

Enlivening images: The Śaiva rite of invocation based primarily on the major Śaivāgamas

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Abstract

The Śaiva Siddhānta rite of invocation, which secures Śiva's special presence in a linga during pūjā, articulates specific theological postulates of Śaiva philosophy. The rite objectifies these postulates within the actions of the worshipper. Invocation explicitly aims to make Śiva manifest in an object, and the actions of the rite make sense only when seen as a means of gaining the real presence of the deity in a support that is external to and apart from the soul of the worshipper. Since Śaiva Siddhānta regards Śiva as ontologically distinct from the soul of the worshipper. The Śaiva worshipper must reach beyond himself to summon Śiva into the ritual domain. No "projection of the worshipper's own mental attitude" could ever, in the Śaiva Siddhānta view, be adequate to invoke Śiva. Rather, the worshipper must employ the powers of mantra and visualization to bring Śiva from his highest state outside the worshipper's body, into a specially-prepared "divine body" which is itself a model of Śiva's active presence in the world. Reversing I Huntington's formulation, we should say that Śaiva invocation refers to Truth precisely in order to reveal it, fully manifest in the Śiva linga.

Key words: siva, saiva siddhantha, sakala, nishkala, sadasiva

Introduction

In describing the rite of invocation as it is presented within one important liturgical system, and showing how this rite enacts an alternative conception of image-worship, clearly differing from the non-vedantā notion presented by Coomaraswamy and others. (The dualistic, realistic, and ritualistic Śaiva Siddhānta sect, based primarily on the śaivāgamās, was highly influential in many parts of India in the 9th through 11th

centuries, and became especially prevalent in South India during the cola period. It is likely that the Śaiva Siddhānta system was the dominant voice in articulating the liturgical programs of the great śaiva temples of the cola kings, and even today temples in Tamilnadu most often trace their ritual practice back to Śaiva Siddhānta texts). (Their rituals are certainly not those of superstitious commoners deprived of Sankara's higher teaching, but rather those

of a formidable school of thought enjoying extensive royal and priestly support. Dagens, Bruno (1979)¹

Since the śaiva rite of invocation, like all śaiva ritual, is integrally related to philosophical conceptions, it is necessary to summarize the theological portrait offered in Śaiva Siddhānta before describing the rite Śaiva Siddhānta –dualistic system of philosophy Śaiva Siddhānta is basically a dualistic system of philosophy. In fact, Śaiva Siddhānta rests on two ontological distinctions: the first between animating consciousness (cit), and inanimate substance (jada), and the second between Śiva (pati), and embodied souls (paśu). Because the soul is fundamentally separate from Śiva, it can never reach union with the supreme. Rather, the goal of a śaiva religious aspirant is to attain a state of equality with Śiva: not to become Śiva, but to become a Śiva⁴. In liberation the individual soul does not merge into the Godhead, but rather becomes an autonomous liberated soul, possessing all the powers of Śiva yet forever separate from him. this fundamental division of souls from Śiva in Śaiva Siddhānta means that purely projective means of invocation can never be fully adequate to summon Śiva.²

unlimited character of Śiva

Śaiva philosophical texts repeatedly stress the unlimited character of Śiva. The svāyambhuvāgama, for instance, describes Śiva as “immeasurable, indescribable, incomparable, without defect, subtle, pervasive, eternal, firm, imperishable,

and lordly. svāyambhuvāgama, vidyā⁵ The limitations which we experience as embodied human beings in a state of bondage do not in any way affect Śiva . This emphasis on Śiva ’s limitlessness, however, raises a problem concerning human access to Śiva . If Śiva is immeasurable, indescribable, and incomparable, what means do we have to know him?

Distinguishing two levels of Śiva

Śaiva philosophers deal with this question by distinguishing two levels of Śiva . The first level is the limitless, transcendent ParamaŚiva -a formless, undifferentiated divinity “without parts” (niskala). Positive knowledge of Śiva at this level is beyond human reach, now we are able to offer worship directly to niskala Śiva . However, at a secondary level Śiva becomes more accessible. This is the differentiated Śiva “with parts” (sakala) as he is understood to manifest himself and act in multiple ways upon the world. Humans are able to know and worship this sakala Śiva precisely because he has a form, or rather a multitude of manifest forms⁶.

Differentiated form of Śiva

The most comprehensive differentiated form of Śiva , according to the saivagamas, is known as SadaŚiva , closely associated with Śiva ’s five fundamental activities (pancakṛtya). Śiva’s most far-reaching effects on the cosmos are accomplished through on the world the actions of emission, protection, reabsorption, concealment, and grace. Śiva performs each of these

activities by means of a mantra, and each mantra corresponds to a face of Sada Śiva with his five faces, five mantras, and five activities, sadāŚiva represents Śiva's most fundamental presence in the world, the "body of mantras" with which he acts.

SadaŚiva - acts in the world.

SadāŚiva is not the only form in which Śiva acts in the world. Śiva takes on many additional aspects or embodiments (mūrtis) which are manifest to humans. The āgamās generally classify these more anthropomorphic manifestations – which include the well known adventures of Śiva described in the purāhas-as form of maheśvara, partial embodiments of Śiva's being. Śiva acts as well through the multiple forms of His inhering Energy (śakti), and through a variety of subordinate beings (Vidyēśvaras, Massaleśvarās, Lokapālās, and so on) whom he employs as agents to act on his behalf in particular parts of the cosmos. In order to account for Śiva's profound effects on the world, then, Saiva theology draws a multifarious picture of sakala Śiva and his agencies.

Śiva both – sakala and niskala

The epistemological division the Śaiva draws between niskala Śiva and sakala does not imply that one level is more real than the other. while the texts maintain that niskala Śiva is true "in the highest sense" (paramārthika) and sakala Śiva however comprehend Śiva remains a "synecdoche" (upacāra) for Śiva's totality, they also stress that Śiva is both niskala and sakala. The

distinction is not one between "true" and "illusory" or even between "true" and "less true", but rather between "encompassing" and "partial". A complete description of Śiva's character must include both his all-encompassing undifferentiated form and the myriad differentiated forms through which he acts in the world.

A parallel distinction underlies Śaiva images. The plain, unfigured linga, which serves as the central icon for Śaiva temple worship, is described as niskala or avyakta (unmanifest). "Anthropomorphic" images representing Śiva's many aspects, by contrast, are classified sakala or vyakta (manifest). (lingas with faces, combining elements of both categories, are termed "mixed" forms.) These are not regarded by Śaivas as "equally ideal, symbolic forms", as Coomaraswamy suggests. Rather, they correspond to the different levels at which one may worship the multifaceted Śiva. According to the Rauravāgama, one should worship Śiva's most comprehensive form, SadāŚiva, in a linga, while his differentiated aspects, considered as manifestations of Maheśvara, are to be worshipped in sakala images⁷. Sakala images of Śiva are not central objects of temple worship, but should be located within the domain of any large Śaiva temple, as a series of partial approximations of Śiva's totality.

This segmentation, which enables Śaiva theologians to conceptualize Śiva and Śaiva image-makers to depict him, also

provides the schema for ritually invoking Śiva into a physical support. During āvāhana, the worshipper first substantiates the secondary level, sakalaŚiva, by constructing and superimposing onto the linga a divine body of mantras to serve as Śiva's body in the ritual. He then uses a mantra to summon Śiva from his highest level, as niskala ParamaŚiva, to descend into and animate this embodiment. The advent of paramaŚiva into Śiva's own body of mantras enlivens the forms, just as the entry of a conscious soul into an otherwise inanimate body brings a person to life. Thus, the worshipper provisionally separates the two levels of Śiva and acts on them sequentially as if they were objectively distinct realities. By doing so, he reunites them as a single, integrated divinity, establishing Śiva's full and special presence in the ritual domain.

Linga becomes a divine body

The first step in a śaiva invocation is to transform Śiva's support – that is, the physical linga and pedestal – into a divine condition suitable for Śiva. The pedestal is remade into a divine throne (divyāsana) for Śiva to sit upon, the linga becomes a divine body of mantras (divyadeha, vidyādeha)

The divine throne is composed of five thrones – stages, each superimposed on the next: the ananta-throne, the lion throne, the yoga throne, the lotus throne, and the pure throne. The worshipper visualizes (bhāvana) each stage individually, in ascending order.

Distributed hierarchically among the throne – stages are the thirty-one tattvas

of the impure domain, the five kalās, the multiple worlds of the cosmos, the letters of the alphabet, and so on⁸. In other words, the worshipper envisions the pedestal as a condensed ritual instantiation of the entire constituent. Which, for śaiva philosophy, makeup the manifest cosmos. Each stage also has one or more inhabiting powers Who act as presiding lords of that stage and all the constituent realities arrayed there. As the worshipper ascends from stage to stage, he also visualizes the form of each divinity and then imposes (nyāsa) it onto the pedestal, using that lord's proper mantra. Significantly, the divine powers that come to inhabit the throne are the multiple forms of Śakti and agents through which Śiva exercise his sovereignty over the cosmos. Through the sequence of visualizations and mantra-impositions, the worshipper systematically transforms the pedestal into a much more comprehensive divine throne, composed of the manifest universe and the many divine energies that support and enact Śiva's lordship in the universe. Next the worshipper must construct a body to sit on the divine throne.

Having thus constructed Śiva's throne, the ritualise with firm mind and restrained faculties should fill his cupped hands with flowers, and visualize an embodiment.

Following meditation- verses, the worshipper puts together, portion by portion, a complete portrait of SadaŚiva, visualizing each of his five faces, ten weapons, and so on, then consolidating these parts into a unified image.

One should meditate that SadaŚiva has five faces, ten arms, and three eyes (in each face). Crystal in color and calm, he has a crescent moon as his crest, and his hair is fastened with a snake. His seat is a lion-throne made of mantras, and he sits atop a white lotus. Ornamented with bracelets, earrings, necklaces, the auspicious thread, waitbands, upper-arm bracelets, golden oracelets, and chestbands, he is a lovely, tranquil, smiling, sixteen year-old. In his right hands he holds trident, axe, sword, thunderbolt, and fire; the mudrā of security and the noose, along with the bell, snake, and hook are in his five left hands.⁹

He transports this imaginative construction from himself into the flowers held in his hands, and scatters the flowers atop the linga. Simultaneously reciting the mantra of embodiment, he invokes in the linga the full form of SadaŚiva, and then imposes onto that form a whole array of mantras that constitute his powers: the five brahmāmantras (asocial with the five faces and five fundamental activities) the thirty-eight kalāmantras, the six angamantras ("limbs" which are intrinsic extensions of Śiva's being, like the rays of the sun), and more. When the body of SadaŚiva is fully imbued with the powers of mantras, the worshipper imposes the vidyadeha mantra, which unifies and completes his variegated construction.

SadaŚiva -highest lord

In this way, the worshipper uses a complex sequence of visualizations to re-envision the

physical forms of pedestal and linga as divine forms, as a representation of the entire cosmos with SadaŚiva as its highest lord and his emissaries stationed at appropriate stages. Yet this is not simply a projection of mental imagery onto external matter, as Coomarasawamy might suggest. Through the imposition of mantrās, the worshipper invokes the actual energies of SadaŚiva and his agents onto the substratum. According to Śaiva Siddhānta, a real metamorphosis of the pedestal and linga is accomplished through this rite.

However complete as a representation of Śiva's active presence in the world, this divine body remains a sakala form, a differentiated embodiment. And, as Śaiva theology postulates, the highest, most comprehensive level of Śiva is the undifferentiated, niskala ParamaŚiva. The second phase of invocation, accordingly, is intended to summon Śiva in his highest state to inhabit the differentiated body that has been constructed for him. ParamaŚiva must merge into SadaŚiva to enliven the image.

This requires two converse ritual movements. First the worshipper recites the mūla ("root") mantra, Śiva's own mantra, rising from the reciter's mūlādhāra up to the dvādaśasta, where ParamaŚiva resides twelve inches above the worshipper's head. As he recites, he gradually reunifies the mantra, and finally unites it into ParamaŚiva. Second, the worshipper leads Śiva together with the mantra from the dvādaśānta back into his own body, and from there outward

into the linga. As Śiva descends, he passes from an undifferentiated, niskala state into a manifest sakala form.

Here as in the construction of the divine body, the worshipper employs both visualization and mantras, but it is the mantra that is crucial to the success of invocation. In Śaiva ritual, a mantra is an invariable element of all invocatory rites. Mantras are effective for summoning deities, the texts tell us, because of the inherent connection of signified (vācya) and signifier (vācaka). The verbal form of the same reality: the mantra is often called the “form” or the sonant aspect of the deity it signifies. Therefore, say the texts, reciting the proper mantra of a divinity automatically renders that god present.

To invoke Śiva into the linga

To invoke Śiva into the linga during daily worship, the worshipper uses a special technique of “ascending pronunciation” (uccārasa), in which the mantra, his breath, and his flower-filled hands ascend along the body’s vertical axis together. The mantra is initially spread throughout the ritualist’s body, and the constituent elements of the world-tattvas, kalās, and so on are distributed hierarchically among the differentiated levels of the mantra. As the worshipper slowly recites the mantra upwards, he gradually reunifies it, until it reaches the point of reabsorption, at the dvādaśānta, where it merges into paramaśiva the externally visible aspect of an ascending pronunciation.) just as all the

differentiated portions of the mantra are reintegrated into a unity, here the mantra its life is reunited with its referent. The fundamental unity of signifier and signified, mantra and divinity, is restored.

When Paramaśiva and his mantra are merged, the worshipper is able to lead Śiva into the form that has been constructed for him.

One should convey Śiva from the dvādaśānta, which is the place where the sound arising from the ascending pronunciation of the mantra ceases, into the embodiment according to the order of emission¹⁰.

By the “order of emission”, the text signifies simultaneously a descending movement in the body and an alteration from an undifferentiated to differentiated condition. Śiva descends in stages. First the worshipper envisions him in the dvādaśānta: “He imagines Paramaśiva as all-accomplishing, undifferentiated (niskala), omnipresent, composed of knowledge and joy, intrinsically radiant” Śiva is then led down into the worshipper’s forehead, where he begins to take on a more visual form.

Śiva resembles a crore of suns, whitening every direction with pieces of nectar that flow forth. Midway between the dvādaśānta and the linga, Śiva is neither fully niskala nor sakala; he has more of a visual form than Paramaśiva, but a much

lesser differentiated form than the multiple-faced SadāŚiva . Next the worshipper exhales, and Śiva passes from the forehead along the breath - channel and out of the worshipper's body, into the flowers held in his hands. The worshipper drops the flowers atop the linga, and Śiva passes enters into the divine body. Now Śiva appears in the differentiated form of SadaŚiva . He has descended from his highest, inaccessible state into a form which human devotees can know and worship. Invocation is complete, and the worshipper may now present more offerings of devotion.

Remembering Coomaraswamy's comment that "omnipresence does not move," We might wonder how it is that Śiva , who is ubiquitous, can move from one place to another . In fact, the rsis who first heard Śiva expound the Kāmikāgama were also puzzled by this. "How is it, O Lord," they asked, "that one can invoke Śiva who is omnipresent? If one acknowledges invocation, this would contradict his ubiquity." If Śiva is not already in the object, then he is not truly pervasive. And if he is already present in the object, how can he enter it?

Śiva answers his interlocutors by distinguishing between two degrees of

presence: Śiva is indeed present everywhere, but in some places he is more present than in others

As fire, though present in a tree from its roots to its tip, may become manifest in one place, just so the manifestation of consciousness in one place does not contradict its pervasiveness. Just as fire is made to arise in wood by rubbing it and so on, Śiva is manifested through the power of mantras and through devotion.

The distinction suggested by these analogies is one between latent and manifest presence. When we speak of the ubiquity of ParamaŚiva , it is a matter of his latent presence everywhere. But when SadāŚiva acts in the world, or when one invokes Śiva into some object, He manifests a "special" presence (viśesanidhāna) in a particular place. In this sense, the movement of Śiva brought about through invocation is not so much a physical displacement as an enhancement in the degree of his presence in the linga from latency to actual manifestation. The actions of invocation simply map out this enhancement in spatial terms as well.

Foot notes

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