



Siva

tāndava stotra

Visualising the awesome tāndava of Siva,
Ravana's ecstatic outpouring of verses
reverberates to this day, with the rhythm,
tone and vitality of the master dancer.

Siva is celebrated as *Sama-gana-priya* and also as *Nata-rajā*. He is an adept in melody and rhythm. Indian classical music traces its origin to *Sama Veda*, the Veda of melodies and chants.

Ravana, the demon king, undertook intense *tapas* seeking immortality. This was denied to him because no one can be immortal on this earth, which is called *Martya-loka* (region of *mṛtyu*-death). Therefore, instead of immortality, Ravana sought 'indestructibility by all creatures' in all the worlds.

He was asked to specifically name all those 'creatures'. He made a detailed list of all living creatures, but left out the category of human beings. Ravana was disdainful of humans and he thought they were too weak to hurt him.

Ravana composed the Siva *Tandava Stotra* and chanted the verses in the *Aryageeti* rhythm.

He visualised the awesome *tandava* dance of Siva while composing this poem. In his great mood of *bhakti*, he sought universal welfare in this powerful hymn.

Stress on Second Syllable

The words and cadence in the *stotra* reverberate with the rhythm and tone of Siva's dance. The stress in the poetic metre falls on the second syllable of each word.

*Jatataveegalathjala / pravaaha
pavithasthaley
Galey- valabhya lambithaam /
Bhujanga tunga malikaa
Damad-Damad-Damad-Dama /
ninaada vaadam arvayam
Chakaara chanda Taandavam
Tanotu nah Sivah sivam.*

Lord Siva wears long garlands of cobras on his neck. His matted forest of hair is purified by the flow of sacred water. He dances the fierce *Tāndava* rhythm to the cadence of the drum sounds *Dama-dama-dama-dama*. May that auspicious Siva bless us!

Every moment, may I find pleasure (*rati*) in Siva, within whose twisted locks of hair the waves of the Ganga are wandering; who has crackling and blazing fire on his sacred forehead; who wears a young crescent-moon on his head.

May my mind seek happiness (*vinodam-ethu*) in Siva, whose

mind has the shining universe and all the living beings inside; who is the charming companion of the daughter of the Mountain King (*Dhara-dharendra-nandini*); and whose merciful glance blocks immense troubles, and who wears space as his clothes.

Siva's knotted hair shines with yellow snakes that carry glittering jewels on their heads. The face of *Dik-kanyas* (maidens of the eight directions), smeared with *kadamba* juice, appear like red vermillion around him.

Lord Siva, whose upper garment is the glittering skin of an intoxicated elephant, rules over all ghosts.

Smarantakam, Purantakam, Bhavantakam Makhantakam, Gaja-antaka-Andhaka-antakam Tama-antaka-Antakam bhaje.

I adore that Siva who destroyed Smara (Kamadeva), who destroyed Pura (Tripura), who destroyed material existence (*Bhava*), who destroyed the *makha* ceremony (of *Dakṣha*), who destroyed the demon elephant Gajasura, and *Andhaka*, the demon, and Yama, the death.

Auspicious *dhimid-dhimidh*...

May Siva be victorious. Siva, whose fierce *taānḡḡava* is set in motion by the sound of the excellent auspicious drum (*mrdanga*) which reverberates with *dhimid-dhimidh* sounds.

When will I be able to concentrate on Sadasiva, whose equal vision perceives as the same a snake or a pearl-garland, gems or a lump of dirt, friend or enemy, a grass-eyed animal or a lotus-eyed person, common men (*praja*) or the king of the whole world.

*Vilola lola lochaney / lalama
bhala lagnakah /
Shiveti mantram uchcharan /
kadha sukhee bhavamyaham //*

Bearing the sacred mark on my forehead, away from lustful eyes, with my forehead and head bound, when will I get fulfillment while reciting the *mantra* 'Siva'?

The concluding verse pleads for universal welfare: The *Sakti* (energy) which is capable of burning all the sins and the pleasing sound produced by *devas* while chanting the powerful Siva *mantra* at the time

of Siva-Parvati wedding, may this destroy all the sufferings of the world.

Great Lineage

The imagery of Ravana for most of us is that of a violent tyrant, driven by base instincts. We tend to ignore his musical genius and his devotion to Siva. Scriptures describe how Ravana pleased Siva by beautifully playing *veena* and singing verses in classical *ragas*.

The scriptural accounts of the birth of Ravana are interesting. He was the son of Rishi Visrava and his wife, Kaikasi. Kaikasi had enticed Muni Visrava through her beauty. She interrupted the sage in his meditation by her arresting presence. Through the sage, she gave birth to Ravana along with his sister Surpanaka and two brothers, Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna.

Ravana's life is also a powerful reminder that Siva as the Supreme *Brahman* is impartial in recognising

tapas— whether it comes from a gentle soul longing for the highest knowledge, or any being that craves for every type of comfort. While the blessing is available to everyone, it is the individual who determines his own destiny as the recipient of the blessing.

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