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Becoming the Dancer
Dissolving the Boundaries between Ritual, Cognition, and Theatrical
Performance in Non-dual Śaivism*

SUMMARY: This paper explores the connection between cognitive ritual and theatrical performance in non-dual Śaivism based on the textual study of the *Mahārthamañjarī* written by Maheśvarānanda (13th–14th centuries) and related texts. The *Mahārthamañjarī* incorporates the image of the dancing Śiva of Chidambaram to expound certain ideas of non-dual Śaiva doctrine and practice. One of the most important issues discussed by Maheśvarānanda was the meaning of Śiva's dance and the possibility for a man or a human agent to become Śiva-the Dancer by performing the Five Acts (*pañcakṛtya*). Surveying the different meanings of *pañcakṛtya* that have developed over time, this paper explores how Maheśvarānanda's project of discovery one's own status as Śiva-the Dancer is essentially a discovery of being an agent of the Five Acts.

KEYWORDS: cognitive ritual, performance, dancing Śiva, non-dual Śaivism, *pañcakṛtya*

1. Introduction

Non-dual Śaivism provides us with a model of ritual that effectively crosses the boundaries between ritual, cognition, and theatrical performance, and in this way demonstrates how artificial these boundaries can be. The rites are acted out in thought, and not in physical space, therefore the sequence of ritual action is interpreted in terms of cognition

* I am very grateful to Elisa Ganser and Ewa Dębicka-Borek for their suggestions, comments and unwavering support in revising this paper. I also thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticism and careful reading of the Sanskrit passages. The work on this paper has been financially supported by FIND (Fondation Inde-Europe de Nouveaux Dialogues).

and knowledge. Since the ritual action assumes an inner, cognitive dimension that stands in opposition to the outer, external one, the use of external objects that normally facilitate ritual action—such as gestures, recitation and sacrificial substances—is substituted by the reflection on the underlying identity between the individual self (*puruṣa*) and Śiva, the pure consciousness. For some authors of non-dual Śaivism, this reflection assumes a peculiar form of role-taking, where the *puruṣa* takes on the role of Śiva-the Dancer by performing his Five Acts. In my paper, I will focus on the theoretical model that appropriates the concept of the dancing Śiva and links it with a discovery of one’s own status as a performer, a playful agent, expounded in the work of Maheśvarānanda.

Maheśvarānanda (13th–14th century) was an exponent of non-dual Śaivism of Kashmir and a resident of Chidambaram, the town famous for the temple dedicated to the dancing Śiva (Naṭarāja), during the reign of the Cōḷa kings. In his *Mahārthamañjarī*, Maheśvarānanda not only adopted the image of the dancing Śiva to expound certain ideas and practices of non-dual Śaivism, but he also enshrined Naṭarāja as a symbol of the non-dual Śaiva pantheon, epitomizing both the Trika and the Krama doctrinal identities (Sanderson 1990: 33). When clarifying the purpose (*prayojana*) of writing his treatise, Maheśvarānanda avers: “Out of affection for his pupils he (Maheśvarānanda) composed his book so that, O wonder!, like the Lord dancing in the middle of the Golden Hall (*kanakasadas*), Śiva who is reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) is clearly here before our eyes!”¹ These glosses show that the main purpose of Maheśvarānanda’s literary undertaking is to activate in his disciples a direct perception (*sākṣātkāra*) of Śiva, who, defined within the framework of the Pratyabhijñā philosophy, is reflective awareness. This direct perception is, in turn, compared to Naṭarāja dancing in the *kanaka-sabhā* of the Chidambaram Naṭarāja temple. Again, at the end of his book, Maheśvarānanda makes

¹ *kanakasadaso madhye nṛtyann iva prabhur adbhutam | yad iha sulabhaḥ sākṣātkartuṃ vimarśamayāḥ śivaḥ || Mahārthamañjarī with Parimala*, p. 194. Trans. Smith 1996: 190.

rather conspicuous reference to Naṭarāja with regard to his literary undertaking: “This book is as sweet as the Kāverī (river), as fragrant as the water lily, its importance is like that of Naṭeśa’s dance.”² There is also a quotation from the *Ānandatāṇḍavavilāsastotra*, a lost text attributed to Maheśvarānanda’s guru Mahāprakāśa which, as the title itself suggests, is a praise of Naṭarāja’s dance of bliss (*ānandatāṇḍava*) framed in the perspective of the Śaiva doctrine of non-duality: “We, for our part, praise your shining down through the universe when you look outwards, and when you look inwards we praise your inner composure composed of the bliss of autonomy—freedom arising from bringing about the dissolution of the universe.”³ These sparse but, nonetheless, important references to Naṭarāja of Chidambaram start to make sense when we assume a hypothetical link between the image of Naṭarāja and the concept of Śiva-the Dancer expounded in the verse 19 of the *Mahārthamañjarī*. It is in this verse that Maheśvarānanda justifies and provides philosophical explanation to his concluding statement in which he equates the importance of his book to Naṭeśa’s dance. It is here where a new interpretation of Śiva’s dance emerges most clearly focusing, in particular, on the possibilities for a human to become Śiva-the Dancer by performing the Five Acts (*pañcakṛtya*), interpreted within the esoteric framework of the Krama theology as Five Flow Goddesses (*pañcavāha*). Even though the concept of the dancing Śiva has a long history in the Śaiva soteriology prior to Maheśvarānanda⁴

² *kāveryā iva mādhuryaṃ kahlārasyeva saurabham | naṭeśasyeva tan-
nṛttam asya granthasya gauravam || Mahārthamañjarī* with *Parimala*, p. 195.
Trans. Smith 1996: 190.

³ *yac coktam asmadgurubhir ānandatāṇḍavavilāsastotre—vayaṃ tv
imāṃ viśvatayā avabhānaṃ bahirmukhasyāsya tavonmukhasya | svasaṃhītaṃ
viśvavilāpanodyatsvatantratānandamayīṃ namāmaḥ || iti | Mahārthamañjarī*
with *Parimala*, pp. 159–160. Trans. Smith *ibid*.

⁴ It is perhaps worth mentioning that the great Pallava king Mahendra-
varman (7th century), who established his court in Kāñcīpuram, praises, in the intro-
ductory verses of his satirical play *Mattavilāsa*, the divine Śiva-the Skull Bearer
(*divyaḥ kapālī*), who is himself a spectator who dances “seized of emotions

with origins antedating the famous stanza of the *Śivasūtra* (3.9): “The Self is the Dancer” (*nartaka ātma*) often referred to in the non-dual exegetical literature of Kashmir as an authoritative statement proving Śiva’s dancing nature, Maheśvarānanda was the first non-dual Śaiva author who linked Śiva’s dance with the concept of *pañcakṛtya/pañcavāha*.

In order to understand the rationale behind Maheśvarānanda’s interest in the dancing Śiva we need to consider the larger socio-political framework, which is often responsible for changes in doctrine and practice. Thus, the adoption of the local cult of Naṭarāja by Maheśvarānanda should be located in the broader socio-religious-political realm of Cōḷa Chidambaram, in which the conceptual framework of Maheśvarānanda’s tantric system can be seen as reflecting the specific intellectual underpinnings of a particular historical and cultural milieu. The methodological approach I am adopting here remains responsive to the specifics of history and is thus contingent on understanding the influence of socio-political factors in shaping theories and practices. The Cōḷa rulers belonged to a cultural milieu in which the concept

and portraying sentiments—comprising the courses of the three worlds—by speech, dress, action and feelings.” *Mattavilāsa* of Mahendravarman, trans. by N. P. Unni, quoted in: Zvelebil 1985: 53. Moreover, Śaiva tantric literature abounds with the images of dancing Bhairavas. For example, in the fifteenth chapter of the *Kulakaulinīmata*, which is attributed to the Western Tradition (*paścimāmnāya*, worshipping the goddess Kubjikā), Bhairava in the form of Man-Lion (Nārasimha) is referred to as the Lord of the Body (*kula*), the Lord of Dance who bears all forms. Cf. *Kulakaulinīmata* 15.268–278. Another illustration of dancing Bhairava, this time in his Navātman form, is found in the *Śambhavanirṇaya*, the text exposing a variant of the Kubjikā cult (*paścimāmnāya*), which Sanderson has identified as the Ṣaḍanvaya Śāmbhava. In this system, Śiva as Navātman/Navakeśvara is visualized dancing as he embraces his consort Samayā/Kubjikā. Cf. *Śambhavanirṇaya* 3.10. Quoted in: Sanderson 1990: 55, cf. 102. In the third verse of Abhinavagupta’s *Tantrāloka*, in the description of the three Trika goddesses, the goddess Aparā is said to be residing in the body of dancing Bhairava and plays within it like a lightning flash in a sky covered with stormy clouds. See Tā 1.3.

of royal power was being derived fundamentally from its aesthetic capacity. Like the majority of royal courts of South and Southeast Asia of the medieval period, the Cōlas adopted this global trend of the aesthetic representation of power and used it as a tool of legitimization of their royal sovereignty (Pollock 1998; Ali 2004). The implementation of this aesthetic paradigm of power can be seen both in the realm of art and architecture that became inherently politicized—i.e. royal temples (Tañjāvūr, Gangaikondacōlapuram, Chidambaram), royal gods (Naṭarāja), etc.—as well as in the application of a common aesthetic ‘language practice’ based on the stylistic devices of Sanskrit *kāvya* and royal eulogies (*praśasti*), especially used for depicting the authority of kings and their political actions (Ali 2004).⁵ The principle of aesthetics had also played a central role in adapting Naṭarāja—the dancing Śiva of Chidambaram as the family deity (*kula-devatā*) of the Cōla’s ancestral lineage. In the 10th century, the icon of Naṭarāja underwent a radical makeover to fit into the aesthetic agenda of the Cōla kings, who, in order to establish a homology between the royal and the sacred, perfected Naṭarāja’s dancing pose and made it fit into the graceful posture of a royal god.⁶ The makeover of Naṭarāja’s icon went hand in hand

⁵ For example, the conquest of Tañjāvūr by Vijayalāya Cōla narrated in the Trivalangadu plates of Rājendra Cōla accommodates the metaphor of erotic love “in which the whitewash of the town’s mansion is compared to scented cosmetic and Vijayalāya is said to have captured the town just as he would seize his own wife who has beautiful eyes, graceful curls, a cloth covering her body, and sandal paste as white as lime, in order to sport with her” (Spencer 1982: 92). The capture of the city is compared to the sexual seizure of a woman whose description is eroticized. This example shows how the popular sentiment of *kāvya* literature—erotic sentiment or *śṛṅgāra rasa*—was employed to convey the aesthetics of a political action. See also Ali 2000 and 2004.

⁶ Historically speaking, the introduction and development of the image of Śiva as the Lord of Dance (Naṭeśa) begins in Tondaimaṇḍalam under the Pallava rule in the 7th century. However, it was not before the 10th century, under the patronage of the Cōla queen Semibyan Mahādevī, that the image of a classical Naṭarāja in a graceful *ānanda-taṇḍava* pose was created (Kaimal 1996: 61).

with the progressive change in the architectural design of the Naṭarāja Chidambaram temple, which began to serve as “a metaphor for a royal power [...] and also as an ideological tool for the Chola monarchy” (Champakalakshmi 2011: 488). From Cōḷa times onwards, we increasingly find Chidambaram as a space that undergoes architectural remodeling, marked by expansionism in order to host specific religious-cum-political events. Religious space becomes remodeled as theatrical space to include the audience. The vast halls and open courtyards are commissioned by the Cōḷa kings to accommodate a growing number of spectators in order to facilitate a new cultural practice that placed festivals (*utsava*) at the centre of Cōḷa Chidambaram (Wentworth 2008). Festivals were the most effective tools for staging royal selfhood, a staging that was used to schematize the political and the religious dimensions of regality in the same format of image-making, by relying on a cosmic parallelism. The recorded history of the Cōḷa period gives evidence that the 10-day festival, performed monthly in the various temples of Chidambaram, was directly linked to the personal asterism of the ruler: either with the day of the king’s accession to power or the day of his natal star (Swaminathan 1978: 270–74). By sharing the same natal star, the identity of the king was connected to that of the deity and, through this connection, the king’s persona acquired both cosmic and divine identity.⁷ During the festival, the king and the image of the god were both driven in processional chariots throughout the city. In most general terms, the procession in chariots conveyed the idea

⁷ The asterism of Rājendra Cōḷa was Ārdra, also known as Ārudra (for the presiding deity of this asterism was Rudra), which was also the natal star of Naṭarāja. During this Ārdra festival, drama, dance and singing of *bhakti* hymns were performed. Since both the ruler and the god shared the same asterism, the festival called Rājendra Cōḷaṅ Tirunaḷ (‘The Sacred Day of Rājendra Cōḷa’) was organized in honour of the king (*Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy* 104 of 1913, Swaminathan 1978: 274). Similarly, the second annual Naṭarāja festival after Ārdra, known as Āṇi Mahotsava, still performed today in Chidambaram, was initially associated with the asterism of Uttirattādi or Uttara Bhādra-pāda, the natal star of Vikrama Cōḷa (Swaminathan 1978: 273).

of dominion over the territorial space covered by it. The Cōlas were attracted to the totality of powers ascribed to the Naṭarāja image and to his performative capacity to dance, which was articulated in the context of territorial annexation as well as of aesthetic perfection. Therefore, they took recourse to the practices of legitimating royal power by establishing control over the field of visual perception, intent on creating parallels between the king and the god, in which both acquired the status of performer. In one of the royal eulogies, for example, Rājarāja I's destruction of the rival armies is compared to Śiva's act of destruction, annihilating the souls at the end of the eon.⁸ Recurrent festivals (*satatotsava*), which—as Maheśvarānanda tells us—were often taking place in Cōla Chidambaram,⁹ contributed to the crystallization of the image of the powerful performer in the popular psyche in which the god and the king 'danced' together in the political conquest or *digvijaya*. This parallelism and complementarity between the Cōla king and Naṭarāja made them both the embodiment of sovereign power. Maheśvarānanda's work should thus be seen as a product of the high culture of Cōla Chidambaram, in which the importance of the aesthetic representation of power was particularly recognized. In this connection the icon of Naṭarāja, royal temples, royal eulogies and the vast array of the aesthetic media of communication, i.e., festivals, etc., reached their peak.

Apart from the 'external' motives noted above, Maheśvarānanda's adoption of Naṭarāja could also be interpreted by means of 'internal' factors, insofar as his treatise implicitly addresses dogmatic issues. These were considered of utmost importance to the competing Śaiva discourses that had their stronghold in Cōla Chidambaram. It is arguable that Maheśvarānanda tried to develop strategies for coming to terms with the highly successful Śaiva Saiddhāntika orthodox forces in the hope of securing royal patronage. This was not only vital for his own survival as a scholar, but also to provide a much needed boost to enhance the status of a presumably marginal non-dualistic Śaiva movement. Textual and

⁸ Leyden Plates of Rājarāja I, in: Balasubrahmanyam 1975: 7–8.

⁹ *colās te satatotsavā janapadāḥ* MMP, p. 195.

epigraphical evidence show that the Cōḷa kings were initiated by Śaiva Siddhānta gurus who were deeply woven within the fabric of Cōḷa Chidambaram. The latter often assumed the role of royal preceptor (*rājaguru*) with the authority to provide Śaiva initiation (*dīkṣā*) to the monarch (Sanderson 2005). Īśānaśiva, the royal preceptor of Rājarāja I (985–1014) and presiding priest of his royal temple at Tañjāvūr, was a Śaiva Siddhāntin. Īśānaśiva's successor Sarvaśiva, also a Śaiva Siddhāntin, was the royal preceptor of Rājendra Cōḷa I (*ibid.*: 233). Finally, in 12th-century Chidambaram lived Aghoraśiva, the author of the *Tattvaparakāśavṛtti*. According to Cox (Cox 2006), Aghoraśiva was one of the most important exponents of the Śaiva Siddhānta, closely affiliated to the royal dynasty of the Cōḷas and the Naṭarāja temple. Given Aghoraśiva's popularity, and the widespread use of his ritual manual *Kriyākramadyotikā* throughout Śaiva temples in South India, it seems plausible to suggest that by engaging in polemic with him, Maheśvarānanda wanted to distinguish himself as a scholar. Again, according to Cox (*ibid.*), Maheśvarānanda's exposition of the thirty-six levels of reality (*tattvas*) based on the Pratyabhijñā philosophy—given in the first part of the *Mahārthamañjarī*—may be interpreted as a polemic attempt against the interpretation of the *tattvas* in Aghoraśiva's *Tattvaparakāśavṛtti*. If we accept the argument that Maheśvarānanda's treatise was written out of the need and ambition to compete with the Śaiva Saiddhāntins, then it is also plausible to argue that his engagement with one of the most important theological issues discussed by his rival tradition, namely the concept of Śiva's *pañcakṛtya* ('the Five Acts'), would be an effective way to enter the philosophical debate. Beginning with Tirumular, Śaiva Saiddhāntika theologians had linked the Five Acts of Śiva to his dance. I argue that Maheśvarānanda's adoption of the Naṭarāja concept in philosophical garbs stemmed to a considerable extent from two facts: on the one hand, it was motivated by the encounter with the dominant aesthetic ideology represented by the Cōḷas, on the other, by a state-supported theology promoted by the leading Śaiva Siddhānta masters.

Maheśvarānanda's adoption of Naṭarāja into his tantric system, which he calls *anuttarāmnāya*, rests on two assumptions. First, Naṭarāja becomes the symbol of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) or reflective awareness

(*vimarśa*); second, identity between the individual self (*puruṣa*) and Śiva becomes established on the ground of sharing the nature of the Dancer (*nartaka*). The Dancer is additionally described as a playful agent performing the Five Acts (*pañcakṛtya/pañcavāha*). Thus, Maheśvarānanda's project of discovery one's own status as Śiva-the Dancer is essentially a discovery of being an agent of the Five Acts.

2. Dissolving the boundaries between ritual, cognition and theatrical performance

Insofar as ritual and worship are concerned, Maheśvarānanda seems to faithfully follow the footsteps of his predecessors, Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja, who attempted to dissociate ritual from the physical space and relocate its function and meaning into the inner space of consciousness. The concept of ritual action becomes redefined as action taking place in consciousness, and the external rites—the sacrifice (*yāga*),¹⁰ fire oblation (*homa*),¹¹

¹⁰ *tatra bhāvānām sarveṣāṃ parameśvara eva sthitiḥ nānyat vyatiriktam asti iti vikalparūḍhisiddhaye parameśvara eva sarvabhāvārpaṇaṃ yāgaḥ sa ca hṛdyatvāt ye saṃvidanupraveśaṃ svayam eva bhajante teṣāṃ suśakaṃ parameśvare arpaṇaṃ ity abhiprāyeṇa hṛdyānām kusumatarpaṇagandhādīnām bahirupayoga uktaḥ* || TS, chap. 4 (pp. 25–26)—“The sacrifice (*yāga*) means the offering of every state and condition of being to the Supreme Lord alone by reinforcing the mental representation: ‘all states and conditions of being rest in Paramaśiva alone and nothing else apart from Him truly exists’. The use of external things, such as the offering of flowers, food and perfume, because of their capacity to produce delight in the heart, are said to have immediate access to consciousness. The offering of these (delightful) things to the Supreme Lord with this intention is easy indeed.”

¹¹ *sarve bhāvāḥ parameśvaratejomayā iti rūḍhavikalpaprāptyai parameśasaṃvidanalatejasi samastabhāvagrāsasikatābhimate tattejomātrāvaśeṣatvasahasamastabhāvavilāpanaṃ homaḥ* || TS, chap. 4 (p. 26)—“Fire oblation (*homa*) is the dissolution of every condition of being (*bhāva*) in the splendour of the fire of pure consciousness (*saṃvit*) of the Supreme Lord, who is identified with the devourer swallowing all conditions of being with the purpose of

prayer (*japa*),¹² observance (*vrata*)¹³ and union (*yoga*)¹⁴—become transferred into a purely inner type of ritual. Maheśvarānanda, for his part, introduces the concept of ‘inner worship’ (*antarbhakti*), and suggests that the only deity to be worshipped is the great light of one’s own consciousness, and nothing else.¹⁵ Similarly, the use of ritual

arriving at perfect mental representation: ‘all conditions of being are created as the splendour of the Supreme Lord’. This splendour only remains, while the rest is the oblation in the sacrificial fire.”

¹² *tathā ubhayātmakaparāmarśodayārthaṃ bāhyābhyantarādīprameyārūpabhinnabhāvānapekṣayaiva evaṃ vidhaṃ tat paraṃ tattvaṃ svasvabhāvabhūtam iti antaḥ parāmarśanaṃ japaḥ* || TS, chap. 4 (p. 26)—“Prayer (*japa*) is the (cultivation) of the inner thought-reflection (*parāmarśa*) that the supreme principle exists in its own nature, without association with external and internal forms of cognizable objects. This thought-reflection is carried out with the purpose of generating the (pure) reflection consisting of both external and internal forms.”

¹³ *sarvatra sarvadā nirupāyaparamēśvarābhīmānalābhāya paramēśvarasamatābhīmānena dehasyāpi ghaṭāder apy avalokanaṃ vratam | yathoktaṃ śrīnandiśikhāyām*—“*sarvasāmyaṃ paraṃ vratam iti* ||” TS, chap. 4 (p. 27)—“Observance (*vrata*) is viewing everything—like a body, a jar, etc.—everywhere and at all times, with the presumption of being equal to the Supreme Lord. This is for the purpose of attaining the conception of being the supreme Lord, which is unattainable by any other means. As it has been stated in the *Nandiśikhā*: ‘Equality with regard to all things is the true observance’.”

¹⁴ *itthaṃ vicitrāiḥ śuddhavidyāṃsarūpaiḥ vikalpaiḥ yat anapekṣitavikalpaṃ svābhāvikaṃ paramārthatattvaṃ prakāśate tasyaiva sanātanatathāvidhaprakāśamātratārūḍhaye tatsvarūpānusamdhānātmā vikalpaviśeṣo yogaḥ* || TS, chap. 4 (p. 26)—“In this way, union (*yoga*) is a particular mental representation, which has as its nature the act of synthetic awareness (*anusamdhāna*) entering into the Lord’s nature. By means of it, the mental representation which is independent, natural and belonging to the supreme category, becomes manifested through various cognitions that are in themselves part of Pure Knowledge, and is being made to expand into the continuous light (of pure consciousness) alone.”

¹⁵ See MMP, v. 47 (p. 118): *mahāprakāśa eva devatā, nānyaḥ kaścit* | —“The great luminosity is verily the deity and none other.”

substances, normally offered during worship, such as scented flowers, incense and lights are opposed and ridiculed for making noise; instead, the act of worship is redefined as the thought-reflection (*parāmarśa*) on one's own true nature.¹⁶ Maheśvarānanda advocates turning away from the exteriority of ritual action to the interiority of consciousness. The shift in emphasis from the external to the internal extends even to the ritual objects. As a matter of fact, worship of different types of material *liṅgas* made of earth, stone, or jewel should be forsaken altogether and substituted by the worship of the *liṅga* made of consciousness.¹⁷ Furthermore, Maheśvarānanda links people's tendency to rely on external rites with their innate ignorance, which, according to the precepts of non-dual Śaivism, is the cause of bondage and transmigration.¹⁸ Maheśvarānanda is clear that the performance of external rites, such as worship (*pūjā*), prayer (*japa*), visualization (*dhyāna*), fire-sacrifice (*homa*), and worship of the *liṅga*, continues as long as one does not understand the true nature of the supreme principle of consciousness, which he—following the description given in the Kaula text, *Śrīprabhākaula*—defines as tranquil, omnipotent and pure. Once such understanding is reached, the enactment of those external rites loses its purpose and significance.¹⁹ Maheśvarānanda goes even

¹⁶ See MMP, v. 42 (p. 106): *tasmāt svasvarūpaparāmarśa eva paramā pūjā | anyat tu gandhapuṣpadhūpadīpādi āḍambaramātram iti tātparyārthaḥ |*

¹⁷ See MMP, v. 47 (p. 118): *tathā śrīpūrve—sarvam anyat parityajya cittamātre niveśayet | mṛddhātuśailaratnādibhavaṃ liṅgaṃ na pūjayet | arcayec cinmayam liṅgaṃ yatra līnaṃ carācaram || iti |*

¹⁸ Tā I.22. *iha tāvat samasteṣu śāstreṣu pariḡiyate | ajñānaṃ saṃsāra-hetur jñānaṃ mokṣaikaakāraṇam ||*—“Meanwhile here (in our tradition) all the scriptures unanimously declare that ignorance is the cause of transmigration and knowledge is the only cause of liberation.”

¹⁹ See MMP, v. 42 (p. 107): *yathā ca śrīprabhākaule—yāvat tat paramam śāntam na vijānāti sundari | tāvat pūjāpādhyānahomaliṅgārcanādīkam || vidite tu pare tattve sarvākāre nirāmaye | kva pūjā kva japo homaḥ kva ca liṅgapariḡrahaḥ || iti ||*—“For instance, in the *Śrīprabhākaula*, it is also stated: ‘O Beautiful Lady, as long as that supreme tranquillity is not

further. Quoting from VBh 153, he says that once the adept realizes that the non-dual Śiva-consciousness is equally the ritual agent, the ritual object, and the ritual substance, there is no longer any ‘thing’ at all that should be offered worship.²⁰ Such a position only reinforces the theoretical framework of non-dualism according to which there is nothing whatsoever that exists outside of consciousness, therefore there is no ontological difference between Śiva and the world, Śiva and the devotee, and so on. Once the cloud of duality that obscures the true nature of non-duality is removed, the all-pervading Śiva-consciousness, in whom everything is included, shines forth.

The internalization of ritual action is merely a prerequisite for understanding Maheśvarānanda’s concept of cognitive ritual, which he indeed borrowed from the Krama tradition. Maheśvarānanda was well acquainted with the Krama system and its scriptural basis. In fact, the second part of his treatise (beginning with verse 34) is almost entirely dedicated to the exposition of Krama esoteric practice, which he expounds citing frequently from the Krama scriptures, i.e. *Kramasadbhāva*, Trivandrum *Mahānaya prakāśa*, *Mahānaya prakāśa* of Arṇasimha, *Cidgaganacandrikā*, *Kramasiddhi*, *Kramakeli*, and *Kramavāsanā*. The Krama masters, beginning with the first historically attested preceptor Jñānanetra (mid 9th century), developed a cognitive ritual system for the worship of the goddesses who embody the process of cognition. These goddesses alone constitute the internal consciousness-based sphere of the ritual. In this ritual, the worship of the cognitive act represented by the goddesses of

understood, so long worship, recitation, meditation, fire-sacrifice, worship of the *līṅga*, etc. [persist]. When the highest reality is known, in all forms and pure, where is worship? Where is recitation? Where is the fire-sacrifice? And where is the worship of the *līṅga*?”

²⁰ See MMP, v. 42 (p. 107): *yad uktam śrīvijñānabhaṭṭārake—yair eva pūjyate dravyais tarpyate vā parāvaraḥ | yaś caiva pūjakaḥ sarvaḥ sa evaikaḥ kva pūjanam || iti ||* —“As it is stated in the *Śrīvijñānabhaṭṭāraka*: ‘The substances by which he (Śiva) is worshipped or satiated and the worshipper, all these are just a single reality. Then, where is worship?’”

consciousness aims at attaining a particular level of consciousness, where the cognizer perceives his own cognitive process as the spontaneous play of universal energies. The anonymous *Mahānayaprakāśa* published in Trivandrum²¹—the text that structures Krama soteriology within the *Tantrāloka/Mālinīvijayottara* system of the means of realization (*upāyas*) quoted by the *Tantrāloka*'s commentator Jayaratha (14th century) and extensively by Maheśvarānanda—elaborates on the concept of 'cognitive ritual' in the context of achieving the goal of non-dualistic Śaivism which is the state of total immersion into Śiva (*śāmbhavasamāveśa*), after the descent of a very intense form of power (*mahātīvra śaktipāta*) as follows:

One's own nature becomes manifest through the structured worship of those goddesses of consciousness who, in the very intense form of *śaktipāta*, shine forth on the plane of worldly existence moving externally and internally again and again, losing their separate identities when they come into contact with the great void at the beginning and end of every cognition. For that person who has entered into self-realization, which is empty even of the latent traces of differentiating perception, knowledge shines forth in such a way in which there is no dependence upon any means.²²

The worship of the goddesses who embody the cognitive act has been conceived as a praxis of instilling in practitioners the sense of the structure of consciousness arranged as creation (*śṛṣṭi*), maintenance (*sthiti*), withdrawal (*saṃhāra*), the inexplicable (*anākhyā*) and luminosity (*bhāsā*). This sequence of the deployment of energies (*krama*) identified with the Five Flow Goddesses (*pañcavāha*), each corresponding to a particular phase in the *krama*, rose to be the core of the Krama tradition itself. In this perspective, ritual performance becomes

²¹ My understanding of the *Mahānayaprakāśa* of Trivandrum is entirely indebted to Prof. Alexis Sanderson who held the reading classes of this text at All Souls College, University of Oxford, in Hilary and Trinity terms 2015. All the emendations as well as the translation of this text are an outcome of these classes.

²² For the Sanskrit text, see Sanderson 2007: 313, fn. 262 and 263.

a highly meditative practice for infusing the process of non-discursive awareness (*nirvikalpa*) through the equation of ‘worship’ with meditation on the movement of awareness within the said five-fold sequence. Maheśvarānanda was well aware of this cognitive ritual framework, for he quotes from the root Krama text, the *Kramasadbhāva* (5.3; 5.5–5.6), where the idea of worshipping the phases of the cognitive act is addressed as follows:

“Among these five sequences, which sequence should be worshipped in the beginning? O Thou of Beautiful Hips, tell me that in detail according to the prescriptions.” Thus [Śiva] addressed [the Goddess]. “O God, what I have told before is the great sequence of the Five Flow Goddesses. Amongst these kings of the *krama*, *sṛṣṭi* is always in the beginning. Then *sthiti*, *saṁhāra* and *anākhyā*. Thereupon the one called *bhāsā*. Following this, one should worship the non-sequential sequence.²³

From the exegetical works of the Krama traditions, we know that these Five Flow Goddesses are identified with the five phases of the cognitive act that belong to every individual. Creation of the object in the objectivity is *sṛṣṭi*. Whenever this creation of the object is established for a certain duration of time, this is the phase of maintenance (*sthiti*). Turning away from the perceived object (e.g., a jar) to perceive another object (e.g., a pillar), which is the withdrawal of the previously projected object, is *saṁhāra*. The state in between the two cognitions, e.g., that of a jar and a pillar, is called *anākhyā*, when there is a withdrawal of all subjective cognitive impressions into the non-discursive potentiality. Finally, when all the differentiated objects are cognized at once in the unity of consciousness as indistinct from their

²³ *yathā śrīkramasadbhāve—teṣāṃ madhyāt krameṇaiva ādau pūjyas tu kaḥ kramah | tan me kathaya suśroṇi! vistareṇa yathāvidhi || iti praśnānantaram—purā yat kathitam deva pañcavāhamahākramam | teṣāṃ tu kramarājānāṃ sṛṣṭirūpo 'grataḥ sadā || tatas tu sthitisamhāram anākhyam ca tataḥ param | bhāsākhyam ca tataḥ paścāt (pañcāt MMP) pūjayed akramakramam || iti ||* This is the quotation from the *Kramasadbhāva* (v. 5.2–3), which reads *paścāt* instead of *pañcāt* as attested in the edition of the MMP, v. 40 (p. 104). I thank the anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

primordial source—i.e. the true Self—this is the phase of *bhāsā*. By meditating on the inherent dynamism of the phases of cognition (the Five Flow Goddesses) that emerge and subside in the course of perception, and by seeing it as part of the universal process, the *vikalpas* become purified. No longer binding, they establish the essential identification of the cognizer with pure consciousness.

Maheśvarānanda is clear that the Krama cognitive ritual framework, which operates entirely on one’s own *vikalpas*, is the highest and most esoteric of all Śaiva traditions and the only way at the disposal of those practitioners who, in their quest for liberation, have exhausted all other models that exoteric and esoteric Śaivism offers. In support of this argument, Maheśvarānanda quotes, without attribution, only a part of the verse from the Trivandrum *Mahānayaprakāśa* as follows: “For those who are seeking the great teaching (of the Krama), having exhausted all other methods (of self-realization), there is no path other than that which suddenly swallows their cognitions.”²⁴ The context of this partial quote makes better sense when we look at the two verses preceding it:

In such teaching as the Kula and Kaula, the Śākta, Trika and Mata together with their esoteric elaboration, which are the cause of the rest in one’s own nature; and in the various divisions of the Siddhānta-tantras consisting of many different methods, although they are established in their own right, (in all of them) the *mahānaya* (the Krama system), along with its cognitive context, is pervasive.²⁵

This important passage seems to maintain the idea that all other models of Śaivism, beginning with the most exoteric Śaiva Siddhānta to the most esoteric Kaula traditions, contain the inner dynamism of the Krama. One example in support of this argument is the concept of

²⁴ *paurvāparyaparikṣiṇā* (MPT: *sarvopāyaparikṣiṇās* MMP) *ye* (MPT: *te* MMP) *mahārthārthinaḥ kila | asti nānyā gatis teṣāṃ vikalpagrāsasāhasāt || Mahānayaprakāśa* of Trivandrum (MPT) 1.32, quoted in MMP, v. 68 (p. 172).

²⁵ *kulakaulādikāmnāyaśāktatrikamatādiṣu | sarahasyaprapañceṣu svarūpa-sthitihetuṣu || siddhāntatantrabhedeṣu nānopāyātmakeṣu* (conj.: *nānyo-* Ed.) *ca | sthiteṣu api ca sollekho vyāpako hi mahānayaḥ ||* MPT 1.30–31.

pañcakṛtya, the five great cosmological acts of Śiva who creates the universe (*śṛṣṭi*), maintains it (*sthiti*), withdraws it (*samhāra*), conceals it (*tirodhāna*) and bestows grace (*anugraha*). This became one of the most powerful theological concepts in the exoteric Śaiva Siddhānta. When interpreted from the point of view of the esoteric Krama, these five acts are taking place in each act of cognition. As we shall see in the following pages, both Maheśvarānanda and his predecessor Kṣemarāja (11th century) clearly intend Śiva's *pañcakṛtya* to be read both in Krama esoteric as well as in pan-Śaiva exoteric terms.

From the review of the above passages and quotations, it seems that Maheśvarānanda's attempt at blurring the boundaries between ritual and cognition simply follows the framework already discussed at length by Krama authors before him, especially Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja. It would, however, be misleading to assume that Maheśvarānanda did not bring in new ideas to this discussion. His distinctive originality lies namely in his attempt to look for a fresh synthesis of the various Śaiva and Śākta traditions.²⁶ Despite the fact that his theories can be thought of as a unique amalgam of Pratyabhijñā, Trika, Krama, Kaula, and Śrīvidyā, heavily grounded in the theoretical framework of classical non-dualist authors, he succeeded in providing an alternative to the existing views on perhaps every aspect of non-dual Śaivism, what was both specific and cohesive enough to break a new ground into the understanding of non-dual Śaiva doctrine and practice.

One of his greatest original contributions was the establishment of a link between ritual, cognition, and theatrical performance. Maheśvarānanda tried to construct and propagate a position that, on the one hand, would reflect the ethos of the dancing Śiva of Chidambaram and, at the same time, engage in dialogue with the rival Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. He also reformulated the basic concept of dancing Śiva, that already had its history in non-dual Śaivism, through an original blending of the philosophical system of the Pratyabhijñā and the ritual-based system of the Krama. Maheśvarānanda borrowed the concept

²⁶ Maheśvarānanda himself asserts that the purpose of his commentary (*parimala*) is to unify the different 'flowers' of doctrinal ideas by establishing a 'bouquet' (*mañjarī*) comprised of a single fragrance MMP, v. 1 (p. 7).

of Śiva-the Dancer performing the Five Acts from the Chidambaram culture of the dancing Śiva and from the predominant system of Śaiva Siddhānta. From the Pratyabhijñā system, he borrowed the theory of a free agent who exists as the substratum for the constituent cognitive process.²⁷ From the Krama system, he borrowed the cognitive ritual framework of the Five Flow Goddesses arranged as creation (*śṛṣṭi*), maintenance (*sthiti*), withdrawal (*saṃhāra*), inexplicable (*anākhyā*) and luminosity (*bhāsā*). The influences from these three different conceptual frameworks led Maheśvarānanda to an original reformulation of the non-dual concept of Śiva-the Dancer as a metaphor of the liberated state (*jīvanmukta*). Unlike Maheśvarānanda, however, earlier non-dual Śaiva authors pass over in silence the link between Śiva's dance and the *pañcakṛtya*. On the contrary, they focus entirely on the process of aesthetic transformation in which the entire psycho-physical mind-body complex becomes metaphorically transformed into the fundamental components of a dance-performance: the Self becomes the Dancer, the body converts into the stage, and the senses turn into the spectators (ŚSū 3.9–14). Moreover, all these components partake in bringing about an aesthetic experience (*rasa*) characterized by wonder. The *jīvanmukta* of Vasugupta's *Śivasūtras* dances on the stage of his own body, savouring the aesthetic emotions (*rasa*) through the expansion of his own senses. This complete transformation of the ordinary body into its aesthetic equivalent results in total freedom, which is nothing else but the realization of one's own body as the cosmic body.

For Maheśvarānanda, on the other hand, Śiva's dance is essentially the enactment of the Five Acts in the inner consciousness-based sphere of ritual, by worshipping or meditating on the Five Flow Goddesses, who represent the Krama esoteric core. By situating cognitive ritual in the realm of performance, Maheśvarānanda subsumes the Pratyabhijñā's model of the omnipotent agent and the Krama cognitive ritual framework under the image of the dancing Śiva. For him, worship becomes a process in the dynamic identification with Śiva through

²⁷ On the concept of the Agent as the underlying substratum of all cognitions, see ĪPK 4.1.16 in: Torella 1994: 208.

the discovery of one's own agency to constantly perform the Five Acts. This latter shows signs of his indebtedness to Somānanda's *Śivadṛṣṭi* (Nemec 2011: 48), but Maheśvarānanda goes even further, for he adds to the Five Acts of Śiva the notion of the dancer as a playful agent. Therefore, it is not merely the contemplation of one's own identity with Śiva—the agent who performs the Five Acts that triggers in the practitioner the recognition of being Śiva, but also the contemplation of his identity with Śiva—the Dancer. In this way, Maheśvarānanda makes a breakthrough into the realm of theatrical performance, where he develops the concept of the playful agent, transcending the notion of agency propagated by Pratyabhijñā authors. Before going into more details of what exactly the performance of the Five Acts of Śiva—the Dancer entails, it would be useful to give a brief overview of *pañcakṛtya* as epitomizing Śiva's dance, and its different interpretations in Śaiva Siddhānta and non-dual Śaivism.

3. *Pañcakṛtya*: defining Śiva's dance performance

The earliest textual reference to the *pañcakṛtya* of Śiva is given in the 11th–12th-century *Tirumantiram*²⁸ of the Tamil Siddha Tirumular,²⁹ in which the five limbs of the Naṭarāja icon are compared with the Five Cosmic Acts he performs. Thus, according to the *Tirumantiram*,

Hara's drum is creation,
 Hara's hand gesturing protection is preservation;
 Hara's fire is dissolution;
 Hara's foot planted down is concealment
 Hara's foot, raised in dance, is grace abiding.³⁰

²⁸ The dating of this text differs among the scholars. The last attempt, which I follow here, was made by Goodall (1998: xxxvii–xxxix), who provided a new evidence for dating this text based on the inclusion of the Śaiva Saiddhāntika concepts in the fifth chapter. For the summary of different views regarding the dating, see Wessels-Mevissen 2012: 299, fn. 6.

²⁹ For the exposition of the *pañcakṛtya* myth in the *Tirumantiram*, see Martin 1983.

³⁰ *Tirumantiram* 2799, trans. by B. Natarajan (slightly altered by Smith), quoted in: Smith 1998: 17.

Tirumular's *Tirumantiram* is important not only because it is "the earliest exposition of Śaiva Siddhānta in its metaphysical, moral, and mystical aspects" (Sivaraman 1973: 31), but also because it is here that Śīva's dance is given philosophical interpretation for the first time to signify the concept of *pañcakṛtya*.³¹ After a lapse of few centuries, probably around the 14th century, we find another reference to Śīva's dance and his Five Acts given by an influential Śaiva Siddhānta author, Umāpati Śīvācārya, who, just like Maheśvarānanda, happened to live in Chidambaram. In his *Kuñcitāṅghristava*, he writes:

In the beginning He Whose form is the self
 created Brahma for the creation of the worlds,
 Hari for their protection,
 and the form of Rudra for their destruction,
 and then Maheśa for concealing everything,
 the form of Sadaśiva with Parvati beside Him
 to show favour to those worlds.
 He performs the Dance of Bliss in the Hall.³²

The dualist Śaiva Siddhānta theology provided philosophical explanation for Śīva's *pañcakṛtya*, that authors such as Tirumular and Umāpati Śīvācārya linked to Śīva's dance. According to Sivaraman,

the validation of the central reality of the Śaiva Siddhānta, namely, Śīva, is contained in the notion of cause applied to it. The defining characteristic feature of Śīva as the Lord of all cosmic operations is a logical extension of the same idea... (Reality) considered in further relation to the exigency of the 'cosmic' functions of creation, maintenance and dissolution, together with the two 'microcosmic' operations of self-concealment and self-revelation, is the Lord or the Sovereign (*pati*). (Sivaraman 1973: 127)

As Sivaraman specifies:

In this way, Śaiva Saiddhāntika theology of grace permitted them to disengage grace from human control and to return its meaning to Śīva alone. Out of Five Acts of Śīva, only two relate to the individual self, namely concealment through which Śīva veils the true reality from bound soul and grace that liberates. (*ibid.*)

³¹ See Soundararajan 2004: 29 and Martin 1983: 174.

³² The *Kuñcitāṅghristava* of Umāpati Śīvācārya, v. 102, in: Smith 1998: 18.

Although non-dualist Śaivas prior to Abhinavagupta knew about the *pañcakṛtya* of Śiva, they were not concerned with it.³³ A major shift in developing a Kashmiri Śaiva version of *pañcakṛtya* came with Abhinavagupta's disciple Kṣemāraja (11th century), who placed the Five Acts at the centre of non-dual Śaiva soteriology.³⁴ As we shall see, it was Kṣemāraja who exercised a considerable influence on Maheśvarānanda's reformulation of the *pañcakṛtya* in connection with Śiva's dance. Given the intertwined complexity of the concepts entering into the formulations of Śiva's *pañcakṛtya*, it is difficult to identify the reasons for the conceptual shift that occurred within non-dual Śaivism, beginning with Kṣemāraja. Perhaps it was a growing popularity of Śaiva Siddhānta *āgamas* that influenced this choice. Maheśvarānanda's intentions are easier to decipher. One of his motives for identifying the *pañcakṛtya* with Śiva's dance has to be sought in his individual effort at establishing visibility for non-dual

³³ The author of the *Śivadṛṣṭi* ('Vision of Śiva') Somānanda (9th century)—the first treatise to furnish a philosophical foundation of the Pratyabhijñā school ('Recognition [of the Lord]')—refers to Śiva's Five Acts in the following words: "Given that it is said that it is Śiva's nature to perform the five types of activities, what need is there to search for other motives, when he is engaged in his own conduct?" *Śivadṛṣṭi* 1.12–13, trans. Nemeč 2011: 116. These verses can be compared with Kṣemārāja's PHṛ, v. 1., where Śiva is defined as the agent of the Five Acts.

³⁴ In his *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, Kṣemārāja writes: *tathāpi tadvat pañcakṛtyāni karoti* |—"Even in this condition [of the empirical self], he [the individual self] does the five *kṛtyas* like him [Śiva]." He says further: *ata eva ye sadā etat pariśīlayanti te svarūpavikāsamayaṃ viśvaṃ jānānā jīvanmuktā ity āmnātāḥ* |—"Those who ponder over this [the five-fold activity of the Lord] knowing the universe as an unfoldment of the essential nature [of consciousness], become liberated in this very life." PHṛ, v. 10. trans. Singh 1988: 73, 75. In another verse, Kṣemārāja concludes: *tadaparijñāne svaśāktibhir vyāmohitatā saṃsāritvam* |—"To be a *saṃsārin* means being deluded by one's own powers because of the ignorance of that [authorship of the five acts]." PHṛ, v. 12. trans. Singh 1988: 78.

Śaivism in Chidambaram by entering into competition with the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta, who held in its grip the entire temple-culture of Tamil Nadu.

The transition from the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta to a non-dualist Śaiva perspective brought about some changes in the way the Five Acts of Śiva were conceived. The Siddhāntins conform to the view that these Five Acts have their parallel at the individual level, and that agency at this level is ultimately due to Śiva's omnipotence, but this does not mean that Śiva and the individual being have an equal ontological status. According to the view of Śaiva Siddhānta, the reason for Śiva performing the Five Acts is that the *karman*, and other impurities which bind the soul of the individual being, may mature and eventually fall from him (*karma-sāmya*,³⁵ *mala-paripāka*) through the grace of Śiva. Although non-dual Śaivas equally hold that impurities (*malas*) are responsible for effectuating the primordial bondage, they do not consider them as material substances, as in the Śaiva Siddhānta; for them these impurities abide only in thought.³⁶ Moreover, non-dual Śaivas are mostly concerned with the possibility of realizing the Five Acts of Śiva in one's own individual being. As Flood explains:

³⁵ The balance of *karma* (*karma-sāmya*) removes the blockage that prevents the adept from experiencing Śiva's power (*śakti*); it is linked to the descent of Śiva's grace that acts as a trigger impelling the adept to search for the guru and take Śaiva initiation.

³⁶ Impurity is associated with the three *malas* (stains) effective in generating a wrong perception of one's own true Self. Two of these stains, *āṇavamala* and *karmamala*, are understood respectively as an incomplete realization of one's own omniscient power of knowledge (*jñāna-śakti*) and as an incomplete realization of one's own omnipotent power of action (*kriyā-śakti*). The tantric 'path of power' is a realization of one's own innate agency, in which ordinary contracted and impure consciousness is transformed into omnipotence and omniscience. Maheśvarānanda seems to follow this line of reasoning when he introduces the image of the Dancer to represent the fullest realization of the inherent agency consisting of the powers of knowledge and action and constituting the nature of Śiva, the playful agent.

The basic difference between Saiddhāntika and Kashmiri Śaiva understanding of the Five Acts of Śiva lies in the fact that in the case of the dualist Saiddhāntika tradition, it is the transcendent Lord in his aspect of Sadāśiva who performs the Five Acts, not the individual self. Sadāśiva is totally distinct from *māyā*, from which the material and mental universe is generated. Bondage, according to the Śaiva Siddhānta, is a result of the unconscious material universe of *māyā* and only Śiva's grace and ritual action is able to remove it. Liberation is thought to occur to Saiddhāntin at death, which means he becomes omniscient and omnipotent like Śiva, but ontologically distinct from him. (Flood 1996: 163–164)

On the contrary, in non-dualist Śaivism, the individual self (*puruṣa*) is ontologically the same as Śiva, but the *puruṣa* is ignorant about his real status because of the impurity of thought-constructs generated by a dichotomizing tendency that establishes duality between the subject and the object. Liberation-while-living occurs when the individual self recognizes himself as Śiva performing the Five Acts.³⁷ Thus, for example, Kṣemarāja tends to focus on showing that the identification between Śiva and the individual self (*puruṣa*) takes place through the exercise of a careful attention (*avadhāna*) to the relationship between subject and object that aims at forsaking the notion of duality normally underlying this relationship:

The Supreme Lord, who is the light of consciousness is also the agent of these five cosmic operations at the microcosmic level of the individual subject. However, only one who knows how to attend carefully to that relationship between subject and object can be aware of it fully.³⁸

³⁷ PHṛ, v. 13: *tatparijñāne cittam eva antarmukhībhāvena cetana-padādhyārohāt citiḥ* ||—“Acquiring the full knowledge of it [i.e. of the authorship of the five-fold act of the Self], *citta* itself [the individual consciousness] by inward movement becomes *citi* [universal consciousness] by rising to the status of *cetana* [perfect or uncontracted consciousness].” (trans. Singh 1988: 85).

³⁸ *Spandasamdoha* of Kṣemarāja, p. 12, trans. Dyczkowski 1994: 66. See the similar passage in the *Vijñānabhairavatantra*, v. 106: *grāhyagrāhaka-saṁvittiḥ sāmānyā sarvadehinām | yoginām tu viśeṣo 'sti sambandhe sāvadhānatā* ||—“The awareness of subject and object is common to all embodied beings. The *yogīs* have, however, this distinction that they are mindful of this relation.” (trans. Singh 2006: 96).

He elaborates on this procedure in his *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* (v. 10) and *Spandasam̐doha* (v. 1) saying that he merely expounds the view of the *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* (fourth *āhnikā*, v. 7), where Utpaladeva states that it is precisely a differentiation between the perceiving subject (*grāhya*) and the perceived object (*grāhaka*), which “constitutes the bond of the *samsāra* in the limited soul” (Torella 1994: 214). Much of the power of Kṣemarāja’s argument lies in the premise that the *pañcakṛtya* performed in our cognitive sphere enables us to achieve a total identity with Śiva. One important element he brings out in this connection is that by paying attention to the five phases of the cognitive process, a *yogin* attains the liberated state of pure consciousness unhindered by the limitations imposed by the *vikalpas* that bound him to the cycle of *samsāra*. Here, Kṣemarāja clearly reads the exoteric, pan-Śaiva concept of *pañcakṛtya* in terms of the Krama esoteric model, where the Five Acts represent the five phases of the cognitive process: creation (*sr̥ṣṭi*) is the perception of ‘blue’ in definite space and time; persistence (*sthiti*) is a certain duration of the perception of ‘blue’ in a specific locus; withdrawal (*saṃhāra*) is equated with doubt that arises when ‘blue’ is perceived as something different [from ‘yellow’, for example]; obscuration (*vilaya*) is connoted by concealing the subject through destruction of the latent impressions (*saṃskāras*), memory, etc.; grace (*anugraha*) is the perception of ‘blue’ as identical with the light of consciousness.³⁹

To sum up, for the dualist Śaiva Siddhāntins, the main goal of Śiva performing his *pañcakṛtya* is the possibility of divine grace for the individual self; this very act of grace becomes instrumental for ripening the source of the self’s finitude so that it becomes fit for removal (Sivaraman 1972: 192). For non-dualist Śaivas, on the contrary, this goal is not accomplished through the passive reception of divine grace, but by discovering the agency of Śiva that innately belongs to the indi-

³⁹ For Kṣemarāja’s description of the Five Acts taking place in cognition, see *Spandasam̐doha* of Kṣemarāja, p. 12, trans. Dyczkowski 1994: 66. For a similar model, see *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, v. 10 in: Singh 1988: 75.

vidual self. Moreover, in the version promoted by Maheśvarānanda, by performing the Five Acts the individual self becomes elevated to the position of a playful agent and becomes Śiva-the Dancer.

4. Becoming the Dancer according to Maheśvarānanda

Maheśvarānanda seems to support the idea that those who have come to an end with the models of self-realization offered by all other schools of Śaivism need the highest Krama teaching of cognitive ritual, which he understands as a thought-reflection (*parāmarśa*) on one's own true nature. If the deity is equated with the pure light of consciousness (*mahāprakāśa eva devatā, nānyaḥ kaścit*, MM, v. 43), the act of worship must be a contemplation of that identity as the means of bringing about the definitive purification of the structure of the *vikalpas*, which upon losing its sense of separateness from the self become pervaded by the light of consciousness. For Maheśvarānanda, this contemplation (*parāmarśa*) is conveyed through the image of the Dancer/Actor. The adept meditates on the five phases of his own cognitive act, identified with the Five Flow Goddesses of the Krama. This five-fold meditation alone constitutes the act of worship. Maheśvarānanda begins his exposition of the Dancer/Actor, where Śiva assumes the role of *puruṣa*, by introducing the concept of 'play'. This suggests a theatricalization of reality, in which the identity of Dancer is assured by Śiva's capability of assuming all the roles, including that of *puruṣa*. Thus, the Dancer is at the same time also an Actor⁴⁰ displaying the cosmic drama, which presupposes his capacity to enact or perform diversity. In the second part of his exposition, Maheśvarānanda elaborates on the concept of

⁴⁰ In the Indian tradition, it is often impossible to draw a clear demarcation line between dancing and acting. Both these concepts can in fact be indicated, outside the restricted corpus of the dramatic technical literature, by the roots *nṛt* or *naṭ*. For this reason, 'dancer' and 'actor' are used here as synonyms. Similarly, the metaphor of the world as a drama is already a productive metaphor in earlier works of non-dual Śaivism. See, e.g., Bansat-Boudon 2004; Cuneo 2016; Törzsök 2016.

dance-performance, which he equates with the autonomous agency to perform the Five Acts for both Śiva and the *puruṣa*.

4.1. The drama of bondage and liberation

Śambhu, the pure consciousness, is the dancer/actor of this world-drama, and his state, which consists in taking on all the roles, is unique; he becomes the individual self (*puruṣa*).⁴¹

That of the world as a drama or *theatrum mundi* is a central metaphor in Maheśvarānanda's exposition of the Dancer, through which he attempts to approach a metaphysical problem of non-duality, constituting the foundation of Śaiva metaphysics. What characterizes Śiva-the Dancer is clearly his being the protagonist of a drama, which he enacts as a sign of his total freedom. The metaphor of Śiva who enacts the world-drama has a long history in non-dual Śaivism prior to Maheśvarānanda, whose legacy he is aware of, for he quotes the famous stanza of the *Śivasūtra* (see the footnote above). He also quotes a verse from Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa's *Stavacīṅtāmanī* (59): "The drama that is the triple world contains many good motives and climaxes/is the source of numberless living creatures: having begun it, oh Hara, what poet other than you can complete it?" (Cox 2012: 207). More importantly, Maheśvarānanda's

⁴¹ MM, v. 19 (p. 49): *ya eṣa viśvanāṭakaśailūṣaḥ śuddhasaṃvicchambhuḥ | varṇakaparigrahamayī tasya daśā kāpi puruṣo bhavati ||* This verse is also translated in Cox 2012: 207. Maheśvarānanda (MMP, v. 19, p. 49) glosses "the dancer/actor of this world-drama" as follows: *parameśvaro hy aham eva sarvam iti vaiśvātmīyaprathānubhūtiśphāracamatkārottaratayā śuddhāṃ saṅkocakalāṅkaśāṅkāśūnyāṃ saṃvidam svasvātantryasvabhāvavidyāmayīm anubhavann anenaiva hetunā "nartaka ātmā" iti śrīśivasūtrasthityā viśvanāṭakasya śailūṣo naṭa iti vyapadiśyate ||*—"The supreme Lord experiences the cognition consisting of the knowledge of his own nature's essential freedom. [This cognition] is pure, i. e. devoid of limitation, impurity, and doubt, and by having as its state the expansive, ultra aesthetic wonder of the all-pervading experience of his universal nature being the 'world', as expressed by the statement: 'I am indeed all'. Precisely for this reason, he is taught to be 'a performer', 'the dancer of this world-drama' as it is stated in the *Śivasūtra*: 'the Self is a Dancer'." See also Cox 2012: 207.

adoption of the *theatrum mundi* metaphor serves as the basis for his exposition of non-dual Śaiva soteriology. Quoting from the *Sārasāstra*, he says:

The Sovereign of the Gods binds himself and liberates himself. He experiences himself and cognizes himself, and he also perceives himself.⁴²

We can understand from this quote that the drama performed by Śiva is actually a drama of bondage and liberation and these are related to the two cosmological acts of Śiva: concealment (*tirodhāna*)—through which Śiva conceals himself in the individual self—and grace (*anugraha*)—through which he reveals himself as non-different from the individual self. Thus, concealment or bondage is a necessary criterion for the availability of grace. Despite its soteriological dimension, Śiva's drama of bondage and liberation also signals the enactment of the drama that is the world. Śiva-the Dancer represents the main character in this play, acting out multiple roles. This is the specific feature of Śiva-the Dancer, defined in the verse above as a 'unique state'. A basic principle of this performative competency is its universality, a certain universal egalitarianism that reflects the view that Śiva is equally present in all states and conditions, whether pleasant or unpleasant. Yet, another trait accentuated in this discussion is his intrinsic attitude of being in a frolicsome mood. Śiva is credited with playfulness when he engages in role-playing. His ability to play multiple roles is a sign of his reflective Self. This topic is repeated constantly in various Kashmiri Śaiva scriptures. Two examples of this kind are taken from the *Śivadṛṣṭi* and quoted by Maheśvarānanda:

Just as a king, having sovereignty over the whole earth, engulfed in the joy of his majesty, plays engaging in the duties of a soldier, mimicking his conduct, so the Lord whose nature is joy, plays out this and that [character].⁴³

⁴² *Sārasāstra* quoted in the MMP, v. 19 (p. 49): *svayaṃ badhnāti deveśaḥ svayaṃ caiva vimuhyati | svayaṃ bhoktā svayaṃ jñātā svayaṃ caivopalakṣayet ||* See also Cox 2012: 208.

⁴³ *Śivadṛṣṭi* 1.37–8, quoted in MMP, v. 8 (p. 26): *yathā nṛpaḥ sārvabhau-
maḥ prabhāvāmodabryṃhitaḥ | krīḍan karoti pādātadharmāṃs taddharmadharma-
taḥ || tathā prabhuhḥ pramodātmā krīḍaty evaṃ tathā tathā |*

Playfully, the supreme Lord assumes the bodies, which will be perceived as painful, and which, performing actions, will be connected with their fruits, and as a consequence will dwell in the abyss of the ocean of hell.⁴⁴

The necessity of examining the reasons behind Śiva's play led Maheśvarānanda to ascertain Śiva's total freedom as characterized by his ability to 'do the impossible'. Quoting the *Tantrāloka*, Maheśvarānanda says: "But because he is able to do what is extremely difficult, [and] because of his pure freedom, the Lord is an expert in playing the game of veiling his own Self."⁴⁵ Here again, Maheśvarānanda follows Abhinavagupta in equating Śiva's capacity of self-veiling into the individual souls with his activity of dancing (Tā 1.332). For Maheśvarānanda, these stanzas of the *Tantrāloka* prove that Śiva descends on the path of *māyā* to assume the role of *puruṣa* as part of his inexplicable play, and even at this stage he always performs the Five Acts.⁴⁶ His argument, where the Dancer is assigned the constitutive and essential nature of both Śiva and the *puruṣa*, is constructed in two steps. The first step aims at ruling out the idea that the *puruṣa* is different from Śiva. This step proceeds by showing that, first of all, the *puruṣa* is a concealed form of Śiva, and secondly, that the *puruṣa* and Śiva are identical because of their ability to perform the Five Acts. The second step in Maheśvarānanda's argument points out the *puruṣa*'s powerlessness to recognize Śiva/the Self as the agent of his own actions. This powerlessness occurs due to a false association with the psycho-physical organism governed by the sense of

⁴⁴ *Śivadṛṣṭi* 1.36–7, as given in Nemeč's edition 2011: 136 (quoted in MMP, v. 19, p. 52): *krīḍayā duḥkhavedyāni karmakārīṇi tatphalaih | saṃbhatsyamānāni tathā narakārṇavagahvare || nivāsīni śarīrāṇi grhṇāti paramēśvaraḥ | iti |*

⁴⁵ *Tantrāloka* 4.11, quoted in MMP, v. 19 (p. 50): *kiṃtu durghaṭakāritvāt svācchandyān nirmalād asau | svātmapracchādanakrīḍāpaṇḍitaḥ paramēśvaraḥ ||* See also Cox 2012: 208.

⁴⁶ *iti śrītantrālokaśthityā māyāpathāvatīrṇo 'pi paramēśvaravat sarvadā pañcāpi krtyāni karoti |* MMP, v. 19 (p. 50).

egoity, as expressed in the statements: “I am healthy”, “I am thin”, “I love”, “I enjoy”, “I breathe”, “I am void”. In these six stages, egoity is seen⁴⁷. This powerlessness, however, can be converted into omnipotence under one condition. What is essential is precisely the recognition that it is the agent, the Self, that stands behind the various operations of the psycho-physical organism. Maheśvarānanda supports this idea with the following words: “The body, the senses, etc., must include an agent as their essence. What else is desired to be the cause with regard to the agent of this phenomenal world?”⁴⁸ As we will see, the discovery of one’s own Self as being the agent of all actions is, above all, a realization of the autonomous agency to perform the Five Acts. We will now turn to the exposition of this agency in the second part of Maheśvarānanda’s examination.

4.2. Dance of Śiva, dance of the *puruṣa*: discovering of the autonomous agency to perform the Five Acts

Maheśvarānanda tends to focus on showing that the identification between Śiva and the *puruṣa* is established on the ground of their sharing a uniform nature, i.e. the nature of the Dancer: the Dancer is the one who dances. As mentioned earlier, in Śaiva Siddhānta theology, Śiva’s dance is already identified with the autonomous agency to perform the Five Acts (*pañcakṛtya*) of creation (*śṛṣṭi*), maintenance (*sthiti*), withdrawal (*samhāra*), concealment (*tirodhāna*) and grace (*anugraha*). Śiva incessantly performs his Five Acts in the transcendent and immanent realm. These Five Acts are always linked to his playful spontaneity. The Dancer is never bereft of his agency to perform the Five Acts; in this sense dancing is a paradigm of dynamic ontology. While discussing the problem of agency, Maheśvarānanda

⁴⁷ *Virūpākṣapañcāśikā* quoted in the MMP v. 19 (p. 52): *sampanno 'smi kṛśo 'smi snihyattāro 'smi modamāno 'smi | prāṇimi śūnyo 'smīti hi ṣaṭsu padeṣv asmitā dṛṣṭā ||*

⁴⁸ *dehendriyāder ātmavve kartṛtvam paryavasyati | prapañcasyaiva kartṛtvam kāryam anyat kim iṣyate ||* MMP v. 19 (p. 54).

offers a unique analysis of the dance performed by Śiva, grounding his description in the Five Acts unfolding in two different spheres of manifestation: macrocosmic and microcosmic. In other words, his dance has an outer and an inner dimension. The outer, macrocosmic form of dance is exemplified in the cosmological display of the thirty-six categories of existence (*tattvas*), ranging from Śiva down to the Earth. Quoting from the *Śrīnaiśvāsa*, Maheśvarānanda says: “In one part, you are the inner Self, the Dancer who protects this globe”.⁴⁹ Here, the idea of Śiva’s agency is grounded in a general concept of cosmological process through which Śiva creates, sustains, withdraws the world and conceals his own nature through *māyā*, which marks the summit of his freedom.⁵⁰ By making such a statement, Maheśvarānanda interprets

⁴⁹ *yad uktam śrīnaiśvāse—tvam ekāṃśenāntarātmā nartakaḥ kośa rakṣitā iti* | quoted in MMP, v. 19 (p. 49). The translation of *kośa* as ‘globe’, ‘container’ makes sense in the cosmological context of Maheśvarānanda’s commentary, who immediately after this quotation glosses ‘the world’ as an aggregate of *tattvas*, from Śiva (*śiva-tattva*) down to the Earth (*pṛthvī-tattva*) (*ibid.*).

⁵⁰ *iyam eva hi tasya svātantryotkarṣakāṣṭhā, yat svātmāvabhāsādvaitajīvite jagati bhedaprabhedavaicitryotpādanaprāvīṇyam, yenātidurghaṭakārī parameśvara ity āghoṣyate | ata eva cāsau lokapatih, dehākṣabhuvanādeḥ prapañcasyeśvaraḥ | māyāvyatireke bhedaprathāpāramārthyasya prapañcasyābhāvaḥ | tadabhāve ca tatpratiyogikasya parameśvaraiśvaryasyānupapattir iti na kiñcid apyujjimbheta | tad iyaṃ māyā nāma tasyotkṛṣṭam svātantryam* |—“[*Māyā*] is certainly the summit of his freedom, that is, the fact that he possesses the ability of generating the manifold divisions and sub-divisions of the world, that exists as identical with the manifestation of the Self. Because of this, the supreme Lord is declared to be the doer of difficult things. That is why he is the lord of the world, the lord of the phenomenal world [who brings to manifestation] the body, the senses, the worlds, etc. In the absence of *māyā* the manifestation of the phenomenal world, which, in the true sense, is [just] the expansion of difference, would not exist. And in the absence of the phenomenal world, the sovereignty of the supreme lord, which is its counterpart, would fail to be proved, and nothing whatsoever would be brought to manifestation. Therefore, this which is called ‘*māyā*’ is the summit of his freedom.” MMP, v. 17 (p. 44).

the *pañcakṛtya* of Śiva in pan-Śaiva exoteric terms. The inner microcosmic form of dance takes place at the level of the *puruṣa*. Śiva dances in/as *puruṣa* insofar as he performs the Five Acts in the drama of human life: “Even by enacting the drama of being a *puruṣa*—through all stages [of life], namely, birth, childhood, youth, maturity, and death—in the end I am Śiva, the great Dancer.”⁵¹ Birth, childhood, youth, maturity, death; these are the five moments of time imitating the play of the dancer.⁵² Therefore, a specific ‘temporality’ belongs equally to the experience of life and to the experience of play-acting, since the plot, just like life, develops along a temporal sequence made of different stages. This temporality affects also the activity of playing a part in the cosmic drama, i.e., Śiva performing the Five Acts. However fleeting and transient the nature of these stages, there is no breach in the absolute non-dualism, in which Śiva-the Dancer acts out all the parts simultaneously at all times.

To prove the ontological homogeneity between Śiva and the *puruṣa*, Maheśvarānanda argued that the possession of an autonomous agency in performing the Five Acts belongs equally to both. Thus, the cosmological agency of Śiva (*pañcakṛtya*) becomes transferred into an agency of a purely cognitive type, belonging to every individual. His demonstration consists of two parts. In the first, he argues that the *puruṣa* is actually being consubstantial with Śiva but remains ignorant about his real status due to the absence of the descent

⁵¹ *jananaśaiśavayauvanavārdhakavyayamayair akhilair api sandhibhiḥ | abhinayann api pauraṣanāṭakaṃ pariṇatau sa śivo śmi mahānāṭaḥ ||* MMP, 19 (p. 49).

⁵² *sṛṣṭiṣṭhityādyavasthāpañcakāvinābhūtatvād ārambhayāt nādyavasthāpañcakalakṣaṇasya nāṭakasyānukaroti* |—“Because he (Śiva) cannot subsist without the five stages beginning with creation, maintenance, etc., he enacts a drama consisting of the five stages of plot-development such as commencement, effort, etc.” MMP, v. 19 (p. 49). (Note that the five *avasthās* of drama are given using technical terms issuing from the dramatic tradition, expressed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and other treatises, which is an interesting case where theatrical concepts are used to explain philosophical-religious ones).

of power, etc. To use his example, “even a potter has the nature of the almighty Śiva while making a pot, but because he does not recognize it, he remains a potter. This is the meaning.”⁵³ This example echoes the Pratyabhijñā notion of the omnipotent agent, in which a potter erroneously identifies himself to be the agent of his own actions. What he should realize is that it is the Lord himself who is the agent of his actions, therefore, the potter is not a limited but a universal creator (ĪPK II. 4. 9). In the second part of the demonstration, Maheśvarānanda sharpens his argument by saying that even while existing in the domain of *māyā*, the *puruṣa* possesses the autonomous agency of consciousness identified with the Five Acts. In a way similar to Kṣemarāja in the *Spandasamdoha* (see above, fn. 39), he elaborates on the Five Acts taking place in the cognitive process and concludes:

Thus the Puruṣa’s real appeal is established [to be] that lordly power that is simultaneously performing the five tasks beginning with creation, without any restriction whatsoever.⁵⁴

⁵³ *kumbhakārasyaṅpi ghaṭakarāṇe sarvaśaktiśivātmatā, tadaparijñānāt tu kumbhakāratety arthaḥ* || MMP, v. 19 (p. 49).

⁵⁴ MMP, v. 19 (p. 51). The full passage reads: “And so, whenever this [*puruṣa*], [insofar as he] possesses the autonomous power of awareness, is in the process of beholding something—for instance, a pillar—and so focuses on [the act of] beholding [that] pillar, there is emanation (*śṛṣṭi*) of it. That is to say [*iti kṛtvā*], emanation [takes place] through [the *puruṣa*] alone, in as much as it is perceived to be something dissimilar from [other things, like] a pot. Once [awareness] has been fixed in that same place for two or three instants, [the pillar] comes to possess stasis, since ‘stasis’ (*sthiti*) is the label given to the endurance of the particular forms held by objects [*padārthānām tattadrūpatayā dhārmyamānasya sthītatayoktatvāt*]. And when the focus shifts to another entity, for example a pot, then there is the retraction of the pillar and the emanation of the pot. But, where there is the intermediate state between leaving off the pillar and settling on the pot, there is the fourth condition consisting of pure awareness, devoid of involvement with any content. As I said in my *Hymn to Komalavallī*: ‘When the mind has left off one thing that it has perceived and prepares to enter another: Mother, they say that your nondual reality is that fleeting [moment] that arises at the interstice.’ Running

The ultimate identity of Śiva and the *puruṣa* can be discovered in the realm of the cognitive process, since the macrocosmic set of five cosmological acts has its equivalent in the inner, microcosmic dimension, of the cognitive process. On the level of the *puruṣa*, the Five Acts constituting Śiva's cosmic processes take the form of the five-fold cognitive process interpreted in Krama terms as the Five Flow Goddesses.⁵⁵

through all these stages and able to transcend them all, there is the power of consciousness that exists within the Self, [called] Pure Light (*bhāsā*). Or, better still, within [the moment of] a synthetic awareness of something like a pillar, when one focuses upon it as being a pillar, then the fact of it being made of wood (for instance) is suppressed. And when one focuses on its being made of wood, then there is the suppression of its being a pillar. Thus, the emanation of one and the retraction of the other can both clearly be seen. However, when one reflects on the combination of properties like 'being a pillar' or 'being made of wood', there is stasis, as neither of the two thoughts is being suppressed. And when there is the cessation of all the various conceptual thoughts such as 'being a pillar', then there is [the state called] the Nameless. When there is reflection upon the Self's radiance there is 'Light'—thus the entire set of emanation, [stasis, retraction, the Nameless, and Light] are to be seen [here]. And, with respect to this same example, when [the *puruṣa*] perceives a pillar as delimited by space, time, and form, he is not [merely] the would-be creator of its delimited manifestation. Nor is he [merely] the would-be retractor of its delimited manifestation as it is not delimited by [these particular coordinates] of space, time and [other factors]. On the other hand, [the *puruṣa*] is not [merely] the would-be sustainer of universal properties, for instance 'pillar-ness.' The [*puruṣa*] does experience the Fourth [Condition] when perceiving [some object] without conceptualization, and also [*punaḥ*] shows favor when revealing [phenomena] to be unified in their essence [*prakāśaikyena prakāśane*]." Trans. Cox 2012: 209–211.

⁵⁵ See previous note. Interestingly, in the *Kālikulakramārcana*—the liturgy of the Krama system still used today by the Kaula Newars of Nepal—the Five Flow Goddesses should be imagined as invested with a specific bodily state and ritually placed in the different parts of the worshipper's body (*bhāva nyāsa*). The corresponding list of the bodily states (*bhāvas*) is given as follows: 1) *śṛṣṭi*, standing straight, 2) *sthiti*, standing with left foot

By attending to the inherent five-fold dynamism of the cognitive process that emerges and subsides in the course of perception, and by seeing it as a universal process, the agent realizes his autonomous agency, and thus, his Śivahood. In this light, the dance of Śiva/*puruṣa* corresponding to the *pañcakṛtya*, might therefore be regarded as a liberating dance of consciousness grounded in the sovereignty of the individual self.

5. Conclusion

For Maheśvarānanda, cognitive ritual is a practice of maintaining awareness on the five-fold cognitive process. That alone has inherent efficacy to transform the adept by unveiling one's own true nature as a playful agent in the precise sense given by the Pratyabhijñā philosophy to the notion of free agent. For Maheśvarānanda, this agent is Śiva-the Dancer. The aim of the cognitive ritual for the *puruṣa* is that by contemplating on his status as the agent he may recognize himself as Śiva performing the Five Acts and thereby get liberated. Thus, Maheśvarānanda goes further, for he equates cognitive ritual with performance, i.e. the enactment of Śiva's dance in the epistemic sphere by the adept worshipping or concentrating on the Five Flow Goddesses. This is a cognitive dance that leads to liberation. The adept following the Krama esoteric method still engages in the cognitive process, but his consciousness is no more bound in its natural flow. On the contrary, his cognitive act is transparent, autonomous and radiant. Placing his soteriological system in the perspective of the *theatrum mundi*, Maheśvarānanda is clear that in this world-drama the process of role-taking is reciprocal: it is not only the *puruṣa* who, in his cognitive/contemplative ritual practice, takes on the role of Śiva-the Dancer in order to reach liberation, but Śiva himself who, as part of his role-taking, puts on the mask of the *puruṣa* to display the drama of bondage and liberation. In other words, dancing/acting is the expression of total freedom

bent and the right foot straight, 3) *saṃhāra*, standing in the fighting position, 4) *anākhyā*, sitting in the lotus posture, 5) *bhāsā*, dancing.

for both Śiva and the *puruṣa*. For Maheśvarānanda, the dance of Śiva is seen as a metaphor signifying the connective force that, in a most captivating and enchanting way, provides a link between the godhead and humanity. Śiva dances the drama of the world, but, more importantly, the dance of man is seen as an act of ritual transformation leading to freedom. Given the existing power structures of the aesthetic worldview of medieval Cōḷa Chidambaram, which revolved around the cult of the Naṭarāja—Śiva's form as the dancer *par excellence*—one cannot rule out the possibility that, by forging a powerful non-dualistic speculative paradigm capable of accounting for the link between the deity and man through Śiva's dance, Maheśvarānanda was also seeking entrance into a universe dominated by the display of *bhakti* to the Naṭarāja.

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