

## **The Widening Gyre: Rippling Connotations of Shiva's Cosmic Dance**

Forrest McGill, Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

February 5, 2012

### Widening in time

- Early times, then 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> c. Tamil poet saints, then continuing, with developments, to the present

### Widening in geography

- Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu state. Nataraja Temple
- Other parts of India, plus Sri Lanka, Nepal, Cambodia. But: Indonesia?
- Worldwide (CERN [European Organization for Nuclear Research], etc., etc.)

### Widening in religious contexts

- Shiva in a variety of Hindu contexts, including Tantric
- Shiva in Buddhist contexts
- Interchange of Shaiva and Buddhist ideas and motifs

### Widening in familiarity and usage

- “Traditional” understandings of dancing Shiva
- Dancing Shiva and icon as political emblem
- Modern transformations of the icon
  - Means of transmission: Indian and non-Indian dance (e.g. Ted Shawn), films, TV, comics (Amar Chitra Katha), popular prints, etc.

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### Key figures (most of whom are sometimes represented dancing):

#### Shiva (adjective, Shaiva)

- Forms:
  - Nataraja, “king/lord of dance”
  - Bhairava, a fierce form
- Family:
  - Wife: Parvati (aka Uma); children (by complicated means): Ganesha (*gana+isha* = “lord of ganas”), Skanda (aka Karttikeya, Murugan, Kumara, Subramanya, etc.)
- Gang:
  - Ganas: exuberant, sometimes militant, followers of Shiva. They have a variety of forms and can shapeshift
  - Nandi (bull) and Nadikeshvara (partly anthropomorphic)

Deities with whom Shiva is associated:

- Durga (sometimes thought of as Shiva's wife, associated with or identical to Parvati)
- Kali ("Durga's personified wrath")
- Yoginis, Warrior goddesses associated with Durga

## Further Reading

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