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The Ultimate Self-Awareness: Tracing a Sense of Self in the Manifesting God

ABSTRACT: Śiva’s sense of self is ever-evolving, ever-changing. His self-awareness is in constant motion, expanding and contracting in its many manifestations. The movement is circular. It forms Śiva’s life cycle which is structured and bound to an internal dynamic based on a tensile balance between the reflexive and reflective modes of the god. The following article examines this dynamic, sketches the structure of the life cycle as it appears in the *Kālavadhā Kāvya* of Kṛṣṇalīlāśuka, and aims to shed new light on the vibrant sense of Śiva’s self.

KEYWORDS: *Kālavadhā Kāvya*, Kṛṣṇalīlāśuka, divine life cycle, manifestation, self-awareness

The *Kālavadhā Kāvya*—Introduction

The Narrative

The *Kālavadhā Kāvya* of Kṛṣṇalīlāśuka is a 14th-century Sanskrit poem from Kerala depicting the Pūraṇic episode of Śiva killing Kāla, that is, Death or Time, to save Mārkaṇḍeya, his devotee. This short, dense text is made up of 118 verses, which constitute three *sargas*, or chapters.



The first *sarga* depicts a battle between Śiva and Kāla, the god of death. The story is embedded in a frame narrative in which Kṛṣṇa asks Śiva to tell him his most wonderful tale, the tale of his victory over Death. Unlike most variants of the story in South India, this version presupposes readers' familiarity with Mārkaṇḍeya's birth story, which is as follows:

Mārkaṇḍeya's parents waited many years for the birth of a child. They engaged in different rituals and penance to honor Śiva, who in return gave them a choice: they could give birth either to a brilliant child who would die on his sixteenth birthday or an ordinary child who would die in old age. They chose a brilliant child, Mārkaṇḍeya, who indeed excelled in all virtues. When he reached his sixteenth birthday, his predestined time to die, his mother could not bear the thought of his death and urged him to run away. While on the run, Mārkaṇḍeya reached a Śiva temple. Holding on to the *liṅga*, he woke up Śiva, who was eager to save the boy. These, in brief, were the events that set up the circumstances in which Śiva and Kāla came to meet and engage in a battle.

Assuming reader's knowledge of these prior events, the *Kālavadhā Kāvya* picks up the narrative *in medias res*. The text opens with description of Śiva's assembly hall on Mount Kailasa, where a celebration is taking place. Suddenly, a hideously loud sound interrupts joyous dancing and felicitations. At this point, the text does not reveal the source of this terrifying sound but instead focuses on the fear it arouses in the gods, particularly Śiva.

*tat tat tathāvidha mahotsva-maṇḍitāyām
sevāntair diviṣadām nikaraiḥ sadasyām
āvīrabūva kim api dhvanitaṃ sudūrād
apy aiśvaram hṛdayam ācalayat kṣaṇena* (KVK 1.10)

Then, a noise suddenly emerged from afar into the seat of heaven,
which was decorated ceremoniously with masses bowing in worship.
It shook even the heart of Śiva.

Viṣṇu, Śiva's companion, and Nandi, his servant, rush to Śiva's aid. Their conversation reveals the fact that Mārkaṇḍeya is being held

captive by Kāla. Together with the other gods present at the assembly, Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Nandi set out to confront Kāla's army; however, when they meet Kāla, he does not recognize Śiva or Viṣṇu. It is only after Skanda, the god of war, shoots an arrow into Kāla's eye that he is able to see them for who they really are. Taking advantage of the fact that Kāla is distracted, Nandi seizes Mārkaṇḍeya and brings him to Śiva's side. A battle commences between the two camps. When the warriors on both sides have exhausted their strength, Śiva and Kāla confront each other. Kāla's various weapons prove futile against Śiva, who neutralizes each of them one by one. Kāla is bewildered as to why his soldiers are dropping dead without his explicit permission. After all, he is the god of death, the one in charge of ending lives; no one can die without his consent.

*muktvā vaśaṃ mama kathaṃ vigamo hy asūnām
senāsv iti prativicintya yad āsta kālah
kāmāri-sevaka-janena tadā tadīyaṃ
sainyaṃ vyañīyata vibhidya surendra-pakṣam (KVK 1.47)*

At that time, Śiva's servants, who had been defeating [Kāla's] troops, led them to the gods. Kāla stood there, thinking: "How is it that the death of my army is unimpeded by my control?"

Frustrated, Kāla draws his deadliest weapon, the *danḍa* (staff), and hurls it at his opponent. Śiva catches the *danḍa* mid-air, gaining control of the battlefield. His troops, seeing him holding the *danḍa*, confuse him with Kāla and plunge into panic. The first *sarga* ends when Kāla acknowledges Śiva's supremacy; he is then killed by Śiva's *śūla* (trident) and absorbed into the god.

The second *sarga* begins with Viṣṇu praising Śiva in a series of verses that deal with events from the deity's life story, such as the burning of the *Tripuras*, the three demon cities. The chapter continues with praises of both Śiva and Viṣṇu. At the end, a unified form of the two is praised at the very moment of their unification. This union of Śiva and Viṣṇu is a feature unique to this text. Most versions of the *Kālāntaka*,

the killing of Death narrative, focus on praising Śiva or depict a world without death.

In the third *sarga*, Mārkaṇḍeya recognizes the two gods' unified form and praises them in this form, expressing desire to experience such a unification eternally. The text ends with the gods' unified form splitting once again into two separate entities. Viṣṇu returns to *svarga-loka* (the world of gods, the upper realm), while Śiva settles, in the form of a *liṅga*, in the Tṛpraṅgode temple.

The *Kālavadhā Kāvya* portrays a unique and unexpected evolution of the *Kālāntaka* story by praising the unification of Śiva and Viṣṇu, a very local devotional and literary feature, essentially specific to Kerala. In fact, the text matches the Pūraṅic narrative only in the first *sarga*. This Pūraṅic narrative can be found in its different versions in classical literature such as the *Mahābhārata*, *Bhāgavatapūraṇa*, *Śivapūraṇa*, *Padmapūraṇa* and other texts. Moreover, it is widely revered in South India, where it is tied to different temples as their *sthalapūraṇas*, stories depicting the mythological past of a temple or a place. For example, in the Tamil town of Tirukkaḍavūr there stands a temple on the spot where Mārkaṇḍeya was said to have held on to the Śiva *liṅga* and cried for help (Shulman 1983). Certain South Indian texts recount the *Kālāntaka* narrative as well. Some examples of that are provided by the Sanskrit *prabandha*, the *Śivavilāsacampū* written in Tanjavur during the 18th or 19th century by Virūpākṣa (Thirumathi 1991); the Malayalam *kiḷlipāṭṭu* (the parrot song genre) called *Mārkaṇḍeyapūraṇa* (Nair 1982); a *tiruvāttirappāṭṭu*, sung by Nair women on the night of Śivarātri festival (Mss. 21705-c. in the Kerala Oriental Manuscripts Library); Kuñjan Nambiar's *Kālan Ilāṭṭa Kālam* (Thamburan (ed.) 1904), and more.

It was in this textual context that the *Kālavadhā Kāvya* of Kṛṣṇalīlāsuka came to be composed. The text was first published by M. Ramakrishna Kavi in 1932 in Devanagari script. It has been re-published since by K. Raghavan Pillai (1962, Devanagari), Veluthatt Narayanan Namboothiri (1967, Malayalam script), and K. P. A. Menon (1996, Devanagari), who also provided a (rather rudimentary) English translation of the text.

The publications mentioned above are based on manuscript 17598, now in the University of Kerala Manuscripts Library. The manuscript was previously owned by the Kāṭṭumāṭam Mana family, a Tantrika-Brahmin family from Mallapuram district, not far from Trpraṅḡe Temple mentioned in the KVK (Kerala Oriental Manuscripts Library Vol. X no. 3.). The manuscript includes fourteen other texts, among them *stotras* (hymns of praise) to various gods, short *kāvya*s (poems), and the *Govindābhiṣeka*, also known as *Siriciṃdhakāvyaṃ* (*Śrīcihṇakāvya*). The *Śrīcihṇakāvya* is a grammatical work written in Prakrit demonstrating the basic concepts of the language as presented by Vararuci in *Prākṛtaprakāśa* (Wilson 1975: 19, 74–75).

All the texts in manuscript 17598 are ascribed to Kṛṣṇalīlāsuka, also known as Bilvamaṅalam, a poet renowned throughout India. This author is generally recognized as the author of the famous *Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛta*. Nevertheless, there is a wide-ranging debate in traditional and academic scholarship regarding the identity, dating, and geographic affiliation of Kṛṣṇalīlāsuka. It may even be that more than one poet was known by this name. As I discuss in detail in Salay 2022, manuscript 17598 provides a set of biographic verses that strongly point to the Keralite origin of the poet and support the dating of his work to the beginning of the 14th century.

The Local Intellectual Context of the *Kālavadha Kāvya*

Though there is no definitive proof that Kṛṣṇalīlāsuka wrote all the texts attributed to him, his identification as a 14th-century Kerala scholar provides an insight into the literary and philosophical worlds in which he was deeply immersed. Through texts like *Puruṣakāra* and *Śrīcihṇakāvya*, we become aware of the interest of the 14th-century Kerala scholars of the Mallapuram region in both Sanskrit and Prakrit linguistics and grammar, as well as their vibrant activity in the field of mathematics.

Likewise, texts such as the *Kṛṣṇakarṇāmṛta* and *Kālavadha Kāvya* reflect a particular religious atmosphere in which Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva

devotional literature was being composed, with an emphasis on the harmonious relationship between the two gods as well as the groups of their respective devotees. This is a unique Kerala feature, which remains dominant in Kerala to this day. A devotee of Viṣṇu visiting a Vaiṣṇava temple will always stop and acknowledge the Śiva deity residing in the same temple and vice versa.

Finally, texts such as the *Gopālastotra* and *Karmadīpikā* (also attributed to Kṛṣṇalīlāśuka) were clearly influenced by Tantric concepts and by the Tamil *Āgamas* (Unni 2006: 206). These philosophical and devotional approaches are certain to have impacted the *Kālavadha Kāvya*.

Subject to such influences, this short *kāvya* was composed in a highly condensed form. Each verse not only moves the narrative forward but is also designed to generate a particular response in the reader. This response is produced by the text's structural, aesthetic, and poetic elements, which, while operating on the narrative level, simultaneously contribute to the communication of the underlying philosophical ideas—conceptual notions that are part of the cultural discourse of the time but may not be explicitly present in the text. The experience of reading and engaging with the text initiates an emotional response in the reader, a response involving sensual, aesthetic or devotional, and intellectual dimensions.

Self-Awareness and the Dynamic of Manifestation: Three Stages of Manifestation in the *Kālavadha Kāvya*

The placement of this text at the climax of the Purāṇic narrative shifts the focus from a straightforward tale to the philosophical realms of divine manifestation. In its course, the text transforms Śiva from an inactive entity lacking a sense of self to an active god fully conscious of himself. Each *sarga*, in depicting a different aspect of Śiva, ultimately creates a mechanism for divine self-expression.

In the *Kālavadha Kāvya*, the literary tools that describe this unique dynamic are skillfully utilized to create a multi-layered text that opens

the door to a rich philosophical world. These tools are employed to convey complex Śaiva and Tantric ideas regarding the metaphysics of Śiva's materialization. In my forthcoming doctoral dissertation, I examine in greater depth metaphysical notions woven into the *Kālavadhā Kāvya*, including the concepts of *parāmarśa*—synthetic awareness of Śiva; *prakāśa*—the light of consciousness; and *vimarśa*—self-awareness or active consciousness, which constitute the two qualities of Śiva—namely reflexivity and reflectiveness—through which the universe and the god himself manifest themselves. Other philosophical notions that can be found in the *kāvya*'s deeper layers are those of *parāvāc*—the primordial, supreme sound, which is the source of all creation; *tattva*—the many *essential* expressions or manifested aspects of divinity; and the connection between word or sound and the *śakti* element of Śiva.

In what follows I investigate Śiva's sense of self as it develops in the KVK. The study begins by reviewing the three stages of Śiva's manifestation as portrayed in the text and then moves to examine these stages as representing hierarchical steps in the linear evolution of the god. Next, it considers the idea of a divine sense of self as a part of the mechanism of manifestation. The essay proposes to dissect this mechanism, breaking it into its different components in order to offer a new paradigm for understanding the metaphysics of Śiva's life cycles. This will deepen our understanding of Śiva's reflexive and reflective qualities as components generating the god's self-awareness.

Stage One—An “Epithet” God: Śiva Manifested as Kālāntaka

The first *sarga* depicts the battle between Śiva and Kāla, where the former emerges as the Kālāntaka Śiva, an “epithet” god; a god with discernible attributes, a physical body and identifying icons. Kāla's anger is the motivating force for Śiva's materialization as the killer of Death. Thus, it is an external factor that initiates the metamorphoses. This comes about at the climax of the battle, when Kāla hurls his *daṇḍa* at Śiva. Śiva catches the *daṇḍa*, transforming himself into the physical appearance of Death.

*daṇḍodyataṃ taṃ paritāś carantaṃ
nijaṃ gaṇo vīkṣya mṛdhāṅgaṇeṣu
kṣaṇaṃ kṣaṇoty eṣa mṛdhe purāsmān
kālah kilety āśaya-saṃśayo 'bhūt (KVK 1.52)*

When his *gaṇas* [Śiva's troops] saw Śiva running all over the battlefield holding up the *daṇḍa*, they were frightened, thinking: "This Kāla can quickly kill us in battle."

The physical similarity between Śiva and Kāla is brought about by a responsive act and not by an active initiative. Śiva then becomes more deadly than Death, so much so that even Śiva's *gaṇas* (troops) are frightened and confused.

By expressing their fear, the *gaṇas* provide Śiva with a reflection of himself, which immediately generates the actual realization of his Kālāntaka form. Once again it is an external perspective that prompts Śiva to take on a bodily garb. This occurs at the most dramatic moment of the Kālāntaka narrative, when the thus manifested Śiva kills Death:

*hara-śūla-śaktim abhinandya mandiraṃ
nijam āgatam yama-hṛdayya¹-tejasā
śiva-dīvyā-deham anu saṃśaye kṣaṇād
akhilāmara-rṣi-nicayākṣi-sākṣiṇā (KVK 1.53)*

The light of Yama's heart appeared in front of sages' eyes and all the gods. While celebrating the power of Hara's *śūla*, it entered Śiva's divine body to find rest, thus reaching its death.

Kāla's triggering rage is rewarded with *mokṣa* (liberation) as he is absorbed into Śiva's body, thus making him, Death, a *bhakta* of Śiva. This Śiva is unaware of his selfhood and is responsive to and reflective of his *bhakta*. The structure of the verse describing the

¹ The spelling *hṛdayya* appears in all known versions of the text.

climax of this extended episode (KVK 1.53) supports Śiva's passivity: the subject of this verse is not the victorious god but rather his enemy-*bhakta*, Kāla.

Stage Two—Sounding the God into Existence

Once Śiva has manifested himself as the Kālāntaka he is praised by Viṣṇu, his collaborator at this heroic moment. Viṣṇu praises Śiva as a god of contradictions while explicating philosophical ideas implied in the first *sarga*—specifically, that dying at the hand of Śiva is the ultimate grace that may be bestowed upon a *bhakta*.

*tava divya-pāṇi-paripūta-nirlasac-
chita-śūla-lūna-nija-kāya-bandhanah
śamano 'yam asta-śamanām gatim gato
na hi nigraho hy ayam anugrahaḥ param* (KVK 2.5)

Pierced by the sharp *śūla* shining with purity in your divine hand, Śamana [Kāla] reached the deathless way by being bound to your body. This [death] is not destruction but rather the most incredible kindness.

When Viṣṇu finishes his song of praise, the other gods, witnesses to the event, begin their praise of both Śiva and Viṣṇu as one unified god. Having witnessed the unification, they sing:

*atha gāḍham aśruta-carīr girah param
viniśamya nah pravahataṁ prasannatām
nija-kautukena calitāntarā vyaṁ
na hi joṣam eva bhavitum kṣamāmahe* (KVK 2.19)

After listening deeply to these unheard-of words, bring us to a state of peacefulness. We, who are utterly filled with enthusiasm, are overjoyed and cannot keep silent.

The gods who have heard the *giraḥ*, words, introduce the notion of god as speech or sound that must be uttered aloud. Conceptualizing god as sound is a Tantric approach to divinity, and it resonates and corresponds with the *Āgama* literature.² In the *Āgama* texts, Śiva is introduced as the cosmic sound splitting itself into fractions of sound that humans can perceive. The gods, too, hear this sound and cannot remain silent at this revelation, much like the Rṣis (Seers) of the *Āgamas*, so they begin to sing:

*yata etad āvirabhavaj jagat-trayaṃ
paripālitaṃ lasati yena tejasā
api yatra nirvṛtim upaiti māyayā
tad idaṃ dvidhā-kṛtam aho nijecchayā* (KVK 2.20)

He manifests the three worlds, protects them, and inhabits them with his brightness. That by whom the three worlds come to rest through his [power of] illusion, becomes two through his will.

This verse introduces a deity with a will, unlike the merely responsive Śiva of *sarga* one. Śiva appears here as the cosmic sound, having gradually transformed himself from a physically embodied entity to a more abstract form, the essence of the universe, its source and destructive illusion. This Tantric notion is conveyed using the word *icchā* (desire, volition)—the unified god divides himself into the physical Śiva and Viṣṇu *at will*.

Although the reader may first sense the deity's self-awareness or its potential in the god's will to manifest himself, Śiva is still dependent on an external agent. It is up to the gods to take up the essential task of reconstructing a unified divine entity, using sound to weld Śiva and Viṣṇu together:

*paśu-mocanaika-niratāya te namaḥ
paśu-pālanaika-niratāya te namaḥ
guru-śaila-vandana-parāya te namaḥ
guru-śaila-cālana-parāya te namaḥ* (KVK 2.22)

² On the metaphysics of the Śaiva *Āgamas*, see Davis 1991: 9–10.

Salutations to you, who is solely engaged in liberating all living souls;
 Salutations to you, who is solely engaged in protecting the living beings;
 Salutation to you, who focuses on worshipping the great mountain,
 [your] father-in-law;
 Salutation to you, who focuses on lifting the great mountain
 [Govardhana].

This verse and others comprising the gods' *stuti* praise the unified form of Śiva and Viṣṇu. The text portrays the two gods by resorting to literary conventions incorporated in well-structured sentences relying on sound patterns. In other words, the god himself is the very device through which other entities materialize him. Thus, Śiva, who has appeared in a bodily form, is pulled into an abstract physicality of the unseen by means of the apprehensible guise of sound. In this way, stage two of Śiva's manifestation is a transitional phase that incorporates his reflective, dependent awareness and his reflexive, self-structuring awareness.

Stage Three—The Ultimate Śiva

In the final stage, Śiva and Viṣṇu unite:

*akhila-muni-janānām antar anveṣaṇīyaṃ
 nikhila-nigama-vācāṃ vibhramair lakṣaṇīyam
 nayana-patham upetaṃ maṅgalānandapūram
 sapadi tam anubhūya vyājigīrṣan munīndraḥ* (KVK 3.1)

Experiencing him, the best of sages immediately wished to praise god who is full of auspicious bliss, who has appeared and become perceptible in the intensities of all the sacred words; he who can be found in the souls of all sages.

Śiva is no longer a god with a body, an “epithet” god with visible icons. Neither is he an entity separate from Viṣṇu. From within the

manifestation of an abstract sound, a unitary form of god emerges, a form that actively and willingly reaches its fullness in this union. The sight of this union inspires the human devotee, Mārkaṇḍeya, to sing at the climax of the *kāvya* the following words:

*stotary evaṃ munīndre gurutara-karuṇā-sāndram utsṛṣṭa-bhedam
tat tattvaṃ prādurāsta pratidiśam abhito dhāma-mātram tad agre
bhūyo 'pi dvaitam eva vyalasad atha muniḥ prāpta-nirvāna-mārgam
matvātmānam pramoda-vyatikaram agamad gadgado bhāvabhedaiḥ
(KVK 3.29)*

While Mārkaṇḍeya, chief of the *muṇis*, praised, the true *tattva* state [of Śiva] manifested. This *tattva* has no divisions; it is dense with great compassion, and its body is all light. It was shining in all directions in front of him [Mārkaṇḍeya]. Then the duality played again, and the sage, considering *himself* as one who has arrived at the path of nirvana, was filled with overwhelming joy. He stuttered as he experienced a whirlwind of emotions.

Notice that Mārkaṇḍeya's *bhāvabhedas*—a variety of emotions arising in him while learning the secret of the inner dynamic of the divine—are the cause of his stuttering. The very same term, *bhāvabhedā*, could also imply the many forms of Śiva's existence. Mārkaṇḍeya has just witnessed Śiva appearing as *one, true self*, which, at will, can divide itself again into two, playing, *vyalasad*, with different forms. Śiva's *bhāva*, condition, and Mārkaṇḍeya's *bhāva*, emotion, are captured in a single compound, thus creating another reflective moment.

In the very last verse of the *kāvya*, Śiva completes his life cycle:

*atha prayāteṣv akhileṣu nākiṣu
dviṭīya-veṣe jaladhīm pratīyuṣi
tasmin punaḥ śvetavane śivaḥ svayaṃ
liṅgātmanā saṃnidadhe munīchayā
(KVK 3.30)*

Then, while all the gods set off and Viṣṇu (the second form/the one appearing as a companion) departed towards the ocean, Śiva, by the wish of [Mārkaṇḍeya] the sage, installed himself in his *liṅga* self at Śvetavana.

In this verse, the reader learns that the deity chose to reside in Śvetavanam, that is, Tṛpraṅgoḍe. Thus, in his poem the poet takes the reader from a narrative that begins in a world of the fantastic to god's immaterial revelation and ends the process of materialization at a specific corporeal place located in the reader's actual world, the Tṛpraṅgoḍe temple, where Kālāntaka indeed resides and where local Kerala tradition places the act of defeating Kāla.

Moving Up: The Hierarchy of Śiva's Manifestations

At first reading, the three stages of the materialization of Śiva presented above portray a linear evolution of the god, similar to the South Indian cosmology described by Handelman (2014: 26), who observes: "The evolution of divinity (...) is the movement from the lower-order reflective to the higher-order reflexive, a metamorphosis to self-realization that is integral to a deity who encompasses the cosmos in his being." Handelman points out two essential features of Śiva's manifestation. The first is the god's reflectivity: when Śiva is responsive to a *bhakta's* (devotee's) trigger, he is reflective. The second is the god's reflexivity: when he is aware of himself, he is a reflexive entity. Handelman interprets this inner dynamic of Śiva in terms of hierarchy: the reflective god dissolves toward his *bhaktas* and experiences some form of loss; he descends. The self-aware god, on the other hand, is transcendent and distant from his devotees. Put differently, the more Śiva is aware of his selfhood, the more reflexive he is and the more abstract he becomes. The *Kālavadha Kāvya* illustrates Handelman's model well.

In the first stage of the *Kālavadha Kāvya*, the act of killing Kāla creates the "epithet" manifestation, pointing to Śiva as a deity dependent on an outer motive and an external executor. According to

Handelman's model, this is a manifestation of a *devolving* god who loses a bit of his selfness to his *bhakta*.

In the second stage of transformation, Śiva appears as sound, an abstract form, constructed by the gods' praising through singing the physicality of the "epithet god." The other gods describe Śiva by his physical qualities but rely on the abstract concept of sound to materialize him. Thus, the *Kālavadhā Kāvya* uses the first materialization to create the even more abstract Śiva. Here the reader experiences a transitional phase that fits Handelman's logic, according to which Śiva awakens into self-awareness as he is made of his own substance but is not quite there yet. He is not yet exercising divine will and is dependent on others' depiction of him.

In the last stage, Śiva manifests himself in his *tattva*, his absolute mode of existence, which comes forth at Śiva's own will. As earlier noted, according to Handelman, the modes of existence moving from reflectivity to reflexivity are arranged in a hierarchal order—with reflexivity being the summit, the most complete and desirable mode of Śiva's existence. In verse 3.29, the *tattva* is fully reflexive as it plays with its different expressions, chooses its own appearance, and is the substance of its own formation. At the same time, it is reflected in Mārkaṇḍeya and mirrors his emotional state.

The tension between the reflexive and reflective modes of Śiva allows us to consider the active participation of the divinity in forming Śiva's self-awareness. The self-aware Śiva chooses his appearance, thus actively generating it. Different divine appearances do not compete; instead, they form a spectrum of divine forms that nourish each other. Śiva's movement on this spectrum is connected, as Handelman has suggested, to the degree of the god's self-awareness.

However, though the three stages of manifestation depicted in the *Kālavadhā Kāvya* appear to unfold according to the linear, hierarchical evolutionary pattern suggested by Handelman—moving up from the lower-order reflective to the higher-order reflexive—the final movement of the third stage suggests a different pattern. In that culminating movement, the fully reflexive, self-aware, free-willed Śiva

chooses to reappear in a physical form of the Trpraṅgoḍe Kālāntaka *liṅga*. By doing this, Śiva breaks off from his united self only to begin a new cycle of manifestation. Put differently, in the *Kālavadha Kāvya* Śiva's metamorphosis to self-realization is not simply a linear evolution through hierarchical stages; rather, the poet presents that metamorphosis as a dynamic of stages that form part of a circular life cycle.

Changing the Paradigm: A Circular Life Cycle

Looking closer at the circular structure of Śiva's inner dynamic in the *Kālavadha Kāvya*, we find four components that characterize each stage of materialization: (1) substance, (2) generating force, (3) mode of existence, and (4) cognitive state. This structure calls for a new paradigm, a new approach to understanding the mechanism of Śiva's sense of self.

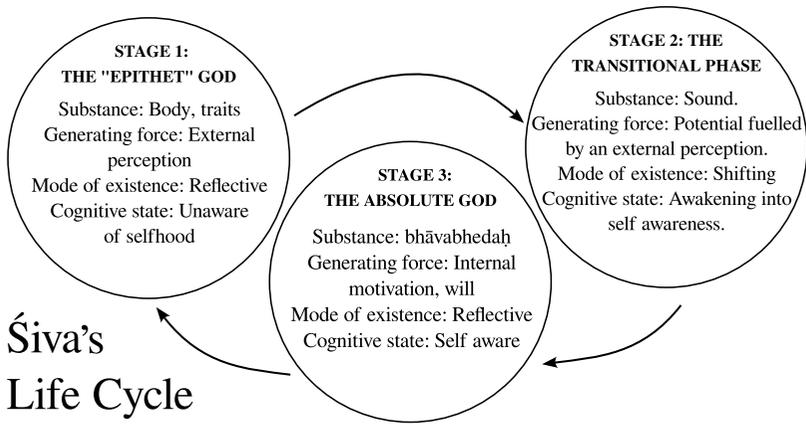
The first component, *substance*, expresses the matter or material that characterizes each stage of materialization. The author utilizes three substances: bodily or physical traits portraying a physical Śiva with a name and history; sound, representing a more abstract idea of the divine, which has the potential to reveal itself; and finally, the *bhāvas*, the many subtle expressions of the god, which represent Śiva's potential to fully manifest.

The second component is the *generating force*—that which motivates Śiva to manifest. The force can be an external power, exerted upon Śiva by his *bhakta*, as in the case of the “epithet” god; it can be Śiva's own will as presented in *sarga* three; or it can even be a mixture of the two, as in the transitional phase conveyed in *sarga* two.

The third component, the *mode of existence* of the manifesting god, reveals Śiva as reflected or reflexive or a combination of both. This component is closely tied to the next component, “the cognitive state,” since mode of existence directly affects awareness.

The fourth component is Śiva's *cognitive state*. Here is where Śiva expresses his degree of self-awareness. Is the god aware of himself? Is he active in forming his self-manifestation?

Analysis of the four components of Śiva's manifestation lead one to the following observation: the more abstract the substance comprising Śiva, the more reflexive he is. And the more reflexive he is, the more he can exercise his divine will, indicating his self-awareness. Thus, in contrast to Handleman's view, which considers the reflective, "epithet" god as the one that dissolves toward his *bhakta*, in the case of the *Kālavadha* life cycle, Śiva begins as a solid, corporeal entity and *dissolves* into his ultimate self, spreading out and transforming into a manifestation.



This metaphysical process corresponds to the Tantric notion that Śiva divides himself in order to manifest himself and produce the material world (Padoux 1990: 91; Reich 2021: 58–83). It is this diffuse entity that constitutes the great potential of the god waiting to be fulfilled. From this unlimited potential, a new cycle may emerge.

This analytical scheme explains the movement of Śiva within each stage of manifestation: the more tangible the substance of the god, the more he is dependent on external execution and reflection to bring him to a certain level of self-discovery. What then makes Śiva move from one stage to the next? The answer may lie in the relations between the different reflective conditions and how they influence Śiva's selfhood.

The Dancing Bhadrakālī or How the God Came to Know Himself

Śiva expresses himself through the mechanism of manifestation. His existential mode, the measure of his reflexivity, enables his cycle of manifestation to progress. A reflective Śiva awakens into a sense of self through the actions of his *bhakta*. His awakening self is now hungry for more experience of himself-in-formation. The *Kālavadha Kāvya* expresses this hunger through the growing activity exercised by Śiva.

In the process of amplifying his presence and based on his will to arrive at his ultimate mode of being, Śiva shifts in stage one of materialization from inactivity and dependence on the *bhakta* to active participation. This inherent movement toward active participation enables the god to witness himself generating his own self. In other words, an aware god is an active god. Thus, the *Kālavadha Kāvya* life cycle shows that when Śiva manifests himself in an unmodified form, he stands in a contradictory existential mode—Śiva is both reflective and reflexive at the same time.

The mutual modes of being are the essence of the *tattva-rūpa*, the true form, of Śiva. From this perspective, the inner dynamic of Śiva can be understood as one essence experiencing duality. This inner dynamic echoes that of the Ardhanārīśvara, the androgynous Śiva, both male and female. The androgynous nature of Śiva includes the masculine Śiva on the right side of the body and the feminine *śakti* on the left. *Śakti*, that is, power, ability, or strength, can manifest either as an amorphic force that drives the god's actions or as the embodiment of any one of his female consorts. In either case, this *śakta* element constitutes the deity's proactive force, and is thus closely linked to the reflexive nature of Śiva.

One example connecting androgynous experience to the matter of reflexivity is found in a Kerala theatrical piece, the Kūṭiyāṭṭam production of the *Mattavilāsam*—more specifically, the embedded story of Bhadrakālī, in its unique local version. In this version of the Pūraṇic tale, Śiva creates Bhadrakālī from the fire in his third eye so that she may kill the recalcitrant demons emerging from demon Tāraka's drops

of blood. She indeed destroys them but is now herself out of control. The goddess's hunger grows, and she threatens to consume the whole universe. Śiva then stands before the raging goddess and begins dancing to soothe her. She sees the god, joins his dance, and calms down (Shulman 2021).

Bhadrakālī is a part of Śiva, fashioned by his will from his own self, and can be understood as an expression of his androgynous nature. Therefore, Kālī's deadly hunger is also Śiva's hunger to know his own self and express his selfness. Once Bhadrakālī has achieved her purpose—killing the *bīja-raktam* demons—she is eager to consume more of the universe and satiate her hunger. Śiva begins his dance. At this moment, Bhadrakālī is a part of Śiva himself; she stands in front of Śiva and sees him dance. She begins to dance and reflects Śiva as a mirror. On the level of plot, this is a reflective moment. Both gods mirror each other. At the same time, situated in front of the dancing goddess, it is not only the goddess that Śiva sees but also himself.

Śiva's calming intervention is his opportunity to exercise both activity and will. He is active in controlling Bhadrakālī's hunger, his hunger, and achieves this through manifesting himself as Nāṭarāja, the dancing Śiva. Thus, Bhadrakālī's raging hunger is met with Śiva's will to express his selfhood. This resonance constitutes a highly reflexive moment. No wonder, then, that the Cākṃyār actors incorporated this widely known episode with its unique ending into the *Mattavilāsam* performance.

This theatrical piece is highly ritualized and philosophically corresponds to different—reflective and reflexive—modes of Śiva (Shulman 2021). In this way the Kūṭiyāṭṭam tradition explains the origin of the divine dance and the origin of the dancers, the Kūṭiyāṭṭam actors themselves. A reflexive approach in itself, the narrative of Bhadrakālī in the *Mattavilāsam* context highlights the notion that Śiva must obtain both modes of reflexivity to completely fulfill his potential. This critical moment resonates with that of Śiva's *bhāvabhedas* reflecting in Mārkaṇḍeya. There, too, the god experiences the duality at the base of Śiva's actualization as a unified essence.

Bhadrakālī's example points to a deeper understanding of the reflexivity of Śiva. In the moment of dancing, Śiva the male looks at Bhadrakālī, his feminine self. The androgynous god has split into its parts. Without this separation, there is no possibility of experiencing simultaneously both reflective and reflexive moments. Thus, the goddess, being part of Śiva, is at the root of his reflexive modus. Without her and without their ability to split from one another, Śiva, as a divine concept, cannot obtain his ultimate fullness.

The Kālavadha expresses this idea in subtle references to the androgynous Śiva. In a series of verses describing his relationship with the goddess, the text establishes the reflexivity of Śiva in the goddess herself. Interestingly, as in the Bhadrakālī episode, the prominent motifs used to express this link are the acts of gazing and the dance.

The goddess's first appearance in *sarga* 1 situates her in the context of dance and calm enjoyment:

*vismārayan vilasitaiḥ smara-dāha-vārtām
sevāvilāsamaya-lāśya-rasajña-vargam
narmoktibhiḥ pramadayan nalināruṇākṣam
ālokayan giri-sutānanam antarāle* (KVK 1.9)

With his graceful games, he makes those who have tasted the gentle playfulness of serving him forget the act of burning Kāma. He pleases Viṣṇu with witty jokes. During the breaks, he glances at Pārvatī.

The *lāśya* here refer to the entertainments in the hall and, more specifically, the gentle dance associated with the feminine aspect of the androgynous representation of Śiva (O'Flaherty 1980: 132–133). The dance in the assembly hall is the same as the one Śiva performs in order to calm Bhadrakālī. The dance in the hall is also tied to the notion of gaze. Śiva casts his glances at the goddess during the intermediate intervals, *antarāla*, created by the pauses in the dance. These are the quick, shy looks a lover might give to his beloved. Śiva's glances are thrown back at him by the goddess:

*trasati priyā tava galānucumbitaṃ
bata kālakūṭam iti kūṭa-vārtayā
yad idaṃ lasat-kuvalayodara-dyuter
nija-netra-pāta-lalitasya jṛmbhitam* (KVK 2.8)

It is no wonder that your beloved, Pārvaṭī, is afraid because of the false rumor that the dark blue color on your neck is the *kālakūṭam* poison. Surprisingly, your neck shines blue because of the blue-water lily-like splendor blooming in [Pārvaṭī's] playful eyes as she gazes [at your neck].

The blue-black mark on Śiva's neck, a well-known iconographic feature, is not the poison he drank when saving the universe from calamity; instead, it is the blue light cast at him by Pārvaṭī's glance. Put differently, the goddess's reflection touches Śiva's neck and brands him with what is known as his trademark. Once again, the power of a glance brings Śiva to manifestation. Nevertheless, the goddess, the active element of Śiva, is projecting the god to himself. From this perspective, Śiva's blue neck portrays a reflexive moment. Thus, the goddess is the operating principle of the god in charge of awakening his own awareness of himself. Indeed, in Tantric schools of thought, the feminine *śakti* element of Śiva is associated with *vimarśa*—god's self-awareness (Padoux 1990: 77).

Similarly, verse 2.8 exposes the reflexive-reflective tension inherent in Śiva's manifestation. As demonstrated above, a glance, which is a method of forming the god, is strongly connected to the calming effect of dance:

*adhilāsyam ullasitam apsaro-gaṇair
abhikālavairi-vilasad-vilocanaiḥ
nayanāgni-dagdha-vapuṣā manobhuvā
niyataṃ prasādayitum eva coditaiḥ* (KVK 2.27)

The celestial dancers were encouraged by Kāma, whose body was burnt in the fire of [Śiva's] eye, to dance the pleasant dance, with [their] eyes gleaming toward Śiva, the killer of Kāla. It is undoubtedly in order to calm [him].

The Apsaras look at Śiva, dancing to calm him down, just as Śiva looks at and dances with Bhadrakālī. Since the readers have read verse 1.9, they already know that the dance is an inherent aspect of the god. Based on this understanding, we, the readers, can comprehend the reflexive moment in verse 2.27. This reflexive moment joins the examples given above in portraying and articulating an understanding of the goddess as the active participating element of the androgynous Śiva and herself the reflexive quality of the god, which allows him to discover (or re-discover) his sense of self.

Conclusion: Motion is Śiva's Nature—Corresponding with Tantric Metaphysics

This essay has dealt with the internal, circular dynamic of manifestation that operates in Śiva's life cycle as presented in the *Kālavadhā Kāvya* of Kṛṣṇalīlāśuka. From a reflective, non-aware, inactive consciousness Śiva moves—through an awakening—to a self-awareness expressed in acting out his own will. At the fullest stage of his manifestation, Śiva is both reflexive—creating himself willingly, from his own substance—and reflected, his internal process projected and reflected upon an external entity, which may be itself a fraction of Śiva. What was reflected out of Śiva reflects back at him. This dynamic is the power that moves Śiva from one kind of self-expression to another. In other words, Śiva experiences a dual state of being, which is integral to his emergence as the unity of the universe.

To conclude, the *Kālavadhā Kāvya* is a unique text that presents a kinetic sense of Śiva's self. Śiva's selfhood is expressed by means of his very life cycle, which is structured and bound to an internal dynamic based on a tensile balance between the reflexive and reflective modes of the god and manifested through an ongoing circular movement of contraction and expansion of Śiva's self-awareness. This dynamic, which reflects the intellectual environment in which the author, Kṛṣṇalīlāśuka, operated, has been skillfully crafted and woven into a well-known narrative that would have been familiar to the South Indian reader of the 14th century.

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