
THE MEANING OF THE ŚIVALINGA

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The Lady Lilavati Ramanathan Memorial Lecture 1988
University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka

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1989

**Printed in Sri Lanka by Sridevi Printers (Private) Ltd.
27, Pepiliyana Road, Nedimala, Dehiwala.**

The Lady Līlavati Rāmanāthan Memorial Lecture is delivered at the University of Jaffna in terms of an endowment established in 1981 by the Caiva Mankaiyar Capai (Saiva Women's Association) of Jaffna to commemorate the services of Lady Rāmanāthan, wife of Sir Ponnambalam Rāmanāthan, K. C., C.M.G., to education and religion.

The 1988 Memorial Lecture was prepared by Professor Tambyah Nadarāja, M.A., Ph.D. (Cantab.), Hon. Litt.D. (Jaffna), Hon.LL.D. (Colombo), Emeritus Professor of Law, University of Colombo, and Chancellor, University of Jaffna. It was read at the University of Jaffna on 27th November 1988 by Dr. Kailāsanātha Kurukkal, Professor of Hindu Civilisation, before an invited audience, with the Vice-Chancellor of the University, Professor A. Thurairājah, in the Chair.

The text of the lecture appears in the present publication, which also contains notes, a bibliography and an index. Most readers will probably be content to read only the text of the lecture (pages 1 to 9) without referring to any of the notes; but some of those who have read the text through might wish to re-read the paragraphs of the text along with the notes referred to in those paragraphs. The notes contain references to authorities for statements made in the text and to books and articles containing illustrations of *līngas* and icons mentioned in the text, as well as other relevant material.

C. M.

The first two introductory paragraphs of the lecture were the following;

When I was invited by the University of Jaffna to deliver the Lady Lilāvati Rāmanāthan Memorial Lecture for 1988, I accepted the invitation with pleasure—not only because I happen to be the Chancellor of this University but also because Lady Rāmanāthan happens to be my grand--aunt. Although I did not have the privilege of knowing her personally, I had heard from older relatives of mine much about the personality and the work of this cultured lady from a foreign land who had made Sri Lanka (and more particularly Jaffna) her home. For her dedicated services to education the University of Ceylon at its very first Convocation in 1942 conferred upon her the degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*; and I still remember vividly the impression created on me by the sight of her austere figure as she stood up on the stage to receive the degree.

In the Preface to a book jointly planned by her and her husband, in which the story of the *Ramayana* was retold for young people, she referred to him as “my one Great Friend, my Beloved Teacher, my Everlasting Light of Grace and Truth”; while in his Introduction to that book he called her “my *Sahatharmini* (help-mate in good works)”. This last description was indeed an apt one for a wife who, for a quarter of a century, had not only taken upon herself the burden of many routine matters in order to free her distinguished husband for more important activities in the spheres of politics, education and religion, but had also shown a lively interest in all those activities. After his death in 1930 she presided over the destinies of the two schools he had established and administered various educational and religious trusts until her own death twenty three years later.

THE MEANING OF THE ŚIVALĪŅGA

In the cult of Śiva the most sacred object in both public and private worship is the pillar or column called the *Śivalīᅅga* (which will be referred to hereafter as the *līᅅga*¹). It has rightly been said that the significance of the *līᅅga* in the Śaivite world is comparable to that of the Cross in the Christian world.² Yet it has long been usual for many who are not Hindus, and even for some Hindus who uncritically follow them, to regard the *līᅅga* as a representation of the phallus of Śiva. Thus, the Roman Catholic missionary, Abbé J. A. Dubois, who worked in South India between 1792 and 1823³, described the *līᅅga* as an "obscene symbol" and "an insult to decency."⁴ Over seven centuries ago a Tamil text of the Śaiva Siddhānta school of philosophy remarked on the difficulty of understanding the true meaning of the *līᅅga*.⁵ In this lecture we shall consider the *līᅅga* in mythology, art and philosophy and endeavour to explain the meaning it holds for Śaivites who worship it today.

Of the various visual representations of Śiva used in both public and domestic worship anthropomorphic icons and the aniconic symbol of the *līᅅga* are the best known.⁶ There are several well known anthropomorphic forms of Śiva—such as Naᅅarāja, the Dancing Lord; Dakᅅiᅅāmūrti, the "south-facing form" of Śiva as teacher; and Somāskandamūrti, Śiva with his consort Umā and his son Skanda. But, however great the emotional appeal some of these forms have for worshippers as subjects of their devotional fervour, the *līᅅga* is considered the *mūlavigraha*, the "fundamental form" of Śiva, as being the most abstract as well as the most comprehensive in meaning of all the visual representations of Śiva. Consequently, it occupies pride of place in the innermost central sanctum, the *garbhagrha* or "womb house", of the temples of Śiva; while the anthropomorphic images are disposed in niches in the outer walls of the *garbhagrha*, or in shrines in the corridors and courts that surround it, or they appear on the gateway towers (*gopurams*) of the temples.

Liṅgas may be made of various kinds of materials. Those intended for temporary use to be discarded thereafter may be made of ephemeral transitory (*kṣaṇika*) materials, such as sand, river clay, rice, sandalwood paste, flowers or molasses; while for more durable *liṅgas* stone, metal, precious stones⁷, wood or earth may be used.⁸ Indeed the substance of a *liṅga* may be any one of the five constituent elements of the universe, the *pañcabhūtas* of earth, water, fire, air and ether.⁹ *Liṅgas* may be movable (*cala liṅgas*) or immovable (*acala liṅgas*), and they may be man-made (*mānuṣa liṅgas*) or “self-born” (*svāyambhuva liṅgas*), which are highly venerated as they are believed to have come into existence spontaneously and to have existed from time immemorial.¹⁰

The man-made immovable *liṅgas* made of stone, which are set up for public worship in temples, consist of three parts: the visible cylindrical uppermost part, called the *Rudrabhāga*, the Rudra part or *Pūjābhāga*, to which the rituals of the temple service (*pūjā*) are directed; and two lower parts that are not visible (because they are inserted in and covered by the supporting pedestal)—the intermediate octagonal *Viṣṇubhāga*, the Viṣṇu part, and the lowest square *Brahmabhāga*, the Brahma part.¹¹ The visible *Rudrabhāga* of the *liṅga* may be embellished in various ways. Thus, it may have plain vertically demarcated facets¹²; or vertical and horizontal lines may be incised on it and miniature *liṅgas* may be carved in the spaces formed by the intersections¹³; or faces, busts and even full-length figures, representing the five “faces” that are aspects of the total reality of Śiva¹⁴, may be carved on and project from the *Rudrabhāga*. Apart from the immovable *liṅgas* established for public worship, smaller movable *liṅgas* are used in private worship or are worn on the person – for example, by members of the Vīraśaiva (“Stalwart Śaivas”) or Liṅgāyat (“Liṅga-wearer”) sect.¹⁵

It is interesting to speculate on the circumstances that may have influenced the choice of an upright pillar or column for the *liṅga*. It has, for example, been suggested that the veneration of Buddhist votive stūpas or reliquary mounds, especially miniature ones, must have contributed to the idea of a column as a religious emblem.¹⁶ But, whatever the merits of this suggestion, a more likely prototype of the *liṅga* may be found in the stones, in the form of

megaliths, menhirs or dolmens, which in India (as in many other countries all over the world) were erected to mark the places where the bodies or the ashes of departed saints and heroes have been enshrined.¹⁷ Thus, in India, Śaiva shrines with the *liṅga* in the central sanctum were built over the tombs of great saints¹⁸ and, memorial stones (in Tamil *vrakkals*, “hero-stones,” or *naṭukals*, “planted stones”), set up on the graves of warriors who had fallen in battle or of other persons whose heroism merited commemoration, become invested with divinity in the course of time.¹⁹

But those who are familiar with Tamil literature consider the most probable prototype of the *liṅga* to be the *kantu*, a small pillar or post representing divinity which, according to early Tamil texts dating from about the beginning of the Christian era, was established for worship in public places.²⁰ The word *kantu* is said to mean “post” or “pillar” and “post representing a deity”²¹ and the word *Kantali*, the name for the divinity represented by the post, is a compound of *kantu* and *ali*.²² One meaning of the latter word is “straw”²³, so that *Kantali* has been interpreted as meaning the “post to which the sacrificial victim was bound with straw or rope.”²⁴ Later *Kantali* was explained, in accordance with higher and more abstract conceptions of the Divine, as “the supreme substance, the Being above all elements of matter”²⁵; in other words, as “the Reality, transcending all categories, without attachment, without form, standing alone as the Self.”²⁶ It may be mentioned here that in the temple of Śiva at Kanrāppūr, near Tirūvārūr, in Tanjāvūr District, Tamil Nādu, he is worshipped as *Naṭutaṛinātan*, the Lord (*nātan*) of the *Naṭutaṛi* or “post planted in the ground.”²⁷

We must now consider the meaning of the *liṅga* with particular reference to the related myths and philosophical conceptions and its representations in art. The word *liṅga* means “sign” and, with reference to a male, the distinctive sign of that sex, the phallus²⁸. As the formless, transcendent, unmanifest Absolute, Śiva has no *liṅga* or distinctive sign²⁹: “Śiva is signless (sexless), without color, taste, or smell, beyond word and touch, without quality, changeless, motionless.”³⁰ But as the Absolute in manifestation Śiva is perceived through the distinctive sign of the *liṅga*, which is one of the most abstract shapes under which the nature of the unmanifest

can be represented,³¹ as well as in a variety of more concrete anthropomorphic forms. "Śiva as the undivided causal principle is worshiped in the *liṅga*. His more manifest aspects are represented in anthropomorphic images. All other deities are part of a multiplicity and are thus worshiped in images."³² In the cult of Śiva the worship of limited and partial manifestations of his total reality in anthropomorphic forms is regarded as a lower stage than worship of the abstract *liṅga* form³³; but it is also recognised that a higher stage than even worship of the material, externally visible *liṅga* is the worship of the subtle internal *liṅga* within the devotee's heart,³⁴ and that the former is only a preparation for the latter.³⁵

The mythology of Śaivism, which has grown up over a period of about three thousand five hundred years, has been a rich source of inspiration for many forms of art—literature, dancing, sculpture and painting—and the myths have also served as popular vehicles of philosophical teachings. "In the ongoing myth of Rudra/Śiva events unfold across the aeons"³⁶ and in many different settings of place, and "each new cosmos repeats and carries forward the fundamental themes".³⁷ "The kaleidoscopic theophanies of the god in the myth are well illustrated by the parts of it that relate to the origin of the worship of the *liṅga*. The essential feature of these parts is that of the ascetic god who, when asked by Brahma the Creator to procreate, refused to produce fallible mortals and turned into a motionless pillar (*sthānu*)³⁸ or who, according to another version, castrated himself.³⁹ When the severed limb fell to earth, it raged about agitating the universe and its inhabitants; and it came to rest only when Śiva's spouse, the Great Goddess, took it in her womb (*yoni*). This resulted in the worship of the *liṅga* column on a *yoni* pedestal.⁴⁰ But another explanation of the origin of the worship of the *liṅga* is that it represents the burning pillar of fire which, according to some versions of the myth, appeared between Brahma the Creator and Viṣṇu the Preserver when, at the end of one aeon and the beginning of another, they were each arguing for his own supremacy—a pillar whose physical limits and meaning neither could fathom, until Śiva's miraculous manifestation from within the flames led to both acknowledging him as the Supreme God⁴¹ and to the establishment of the worship of the *liṅga* on earth.⁴²

Thus, two conceptions of the *liṅga* emerge from the myth of Rudra - Śiva—one that it represents the severed phallus of the ascetic god who did not wish to procreate and the other that it represents the fiery pillar of light that appeared at the beginning of a world aeon. Although the latter is the conception that the vast majority of Śaivites have in mind when worshipping the *liṅga*, it is necessary to consider the other view too and to explain its true meaning.

In this connection we must notice some changes in the form of the *liṅga* that took place in the course of its historical development. Broadly speaking, the earlier *liṅgas* are large and realistically phallic in appearance⁴³; but gradually, from the period of the Gupta kings (fourth to sixth centuries A.D.) onwards up to late medieval times, there was a reduction in the size of the *liṅga* and its naturalistic appearance was also subdued until it assumed the form of an abstract pillar or column, a form which has continued to modern times.⁴⁴ Another historical development was the change in the nature of the support for the upright *liṅga*. Originally the pillar established for worship as a *liṅga* rose from the ground or from a plinth and it was not set (as it is nowadays) within a supporting pedestal (*piṭha*) with a projecting spout at its upper end (which serves the purpose of draining off the water poured over the *liṅga* in the course of rituals).⁴⁵ A square *piṭha* for the *liṅga* was introduced in the first century A. D., and *piṭhas* that were octagonal and circular in cross-section appeared in the seventh and eighth centuries.⁴⁶ The introduction of the circular *piṭha* led to the interpretation of it as a *yoni*, the female principle complementing the male principle of the *liṅga*⁴⁷; and the two in conjunction—the male principle being Cosmic Spirit (*puruṣa*) and the female Cosmic Substance (*prakṛti*), the imperceptible substratum of the phenomenal world—were envisaged as responsible for the manifestation of the world.⁴⁸ This was a late development, which has been traced to the influence of Tantric⁴⁹ ideas.⁵⁰

These twin fundamental principles of duality pervade the cosmos,⁵¹ and in describing the blending of the two sexual metaphors inevitably came to be used.⁵² But in this context the *liṅga* and the *yoni* should be suggestive of no improper ideas, since they are symbols of the mysterious creative force which rules the universe, manifesting itself unceasingly in the transitory forms of the universe and individual creatures.⁵³ This great force was one of the earliest

subjects of worship not only in India but in many other countries throughout the world; and the veneration of an upright column or pillar (like the *liṅga*) in some form or other, regarded as a symbol of the link⁵⁴ between the two sexes and of the force that kept the tribe together and ensured the continuity of the human race, became a fundamental feature of both religion and philosophy.⁵⁵ It is relevant to point out that the appearance of the *liṅga* in its conventional form and the rituals for its installation and worship⁵⁶ have for centuries been perfectly decorous⁵⁷; and the *liṅga* is never associated in the minds of its worshippers with anything but feelings of the purest reverence and devotion. But this reverence is not based only on the view that the *liṅga* is a symbol of Śiva as the source and the embodiment of cosmic energy. There are also other conceptions evoked by the *liṅga*, even when it is regarded as the phallus of Śiva, which we must now consider.

Images of Śiva have been known for over two thousand years. Some of them show his standing figure carved on the front of the stone column of the *liṅga* itself⁵⁸; while others show him in various anthropomorphic forms, sometimes with the *liṅga* erect (*ūrdhvaliṅga*). This last feature is found in iconic representations of many forms of Śiva,⁵⁹ including Śiva absorbed in yogic contemplation.⁶⁰ This last form especially, the ithyphallic yogi, raises the question of the true meaning of what has been called "the central paradox of Śaiva mythology, [that] of Śiva, the erotic ascetic."⁶¹ The explanation of this paradox is that, although the erect phallus of images of Śiva is ordinarily thought of as a sign of erotic stimulation leading to the release of the seeds of procreation, it is in the eyes of initiates in the doctrines of Tantric yoga a sign of continence and chastity,⁶² not of licentiousness. The ascetic who, without expending his procreative powers, conserves and concentrates them within himself by yogic disciplines,⁶³ is believed to be qualified to attain supreme mystical realisation. Thus, Śiva as the ascetic god who, refusing to procreate, became a pillar or castrated himself⁶⁴ and also as Yogeśvara, the Lord of Yoga, "stands for complete control of the senses and for supreme carnal renunciation."⁶⁵

Consequently, both the *liṅga* pillar in the temple (which, it must be noted, rises from the pedestal with its head pointing upwards, away from the latter and without penetrating it) and the

erect *liṅga* of anthropomorphic images of Śiva are to be understood as connoting the control of sexual power and its transubstantiation within the body of the yogi from the earthly to the transcendental plane.⁶⁶ This connotation is most clearly indicated in, but is not restricted to, the *mukhaliṅga* ("face *liṅga*"),⁶⁷ which by the unified combination of phallus and face⁶⁸ forms a "symbol of the ascent and transmutation of sexual into mental power, a channeling of the procreative into creative faculty."⁶⁹

The other view of the *liṅga* that emerges from the myth of Rudra-Śiva is that the *liṅga* represents the fiery pillar of light that appeared in the primaevial darkness at the beginning of a world aeon. This is the conception that the vast majority of Śiva's devotees have in mind when they worship the *liṅga*. This cosmic pillar of light is in fact a form of the *Axis Mundi*,⁷⁰ the central vertical axis of the universe connecting the netherworlds, the earth and the heavens⁷¹; in this Axis of Existence every cosmic process has its beginning, its sustenance and its end. Etymologically the word *liṅga* is said to be derived from two roots, *li* "to dissolve"⁷² and *gam* "to go out"; so that *liṅga* "means the ultimate Reality into whom the creatures of the world dissolve and out of whom they evolve again."⁷³ Thus, as a form of the *Axis Mundi* the *liṅga* is a visible symbol of the formless Parama- (or Para-) śivam ("Supreme Śiva"), Ultimate Absolute Reality⁷⁴.

The fiery *liṅga* has been "equated with the shaft of light or lightning (*vajra, keraunos*) that penetrates and fertilises the *yonī*, the altar, the Earth, the mother of the Fire, for 'light is the progenitive power.'⁷⁵ The language of sexual metaphor thus used with reference to the *liṅga* regarded as the cosmic pillar of light representing the Absolute connects that concept of the *liṅga* with the view that it represents the phallus of Śiva. For, as we have seen,⁷⁶ the phallus of the ascetic god, the Great Yogi, is not so much a symbol of procreative power as of such power, controlled by yogic discipline and transmuted mentally to the enlightening wisdom that leads to Ultimate Reality. In this way a link is established between the two apparently divergent concepts of the *liṅga* which emerge from the myth of Rudra-Śiva; and we would be justified in saying that devotees of Śiva regard the *liṅga* as a visible symbol of invisible transcendental Divinity, a symbol which evokes the presence not merely of the creative energy of Śiva but of his Total Reality.⁷⁷

A distinguished Western scholar, Stella Kramrisch, has written: "There is no object in the world of Śiva more sacred than the *liṅga*⁷⁸... In the world of Śiva the significance of the *liṅga* is comparable to that of the Cross in the Christian world, and that of the figure of Śiva with the *liṅga* or of the faces of Śiva together with the shape of the *liṅga* to the figure of the Savior on the Cross".⁷⁹ It has been said of the Cross that it "bespeaks evolution in religion.... It begins with one thing⁸⁰ and ends with another."⁸¹ This statement would be equally true of the *liṅga*.

We have now considered the *liṅga* with reference to the myths of its origin and in relation to changes that took place, in the course of historical development, in its external form in art as well as in the philosophical conceptions as to its meaning. We have seen that the two chief views of the origin of the *liṅga* that emerge from the myths are that the *liṅga* represents the cosmic pillar of light that appeared at the beginning of a world aeon⁸² and that it represents the severed phallus of the ascetic god who had refused to procreate.⁸³ The former is the view of the *liṅga* that is held by most Śaivites who worship it, in temples and in homes, as representing Śiva conceived as the supernal Light of the World and the Axis of Existence.⁸⁴

The other view of the *liṅga* as representing the phallus of Śiva has often been misunderstood. We have already mentioned the description of the *liṅga* as an "obscene symbol" by the French missionary Abbé Dubois.⁸⁵ In thus describing it he was expressing "the point of view of the religion which has prevailed in the West, in which the dominant sexaphobic complex considers the sexual act impure and not susceptible of being made sacred,"⁸⁶ whereas "the sacralisation of sex... was achieved by many traditional civilisations,"⁸⁷ including the Hindu. Apart from this, the Abbé himself conceded that "the obscene symbol contained an allegorical meaning and was a type, in the first instance, of the reproductive forces of nature and the generative source of all living beings"⁸⁸—in other words, that it was a symbol not of the individual sexuality of Śiva but of his cosmic creative energy. We have explained above other ideas relating to the *liṅga* when it is regarded as representing the phallus of Śiva, which suggest an even higher conception

of its meaning than as the symbol of cosmic creative energy—namely, that it also connotes the control of sexual powers by yogic discipline and their transmutation mentally to the enlightening wisdom that leads to Ultimate Reality.⁸⁹

In the light of these considerations, it is clearly quite misleading to describe the *liṅga* as a phallic symbol unless the profound philosophical ideas which elevate the phallic elements⁹⁰ in the concept of the symbol are emphasised. These ideas are unfortunately unknown to most of those who use the phrase “phallic symbol” as a shorthand mode of expression.⁹¹ But the use of that phrase without reference to those ideas results in what has been called “the degradation of the symbol”⁹²; for “when the mind is no longer capable of perceiving the metaphysical significance of a symbol, it is understood at levels which become increasingly coarse.”⁹³ A modern Christian missionary (who possessed a much better understanding of the origins and historical development of both Hinduism and Christianity than was possible at the time when the Abbé Dubois wrote in the first quarter of the nineteenth century) has rightly declared; “When thinking of sexual symbolism one’s mind should remain on as lofty... a plane as that for which the symbol stands. One should no more degrade this [*liṅga*] concept than one would the concept of the New Testament where the Church is said to be the bride of Christ, a concept with as much grist for the mill of the vile-minded as the other.”⁹⁴

NOTES

1. Writers in English use *liṅgam* (which in Sanskrit is the nominative case of the neuter noun) and *liṅga* (the uninflected base form of the same word) interchangeably. In the present article *liṅga* is used, except in quotations in which *liṅgam* appears.
2. Kramrisch (1981a), p.xvi.
3. Dubois (1924), pp vii. xi, and xxviii.
4. Op. cit., p. 631.
5. Arulnanti Civācārya, Civañānacittiyār, Cupakkam (c. 1253) 1.69.
6. There are also verbal representations (such as *mantras*) and visual representations other than anthropomorphic icons and the *liṅga* (such as *yantras* or abstract geometrical linear diagrams).
7. Crystal (*sphaṭika*) *liṅgas* are highly regarded, "because... the crystal ... has no colour of its own but reflects the colour of the object with which it comes into contact signifying that Śiva becomes what an ardent devotee desires Him to be. He is the source of all colours and all colours merge in Him." (H.H. Sri Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati in Anon. (1969), p. 180).
8. Pūrva Kāraṇāgama 30.5,6, transl. Curtis (1973), p. 65.
9. Tamil traditions associate these *liṅgas* with particular temples in the Tamil land—temples situated in Tiruvārūr and Kāñcīpuram (earth), Tiruvānaikkāval (water), Tiruvaṅṅāmalai (fire), Kālahasti (air), and Chidambaram (ether), for the last of which see n. 74 ad fin.
10. Some texts give lists of sixty eight *svāyambhuva liṅgas* (see, e.g., Rao 2 (i) (1916), pp. 82-85). A *svāyambhuva liṅga* that is not immovable is the *liṅga* of ice in a rock cave in Amarnath, about 80 miles from Srinagar in Kashmir. This *liṅga* gradually forms in the bright half of a lunar month (culminating in its fullness on the full moon day) and gradually melts away in the dark half of the month. (Danielou (1984), p. 58 and Plate 5; Anon. (1940), pp. 321-322).

11. Rao 2 (i) (1916), pp. 87, 99. The three parts of the *līṅga* thus represent the three high gods of Hinduism. (*Līṅga Purāṇa* I. 74.19-20 and II.47.11, transl. B.S., v(1973), p. 368 and vi (1973), pp. 767-768); and the Female Principle, thought of as Śiva's consort, is also represented in the supporting pedestal (*Līṅga Purāṇa* I. 74.20-21 and II 47.8-10, transl. *ibid.* and Śiva Purāṇa I.11.22-23, transl. B.S., i (1970), p. 69; and see p. 5 at n. 47).

The legend relating to the *līṅga* in the Kaccapēśvara ("Lord of the Tortoise") Temple at Kāñcīpuram, Tamil Nādu, illustrates the Tamil Śaiva view of the supremacy of Śiva over the other gods. Śiva, after destroying everything in the universe in one night, danced with his consort and then, appearing in a *līṅga* of light, recreated everything he had destroyed. Brahma paid adoration to this *līṅga* and obtained the power of creation; while Viṣṇu, who in the form of a tortoise had terrorised the area, was subdued by Śiva and forgiven upon worshipping the *līṅga*. (*Kāñcīpurāṇam* 23.1-12, summarised in Dessigane, Pattabiramin and Filliozat (1964), pp. 29-30).

12. See, e.g., the *līṅga* from Tiruvorriyūr in Rao 2 (1), Plate X Fig. 3.
13. See, e.g., the *līṅga* from Tiruvorriyūr in *op.cit.* Plate VIII Figs. 1 and 2, the latter of which is a *sahasra* ("thousand") *līṅga* containing a thousand miniature *līṅgas*.
14. The doctrine of the five faces (*pañcavaktra*) of Śiva, which represent aspects of his total reality, has many applications in Śaiva philosophy, ritual and art (see, e.g., Gonda (1970), pp. 42-44, 47-48; Kramrisch (1981b), pp. 182-189). In art the five heads appear in images of Sadāśiva, the "Eternal Śiva" (see, e.g., Sharma (1976) Plates XV, XVII, XX-XXIV). and also in *mukhalīṅgas* ("face *līṅgas*"). Usually only four of the five faces are depicted, looking out in the four directions of space, the fifth on the top being implied. The number of faces of a *mukhalīṅga* in the innermost sanctum of a temple would normally correspond to the number of doors of the sanctum (Banerjea (1974), pp. 460-461); where there is only one door, the single face implies the others (Kramrisch (1981a), p. 3).

15. They are averse to the worship of Śiva in anthropomorphic forms and regard the *liṅga* as the most sacred symbol of Śiva's divinity. "The distinctive mark of Viraśaivism is... the wearing of a *liṅga* upon the body.... The *liṅga*... becomes symbolic of the presence of god in the body galvanising ... every cell in it.... The *liṅga*... is given by the guru to the body at... birth. It should always be borne on the body from... birth to... death." (Kumaraswamiji (1956), pp. 100, 102.)
16. Fergusson (1876), p.167; Havell (1908), p. 56 n.1. Sir Charles Eliot, ii (1954), p. 143, points out that scenes like that depicted in Grunwedel (1901), p.29 Fig. 8 could easily be supposed to represent worship of the *liṅga*.
- Thor Heyerdahl (1986), pp. 271-2 reports: "Both in Sri Lanka and here, on the Malabar coast [of South-West India] I had come across sacred sculptures of the phalloid form we had excavated in the Maldives. [See op. cit., p. 127]. Here, among ... Hindus, they were still in ritual use as *Shivaliṅgam* [while] similar sculptures ... in Sri Lanka were considered to be miniature stupas."
17. Many ideas have contributed to the veneration which attaches to such stones: see generally Eliade (1976), chap 6.
18. Even after cremation became the chief method of disposing of the dead in Hinduism, the bodies of spiritually advanced persons, who were believed to have reached God and attained liberation from the cycle of births, were not cremated but buried (Eliade (1958), p. 422), usually seated in a yogic pose. (Śiva Purāna, Kailāsa-saṃhitā, chap. 21, transl. B.S., iv (1970), pp. 1760-5.)
19. See, e.g., Aravamathan (1931), chap.8, where many references to ancient Tamil texts and South Indian inscriptions are given. Compare Nagaswami (1980), pp. 51-54.
20. E.g., Paṭṭinappālai 248-9, Akanānūru 307 (both referring to a public hall (*potiyil*) containing a pillar in which a god dwells).
21. T. L. 2 (i) (1962), p. 719. The word is said to be derived from the Sanskrit *skandha* (ibid.)
22. T. L. 2 (i) (1962), p.218.

23. T. L. 1 (i) (1956), p. 162.
24. P. T. Srinivasa Aiyangar (1930), p. 22. Another interpretation is that *Kantu* refers to the withered stump of a sacred tree and *ali* means "to destroy"; so that *Kantali* refers to a stone post installed for worship to replace a sacred tree which has been destroyed by the ravages of time (G. Subramania Pillai (1948), pp. 123-4).
25. Srinivasa Aiyangar (1930), p. 22.
26. Naccinārkkiniyar in his comment on Tolkāppiyam, Poruḷatikaram, ii, 88, transl. Arunachalam (1981), p. 116. Cf. the Tamil verse quoted by Naccinārkkiniyar (Ganesaiyar (1948), p. 302), describing *Kantali* as: "Standing by Itself, propless and formless, for all things It is the mainstay, Eternal Bliss, transcending word, deed, thought and wisdom's flight, It is the pure, stainless Light". transl. Subramania Pillai (1948), p. 123, slightly adapted). In passing we may note that the Tamil texts relating to the *kantu* and to *Kantali* do not connect them with the phallus, with which (as we shall see) the *liṅga* is sometimes identified.
27. *Naṭu - taṛi* T. L. 3(v) (1929) p. 1807 and 4 (i) (1963 p. 2143). According to the local tradition a devotee of Śiva, who was married to a Vaiṣṇava husband, used secretly to worship the post to which calves were tethered as Śiva; and when the husband, observing this, cut the post with an axe, Śiva emerged from the post. Consequently, the place was called *Kaṇṛāppūr* ("calf-post-place") and the god established there was called *Naṭutaṛi* (Suppiramaniya Pillai (1912), 0.85). Śiva is referred to as *Kaṇṛāppūr Naṭutaṛi* in Tamil hymns of Appar (Tirumurai 6.61).
28. "The distinctive sign through which it is possible to recognise the nature of some one is called a *liṅga*" (Śiva Purāṇa 1.16.106, transl. Danielou (1964), p. 222).
29. Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad 6.9.
30. *Liṅga Purāṇa* 1.3.2-3, transl. Danielou (1964), p. 222.

31. "From the signless comes forth the sign, the universe. This sign is the object of word and touch, of smell, colour and taste. It is the womb of the elements, subtle and gross". (Linga Purāna 1.3.3-4, transl. Danielou, *ibid.*)
32. Karapatri (1941-2), transl. Danielou, *ibid.* Cf. Śiva Purāna Vidyeśvara-saṃhitā 5.8-15, 17-24, transl. B.S., i. (1970), pp. 50-51 and Skanda Purāna Kāśī Khaṇḍa 97 (Kṣetratīrthavarṇana) 5-6. The last sentence of the quotation from Karapatri requires some qualification. For Viṣṇu and Devi, the Goddess, are worshipped in the aniconic forms of a *śālagrāma* stone (Krishna Sastri (1916), p. 70) and a Sṛī Yantra or Chakra respectively. But these are not placed as the sole object of worship in the central sanctum of a temple (as the *liṅga* is), although they may be given pride of place in domestic worship. (*op. cit.*, pp. 70-71, 222; Banerjea (1974), p. 394.)
33. In a temple of Śiva the installation of a *liṅga* is considered primary, while that of anthropomorphic images is secondary; and a temple with the latter is "unfruitful" if it has no *liṅga* (Śiva Purāna Vidyeśvarasaṃhitā 9.46 (transl. B.S., i (1970), p. 63). The Pūrva Kāranāgama 30.7, 8 (transl. Curtis (1973), p. 66), considering different representations of Śiva for worship, states that a painted canvas is superior to a transitory *liṅga* (made for ephemeral use, see p.2 above), "a bas relief superior to a canvas, an image better than a bas relief A Liṅgam is more excellent than an image. Superior to a Liṅgam (is) the Formless."
34. Ramana Maharṣi, the great sage of Tiruvannāmalai in Tamil Nādu, declared: "The *jīva* [life principle], which is the Śivaliṅga, resides in the heart-lotus, The body is the temple; the *jīva* is God (Śiva). If one worships Him with the 'I am He' thought, one will gain release." (Osborne (1968), pp. 26,27).
35. Śiva Purāna Rudrasaṃhitā 1.12.51-58, transl. B.S. i, (1970), p. 228; Liṅga Purāna 1.75. 19-22, transl. B.S., v, (1973), p. 371; cf. Kūrma Purāna 2.11. 94-95 and 98-99, transl. B.S., xxi, (1982), p. 384.
36. Kramrisch (1981 b), p. 110.
37. *Op. cit.*, p. 120.

38. "Keeping the semen drawn up, Sthāṇu stood still until the great deluge. Because he said 'Here I stand (*sthito'smi*), he is known as Sthāṇu (one who stands)." Vāmana Purāṇa 10.64, transl. Kramrisch (1981 b), p. 119. cf. Mahābhārata Anuśāsanaparvan v. 7510: "since, standing aloft, he consumes the lives of men and since he is fixed and since his Liṅga is perpetually fixed, he is therefore called Sthāṇu". (transl. Muir, iv (1873), p. 405). For Rudra-Śiva as Sthāṇu see generally Kramrisch, op. cit., pp. 117-122.
39. Op. cit., pp. 127-133 and 153-158.
40. Op. cit., pp. 241-3.
41. For this Liṅgodbhavamūrti, "Liṅga Manifestation Form" see, e.g., Liṅga Purāṇa 1.17 For three sculptural representations of this form from South India see, e.g., Munshi (1957) p. 110, Meister (1984) Plate 194 and Banerjea (1974) Plate XXXI Fig. 4 (11th century, Brhadiśvara Temple, Tanjavur); Kramrisch (1981a) p. 10 (12th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); and Zimmer (1946) Fig. 30 and pp. 130-1 (13th century, Musée Guimet, Paris).
42. Kramrisch, op.cit., pp. 158-161. In a few Sanskrit Purāṇic versions (e.g., Vāmana Purāṇa 6.57-73) of the Liṅgodbhavamūrti, the cosmic pillar of light is a transfiguration of the dismembered limb of Śiva; but most versions (e.g. Kūrma Purāṇa 1.26; Liṅga Purāṇa 1.17; Śiva Purāṇa Jñānēśvara-saṃhitā²) do not connect the two. Nor does the Tamil Kantapurāṇam.
43. E.g., the *liṅga* in the Parasurāmeśvara Temple at Gudimallam Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh (Rao 2 (i) (1916) Plates II and III; Coomaraswamy (1927) Fig. 66; Eck (1983) p. 70.) The Gudimallam *liṅga* is ascribed to the 3rd - 2nd century B.C. by Kramrisch and Srinivasan in Meister (1984) at pp. 3 and 33-4, to the 2nd century by Sharma (1978-1979), pp. 50-54, and to about 50 B. C. to 50 A.D. by Mitterwallner in Meistes (1984), at p. 19. However, Sarkar (1986), pp. 118, 120 ascribes it to the 4th century A.D.
44. For a detailed analysis of the development of the form of the *liṅga* see Mitterwallner in Meister (1984), pp. 12-20, summarized at pp. 26-27.

45. Banerjea (1974), pp. 169, 456.
46. Mitterwallner (1981) in Meister (1984), pp. 26-27.
47. Kramrisch (1981b), pp. 80, 167.
48. "The symbol of the Supreme Man (*puruṣa*), the formless, the changeless, the all-seeing eye, is the symbol of masculinity, the phallus or *liṅga*. The symbol of the power that is Nature, generatrix of all that exists, is the female organ, the *yoni*." (Karapatri (1941-2), p. 154, transl. Danielou (1964), p. 223).

The *liṅga* column surrounded by the *yoni* pedestal has thus been taken as representing sexual union and the combination of the two has been regarded as a symbol of androgynous biunity, representing Śiva and Śakti, the primordial parents of the universe. The anthropomorphic symbol of this biunity is the figure of Śiva as Ardhanārīśvara, the "Lord who is half (*ardha*) woman (*nāri*)," which is male on one half of the body and female on the other. This figure is sometimes found carved on the column of the *liṅga* (cf. n. 58 below). In the temple of Kānappēr (Kālaiyārkoṣṭhī), Madura District, Tamil Nādu, there is a *liṅga* the right side of which is black and the left golden in colour, which according to the local legend was the result of Śiva fusing with a part of the golden-hued goddess Gaurī, who had demanded that he marry her so that they might never be separated again (Shulman (1980), pp. 268-270). The goddess component of the *liṅga* is also shown in icons depicting her emerging from the *liṅga* (see, e.g., Banerjea (1974), pp. 508-9 and Plate XLV Fig. 2, Huntington (1985), Fig. 18.29 p. 410 and p. 409 n. 17); cf. Jung (1967), pp. 209, 221 and Plate 29), which are counterparts of the much more common representation of the Liṅgodbhavamūrti or Śiva emerging from a pillar of fire (see p. 4 above for this myth of the origin of the *liṅga*)

49. "Opinions of what Tantrism is are quite diverse.... Tantra is essentially a method of conquering transcendent powers and of realising oneness with the highest principle by yogic and ritual means—in part magical and orgiastic in character Tantrics take for granted that ... the macrocosm and the microcosm are closely connected. The adept ... has to perform the

- relevant rites on his own body, transforming (it) into a 'cosmos'. The macrocosm is conceived as a complex system of powers that by means of ritual - psychological techniques can be activated and organised within the individual body of the adept... The Tantric movement is [often] inextricably interwoven with Śaktism." ("Hinduism," Enc.Brit., Macropaedia, viii (1974), p. 896). Śaktism regards the goddess as the energy (*śakti*) and as the activating power of a divine couple, of whom the male deity is thought of as passive until activated in an union which gives rise to all the manifestations in the universe.
50. Mitterwallner (1981) in Meister (1984), pp. 26-27; cf. Banerjea (1974), pp. 456 and 169. In the earlier phases of the development of the *liṅga* form (when the idea of the sexual union of Śiva and his consort was absent), the *liṅga* was a symbol of fecundity and fertility, resulting in prosperity (Mitterwallner, op.cit., pp. 26-27).
 51. Danielou (1964), pp.34-5, 44, 223-4. "Every being ... of the masculine sex should be known to be of Icana [Śiva], while every being ... of the feminine sex should be known to be of Umā [Śiva's consort]. This universe of mobile and immobile creatures is pervaded by [these] two kinds of forms." (Mahābhārata Anuśāsanaparvan 14.231, transl. P.C. Ray (1893) p. 74). Cf. Civañāna Cittiyār, Cupakkam 1.69 which says that throughout the universe God has created forms which are similar to each other but also distinguishable in respect of the differences between males and females and that Life itself has arisen from the interaction between Śiva and Śakti, his power or energy regarded as his consort.
 52. For the widespread use of sexual symbolism in various religious traditions, including Christianity, see Coomaraswamy (1938) in Lipsey, ii (1977), pp. 231-240.
 53. Monier-Williams (1891), pp. 224-5; Eliot, ii (1954), p. 144. In "the *liṅga* we worship Śiva who pervades all individual generative powers From the relation of *liṅga* and *yonī* the whole world arises. It is divinity which under the form of all individual *liṅgas* enters every womb and procreates all beings." (Karapatri (1941-2), pp. 154, 163, transl. Danielou (1964), pp. 227, 225).

54. "The Sanskrit Lexicon gives the word *link* as closely related to [the word *liṅga*]" (Carpenter (1927), p. 87).
55. Carpenter (1927), pp. 87-91 and (1920) ch. 15. Several traces of the reverence for the organs of generation and of the sexual symbolism connected with them have persisted down to modern times in some practices followed in even Christian countries (see, e.g., Danielou (1984), pp. 57, 60, 61; Mees (1985) p. 40).
56. See, e.g., Agni Purāṇa ch. 95; Liṅga Purāṇa I chs. 27, 79; Kūrma Purāṇa 39. 1-12.
57. Rao 2 (i) (1916), pp. 70-71; Eliot, ii (1954), p. 143; Wilson (1862), p. 64.
58. E.g., the Gudimallam *liṅga* (see n. 43 above) and the *liṅga* of the late 1st or the early 2nd century A. D. from Mathura, Uttar Pradesh (Kramrisch (1981a), no. 10 p. 11 and (1981b), p. 166). Sometimes the figure of Śiva as Ardhanārīśvara (see n.48 above) is carved on the *liṅga*: e.g., the *liṅga* from Agroha, Haryana, now in Gurukul Jhajjar near Delhi, and that from Mathura, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, both dating from between the 2nd and 4th centuries (see Williams (1987), Plates 1, 3, 5 and pp. 299-301).

The first known occurrence of the juxtaposition of an icon of Śiva and the *liṅga* was in the Gudimallam *liṅga* (see n. 43), and it has been suggested that the sculptor felt it necessary to carve the figure of Śiva on the *liṅga* because at that time the connection between Śiva and the worship of the *liṅga* had not been definitely established (Banerjea (1935), p. 39, following the earlier suggestion made by Bhandarkar in 1921).

59. E.g., Śiva dancing (Gaston (1982) Plates 15, 16, 17b, 36a, 36b 37, 38, 90, 91, 94; Sivaramamurti (1974a) Figs 9, 172, 173, 174, 202, pp. 172, 298, 299, 300, 322); Śiva as Ardhanārīśvara (Huntington (1984), Fig. 227); Śiva seated or standing with his consort (Kramrisch (1981a), Plate 50 p. 60, Plate 54 p. 65 and Plate 47 p. 56); Śiva as Bhairava (op. cit., Plate 92 p. 112).
60. E.g., Śiva as Lakuliśa, a Śaiva teacher of about the 1st or 2nd century A. D. who systematised the doctrines of the Pāśupata sect of Śaivism and came to be regarded as an incarnation of

- Śiva (Banerjea (1974), p. 480). For various types of Lakulīśa images see Shah (1981) and Mitra (1981) in Meister (1984), chs. 7 and 8 and the annexed Plates. Śiva as the Lord of Wisdom has two forms - Lakulīśa and Dakṣināmūrti, the latter being more common than the former in South Indian temples (Sivaramamurti (1974 b), p. 78).
61. O'Flaherty (1981), p.4.
 62. "It is the liṅga, raised up, which the rishis, gods, gandharvas and apsarasas worship When his liṅga remains constantly in a state of chastity and people reverence it, this is agreeable to the great god" (Mahābhārata, Anuśāsana-parvan v. 7516, transl. Muir, iv (1973), pp. 405-6).
 63. "Control of the seminal fluid is thought to entail control of all passions and the achievement of desirelessness". (A. Bharati (1965), p. 294). "The inner reabsorption of the seed is ... the drinking of the elixir of immortality [which] requires complete mental control.... Thus the yogi alone drinks the ambrosia, which the man of the world spills." (V. S. Agravala (1937), p. 497, transl. Danielou (1964), p. 77).
 64. For the myth see p. 4 above.
 65. A. Bharati (1965), p. 296.
 66. Kramrisch (1981b), pp. 12, 164, 180-181, 242-3, 249, 430.
 67. See p. 2 above.
 68. The faces appear at the top of the cylindrical part (called the *Rudrabhāga*) of the consecrated *liṅga* in the temple, which is composed of the *Rudrabhāga* and two lower parts, the *Viṣṇubhāga* and the *Brahmabhāga* (see p. 2 above). It may be added that the body of a follower of Śiva which by his devotions has become imbued with Śiva's presence is also regarded as a *liṅga* consisting of three parts: the part below the navel, the *Brahmā* part; that from the navel to the armpit, the *Viṣṇu* part; and the face or head, the *Śiva* part, which, significantly, corresponds to the phallus of Śiva (Śiva Purāna, Vidyeśvara Saṃhitā, 17.143-146, transl. B.S., i (1970), p. 117).

69. Kramrisch (1981b), p. 181;cf. p. 430.
70. Coomaraswamy in Zimmer (1953), p. 128n.
71. For the sacred site (e.g., mountain, temple, palace, city) which is identified with the centre or navel of the universe as being the place through which the *axis mundi* passes see M. Eliade (1976), pp. 374-9. Two well known Indian sites of the localisation of the *axis mundi* in the form of the *līṅga* of light are Kāśī (Vārāṇasi) and Tiruvaṅṅāmalai.
72. *Lī* is related to *laya* "dissolution": "everything is dissolved in [the *līṅga*]." (*Līṅga Purāṇa* 1.19.16, transl. B.S., v. (1973), p. 69).
73. Kumaraswami in Radhakrishnan (1952), p. 399. Cf. Suprabhedāgama, cited in Rao 2 (ii) (1916), p. 364: "the *līṅga* is so called because at the time of destruction beings dissolve into it and at the time of creation they emerge from it".
74. *Kūrma Purāṇa* 1.26.78-85, transl. B.S., xx (1981), p. 227. "In the *līṅga* dwell all the gods" (*Skanda Purāṇa*, transl. Danielou (1964), p. 228): "nay, everything beginning with Brahmā the Creator and ending with an immobile thing is founded on ... the unchanging *Līṅga*." (*Līṅga Purāṇa* 2.46.15-21, transl. B.S., vi (1973), p. 766).

A similar view of the *līṅga* is reflected in some temple rituals. For example, in the Naṭarāja Temple of Chidambaram in Tamil Nādu (which Tamil Śaivites regard as being The Temple *par excellence*), the priests invoke in the *līṅga* nine of the higher *tattvas* or transcendental principles in the evolution of the universe: from the bottom upwards in ascending order of subtlety these are Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Maheśvara, Sadāśiva, Bindu, Nāda, Śakt. and Śiva; and then in the space above the *līṅga* they invoke what is sometime called the *Ākāśa Tattva* which is the source of all the other *tattvas* (Nagaswamy (1984) in Meister (1984), pp. 178-180 and Nagaswamy (1987) in Nagaraja Rao, i (1987), pp. 241-2). *Ākāśa*, "ethereal space" is the primary and most subtly pervasive manifestation of Divinity and is an

invisible symbol of Ultimate Reality; and the *ākāśa* enclosed by the walls of an otherwise empty chamber is sometimes described as constituting an *ākāśa liṅga*—as in part of the Cit Sabhā (“Hall of Pure Consciousness”) of the Naṭarāja Temple of Chidambaram (see n. 9 above).

75. Coomaraswamy in Zimmer (1953), p. 128 n. “In the older Christian nativities it is represented by the Ray that extends from the sun above to the interior of the cave in which the Earth-goddess bears her Son”. (ibid.) For Light as the progenitive power see Taittirīya Saṃhitā 7.1.1.1, Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 8.7.1.16 and M. Eliade (1971), pp. 3-4.

In the Vedic imagery the *liṅga* of light was conceived as the arrow (*bāṇa*) piercing the earth and the heavens with its two ends. (V. S. Agrawala (1984), p. 44; cf. pp. 3, 43). Śiva’s arrow is the vehicle of his energy, no less than the *liṅga*, with which it has been equated. (Zimmer, op.cit., p. 187).

76. See p. 6 above.

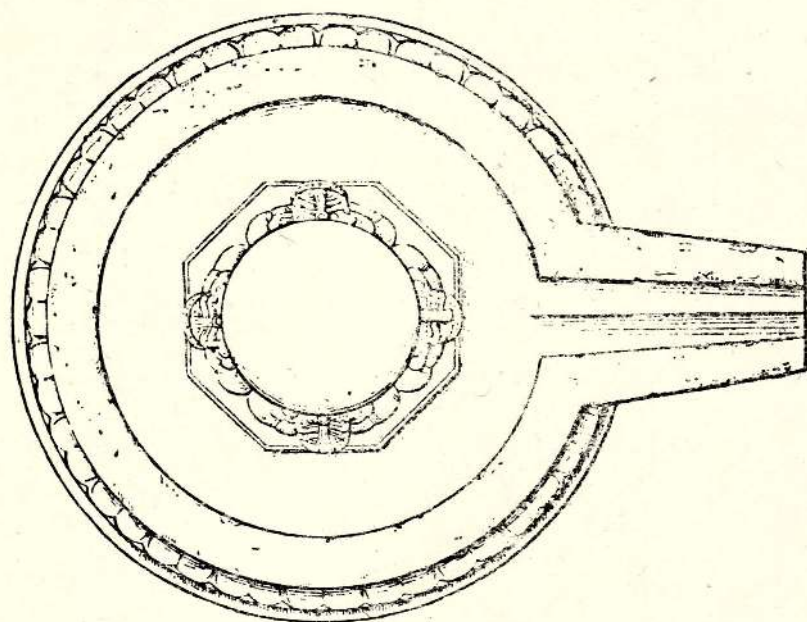
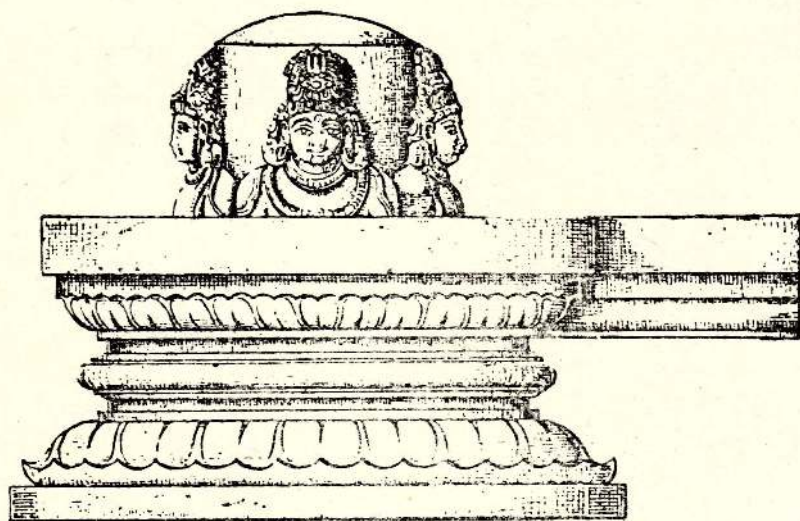
77. Many legends, illustrated in iconography and painting, describe Śiva as emerging out of the *liṅga* to help his devotees: e.g., Mārkaṇḍeya and Śveta, who were about to be removed by the God of Death (see Kramrisch (1981a), pp. 48-9 and 221). Compare also the legend of Śiva emerging from a *liṅga* to help his devotee Tinṇaṇ or Kannappaṇ (the “Eye Devotee”) at Kālahasti (see n. 9) (Pope (1900), pp. 141-5).

78. Kramrisch (1981a), p. xv.

79. Op. cit., p. xvi.

80. “The well-known T-shaped cross was in use in pagan lands long before Christianity as a representation of the male member and also at the same time of the ‘tree’ on which the god ... was crucified; and the same symbol combined with the oval (or *yonī*) formed the Crux Ansata ... of the old Egyptian ritual — a figure which confessedly indicates the conjunction of the two sexes.” (E. Carpenter (1920), p. 183). It has even been said that the “fundamental basis of Christianity is more purely Phallic than that of any other religion now existing.” (Hannay (1913), pp. 25, 257).

81. S. Rocco (1898), p. 6.
82. See p. 4 above.
83. See p. 4 above.
84. See p. 7 above.
85. See p. 1 above.
86. Evola (1971), p. 179, transl. Danielou (1984),. p. 151.
87. Ibid.
88. Dubois (1924), p. 631. H. K. Beauchamp, an editor of Dubois' book, points out (op. cit., p. 111 n. 1 at p. 112) that the obscenity "is from the European point of view. From the Hindu point of view [it] symbolises spiritual and religious truths connected with the divine origin and generation of mankind."
89. See pp. 6-7 above.
90. See, e.g., the reference to the phallus in one version of the myth relating to the origin of the *liṅga* (p. 4); the naturalistic appearance of early *liṅgas* (p.5); and the late development associating the *liṅga* column with its pedestal interpreted as the *yoni* (p. 5)
91. They are not known even to educated Hindus, except those with a scholarly knowledge of the Tantric background (Bharati (1965), p. 296).
92. To use the language of Mircea Eliade (1965), p. 100 (where he is referring to the theme of the androgyne).
93. Ibid.
94. Piet (1952), p. 147 n. 1.



Mukhalinga
(from Rājarājesvaram Temple,
Tiruvānaikkāval)

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