


David Shulman 
ddshulman@yahoo.com
(The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel)

Seeing into the Mind in Early Modern South India

ABSTRACT: In contrast to the many South Asian texts that explore deep, metaphysically oriented states of mind, introspection of a personal, empirical, everyday kind is relatively rare in the textual archive until the early modern period, beginning roughly in the 16th century. At that time a remarkable richness of personal introspective works is evident in all the major south Indian languages. This article explores some of the features of that literature, with representative examples of literary, musical, and philosophical sources focused on the individual and on her or his sense of self.

KEYWORDS: introspection, South India, perception, Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar, Dhūrjaṭi, Dharmarāja, self-awareness, autobiography

1.

Let me begin with a discovery, arrived at inductively through the sources we have been studying for the last three years within the framework of the ongoing European Research Council project at the Hebrew University.¹ It is now clear that in all the major languages of southern India—Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam, Sanskrit, Persian, and to some extent also Marathi and Oriya—a rich literature of personal introspection, of

¹ *The New Ecology of Expressive Modes in Early Modern South India*. See <https://neemerc.huji.ac.il>.



a new kind, emerged, beginning in the late 15th century and accelerating in intensity through the 16th to 18th centuries. I would like to define some of the analytical features of this literature, to present a few typical examples, and to distinguish introspection of the early modern varieties in the south from other, more familiar forms of self-examination in South Asia. It is also possible to characterize the historical matrix that generated this new literature as well as its first audiences, among whom we also find the poets and musicians who authored these new forms.

Individual, empirical introspection implies an evolving understanding of the self, whatever one might mean by this elusive word, and of the mind. The essays in this volume explore novel versions of an early modern self that our sources articulate, each in its own way, always in a locally inflected setting, language, and cultural ecology. Issues of self-definition during this period clearly invite further study (for comparative perspectives, see Taylor 1989 and Wahrman 2004). One important hypothesis can be stated at the outset: if the self always knows more about us than we know about “it” (Winnicott 1989: 271), we can at least posit that early modern South India developed new models of the human mind, with its perceptual and affective elements—models that can be described analytically on the basis of the rich materials at our disposal. As we continue to pursue this hypothesis, the theme of introspection remains very much at the center.

Before I try to define what I mean by introspection, here is an example of the tone and texture that interest us:

If I imagine all the awful things
that happened to me in the past,
I feel disgust.
If I look straight ahead
at the terrible deaths that await me,
I get scared.
When I see into myself, when I think
of all my ways and deeds, fear
becomes terror, and time
goes black,
Oh god of Kālahasti. (*Śrīkālahasti-śatakamu* 1966: verse 76)

Nominally addressed to Śiva at the temple of Śrīkālahasti on the Andhra-Tamil border, this poem, like many others in Dhūrjaṭi's *Śrīkālahasti-śatakamu*, is a record of self-scrutiny—probably a singular, non-recurring moment of reflection captured in words. When the speaker looks into his own mind, he is appalled at what he finds there. He has bad memories, remorse, disgust at parts of his own nature, overwhelming fear, and a sense of urgency: time goes black; there may not be any time left. He seems to want to share these feelings with his divine (but silent) interlocutor, though the devotional component of a poem like this is less in evidence than the first-person scan of an interior space. Will the insight he articulates change anything in his life? Who can say?

Etymologically, in English and other Western languages, insight and introspection are both linked to vision, as if the seeing eye turns itself in a half circle in order to study what lies inside, including its own process of seeing. The two terms overlap to some extent but are not isomorphic; in popular usage, insight may or may not be derived from introspection. Yet since sight is involved in both cases, there must be an element of illumining, shedding light on what is dark. So it is not unusual for sensitive thinkers like Marcus Aurelius or Augustine or, much later, Montaigne to think about both insight and introspection as bringing a latent bit of knowing, usually self-knowing, out of the obscurity natural to it and into the light, which allows for understanding (by no means the same cognitive act as knowing). The latent self-knowledge must, however, pre-exist in the knower's mind, awaiting only that shaft of light and, perhaps, favorable conditions for its emergence outward. Thus the introspective process could be said to follow a standard trajectory, moving inward from the surface of the eye, or of the mind, and then reverting back to the more external surfaces, where things can be known, formulated in language, and possibly understood.

I doubt that south Indian forms of either insight or introspection are thought to follow a similar circular route. It is not even certain that we are dealing with mentation and intellection alone. We have, in the period in question, a rich continuum of emic terms for the inner domain of the human being (also for other beings, including gods and animals),

a domain which includes the mind and is, at times, subsumed by what we call mind. All the major south Indian languages have a word for innerness, or inside-ness, in general—*uḷ* in Tamil and Malayalam; *ullamu* and *lo* (*lopala*, *lonu*) in Telugu; *ōḷ*, *ōḷavu*, *ōḷagu* in Kannada. All these words are cognates (Burrow and Emeneau 1961: 600). Tamil *uḷḷam*, the inside, is also linked to the verb *uḷku*, to think or feel. Other words are formed from the same root. Malayalam has *uḷppū* (Candrolsavam 1969: 2.78), perhaps the “flower of the mind” or a nominal form of the same verb *uḷku*. In Tamil we find *uḷḷakkāṭci*, inner vision, the mind’s eye (see *Naiṭatam* 1907: 4.32; also Shulman 2021); also *uḷḷiṭu*, the hidden inner meaning of a thought or idea (*Kāñcippurāṇam* 1964: *pāyiram* 20) and *uṭpōruḷ*, a synonym of the latter. Telugu *lo* can also mean simply the thinking mind (*Vasu-caritramu* 1920: 4.89). Similar words for a largely unspecified interiority, a lively dimension of feeling and perceiving, are Tamil-Malayalam *akam*—note Malayalam *akattaḷir*, a budding or sprouting inside—and Sanskrit *svāntam*, one’s interior, or sometimes simply “mind”.

Within this large, elastic, and usually privileged realm of innerness, we can distinguish two somewhat more specialized semantic clusters. One has to do with a deep internal core, innerness compacted, generative, and firm: thus Malayalam *kāmpu* or *manakkāmpu*, literally the pith or hard core of the mind, like the kernel or pith inside the coconut (Burrow and Emeneau 1961: 1250). It is worth noting this notion of solidity in the depths of the self, in contrast to prevalent Tamil notions of innerness as fluid, soft, melted down. Both Malayalam and Kannada also refer to the inner depths of a person as *karaḷ* or *karuḷ*, literally the liver, lungs, bowels, guts—often the site of intimate and intuitive perception, and of love (*Naḷa-caritam* 1969: 4.1; Kittel 1894 s.v.).

Then we have the terms—sometimes overlapping with this sense of the affective-cognitive core of a person—for the more specific knowing and perceiving parts of the mind-self. Sanskrit *manas*, classed as the sixth sense (*indriya*) in classical philosophical texts, has been assimilated in all the southern languages in various forms (note *manakkāmpu* above). *Maṇam*, *manamu*, *mānasam*, and so on, have a lively presence both in colloquial speech and in our texts. Tamil *maṇam* can easily coincide

with *uḷlam* in the sense of “mind” (Shulman 2012: 178–182). Consider Malayalam *mano-rājyam*, “the kingdom of the mind”: a rustic woodman in Unnāyi Vāriyar’s Kathakaḷi play, the *Naḷa-caritam*, uses this compound to say, “I can imagine so many possibilities” (*Naḷa-caritam* 1969: 2.9/104; Gopalakrishnan 2001: 114). Sanskrit *antaraṅgam*, literally the inner part or organ, shifts its domain of application according to context—mind, self, interiority *per se*, the affective dimension, understanding (not simply “knowing”; see *Naḷa-caritam* 1969: 3.4; *Muttusvāmi Dīkṣita kṛti maṇidīpika*, [*Māye tvam yāhi*] 1990: 644). Philosophical texts, or literary texts close to philosophical discourse, speak more precisely of *antaḥkaraṇa(m)*, the cognitive apparatus that enables perception, the processing of sensual impressions, and thought, including self-recognition.

Many of these terms are capable of describing diary-like scans of the inner surfaces of the mind and heart, with or without intellectual, analytic input. But introspection in the personal, non-metaphysical sense does have at least one special name in Telugu—this is the Sanskrit philosophical word *adhyātma*, that is, something deeply connected to the self, *ātman*, conceived of as a subjective entity. The *padam* compositions of the great Telugu poet Annamayya (Tirupati, 15th century) are divided into two classes—love poems (*śṛṅgāra*, a radical revision of the word known from classical Sanskrit poetics) and *adhyātma*, in the meaning I have just mentioned. There are ancient precedents for this use of the word (e.g., *Gaṇḍa-vyūha* 1960: 54/416). The term surely reflects a context-specific notion of the thinking, feeling, reflexive self (or, in Buddhist contexts, of the non-self).

The terminological discussion can stop here. The crucial point, for our purposes, has to do with a categorical divide between subjective self-examination, the topic at hand, and what we can call metaphysical insight. The latter, which is capable of transforming the entire existential complex of a person, is built into many South Asian philosophical systems—Yoga, Advaita, both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism, Tantric Śaivism, and a wide swathe of unconventional lineages of teaching. Such insight also has names: *prajñā*, *bodhi*, *bodhi-citta* (Buddhist usages),

jñāna/vijñāna in the Brahminical traditions, *uṅarvu* in Tamil Advaita and *bhakti*, and so on. Generalizing with abandon, we might say that insight of this nature is thought to pierce the opaque veil of reality through an ego-less movement of the mind or the deeper self, the object of such an experience. One could also say that such an inner shift in one's very being takes place within a supra-cognitive realm of "pure" consciousness. In the non-dual school of classical Advaita, the individual leap into a fuller awareness—of reality, of truth, of the hidden depths of self—brings one into a form of content-less consciousness, a fullness of existence itself identified as truth. Such an awareness is, by definition, beyond the reaches of the personal cognitive apparatus, its bodily and mental coordinates (*antaḥkāraṇa*) and, indeed, any residues of individualized self-perception. The contrast that Bina Gupta draws between such non-dual awareness and Western, specifically Cartesian theories of mind applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to other Indian schools:

The Cartesian picture [of the mind, DS] grounds consciousness in the 'I', which itself is construed as an entity in the world; the Cartesian ego belongs to the world. The Advaita consciousness is not part of the world; it is rather the foundation of the world. The Cartesian immediacy is an inner perception by oneself of one's own conscious states... *For Advaita, the immediacy of consciousness lies in its (consciousness') self-luminosity, which does not require a subject's possessing introspective self-knowledge.* (Gupta 2012: 110; my emphasis, DS)

There is an intrinsic association of such "immediacy of consciousness" with special forms of attentiveness. Attentiveness, *ādara* in the Nyāya terminology, was classed as an *ātma-guṇa* alongside the imaginative, creative, and synthesizing faculty, *bhāvanā* (Shulman 2012). For the logicians, the self is a living, internal entity that takes note, pays attention, makes deductions and inductions, and records perceptions. What stands out in the early modern practice and theory of attentiveness is the novel range of its objects—transient moods, for example, the very life blood of the *padam* songs in Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam; also the pervasive experience of disjunction, in various forms internal to

the feeling, thinking subject. Within the affective realm, we find well-articulated states of extreme loneliness, also despair, cognitive confusion, doubt, and a notion of an alien self. Note that such introspective contents are not linked to the prevalent category of possession, *āveśa*, when the self is, as it were, taken over by a menacing other from outside (Smith 2006). Rather, we find an articulate person, like Nala in the *Nalacaritam*, who feels other than himself, as he has known himself until the transformative moment of crisis. This is something clearly different from the classical Advaitic premise that the empirical self is always, by definition, other than the deeper and truer metaphysical, impersonal self—although the Advaitic notion may still, at times, come to color self-perception in the new introspective style.

The crucial point about all the kinds of attentiveness focused on the individual, personal, empirical subject in the early modern period is that the very act of paying attention has acquired a profoundly creative aspect. One who is attentive to the unstable range of thought and feeling is an active partner to the creation of her own mind. Something remarkable has changed in the way the mind is modeled, implicitly or explicitly, by the early modern South Indian poets, musicians, painters, and theorists. Recursive or reflexive impulses direct the interest of all these men and women to what A. K. Ramanujan famously called the “interior landscape.” Perception folds in upon itself and, in doing so, opens a window for us, like for the seeing subject, to study its operative modes.

2.

Where do we find personal introspection in the early modern sources? Once one is sensitized to its tones and textures, one finds it everywhere. Let us take a clear-cut example. First-person autobiographical narratives begin to crop up in various parts of the sub-continent, mostly from the 17th century on. In the south-west, we have a remarkable 18th-century autobiographical document, today referred to as the *ātma-katha*, “Story of Myself,” of a Nambudiri Brahmin called Appattu Aṭīri from the village of Panniyūr. The text, which resurfaced from the archives of

a district court in Pālakkāḍu, has been published by N. M. Nambudiri and, a second time, by V. V. Haridas. It clearly deserves a full study on many counts, since it could be said to encapsulate the political, economic, and social history of its time alongside the dramatic cultural themes it seeks to record.²

This “Story of Myself” has a complicated and somewhat tantalizing textual structure. In effect, it is part of a corpus that includes at least four complementary texts: (1) a copper-plate, now lost, in which there was a record of what Lord Śiva announced, or rather prophesied, to Aṭīri late one night, after eleven years in which this author had been fasting and praying in the god’s temple; (2) a palm-leaf manuscript, also lost, that was apparently a copy of the copper-plate text, but maybe also of something more; (3) Aṭīri’s autobiographical work, in Malayalam prose, comprising some forty printed pages; and (4) a first-person sequel by another Nambudiri, Vēḷḷa, one generation after Aṭīri and very closely connected to the latter’s family. Vēḷḷa’s work shows, among other things, how the original prophecy by the god was fulfilled, word by word, in the *īśvara* year of 1757–1758. These four texts intersect and overlap in many ways: (1) and (2) are embedded in (3), while (4) takes up the basic themes and features of (3) and provides them with closure before going on to record somewhat later events, including Vēḷḷa’s meeting with Hyder Ali, the Mysore ruler, during Hyder’s invasion of Kerala in 1766.

If one reads Aṭīri and Vēḷḷa together, one can hardly escape the impression that they constitute a premeditated literary structure with the divine prophecy at their core. These are historiographical works committed to transmitting true factual narratives, akin stylistically to the Malayalam prose histories today known, collectively, as *The Origin of Kerala (Keralolpatti)* and to temple chronicles (*granthavaris*). There may also be an important link to the south Indian genre of *kāla-vidyā*, “Knowledge of Time,” in which the past is narrated as a series of future events (Wagoner 1993: 35–38, 165–169; Narayana Rao et al. 2002: 120–122). This is not the place to explore further the evolution of this unique

² Abhilash Malayil and I are preparing a historical monograph about the Aṭīri text.

corpus; it will have to suffice to say that it begins by taking the imagined reader, whoever he or she was meant to be, through the background story of long-standing conflict (*kūrumalsaram*) between the Brahmins of Panniyūr and their rivals from another village, Śukapuram. Both factions sought the support of the Zamorin ruler in Calicut, the major political power in North Malabar; when this powerful patron switched sides in the dispute, more or less abandoning his erstwhile Panniyūr protegés, our autobiographer, in anger and despair, embarked on his years of penance in the Śiva temple that culminated in the revelation mentioned above. This critical event comes near the halfway mark of his text.

Let us have a look at how Aṭīri describes that moment.

In the eleventh year, the god spoke to us and I achieved release, *mukti*. How can I describe that vision?

One day, not noticing that it was after midnight, we saw a divine body, *svarūpam*, that we had never seen or known before. I cannot really describe it. I knew that this was my lord, Tampurān, Lord Śiva from the northern shrine (Vaṭakovil mahādevan). Tremendous happiness filled my heart. I bowed down and said, again and again, “Protect us, Lord, Poṛri”. I was stuttering because I remembered all the difficulties we had been exposed to. I was weeping tears of joy. The Lord spoke:

“Brahmin. Whatever you want will happen just as you think of it. There is no need to worry. When you die, you and your wife will arrive in my world because of your devotion. There is also this task. You also have to see and worship Viṣṇu in his form as the Boar, Varāhamūrtti. There is a time ordained for that worship [the *īśvara* year 1758]. Your nephew [Nārāyaṇan] will be there for that, right? He will get your hereditary right, and his progeny will join your line. He will accomplish whatever he desires. You can visualize everything through awareness (*jñānam*). Any uncertainty and confusion will go away. But one thing needs to be done now. Your wife is worshipping me without thinking of anything or anyone else, only wanting to get the boon of serving her husband. She’s the best.

Keep worshipping me at home, as a householder. That's what I want. You'll get whatever you want."

The god disappeared after this vision [*anujña*: perhaps meaning permission?] I stayed in the mandapam with my hands folded in prayer. Was God's appearance a dream? But I was wide awake! Was he testing me? I had this small doubt. Then I woke up Nārāyaṇan and told him all these things. He too was filled with devotion.

The next day, in that same place, I couldn't decide if God was testing me or not. Would it turn out to be true? Would it be a sin to stay here, disobeying his orders, wondering about this? I had no certainty about what to do; it was an oral message by the god. My heart still burning, I was speaking with Nārāyaṇan when the god spoke again and said, "It's all true. You have to go home. Have no doubt." I folded my hands and said, "Please forgive all the things I was thinking inappropriately. You are my only support." I said this over and over.

I put god in my heart and went home. (*Appattu Aṭīriyūṭe Āmakatha* 2018: 48–49)

Various discussions and quandaries awaited Aṭīri at home; he takes great pains to record, apparently verbatim, everything his wife said in response to his news. In general, the text includes long segments of dialogue, for the most part very credible. Most striking, however, are passages like the one just translated, where the author reports on the hesitations, doubts, and conflicts that fill his consciousness. We might think that a revelation so overpowering and consequential would entail a sense of certainty. It does not. Maybe it was all a dream, or a day-dream, a happy delusion? Maybe the god was simply testing him? Should he obey the god's command? It is this very wavering, the self-doubt that is natural when divinity invades our existence, that Aṭīri seeks to formulate and preserve. Whatever else we find in this text—detailed narrative of social conflict and political crisis, rich intertextual citations, a texture meant to convey factuality, a prophetic tone that is historical in its own way—the element of honest reporting takes precedence. This repeatedly includes the documentation of mental agony and confusion in a milieu rife with ambiguity.

If we juxtapose the prose section above with the poem with which we began, we detect a resonance that is active in a wide spectrum of early modern south Indian texts, in all the expressive media. We need to define that resonance more accurately—also to distinguish it from the quite different tonality of the earlier devotional texts, in all the languages. The latter are not devoid of introspective moments (it is a truism, misleading like other truisms, in the secondary literature that *bhakti* poetry is highly personal in tone), but a work of self-revelation such as Aṭṭi's is of a different order entirely. Autobiography, like diary entries, begins with the unstable self that hopes to capture something of its shifting, enigmatic contours. If we dig a bit deeper, we will also find philosophical and theoretical correlates in the erudite literature of this period. Let me give another example.

3.

In the second half of the 17th century, an Advaitic philosopher named Dharmarāja was living in the small, intellectually lively Tañjāvūr village of Kaṇṭaramāṇikyam. Dharmarāja wrote a compendium of Advaita seemingly meant for his pupils and his sons, one of whom, Rāmakṛṣṇa Adhvarīndra, wrote an excellent commentary on his father's book, the *Vedānta-paribhāṣā*. As a lucid synthesis of a late-Advaita view of the world, this work has no equal. At the same time, the author by no means limits himself to summarizing classical doctrines and theories. He has his own view of a non-dual reality. In particular, what he has to say about perception, *pratyakṣa*, is penetrating and original. It is also one of the missing links to understanding our questions about innerness and self.

I won't enter here into a detailed, technical *précis* of Dharmarāja's views but will instead focus on one important aspect of his thought. Dharmarāja starts from the epistemology of what we call the Vivaraṇa school, in which nothing we know is free from an inherent element of ignorance. The act of knowing—certainly knowing about objects, which in this system are real enough—consists first of all in illuminating

something that was previously veiled by ignorance. The light comes from the luminous awareness that each of us has an inside and that is called the witness, *sākṣin*. The witness is a godly thing, trans-empirical—that is, existing beyond, but always informing and motivating, the range and operation of our normal mental apparatus, in all its forms and modes.

How does the *sākṣin* relate to perceptions of the personal self, or of the internal surfaces of the mind? For Dharmarāja, in opposition to earlier Advaitins, for us to recognize that we are happy or sad or angry or depressed requires the operation of a special mental mode, *ṛtti*. Such a mode is not identical with the *ṛtti* at work when we perceive external objects, such as, say, pots. How so?

It is all a matter of awareness, *caitanya*, and awareness comes in three varieties: object-awareness, awareness linked to the means of knowing, and the awareness of the person who is perceiving (*viśaya-caitanya*, *pramāṇa-caitanya*, and *pramāṭṛ-caitanya*; *Vedānta-paribhāṣā* 2003: 1.17). That is, respectively: awareness defined by (to take again the standard example) a pot; awareness defined by the particular *ṛtti* mode of perceiving that pot; and awareness defined by the mental apparatus itself, as a whole, *antaḥ-karaṇa*. In the first case, according to the Advaita, the mental apparatus, which is suffused by light, literally exits the eye, moves toward the pot, wraps itself around that pot, and then returns to the eye bearing the contours of the pot, which are processed—that is, known—with the help of the witness. Note that the pot produces change in the perceptual apparatus that encounters it. So far, there is nothing exceptional about Dharmarāja’s summary.

But then something rather new appears. Dharmarāja tells us that awareness conditioned by the object of perception is not different from the self-awareness taking place within the perceiving person. If, with the help of the mental mode, I see a pot, I am not quite distinguishable from that pot. The two of us, the pot and I, are deeply bound to each other. In fact, insofar as a cognitive perception is concerned, neither of us is separate or independent. In a certain, defined sense, what I see is what I am. The pot is I, as I am it; we share an intimacy that may not exhaust our respective natures but that does issue from them in

the process of perceiving and being perceived. In a wider sense, an existential interdependence necessarily operates between us. Put differently, the pot is quite real, but I can know it only by creating it in the course of seeing it, a process that may also require an imaginative element (Shulman 2012). All of this happens in the mind, which acquires a certain relative autonomy. Attentiveness is part of the process, as I mentioned earlier in relation to the expressive genres. One might say that here, too, in a philosophical idiom, perception plays a part in the very creation of the mind.

Let us take a further step. The mind is not a sense organ (*indriya*), like the five other ones—in contrast with the position of other Advaita schools (specifically, the Bhāmatī line). For Dharmarāja, the mind is of a different level of complexity altogether. Its modes of perception extend to internal, affective states, which are directly known by the witness self (operating through its own *vṛtti* mode) and, in a sense, non-cognitive. Why this insistence on the mind's existence as something quite other than a sensual organ? Because the mind does much more than simply register impressions (or create pots). It is, says Dharmarāja, proximate to the *jīva*, the living self. The mutual determination of object and mind shows us the *jīva* in action. The *jīva* and the inner witness overlap, at the very least, and may in fact coincide.

Who, then, is the agent of knowledge, including self-knowledge? The witness, no doubt. But the witness, says Dharmarāja, comes in two distinct varieties. There is the *jīva-sākṣin*, the witness that belongs to, or inheres in, or operates through, the *jīva*; and there is an *īśvara-sākṣin*, the witness that belongs to God (understood as a nominally personalized being, very close to the total being that is undifferentiated godliness, brahman: *Vedānta-paribhāṣā* 2003: 1.66 and 69). The *jīva*-witness suffers from *a priori* nescience; the *īśvara*-witness suffers from *māyā*, the beginningless source of nescience. Ignorance, as we saw, is at play in every cognitive act. Now Dharmarāja tells us that there is an infinity of individual *jīvas*—for if that were not the case, then you, the reader, and I, writing these words, would see, remember, and know exactly the same things, which is clearly not the case.

This is a momentous theorem. Perception, and the inner witness who drives it, have been individualized. Each of us sees his or her own pot, which shares its existence with each of our personal minds. There is only a short step from here to a notion that introspective states are no less autonomous and singular than the autonomous and singular mind that observes them.

Stated differently, with an eye to our wider themes: perception, including self-perception, according to Dharmarāja, potentially entails a deeper kind of seeing; the internal witness, the source of our aliveness, is involved in a personal way. Seeing something, anything, is not a mechanical act but an expression of the visionary capacity of the mind, including a singular, subjective relation to, or indeed the creation of, what is seen. Within this general formulation of how mind works, there is space for insight—that is, a kind of knowledge that brings wholeness into the non-unified field of perception through the working of an affective mode, *ṛtti*, that is both personalized and aware of its own operation. I see X, I see myself seeing X, I see myself as profoundly bound up with X in a mutually creative process, and I know that I am seeing myself—the particular person that I am—in all these ways. One might take this as a non-dualist, realist definition of introspection. Note that thinking now exceeds any representational process; it is not easily amenable to paraphrase or translation; and it may include empathic, causally effective thought-sensations that penetrate into the objects it creates into existence. This last sentences invites us to consider processes that could be called extrospection, a necessary complement to introspection in this philosophical field, as in others.

4.

If all this sounds rather abstruse, let me reassure you. Nothing could be more down-to-earth. Perhaps surprisingly, this way of understanding ourselves pervades the expressive forms I have mentioned—especially music, where it informs many of the great *kr̥ti* masterpieces of the 18th and early 19th centuries in the far south. The Tantric Śrīvidyā that shaped all of Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar’s oeuvre is deeply indebted to the

Tanĵāvūr Advaita we have just sampled. For example, look at this highly personal *ṛti* in the rather rare raga Taraṅgiṇī:

māye tvam yāhi
mām bādhituṃ kā hi

dhyāye dhyeye
tvam ehi mudam dehi mām pāhi

gāye geye
yāhi kāhi ehi dehi pāhi (1)

upāye upeye
sarasa-kāye rasa-kāye sakāye āye (2)

samudāye guruguhodaye
sudhā-taraṅgiṇī antaraṅgiṇī (3)
(Muttusvāmi Dīkṣita ṛti maṇidīpika 1990: 644–645)

Māyā! Go away.
Who are you to torture me?

I meditate only on you,
the only subject.
Come to me.
Make me happy.
Take care of me.

I sing of you, who are worthy
of my song, whoever you may be.
Goddess of words and sound!
Give me whatever, go, come,
take care of me. (1)

You are the means,
 and you are the end
 to be savored,
 enfleshed, embodied
 delight, my only
 prize. (2)

You are everything
 put together,
 Guruguha's one hope,
 a happy torrent hiding
 deep inside. (3)

At first hearing, this text looks like a long series of second-person singular imperatives (in colloquial Sanskrit) addressed to a goddess who embodies *māyā*—Illusion, Ignorance, Misperception. Go away. Come to me. Make me happy. Take care of me. Come. Give. Once more: Take care of me. At second hearing, other thoughts and formulations assume salience, like the second-person pronoun—“you, whoever you may be.” But there is no mistaking the intimate tone of the verses. The author is speaking to a goddess whom he knows very well and whom he is trying to order around, in seemingly contradictory ways.

First he tells her to go away. Who needs the bafflement of *māyā* or the ignorance that is her stock in trade? He is indignant: “Who are you to torture me?” But then, in the second refrain, he tells her to come to him, to make him happy. This back-and-forth movement pervades the entire text. Call it ambivalence, if you like. And this *kṛti* is also a South Indian love poem in which the speaker quite casually, and traditionally, voices his or her conflictual impulses in relation to the frustrating deity who is always both far away and close, perhaps too close. The text could almost belong to the *padam* genre of lovers' conversations—each of them unique to a passing moment—that came to dominate much musical composition in all the major languages in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The performance history of this composition contains a surprise. The ascending and descending scales of the raga offer two competing ways of singing the sixth note, *dha*. Originally, it seems, this note was sung as what is called *śuddha dhaivata*, the lower sixth, *dha1*. But in modern performances, what we hear is almost always the raised *dha2*. Singers such as Sikkil Gurucharan attest that when they first learned to sing *Taraṅgiṇī raga*, they were taught to sing it with the raised *dha2* and only discovered much later the alternative, probably older, way of singing with *dha1*. It makes a considerable difference. It is a little easier to hear the higher frequency of *dha2*, and probably a little easier for the singer to perform it.

Why should this matter? For one thing, the *dha* note appears in many crucial melodic phrases tied to the verbal text, beginning with the opening Pallavi refrain (here translated following the Sanskrit syntax):

Māye tvam yāhi mām bādhituṃ kāhi
sa dha pa dha sa dha sa ri ma ga ri
 Māyā [you] go away. Me to bother who are you?

In the *anupallavi* secondary refrain, that *dha* reappears with the phrase *mudam dehi*, “Make me happy” (*dha sa dha ni pa*) and, ending that line, *mām pāhi*, “Take care of me” (*dha sa ri ga*). So we need the *dha* for “Go away” as well as for “take care of [me]”—and it seems to have a necessary affinity with the pronoun “me.” Every time the verbal text circles back to the refrain, there it is again. In the first *caranam* verse, we have, again, *kāhi*, “whoever you are,” marked this time with the *dha* (*ibid.* 645).

Before I slip into an overly technical analysis, let us try to understand a little more about this troublesome but beloved goddess. The deity of the Śrīvidyā has internal oscillation as a strong element in her character. Her geometric *yantra*, which is a complete, self-contained model of her cosmos, is composed of nine overlapping triangles: four pointing upwards, five pointing downwards. At the mid-point of this diagram is the lone *bindu* point out of which the triangles, each a world

of its own, have emerged and into which they will be absorbed. It makes good sense that the larger number of triangles point downward, for that vector of descent is the embodiment of the goddess as she moves toward us, creating worlds within worlds as she comes. This direction is privileged, reflecting her wish or need to be with us, though we know from Dikṣitar's text that her mode of being with us is baffling and elusive. The other vector coincides nicely with the imperative *yāhi*: "Go away". She ascends back to the highest heaven. Dissecting her movement in this way is, however, no less misleading than the ongoing presence of the goddess in our world, and in herself. The two seemingly opposite impulses are active simultaneously at all moments.

Given this tantalizing oscillation within the deity, Dikṣitar has, as it were, entered into a game, a kind of hide and seek.³ He plays with the opposing poles of her nature, which seem to be reflected in his own internal struggle. He tells her to go far away, then wants her back. He needs her, recognizes her at the end as "a happy torrent hiding inside" (*sudhā-taraṅgiṇī antaraṅgiṇī*). Maybe he is happy to be tormented by her. Maybe he has reached some point in his own self-awareness where that rushing torrent is in itself a palpable sense of release—not from the world but into the world. Recall the realistic, individualized Advaita that we saw in Dharmarāja. Oneness, *aikyam*, Dharmarāja tells us, does not preclude wavering, complex acts of perception and cognitive disjunction. Interestingly, oneness is not the same as "non-difference." There is space for the composer, the singer, and the listener, perhaps also the goddess, to peer into the recesses of their minds.

This composition could almost be a diary entry. A single note, that playful *dha*, historically selected or inflected, focuses and brings out the introspective gaze. Like the goddess herself, this variable note is both high and low, depending on how the performer sings it. Moreover, innerness is regularly dissonant. *Māyā*, at home in the mind of the composer, moves through unpredictable, shifting states of being

³ I thank Naresh Keerthi for this formulation and for shedding light on the *kṛti* as a whole.

and knowing, as does he. Knowing something of her, he discovers something of himself. An intricate mutuality is built into this kind of emergent knowing.

Something rather similar to this nuanced scanning of the mind is at work in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam theater of Kerala as we know it today (see Shulman 2021). Extrospection, the necessary complement to introspection—that is, the undeniable potential we all have to see into the mind of another, however we may understand that process—is repeatedly present in Unnāyi Vāriyar’s masterpiece, the *Naḷa-caritam*. The *padam* songs in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam (also a few in Sanskrit) are, as I have mentioned, either personalized love-poems or powerfully introspective statements. The larger-scale *pra-bandha* poetic works, also present throughout the south, speak to us in the voices of their clearly distinctive, individual authors communicating with new audiences of self-made men and women who must have relished the emerging introspective themes. We have seen only a small sample from a large set of texts. One of the compelling features of such introspective works in the early modern period is the possibility, or rather the necessity, of idiosyncratic self-expression by each major artist, in diverse cultural and linguistic settings. As I have said at the outset, the plethora of such materials suggests that we are observing a civilizational shift with pronounced thematic regularities. Hidden within them, perhaps not so deeply hidden, are conceptions of the self that are specific to that time and place. The essays in this issue of CIS bear witness to some of the forms this cultural shift undergoes.

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