indian sculpture for the first time during the Rāṣṭrakūṭa period in the दशावतार Cave and the Kailāsa Temple at Ellora, the first finished in the time of king Dantidurga (735-57) and the second in the reign of Kṛishṇarāja I (757-772). It is a rare phenomenon that these two shrines, which were the most wonderful accomplishments of their age both in architecture and sculpture, also have been

adorned with the other motifs like the अन्धकापुरसंहारमूर्ति, the दक्षयज्ञविध्वंस मूर्ति, the गजासुरसंहार मूर्ति, उमामहेश्वर मूर्ति, अर्धनारीश्वर and the ताण्डव मूर्ति.

The iconographic and literary motifs taken together can be attributed only to the Rāṣṭrakūṭa period in about the middle of the eighth century A.D. The कालारि or यमान्तक form of शिव is connected with the liberation of मार्कण्डेय from the clutches of Death, and depicts मार्कण्डेय praying to शिव for deliverance from यम who is repulsed by a kick of the Divine feet. It is only in the दशावतार Cave and the कैलास Temple of Ellora that the theme has been discovered so far (Gopinath Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography* Vol. II, pt. 1, Plate 34). The त्रिपुरान्तक representation is similarly of very rare occurrence in early sculpture and has hitherto been discovered together only in the above two places, pointing to the period circa 735-770 A.D. (Gopinath Rao, *op. cit.*, Plate 37). This gives a reasonable basis to assign the शिवताण्डव स्तोत्र to about the middle of the eighth century and its composition may be the work of some brilliant poet of the Rāṣṭrakūṭa age in the Deccan.

The स्तोत्र was recited by रावण after his worship of God शिव (पूजावसानसमये दशवक्त्रगीतम्). This worship-scene is also illustrated at Ellora in the Kailāsa Temple in a grand sculpture known as 'Rāvaṇa lifting Kailāsa' (कैलासोत्तोलनमूर्ति, which was allied to the रावणानुग्रह मूर्ति (Gopinath Rao, *Hindu Iconography*, Vol. II, pt. I, Plate 53). In this respect also the दशावतार Cave of Ellora is similar to the कैलास temple (Rao, *ib.* Plate 54). It may, however, be noted that the Elephanta Cave-shrine also depicts the रावणानुग्रहमूर्ति, but not the त्रिपुरसंहार and यमान्तक or मार्कण्डेयानुग्रह forms, which are peculiar only to the दशावतार Cave and the कैलास Temple of Ellora, as stated above.

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