

A Homage to

Mount Kailas and Manasarovar

The Spiritual perspective :

The Śiva Concept

The human race since its appearance in Nature has advanced in two ways — (i) to utilize the forces of Nature for one's own living and (ii) to peep beyond the Nature out of curiosity or in order to go beyond the limitations of Nature. The former turned out to be the science and technology, and the latter developed into religion and spirituality.

The observations and realisations of the spiritual and religious sector has been rolling down through ages. The Seer/saints/sages, the scriptures and a common place of meet or worship are the three spokes of the wheel of Religion. When we come to Hinduism, we find, right from the Vedic age, Hindu Culture has accepted their importance; the religion is more bent on spirituality and insisting on realisation than on codes and formalities. This developed the insight into perception of Divinity in the day to day life of a Hindu. An illumined soul could, of course, vividly perceive Divinity everywhere, in all beings and things. For the man of the common run, and for children and others on the path to perfection, specific places of worship where Divinity could be easily conceived and perceived were identified. Where such naturally Divinity-radiating places and objects were not found, temples were erected and by adopting appropriate ritualistic formula, the Divinity was invoked usually by a Spiritual authority or by a qualified priest. Since time immemorial, temples have remained centres of eternal Vedic form of worship. These were secondary aids to Realise the Divinity lying within oneself. The whole attention and primary concern was to discover the Divinity within oneself. The worship in a temple consisted of projecting this inner Divinity upon the idol or any emblem placed in the temple and offering love and adoration. It is almost like looking into a mirror and dressing/decorating/adoring one's own self; it is worshiping the inner Divinity in external idol. This inner Divinity, the uninvolved Witness lying in the heart of every being in Its own glory, the Pure Consciousness, is the Śiva (शिव) or the Śiva principle (or Śivatattva – शिवतत्त्व). Any object/emblem used to portray this Divine principle is called a *Liṅga* (लिङ्ग); one's own Self, the Pure 'I'-sense which is not associated with the body or the world nor with the limitations of time and space — when said to represent Śiva/Śivatattva is called *Ātmaliṅga* (आत्मलिङ्ग).

There is verse in Sanskrit by Shankaracharya which brings out the Advaitic way of worshipping the Lord, the inner Divinity, considering the 'Self' itself as His emblem.

आराधयामि मणिसन्निभमात्मलिङ्गं
मायापुरी-हृदयपङ्कज-सन्निविष्टम् ।
श्रद्धानदी-विमल-चित्तजलाभिषेकैः
नित्यं समाधि-कुसुमैरपुनर्भवाय ॥

Ārādhayāmi maṇisannibhamātmaliṅgam
Māyāpurī-hṛdayapaṅkaja-sanniviṣṭam |
Śraddhānadī-vimala-cittajalābhiṣekaiḥ
Nityam samādhi-kusumairapunarbhavāya ||

The *Ātmaliṅga* which is radiating the pristine purity and shining like a crystal is enshrined in the lotus of the heart that is secured in the citadel of the physical body which is a product of *Māyā*, the Great Deluding Power of the Lord. Seeking Liberation, I worship that *Ātmaliṅga* by bathing it with waters of love, faith and dedication (*Śraddhā* – श्रद्धा) and flowers of *Samādhi* (total absorption in the transcendental Realm).

In apposition to temple, when we come across a natural phenomenon discovered /availed/believed as an emblem of God or Divinity, like a land (for e.g. the Kashi, Brindavan, Bethlehem etc.), or a river (like the Ganga etc.), or a mountain (like the Kailas etc.), or lake (Gaurikund, Manasarovar etc.) — we see we derive inspiration and divine awareness which in turn silences all inner dialogues and inner conflicts, and the inner Divinity shines in that stillness. It is exactly opposite to what we do in temple : in temple we project/invoke our inner Divinity on the emblem for worship, while in case of natural emblem we draw in external Divinity from the emblem which triggers inner Divinity.

The Hindu civilization centred on Spiritual Enlightenment as the sole purpose of human life was the most remarkable to flourish and influence the whole of Eastern world. From the ancient times Nepal, Tibet, China and the immediate neighbouring territories had imbibed Hindu and Buddhist principles of philosophy, religion and way of living. It was so easy for indigenous people around India and the East because prosperity, peace and contentment the Indians enjoyed were ascribed to Divine protections and their devotion to God and the ideals of life; the cosmology too was similar. The Kings who had responsibilities to discharge, to protect and ensure prosperity of the kingdom welcomed Indian gods and goddesses, though entirely foreign, they found a place beside the local Deities. Thus particular devotion was accorded to god *Śiva* and *Viṣṇu* (विष्णु) and also to *Buddha*.

To outsiders Hinduism mostly appears as a complex mixture of contradictory beliefs and multiple gods. In theory, philosophy, general understanding and practice it happily incorporates all forms of belief and worship within itself, on a common spiritual foundation. No beliefs or forms of worship are rejected by Hinduism. For Hindus religious Truth is ultimate, natural and ineffable. At its heart, Hinduism does not depend on the religious beliefs, faiths or philosophical concepts, neither does it advocate single individual God or multiple gods, but on the Realisation of Truth. They are all but secondary back-ups and non-essential supportive factors — a mere ladder to climb to the summit of Realisation of God/Self/Truth which alone ensures Liberation. Essentially all Hindus believe in the *Brahman*, The Absolute, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss-Absolute, The One without a second, without attributes (*Nirguṇa* - निर्गुण). *Brahman* is beyond sense perception and beyond the reach of mind or intellect being beyond time, space and causation. *Brahman* is Eternal, uncreated and unlimited; the entire relative existence in which we live with all beings in it emanates from *Brahman*, sustains itself in *Brahman* and ultimately returns to or dissolves in *Brahman*, The Absolute. The multiple gods and goddesses are merely manifestations — knowable titbits/ aspects of that unknowable Formless Existence for human minds to get an inkling of the Beyond. One may freely pick and choose any form, any aspect of That to suit

one's own nature, and transcend all limitations of Nature and reach the Ultimate, the Absolute. This ultimate Reality, The Eternal, is Pure Consciousness, The *Śuddha Ciatanya* (शुद्ध चैतन्य). In this timeless-spaceless- Existence where there is no action or movement, the Pure Bliss, there appear innumerable globules of time and space bound relative Existence, where movement and actions are possible; they are the innumerable universes; we are living in one of such universes. Just as earth is floating in space, our universe is floating in timeless spaceless Existence, the Absolute. The Pure Consciousness (*Śuddha Ciatanya*) in which they appear, Itself pervades every universe, and also appears as countless sparks of Consciousness in every universe which gain individuality and individual identity as the living beings, the *Jīvas* (जीवस). With the *Jīvas* as point of reference, the universe packed with Power and backed by Consciousness is called *Prakṛti* (the Nature). The embodied individual Soul is the microcosm, while the cosmic existence (with Consciousness pervading it, the *Prakṛti*) is macrocosm. The Consciousness pervading the individual Soul appearing to be bound by *Prakṛti* (प्रकृति) is *Jīvātman* (जीवात्मन्); and the Consciousness pervading the universe is called *Īśvara* (ईश्वर - the Lord of the universe).

Beginning with creation of the universe till the Creation ends, the *Īśvara* maintains His 'I' sense and identifies with the universe (as we do with our body). The cosmic 'I' is *Īśvara*, the universe is His body. At the very onset of Creation, the cosmic I at first makes its appearance; the power that He is associated with at all times is the Power of Consciousness, the *Citśakti* (चित्शक्ति). In the Pure Consciousness, The Absolute, there is no action or movement; the act of creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe is ascribed to *Īśvara*, which goes in an unending cyclic order. [It is like — while in sleep (a state of ignorance) our ego associated with power of mind creates a dream-world, participates, maintains and dissolves the dream before we wake up again.]. The Power of Consciousness, *Citśakti* at the moment the Creation is about to begin is called 'The Primordial Power' *Ādiśakti* (आदिशक्ति) or *Ādyāśakti* (आद्याशक्ति). Creation beginning, the time makes its appearance and space starts expanding from zero to boundless measures. The *Ādyāśakti* functions as a Creative Power and is known as *Sarasvati* (सरस्वति). The *Īśvara* associated with this power of creation, the *Sarasvati*, is called *Brahmā* (ब्रह्मा), the Creator. Once the basic universe is ready for appearance of life/beings in it, the Power associated with *Īśvara* transposes Herself from Her creative aspect to Her maintenance/sustenance aspect and is known as *Lakṣmī* (लक्ष्मी). The *Īśvara* associated with this Power, *Lakṣmī* is called the *Viṣṇu*, the Sustainer/preserver. *Brahmā* plays an active role only during creation of the universe. There after he is resolved back into *Īśvara* and *Viṣṇu* appears. His resolved state is regarded as remaining in uninterrupted meditation in Pauranic stories. Therefore he is regarded as aloof figure, and receives no worship, unlike *Viṣṇu* and *Maheśvara* (महेश्वर - as *Śiva*) who receive adoration and worship. For Pauranic and mythological purpose, *Brahmā* (distinct from *Brahman*, the Absolute) is deemed as the source, the seed, of all that is as relative existence. *Brahmā* literally means boundless Immensity. Philosophically he is the first stage of manifestation of the notion of individual Cosmic Personality associated and functioning as 'Creator'. Theologically, He is the uncreated Creator – self manifest first Person, *Svayambhū* (स्वयम्भू).

Cosmologically, He is the patriarch – the *Pitāmah* (पितामः). He is Ordinator, the *Vidhātā* (विधाता) and the architect of the universe, the *Viśvakarma* (विश्वकर्म).



Īśvara as the Creator : THE BRAHMĀ

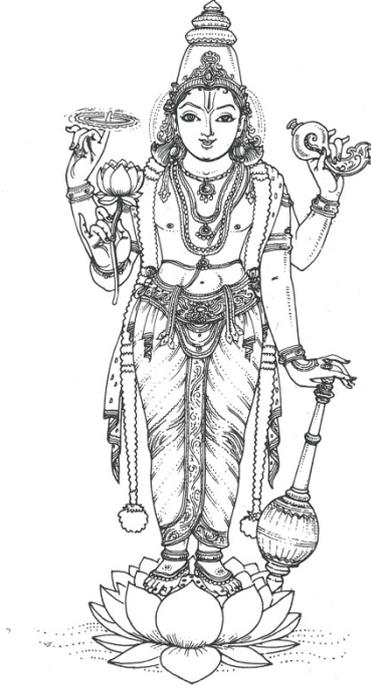


Power of *Īśvara* functioning as Creative power :
THE SARASVATI

The icon of *Brahmā* has four heads facing four quarters with flowing beards and eyes closed in meditation. The four faces in four opposite directions represent evolving of space and time and all round vigilance, care and concern under which creation is being effected. Closed eyes represent the transcendent Realm from which the creation is evolving. There are four arms holding different objects in different poses. The objects are a rosary [*Akṣamālā* (अक्षमाला) — which shows the creation is cyclic with evolving and involving process from infinite to finite and from finite to infinite]; a brush of *Kuśā* (कुशा) grass [*Kūrca* (कूर्च) — usually used for painting and in rituals – indicating various planes of existence with varieties of object of different size, shape and colour all bound together with life and beauty embedded in them]; a ladle [*Śruva* (श्रुव) indicative of love and sacrifice as the basis of creation, its existence and continuation]; a water pot [indicative of causal waters (Consciousness) from which the Creation has erupted, is pervading the universe and also remains embodied in every being as the indwelling Spirit]; and a book [*Pustaka* (पुस्तक) – represents knowledge – both sacred and secular – every secret is available within the Nature and every *Jīva* is entitled for it, seekers shall get it, and that release from bondage is within the reach of man provided he strives to attain it.].

The aspect of *Īśvara* as *Viṣṇu* continues till the end of creative cycle. Being a preserver, sustainer and governor of the universe and all beings in it, He favours right actions, observance of law and order and goodness. And, allows the Nature to act and deal with the rest who are otherwise. He is usually depicted symbolically with four arms. The two left hands hold : the first one, a conch shell [as it can be blown like a trumpet, and symbolises

the *Nāda*¹ (नाद), the unbounded Potency of the absolute Fullness in Brahman (*Pūrṇatva* – पूर्णत्व) expressing as basic continuum of Power and Bliss, an expression of *Om*, owing to and from which the relative existence emanates.]; the second one, a mace indicative of Power and Authority as the unchallenged Supreme Controller and Governor of the universe.



Īsvara as the Sustainer : THE VIṢṆU



Power of *Isvara* functioning as Sustaining power :
THE LAKṢMI

The two right hands hold : the first one, a lotus [whose petals are symbols of unfolding universe with life, love and beauty as its characteristics]; and the other holds a discus indicative of Supreme Will — every power within the creation including the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe functioning as per His wish. The wheel of time (*Kālacakra* – कालचक्र), wheel of Righteousness (*Dharmacakra* – धर्मचक्र) and every law functioning in the universe is being under His Supreme Will and vigilance. The discus is also indicative of the fact that everything in the universe is limited but is in a state of constant motion (a vibrative existence, as if), a process of cyclic movement (water to cloud, cloud to water; seed→plant→seed, egg→hen→egg; tree→earth→tree etc..) which fulfils scarcity and imparts life and sustains life; and gives a sense of *Pūrṇatva* – completeness, fullness, self-containdness to this relative existence. He is Pure Consciousness, the Pure spirit, the Eternal in His Real formless aspect, who pervading the universe exists as its substratum as well as the indwelling Spiritual Essence in all living beings, thus being termed as *Antaryāmin* (अन्तर्यामिन्).

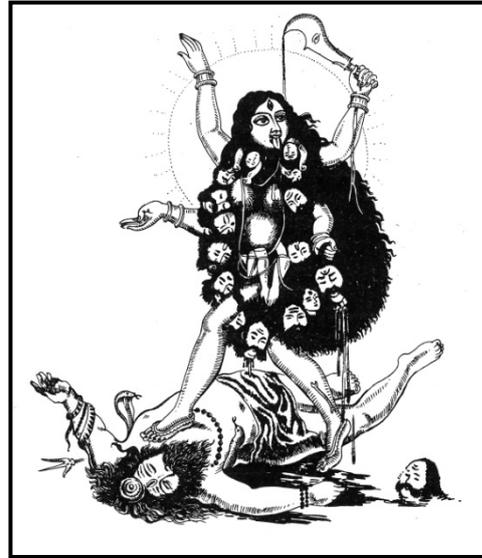
¹ The pre-creation and post-dissolution state of the universe in its pure energy form. At the time of dissolution, the universe collapses into a point called the *Bindu* (बिन्दु) and then expands in the reverse way into the Absolute as *Nāda* (something like a sound expanding in air/space, say, imperceptible/inaudible sound.) and then finally finds absolute oneness with *Brahman*, the Absolute. Again, prior to creation, the Creative Impulse raises waves of *Nāda* which expands, and then collapses into a single point, the *Bindu*, which expands outwardly as the universe. The external stages of evolution is called *Kalā* (कला). The *Brahman* in other words the Absolute, is beyond *Nāda*, *Bindu* and *Kalā*.

While pervading the universe, He also, like a wave appearing in the ocean, incarnates time and again for fulfilling a Divine purpose. *Rāma*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Buddha* etc., being such incarnations.

At the end of a cosmic cycle, when the time is ripe for dissolution, the *Īśvara*'s Power functioning as *Lakṣmi* and Himself acting as *Viṣṇu* declain. And the *Īśvara* steadily gets associated with a revised aspect of His Power as the 'retractive power' called *Kāli* or *Mahākāli* and Himself being associated with the 'Retractive Power', *Kāli*, ministers over the dissolution of the universe under new identity and new designation as *Maheśvara*.



Īśvara as the Retractor : THE MAHEŚVARA



Power of *Īśvara* functioning as retracting power :
THE KĀLI

The three aspects of *Īśvara* (also called *Parameśvara*) together forming one unit is the Hindu Trinity. The respective Powers of creation, sustenance and dissolution are given a feminine form and are said to be their 'concerts' under the name – *Sarasvati*, *Lakṣmī* and *Kali*. The term to denote any Power is *Śakti*. The senses, sense perception, this perceivable world, these innumerable souls/beings, the pain/pleasure, all experiences and movements/events, the bondage and release — everything is a play of these Powers, the *Śaktis* and therefore they are called as Great Causes or as Divine Mother. *Brahmā*'s part in the universe being over with its creation, He is not worshipped. But the *Viṣṇu*, *Maheśvara* (in his self-contained aspect as *Śiva*) and the *Śakti* (the Divine Mother) are adored, extolled, worshipped — thus in Hinduism, we find three major groups — *Vaiṣṇavās*, *Śaivās* and *Śaktās*.

From the ancient times throughout the length and breadth of India, the land of Hindus, the worship of *Maheśvara* in his graceful and auspicious aspect as *Śiva* has come down in an unbroken tradition.

Maheśvara is the final Deity [Deity = a Power backed by Consciousness bringing about a particular effect or functioning in fulfilling some purpose] responsible for the dissolution of the universe. He is the last aspect of *Īśvara* (the Lord of the universe).

Brahmā as a centrifugal force projects the Universe and *Maheśvara* as centripetal force retreats back to the source, a natural tendency of every object to remain merged in the non-dual experience of the Bliss Absolute. *Śiva* is that aspect of *Maheśvara* when he remains absorbed in an ecstatic state of Bliss in His own Self (*Ātmaratiḥ* – आत्मरतिः). This state *Maheśvara* enjoys at all times till the dissolution of the universe begins, there after He comes to the active state of effecting the dissolutive process. Literally, *Śiva* means one who is asleep to the world and worldly ways but awake to the Reality, the *Brahman*; and the one who puts the world to sleep at the end of the cycle till the next cycle of creation begins. He being ever awake to the devotees' call is fully asleep/indifferent to their worldly ways. Thus is His name 'the Innocent' — *Bholā* (भोला) or *Bhole* (भोले). His getting pleased with a thrash offerings or nothing at all, gives Him the name *Āśutoṣ* (आशुतोष), 'The instantly pleased'.



Īśvara, the Lord of the universe as : THE ŚIVA

[Prior to and after the dissolution of the universe, *Īśvara* immersed in the Bliss of His own Self]



The Power of the Īśvara : THE PĀRVATĪ

[Remaining in Her Potential/passive from as a blissful Mother]

To the ordinary beings dissolution or going back to the cause is 'destruction'. All that has a beginning must have an end, that which is born must die, that which is composed must decompose. This is an inevitable and inviolable law. The principle that brings about this disintegration of the universe, the power that is behind the 'destruction' (dissolution) of the universe is *Śiva* (as *Maheśvara*). The destructive aspect is always presumed to be 'terrible'; attributing His destructive act to His terrific aspect, He is called the *Rudra* (रुद्र), The Terrible.

The process of creation and the process of destruction are said to be and can well be imagined to be most charming and bewitching one. The evolutionary process is said to be graceful endowed with beauty and sweetness. Being smooth and flowing it is accredited to

be a dance of the feminine type which is called *Lāsya* (लास्य) and is ascribed to the dancing of Divine Mother, the *Śakti*. With a view to give a contrast to the dissolution process, the *Lāsya* is assigned to Goddess *Pārvati* (पार्वति), and depicted as ‘consort of *Śiva*’. While the ending phase of creation, the dissolution, is stormy movements, every object being carried away and forcefully sucked back into the cause in reverse order. It looks like heroic manly dance, fierce and frantic. This is symbolised by *Śiva* dancing as *Naṭarāja* (नटराज), meaning the ‘king of dances’. The retraction of the universe moves from gross to subtle and then from subtle to the causal — ending in the ultimate thinning out into the boundless Consciousness, from which the entire universe (and innumerable similar universes) spring up again and again. *Śiva* who was *Maheśvara* during the process of dissolution, again attains back the *Śiva* state of being merged in the Absolute, which again is His true Self.

Philosophy and discerning the symbology is only to enrich our lives with love, purity and the spirit of sacrifice; to walk on the path of righteousness towards Eternal Freedom. Now the time is ripe that we have to equip our lives with these virtues.

Śiva is worshipped in the anthropomorphic portrait and also in an emblem (a stone or otherwise) known as *Liṅga*. The most common pictures and images of Him depict him as a very handsome youth, resplendent with purity and divinity represented by pure white complexion like camphor (*Karpūragaura* – कर्पूरगौर). *Śiva*’s this snow white colour sitting motionless in deep meditation matches with snow-clad mountains of Himalayās which is His abode and Himself as the magnificent Kailas. We must have two visions of Architecture – the smallest/minute minuscule conception and the large/vast cosmic conception. As an example we may have the ornaments women wear in India – precise and compact – depicts precision and perfection in minute designing and carving; and the cosmic designing, the world as an architectural show-piece. The microscopic view of an atom and the megascopic/astronomical view of this universe. The Vedas express these two visions as — *Aṅoraṇīyān* (अणोरणीयान् - atomic among the smallests) and *Mahatomahīyān* (महतोमहीयान् - greatest among the titanics). These two views help us to understand how and why Kailas was viewed as manifesting Divinity, a source from where Divinity can be tapped, a hint and a clue to perceive Divinity. The white snow towering and toping Himalayas, especially when snowing starts, stands for the ocean of Consciousness, the Light that dispels spiritual darkness, the ignorance. Being ever in unbroken communion with the Absolute, He is the very personification of this Cosmic Consciousness; *Jīva* who meditates on this concept, ‘the *Śiva*’, shall witness that Light being non-different from one’s own true self, *The Self*.

Śiva is shown with strong and smooth limbs besmeared with ash, so smeared is his sublime hallowed body. It is not ordinary ash *Śiva* uses, it is the ash left over after the human dead body is cremated (*Citābhasma* – चिताभस्म). Body is a product of Nature, the *Prakṛti*. Every being comprises of two parts — consciousness and matter [i.e., *Cit* (चित्) and *Jada* (जड) or the *Puruṣa* (पुरुष) and *Prakṛti*]; here cremation is taken as destruction of *Prakṛti* and the ash is taken to represent the *Puruṣa* principle – the Pure Spirit. Smearing body and limbs with ash brings about the understanding of oneself as Spirit (*Caitanya* – चैतन्य) and denial of oneself as body. The application of the holy ash by the *Śaivites* (followers of *Śiva* cult) is to

proclaim to an onlooker that the particular body is dedicated to God and it entirely belongs to God, it is neither an object of enjoyment nor an object that enjoys.

The cremation is the last Hindu rite and the last sacrament (the 16th of the *Śoḍaṣa Samskāra*) imparted to the departed soul after death. So, Śiva smearing cremation ash indicates that He is the final Goal and destination of every *Jīvātman*, the living beings. It also signifies that He is the end of this universe and Lord of retraction of the universe. Thus, ash represents an ascetic life which purifies and sanctifies man at all levels of his being making him aware of the final product the Pure Consciousness, the *Ātman*, his own real Self. Śiva has three eyes – the third eye is on the central forehead. Of the three eyes, the two normal eyes perceive the natural world in its gross, subtle and the causal aspect and the third one perceives The Beyond. It means that He is the witness of waking, dream and deep sleep states (*Jāgrat*, *Svapna*, *Suṣupti* states – जाग्रत्, स्वप्न, सुषुप्ति) as well as of the transcendental (*Turīya* –तुरीय). It is said that when He opens His third eye the whole universe gets destroyed. In fact it is ‘waking up’ to the *Turīya* state with all beings included within Himself [wherein Transcendental Realm the Substratum of the universe, the Ultimate Reality, the Absolute is experienced; it is identical with *Nirvikalpa Samādhi* (निर्विकल्प समाधि). It is like our waking up from a dream state whereupon the dream world hither to being experienced at once gets totally obliterated.]. Nothing of this relative existence remains anymore. The third eye represents the Supreme knowledge and supreme wisdom. It symbolises his omniscience. Within the realm of Nature with *Jīva* as reference point the three eyes are said to represent sun, moon and fire, the source of light, life and heat.

To make the *Sādhakās* (spiritual seekers) understand the gravity of sex dominance by Nature on all beings, its subjugative and tyrannizing spur on every being and at the same time its unsubstantiality and fallacy revealed when the light of Truth dispels the darkness of *Māyā*, the Ignorance — Śiva as perfect *Yogi* and the ideal of *Yoga* is brought in. It is said that the Nature’s indomitable inducement embodied in every *Jīva* (individual soul) as sex impulse which maintains continuance of life on this earth, went to tempt Śiva who was sitting in deep absorption in *Samādhi*. In all beings the sex-urge is said to be incited by a power personified as the god of Lust, the most beautiful one with unchallenged charisma. He is invincible and is capable of seducing even the ascetics and sages of highest self-control, and has not spared any *Jīva* unsmitten. Except a few extremely rare souls that are striving to go beyond Nature in order to attain Eternal Freedom and Immortality, the whole of rest cherish and covet him with great gusto. He is said to possess no body but resides in every *Jīva* and manifests as sex-urge form within. He is personified with the name *Madana* (मदन) or *Manmatha* (मन्मथ; the agitator/churner of mind). In contrast to hard sharp arrows of hunters, he is supposed to possess an arrow of flowers (soft, pleasant) which, with a soft feather touch he pierces into the heart there by he binds it with an enchanting sweetness of ‘sex-love’, the most powerful and imperceptible bait of slow poison that drains out all vigour and strength, blocks the way to Spiritual glory, and closes the door to inner Bliss and Peace. Further, it fills the heart with guilt and a sense of sin which lowers the self-image and paves way to self-destruction. It is this all conquering *Madana* who with an intention to divert Śiva from the state of *Samādhi* to fulfil some ‘Divine purpose’, tries to seduce Him by releasing his ‘arrow of flowers’

(*Puṣpabāṇa* – पुष्पबाण). Śiva was in his deep *Samādhi* wherein He was experiencing absolute oneness with the Pure Consciousness (*Śuddha Caitanya*) which is the inner essence of all beings. This aroused sex-love in every being of the universe — gods to insects, including plant life, each leaf and flower bunch trying to stretch themselves to hug and kiss the other — only a few surrendered souls whom God's grace was protecting remained unaffected. The distraction provoked Śiva to open His third eye which burnt down *Madana* to ashes. Śiva's third eye is the eye of Supreme Knowledge (*Jñāna Cakṣu* – ज्ञान चक्षु ; which the *Jīva* attains after God realisation); no ignorance nor its product can survive in the presence of that Supreme Knowledge. After all, *Kāma* i.e., the Lust, the demands of flesh, is merely a product of ignorance. How can it survive the Supreme Knowledge with which comes the actual realisation that I am not the body – gross, subtle or causal. When Śiva, the Supreme self of all *Jīvas* opened His eye of knowledge, every *Jīva* at once experienced its eternal oneness with the Absolute; thus there remained no soul to perceive this world of duality. When there is no perceiver, the perceived ceases to exist, like a multifarious dream entirely disappearing when the perceiver wakes up. As the legend goes, Śiva realising the need, fulfilled the Divine purpose and blessed the world and *Jīvas* by bestowing peace and prosperity. The stories and legends are basis through which philosophical concepts and spiritual truth are supplied for contemplation, absorption and bringing them into one's own life-stream so that the mundane become Spiritual and the life buoyant with sweet freshness of peace and bliss. This Śiva who destroyed lust (*Kāma*) keeps His 'wife' *Pārvati* (His Power, the power of Consciousness, the *Cit-Śakti*, Personified as *Pārvati* and being inseparable from Him, is said to be His consort,) on His own lap. The love between Śiva and *Pārvati* is said to be 'Lust-free love' (*Kāmarahita Prema* – कामरहित प्रेम). This is highest human ideal regarding the husband wife relationship. We can see its replica completely brought out without the slightest compromise in the life of Sri Ramakrishna and Ma Sharada Devi. Naren (Sw. Vivekananda) as a playing boy of five years loved and worshipped Śiva for His immaculate purity and selfless love. It is worth recollecting here the love of Radha and Krishna which is upheld as the love-supreme and is called the *Videha-prema* (विदेह प्रेम) – the LOVE of two lovers who are unaware of their bodily existence; Radha since her infancy never was aware of her possessing a physical body. She was aware of Krishna alone and her own Spiritual Existence and eternal relationship with God, and never come down to bodily level. All her physical activities went on like a machine working guided by 'Nature', her I centred round Krishna, the Supreme Spirit. Sri Ramakrishna lived six months in *Nirvikalpa*, Radha lived whole her life in a 'Dvaitik Nirvikalpa' with Krishna alone as all in all; she knew nothing but Krishna. When *Sādhakās* (spiritual seekers) with all their sincere efforts and years of struggle find it impossible to cross over the sex idea, they are asked to surrender to Śiva or Radha or to Mother Ganga (manifest in the waters of Ganga River). The Mother Ganga is the most sacred Divine principle, eternally pure and perfect, absolutely free from sex in any form, and destroyer of sin and sanctifier, whom Lord Śiva mounts on his crest with great love and honour. She is depicted as shining bright amidst the dark matted locks of hairs over the head like a crest-jewel or like a streak of lightning amidst the dark sky at night.

The entire computer world — the internet, the P.C's, the media, the games and warfare, photography, the vast medical field etc., — is based on a simple principle expressed

in binary notations as 0 and 1. Same way the entire universe can be reduced to two basic components - *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti* — or *Śiva* and *Śakti* (consciousness *Cit* and Its power *Citśakti*) personified and symbolised and principles lucidly expressed in legends and stories as *Śiva* and *Pārvati*, Father and Mother of the universe. *Kālidāsa* begins his work *Abhijñāna Śākuntala* (अभिज्ञान शाकुन्तला) with the invocative prayer :

वागर्थाविव संप्रक्तौ वागर्थ-प्रतिपत्तये । जगतः पितरौ वन्दे पार्वती-परमेश्वरौ ॥

(*Vāgarthāviva sampraktau vāgartha-pratipattaye. Jagataḥ pitarau vande pārvatī-paramēśvarau*)

“As the speech and the meaning it conveys are interlocked and non-different from each other, so intermingled and united at every level are the Lord *Śiva* and Mother *Pārvati* who are the causes of this universe. To them I bow down desirous of attaining the non-dual experience proclaimed by Vedas (the Mahāvākyas : *Aham Brahmāsmi* – अहं ब्रह्मास्मि).”

This twin principle is what universe is; the Spirit and Matter. Every object, every point of space, every atom, even the invisible subtle world like the mind or feelings, is a combination of *Śiva* and *Śakti*. Every atom is energy packed and intense unceasing activity is going on — electrons moving round the protons since millions and millions of years! The entire play is going on the platform of Consciousness; the Consciousness projecting within Itself through the screen of time and space as matter and energy.

The existence of an atom or an object independent of its material part is *Śiva*, its material part, its atomic-configuration, the throbbing/palpating energy, its self expression, its perceivability, its qualities, its properties, its functions etc., are play and display of *Śakti*. The consciousness that is backing and imparting existence to every object in this world, good or bad, ugly or beautiful, pain or pleasure — is *Śiva*, objects themselves are the Divine Mother, *Śakti/Pārvati*. For those who find difficult to understand this concept, we may further grossify and say — there is power in every object, knife has the power to cut and pen to write. The knife is *Śiva* and its power to cut is *Śakti*. Pen is *Śiva*, its power to write is *Śakti*, the fire is *Śiva* its power to burn, power to impart light and heat is *Śakti*. Similarly the ‘Self’ in man and every being is *Śiva* and the body-mind-complex with its power, properties and functions is *Śakti*. The universe and all other beings are viewed as a combination of *Śiva* and *Śakti*¹. When we thus move to the root of things to perceive this truth, then we see there is neither good nor bad, pure or impure, spiritual or secular but is a Divine play going on. It is to this state of realisation that we need to lift our consciousness. Man becomes silent with Great wonder and Bliss. The wonder and joy which a pilgrim experiences when he/she witnesses the Mount Kailas is a minutest glimpse of that Great wonder and Bliss. In that man recognises himself as a pure divine child of this Nature and recognises his ‘eternal Parents’. After this correct version of this world and of oneself dawns in the awareness of a devotee, he moves forward with fearlessness and confidence till he realises his absolute Oneness with them in the non-dual Spiritual experience. This aspect of *Śiva* confers fearlessness to all from

¹ ‘*Śivamayam Jagat*’ (शिवमयम् जगत्) ‘Pervaded by *Śiva* is this universe’, ‘*Yadasti yadbhāsate’tra sā śaktiḥ*’ (यदस्ति यद्भासतेऽत्र सा शक्तिः) ‘whatever exists here or seen expressing itself, is *Śakti*.’

every type of danger and evil is depicted by specific hand pose *Abhaya Mudra* (अभय मुद्र = The right palm raised to breast level and focused to devotee thereby bestowing fearlessness). The icon of Śiva portrays four arms; the lower right hand is showing this *Abhaya Mudra*. The left lower hand with open palm is pointing to the earth below and is called the *Varada Mudra* (वरद मुद्र; a posture of hand that grants boon) that fulfils any seeking that is not harmful to the *Jīva*. In the other two hands we find Śiva holding a trident (*Trisūla* – त्रिशूल) and a double coned handy drum (*Ḍamaru* – डमरु). Around the neck and here and there over the body serpents are adorning like ornaments — necklace, girdle and arm-bracelets.

The trident in the hand of the Śiva reveals His grip on Nature, *Prakṛti* comprising of three *Guṇas* (गुणस) – *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas* which are three pain inflicting and binding forces of Nature. It is an important destructive weapon indicative of the Power, Capability and Authority over dissolution of the universe. As a defensive weapon it bestows protection for all beings under the ruler ship and epithet – *Paśupati* (पशुपति), the Lord of the beings.

The drum (*Ḍamaru*) in the hand and serpents on the body are very significant. The creation has two aspects : the evolution and the involution. There are, from the *Jīvās* stand point, two existence the Absolute and the Relative; the Absolute existence is *Satccidānanda* (सच्चिदानन्द) – the Existence-Consciousness-Bliss-Absolute which is Pure-Consciousness beyond time, space and causation. The relative existence is this universe bound by time, space and causation. Absolute is changeless, Eternal, Infinite where as the relative is everchanging flux, temporal and finite. The relative evolves from the Absolute; time, space etc., being successive evolutes. At the root of this creative process lies the creative pulsation an imperceptible throbbing in the Pure Consciousness (There is yet neither time, space nor any movement) and is called *Nāda*. The *Nāda* is the basic continuum of Power and Bliss rising out of its fullness (*Pūrṇatva*). It is as if the excessive fullness and completeness of Bliss Absolute wants to burst forth and express Itself in many ways — from it the universe appears with bewildering array of multifarious objects. This evolution from *Nāda* is symbolised by the hand-drum (shapped like an hour-glass) comparing it with impulsive pulsating sound of the drum. So the drum represents the evolatory process of the universe. The drum being the symbol of sound, is also indicative of sound produced by animals and insects and birds, as well as speech — all rise from the individual consciousness of beings. So also it represents any sound within the creation like of the thunder or of water falls. A remarkable thing that differentiates the human from all other living beings is speech and language which can convey any sort of knowledge or understanding or experience, be it of past, present or future, lying within the range of perception or beyond. So the entire gamut of knowledge, spiritual or secular is represented by the *Ḍamaru* including the sound such as the ‘logos’ from which the creation is deemed to proceed. It also represents the entire music world of earth and of heavenly abodes, and varieties of musical instruments. The alphabets of Sanskrit language is re-arranged by Panini, the pre-historic grammarian in a most ingenious manner to facilitate expressing grammatical rules and procedure and processes. There are fourteen such articulations not conveying any meaning – formula like express on as Ai-un, ṛṛk etc.,. These sound codes are said to have originated from the *Ḍamaru* when Śiva played it during his *Tāṇḍava* dance.

Exactly opposite to this process of evolution is the process of involution, the reverse order of withdrawal, evolutes entering back each other — and is symbolised by serpents. The word for serpents in sanskrit is *Nāga* (नाग). *Śiva* is called *Nāgabhūṣaṇa* (नागभूषण, adorned by serpents). The iconologic interpretation of serpent is ‘sperm’ —the consciousness involved in the matter in its micro-infinitesimal size. [How Consciousness, (unlimited and ever free) gets involved in matter (limited and bound) is the topmost secret of this Creation; one who knows this secret, knows the way-out and to him embodiment is a play.]. So, primarily snakes represent the process of involution. The involution pre-supposes destruction of the earlier stage. Tree gives affixed number of seeds, man begets a fixed number of children, grows old and dies. Death is not the end, it is beginning for the next. Throughout the life — from conception to death — involution was taking place in an unseen sub-terrain of that *Jīva*. The impressions received, the tendencies created by thoughts and actions, the pending file of actions awaiting the fruits — were jointly preparing the seed for the next birth. When the seed formation is complete, the physical body falls off; old age is the final winding up at gross level. This process continues endlessly — a series of transmigration, of births and deaths. The perennial energy associated with existence of a *Jīva* (individual soul) in this universe either in an embodied state or in a disembodied state, which accomplishes the above process of transmigration – the involution and evolution cycles — is called the *Kuṇḍalinī* (कुण्डलिनी) which again is represented by serpent. The *Kuṇḍalinī* links the *Jīvātman* with the inconceivable Power of the Absolute, the *Citśakti*. Thus we see serpent-worship independently being done in India, especially in south India, and emphatically in south Canara Districts of Karnataka. And again, we see it associated with major gods and goddess — it is *Viṣṇu*’s reclining bedstead, it is crawling ornament over *Śiva*’s body, it is griddle for *Ganesh*, a weapon in the hand of *Durgā* — etc.,. The intimacy, freedom and obedience they display in the company of *Śiva* indicates that the involution/evolution (death and rebirth) as well as spiritual enlightenment (serpent as *Kuṇḍalinī* Power) is verily at his command and disposal. And this aspect of Him is most welcomed and most sought by the *Jīvās*. In this aspect He is called *Mṛtyuñjaya* (the conqueror of death).

The famous Mantra ‘*Mahā-Mṛtyuñjaya Mantra*’ (महा-मृत्युञ्जय मन्त्र) runs as follows :

“त्र्यम्बकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनं । उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनान्मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात् ॥”

(*Tryambakam yajāmahe sugandhim puṣṭivardhanam | Urvārukamiva bandhanānmṛtyor mukṣīya māmṛtāt ||*)

“We adore and worship through sacrifice (*Yajāmahe*—यजामहे) the three-eyed Lord (*Tryambakam*—त्र्यम्बकं) who is fragrant (i.e., though not visible to eyes, the grace and presence of whom is perceptible, even from a distance like the fragrance of a hidden flower, to persons given to piety and love of God and loving service to beings; *Sugandhim*) and who enhances the nourishment (who imparts stamina to cope up with all odds of life and promotes welfare and aids physical prosperity and spiritual advancement; *Puṣṭivardhanam*). May we be made to get released (*Mukṣīya*—मुक्षीय) from

death (*Mṛtyoh*–मृत्योः) **just as a ripe cucumber**¹ (*Urvārukamiva*–उर्वारुकमिव) **separates itself from binding stalk** (*Bandhanāt*– बन्धनात्); **may we never get separated** (*Mā*–मा) **from Immortality** (*Amṛtāt*–अमृतात्).

Śiva has been figured out to be wearing a crescent moon as a diadem. Crescent moon actually represents *Kalā* (कला) the phases or stages through which creation appears and disappears. Like the phases of the moon waxing and waning, beginning from *Prakṛti* the Creation waxes forth issuing evolutes after evolutes to the final stage of the universe with beings living in it. Then, retracts back in the reverse order when the waning begins. The crescent moon represents the entire Nature passing through repeated cycles of projection-sustenance-retraction. Its being a diadem indicates the Nature/universe in any condition, at any time is precious to Him and shines in Him as an ornament, and as *Īśvara* He is its substratum too. The crescent moon upto two digits (i.e., two days after and before new moon) is stainless (*Nirmala* –निर्मल) and is considered as a sign of purity. Stains (blackish spots) starts appearing from the 3rd day. Gods bedecking them upon their crown indicates purity is their ornament and is the supreme virtue. Divinity invariably moves with purity; purity in thought, speech and deed.

The graphic presentation includes a garland of human skulls. A human skull represents highest evolved state of a living being. One is said to attain to this state hopping through many of the eighty four lakhs of species of lives (plants, micro-organisms, insects, reptiles, birds, aquatic life, animals and human beings etc.) according to one's *Karma*. Humans alone have the power of thinking and options to choose and capability to transcend Nature. Thus the human life is said to be most precious one. Human skull represents all other species. It also represents a life time. A garland of skulls represents a series of lives of a soul from its appearance in Nature till it returns Home being Liberated again. The Lord's wearing it around the neck depicts the immense love, concern and care that he has for every living being. It gives the assurance to every *Jīva* "You are never alone, I am always with you, I care for you, I love you, I share your joys and sorrows, never feel lonely, never feel helpless."

Nandi (नन्दि), the vehicle :

Human is a transaction between the animal and the divine. Till the human climbs over to his *divine nature*, animal continues to ride over him and force him to seek worldly enjoyments and sense pleasure. Once he shifts to higher life and manifests his divine nature he starts riding over the very animal which was all through enslaving him by riding over him. All pictures of Hindu gods and goddess predominately contain some animal placed at the foot off the Deity as His/Her vehicle on which the Deity is supposed to ride over. It only shows the supremacy of Divinity and power that subdues, controls, transports and utilises the animal and particular features and traits it displays. It is expression of Divinity and also a call for

¹ The example of ripe cucumber beautifully brings out the way in which a spiritually matured or Nature-matured person easily and naturally gets freedom from the earthly bondage at the dawn of knowledge or at the close of a well-spent life.

conquering one's own animal nature; only those who conquer their animal nature can find the Divine company, the company of God.

Maheśvara is a retractive Power that forces and pushes the universe to its causal form of placidity and equilibrium. The bull is a symbol of power as well as a slavish worker when tamed. [compare with the words : bulldozer, bull-worker etc.,; Bull among men = man of expressive and commanding personality]. It uses little brains and not a very sensitive animal — said to be suitable for *Maheśvara* for his retractive work. The Bull is called *Vṛṣabha* (वृषभ) in Sanskrit. When *Maheśvara* remains in his *Śiva* aspect, this *Vṛṣabha* too changes his entire nature to suit the *Śiva* aspect — with a joyful composure, and is named *Nandi* – meaning ‘the delightful/ the gladdened’. He is said to be sitting at the feet of *Śiva* with undivided attention as His chief attendant depicting all qualities of a *perfect devotee*. Every *Śiva* temple without exception has an image of this sanctifying bull – *Nandi*. It is an animal in which animal-hood has fallen off and the supreme divine qualities are fully manifest — especially freedom from sex, ego and selfishness; and the pure unalloyed devotion to God and the pure love for beings; no seekings of any type — therefore ever blissful, ever contented and ready to serve at anytime in any capacity — thus called ‘the *Nandi*’. The *Śiva* remains absorbed in the Absolute and the *Nandi* in *Śiva*. He is supposed to have received the command from Lord *Śiva* “sprinkle the coolant of compassion and love and bring solace wherever you see people burning; anoint those who are suffering, with cool balm of devotion; give them the shield of Divine name and crown them with the understanding ‘God alone is True and Eternal, and is ever within you and without too’ — this too is service unto Me, I reside in them all and they in Me”. So, it is said that he moves about removing the suffering of beings — that is the meaning of the word *Vṛṣabha*¹. Sadhus and holymen try to imitate this life to win the favour of *Śiva*. There is the south Indian tradition to tell their woes and needs in the left ear of the image of *Nandi* by closing the right ear so that he will himself solve or convey to his beloved Lord.

When we look at iconological symbolising etc., we understand how much pains the sages of yore have taken to build up a perfect social setup for human evolution to the divine. The sages have made lots of ways for human resurrection and redemption. In this world where things are falling apart, values are on the decline and peace is but a far off cry, man seems to have lost in darkness of utter selfishness and material chase — the light does persist in that darkness, truth does persist amidst the untruth, and life does persist amidst death. Unique and unsurpassed is the spiritual heritage of India. Passing through so many ups and downs in the course of countless millennia it has been and shall remain giving life, light and strength to mankind. We have to avail, utilise and outstrip the engulfing darkness. Swami Vivekananda said ‘Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within’. Now the time has come in our lives to awaken this potential divinity and actualise it through its dynamic manifestation by following the foot steps of the ancient sages. Sri Ramakrishna said “I have prepared the mould, cast yourselves and reach the summit”. We

¹ *Vṛṣabha* is from the root *Vṛṣ* [वृष्] *Siñcane* – to sprinkle]; “अभिगच्छतो भवद्गद्धान् सिञ्चति” (*Abhigacchato bhavadgadhān siñcati*) — “keeps on moving sprinkling coolant over the burning souls scorched by the sufferings in the world”.

derive from Him the right knowledge, right way of life and right path for spiritual strivings; and is the only way for us and for the entire mankind. Let us be the true spiritual seekers, Him being with us, He shall Enlighten us.

This covers the anthropomorphic symbolisation and iconographic representation of the Śiva ideal. There are innumerable ways in which He has been viewed, presented and worshipped by devotees. The essence is same and has been covered in the previous pages. Apart from this anthropomorphic adoration, there is a widely accepted and universally venerated form of worshipping Śiva in an emblem called Śivaliṅga.

The Śivaliṅga (शिवलिङ्ग) :

During spiritual infancy when the concept of God is not yet clear, to present the inconceivable, imperceptible Reality, efforts are made to present certain perceivable objects to represent Divinity or God. These ‘signs’ or ‘signboards’ that stand pointing to the imperceptible God-head is called *Liṅga* — literally meaning ‘sign’ ‘emblem’ or ‘indicator’. There are three approaches to the inaccessible God —

(i) conceiving God in an idol, and is called ‘*Pratimā Upāsanā*’ (प्रतिमा उपासना). God is conceived as a ‘Person’ and with a particular attitude and relationship, feelings are centred around Him/Her. Feeling converts the idol into a Living-Being receiving all services and reciprocating the feelings. As love deepens spiritual sensitivity develops in the devotee which suppresses down the material part of the idol. The idol becomes more and more living and filled with consciousness — from *Mṛṇmaya* (मृण्मय; matter persisting) the idol turns *Cinmaya* (चिन्मय; consciousness persisting). Then finally the *divine eyes Divya Cakṣu* (दिव्य चक्षु) to perceive the Divine emerges. This is predominantly the path of ‘Devotion’.

(ii) The second approach is called the *Pratīka Upāsanā* (प्रतीक उपासना). A visible or perceptible or conceivable objects other than an idol is taken to represent God. In and through that object love, feelings, prayers and worships are conveyed. The object representing or indicating God can be a stone piece or a metal block or a flower, leaf or water or river or hill or a tree or Sun or Moon or any other object found suitable and where the devotee finds it comfortable and convenient to conceive God and is called *Pratīka*. The conception of God may either be personal or impersonal or a combined understanding of personal and impersonal. In Tamilnadu (India) there are five different famous temples where Śiva is worshipped in five base elements of creation — earth (*Pṛthvi* – पृथ्वि; a cylindrical block of earth), water (*Jala* – जल; a shrine in which water is flowing), fire (*Agni* – अग्नि; a massive lamp like rising flames burning in the shrine), air (*Vāyu* – वायु; a constant flow of wind registered by flickering lamp) and space (*Ākāśa* – आकाश; an empty shrine with no objects at all in it.); they are all *Pratīkās* — the emblem/sign/indicators pointing to the Reality that stands behind them and pervading them, and therefore called *Liṅgas*. A *Liṅga* may be used to represent any Devata/Deity or the Absolute itself. But commonly speaking the *Liṅga* refers to an emblem of Śiva; to be more specific the term *Śivaliṅga* is used.

(iii) The third approach is one in which neither idol (*Pratimā*) nor an object as emblem/sign (*Pratīka/Liṅga*) is used. It is without any external aid. Figuring out mentally one’s own conception of God, – adoration, worship etc., are offered. Giving full vent to feelings, the

mentally conceived God is worshipped with mentally conceived/prepared ingredients; adored and entreated mentally. It is science /method in which mentally conceived material aspect serves as base for manifesting the Spirit — a synthesis where the opposites lose their contradictions and project a Divine Presence in the heart of the devotee. This unitive approach is called *Upāsanā*. It is Advaitic essence, the Upanishadic fundamental, projected and utilised in pauranic methods. It is a combined effort of heart and intellect where body and external physical world is put to silence in order to invoke God to transcend the Nature and realise the Truth.

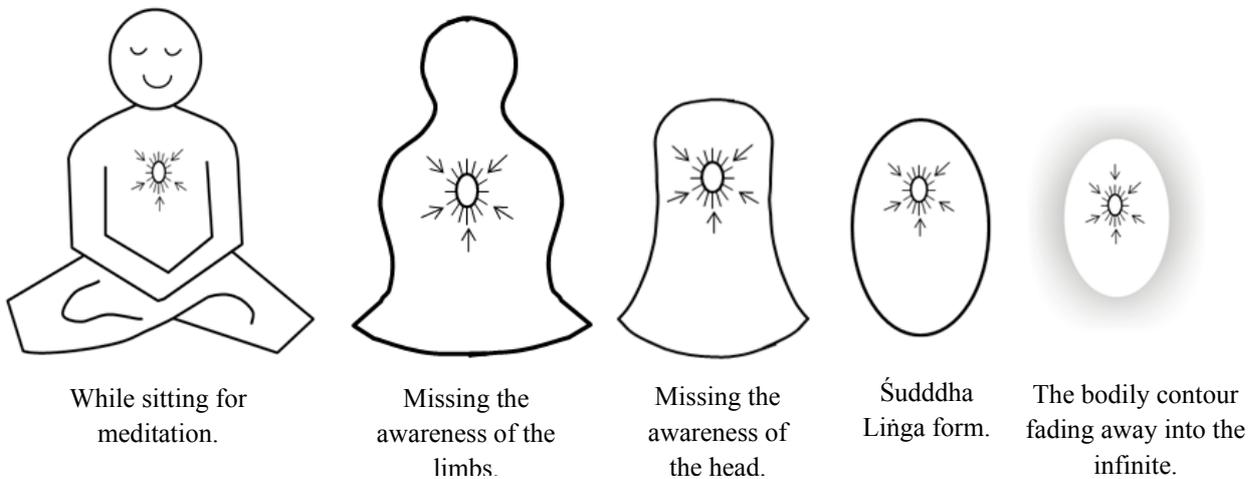
Thus, having accepted God as Pure Consciousness and all pervading (Omnipresent), we must accept that he knows and is aware of everything in this universe as well as the beyond, our feelings and expectations too, i.e., being Himself Omniscient. Along with this understanding if we accept God to be all capable (Omnipotent) we must not find it difficult to accept that He can appear in any form we like, choose or seek. This aspect of God is called *Sākāra* (साकार) — with name, form and qualities/attributes (*Nāma, Rūpa* and *Guṇa*). His appearing as the universe, as all beings in it, His taking up various forms — all come under *Sākāra* and is said to fall within the understanding and imagination of man, mentally conceivable (may be that it demands a higher refined intellect). The other aspect of His, from which these various forms (i.e. the name, form, qualities, time, space, action, movements, laws etc., — The *Sākāra*, The *Līlā*) manifest, and is sustained by, and into which it dissolves back without a trace is called the *Nirākāra* (निराकार = The One without ‘name, form or attributes’.). It remains eternally irrespective of whether the Creation remains or not, beyond *time, space and causation*, and is the Changeless Absolute, and therefore called *Nitya* (नित्य). It, being beyond time, space and causation, is beyond human conception but can be experienced directly if we can transcend and go beyond our puny mind and intellect.

The former (*Sākāra*) is approached through love and worship of definite forms with definite name and definite attributes — like Rama, Buddha, Ramakrishna— mentally or in and through an image or photo. Whereas the inconceivable Reality, the *Nirākāra* is searched through denial of every conceivable aspect and is called *Neti, Neti* – not this, not this – then ultimately what remain, Remains — neither I nor you, neither this nor that, no duality — the One Indivisible Ultimate Truth, the Absolute, The Pure Consciousness, the *Śuddha Caitanya* (शुद्ध चैतन्य) indicated by the word *Sat-Cit-Ananda – Sacchidānanda*.

Liṅga is something between these two aspects, like a transition phase as if, where in — both *Sākāra* and *Nirākāra* are included and yet, is neither the *Sākāra* nor the *Nirākāra*. *Śiva* being immersed in the bliss of His own self, non-different from the Absolute, may be said to be Formless again, responding to the call of a devotee in the form desired by him/her — may be said to be with form. The two aspects are conceived together and, an indefinite form is chosen for the purpose of adoration and worship of the twin aspects and is called the *Liṅga*. The word ‘*Liṅga*’ is an abbreviated laconic or epigrammatic form of the expanded version ‘लीयते गम्यते इति’ (*Līyate gamyate iti*) ‘Remains absorbed/merged, yet keeps moving!’ — “The one immovable who moves in one’s dissolved state!”. With reference to

creation, however, it means: into which the entire Creation along with time dissolves/merges back (*Līyate*) and from which it raises again (*Gamyate*)’.

One fact is that, while meditating, we sit in our common posture of squatting. After a while we withdraw our mind from the external world and start moving inward. As we go inward, the moment we transcend our bodily existence, the limitation that we have put on ourselves, limiting ourselves to the gross body, ends. We do not feel the presence of limbs, the *Karmendriyas*. Our senses and mind directed towards the core of our being makes the sense organs present in the head and of skin, to be withdrawn from their respective seats and remain in heart region continuing to dive to the core, thus making the head and skin limits disappear. The awareness of our sitting erect with our attention directed inward looses the body-contour and takes up an elliptical existence gradually fading away into the infinite.



This awareness of ourselves as something like an ellipsoid with no specific bodily limits gives an awareness of ourself being a ‘limitless *Liṅga*’, radiating divinity all around. This is the beginning of ‘*Śiva-consciousness*’ which leads ultimately to the grand *Śiva* state.

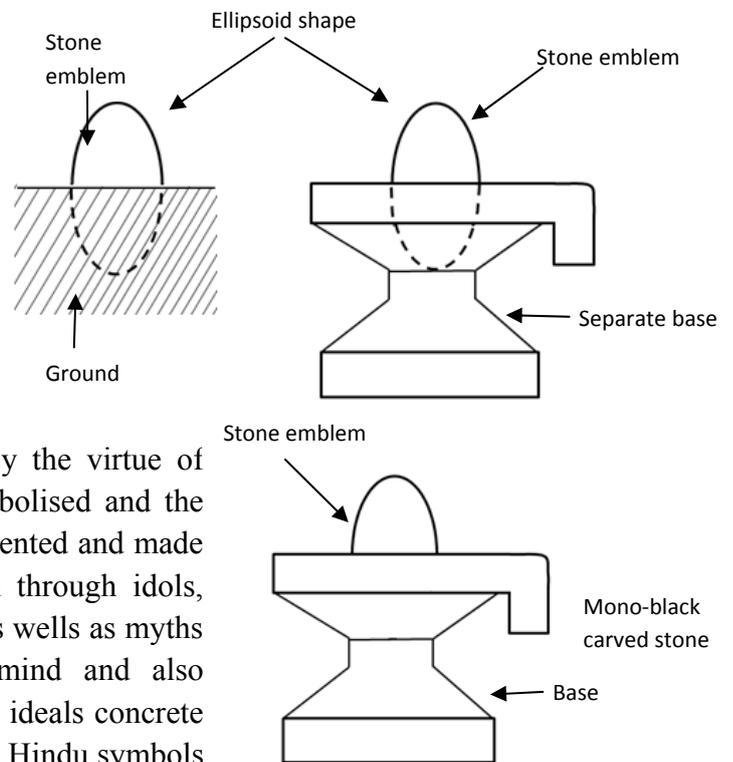
The Seers ‘saw’ *The Light of the Truth* transcending their own body and mind. Then they designed the paths to God, tried to express the Inexpressible through words. The sages and ascetics - *Rṣīs* and *Munis* who succeeded those Seers contemplated over it and meditated on that ‘Incomprehensible’. They reached their ‘Goal’ that makes man Immortal. They tried to express the ‘*Inexpressible*’ through words; they tried to point/hint at that ‘*Inconceivable*’ even through their own mind and intellect’, by hinting at It in various and all possible ways. The oral expressions became ‘*Mantras*’ and the material indicators became *Liṅgas*. Any object in this universe being distinct from all others, indicates the lack of rest of the objects in it, and therefore is unfit to represent that *All-Inclusive*. Therefore symbolisation became necessary and inevitable. All these, be it *Liṅga*, *Mantra* or *Guru*, are mere ladders helping us to reach the summit of realisation.

In Hinduism the *Īśvara* (The Lord of the universe who governs the universe pervading it as Consciousness and remains as its substratum too) Himself creates, sustains and dissolves the universe. It is He Himself, The God, who emerges out with particular qualities and powers and appears as the Creator. When that function ends, He then consolidates Himself

and re-appears with a new personality altogether with entirely new qualities and new powers and a new trend to manage and govern the universe as *Viṣṇu*; and then finally as *Maheśvara*, an entirely different Person, as if. But, it is the same One God, The *Īśvara*. So the *Śivaliṅga* symbolically represents the God Himself whom Christians call “The Father in the Heaven” and Muslims call “Allah”. So, In Mecca, where the entire Muslim community of the world keeps their undivided devotion, is a black stone emblem, the *Liṅga*, representing the Divinity of their Faith and belief.

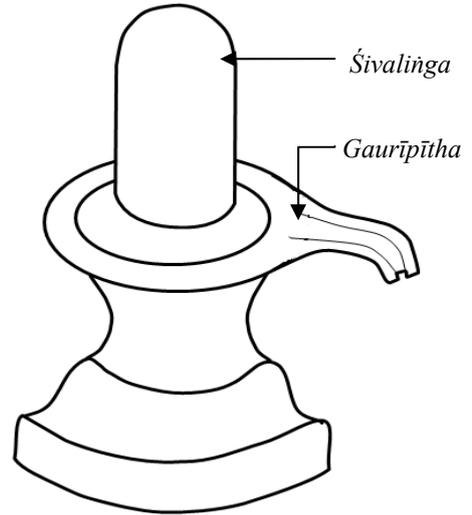
Symbolism is widely adopted by science. With introduction of computer, every thing is being codified and stored. Symbolism is an art and a science, a natural evolved state of mind and intellect to represent ideas and ideals, concepts and realities through the medium of signs, symbols or emblems. It needs intellectual discernment and not scientific research or investigation to understand symbolism. By the virtue of certain similarities between the object symbolised and the symbol, an objective/an abstract idea is presented and made easy to reach human mind. In Hinduism through idols, forms, diagrams, natural objects and signs as wells as myths and stories, the Truths inaccessible to mind and also realities of life that make human values and ideals concrete — are presented. This is symbolism; and all Hindu symbols originate from the common platform of realisation of Spiritual Truths and therefore bear deep spiritual significance. What is needed is proper and faithful interpretation which can come only from a spiritual personality. The ancient Ṛṣis and Munis of the Vedic times developed the *Śiva* emblem called ‘*Śiva-Liṅga*’ to indicate the *Śiva* state both at Cosmic and individual levels. It is usually a stone, ellipsoid in shape (In Northern India naturally found ellipsoid shaped stone formed by running waters in rivers are picked up especially from the River Narmada where as the South Indians get them carved from locally available stone blocks). Unlike a sphere which has a single focus, ellipsoids have two foci. The two points (foci) lie in perfect balance and harmony forming one objective whole. They correspond to two aspects of the one and the same Reality — the all pervading Consciousness known as *Śiva* and the Manifested Power, the *Śakti*.

The naturally found ellipsoid-stone-emblem of *Śiva* is embodied in a base structure or in ground in such a way that the lower half remains buried in the ground/base. The lower *invisible* portion embedded in the base (or the base itself in the mono-block-carving) represents the Substratum, the Pure Consciousness, the *Caitanya* either as the Absolute Itself or as the *Īśvara*. The upper visible/exposed portion represents *Śakti*, The Power of *Īśvara*/Power of *Consciousness* which has manifested as this universe and all beings. The invisible is said to be expressing through the visible, i.e. *Śiva*, the substratum/ *Īśvara*, is



expressing through the visible portion of the *Śiva-Liṅga*, the *Śakti*; i.e. the Unmanifest is expressing through the Manifest. We can even understand it as the Transcendental manifesting or expressing as the immanent; i.e. totally, the One Ultimate Reality, the *Śiva*. The features and construction of *Śiva-Liṅga* (ellipsoid) are perfectly suited to indicate/symbolise the twin aspects of the Reality – the Transcendental and the Immanent or the Unmanifest and the Manifest or the *Śiva* and *Śakti*.

One more interesting point to note is the cross-section of the ellipsoid along its axis is an ellipse, while the cross-section across, i.e. right angles to its axis, is a circle. A circle has a single focus and is endless and beginningless continuum. And therefore represents the Absolute, the Pure *Consciousness* or the *Īśvara* as *Śiva*. On the other hand the ellipse with two foci, is said to represent the manifest world with all beings. The entire universe is in a state of unabating flux, constant motion with bi-polar system of one holding the other in an elliptical bond – be it Sun/stars with planets, or the nucleus with electrons. So also every *Jīva* is moving round the *Īśvara*; in fact, that is the meaning and significance of the *Pradakṣiṇa* (प्रदक्षिणा- circumambulation) performed round the temple or Deity [i.e. moving round the Lord (*Pra*) keeping Him always to the right (*Dakṣiṇa*); keeping someone to one's own right or being oneself to the left of someone indicates acceptance of oneself being the subordinate and seeking protection, nourishment and guidance from the other on the right]. Thus, the ellipse is indicative of the manifested universe with all beings in it. So, the *Śiva-Liṅga* when seen from top (plan) is a circle representing Pure Consciousness and when viewed from the front (elevation) is an ellipse representing the universe with Pure Consciousness as the substratum and being pervaded by It.



Śivaliṅga with pedestal (Gaurīpīṭha)

Strangely and surprisingly, the western oriented minds both in India and abroad give a different version also of the *Śivaliṅga* as a phallic emblem. Because in some of the Indian dialects, in an informal crude way, the term '*Liṅga*' is used to refer phallus. Therefore in those places, for example, in Madhya Pradesh, another term *Piṇḍi* (पिण्डि) is used for the *Śivaliṅga* emblem. In Sanskrit *Śiśna* (सिञ्ज) term is used for phallus, and '*Liṅga*' term to mean 'sign or emblem'. In most of the places of North India, the pedestal in which the *Śivaliṅga* is mounted is called *Gaurī Pīṭh* (गौरी पीठ) and its view from the top (its plan) is half semicircle and the other half is little ovalish with a snout for the water poured over the emblem to flow down. This *Gaurī Pīṭh* is said to represent the universal Motherhood, the Power of Consciousness (*Citśakti*), that releases the *Jīvas* (cause *Jīvās* to manifest) in the Nature, once the Creation of the universe is complete. *Gaurī* is an epithet of *Pārvatī*, the Power of the Lord *Śiva*, and means 'resplendent with light of Consciousness', 'the Bright One'. Here in this context the *Liṅga* is said to represent the 'The universal Father hood' that remains as an unstainable Divine principle in every *Jīva* (individual soul) realising which the *Jīva* gets

released from bondages of Nature and returns Home. In Christianity too the God is called the 'Father' in the heaven. The phallic cult offer their worship to this Pedestaled *Liṅga* unit not only to honour the Divine Father-Mother Principle but also to remind that all beings have originated from a common Divine Principle, we are Divine children with a common Divine parentage. Each *Jīva* is worthy of worship and honour by the other; so this tradition of Namaste 'I salute You'. My earthly parents might have given me a physical body through their physical (sexual) union. But 'I' who have been clothed with that earthly body have come from a Source where there is neither sex nor duality, I am eternally pure and Divine. My physical body – the body-mind-complex, being a product of sex (of my earthly parents) might have inherited sex and the dominating sex drive, but from the inseparable Eternal Oneness of my heavenly Parents which brought me to this universe, I inherit my oneness with the Absolute '*Aham Brahmāsmi*', '*Soham*', '*Śivoham Śivoham*'. It is interesting to note and know that the 'phallic cults have existed in all countries and in all civilisations'. An image of this is used as a symbol of generative power in Nature and is called phallicism or phallism and the word has come from Greek word *phallos*. In the religious background on the other hand, it is used in a sense of recognition of one's own Divinity and the Divinity in all beings. Divinity eliminates sex awareness and sensuous awareness even from the life of a householder. The awareness of our Divinity makes us manifest our Divinity and move towards God, our Home, towards purity, joy and freedom, towards the Light of Truth. The awareness of body makes us manifest our worldly tendencies and move towards the world, towards base enjoyments and demands of flesh, towards suffering and bondage, towards the darkness of *Māyā*. However the worship of phallus as well as of female genitals does exist in the Tantric system. But it is purely esoteric and is limited to very high order of *Sādhakās* and can neither be generalised nor be brought into common vogue. When a *Sadhaka* reaches Absolute Perfection proclaimed by the Tantras, having reached the ultimate goal of human life, in that Liberated State of highest realisation, the Illumined Soul is made to worship by his/her *Guru* (the spiritual preceptor) the genitals of the opposite sex according to Sastric prescription. Thus the women *Sādhikā* who has reached the desired end and has become firmly established in the divine state that no temptations, fear and grief can shake the person anymore and is experiencing the everlasting Bliss, peace and Freedom within herself — worships the phallus of a youth with perfect equanimity seeing God/Brahman/Divine Mother every where, in all beings and all objects, as a mark of having transcended all limitations of Nature and the Nature Herself. Similarly, men on reaching the final beatitude are made to worship the female genitals as a sign or conquest of Nature. And this is the ultimate state and final ceremony according to Tantras and is called *Pūrṇābhiṣeka* (पूर्णाभिषेक), 'the divine coronation'. The shifting of awareness from the body to one's own Divinity is called *Ūrdhva-gamana* (ऊर्ध्वगमन) and the person whose awareness is thus shifting is called *Ūrdhvagāmī* (ऊर्ध्वगामी). The person who has completely closed the lower vents of *sex and lucre* and, being totally free from the lower desires, has succeeded in directing his energies that flow out through lower channels to the higher channels of spiritual brilliance and spiritual competence and spiritual connoissereure, that person, be it man or woman, is called *Ūrdhvaretas* (ऊर्ध्वरेतस्). One of the epithets of *Śiva* is "*Ūrdhvaretas*". Only when the sex energy is restrained, blocked and transmuted, it can open up higher centres of consciousness;

and is the only way to gain spiritual experience. The *Ūrdhvaretas* has four different stages — (i) the first stage is one of an intense struggle to eliminate and sublimate lower urges and transmute the essence of life draining out as carnality and sexual energies. A person given to this up-lifting life and lying at this stage is called Brahmacharin/Brahmacharini. (ii) The second stage is that in which one who has succeeded to a very great extent to conquer the carnal cravings and has been able to divert it to heart centre to love God or love and serve all beings or remain in Spiritual awareness to feel divine and divinity. The *Sādhakā* at this stage (man or woman) is called *Mahātma* (Great soul). At this stage one must be very careful. If one does not guard oneself through love of God and self-surrender, then there is every chance of a fall from the ideal. (iii) The third stage is reached when there is an unbroken awareness of the *Divine*. The consciousness now ascends to *Viśuddha Cakra* (विशुद्ध चक्र) that corresponds to throat level. It is a level of experience wherein name and form are melting away into formless aspect. After reaching this stage a *Jīva* can remain in a beautiful composure of mind and can attend to all duties of life undisturbed. And also he gets the power and authority to serve and help others to come out of the Nature's grip of carnal cravings and worldly tendencies, being himself unaffected in any way the most. The person who has reached in this stage of *Ūrdhvaretas* is called *Mahāpuruṣa* (महापुरुष). The important factor at this stage is there is no more chances of a fall to the worldly life again. (iv) The final stage is one of ultimate realisation — when one is illumined, Enlightened. Having reached the ultimate goal of human life he/she remains as *Jīvanmukta*. Liberated while living. The person who has reached this stage is called *Puruṣottama* (पुरुषोत्तम). *Śiva* being the Lord of *Yogās* and *Yogīs* [*Yogeśvara* (योगेश्वर) and *Yogīśvara* (योगीश्वर)], the *Sādhakās* take refuge at His feet for their release from the grip of Nature especially from the sex impulse and sex awareness. A *Sādhakā* in the above mentioned second stage of *Ūrdhvaretas*, though not having intense ecstatic love of God, can enter into *Samādhi* if he but feels compassion for all beings. We must not segregate ourselves from the rest of the beings. We must put ourselves among the rest of the lot to see the plight of all beings; but remain uninvolved. A *Sādhakā* can be indifferent to the world because his whole attention is diverted to attainment of God. But he can never be without compassion for all beings. Then only the *Sādhakā* understands exactly where and in what a plight he is and why is he seeking Divine compassion. The need of a spiritual experience or *Samādhi* or God-realisation then becomes an inevitable immediate necessity without which he understands he shall be doomed forever. On seeking the state of *Samādhi* from the Yatishwaranandji Maharaj, his sevak Somanath Maharaj was told “Absolute purity and compassion for all beings will surely lead a *Sādhakā* to *Samādhi*, irrespective of love of God. Devotion to God makes one to attain these two qualification, and love of God quickens the process”. “What do you mean by compassion for all beings should I enter the field of activities of service to mankind?” was the next question. Maharaj replied “feel for others as you feel for yourself, how helpless is man! Feel it and pray often with tears for all; all includes you too, that is Vedic culture, Vedic path. But be aloof from this world for the present and intensify *Sādhana* be immersed in yourself be a *Śiva* yourself, but never say I don't care for this world, it is misunderstood Advaita. We enter into *Samādhi* by accommodating the whole world within us, dissolving it within us. Swami Vivekananda says “हृदि प्रणयति विश्वं, व्याजमात्रं विभुत्वं” (*Hṛdi praṇayati viśvaṁ, vyājamātraṁ vibhutvaṁ*) ‘the whole

world is resting in the heart and is floating in the Love, the Lordship a mere hoodwink'. Śiva sits immersed in Self with the world dissolved in His Love. This is Śiva.

Śiva never interferes in the affairs of Creation or in the affairs of its sustenance but when his duties of retraction / dissolution of the world demand, He wakes up with His inner Bliss undisturbed from His age-long *Samādhi* with deep concerns, dexterity and dedication sincere to the core, He concludes His role gracefully. These four special characteristics (i) The *Ūrdhvaretas*, (ii) Seeking nothing from this world – total renunciation (iii) The extreme compassion for all being (iv) and the dutifulness with deep concern, Himself remaining totally uninvolved— makes Him the Lord of the sannyasins and uphold the ideal of sannyasa, the Renunciation.

All these characteristics of Śiva — as a yogi ever immersed in the Absolute, as Lord of Yoga, as the Ideal of *Sannyāsa*, full of wisdom, knowledge, compassion and renunciation, makes every *Jīva* who contemplates on Him to intensely seek the Supreme knowledge that makes man – a veritable God on this earth. Śiva who blesses those seekers with the Supreme Knowledge is given the epithet - *Dakṣiṇāmūrti* (दक्षिणामूर्ति).

There are three meaning assigned to this aspect of Śiva —

(i) *Dakṣiṇa* (दक्षिण) to mean: able, skilful, dexterous, competent, clever.

Mūrti (मूर्ति) to mean an embodiment.

Dakṣiṇāmūrti (दक्षिणामूर्ति) — in this sense means : the Divine embodiment that is able, skilful, dexterous, competent and clever and is ever ready to bestow the knowledge, the Spiritual Truths to the seekers. That is, the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti* represents a special embodiment of that compassionate Lord who is skilled in and ever ready to bestow the Supreme Knowledge to the true seekers of Truth.

ii) *Dakṣiṇa* (दक्षिण) to mean facing southwards — From ancient times seers and sages preferred Himalayas where Nature overflowed with abundance. There was no scarcity of food; naturally available fruits, roots, honey and forest vegetables were bountiful. Climate was ever cool and pleasant. Water was fresh, clean and pure. Caves could offer shelter and solitude for contemplation. So, utilising the Nature's gift sages could reach high states of realisation. And thus, Himalayas was all through a source of knowledge and centre of its promulgation. On the other hand Śiva was their Lord and source of inspiration and was identified with the entire Himalayas, with every peak which proclaimed His glory and remained immovable by forces of Nature remaining immersed as if, in their own Bliss



Dakṣiṇāmūrti

through Eternity. Seekers from all over India turned their faces towards North, the Himalayas and deemed Śiva, the Compassionate is sitting with His Blissful form facing them, i.e. facing South. Thus the symbolised form of *Dakṣiṇāmūrti* is sitting facing the Southern direction under a Holy Banyan Tree surrounded by seekers and Sages. He has three eyes (the two normal eyes that give the knowledge of the Relative Existence i.e. this entire universe with beings, and the third one that gives the knowledge of the Beyond, the Absolute); meaning He is the knower of everything. He has four arms. The right front displays *Jñānamudra*¹ (ज्ञानमुद्रा) — imparting the Knowledge Supreme. The left front hand holds the Holy Scriptures, the primary source of knowledge and commandments needed for mankind to raise to God-hood. It is held in *Varadamudrā* (वरदमुद्रा)— bestowing of gifts, boons and blessings. The back raised right hand holds a rosary backed by a serpent. Rosary represents intense spiritual practices and an unbroken thought of God while the serpent represents the power of *discrimination* backing the Sadhna, the uncompromising *Viveka*. The left back arm holds fire, indicative of the fire of renunciation and the fire of longing. He is sitting in a semi-squatting position on a block of stone as seat. It indicates firm determination, vows and resolutions the *Sādhakā* mounts himself on. The left leg is placed on the right – in a Yogic posture. With the right leg He tramples over the demon called *Āpasmāra* (आपस्मार) indicative of the causal ignorance - *Mūla Avidya* (मूल अविद्या), the cause of bondage and transmigration. *Dakṣiṇāmūrti* indicates entire *Sādhaktva*, the Spiritual aspirancy; the qualities, codes and practices the aspirant should adopt, the attitudes the *Sādhakā* must bear, the principles and precepts that the *Sādhakā* must hold on to and the dedication and sacrifice he has to do. Then it is said that Lord intuitively from within instantaneously the aspirant with the non-dual experience through silence — (“गुरुस्तु मौनं व्याख्यानं शिष्यास्तु छिन्नसंशयाः”) (*Gurustu maunam vyākhyānam śiṣyāstu chinnaśayāḥ*) “The Guru is expounding through silence and the disciples are being rendered free from all doubts!” Spiritual knowledge can only dawn within oneself through Divine intuition. This truth too is depicted through the *Dakṣiṇāmūrti*.

(iii) *Dakṣiṇā* (दक्षिणा) to mean impartial and, gift in general :

Śiva in His other aspects as the Creator, Sustainer and Retractor, and with His own Śiva-hood, is a store house of limitless knowledge — the knowledge that humans can never reach as well as the knowledge that humans can reach – external physical sciences as well the Spiritual Truths. Mind, intellect and senses can give us the knowledge of external physical world that develops into science and technology. But the power behind the mind, intellect and senses come from the Pure Consciousness, The God, the Indweller. All *Jīvās*

¹ *Jñānamudra* :- the palm is held up as if blessing someone standing in the front. The fore finger is joined to the thumb leaving the other three fingers remain erect pointing the sky. The thumb alone can reach back and front of every other finger. No other finger can reach any other except the thumb and that too when they bend down. Therefore the thumb is considered as The God and for the forefinger as *Jīvātman* and the rest of the three fingers as Nature comprising of three *Guṇās* – *Satva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. *Tattvamudra* is message ‘O! man, give up everything and get unified with the Supreme Truth, The God. Krishna is said to have shown this posture when he was giving His final verdict (“सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज । अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥”) (*Sarvadharmān parityajya māmekaṁ śaraṇam vraja | Aham tvā sarvapāpebhyo mokṣayisyāmi mā śucaḥ* || B.G 18/66).



Ardhanārīśvara

are internally connected to the *Īśvara* — just as all mobile phones are internally connected to the tower. The spiritual Truths being beyond mind, senses and intellect has got to come from the inner channel connecting to *Īśvara*. And that knowledge is the gift from the Lord given impartially to all *Jīvās* who, seeking Immortality have put an end to worldly seekings. So the epithet *Dakṣiṇāmūrti*, The Bestower of the impartial gift of Knowledge.

His immaculate purity, His whole hearted love and respect for all women, the utter concern and the freedom His consort (His power, the *Pārvati*) gets from Him, the inseparable union through eternity His consort experiences make Him an ideal husband that all Hindu women seek. And a day before the Ganesha chaturthi [the annual Hindu festival dedicated to Ganesha that falls on fourth day of bright forth night of Bādrapadha (august)] or on Shivaratri day [annual festival dedicated to Shiva which falls on fourteenth day of dark half of Māgha (February/march)] the unmarried girls in North India observe fasting and austerities to get such an ideal

husband; and the married ones seeking Lord to bestow a long life and those very matchless qualities to their husband.

Now, of the various aspects of Shiva the most important aspect with respect to the creative principle is that of *Ardhanārīśvara* (अर्धनारीश्वर; अर्ध = half, नारी = woman, ईश्वर = ‘The Lord with his half being woman/lady). It signifies the potency in the Consciousness that can divide Itself into two and then multiply endlessly. It is this basic principle that has been responsible for making the Sages to consider the *Śakti* or the Power as feminine, and Consciousness which is its substratum as masculine, each being consort of the other. Of course, as a corollary we may also derive the meaning to say that man and woman are mutually complimentary. But in its wider perspective, it signifies the bipolar nature of the universe. The iconographic picture comprises of an image with its right half is that of *Śiva* and left, that of *Pārvati*.

When we come to the individual level of our own existence, and when we consider our place and our part in Nature, our limitations, the purpose and significance of life and human existence and its final culmination, we see, the moment the limitation is put on the Consciousness as a part of creation of the universe or of the individual sole, a bipolarity makes its appearance within that limited Consciousness which becomes the source of all duality. That is, infact, the *Ardhanārīśvara*. And be it the Cosmic existence or an individual soul, after passing through various transformations governed by the law of cause and effect, finally, after completing the cycle, it reaches the same state of *Ardhanārīśvara* before it re-dissolves itself into the pure consciousness, the Bliss Absolute.

In every being in its early embryonic stage the sex remains in a neutral state. At this stage it is neither male nor female; the male and female aspects in that state neutralise each other being yet in their rudimentary state. It is a sexless stage and corresponds to the *Ardhanārīśvara* aspect of Śiva experiencing *Pūrṇatva* (the absolute *fullness, completeness*) and Bliss within Himself. As the embryo grows the differentiation of sex sets out, the male and female aspects separate like a bean seed splitting into two halves before germinating. Before they express clearly one of the halves, either male or female aspects enter into dormancy and the other begins to define itself in detail according to the inherited tendencies¹. If the male tendencies like the adventures, dominating, strong passion, intense desire for enjoyment, impulsive, harsh nature, aggressive, egoistic etc., are predominant, then male body manifests and the female counter part gets withdrawn and enters into total dormancy. If, on the other hand, the female tendencies like compassion, prudence, care taking, painstaking, sacrificing, affectionate, patient, of soft nature, modest, etc., are predominant, then a female body projects out and the male counterpart enters into dormancy. This renders, in beings, a sense of incompleteness, something wanting, a dearth, constant void, loneliness (*Abhāva* – अभाव) within; it is this void that manifests as sex impulse and loneliness and forces every being to seek a life partner in the external world because the senses are turned outward. Through this the Nature fulfils its purpose of ‘preservation of species and their propagation in Nature’ but the beings never get fulfilment because the inner dormant male or female counter part can never be counteracted by external physical bodily partner. Infact, one can never get rid of the inner void nor achieve fulfilment till the wisdom dawns that the happiness, joy, bliss and peace that a person seeks can never be found in the external world but is within himself/herself. Thus, when a person with the right matured understanding turns his/her vision to higher ideals of life and learns to seek the Divine and Eternal happiness in place of momentary pleasures of life, the cause of void within, the female/male counterpart that had entered into dormancy gradually and imperceptibly begins to articulate or express and go on neutralising the manifested manhood or women-hood that was creating a havoc within. The person starts experiencing great peace and bliss within, attains the inner Freedom of the Soul that was bound to the external Nature. This is attaining Śivahood. Sri Ramakrishna puts this in his simple words “बद्ध होले जीव, मुक्त होले शीव” (*Baddha hole jīv, mukta hole Śiv*) — “bound remains *Jīva*, released becomes *Śiva*”.

Naṭarāja (नटराज) :- We have seen earlier Śiva as *Maheśvara* dancing the *Tāṇḍava Nṛtya* at the dissolution of the Universe. At times in His Śiva state, the great Bliss of being immersed in *Samādhi* overflows as an ecstatic dance when a little awareness of an existence of manifested universe flashes faintly in that ocean of Bliss like a speck in an ocean. This blissful dancing form is called “Nataraja”. Normal human being has his senses turned outward and is unaware of the Blissful immortal Self within. Steeped in ignorance and self forgetfulness he is enmeshed in the world of duality. But when he happens to shut the external vents and turn inward, he through *Sādhanā* reaches the Eternal Immortal self,

¹ The codified blueprint that the *Jīva* is carrying from its previous incarnations known as *karmāsaya* (कर्मशय= those fruits of action that have come to maturity, the *Karmaphala* + the acquired tendencies, the *Vāsanās*) i.e. the software.

inebriated by the thrilling experience, unable to contain the bliss within, the man dances in an ecstatic state as he happens to come down a bit from *Samādhi*. It corresponds to the Śiva's dance which again, we see in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. His frequent *Samādhis* were now and then interspaced with dancing and singing.

The worship of Śiva :-

India, till very recent days, was exclusively an agricultural country. In vedās we find the commandments emphatically directing “अन्नं बहुकुर्वीत तद् व्रतम्” (Tai.up) “produce the food in abundance, that shall be your vow”. When we see the famine stricken, we understand that nothing can sustain life. None of the advancements in science & technology can save life if there is no food to eat. Cars & aeroplanes, T.V.s and mobiles, computers and all modern Communication Technologies, all modern comforts, machine power or war weapons fail miserably when there is acute dearth of food. We could see whole of India was but rural villages with green fields of multiple crops. Majority people were devoted to agriculture. Often they have intense work and often a bit of leisure. The Nature too goes on changing Her apparel; each month, each season She looks “different: ever new, ever fresh”. So changes the human moods and feelings. And, matching to the human moods and Nature's spectacular display there appears various festivals of the Hindus. The Hindu festivals aim at brining the three entities – the Nature, the man and a suitable Deity in perfect alignment so that the Divine is manifest in the devotee's heart.

Thus, the winter coming to its fag end, the pleasant atmosphere spreading all around, the spring season stands with new shoots, and people get a little leisure from their routine work while waiting for crops to ripe for harvest. At this juncture Nature seems to be tempting towards self-aggrandisement. So, as if to rescue from that urge, there appears the festival Sivaratri in the month of Feb-Mar to remind man of the ultimate Goal of life – the God-realisation. Śiva is embodiment of renunciation and enjoys only the pure Bliss of *Ātman*, being immersed in His own Self! The very thought of Him makes man shrink from seeking worldly prospects or worldly enjoyments. Instead, inspires the soul to seek eternal Freedom from this binding and pain inflicting Nature. It makes the *Jīva* to seek everlasting Bliss. In expectation of His grace and as a part of one's own dedication, the devotees fast on Sivarathri day without taking any food (Many fast even without taking water.). They observe vigil and perform the worship of Siva throughout the night. The night is divided into four quarters, each is called a प्रहर (Prahara). Each quarter is dedicated to one aspects Śiva and He is worshipped through that particular aspect. The four aspects are — (i) ईशान (*Īśāna*, the one who rules Himself), (ii) अघोर (*Aghora* — non-terrible), (iii) वामदेव (*Vāmadeva* — the humble ever ready to serve/help), (iv) सद्योजात (*Sadyojāta* —instantly born; the moment the devotee calls Him, He is already there, therefore called the instantly born). Śiva is said to be exhibiting these four characteristics (also called as the four faces) along four directions. These four receive external worship during the four quarters. Then the fifth is worshipped within the heart at the end of Sivarathri function. The fifth aspect/face that is finally worshipped is तत्पुरुष (*Tatpuruṣa* = That Supreme Being) who is totally identified with the Absolute. And, His worship is done by self offering into Him in meditation at the end of the

Pūja. Isāna who is said to face towards zenith, also called *Sadāśiva* (सदाशिव), represents the highest aspect and is said to grant Liberation to the *Jīvas* who seek liberation. *Aghora* is said to be facing south who out of compassion is said to renovate the lives of the spiritual seekers who go to Him helplessly with worldly *Samskaras*. *Vāmadeva* is facing north who is said to maintain the spiritual fire in spiritual aspirants devoted and dependent on Him till they reach the Goal, and go on revealing the Truth by removing veil after veil of *Māyā*. *Sadyojāta* is said to be facing the west who creates dispassion towards the worldly life and generate genuine spiritual seeking in His devotees' heart. *Tatpuruṣa* is said to be facing east and is accommodative of all things — good and bad, pure and impure, ignorance and knowledge — and on reaching Him all things/beings lose their dualities and become one non-dual Bliss Absolute.

Centring around this Supreme aspect originates the Gayathri Mantra relating to *Śiva* (also known as the Rudra Gayatri): “तत्पुरुषाय विद्महे महादेवाय धीमहि । तन्नो रुद्रः प्रचोदयात् ॥” (*Tatpuruṣāya vidmahe mahādevāya dhīmahī tanno rudraḥ pracodayāt*) “May we know (or realise) the Supreme Person, for that we do meditate upon *Mahādeva* and into that meditation (*Samādhi*) may the Lord Rudra impel us/may Rudra awaken the Spiritual consciousness in us”.

Tatpuruṣa, *Mahādeva* and *Rudra* are different epithets of the same Divine Person, the *Śiva*: either implying His Divine Interference in *Jīvas* life when called for or His Spiritual characteristics or His functional aspects as *Maheśvara*.

By the word/epithet *Tatpuruṣa* (= ‘That Supreme Reality’), The Absolute Reality is invoked, being the desired end, the object of Realisation. Using the word *Mahādevaya* [= ‘The Great Illuminator’; *Mahā* (महा) = great, *devāya* (देवाय) = from the root *Div* (दिव्) to mean illumination], we resolve and fix our minds for meditating upon Him and His unique characteristic of being a great Illuminator, all capable, all concerned, all loving. *Mahādeva* is the usual name by which His unrivalled Divine nature is described. The aspirant seeking Liberation (*Mokṣa*) or final beattitude express his/her longing to know the Supreme by the verb in the potential mood (May we realise = विद्महे). The same mood is used also in connection with the meditation [may we meditate *Dhīmahī* (धीमहि)] implying that even the desire to meditate is engendered only through prayer to the Supreme for its gain. Similarly the potential mood ‘may Him enlighten’ (प्रचोदयात्) indicates the firm determination of the aspirant to reach that goal and His vow to sacrifice his/her all to that one end, as well as his surrender of ego to avail the Divine grace. The name *Rudra* as applicable to a Spiritual aspirant is described as the power that rules knowledge and wisdom and thus destroys root-ignorance, the *Avidyā*. *Rudra* is Resplendence of knowledge and wisdom and is said to be *Jñānadāta* and as such He is guide of the whole universe. This is the *Śiva*’s Guru aspect (as spiritual teacher), the Scorcher of darkness of ignorance, and Enlightener.

The essence of all worships comprises of:-

(i) A name and characteristic description of the object of worship (the Deity); (ii) a longing in the heart of the worshipper to comprehend/experience/realise the beloved object of

adoration/worship, and (iii) (knowing that this task is humanly impossible), a prayer to the same Divinity for assistance/help/goading and for keeping one's own intellect under control and tuned to Divine so that one might avail oneself the Divine grace and attain the highest and the best fruit of life. The *Gayathri* formula (*Mantra*) presents them in the most luminous and concise manner using the three verbs *Vidmahe*, *Dhīmahī* and *Pracodayāt*. The greatest help that a spiritual aspirant ought to expect from God should be the guidance of his thoughts in the right direction that makes him/her perceive the Divine and the Spiritual Truths. There are a number of *Gayathri Mantras*, each pertaining to a particular Deity. The use of the two verbs (*Vidmahe*, *Dhīmahī*) in first person plural (*We* seek to know, *we* meditate) and *Nah Pracodayāt* (illumine *us*) in seeking collective illumination, in all *Gayathri* formulas (*Mantras*), is specially noteworthy. Externally man is gregarious by nature, and cannot dislodge the rest of human existence from his consciousness till he finds the 'One' that has manifested as many. Before the intense longing masks the presence of others, if any aspirant tries to isolate from the rest, then the spiritual progress slows down because wrong/false understanding is intervening. When we go a little deeper and observe, we see that all beings have a common Spiritual Ground, which we generally call The God. The One Consciousness has manifested as many conscious beings; One Life has manifested as innumerable lives. No being can be a separate entity, each being a partial manifestation of a whole. Thus the aspirant can reach the summit of Spiritual realisation and his/her oneness with God only when he/she moves ahead holding in the heart the thread of collectivity to which he/she belongs.

It is therefore necessary that every religious aspirant who strives for one's own upliftment must include the entire community to which he belongs to, as a part of himself or else himself as a part of the community — and that is the password for his or her entry into the Spiritual Realm. In all the *Gayathris* therefore, the central thought consists in a petition to the Most High for initiating, controlling and developing thoughts, desires and feelings of one's own self (i.e., the seeker) in a way conducive to the attainment of the highest human values and the Supreme Knowledge that leads to Liberation. This yearning is seen in the plural expressions 'May we know', 'May we meditate', 'May Him enlighten us'.

The *Mantra* used in *Pūja* (ritualistic worship) and for *Japa* is 'नमः शिवाय (*Namaḥ Śivāya*)' and is called the '*Pañcakṣari*' (a general term to mean 'a *Mantra* with five Syllables'; It is a way of classification on the basis of number of Syllables used). With ॐ it becomes 'ॐ नमः शिवाय' (*Om Namaḥ Śivāya*) and is called 'षडक्षरी' (*Ṣaḍakṣarī*) ('a *Mantra* with six-syllables'). The earlier discussed *Śiva/Rudra Gayatri* as well as these two *Mantras* are used by a devotee in his daily devotions and during special ceremonies. They have an outstanding part to play in the life of a devotee and of a spiritual aspirant. They adopt them for worship and meditation as also for mental and oral repetition (*Japa*). The *Mantra* '*Om Namaḥ Śivāya*' means "The Ultimate Reality, the Eternal Absolute Existence which has manifested as *Śiva*, to Him I surrender." With an attitude of total unconditional surrender, with this meaning alone shining in the awareness, the *Mantra* is repeated: then it is called *Japa*. In *Japa*, *Artha* (meaning of the *Mantra*) and *Bhāvana* (deep feelings) are necessary for reaching the desired end. Or, there must intense love that generates yearning for God.

The worship of Śiva runs parallel to the ritualistic worship of all other Deities with an elaboration in *Abhiṣeka* (अभिषेक), the bath giving ritual. Śiva is said to be ‘bath loving’ ‘*Abhiṣeka priya*’ (अभिषेक प्रिय). Various ways of bathing with various items is observed according to one’s own capacity (the time, money and efforts they can put). It may either be according to scriptural prescription or one’s own whims and feelings. Most easily available at all places is water, and it indicates the life principle in all living beings. Water remains as the substratum of life and air as the sustainer of life and sunshine (indirectly available as food as well) as the provider of growth and development in the embodied state of all beings. So, in Hinduism these three entities are greatly honoured and adored as ‘gods’ or as special gifts of Nature or of God; and such entities are treated as ‘Power Heads’ in Tantras. And, these three principles are ritualistically offered to the Almighty as a sign of offering one’s own life, in the formal and informal worships, as showering a bath etc., (*Abhiṣeka*), fanning with *Cāmara* (चामर = fan made of yaks’ hairs), and waving of lamp.

The main worship of Śiva begins with *Abhiṣeka* unlike all other worships which begin with honouring the Deity by washing feet (*Pādya* – पाद). In fact, even before the *Nyāsas* (न्यास — i.e., self attunement to Deity and infusion of power of the Deity), a symbolic *Abhiṣeka*, as if awakening Śiva from His deep *Samādhi* State, is offered by pouring a thin stream of water from a snouted water pot or a deep spoon. Then the procedure of self-attunement/infusion of power (*Nyāsas*) followed by meditation and mental worship are performed. Then, in external worship are offered services of washing feet (*Pādya*) then honouring with a bouquet of flowers (*Arghya* – अर्घ्य), rinsing mouth and face (*Ācamānīya* – आचमनीय) then ceremonial bath (*Abhiṣeka*). In *Abhiṣeka* usually the Deity (Śiva) is bathed with 5 items called the five nectars (*Pañcāmṛta* – पञ्चामृत). The five items are — (i) milk, (ii) curds, (iii) ghee, (iv) honey and (v) sugar. It is symbolic of transcendence of five sheaths that cover every being through which the embodiment occurs. The naturally available ingredients are used in which nourishment and sweetness are together found. Milk which represents a complete food that builds up the body is symbolic of physical sheath, the *Annamaya kośa* (अन्नमय कोश). Śiva’s image or emblem or any object (flower etc.) in which Śiva is invoked is bathed with milk and viewed to have been covered with gross physical body. Then pure water, preferably water of Ganges is poured over the image as Divine awareness that effects transcendence of physical sheath. Śiva is viewed to have transcended the physical awareness. Next, curd, being a transformed product of milk, is taken for energy generated by food intake and is symbolic of energy-sheath *Prāṇamaya kośa* (प्राणमय कोश). Bathing with curds, the *Prāṇamaya* (energy sheath) is viewed and pouring pure water (Divine awareness) its transcendence is viewed. Ghee being the refined essence of milk is taken to symbolise mind (*Manas*) or the sheath of mind, *Manomaya kośa* (मनोमय कोश). Bathing with ghee Śiva is viewed to be enveloped in sheath of mind; pouring pure water (Divine awareness) its transcendence is viewed. [The transcendence of sheath of mind i.e., the thought barrier, shifts the entire awareness from the bodily existence (*Dehabhāva*; देहभाव) to the level of transmigratory existence i.e., *Jīva bhāva* (जीव भाव). Simultaneously the aspirant gets a glimpse of one’s own spiritual existence, and is said to be spiritually awakened]. The next sheath that covers the Self is of knowledge. Is also called because all types of knowledges we possess (knowledge of this and of that, of pot

or cat) remains embedded there in an undifferentiated state, and when need arises it manifests in the mind getting differentiated as 'pot', 'table', 'patriotism' etc.,. Here presence of Spirit (the consciousness, *Caitanya*) is directly experienced. Within this sheath, before entering into the next and the final [*Ānandmaya kośa* (आनन्दमय कोश) – the sheath of bliss] sheath, we enter a side track leading to *Cidākāśa* (चिदाकाश), the space of Consciousness (something like a sea basin, a pool of water locked in land and connected to the sea) as if connected to the ocean of Pure Consciousness, the Absolute. Here the devotee gets the direct Spiritual experience, the visions of various gods and goddesses compared to which our present waking state is a mere dream world. Here the pure Bliss being beyond the human conception is compared to honey, the essence of all flowers of this world. Thus honey represents *Vijñānamaya kośa* (विज्ञानमय कोश), the sheath of knowledge. Bathing with honey the devotee visualises the sheath of knowledge engulfing the Lord Śiva and pouring the pure water subsequently, visualises the transcendence of the sheath. The final sheath is the sheath of bliss, the *Ānandmaya kośa* and represented by sugar, from which all other sweets are prepared. It is the final word on sweetness. Bathing the emblem of Śiva with sugar one visualises the final sheath or veil covering the Lord Śiva. Then, pure water is poured over it and the *sādhakā* finally visualises the transcendence of sheath of bliss as well as totally being free from the entire network of Nature or the *Māyā*. The Perfected state of absolute bliss, peace and freedom as pure Spirit, the *Caitanya*, is found identical with Śiva. And to that Śiva who is immersed in his own Self, are offered sandal paste, flowers, bilva leaf, incense, lamp and food offering as a part of the worship in order to endear and love that state. Finally seeking that State for oneself, the aspirant offers himself/herself totally in self-surrender. This is precisely what Śiva pooja is, for, the union of the worshiper and the worshiped is the very purpose of worship.