

# Worshiping Śiva in Medieval India

*Ritual in an Oscillating Universe*



Richard H. Davis

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## Preface

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IN THIS ESSAY, I attempt to take seriously a simple postulate that seems to me fundamental to the study of ritual: that those who compose and perform the ritual are conscious and purposeful agents actively engaged in a world they themselves constitute, in large measure, through their practices of knowing and acting.

The “world” in which Śaiva ritual takes place is not the familiar world of Western science or “common sense” that modern Westerners often believe common to all people. Nor does it occur in some sociologically defined universe of a particular community or society, as social anthropology might portray. Rather, Śaiva liturgy is performed in a world that is ontologically organized and constituted by Śaiva siddhānta: a world that oscillates, that is permeated by the presence of Śiva, in which humans live in a condition of bondage, and where the highest aim of the human soul is to attain liberation from its fetters. Within that world, the Śaiva worshiper acts with and upon forces, objects, and categories that are defined for him by Śaiva ontology, and his goals in practicing ritual are based on the possibilities and purposes of human attainment depicted in Śaiva soteriology.

My aim in this study is to explicate, insofar as I am able, both the world envisioned in Śaiva siddhānta and the way in which daily worship reflects and acts within that world. This world is assuredly not the one we think we live in, but nevertheless it is a world we can enter, partially and temporarily, through a mental “reenactment,” as R. G. Collingwood put it. The Śaivas themselves would call it *bhāvanā*, “imaginative re-creation.” For the Śaivas, as for Collingwood, this reconstructive praxis is primarily intellectual and rational, rather than simply a matter of empathy. By rethinking ourselves the convictions and intentions a well-versed Śaiva ritualist of the twelfth century would have brought to his daily practice, we can mentally place ourselves in his temple and reenact his worship of Śiva.

To enter that world, it will be necessary to attend to two different modes of discourse in Śaiva literature: the propositional discourse of philosophical knowledge (*jñāna*) and the practical discourse of ritual action (*kriyā*). These are, in the Śaiva view, integral and necessary to one another. According to the Śaiva siddhānta tradition, a Śaiva *āgama* should have four sections or “feet” (*pādas*) to be a complete, self-standing treatise. One section, the *jñānapāda*, describes how the world is; it sets forth, in metaphysical and theological terms, the fundamental order of the universe as envisioned by Śaiva siddhānta. A second section, the *kriyāpāda*, prescribes how one should conduct oneself in that world, utilizing the most powerful and effica-

cious forms of action. (The other two sections, dealing with yogic disciplinary practices [*yogapāda*] and proper day-to-day conduct [*caryāpāda*], are also necessary but clearly subordinate in importance to the first two.) And just as *jñānapāda* and *kriyāpāda* are equally necessary to a complete *āgama*, Śaiva authors insist that an aspirant who wishes to advance within the world of Śiva must exert himself both to know that world and to act properly and effectively within it.

Unfortunately, the applicability of this principle to my own study was not always so apparent to me. When I first began to study the Śaiva *āgamas*, I was like a commentator whom Rāmakaṇṭha criticizes. In his own commentary on the *Matanṅapārameśvarāgama*, Rāmakaṇṭha contrasts himself with this other, unnamed commentator of the same text who ended his explication after the *jñānapāda*.

A certain commentator who knew only philosophy completed an extensive examination of the knowledge section (*jñānapāda*), and altogether disregarded the three practical sections concerning ritual action, yoga, and proper conduct. Whereas I, honoring the Lord Śiva, will here compose a lucid exposition of those sections as well, because the types of action prescribed here conform (*anuga*) completely with the meanings of the philosophical discourse.

He was engaged only by philosophy; I was concerned solely with ritual. As a historian interested in temple ritual and its relation to medieval Indian political formations, I wished to read only those practical portions of the *āgamas* dealing with *kriyā*, and not waste time with what I considered speculative metaphysics. I believed I would be able to discern the significance of medieval Śaiva ritual texts directly by locating them in the context of the social and political structures of medieval South India. I was certainly mistaken in this presumption.

To be fair to myself, the commentator that Rāmakaṇṭha criticized and I are not the only ones ever to have pursued such shaky, one-legged inquiries. In fact, the large majority of scholarly studies dealing with Indian rituals make no recourse to the philosophical foundations on which the rituals are based. They characteristically present Indian rituals as instances of highly elaborate routinized behavior either divorced from any formative consciousness or based on severely flawed apprehensions of the world. On the other side, it is only the rare study of an Indian philosophical school that makes any extended reference to such practical corollaries as modes of proper conduct or ritual activity. Scholars most often portray Hindu theology as the exercise of great intellectual ingenuity with little or no concern for practical consequence. So in focusing my attention on only one limb of the body of thought and action I wished to study, I was simply following the habitude of my scholarly field.

As I commenced reading the account of daily worship in *Kāmikāgama*, however, I soon realized that I was missing something. At first I saw it as a problem of terminology or technical language. What were the five *kalās*, or the twelve *kalās*, or the thirty-eight *kalās*, to which the text kept referring? Who were the Vidyēśvaras, the Maṇḍaleśvaras, and numerous other superhuman characters who periodically showed up in the ritual terrain? What did it mean for the worshiper to “make his hand into Śiva” (*śivikaraṇa*)? Why should a *bubhukṣu* and a *mumukṣu* do things in reverse order? My Sanskrit dictionaries were of little or no avail in tracking down the significance of these, and many other, mystifying terms. With timely help from more experienced scholars in South India, however, I learned that many of the terms I could not comprehend in the *kriyāpāda* were discussed in the *jñānapāda*, and so I began reading philosophical digests and commentaries in addition to my ritual texts. Soon I was able to ferret out the meanings of most of the bothersome terms and to gain a preliminary idea of what was going on in the ritual.

Yet clearing up perplexing terminology was only a first step. It slowly dawned on me that the shared terminology of the two sections was not fortuitous. As the Śaivas would put it, the fetter that was causing my ignorance gradually “ripened,” and its grip upon me loosened, enabling me finally to see the principle of “conformity” (*anuga*) or connectedness of *jñāna* and *kriyā* to which Rāmakaṇṭha so clearly refers. The two sections were *meant* to be mutually explanatory; with good reason were they called two feet of the same entity. Belatedly I started to follow a more conscious two-footed approach in my own reading and research, stepping back and forth between ritual texts and philosophical texts, and found that each helped clarify and explicate the other. The rituals served to illuminate and objectify Śaiva philosophical categories and topics, while philosophy helped me to understand the purposes and strategies of Śaiva ritual.

More than that, I began to see that the Śaiva texts envision a world—the world, they would say—in which the capacities of humans to know about that world and to act within it are two interrelated modalities of a unitary power of consciousness. According to Śaiva siddhānta, every animate being, beginning with Śiva, has a soul, whose principal characteristic is “consciousness” (*cit*). Consciousness, in turn, manifests itself through two primary powers: the power to know (*jñānaśakti*) and the power to act (*kriyāśakti*). Yet these two powers are not fundamentally distinct. Śiva’s power, Aghoraśiva tells us, is in essence a single power. However, because of an “apparent” distinction (*upādhi*) between the spheres of knowing and practical activity, this power seems to take on forms suitable to its tasks in each domain (TPV 3). Similarly, what we humans experience as two separate capacities, to know and to act, is, in the highest sense, the integral

power of consciousness as it directs itself toward the seemingly distinct domains of the knowable and the doable. From the highest point of view, the powers of consciousness are one and the domains in which the powers act are one; from our more limited human perspective, the unitary power appears divided and the single field for its exercise seems differentiated. The conformity we observe now between the philosophical and ritual portions of the Śaiva texts results, in the Śaiva view, from this fundamental integrity.

The metaphysical unity of knowledge and action in Śaiva siddhānta provides the underlying theme and the end point of this study. I will follow an oscillating course throughout, back and forth between accounts of the philosophically constructed world of Śaiva *jñāna* and explication of Śaiva *kriyā* within that world, in an attempt to demonstrate and illustrate the integral relationship between these two modes of Śaiva religious consciousness. At the outset I can only point to the complex intertwining of knowing and acting in Śaiva siddhānta; in the course of the discussion to follow, it will take on a more definite shape and texture. In the end I hope to indicate that the “distinction” between philosophical knowledge and ritual action, while useful and necessary as a starting point for the study of Śaiva worship, becomes increasingly indistinct as we delve into it, much as the Śaiva philosophers themselves speak of the division between knowing and acting as only an “apparent” dichotomy of a fundamentally unified human capacity of consciousness.

## Acknowledgments

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AT THE COMMENCEMENT of daily worship, a Śaiva ritualist constructs a new “body of mantras” by superimposing onto himself a host of powers greater than his own. He is then able to make use of that augmented body in performing all subsequent acts of devotion. Writing this book has not exactly been an act of *pūjā*, but I too have benefited from and relied on the support and assistance of many powers beyond my own in the course of this study. I would like to invoke each here with the appropriate *namaskāra*.

My initial research in India, the *bīja* of all that follows, was facilitated through the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute in Madras, the Sarasvati Mahal Library in Thanjavur, and the Institut Français d’Indologie in Pondichéry. I was very fortunate to read Śaiva ritual texts with Dr. S. S. Janaki, Director of the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, and philosophical texts with T. R. Damodaran, formerly with the Sarasvati Mahal Library. Both helped me in myriad ways during my stay in India, and I thank them for their friendship. I wish also to thank Śrī K. A. Sabharatna Sivacarya of Madras, whose command of *āgama*-based Śaiva ritual, both practical and textual, is of a kind rarely encountered among Śaiva priests nowadays. His demonstrations and explications helped immensely in making the millennium-old *āgama* texts come alive for me. He was also kind enough to let me photograph his enactment of rites of daily worship.

Three scholars associated with the Institut Français d’Indologie deserve special mention: N. R. Bhatt, Hélène Brunner, and Bruno Dagens. Pandit Bhatt generously went over my early translations of the *Kāmikāgama*, patiently answering my endless questions, and Dr. Brunner sent me a valuable set of comments and suggestions on a *Kriyākramadyotikā* translation. Professor Dagens perceptively discussed the project in its early stages and later on made detailed suggestions on a written draft. More than this personal assistance, however, their careful and painstaking work in the field of *śaivāgama* studies over the past twenty-five years, collecting, editing, and translating, provides the foundation on which any future research rests. It would not be possible for me to cite all the places in this study where I have relied on their insights and authority.

At the University of Chicago, where the project germinated as a dissertation, I benefited greatly from day-to-day contact with a whole community of South Asian scholars. In particular, I would like to thank the members of my committee, A. K. Ramanujan and Bernard Cohn, for their support throughout. Ronald Inden, my adviser, has been especially important at every stage of this manuscript. He initially pointed me toward the study of



Śaiva siddhānta texts, and through numerous conversations he suggested new paths to explore in the material when I saw none. It is his combination of critical rigor and breadth of interest that I have sought, albeit imperfectly, to emulate in my study.

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Truly the *mūlamantra* at the root of any research project in these times is funding. Support for research in India was provided by the U.S. Department of Education through a Fulbright-Hays fellowship. The USEF-I officers administering the grant in Delhi and Madras were always helpful to me. For writing up the dissertation, I enjoyed the support of the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation and the Committee on Southern Asian Studies, University of Chicago. Final preparations have been assisted through the grace of an A. Whitney Griswold Faculty Research Grant, the Frederick W. Hilles Fund, and the Morse Fellowship in the Humanities at Yale University.

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Om hām sarvebhyo namaḥ.

## Abbreviations

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AĀ	<i>Ajitāgama</i>
AcĀ	<i>Acintyāgama</i>
ĀPV	<i>Ālayapraveśavidhi</i> of <i>Samakaṇṭha</i>
BhK	<i>Bhogakārikā</i> of <i>Sadyojyoti</i>
ĪP	<i>Īśānaśivagurudevapaddhati</i> of <i>Īśānaśiva</i>
JNP	<i>Jātinirṇayapūrvakālayapraveśavidhi</i> of <i>Rāmakaṇṭha</i>
KĀ	<i>Kāmikāgama</i> , <i>pūrvabhāga</i>
KālĀ	<i>Kālottarāgama</i> ( <i>Sārdhatrīṣati KālĀ</i> )
KālĀV	<i>vṛtti</i> of <i>Rāmakaṇṭha</i> on <i>Kālottarāgama</i>
KārĀ	<i>Kāraṇāgama</i> , <i>pūrvabhāga</i>
KirĀ	<i>Kiraṇāgama</i>
KKD	<i>Kriyākramadyotikā</i> of <i>Aghoraśiva</i>
KKDP	<i>prabhā</i> of <i>Nirmalamaṇi</i> on <i>Kriyākramadyotikā</i>
LPur	<i>Liṅgapurāṇa</i>
ML	<i>Mudrālakṣaṇa</i>
MM	<i>Mayamata</i>
MPĀ	<i>Mataṅgapārameśvarāgama</i>
MPĀV	<i>vṛtti</i> of <i>Rāmakaṇṭha</i> on <i>Mataṅgapārameśvarāgama</i>
MṛĀ	<i>Mṛgendrāgama</i>
MṛĀV	<i>vṛtti</i> of <i>Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha</i> on <i>Mṛgendrāgama</i>
MṛĀVD	<i>dīpikā</i> of <i>Aghoraśiva</i> on <i>Mṛgendrāgamavṛtti</i>
MV	<i>Mahotsavavidhi</i> , a portion of <i>Aghoraśiva</i> 's <i>KKD</i>
PĀ	<i>Pauṣkarāgama</i>
RĀ	<i>Rauravāgama</i>
ŚAC	<i>Śivārcanācandrikā</i> of <i>Appayadīkṣita</i>
SĀSS	<i>Sakalāgamasārasaṃgraha</i>
SDS	<i>Sarvadarśanasamgraha</i> of <i>Mādhava</i>
SP	<i>Somaśambhupaddhati</i> of <i>Somaśambhu</i>
ŚPbh	<i>Śaivaparibhāṣā</i> of <i>Śivāgrayogin</i>
ŚPM	<i>Śaivāgamaparibhāṣāmāñjarī</i> of <i>Vedajñāna</i>
ŚPur	<i>Śivapurāṇa</i> , <i>Vāyavīyasamhitā</i>
ŚRS	<i>Śataratnasamgraha</i> of <i>Umāpati</i>
SS	<i>Siddhāntasārāvalī</i> of <i>Trilocanaśiva</i>
ŚSPbh	<i>Śaivasiddhāntaparibhāṣā</i> of <i>Sūryabhaṭṭa</i>
SSV	<i>vyākhyā</i> of <i>Anantaśambhu</i> on <i>Siddhāntasārāvalī</i>
SupĀ	<i>Suprabhedāgama</i>
SvĀĀ	<i>Svāyambhuvāgama</i>
SvāT	<i>Svacchandatantra</i>

<i>TP</i>	<i>Tattvaparakāśa</i> of Bhojadeva
<i>TPD</i>	<i>dīpikā</i> of Śrīkumāra on <i>Tattvaparakāśa</i>
<i>TPV</i>	<i>vṛtti</i> of Aghoraśiva on <i>Tattvaparakāśa</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Tattvasaṃgraha</i> of Sadyojyoti
<i>TST</i>	<i>ṭīkā</i> of Aghoraśiva on <i>Tattvasaṃgraha</i>
<i>TTN</i>	<i>Tattvatrayanirṇaya</i> of Sadyojyoti
<i>TTNV</i>	<i>vṛtti</i> of Aghoraśiva on <i>Tattvatrayanirṇaya</i>
<i>UKĀ</i>	<i>Kāmikāgama</i> , <i>uttarabhāga</i>
<i>VĀ</i>	<i>Virāgama</i>
<i>VŚĀ</i>	<i>Vātulaśuddhāgama</i>

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## **Ritual in an Oscillating Universe**



## Locating the Tradition

THIS IS a study of the inner world of the Hindu temple: the world, that is, constructed and acted upon by the priests who perform the liturgical rounds that animate and maintain a temple as a living place of worship. To comprehend this world, we will reenact the central ritual of temple Hinduism, seeking as we do to reconstruct as well the metaphysical setting within which this ritual makes sense and from which it derives its efficacy for those who perform it.

"Daily worship" (*pūjā*, *nityapūjā*) is the ubiquitous Hindu ritual form by which devotees of a divinity regularly offer tokens of their respect and adoration to that deity embodied in an image or icon. It is the most common and recurrent ritual action of Hindu temples, and in many respects it is paradigmatic for the entire system of temple ritual as it developed in medieval India. As a general ritual pattern, *pūjā* has myriad variations. Each Hindu order articulates its own version of *pūjā*, suitable for the particular god or goddess to whom it is directed and adapted to its own particular theological convictions.<sup>1</sup>

Here I will focus on the complex formulation of daily worship articulated by the Śaiva siddhānta school during the early medieval period, and recorded in a corpus of Śaiva *āgama* and *paddhati* texts compiled in roughly the eighth through twelfth centuries.<sup>2</sup> The Śaiva siddhānta texts offer without a doubt one of the most complete, detailed, and interesting descriptions of medieval Hindu liturgical practice, and one that is to some extent still authoritative today in South Indian temples.

More specifically, I will draw principally on two fundamental texts of this tradition: the *Kāmikāgama*, which provides a full discussion of public temple worship, and Aghoraśiva's *Kriyākramadyotikā*, a twelfth-century *paddhati* that gives the most influential Śaiva siddhānta account of private worship.<sup>3</sup> Concentrating on the ritual prescriptions (*vidhi*) for daily worship contained in these two texts will enable us to comprehend much of the metaphysical world of Śaiva siddhānta, for Śaiva *pūjā* acts as a virtual précis of Śaiva siddhānta theology, a daily catechism in action for worshippers who undertake it with diligence and mindfulness.

Before we enter the inner world of the medieval Śaiva masters and begin this imaginative reenactment of *nityapūjā*, however, it will be useful to locate the Śaiva siddhānta order outwardly, as a historical religious community that defined itself and formulated its theological and ritual system in a larger cosmopolitical setting. Śaiva siddhānta is nowadays a significant

school of Hindu philosophy and religious practice prevalent only in the South Indian state of Tamilnad. However, in the early medieval period with which we will be primarily concerned, Śaiva siddhānta was a school of Pan-Indian scope enjoying close ties with the political order and often exercising decisive control over the principal religious and social institutions of the time. Let us begin not with the Śaiva priests and adepts themselves, but with one of the great patrons of medieval Śaivism, the Cola king Rājārāja I.

#### RĀJĀRĀJA'S GREAT TEMPLE

In 985 C.E., when Rājārāja I became king, the Cola kingdom was a modest one. Under Rājārāja's great-grandfather Parāntaka I, it had expanded rapidly to include much of South India. But in 953 the Rastrakuta king Kṛṣṇa III marched from the north against the upstart Colas and defeated them decisively at the battle of Takkolam. Thirty-two years of retreat, dynastic confusion, and gradual rebuilding followed for the Cola royalty. By the time of Rājārāja's consecration, the Colas had reconsolidated their sovereignty in the Kaveri River basin of Tamilnad and had acquired some territories beyond their traditional regional center.<sup>4</sup>

Once he became king, Rājārāja began a series of military campaigns. As he explained in his inscriptions, he became convinced, "in his life of blossoming strength," that "the great goddess Earth, as well as the goddess of Fortune, had become his wife." Because of this conviction, he "graciously" conquered kings in every direction, extending his sovereignty until he was "so resplendent that he was worshiped everywhere."<sup>5</sup> These campaigns went on for nearly twenty years, until almost all of India south of the Tungabhadra, as well as parts of Sri Lanka and the Maldiv Islands, owed homage to the Cola king. In his own terms, he accomplished a "conquest of the quarters" (*digvijaya*) and made all kings into his tributaries; he then returned to dwell in his own city, Thanjavur.

In 1003, the nineteenth year of his reign and near the completion of these military campaigns, Rājārāja began construction of an imperial temple in the capital. By the time of its consecration six or so years later, the Rājārājeśvara stood as the most massive temple in India: a granite tower of fourteen stories 190 feet high, with a base 96 feet square, set in a rectangular courtyard 500 feet by 250 feet. The primary icon of the temple was a colossal Śiva-līṅga, probably the largest such līṅga in existence. The octagonal dome at the top of the tower, directly above the central līṅga, was composed of a single huge stone, weighing about eighty tons, that according to tradition was conveyed to the top by means of a ramp four miles long. The temple was sometimes called the "Dakṣīnameru," or World-Mountain of the South, and indeed it must have towered above the Cola landscape like a world-mountain.<sup>6</sup>

The purpose of this monumental structure was to provide a home for the



divinity that Rājarāja and his retinue considered the preeminent overlord of the cosmos, so that the god would come to receive the homage and offerings of devotion presented by the king, his family, and his kingdom. The god was Śiva, referred to in the inscriptions variously as Rājarājeśvara ("Lord of Rājarāja"), Āḍavallān ("Master of Dance"), and Dakṣiṇameruṭṭaṅkar ("Lord of the Southern World-Mountain"). Śiva typically dwells upon Mount Kailāsa, the Uttarameru or Northern World-Mountain. It is a measure of the ambition embodied in this imperial act that Rājarāja could portray himself as having offered Śiva a new home in the south, equal to Śiva's Himalayan abode.

To serve Śiva and the other divine inhabitants of the temple, Rājarāja and his royal entourage made extensive donations and endowments, many of which are recorded on the stone walls of the temple.<sup>7</sup> Rājarāja himself presented gold articles weighing almost five hundred pounds troy weight, silver objects of more than six hundred pounds troy, and myriad jewels. The king's elder sister Kundavai, the second most generous donor, gave about a hundred pounds of gold and almost two hundred pounds of silver and jewels. Rājarāja also gave land, making over the royal share of produce from numerous villages throughout his dominion and as far afield as Sri Lanka. These endowments yielded an annual income of roughly a quarter million bushels of rice paddy. To supply ghee for cooking and for burning oil lamps, livestock was donated to the temple. One inscription details 2,832 cows, 1,644 ewes, and 30 she-buffalos that were assigned to 366 cowherds, who were in turn required to supply ghee to the temple at the rate of one *ulakku* (roughly half a pint) per day for every 48 cows or 96 ewes. (An *ulakku* of ghee per day will keep a "perpetual lamp" burning continuously.) Arrangements were also made for the regular supply of such cooking ingredients and condiments as fruit, pulse, pepper, tamarind, mustard, cumin, sugar, curds, plantains, salt, greens, areca nut, and betel leaves. All of these were necessary for the regular offerings of worship on a suitably grand scale, and for the even grander special offerings made during the several "great festivals" held annually.<sup>8</sup>

A religious institution on such a scale of course required personnel as well as endowments. As the temple inscriptions record it, the king arranged for other temples throughout the realm to supply dancers, some four hundred in all, to entertain Śiva. Forty-eight musicians along with two drummers were assigned to the regular recitation of the *Tēvāraḥ* hymns composed by the Tamil Śaiva saints. The assemblies of brahman settlements (*brahmadeyas*) were required to furnish young students to act as temple servants and accountants. Other villages were called upon to send people for carrying out such diverse services at the temple as holding the parasol (eleven persons), lighting lamps (eight persons), and sprinkling water on the deities (four persons); also required were potters, washermen, barbers, astrologers, tailors, jewel-stitchers, braziers, carpenters, and goldsmiths.