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### **THE VITAL FORM AND SYMBOLISM IN A.K.COOMARASWAMY'S "THE DANCE OF SHIVA"**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The dance of Shiva is the most important aspect of Hinduism. The Vedic religion as in Hindu mythology the dance of Shiva is a creation and destruction involving the whole cosmos: This cosmic dance of Shiva is called 'Anandatandava', the dance of Bliss, and symbolizes the cosmic cycles of creation and destruction, as well as the daily rhythm of birth and death. This comic activity is the central motif of the dance. In a marvelously unified and dynamic composition expressing the rhythm and harmony of life, Nataraja is shown with four hands represent the cardinal directions. He is dancing with the left foot elegantly raised and the right foot on a prostrate figure-'Apasmara Purusha', the personification of illusion and ignorance over whom Shiva triumphs. The upper left hand holds a flame, the lower left-hand points down to the dwarf, is shown holding a cobra. The upper right holds an hour glass drum or 'dumroo' that stands for the male-female vital principle, the lower shows the gesture of assertion: "Be without fear"." Snakes that stand for egoitism, are seen uncoiling from his arms, legs and hair, which is braided and bejeweled". His matted locks are whirling as he dances within an arch of flames representing the endless cycle of birth and death. On his hand is a skull, which symbolizes his conquest over death. Goddess Ganga, the epitome of the holy river Ganges, also sits on his hairdo. His third eye is symbolic of his omniscience, insight, and enlightenment. The whole idol rests on a lotus pedestal, the symbol of the creative forces of the universe.

#### **KEYWORDS:**

Anandatandava, Preserver, Destroyer

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The great Hindu god Shiva has many guises and many representations in art, but perhaps the most familiar is as a dancing figure within a circle of fire, that is as Siva Nataraja, the lord of the dance . It is wonderfully rich in iconography and hidden meaning. Nataraja is represented

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In his triple role as Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. The dance is shown facing within a flaming halo (prabha mandala) which represents time and the circle to symbolize the Hindu belief that it is both cyclical and without end. The flames of the ring sprout from the mouths of makaras or mythical sea creatures shown at the base of the sculpture. The dance is a pictorial allegory of the five principle manifestations of eternal energy – creation, destruction, preservation, salvation and illusion. The dance of Shiva also represents his five activities: 'Shrishti'(creation, evolution); 'Sthiti' (preservation, support); 'Samhara'(destruction, evolution); 'Tirobhava' (illusion); and 'Anugraha'(release, emancipation, grace). The overall temper of the image is paradoxical, uniting the inner tranquility, and outside activity of Shiva.

The dance of smiling Shiva performing is Thandava, the cosmic dance which destroys and creates the universe. The energy and wildness of the dance is shown in his bent knees and the extravagant spreading of the god's hair. Shiva's locks also contain a skull, a datura blossom, and a crescent moon which represents the idea that Shiva is ever-present even if sometimes he is not always visible. Even more prominent is the figure of Ganga, the personification of the river Ganges, which according to Hindu mythology, was brought gently from the heavens down to earth in the god's hair. The Nataraja images, of course, belong to the conception of Shiva generally, and not to the dance in particular.

### **VITAL FORM IN "DANCE OF SHIVA":**

The purpose of dance is to release men from illusion of the idea of the "self" and of the physical world. The cosmic dance was performed in Chidambaram in South India, called the center of the universe by some Hindus. The gestures of the dance Shiva's five activities, symbolized, the first one is creation is symbolized by the drum, the second production is source by the "fear not" hand gesture, the third one is destruction the symbol of fire, the fourth is embodiment point out the foot planted on the ground, and the last one is release symbolized the foot in held aloof. As Nataraja means in Sanskrit Lord of dance, Shiva represents apocalypse and creation as he dances away the illusory world of maya transforming it into power and enlightenment. The symbolism of Shiva Nataraja is religion, art and science merged as one. In God's endless dance of creation, preservation, destruction, and paired graces is hidden a deep understanding of our universe.

Ruth peel's beautiful poem "Mahadev Siva" gives clear vision on the dance of shiva in the following lines,

"The source of all movement,  
Shiva's dance,  
Gives rhythm to the universe.  
He dances in evil places,  
In sacred,  
He creates and preserve,  
Destroys and releases."

The chief part of His dress consists of tightly of fitting breeches, and He wears also a fluttering scarf and a sacred thread. One right hand holds a drum, the other is uplifted in the sign of do not fear;

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one left and holds fire, the other points down upon the demon Muyalaka, a dwarf holding a cobra; the left foot is raised. There is a lotus pedestal, from which springs an encircling glory (tiruvasi), fringed with flame, and touched within by hands holding drum and fire. The images are of all sizes, rarely if ever exceeding four feet in total height. Even without reliance upon literary references, the interpretation of this dance would not be difficult. The images represent dancing having four hands, with braided and jeweled hair of which of the lower locks are whirling in the dance. In His hair may be seen a wreathing cobra, a skull, and the mermaid figure of Ganga; upon it rests the crescent moon, and it is crowned with a wreath of Cassia leaves. In His right ear He wears a man's earring, a woman's in the left; He is adorned with necklaces and armllets, a jeweled belt, anklets, bracelets, finger and toe-rings. The drum also is a general attribute of Shiva, belonging to his character of Shiva's Nadanta dance.

### **SYMBOLISM IN "DANCE OF SHIVA"**

Shiva is providing his own music, as in his upper right hand he holds a small drum – the damaru like the shape of an hour glass which provides not only rhythm but also reminds that it was this drum which made the first sounds of the creation. The bent of the drum is also considered to provide the heart beat of the cosmos, the maya (In Tamil maayai). Conversely, in Shiva's upper left hand he holds agni, the divine fire, which will destroy the universe. Shiva's lower right hand makes the abhaya mudra gesture of blessings which calms all fear, and the lower left arm sweeps across his torso with the hand pointing to his left foot in the gesture of gajahasta, symbol of salvation and liberation. Shiva's right foot is shown stamping on the dwarf figure Apasmara Purusha, who holds a cobra and who represents illusion and ignorance, leading humanity away from truth. the cobra motif is repeated and hangs slain from Shiva's right arm. The god usually wears only a short dhoti which is tied around his waist with a sash. The cobra around Nataraja's waist is kundalini Shakti, the soul impelling cosmic power resident within all. Nataraja's dance is not just a symbol taking place within each of us, at the atomic level, this very moment. The Agamas proclaim, "The birth of the world, its maintenance, its destruction, the soul's obstruction and liberation are the five acts of His Dance.

"Our Lord is the Dancer, who, like the latent in firewood diffuses His power in mind and matter, and makes them dance in their turn". The dance, in fact, represents His five activities (Pancakritya), viz: Shrishti (overlooking, creation, evolution), Sthiti (preservation, support, samhara (destruction, evolution), Tirobhava (veiling, embodiment, illusion, and also, giving rest), Anugraha (release, salvation, grace). These, separately considered, are the activities of the deities Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshwara and Sadashiva. This comic activity is the central motif of the dance. Manivaasagam Kandamar says in his Unmai Vilakkam in verse 36 "Creation arises from the drum: protection proceeds from the hand of hope: from fire proceeds destruction; the foot held aloft gives release. "It will be observed that the fourth hand points to this lifted foot, the refuge of the soul"

Kumaragurubarar in his Chidambara Mummani Kovai points out, "O, my Lord, Thy hand holding the sacred drum has made and ordered the heavens and earth and other worlds and innumerable souls. Thy lifted hand protects both the conscious and unconscious order of thy creation. All these worlds are transformed by Thy hand bearing fire. Thy sacred foot, planted on the ground, gives an abode to the tired soul struggling in the toils of casualty. It is Thy lifted foot that grants eternal bliss to those that approach Thee. These five-actions are indeed Thy Handiwork."

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Maanikkavaasagar says in his Tiruvaasagam XII, 14 "The Lord of Tillai's court a mystic dance performs; what's that, my dear?"

### **CONCLUSION**

The burning ground is not the place where our earthly bodies are cremated, but the hearts of his lovers, laid waste and desolate. The place where the ego is destroyed signifies the state where illusion and deeds are burnt away: that is the crematorium, the burning ground where Sri Nataraja dances, and whence He is named Sudalaiyadi, Dancer of the burning ground. In this simile, we recognize the historical connection between Shiva's gracious dance as Nataraja, and His wild dance as the demon of the cemetery. A great motif in religion or art, any great symbol, becomes all things to all men; age after age it yields to men such treasure as they find in their own hearts. Whatever the origins of Shiva's dance, it became in time the clearest image of the activity of god which any art or religion can boast of. This is poetry; but none the less, science. It is not strange that the figure of Nataraja has commanded the adoration of so many generations of past and familiar with all scepticisms, expert in tracing all beliefs to primitive superstitions, explorers of the infinitely great and infinitely small, we are the worshippers of the Nataraja still.

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