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Singing the Wind: *Śrī Kāḷahastīśa*

1.

Once—it was in the time of the Corona epidemic—the Wind God appeared in my dream. It was just before dawn, and in the dream I was in India with a group of students and friends, but I didn't know what to show them. I was out alone, searching for a suitable site. Early morning. At the edge of a field of ripening wheat, or maybe paddy. Suddenly a wild gust of wind passed through the sheaves, making them dance, then even lifting them out of the earth and setting them down again some distance away. There was a rhythm to this dance, syncopated, not too fast or too slow. Watching the scene, I knew it was the most beautiful sight I'd ever seen. I wanted to capture it on my camera, but it was over long before I'd finished my fumbling, so I missed it. It was a mistake even to try. Who would want to capture the wind? I waited for it to happen again, and indeed there came another burst, rippling through the growing grain, no less beautiful than before.

A week later the Dīkṣitar kriti on the god of Kalahasti asked me to write about it. I think it was a direct consequence of the dream, among other things. I knew the kriti, knew that it was one of the five on the primary elements of creation, *pañca-bhūta*: empty space, wind, fire, water, earth. Dīkṣitar liked composing sets of closely interwoven songs. I'd heard this one many times but never *really* heard it.

It is in the raga called Huseni, whose scale is close to other ragas such as Mukhāri, Bhairavi, and Ānandabhairavi. For those who like to see the ascending and descending scales, here they are:

Ārohaṇam: S R2 G2 M1 P N2 D2 N2 S'
Avarohaṇam: S' N2 D1 P M1 G2 R2 S

A good introduction to the raga can be found at
https://sunson.wordpress.com/about/huseni/

Note the alternation in the D notes from ascent to descent, though the *śuddha daivata* or lower D occurs only in certain phrases, as we shall see. Huseni is classed as a *rakti-rāga*, that is, one in which strong emotional effects are natural, as is undoubtedly the case in the *krti* we will be exploring.

Dīkṣitar's *Śrī Kāḷahastīśa* is set in the 10-beat *jhampa* rhythm. When you learn to count this *tālam* on your palm and fingers, you have a downbeat followed by 6, then another downbeat, and finally the double pulsation (*drutam*) consisting of a down-beat followed by turning the palm upward (and waving it or striking it against hand or thigh). *Jhampa tālam* thus includes an inaudible caesura after the first 7 beats: 7 / 1 + 2. Sometimes this rhythm is marked as 4 + 3/ 1 + 2. It can also sound like repeated 5-beat (*khaṇḍacāpu*) segments. I think that if a great composer wanted the wind blowing through his or her song, *jhampa talam* would be a good choice.

This composition, like the great majority of Dīkṣitar kritis, is fully located in a site, the enchanting shrine of Sri Kalahasti, on the Telugu-Tamil border (today it is officially in the state of Simandhra). Lord Śiva lives here as a *linga* made of wind. You can't see it, but you know it's there because in the relatively air-tight sanctum, the oil lamps are flickering. The goddess here is the beautifully named Jñānaprasūnāmbikā, "She whose hair is redolent of wisdom." I will have something more to say about this temple, perched on the bank of the Suvarṇamukharī River, "Noisy as Gold," and at the foot of a steep hill leading up to the shrine of Kaṇṇappa Nāyaṉār, the devoted hunter who, as we shall see, tore out one of his eyes in order to offer it to the god whose eye had suddenly began to bleed. The pilgrim thus, after seeing the deity and his wife, climbs up to pay respects to Kannapar; and he or she may also want to crawl on his belly into the underground shrine of Pātāla Gaṇapati, who lives there at the entrance to the Nether World. Thus Kāḷahasti is laterally situated where Tamil and Telugu meet and melt together, and vertically situated on a precarious plateau between the dark world below and the little mountain above. Perhaps the continuous transition between these two domains is what generates the godly wind.

Wind is subtle, invisible, sometimes audible, always in motion, thus alive in a way that only subtle, moving things can be. Like wisdom, like fragrance, like this song.

2.

Let us begin with the Sanskrit text—in this case, one seemingly simpler and more concise than is often the case in Dīkṣitar. Nonetheless, it is dense with allusions and a particular reworking of classical themes. At the same time, the principle of iconicity operates throughout, not merely in the melodic sequences but also, indeed above all, in the *jhampa* rhythm. The interweaving of words, notes, and rhythmic beats achieves an intricacy and precision that are almost beyond analytical formulation—but this is true of most Dīkṣitar compositions. I will point out a few important nodes, but it is not a good idea to lose yourself in these technical games.

Pallavi:
śrī kāḷahastīśa śrita-janāvana
samīrākāra māṃ pāhi raja-mauli ehi

God of Śrīkāḷahasti, who protects those who come to him
Wind-formed, protect me, Moon-crowned god
Come

Anupallavi
pākāri-vidhi-hari-prāṇamaya-kośānilākāśa-
bhūmi-salilāgni-prakāśa śiva

Śiva, luminescent
in fire, water, earth, space,
and wind, that is, the outer surface

that is breath
for Indra, Brahmā, and Viṣṇu

jñāna-prasūnāmbikā-pate bhaktābhimāna
dakṣiṇa-kailāsa-vāsābhīṣṭa-dāna-catura-karābja
dīna-karuṇā-nidhe sūna-śara-sūdana
jñāna-bhava paśupate jñāna-guru-guha sac-cid-
ānanda-maya-mūrte hīna-jāti-kirātena pūjita-kīrtte

Husband of the goddess whose hair flowers with wisdom,
honored by those who serve him,
who dwells in Southern Kailāsa,
his hand gifted in giving whatever is asked,
an ocean of mercy for those in trouble,
enemy of Desire whose arrows are flowers,
Lord of beings, born from wisdom,
Guruguha, whose son taught him wisdom,
the very form of joy, awareness, aliveness,
famous because the lowly hunter
offered prayers.

Some things stand out at once. All five of the natural, primordial elements are mentioned by name—the only such mention in the set of the *pañca-bhūtas*. This alone would suffice to position our kriti as a central, integrative composition within this set. The first in the *bhūta* series here is, appropriately, *anila*, the wind which, if one takes the opening line of the *anupallavi* as a single long compound, is identified with the specific "sheathe" or "envelope" or "outer surface" of the self that is known as *prāṇamaya-kośa*. We recognize it from the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (second chapter) and from a long series of Advaita works. This compound is pregnant, heavily overdetermined, both verbally and melodically. I will have more to say of it. Apart from explicitly linking the wind to the breath-envelope, it also offers us the embedded name of the raga—[*k*]*ośāni*[l*a*], probably the older form of this name, [*H*]*osāni*. Dīkṣitar nearly always finds a place within a given composition for the *rāga-mudrā*, or proper name. "Listen to me as I sing or play this raga, chosen for good reason."

We might also notice the two-syllable imperative *ehi*, "Come," at the end of the *pallavi* refrain. Something important and unusual happens there. The singer wants the god to come; maybe he or she makes the god come; maybe he or she makes the god. The imperative may also suggest that, in fact, he is already on his way—the singer simply gives him a little puff or push from behind. Also, the composition begins and basically ends on the note *ri*, not on the far more common *sa*. There are not very many examples of this opening and closing. The *kriti* is balanced on a slight imbalance, or anomaly, that seems to set it into motion and leave it moving still. That same unstable *ri* also opens the *caraṇam* verse beginning with the name of the goddess.

The musical and rhythmic patterns have much to tell us even before we begin to unpack the verbal text. A longer look would show something of interest in practically every

note and syllable. Even without scoring the *svara* notes, we can easily hear the rising and falling melodic sequences (often with a slight twist, rising, regressing beyond the starting point, rising again), as if we were experiencing the rhythm of breath itself: in-breath, out-breath, and at times that almost imperceptible interval where the breath is held, as in Yoga—for example, at that *ehi* moment. There is nothing new in observing the deep iconicity built into a Carnatic *kriti*—the entire classical corpus is suffused by such effects—so it comes as no surprise that this composition breathes, audibly, as the wind moves within it. We could say that we hear breath's own breathing, just as, in so many of our texts, we are driven to watch the sense of sight as it sees itself seeing. I am sure, however, that iconic reflections are the least of what we should be noticing.

As always, there is a question of emphasis and theme, musical and conceptual—that is, thought finding its way into words—strongly supporting one another. A Dīkṣitar *kriti* is always marked by strong, emphatic moments where notes, rhythm, and syllables begin to converge. In *Śrī Kāḷlahastīśa*, as has been noted before,[1] we have melodic sequences that mirror or invert one another. It's not hard to hear them, and we can also see them clearly in Subbaraya Dīkṣitar's scoring. Naresh Keerthi has nicely said: "Dīkṣitar has captured the wind in a mirror." No small feat. Thus we have

ga ri ga ma pa
for the important phrase *prāṇa-maya*, "the outer surface that is breath"

and

ma pa ma pa da… [*ni sa ni da*]

for *samīrākāra*, "wind-formed" (what form does the wind have?).

The surface or sheath that is breath mirrors the invisible *liṅga* made of wind. These two wind-borne moments establish a resonance that pervades the entire composition.

There are many possible variations of this mirroring. For example:

pa ma ni dha ni

for *dāna-catura*, "gifted in giving"

where the initial quick descent suddenly jumps from *ma* to *ni*—a slight burst or puff that breaks linear sequence. And, a particularly important progression:

ma ri ga ri sa [perhaps trailing off to *ni*]

[1] Naresh Keerthi; Shivakumar?

These notes, classed as *vakra*, out of regular scalar sequence, articulate that critical *ehi* at the end of the refrain. One could multiply examples. And we have not yet tried to link such phrases to the beat, to say nothing of their deeper ideational content.

But before we study the rhythm, we need to look more closely at the web of words.

3.

Clearly, as already suggested, the god composed of wind and the breath that envelopes every living self—if "self" is the word we need—are continuous with each other, indeed fused together both in the Sanskrit compound of the *anupallavi* and in the musical repetitions and inversions that reveal and explore that merger. The invisible Lord of Śrī Kāḷahasti might appear, on the surface, to be situated somewhere outside the pilgrim or the singer. That seemingly external vantage point is perhaps the point of departure for our kriti. In the course of its performance, the external becomes ever more internal; or, like breath itself, it wavers between in and out. It is an axiom of south Indian metaphysics that the living breath, *uyir* in Tamil, moving in and out of all bodies, is indivisible; any individual *uyir* is the trans-personal *uyir*, a unitary and singular force of nature, the secret of being alive. Yet this *uyir* undergoes differentiation in terms of greater or lesser density and intensity: thus southern Śaivism likes to say that Śiva, the deep god, embodied in each being, is the "breath of breath" or the "life of life" (*uyirukk' uyirat' āy*),[2] that is, a vital breathing within our normal breathing. Breath breathes through, envelopes, penetrates into itself. Indeed, this is one possible definition of the Śaiva god.

As such, this god has an intimate connection to empty space (*ākāśam*, *vĕṟu vĕḷi*) and, evolving further, with the feminine aspect of himself, the goddess Pārvatī.[3] What is more, as we trace the evolution of this concept through the centuries up to the early-modern period—Dīkṣitar's time—with the important addition of Tantric concepts taken from the school of Śrīvidyā, Dīkṣitar's own conceptual world, we find that the *uyir* becomes increasingly personalized. It also loses something of its earlier tight homology with the universal *uyir* as existential foundation.[4] If in the classical period living beings breathe in continuous harmony with the in-breath and out-breath of god, as we see, for example, at the great temple of Tiruvārūr, by the sixteenth-century this harmony begins to break down, and a dissonance or incongruence become the norm. Human beings, like other creatures, now breathe alone, to their own inner rhythm. Thus we arrive at a paradoxical, tensile affirmation of the life-breath as our common interior reality and, at the same time, as the driving force behind individual existence and personal expression. That tension, now mapped onto the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out, inhabits our song. One might even say that this composition is *about* that tension.

But the text tells us this without compromising a complexity inherent to the classical terminology and the concepts that have generated it. To understand the complexities of breath and awareness, we have to go back to the Upaniṣadic notion of *prāṇa*, the Sanskrit

[2] *Civarāttirippurāṇam* 1.29.
[3] Loc. cit.
[4] See More than Real, Tenkasi.

equivalent of *uyir*, and its role within the five-fold series of surfaces, envelopes, or sheathes. Dīkṣitar takes us directly to the most ancient sources. We will follow him for a little while (please keep the music in your ears).

The notion of five sheathes derives (without the term *kośa*) from the stark and beautiful second chapter of the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*. An evolutionary progression sets the tone, or the introductory note, for what follows.

Out of the self, space came to be. Out of space, wind. Out of wind, fire. Out of fire, water. Out of water, earth. Out of earth, plants. Out of plants, food. Out of food, a person. So a person is made of the fluid core of food. Here is his head. Here is his right side, here his left side, here his self, here the bottom that holds him up. [2.1.1]

A series of emanations appears to move from the most subtle to the most tangible and embodied, each subsequent stage emerging from the former, subtler one and, in turn, generating the next, less subtle one. Some two and a half millennia separate Dīkṣitar from this Upanisad; but see the profound continuity of the primary elements in relation to the self as articulated in the kriti. The series is then, literally, fleshed out:

*All that lives is born from food—that is, all that lives on the earth, lives on food. At the end, they go back into food. Food is the first-born among beings; therefore they call it "all-healing." Those who worship food as brahman attain all there is of food….beings are born from food, live from food; it is eaten (**adyat**e), and it eats (**atti**); hence it is called **annam**, food.*

Yet there is a self made of breath that is different from that fluid core of food and that lives inside it, filling it. It's like a person, corresponding to that person's form. It's head is the in-breath, its right side the middle breath, its left side the out-breath, space is his self, earth is the bottom that holds him up. [2.1.2]

The first paragraph above is in metrical verse, the second in prose; both are in themselves highly lyrical and rhythmically structured in repetitive phrases—definitely a kind of music. The repetitions follow the logic of emanation stated above. The self made of breath generates another self made of mind that inheres in the breath-self, in all its parts and directions. The mind-self generates, in turn, a self made of awareness, *vijñāna*, inhering in the mind-self. And the awareness self gives birth to a self made of joy, *ānanda*, the first-born of *brahman*, the closest to that infinitely subtle, elusive, yet stable foundation of all reality, of all life. The later Advaita schools waver between identifying this overwhelming joyfulness with *brahman* itself, on the one hand, or insisting upon a recalcitrant distance between joy and brahman, since the former is still, they say, time-bound and transient (*kādācitkatva*)[5], unlike the latter, which is immune to, or indeed prior to, time. It is, moreover, not clear if the five selves really exist within one another in a staggered series or if they are a single underlying or overlying self revealed in fleeting aspects of its own continuous being, as if this self were coming into and out of focus as it sees, and seeks to speak, itself.

[5] Thus Vidyāraṇya's well-known compendium of Advaita, *Pañcadasī* 3.10.

The later sources describe the five emanations as *kośas*, the envelopes or external surfaces I've mentioned. Olivelle spells out the logical sequence, noting that the text remains elliptical and thus not entirely intelligible: "A human being is like an onion with five layers. Each outer layer acts as a body to each inner layer, which is the self enclosed by the former."[6] Thus we have, indeed, a series of selves, each one corresponding to a layer that is animated by, or informed by, its predecessor—proceeding, conceptually, from the most to the least subtle, but appearing in the text in the opposite order (food, breath, mind, awareness, joy). I assume that there is an implicit recommendation to the true subject, the practitioner (probably the ritualist involved in sacrifice), to peel away the more external layers in order to reach toward the innermost core.

But the onion image may be misleading. We can't be sure that the outer layers are really diminished in relation to the successive inner ones. Of course, it looks as if they are, and one can easily find support for this view in the canonical sources on non-dualism. But non-dualism itself implies that this existential gradient must be a distortion of something whole and unified that is simply there, always, wherever we look, even if we try to conceptualize or describe it as a progression, or a series of concentric skins, sheathes, surfaces. We encounter statements like my last sentence throughout the medieval Advaita literature—right up to, and including Dīkṣitar's kriti, which is why we are here at this point in an essay about music.

For example: in the *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi*, "Jewel of Insight," ascribed (probably wrongly) to the great philosopher Śaṅkarācārya, we find the following characterization of the "awareness-self":

yo 'yaṃ vijñāna-mayaḥ prāṇeṣu hṛdi sphurat svayaṃjyotiḥ/
kūṭasthaḥ sann ātmā kartā bhoktā bhavaty upādhi-sthaḥ//[191]

The awareness self is there in the breaths, a self-generated light quivering in the heart, being at the highest place, the self itself as actor and eater, resting there as if it were a limiting attribute.

"Eater" means the being that enjoys or consumes the results of actions. So the self that is made of awareness, while still a sort of *vikāra* or distorted emanation of the undistorted innermost self, is nonetheless an embodiment of that inner self and, as such, present as a self-born luminosity within breath and in the heart. We should also bear in mind that every cognitive act, in any living creature, is saturated with, and derived from, the inner self—where else could it come from? Mind and awareness are not identical , by any means, but the self in itself apparently makes no such distinction—it is we, or the Upaniṣadic teacher, who do so in the interests of bringing us closer to some level of aliveness that is not amenable to language.

Or consider the following verse from the *Pañcadaśī*, in its chapter on the *kośas*:

kā-cid antar-mukhā vṛttir ānanda-pratibimba-bhāk/
puṇya-bhoge bhoga-śāntau nidrā-rūpeṇa līyate// [3.9]

[6] Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 359.

There is a certain movement facing inward, a reflection of joy,
which dissolves into a happy tasting and, when taste comes to rest,
takes the mode of sleep.

The movement, *vṛtti*, apparently an aspect of the self, inches inward—from the surface of the awareness-self, seen as a reflection of joyfulness, thus very close to the innermost and highest point, if we can call it a point. Or perhaps joyfulness and total innerness are simply the same, as mentioned earlier. The *Pañcadaśī* likes to use the language of reflection, *pratibimba*, in conformity to one of the two major schools of Advaita.[7] So we have joy as well as a reflected kind of joy that dissolves into something still deeper and fuller when we sleep. T. M. P. Mahadevan rightly speaks of a "calculus of bliss" that we find in this text, as in its Upaniṣadic precursor. And yet there is also a sense that such calculations are ultimately, or even penultimately, false. Joy is joy. The *Pañcadaśī* also states that the self made of breath, that is, wind (*vāyu*), which is what activates the eyes and gives strength, or life itself, to the body, cannot be the full self, since it, the breath-self, lacks consciousness, *caitanya* (3.5). It must then be another, relatively external surface enveloping the vital core of existence. Or is it? Brahman is real, and any apparent or actual piece of brahman is no less real. Maybe breath is saturated with awareness after all. Maybe the sheathe and the sheathed coincide. Even a word like "depth"—used to characterize innerness—may be an artificial and distorting way of speaking about the living person when he or she is most alive.

We'll go back to the music in a moment. Just to bridge the gap, I want to point to the passive verb *līyate* in the verse just quoted. I translated it as "dissolves." We could also use the language of melt-down, absorption, fusing. The *Jewel of Insight* uses this same verb in a common analogy:

*Just as a cloud is guided by the wind and then dissolves back into the wind, so our bondage is fashioned by the mind (**manas**), just as our freedom is mind-made* (174).

It's the ending of the verse that matters here: *manas*, supposedly the third or middle sheath, ranked lower than understanding though higher than breath—if we follow the theoretical sequence—turns out to be the source of freedom, thus situated, so to speak, in the core self, into which it dissolves itself. But *līyate*, from the root *li*, also gives us *laya*, "rhythm". For Dīkṣitar, reabsorption into our self-generated freedom is a matter of rhythmic pulsation.

In sum: We can't seem to escape the intimate linkage between breath and awareness, or mind and rhythm, or self and sheath. In fact, the Upaniṣadic sequence of metaphysical, or meta-psychological, envelopes doesn't work as we might expect it to, in a linear and hierarchical order. The envelopes criss-cross, embed themselves in each other in mutual bonding, elude stable progressions. Their ordering contains a built-in disorder; the sheathes are in continuous movement through each other, absorbing features not only of an earlier or deeper envelope but also, promiscuously, of the series as a single and singular vibrant set. The whole, real self, an innermost order of existence, is present at every moment and at every

[7] To be more precise, Vidyāraṇya follows the *ābhāsa-vāda*, the school of "appearances," according to which the reflection is not entirely real and not perfectly isomorphic with its source.

possible locus or surface, though possibly with differential intensities, textures, and configurations that can, in languages of one kind or another, be captured as they flee. Moreover, the ancient Upaniṣadic self, *ātman*, and the person, *puruṣa*, continuously emerging from it, must coincide.

4.

Now look again at the language of the *kriti*. We have wind, the body of the Kāḷahasti god. He is *samīrākāra*, "wind-formed," a repeated phrase musically limned and emphasized. Like the ancient self, the wind is present at each note and every syllable. We've also seen that wind, the first in the series of five elements, is the envelope made of breath, *prāṇamaya-kośa* (for the three gods, Indra, Brahmā, and Viṣṇu, but also, no doubt, for all of us). Is the *linga* of wind at Śrī Kāḷahasti inside the temple but outside the pilgrims who come to worship it? Or is it, by definition, already inside them? Maybe at this temple, "outside" is an irrelevant category. In any case, the pilgrims are no less involved in *laya*, being absorbed, as Dīkṣitar is in his musical *laya*. And, again: we have every reason to think that the *kriti* uses musical means to bring this wind-filled god into existence, somewhere close to us or indeed internal to us, active in, or ***as***, our breath, mind, awareness.

But just as the enveloping surfaces we've been exploring have a tendency to embed themselves in one another, the five primordial elements turn up in interpenetrating series within the verbal text. First, and most conspicuously, we see a progression from *prāṇa*, breath, or its analogue, wind, to knowledge and awareness, *jñāna*, here very close to the *Taittirīya*'s *vijñāna*. This movement inaugurates the *caraṇam* verse where the composer situates the Kāḷahasti goddess, *Jñāna-prasūnāmbikā*, she whose hair flowers with, or is redolent of, wisdom. Who could resist such a goddess? Wisdom is fragrant, a gentle flowering, as subtle and intangible as the wind. Toward the end of the verse, Śiva is the "Lord of beings, born from wisdom" (*jñāna-bhava*). It's as if the breath-self and the awareness-self were, first, overlapping, then fusing into a heightened form of being. As if that were not enough, the composer signs his own name as *Jñāna-guru-guha*, "Guruguha, whose son taught him wisdom." Dikṣitar assumed this pen-name, so to speak, at the shrine of Murukaṉ/Subrahmaṇya, Śiva's son, in TIruttaṇi or Taṇikai in the northern Tamil country, where he is said to have sung his first song, the famous *Śrī Nāthādi Guruguho jayati* in the foundational Māyāmāḷavagauḷa raga. The story behind Murukaṉ's epithet is that this god, the son, had to teach his own father, the great god Śiva, the real meaning of the *praṇava* mantra (Oṃ). This striking inversion in roles took place at Svāmimalai in Tañjāvūr District.

The Svāmimalai tradition tells us that Murukaṉ, insulted by Brahmā, struck the creator god on his forehead after he, Brahmā, was unable to explain the meaning of the Vedic syllable Oṃ; Murukaṉ then imprisoned Brahmā and took over the business of creation. When the other gods recruited Śiva to restore Brahmā to his usual role, Murukaṉ reported to his father that Brahmā knew nothing about the Vedic mantra and was unsuited to the task of creating a world out of sounds. "What *does* the *praṇava* mantra mean?" Śiva asked his son, who proceeded to initiate his father into the secret meaning, *guha*. Hence Murukaṉ's title, Guru-guha, "Guha the teacher." At Svāmimalai the son's shrine is high up on the hill, far above Śiva's down below.

In the musical performance, Guru-guha is part of the acceleration in tempo that leads the *kriti* toward conclusion. No one can miss the personal assertion of the composer in the name he had assumed. This outward sign is perhaps the clearest, but least important, sign of Dīkṣitar's subjective, affective presence in this *kriti*, as in others.

The Sanskrit text is beginning to appear more and more carefully articulated, with a crescendo in meaning that comes through together with the accelerated rhythm. Immediately following upon *Jñāna-guru-guha* is the phrase *sac-cid-ānanda-maya-mūrtte*, "the very form of joy, awareness, aliveness." The father's teacher assumes this form that culminates in *ānanda-maya*, here an attribute of *mūrtte*, "form," but identical with the innermost envelope in the series we have studied. Breath, awareness, joy—in the precise order as in the *Taittirīya*. We are in the same, though slightly compressed or abbreviated, series. What about the other two envelopes, the food-self and the mind-self? They haven't disappeared. In fact, they are firmly present in that other series of the five elements. In Dīkṣitar's ordering in this *kriti*, we have *anila*, wind; then *ākāśa,* space, the subtle medium of awareness (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.7.1, 3.6.1, *inter alia*); then earth, *bhūmi*, which *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.10 tells us is food (*pṛthivī vā annam*); then water, *salila*, another form of food (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.8, *āpo vā annam*); then fire, *agni*, identified with mind, *manas* (*Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 3.4; see *Viveka-cūḍāmaṇi* 170 on the *manomaya-kośa*); and the final, common feature, *prakāśa*, luminescence. What is missing? Joy, perhaps, that appears explicitly in the final line of the *caraṇam*, and that is also seen as a form of light.

But a *kriti* like this one, however densely articulated, is not intended for mechanical decoding. In fact, mechanics are the worst possible mode of interpreting such a work. The texts are alive, buzzing in the composer's mind, no doubt in their Śrīvidyā extensions, and they make their way naturally, seamlessly, into the phrases he invents, whether musical or verbal, perhaps without much deliberate intellection. We come to his text *ex post facto*, always too late. But our delayed, decelerated response does allow us to see something that may not be immediately apparent on the surface. The five *bhūta* elements are condensed into one—the wind. Then they emerge as separate but linked, luminous entities. They recur, diffused among the three *kośa* sheathes—*prāṇa*, (*vi*)*jñāna*, and *ānanda*, that is, breath, awareness, and joy-- that are first intimated by the wind-sheath mentioned in the *anupallavi*. As in the *Taittirīya*, a principle of sequential embedment is active, along with a countervailing principle of totality and wholeness in each specific embodiment or segment. We could, in theory, speak of continuously deepening embeddings, leading to the point at which everything is so powerfully compacted that the *kriti* can conclude (with one final glance at something not yet explored).

In short: everything is there in the breath, the wind, the *uyir*, whose aspects and dynamics are allowed to come into play as the composition unfolds. That statement includes the goddess with her fragrant hair and the composer himself, who carries the name of the son, who is a kind of god within god, and who has the awareness that enables him to generate the wind-formed deity at this temple or in the listeners' mind. That creative act is, it seems, what "knowing" means.

It time for a short break. Dīkṣitar was not the only great artist to sing about Śrī Kāḷahasti. There's a whole literature from the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries about this site, couched in the poetry and music and introspective personhood that came into being there. The main stories associated with the temple go back much farther, to the middle of the first millennium (in the Tamil *Tevāram* songs) and, some centuries later, to Chola times. The Tamil name of the goddess, corresponding to the Sanskrit Jñānaprasūnāmbikā, is Ñāṉappūṅkotaiyār, "whose hair is fragrant (or flowering) with awareness." In the sixteenth- and seventeenth century texts, this name is linked to a story about the poet Nakkīrar, who denied that a woman's hair could be naturally fragrant—only real flowers can impart such fragrance—and was punished for his stubborn insistence on this point by Lord Śiva, the putative author of a poem about the sweet smell of a woman's hair from the ancient Sangam anthology *Kuṟuntŏkai* (2).[8]

It seems that awareness has a sweet fragrance, like that of the wind enshrined in Śrī Kāḷahasti. So let us add *jñāna*, like *vijñāna* in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, to the series of intangible but entirely palpable substances that congregate at this site. Please recall that the *caraṇam* verse in the *kriti* begins with *Jñāna-* as the first part of Devī's name, sung on that low note *ri*, and that this same word recurs twice more before the verse concludes.[9] Wind, breath, awareness, music—these are commensurate forms of being. Let's add one more: *aṉpu*, the inner movement that we call "love."

Before you protest at what might seem to be a facile, or sentimental, move, look at what the Telugu poet Dhūrjaṭi says in a verse from his *Śrīkāḷahasti-śatakamu*, a collection of a hundred or so entirely personal, introspective poems:

nī rūpambu dalampagā duda-modal ne gānan' īv'aina co
rā rā ramm' aniy añcu jĕppavu vṛthārambhambul' iṅk' eṭikin/
nīran mumpumu pāla mumpum' ika ninne nammināḍam jumī
śrīrāmārcita-pāda-padma-yugaḷā śrīkāḷahastīśvarā

When I try to think about your body,
I see no end and no beginning.
Whoever you are, why don't you call me?--
"Come, come to me." Why
do I keep trying so hard,
always in vain? Whether you bathe me
in water or bathe me
in milk, I'm with you, god,
with the goddess at your feet.[10]

"Come to me"—we know the phrase. So did Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar. One supposes anyone, human or divine could say it. So maybe we should put it aside. But wait. Here are two verses from Tuṟaimaṅkalam Civappirakācacuvāmi's seventeenth-century masterpiece, the

[8] For the Telugu poet Dhūrjaṭi's version of this story, see *Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology*. 192-200.
[9] An alternative reading in the penultimate line of the *caraṇam*, preceding *bhava*, is [*ī*]*śāna*, that is, Śiva.
[10] *Śrīkāḷahasti-śatakamu* 19, taking *rāmā•* as "wife, woman".

Cīkāḷattippurāṇam, the chapter on the rough hunter known as Tiṇṇaṉ or Kaṇṇappar, the most famous of all the great devotees of Śiva at this shrine. It's a pregnant moment: the hunter has dreamt that the god asked him to visit him on the mountain, and thus Tiṇṇaṉ finds the *linga* and is instantly transformed—from a person who is all "iron bathed in mercury" to someone who is entirely embodied in, or as, love (*aṉp' ŏru vaṭivam*, 95):[11]

"Honey, millet cakes, sweet fruits, roots,
and lots of meat—venison, porcupine,
wild boar, iguana, turtle—I myself
will give you all of these. The good hunters
are there to help. Come see our village.
Come now!

Lord, I can't bear the thought
that you're all alone up here
on the mountain. You should come
with me to our village, Uṭuppūr,
where you'll be safe. Please,
think it over." (verses 99-100)

Along with melting down his previous metallic consciousness, Tiṇṇaṉ is possessed by an urgent wish, or need, to feed the new-found god. Moreover, he is profoundly troubled by the god's lonely existence as a solitary *linga* on the hillside. And while most people know this story because of its melodramatic climax, I think this theme of a deity's infinite loneliness is the true core of the way the story is told at Śrī Kāḷahasti. The *linga* of wind is as lonely as the wind. No wonder Tiṇṇaṉ wants to bring him home: "Come. Come with me. Now!"

Next time we listen to Dīkṣitar's *ehi*—I'll come back to it one last time—we should hear these resonances. He must have known the purāṇic texts from this temple. That *ehi* is, as the scientists say, entirely non-trivial. It—*vā* in Tamil, *rā rammu* in Telugu—is the most intimate, familiar, accessible word in any of these languages. In Dhūrjaṭi's poem, it comes along with introspective doubt: he doesn't know what body, what form, belongs to the god he's talking to. He's frustrated, can't break through to another form of awareness, can't catch hold of the wind. He's also lonely. He also, by the way, refers more than once to the Kaṇṇappar story in the course of his inward-directed meditations, always addressed in some way to the god, though the latter often appears as an eavesdropper on the ongoing dialogue or multilogue in the mind of his poet.

Dīkṣitar concludes his *kriti* with Kaṇṇappar— the god at Kāḷahasti is "famous because the lowly hunter offered prayers" (*hīna-jāti-kirātena pūjita-kīrtte*). The fame, *kīrtti*, is derived from what Kaṇṇappar did, which is as much as to say that Kaṇṇappar plays a major role in fashioning this god in the form of existence that we find there today. What took place at Kāḷahasti is as follows. The hunter brings offerings of meat and liquor to the *liṅga*. As it happens, there is a Brahmin priest who worships there each day with vegetarian offerings

[11] This verse, like many in the Civappirakācam text, closely follows and amplifies the corresponding verse in Cekkiḻār's *Pĕriya Purāṇam* (753). On Cekkiḻār's telling of the Kaṇṇappar story see Cox.

(fresh leaves and flowers). The priest is horrified to find his vegan deity defiled day after day by blood sacrifice; he cleans and purifies the image—until the next morning, when it all happens again. Now Śiva wants to teach this priest a lesson; he appears in his dream and tells him to watch what unfolds. Kaṇṇappar arrives to find the *liṅga* bleeding from one of its eyes (these *liṅgas* have a kind of face, and they can see). The hunter can't bear this apparent wound any more than he could contain the god's solitary existence. He scoops out one of his own eyes and places it on the god's face. Then the second eye of the *liṅga* begins to bleed. Kaṇṇappar places his foot on the site of the wound, so that he can find the place, and begins to tear out his other eye—but the god reaches out and stops him in time. Hence his name, "Eye-Man." He has passed an ultimate test, and the priest, too, has become a person. In the Telugu *Basva-purāṇamu* of Pālkuṟiki Somanātha, the rough and innocent hunter says the Śrīkāḷahasti god is his *prāṇa-liṅga*, the life-breath that the Vīraśaiva devotee holds just over his heart.

Sometimes, in twentieth-century India, one hears voices protesting the Kaṇṇappar reference, which might seem to be locked into old and unacceptable notions of caste hierarchy. Much depends on the devotee's lowly origin, as Dīkṣitar mentions. This, however, misses the point. As Civappirakācar says, echoing his model, Cekkiḻār: "Is there any limit to this man's love?"[12] In the *kriti*, too, the final words and notes and drum-beats pour into an infinity, as Kaṇṇappar leads us into the unending *ehi*.

6.

It may sound preposterous, but I think all of this—Kaṇṇappar's sacrifice, Dhūrjaṭi's anguished self-examination, Civappirakācar's melodic narrative, the goddess fragrant with knowing—has poured into Dīkṣitar's composition. The verbal text is a palimpsest to be navigated with the help of the melodic and rhythmic phrases. We have already seen something of the emphases that the music makes audible, or thinkable. However, in this *kriti*, unlike many other Dīkṣitar compositions, we find a repeated lack of congruence, or of isomorphism, between the syntactical verbal units and the non-verbal ones.

It is most apparent in the way a syntagma spills over into its successor within a single rhythmic cycle, *āvartanam*. Thus *samīrākāra*, "wind-formed," slips into the *preceding* phrase, *śrita-janāvana*, "who protects those who come to him." One might expect "wind-formed" to begin its own rhythmic cycle, as indeed it does in later appearances (and in the five-beat *khaṇḍa-cāpu* way of counting). Something similar happens with *prāṇa-maya-kośa*, "the other surface that is breath," in the *anupallavi*. And so on throughout the *kriti*. On the verbal level alone, we find complex enjambment—a phrase bridging the break between two separate lines—as is often the case in Dīkṣitar texts; here, however, it echoes or reinforces the somewhat unusual disjunction between syntax and *tālam*. You may recall that I have argued for a somewhat analogous disjunction, in the early-modern period, in the distinct forms of breathing—the breath-rhythm of the god or gods and the rhythm of human beings, especially insofar as the latter are in the new mode of introspection.

[12] PP 755; *Cīkāḷattippurāṇam* 100.

Wind, being continuous, not subject to our habitual distinctions, binds the unfolding phrases together—audibly, palpably—from beginning to end. And what about that end? I have listened to this composition over and over, and yet the final phrase, *Ehi*, "Come," never fails to move me, sometimes to tears. The God is wind, he is the wind-sheath that adumbrates mind and awareness and joy, he holds the moon on his head, he is this, he is that, but after all these attributes and suggestions the singer says these two simple syllables, *Ehi*. Come to me. Come now. Whoever you are. I can't hold on to you. I can't catch the wind. Come now.

That same *Ehi* is familiar to connoisseurs of Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar. For example, it opens and defines the last, or possibly the penultimate, kriti that Dīkṣitar composed, on the day of his death: the haunting *Ehi Annapūrṇe*, "Come, Goddess filled with food" (Annapūrṇā in Varanasi), in Punnāgavarāḷi raga. "Come, goddess, become present (*saṃnidehi*), be with me." There, as in *Śrīkāḷahastīśa*, it is the simplicity that does the work. I am reminded of a story about the greatest of all Sanskrit poets, Kālidāsa, the author of six long masterpieces, each perfect in every syllable. They say that on his deathbed he said to his disciples, "You can discard everything I composed except for one sentence" [in Prakrit, from the final act of the *Abhijñāna-śākuntala*]: *muñca maṃ jāva ambāe saāsaṃ gamissaṃ*, "I want to go to my Mother."

That *Ehi* in our *kriti* defies the *tālam* count. Breath tapers off. Or perhaps the singer is holding his or her breath: *prāṇāyāma*, as in Yoga. We can trace the inbreaths and outbreaths through the song, including those infinitesimal pauses built into the way a great artist performs it, but the *Ehi* is outside of time, incalculable. Archana Venkatesan has aptly said that the final vowel, ***i***, leaves us with an open-ended, unfinished, unfinishable breath of wind (perhaps a sigh). And in any case, the final two beats of each *jhampa* cycle, which are sometimes keyed in this composition to a single *svara* note, mark that pause, as if the wind has died down for a moment, or as if the god is holding *his* breath. *Prāṇāyāma*, under the right astral, ritual, and awareness-oriented conditions, is the mechanism that awakens the Kuṇḍalinī goddess asleep at the base of the spine and thrusts her upward into the reservoir of *amṛta*, ambrosia, that floods the Yogi's being (or the listener's). Music is breath, including the silent moments when breathing rests.

If you analyze the first 7 beats of *jhampa tālam* as 4 + 3, or the whole 10-beat cycle as 4 + 3/ + 3 (either of these possibilities can be actualized by the percussion accompaniment), you may find yourself in the territory of what the ethnomusicologist Steven Friedson calls "multistable" or "polyrhythmic" or (since these divisions correspond to physical movements of hands and thighs) "polykinetic" acoustic illusions. Four beats shifting to three, or overlapping with three or five, create a tension that may be intrinsic to this composition.[13] It all depends on how it is sung and played. There is something unsettling about such rhythms, which Friedson compares to those well-known visual images that can be deciphered in two opposing ways, though only by choosing at any moment one of the two—goblet and two faces, for example. "In these types of illusions, figure and ground spontaneously reverse themselves, creating perceptual shifts."[14] In *Śrīkāḷahastīśa*, we may well wonder, repeatedly, what is figure and what is ground. Are the wind-borne rhythms present in the drumming, in

[13] Steven M. Friedson, *Dancing Prophets: Musical Experience in Tumbuka Healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997: 137-47. Thanks to Don Handelman and Einat Baron.
[14] Ibid. 140.

the Sanskrit text, or in the slight gaps that open up between them? Multistable rhythmic patterns are widespread in both Carnatic and Hindustani systems, especially in the longer *tālas*; more specifically, a multistable seven-beat rhythm is the preferred, baseline mode in Kūḍiyāṭṭam performance, not by chance—it seems to reflect diffuse, perception-dependent, overlapping temporalities.[15] In the composition we are discussing, the concurrent or superimposed 5-beat and 10-beat *tālams* create another eloquent, multistable pattern.

In my experience as a listener, it is easy to lose the count in *jhampa* compositions, probably because of these familiar tensions. We could also say that the metrical breaks are often at odds with the rhythmic progression, and both, as we have seen, may stand in contrast to the syntax of the lyrics. Incongruence of this sort imparts a liveliness to the music and suggests that, even on the level of temporal pulsation, there is something complex, dynamic, and unbalanced about the topic at hand—say the unpredictable movement of the wind, or a corresponding imbalance in the god. I'll come back to this thought one more time, from a wider perspective, as I try to conclude this essay.

7.

We've taken a roundabout route, leaving the great reservoir of Śrī Kāḷahasti sources mostly untouched. Perhaps I've also missed the main point in the musical text I've been exploring. There is a problem in translating things into (English) sentences. There is a problem about describing things rather than making them or letting them be.

A few more of those sentences by way of closing. Somewhere near the beginning of this essay I said that iconic effects are the least of what we should be noticing. It's too easy to identify them and certainly insufficient to stop there. The *kriti* is all wind and breath and all that comes with such things, though they are not exactly "things," any more than the god at Kāḷahasti is a thing, an object, a datum, something given with the world. No south Indian deity is a given. She or he is always something coming to be, something that might come to be, or rather *someone* who may come to be, emerging in awareness as a living subject, usually in a mode of mutual self-creation in the presence of another aware subject.

So our *kriti* is not in any important sense an attempt to imitate, or even to become, to sing or speak as, the wind. Like all of Dīkṣitar's compositions, it is much more than that. We can hear the wind, and that is as it should be. Maybe not just anyone could create this sonic-verbal-rhythmic masterpiece of windfulness. It takes a great musician-composer to do that. But again let me say that one shouldn't get lost in technical, analytical details. One has to listen.

What the *kriti* gives us is a god, created by singing the sounds, whose nature and attributes, if there are such, are those of the wind, a south Indian wind. We've seen several of them. This god is subtle, a little wild, maybe capricious, playful, in continuous movement, in and out of his own body (in the center of the shrine) and of ours. He, or he-she, cannot be captured and held in place, even in a part of us as subtle and shifting as the mind. He-she is alive, possibly more alive than most of us at any given moment, hence his self-definition as a

[15] See D. Shulman, *The Rite of Seeing*.

deity, the *uyir*'s *uyir*. "Alive" is a synonym for "subtle." In this case, as subtle as the melodic phrases, the sonar-aural body that the composer is busy creating and the performing artist is also creating in a personal way. Perhaps the god is also lost in himself, like the cloud carried by the wind that dissolves back into cloud, as the *Viveka-cūḍāmani* tells us. If that is indeed the case, at times, then the music is one way to bring him back to himself and to us.

It comes down to a kind of awareness, as the lyrics tell us. *Prāṇa*, whatever its place in the ordered series of Upaniṣadic emanations, is intimately there in *vijñāna*, an intimation of awareness and understanding, which are not at all the same as knowing. Centuries of meditative praxis in many South Asian systems have linked breath to mindfulness or to awareness, however these are defined, if indeed they can be defined. We saw that the Advaita textbooks such as the *Pañcadaśī* draw in the contours of this linkage, even if they like to say that breath in itself lacks consciousness. In the mental economy of early-modern South India, and also in the Tantric Śrīvidyā, breath and awareness overlap. Indeed, they are mutually dependent. Awareness is, at the least, a potential, potent attribute of *uyir*, the living, always moving and emergent, self.

Then there are the specific features that this composition brings to the fore as inhering in the god at Kāḷahasti as Dīkṣitar must have sensed him: the hurried overlapping, or extension, of the lyric in relation to the rhythmic cycles; the lack of isomorphism between the verbal and the musical syntax; the initial and final *ri*-note, ever so slightly off balance; the unsettling rhythms of 4 and 3 and 5 and 5 and 7 and 2/3 and 10; the built-in pauses, where breath is held until released; the verbal repetitions that change their form and meaning each time they recur; the mirror-like inversions in phrase, wind reflected in a mirror; the barely audible yet crucial alternation in the *dhaivata* note, high and low; the subtle breathlessness of breath, which, like any living thing, also has to breathe and perhaps to know itself breathing. Above all, there are the two simple syllables that seem to draw all the rest into themselves, that are a whole language in themselves, the closest one might ever get to speaking truly, wholly, to the wind-formed god, as Kaṇṇappar does in his own rough way: *Ehi*, Come. Rush through me. Now is the time.