

Rāvaṇa as a Poet: Divine Dynamism and Devotion in a Hymn of Penitence

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Abstract

While Rāvaṇa's enduring legacy spans the religious, political, and intellectual histories of South Asia, it is in the realm of literature that his presence especially remains dynamic, inspiring a vast and heterogeneous corpus across both classical and vernacular traditions. His sole extant poetic composition, the *Śivatāṇḍavastotra* (ŚTS), widely venerated as a devotional hymn to Lord Śiva, stands as a singular testament to his poetic genius and continues to resonate beyond the confines of sectarian Śaiva devotion. This study reconsiders Rāvaṇa's literary agency by undertaking a close textual analysis of the ŚTS, presenting a concise scholarly translation of its most widely circulated version alongside a review of variant stanzas drawn from several previously unpublished manuscripts. Through a reception-theoretical lens, this paper briefly explores the hymn's transmission history and interpretive flexibility, revealing the ŚTS as a site of devotional intensity, aesthetic sophistication, and layered meaning. Ultimately, the research affirms Rāvaṇa's stature as a cultural and literary figure whose poetic expression continues to provoke scholarly interest and devotional engagement across linguistic, historical, and spiritual contexts.

Key words: South Asia, Śiva, Bhakti, Devotional Poetry, Sanskrit Literature

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Whether conceived as a mythological archetype or a historical personality, Rāvaṇa remains a pivotal figure in South Asia's cultural imagination and intellectual landscapes. His pervasive presence in literary traditions has given rise to a substantial and heterogeneous corpus of texts composed in classical and vernacular languages across the South Asian subcontinent and derivative linguistic and literary traditions. The continued production of works featuring Rāvaṇa in contemporary languages beyond South Asia further attests to his enduring capacity to inspire imaginative expression and scholarly inquiry. Beyond the voluminous body of literature in which Rāvaṇa appears as a prominent character, a particularly compelling facet of his legacy is found in the corpus of texts attributed to him. Although relatively limited in number, these writings include treatises on the exact sciences and, as far as current scholarship can ascertain, a single poetic composition. This distinctive work of poetry, popularly known as the *Śivatāṇḍavastotra* (ŚTS), has been translated into numerous languages and has enjoyed a robust transmission history over several centuries. The reception of the ŚTS across India and its neighbouring regions is primarily linked to its status as a distinguished eulogy of Lord Śiva. Nonetheless, its intrinsic poetic qualities have contributed to its broad appeal, including among non-Śaiva audiences. The cantillation of the ŚTS, even beyond ritual contexts, remains an enduring favorite among ardent devotees, enthusiastic singers, and accomplished vocalists alike; many such performances are available on open-access streaming platforms, including Uma Mohan's rendition of fourteen selected stanzas (Mohan, 2013). This study undertakes a textual re-examination of the widely circulated version of the ŚTS to reassess Rāvaṇa's literary agency and illuminate his capabilities as a poet within the broader context of classical Sanskrit poetics. In addition to presenting a concise scholarly translation of that version, it offers a focused analysis of textual variations drawn from selected, previously unpublished manuscripts of the ŚTS, sourced from various archival collections.

Rāvaṇa as an Influencer

Rāvaṇa has long captivated the interest of scholars across a wide range of disciplines, prompting extensive and thought-provoking interdisciplinary research into the origins of his name, identity, and historical existence. However, a comparative shortage of scholarly research into the works attributed to Rāvaṇa suggests that there is room for deeper investigation from multiple perspectives.

Rāvaṇa's identity has long straddled the boundaries between myth and potential historicity. Classical Sanskrit texts, most notably Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* (RA), depict him as the ten-headed *rākṣasa* king of Laṅkā, a devout follower of Śiva, and a learned scholar well-versed in the Vedas and *śāstras*. While mainstream traditions portray him as a villain, certain sources, especially within Śaiva, Tantric, and regional literatures, represent him as a powerful devotee, philosopher, and even a tragic hero (Hiltebeitel, 2011; Pollock, 1993). Attempts to historicise Rāvaṇa have been notably speculative. Scholars (Pollock, 1993; Thapar, 2000) have emphasised the mythic and literary functions of Rāvaṇa over efforts to root him in historical time.

In the RA, Rāvaṇa more categorically embodies the archetype of adharma (roughly translated as unrighteousness, injustice, or immorality), whose defeat by Rāma restores *dharma* (roughly translated as righteousness, duty, law, or cosmic order). His abduction of Sītā initiates the central moral conflict of the epic, but Vālmīki's portrayal is not one-dimensional because Rāvaṇa is depicted as possessing nobility, scholarly wisdom, and valour, contributing to his enduring complexity as a character (Goldman, 1985). Later vernacular adaptations, including Kamban's Tamil RA, Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas*, and Jain and Buddhist versions, reshape Rāvaṇa's character in numerous ways. For instance, certain Jain retellings reframe Rāvaṇa as a tragic figure in a deterministic moral universe, reflecting non-violent ethical frameworks (Dundas, 1992/2002). In contrast, Kamban's Tamil epic humanises Rāvaṇa while affirming Rāma's divinity and moral superiority (Shulman, 1986).

In recent decades, Rāvaṇa has been reclaimed as a cultural and political icon by various marginalised and subaltern groups in India and beyond. He has been adopted as a symbol of Sinhalese heritage and resistance in Sri Lanka, particularly during and after the civil war. Some nationalist and cultural groups celebrate him as a proto-Tamil king whose memory counters both Sinhalese Buddhist narratives and Indian Hindu influence. Further, in Sri Lankan nationalist narratives, Rāvaṇa is occasionally invoked as a historical king of ancient Laṅkā, predating Sinhalese Buddhist civilisation, thereby serving as a symbol of Tamil or Indigenous resistance to northern (especially Indian) hegemony (Rambukwella, 2018; Henry, 2023), while similar efforts have gained ground across some Indian regions in the recent past.

Recent scholarship has increasingly adopted postcolonial, subaltern, and feminist frameworks to interrogate Rāvaṇa's character and cultural afterlives. For example, Richman's two edited volumes (2001, 2023) present select scholars' perspectives on the diversity of Rāvaṇa's portrayals and the political stakes of interpreting the RA. Some others analyse how modern media, ranging from televised versions of the RA to political spectacles, shape contemporary perceptions of this legendary figure. Rāvaṇa has, therefore, undergone significant reinterpretation in scholarly and cultural discourse, particularly within modern socio-political movements. Recent scholarship and cultural productions have even sought to reframe Rāvaṇa beyond the binary of good and evil, offering more nuanced understandings of his character, identity, and symbolic resonance. Along that line, several literary and theatrical works challenge the monolithic vilification of Rāvaṇa. Bharucha (2021), for example, examines two contemporary performances that reinterpret Rāvaṇa as a dissident and a symbol of creative resistance. Those performances fragment traditional narratives, offering polyphonic and feminist retellings that highlight Rāvaṇa's individualism and relational complexities, especially through his connections with Sītā.

The evolving portrayal of Rāvaṇa reflects shifting cultural, political, and ethical paradigms. From villain to tragic hero, from symbol of oppression to icon of resistance, Rāvaṇa's legend continues to be a potent site for contesting dominant narratives and articulating alternative identities. However, his legacy remains dynamically contested. Far from being a static antagonist, his identity and cultural significance have evolved across regions, languages, and historical contexts.

Whether as a villain, devotee, scholar, or symbol of resistance, Rāvaṇa continues to be reimagined in ways that reflect shifting political, cultural, and ideological currents in South Asia.

Rāvaṇa as an Author

Despite Rāvaṇa's predominant role as an antagonist, a lesser known but significant dimension of his literary and intellectual legacy lies in the corpus of works attributed to his authorship. Those texts, though few yet diverse in content, span a range of disciplines from devotional poetry and ritual manuals to treatises on music, medicine, and esoteric sciences. This literature has drawn attention from scholars of Sanskrit, Indology, religious studies, and intellectual history for its implications regarding mythic imagination, authorship traditions, and the construction of sacred authority.

Attributing multiple and often thematically unrelated texts to a single mythic figure such as Rāvaṇa reflects a broader tendency in Indian literary culture to associate extraordinary knowledge with divine or semi-divine beings. Such practices reflect an economy of textual authority where legendary authorship enhances the status of a work. Manuscript studies of those works have shown significant regional variation in both the content and structure. Many works are preserved in non-standardised forms, transmitted via oral and semi-scriptural means, and embedded within sectarian knowledge systems, complicating efforts to verify historical authorship or establish consistent textual genealogy. However, such texts, though often excluded from the classical canon, play a critical role in the lived traditions of medicine, tantra, and ritual. Any study of authorship in these domains must go beyond philological scepticism to consider social, ritual, and cosmological frameworks that invest mythical figures like Rāvaṇa with epistemic authority.

Another significant facet of Rāvaṇa's role as an author is that his works are widely cited in popular discourses that seek to valorise Indigenous or "non-Aryan" knowledge systems in modern times. Rāvaṇa's scholarly image is invoked to assert cultural pride and alternative intellectual genealogies. Academic critiques of such usage often note the tension between traditional religious claims and modern epistemologies of science and history.

The corpus of works attributed to Rāvaṇa reflects the complex interweaving of myth, devotion, science, and esotericism in South Asian intellectual history. Whether as an expert in poetry, a patron of arcane sciences, or a symbol of Indigenous knowledge, Rāvaṇa's literary persona challenges conventional binaries between sacred and secular, mythic and rational. While the authenticity of these texts remains historically unresolved, their cultural impact and scholarly significance continue to warrant deeper critical inquiry.

In the landscape of South Asian intellectual history, several figures bearing the name "Rāvaṇa" have been cited as authors of works across diverse literary and scholarly genres (NCC 25, pp. 88-90). The Rāvaṇa traditionally credited with the authorship of the ŚTS appears to have used the name more as a sobriquet (RA 7.16.27) than a verifiable historical identity, as his actual name remains unknown. Similarly, the origins of the name among other historical or pseudo-historical

Rāvaṇas remain obscure. The phenomenon of recurring namesakes is a well-documented feature of the Sanskrit literary tradition, often complicating the task of attributing authorship with certainty. If we provisionally accept the arguments that support the historicity of the ŚTS and link its authorship to Rāvaṇa, then this figure may represent the earliest known bearer of the name. In contrast, later individuals who adopted the name “Rāvaṇa,” especially those whose historical context can be more reliably established, appear to have been borrowing a name already imbued with cultural and literary gravitas, rather than assuming it due to any intrinsic resemblance in character or circumstance to the epic figure.

In several manuscripts of works attributed to Rāvaṇa, Laṅkeśvara (Lord of Laṅkā), is given as one of the common alternative names. The CMABSP (pp. 328-329) lists a few works such as the *Laṅkeśvarastotra*, *Liṅgāṣṭaka*, and *Avināṣṭakastotra* by a Laṅkeśvara, which its compilers deem to be Rāvaṇa. However, some other Laṅkeśvaras not recognised as the author of the ŚTS also flourished and authored Śaiva works. One of such Laṅkeśvaras wrote a *Śivastuti*, a 10-stanza eulogy in Pṛthvī metre on Śiva. De (1959), who quotes a stanza from it to compare with Rāvaṇa’s ŚTS, however, does not state anything about the authors’ identity (pp. 123-124). Other appellations such as Daśavadana (DPC, fol. 5v) or Daśavakra and Daśagrīva (CMABSP, pp. 306-307) or Daśakaṇṭha SRTML-1, fol. 1r), meaning “ten-faced” and “ten-necked” respectively, are also attested. While these appellations may be interpreted as literary pseudonyms, which is known to be a widespread practice in the long tradition of Sanskrit authorship, to recognise their deeper narrative and symbolic significance would be vital. Such epithets appear closely tied to the political and mythological identity of the figure before he received the name “Rāvaṇa” from Śiva himself, according to tradition. Those epithets may not, therefore, function simply as stylistic pseudonyms but as markers of a transformed or mythically augmented self, reflecting the author’s elevated status in both literary and religious imaginaries.

There remains no final consensus regarding the number or precise titles of the works attributed to Rāvaṇa, a situation not uncommon in the historiography of Indian literature, where the attribution of texts to renowned figures is often fraught with ambiguity. Nonetheless, as his single poetic composition among the corpus of works ascribed to him, the ŚTS has enjoyed relatively widespread and less-contested acceptance as genuinely connected to his name. However, a few more poetical works are listed in some manuscript (MSS) anthologies, but with a considerable degree of uncertainty of their author being the Rāvaṇa of Laṅkā. The examples include the *Gaurīśvarāyastotra*, *Caraṇāravindastotra*, *Jagaddharoparādhaka* (CMABSP, pp. 308-309), *Parameśvarasya-nāmāṣṭottara-śata*, *Pāśupatayadevāya*, and *Prārthanāstavana* (CMABSP, pp. 316-317). In contrast, the other texts commonly attributed to Rāvaṇa suggest that his intellectual inclinations lay more toward technical and theoretical disciplines than creative or lyrical literature.

Why Rāvaṇa composed only the ŚTS as a devotional hymn remains an open question. However, the legendary narrative that links the origin of the sobriquet “Rāvaṇa” to an episode of intense devotion to Lord Śiva, culminating in the composition of this hymn, offers a compelling interpretive framework. If we accept

this account, the ŚTS may be seen not as a carefully crafted, leisurely literary exercise but simply as a spontaneous outpouring of profound spiritual emotion. In this light, the ŚTS appears as an exceptional moment of poetic inspiration from a figure not primarily identified as a poet but as a scholar and devotee. Such an interpretation resonates with the Romantic notion of poetry as a “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” and aligns with classical Indian ideas of *sahṛdaya* (a sensitive, receptive mind) responding authentically to an overwhelming experience of the divine. Therefore, rather than viewing Rāvaṇa as a seasoned poet, we may understand the ŚTS as a rare but powerful expression of devotion by a polymath whose poetic voice was occasioned by spiritual intensity rather than literary ambition.

Rāvaṇa’s authorship of the ŚTS

The most popular and widely circulated work attributed to Rāvaṇa may well be the ŚTS, which is celebrated for its metrical virtuosity, rhythmic dynamism, and alliterative richness in addition to the embedded sentiments of *bhakti* (loving devotion) that overflow. No critical edition has definitively resolved the ŚTS’s unique position within Sanskrit literature that straddles the line between poetic elegance and ecstatic devotion, but its widespread transmission across Indian and Southeast Asian manuscript cultures, along with its continued use in liturgical and educational contexts, underscores its cultural durability.

Concerning the ŚTS and the figure of Rāvaṇa as its purported author, a series of critical questions naturally arises. Among them are inquiries into whether the hymn may have been composed by an unknown author and later attributed to Rāvaṇa, whether the composer was indeed the legendary ruler of Laṅkā as described in the RA, and whether this Rāvaṇa is the same individual to whom various tantric and Ayurvedic texts have also been ascribed. These questions are further complicated by the recurrent use of the name “Rāvaṇa” in South Asian literary traditions, where namesakes were common and authorship often remains uncertain. Modern scholarship has also explored how the attribution of such a refined hymn to a mythic antagonist contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Rāvaṇa, not merely as a villain but as a complex figure capable of profound spiritual expression.

Additional lines of inquiry concern the geographical and historical referents associated with the historical identity, geographical location, chronological placement, and literary activity of the figure known as Rāvaṇa. These discussions often intersect with more detailed legendary narratives concerning the acquisition of his sobriquet “Rāvaṇa,” his role in the abduction of Sītā, his confrontation with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, and his eventual death as recounted in the RA. For instance, the identification of Rāvaṇa’s Laṅkā with the modern nation of Sri Lanka, though widespread in popular tradition, remains a matter of scholarly debate due to the lack of unequivocal archaeological or textual evidence.

Attempts to date the composition of at least the ŚTS have also yielded no definitive conclusion. The hymn’s stylistic features, use of a dynamic metre, and the

presence of theological themes associated with developed Śaiva traditions suggest that it may belong to a period considerably later than the mythic age of the RA, though its exact historical moment remains elusive. Dating the ŚTS thus becomes particularly challenging, if not altogether speculative, when the author is presumed to be the legendary Rāvaṇa, the antagonist in the RA. Among the few scholarly relevant proposals, Agrawala's (1960) suggestion of an eighth-century CE composition date (pp. 20-21), based on correlations between iconographic motifs in Śaiva temples and the poetic imagery in the ŚTS, stands as one of the more methodologically grounded. This chronological placement, significantly postdating the mythic era of the RA, casts doubt on the attribution of the ŚTS to the Rāvaṇa of Laṅkā. Instead, it supports the possibility that the hymn was authored by a different individual, perhaps a namesake, or more plausibly, an anonymous poet who chose to attribute the work to the legendary devotee of Śiva to lend it both theological authority and literary prestige. Such practices of pseudonymous authorship were not rare in the Sanskrit literary tradition, particularly in devotional and esoteric genres where the association with an exalted figure could enhance the reception and perceived sanctity of the work. However, as already noted, the difficulty of dating the ŚTS lies not only in dating the text but also in disentangling the literary identity of this "Rāvaṇa" from other historical or pseudepigraphic figures of the same name.

Together, these questions highlight the complex interplay between myth, authorship, and textual transmission in the Sanskrit tradition. They also underscore the necessity of cautious philological and historiographical methods when approaching works attributed to legendary figures such as Rāvaṇa, whose name occupies both literary and devotional imaginaries across centuries.

Multiple works across diverse genres have been attributed to individuals named Rāvaṇa, including medical treatises such as the *Arkacikitsā*, *Nāḍiparīkṣā*, and *Kumāratantra*; commentarial works like the *Padaratna* commentary on the *Ṛgveda* and the *Śrīsūkta*; as well as grammatical and phonetic texts such as *Prākṛtalaṅkeśvara* alias *Prākṛtakāmadhenu* and the *Rāvaṇabhāit* alias *Chalākṣara*, which focuses on the correct recitation of the *Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda* (NCC 25, pp. 88-89). These works suggest the existence of a polymathic author or multiple individuals using the same name, either as a marker of lineage, location, or literary aspiration.

Whereas there are persuasive arguments for differentiating the poetic author of the ŚTS from these other figures, few such arguments have been rigorously articulated or substantiated in the scholarly literature. Traditional accounts, by contrast, tend to treat names such as Rāvaṇa and Laṅkeśvara synonymously, often attributing both the medical treatises and the ŚTS to a singular, mythologised author. This conflation, while problematic from a historical-critical perspective, reflects a broader cultural tendency in premodern South Asian literary traditions to consolidate intellectual authority under the aegis of renowned mythic figures, thereby enhancing the devotional and doctrinal weight of the texts attributed to them.

As Sastri (2018) has rightly observed, referring to the ŚTS as "a work attributed to Rāvaṇa" (p. 270) is a more cautious and methodologically sound approach than designating it as Rāvaṇa's *Śivatāṇḍavastotra*, which inadvertently

implies unquestioned authorship and lends the text an aura of unquestionable historical certainty. Such phrasing respects the complexities surrounding textual transmission, pseudonymous attribution, and mythologisation that characterise much of premodern South Asian literary culture. Moreover, maintaining a degree of scholarly agnosticism about the authorship does not diminish the literary or devotional value of the ŚTS. On the contrary, it invites further critical inquiry and leaves open the possibility for future research from textual, philological, or comparative perspectives to clarify the provenance and intellectual context of the work. Encouraging such openness not only sustains academic rigour but also nurtures the investigative spirit essential to the evolving field of Sanskrit studies.

Rāvaṇa's Poetical Magnum Opus

The ŚTS attributed to Rāvaṇa belongs to the *stotra* genre of Sanskrit devotional poetry, which is characterised by hymnic praise (*stuti*) directed toward a deity. A common convention in this genre is the inclusion of the name or epithet of the deity being eulogised in the title. However, given the multiplicity of epithets associated with Hindu divinities, it is not unusual for a single *stotra* to circulate under various titles that reflect different theological or devotional emphases.

Alternative Appellations

Rāvaṇa's ŚTS is also known by several alternative titles, with each foregrounding a different aspect or name of Śiva, including *Mahādevastotra*, *Śaṅkarastotra* (NCC 25, p. 89), *Śivastuti*, *Harastuti*, *Śaṅkarastuti* (CMABSP, pp. 348-352), and *Śivastotra* (CMABSP, pp. 356, 362). These variations reflect both the fluidity of Sanskrit naming conventions and the wide reception of the hymn across Śaiva traditions. Such multiplicity in titling also complicates cataloguing and textual identification, often requiring scholars to rely on internal textual evidence, commentary traditions, and manuscript colophons to determine whether different titles refer to the same text.

The issue of textual identification becomes further complicated when multiple works share identical or similar titles. A well-known example from later Sanskrit literary history is the appearance of many *Meghadūtas*, composed in imitation of the archetype established by Kālidāsa, even reusing its title. Similar situations arise in the case of the ŚTS as well. For instance, a distinct *Śivatāṇḍava stotra* composed by Mahendrasūri, accompanied by a commentary authored by a Śivaśāstrī, is extant. However, this later author adopting the renowned title to lend authority and recognition to his composition also seems probable.

Similarly, the title *Śivastotra*, moreover, has been used by more than twenty authors in the more recent history of Indian Sanskrit literature, attesting to its generic appeal. Some manuscripts of the ŚTS also bear this simpler title, thereby adding to the ambiguity in attribution and classification. Interestingly, another variant title, *Laṅkeśvarastotra*, preserves the identity of the reputed author Rāvaṇa

(also known as Lañkeśvara) within its title itself (NCC 25, p. 89), offering a rare instance in which the authorial name and the object of praise are both foregrounded. This variation illustrates the diverse titling practices in the *stotra* tradition, shaped by devotional intent, literary convention, and the dynamics of reception across manuscript cultures.

Further, Rāvaṇa's ŚTS appears under several alternative titles in manuscript sources, including *Śivanaṭanastotra* (NCC 34, p. 90) and *Pradoṣatāṇḍavastotra* (NCC 25, p. 88, see UPENN-2793, fol. 1r for such use), indicating the breadth of its transmission and the enduring appeal of its central theme, which is Śiva's cosmic dance. The range of titles not only reflects variations in regional and textual traditions but also underscores the fascination that Śiva's dynamic and awe-inspiring dance has held for poets and connoisseurs of devotional poetry throughout Indian literary history.

This fascination has inspired many other compositions in the *laghukāvya* (short poetical work) genre that celebrate Śiva's unique *Tāṇḍava* dance forms. Among these remains the *Śivatāṇḍavastavaśataka* (NCC 34, p. 90), a centum of stanzas attributed to a certain Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita. However, given the recurrence of this name across the landscape of Sanskrit authorship, it remains unclear which Śrīnivāsa Dīkṣita composed this work. Such uncertainty is not uncommon in the Sanskrit tradition, where namesakes, overlapping literary themes, and the lack of biographical detail often obscure authorial identities. Nevertheless, these compositions together attest to the thematic continuity and devotional intensity that Śiva's cosmic dance has inspired across centuries of Sanskrit poetic expression.

Focusing on the genre and compositional objective of the ŚTS, the work has also been referred to by titles incorporating the terms *stava* and *stuti*, both signifying "praise" or "eulogy." These appellations emphasise the hymn's fundamental devotional purpose, which is to extol and venerate Lord Śiva through poetic encomium. An illustrative example is a manuscript (UPENN-2532) titled *Śivatāṇḍavastavarāja* (c. 1700 - 1850 CE), which is preserved in the Collection of Indic Manuscripts of the University of Pennsylvania's Colenda Digital Repository. This manuscript not only reflects the enduring transmission and reception of the text well into the early modern period but also exemplifies how variations in titling conventions highlight different facets of the *stotra*'s devotional and literary identity. Such titles underscore the fluidity within the Sanskrit poetic tradition, wherein a single work may be known by multiple names that foreground either its thematic focus, metrical and stylistic form, or its function as a vehicle of praise.

In several manuscripts, titles of the ŚTS are given concerning the metre employed in its composition, exemplified by the title *Rāvaṇapañcacāmarastotra* (see NCC 25, p. 90 and NCC 34, p. 90 for a listing). However, two manuscripts (Nos. 11143, 11144) among the four listed in the DCSMM, which are introduced under the title *Rāvaṇapañcacāmarastotra*, state in their colophons that the actual title of the work is *Rāvaṇabhujāṅga*. This raises intriguing questions, as the term *bhujāṅga* is typically associated with the *Bhujāṅgaprayāta* metre and used to denote *stotras* composed in that metre, such as the *Śivabhujāṅgastotra*, *Devībhujāṅgastotra*, *Gaṇeśabhujāṅgastotra*, and *Subrahmaṇyabhujāṅgastotra* attributed to well-known literary and philosophical polymath Ādi Śaṅkarācārya. Yet, an examination of

another manuscript compiler's notes reveals that the title *Rāvaṇabhujāṅga*, though corresponding in content to the ŚTS, may not primarily signify the metre but rather the structural form in which the poem is arranged (NCC 25, p. 91 and MSS No. 102 in the CROMM, p. 187). The compiler's observation that the work is a praise of Śiva ascribed to Rāvaṇa and put into the form of a serpent suggests that the stanzas are organised in a serpentine or sinuous pattern, likely designed to facilitate memorisation and enhance the reader's aesthetic experience. This mnemonic and visual structuring of the text would be consonant with traditional Sanskrit poetic practices aimed at preserving and transmitting texts orally. Similarly, the NCC 25 lists *Śivabhujāṅga* as an alternative title for the work known as the *Rāvaṇabhujāṅga* (p. 91), indicating an interchangeable use of these titles within manuscript traditions. These variations in nomenclature underscore the fluidity of titling conventions in Sanskrit literature, where metrical form, authorial attribution, thematic content, and manuscript presentation may all influence the designation of a single text.

Several lesser-known titles of works attributed, often dubiously, to Rāvaṇa appear in manuscript anthologies, though it remains uncertain whether these titles refer to the ŚTS or distinct compositions. For instance, the work titled *Dīnākrandanastrotra* (lit. a eulogy by a crying or desperate devotee), although with some doubt, is attributed in some manuscripts (CMABSP, pp. 306-307, 312-313) to a Daśagrīva and in some others to a *Laṅkeśvara*. The emotive nuance of this title suggests thematic parallels with the ŚTS, potentially indicating that the contents may overlap or correspond to the devotional intensity found therein. The *Parameśvarabhaktistotra* (CMABSP, pp. 316-317) credited to *Laṅkeśvara* is another title associated with the ŚTS, mirroring its contents. However, without a rigorous philological and textual analysis of the contents of these works, definitive confirmation of their identity with the ŚTS is not presently possible. This uncertainty highlights the challenges inherent in tracing textual lineages and authorial attributions within the often-fluid manuscript traditions of Sanskrit literature.

Text Transmission and Commentaries

Owing to its intensely devotional contents and the melodious quality of the stanzas, the ŚTS has historically been one of the most widely transmitted *stotras* within Sanskrit devotional literature. This widespread transmission is attested by the considerable number of extant manuscripts preserved in both private collections and institutional archives. Interestingly, the presence of scribal errors, particularly those involving fundamental orthographic conventions, in certain manuscripts suggests that these texts were often produced through oral transmission, whereby scribes transcribed the stanzas by listening to recitations rather than copying directly from an established written original. This mode of transmission points to a devotional culture centred on recitation and auditory learning, where texts were frequently copied for personal devotional use rather than for broader pedagogical or scholarly dissemination.

Moreover, the conciseness and rhythmic compactness of the ŚTS likely contributed to its frequent reproduction and circulation. Its brevity and mnemonic

qualities would have facilitated memorisation, making it an ideal text for devotional practice and thus encouraging the proliferation of manuscript copies across different regions and communities. These features collectively underscore the dynamic interplay between oral and written traditions in the preservation and propagation of Sanskrit devotional poetry.

The existence of several learned but concise commentaries on the ŚTS attests to the enduring popularity of this hymn, driven by devotees' keen interest in comprehending its profound meaning. Among these exegeses, a generic form of annotation is the *daṇḍānvaya* style characterised by a rod-like syntactic construction where glosses provide synonyms or explanations for each word sequentially, closely following the order of the stanza. The prolific nature of these commentaries has, however, led to some manuscripts lacking clear attribution, with the authors' names, titles, or both omitted.

Notable among the well-known Sanskrit commentaries of the ŚTS are the *Padayojanikā* by Bhāratīgaṇeśa (alias Gaṇeśabhāratī), the *Śivatāṇḍavābhinaya* by Kāmarāja, the *Anvayārtha* by Govindarāma Śāstrī, the *Padayojana* by Mādhavānanda, and the *Candrikā* authored by Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa Śarman. Some other commentaries, such as the *Paribhāṣāyukti* and *Bhāvaprakāśikā*, remain anonymous (NCC 34, p. 91), while a commentary attributed simply to a Kāmeśānanda exists without a formal title. Rāvaṇa's monumental work has also triggered a series of new commentaries in Sanskrit and a few modern languages in India. This diversity of interpretive traditions reflects the complex textual reception history of the ŚTS, underscoring the depth of scholarly engagement it has inspired across centuries.

Theme and Contents

The *Tāṇḍava* dance ascribed to Lord Śiva is a vigorous and rhythmically complex cosmic dance that embodies the eternal cycle of creation, preservation, and dissolution of this universe. Rāvaṇa's masterpiece is unarguably one of the Sanskrit compositions that captured this divine performance as an expression of Śiva's dynamic and transformative power, which is simultaneously destructive and regenerative, underlining his role as the cosmic destroyer and recreator. The dance's intricate rhythms and powerful movements symbolise not only the cosmic equilibrium but also Śiva's fierce *Rudra* aspect, which, despite its ferocity, is ultimately benevolent and auspicious. Such a portrayal of the theological depth and rich symbolism is embedded in the ŚTS, emphasising the tension between destruction and creation as fundamental to the universe's cyclical nature.

An early and notable literary portrayal of Śiva's *Tāṇḍava* occurs in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (16th chapter) of the RA, where the ten-headed demon-king Rāvaṇa, in a moment of hubris, attempts to uproot Kailāsa mountain known to be the divine abode of Śiva. In response, Śiva subdues Rāvaṇa by imprisoning him beneath that mountain. Recognising his transgression, Rāvaṇa offers penance through an extemporaneous devotional hymn composed in praise of Śiva's grandeur. This hymn, subsequently known as the ŚTS, stands out as a lyrical and metrical

masterpiece, replete with alliteration, intricate rhythmic patterns, and vivid, evocative imagery. Its poetic structure and cadence notably parallel the pulsating beat of Śiva's Ḍamaru, which is a sacred hourglass-shaped drum, thus mirroring the dynamic and cosmic energy of the deity's divine dance.

As the legendary account depicts, through this poetic composition of penitence and aesthetic devotion, Rāvaṇa not only restored Śiva's favour but also exemplified the transformative power of sincere praise and artistic expression in the quest for divine grace. His eulogy thus functions as both a theological and literary embodiment of the awe-inspiring potency of the *Tāṇḍava*, while simultaneously affirming the efficacy of devotion, even when arising from a moment of transgression. In this dual capacity, the hymn "overflowing with devout inspiration and the realisation of the ineffable bliss of the Divine in the heart of the Bhakta" (Agrawala, 1960, p. 20) underscores the profound relationship between human fallibility, creative expression, and the redemptive power of divine worship.

Rāvaṇa's ŚTS vividly embodies various *mūrtis* of Lord Śiva through a rich sequence of epithets, each highlighting distinct aspects of the deity's divine persona. For example, the first stanza in its widely circulated version venerates Śiva as Gangādhara (the bearer of the sacred Ganges) while the second stanza honours him as Umāmaheśvara, the Lord united with goddess Umā alias Pārvatī. These descriptions unfold in an awe-inspiring array of poetic diction, meticulously crafted within one of the most dynamic and rhythmically complex metres of Sanskrit prosody, thereby enhancing the hymn's devotional intensity and aesthetic sophistication.

Text Architecture

This remarkable work by Rāvaṇa has existed within an oral tradition for an extended period, a factor that has contributed to numerous variant readings, interpolations, and diverse arrangements of its stanzas. Consequently, the exact number of stanzas in this *stotra* remains a subject of scholarly debate, notwithstanding the popular version's composition of fifteen stanzas followed by an additional concluding stanza that extols the benefits of its recitation.

Due to this traditional variability, most extant manuscripts diverge significantly from the standardised version commonly found in printed editions. For instance, the manuscript UPENN-2532 titled *Śivatāṇḍavastavarāja*, though incomplete and with some textual variants, contains only the final five stanzas of the popular ŚTS version and the four following stanzas that are otherwise unattested in known versions, thereby highlighting the fluidity and multiplicity inherent in the text's transmission history. For the benefit of future researchers, the four stanzas are reproduced here, with square brackets marking syllables that were not read with confidence.

kvacidvibhūtibhūṣitaṃ kvacitpaṭīracarcitaṃ
kvacitdukūlasaṃyutaṃ kvacinmṛgatvagambaram
kvacidvilāsavikṣaṇaṃ kvacinmahogravīkṣaṇaṃ

mamāviraktasantataṃ jagadvilakṣaṇaṃ mahah (14)

*nagādhirājanaṃdinīkapoladaṃttapatrikā-
vivikṭapāṇipamkaje bhujamgarājakaṃkaṇe
virimci[vighmu]sannate vibhūtipāśatorase
prahar[śameti]śamkare manopidivyaṃmanvahaṃ (15)*

*nagādhirājakārmukā[tatāhisamjinepure]
sphurattvagendravāhanāśugapradagdhadānave
vilolabhālalocanānalāhutikṛtānanur-
girīndrakuñjagahvare rarāja rājaśekharaḥ (16)*

*dhagaddhagaddhigiddhigiddidhiṃ dhidhiṃ dhidhiṃ dhidhin
dhvananmṛdaṅgamaṅgalasvanānukāritāṇḍavaḥ
vilāsahāsamindirānanāravindabandhurā
surendrvmṇḍavanditaḥ sadāśīvastumegatiḥ (17)*

Furthermore, the DCSMM catalogues four manuscripts (Nos. 11141, 11142, 11143, 11144) bearing the title *Rāvaṇapañcacāmarastotra*, which encompass varying portions of the stanzas found in the popular edition, alongside several additional ones. For instance, a stanza absent from the widely recognised version is preserved in manuscript No. 11141 (DCSMM 19, p. 7533), illustrating the textual fluidity and the existence of variant traditions within the transmission of the ŚTS.

*namāmi caṇḍatāṇḍavaprasaṅgasaṅgatabhramaj-
jaṭā[lasatsari]ttaraṅgasanmṛdaṅganisvanam
anaṅgamaṅgalakriyādu[dhu]rīṇamedurībhavat-
tamītamassamānakeśapāśakaṃ sadāśīvam*

Beyond the variability in the number of stanzas, a significant structural feature of the ŚTS is the inconsistent sequencing of stanzas across different manuscripts. The ŚTS as in 133-3(A), for example, begins with the stanza *jaṭākaṭāha°* and lists the other stanzas in the sequence (2)(3)(4)(11)(8)(6)(10) of the popular version. The translation provided in this paper adheres to the most frequently observed stanza arrangement in extant versions. Notably, the opening stanza (*jaṭāṭavi°*) by which the entire *stotra* is popularly identified remains absent in most traditional manuscripts examined in the present study. Except for the manuscript LRL-3472 (fol. 1v) which begins with *jaṭāṭavi°* and has *jaṭākaṭāha°* as the second stanza, the ŚTS versions appearing in MSS 133-3(A), KKSURC, DPC, SRTML-1, SRTML-2, CGVS, UPENN-2793, UPENN-2531, LRL-5232, and both 11141 and 11142 as listed in DCSMM (19, pp. 7533-4) instead begin with the stanza *jaṭākaṭāha°*. However, it should be noted that the SRTML-2 (fol. 5v) includes the stanza *jaṭāṭavi°* on its right margin and numbers it as the first stanza. The note “śaligrāmeṇa kṛtā iyaṃ ekaślokena stutiḥ” given at the end of the stanza, seemingly an interpolation, suggests the scribe being grateful to the one who pointed out the omission. Similarly, the UPENN-2531 contains 16 stanzas, including two (8th and 9th)

extra stanzas borrowed from Patañjali's *Sadāśivāṣṭaka* but not included in the popular version. Several printed editions where the ŚTS appears alone or with other *stotras* on Śiva, including the *Bṛhatstotraratnākara* (pp. 112–114), similarly omit the first stanza. Furthermore, two manuscripts (Nos. 11143 and 11144, DCSMM 19, pp. 7534–5) containing the popular ŚTS text but under alternate titles begin with the stanza *jaṭābhujāṅga*°, as observed, for example, in the *Rāvaṇapañcacāmarastotra*. This fluidity in textual arrangement and titling further attests to the complex transmission history of the ŚTS.

Another intriguing feature observed in the structural composition of certain ŚTS manuscripts is the inclusion of preliminary or benedictory stanzas preceding the main body of the *stotra*. A relevant example is found in the manuscript CGVS, which incorporates nine stanzas drawn from Patañjali's *Tāṇḍavāṣṭaka* alias *Nāṭarājastuti* or *Nāṭarājastotra*. Following these, the first stanza of the *Cidambareśvarastuti* alias *Cidambareśastotra* is positioned as the tenth stanza. Just before the commencement of the ŚTS itself is found the following floating stanza in praise of Śiva, as found in many sources such as the *Mantramahārṇava* and *Mantramahodadhi*, situating Rāvaṇa's work within a broader liturgical and poetic framework of Śaiva veneration.

*kailāsācalasannibhaṃ trinayanaṃ pañcāsyamambāyutaṃ
nīlagrīvamahīśabhūṣaṇadharaṃ vyāghratvacā prāvṛtaṃ
akṣasragvarakuṇḍikābhayakaraṃ cāndrīm kalām bibhrataṃ
gaṅgāmbhovilasajjaṭaṃ daśabhujāṃ vande maheśaṃ param*

Given that the content of the CGVS manuscript includes an assortment of devotional stanzas on Śiva, its identification as a manuscript of the ŚTS may seem incontrovertible. The colophon explicitly reads “this is the end of the *Śivastotra*,” thereby confirming its association with the ŚTS, but the manuscript's inclusion of multiple *stotras* suggests that it functions more as a devotional anthology rather than a dedicated or authoritative edition of Rāvaṇa's poem. This points to the likelihood that such manuscripts were compiled primarily for personal or ritual use, reflecting devotional practice rather than serving as carefully curated critical texts focused solely on the ŚTS.

Ending and Colophon

Rāvaṇa's ŚTS typically concludes with one or more stanzas that serve as benedictions or reflections on the spiritual and worldly benefits accrued by those who recite the hymn. These concluding stanzas frequently emphasise the transformative power of devotion and the protective grace of Lord Śiva, highlighting themes of purification, liberation, and the dispelling of obstacles. The presence of such stanzas underscores the devotional purpose of the ŚTS as not merely a poetic composition but also a practical instrument for spiritual elevation.

Additionally, many manuscripts include a colophon following the concluding stanzas, which often affirms the completion of the text. It may also contain statements regarding the text's sanctity, the circumstances of its transcription, or the scribe's devotional intent. In certain cases, the colophon reiterates the work's title, thereby providing textual closure and reinforcing the identity of the hymn. These elements reveal the manuscript's devotional function and the cultural importance attributed to the ŚTS within the Sanskrit *stotra* tradition.

The two concluding stanzas in two manuscripts, Nos. 11143 and 11144 (DCSMM 19, p, 7535) respectively, illustrate the rewards of an ardent devotee. The first highlights the power of remembering Śiva while the second that of reciting the ŚTS.

*pratiprabhātamudyataḥ prabhuṃ prabhāvabandhuraṃ
mṛdaṅganartanāstavaṃ mṛdapriyāmudāvaham
sadāśivasya yaḥ smaret samāhitasvamānasaḥ
sa yāti śāmbhavaṃ padaṃ samastabhogabhāg bhuvi*

*rāvaneśakṛtaṃ stotraṃ yaḥ paṭhec chivasannidhau
śivalokam avāpnoti śivena saha modate*

Some other versions of the ŚTS conclude with stanzas that pay homage to Lord Śiva by invoking and celebrating the diverse and dynamic aspects of his cosmic character. Such concluding stanzas often reflect on his multifaceted nature, ranging from the fierce destroyer to the compassionate protector, thereby encapsulating the essence of Śiva's transcendental and immanent presence.

*namāmi pārvatīpatiṃ namāmi jāhnavīpatiṃ
namāmi bhaktavatsalaṃ namāmi bhālalocanaṃ
namāmi candraśekharaṃ namāmi duḥkhamocanaṃ
tadīyapādapaṅkajaṃ smarāmy ahaṃ naṭeśvaram*

The ŚTS version in the CGVS ends with the following stanza that describes Śiva's ascetic form.

*pāde viśṇuvilokanaṃ kaṭitaṭe śrīnārasimhājinaṃ
hāre kūrmaśiro[kra]raṃ karatale kaṅkālanāmāyudham
śūlāgre śavakeśavaṃ hariśiromālādharaṃ maulināṃ
sarvaṃ viṣṇumayaṃ sadāśivavapuḥ satyaṃ purāṇoditam*

The concluding stanzas in the UPENN-2532 (fols. 4v-4r) eloquently underscore the insignificance of ordinary divine attainments when contrasted with the profound experience of oneness with Śiva. As in the second stanza below, which appears as the 12th in both the 133-3(A) and KKURC, even the divinities adore and worship such a devotee.

*śrīśambhoś caraṇāravindayugalaṃ dhyānāmṛtāsvādināṃ
svargaḥ svapnasakhāyate kratubhujāṃ svāmī varākāyate
rambhā nimbaphalāyate vidhibhṛtāṃ devaḥ piśācāyate
lakṣmīsūkṣmakaṇāyate bhavamahāsindhuś ca bindūyate* (18)

*paṭhati yaḥ prayataḥ śivasamnidhau stavam imaṃ śivatāṇḍavanāmakam
tam atha samtatam unnatamānatāḥ pratipadam praṇamaṃti sureśvarāḥ* (19)

The manuscript UPENN-2793, which presents another version of the ŚTS under the title *Pradoṣatāṇḍavastotra*, contains only ten stanzas from the popular recension and concludes with three final stanzas, i.e., *śrīśambhoścaraṇāravindayugalaṃ*°, *pūjāvasāne*°, and *paṭhati yaḥ prayataḥ*°. Despite its incompleteness, this manuscript preserves a distinct ending that reflects the devotional essence of the composition.

The colophon of the ŚTS typically identifies the author in varying degrees of detail, ranging from concise formulations as seen in the SRTML-1 (fol. 1r) to more elaborate and ornate declarations. Exemplifying the latter, the colophon in the UPENN-2532 (fols. 4r-5v) reads as “*iti śrīmahāpurāṇe śivarahasyakhaṇḍe sakalavedavedāmtasāre vi[dhau]re ye nikhilasuravidrāvaṇarāvaṇakṛto’yaṃ śivatāṇḍavastavaḥ sampūrṇam astu*”, emphasising Rāvaṇa’s identity as an Asura, an adversary of the gods, through the epithet “*nikhila-sura-vidrāvaṇa-rāvaṇa*” (Rāvaṇa who dispels all gods). This characterisation underscores his mythological role as the formidable opponent of the Hindu pantheon.

Metrical Significance

The entirety of the ŚTS is composed in the Pañcacāmara metre recognised as one of the most dynamic and vigorous metres in Sanskrit prosody. This metre imparts the text with a distinctive intensity and rhythmic rigour that vividly conveys its exalted contents. As the *Vṛttaratnākara* (VRA) of Kedārabhaṭṭa (3.89) defines, the Pañcacāmara metre belonging to the Aṣṭī group of metres features a characteristic sequence of prosodic units: *ja, ra, ja, ra, ja, ga* (long) within each hemistich of sixteen syllables and with the *yati* (caesura) occurring after every two syllables. Similarly, Nañjuṇḍa in his *Vṛttaratnāvalī* (p. 137) and his commentator Aṇṇaṅgācārya explain the Pañcacāmara metre with illustrative stanzas.

Whereas the Pañcacāmara metre may seem to lack the melodic softness found in other more musically varied metres, its unique rhythmic structure produces a compelling, spirited tempo. The alternation of short to long syllables immediately preceding each caesura is said to evoke the pulsating beat of the Ḍamaru drum traditionally associated with Śiva’s *Tāṇḍava* dance. This rhythmic cadence not only animates the poetic recital but also immerses listeners in an ineffable energy, mirroring the cosmic dynamism of Śiva’s divine dance.

The Pañcacāmara metre that charmingly invigorates the ŚTS exhibits notable similarities to several other metres in terms of syllabic arrangement. It bears a close resemblance to the Pramāṇikā metre, particularly regarding tempo, though the latter

comprises only eight syllables per hemistich. According to the *Chandomañjarī* (CM 2.249), two combined hemistichs of the *Pramāṇikā* metre (Skt. *pramāṇikāpadadvayam*) correspond to a single *Pañcacāmara* hemistich. Furthermore, the *Pañcacāmara* metre is referenced as *Pramāṇī* in classical treatises such as the *Chandaḥsūtra* alias *Chandaḥśāstra* (CS 5.7) and the *Prākṛtapaiṅgala* (PP 2.202) where the *Nāraca* metre is introduced as a mere namesake (Skt. *namāntara*) for the *Pramāṇī* metre. Thus, it becomes evident that the *Pramāṇikā* (alias *Nāraca*) metre, when doubled within a single hemistich, effectively constitutes one hemistich of the *Pañcacāmara* metre. This structural relationship underscores the rhythmic complexity and formal ingenuity underlying the composition of the ŚTS.

A close examination of the syllabic structure of the *Pañcacāmara* metre reveals that each hemistich comprises eight iambic metrical feet. A disyllabic foot consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable, an iamb corresponds to the *pramāṇī* (*laghu-guru*) foot in Sanskrit prosody. Conversely, a trochee, which is a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable, parallels the *samānī* (*guru-laghu*) foot (CŚ 5.6; CM 2.8; VRA 79). Accordingly, metres constructed from sequences of short syllables followed by long syllables align with the *pramāṇī*-type metres, while those featuring the opposite pattern correspond to the *samānī*-type metres. The *Vitāna* class of metres, by contrast, encompasses those with more complex or irregular arrangements that deviate from these standard patterns. This comparative framework highlights the nuanced interplay of rhythm and syllabic patterns in both Sanskrit and Greek metrical traditions, situating the *Pañcacāmara* metre within a broader prosodic lineage.

Among the Pali metres illustrated in the *Vuttodaya* (VU) of Saṅgharakkhita exist clear counterparts to the Sanskrit metres of *samānī* and *pramāṇī* types. The Pali *Samānikā* metre consists of quarters (*pādas*) that include a cretic foot (*ra-gaṇa*), an amphibrach (*ja-gaṇa*), and a trochee (*guru-laghu*) in each (VU 50), while, conversely, each hemistich of the *Pamāṇikā* metre comprises an amphibrach (*ja-gaṇa*), a cretic (*ra-gaṇa*), and an iambic foot (*laghu-guru*) (VU 51). This correlation reveals a shared rhythmic foundation across Pali and Sanskrit prosodic traditions, where the arrangement of these fundamental metrical feet informs the distinct tempo and cadence characteristic of each metre. Such correspondences also underscore the deep intertextuality and cross-cultural influence within the broader Indic metrical landscape.

Sanskrit literature features several notable compositions in the *Pañcacāmara* metre, likely due to the vibrant and dynamic quality this metre imparts to the stanzas. Prominent examples include the *Ganeśapañcaratna* and the *Narmadāśataka* by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, the *Ganeśapañcacāmarastotra* (also known as *Ganeśapañcacāmarastuti*) attributed to Subrahmaṇya Yogin, and the *Cidambarapañcacāmarastotra* by an anonymous author. These works demonstrate the enduring appeal and versatility of the *Pañcacāmara* metre across different devotional and poetic contexts in the Sanskrit tradition.

Text and Translation

The popular version of the ŚTS is reproduced as it appears in several editions in print and concisely translated below. The translation was prepared consulting pertinent Sanskrit commentaries, notably Gaṇeśabhāratī's gloss found in manuscript LRL-5232, and those by Dharanīdhara Śāstrī and Mādhavānanda present in various printed editions of the ŚTS, with due regard not only to an English-speaking readership but also to the preservation of the Sanskritic *stotra* register.

1. *jaṭāṭavīgalajjalpravāhapāvitasthale*
gale'valambya lambitāṃ bhujaṅgatuṅgamālikām
ḍamaḍḍamaḍḍamaḍḍamanninādavaḍḍamarvayaṃ
cakāra caṇḍatāṇḍavaṃ tanotu naḥ śivaḥ śivam

May Lord Śiva, who performed the fierce Tāṇḍava dance to the resounding “ḍamaḍ ḍamaḍ” sound of his Ḍamaru drum, after wearing a lofty, swaying garland of serpents upon his neck, which is purified by the flowing streams of water (issuing from) the forest of his matted locks, bless us with auspiciousness.

2. *jaṭākaṭāhasambhramabhramannilimpanirjharī-*
vilolavīcivallarīvirājamānamūrdhani
dhagaddhagaddhagajjalalālāṭapaṭṭapāvake
kīśoracandraśekhara ratiḥ pratikṣaṇaṃ mama

May my delight abide every moment in Kīśoracandraśekhara (bearer of the young crescent moon on his head, Śiva); whose crest shines resplendent with the dancing wave-curls of the celestial river turbulently pouring forth from his matted locks shaped like a cauldron, and whose forehead-fire blazes with the resonant "dhagad-dhagad" sound.

3. *dharādharendranandinīlāsabandhubandhura-*
sphuraddṛgantasantatipramodamānamānase
kṛpākaṭākṣadhoraṇīniruddhadurdharāpadi
kvaciddigambare mano vinodam etu vastuni

May my mind delight in that supreme reality, the sky-clad one (Digambara, Śiva), whose heart is ever suffused with joy at the multitude of playful, graceful glances cast by the daughter of the King of Mountains (Pārvatī); and whose merciful sidelong glances restrain (even) inevitable adversities.

4. *jaṭābhujaṅgapiṅgalasphuratphaṇāmaṇiprabhā-*
kadambakuṅkumadravapraliptadigvadhūmukhe
madāndhasindhurāsuratvaguttarīyamedure
mano vinodam adbhutaṃ bibhartu bhūtabhartari

May my mind take wondrous delight in Bhūtabhartṛ (Lord of beings, Śiva), whose matted locks are inhabited by serpents from whose hood-jewels a multitude of tawny radiance streams forth, tinting the faces of the direction-maidens as if with liquid saffron; and who shines resplendent in the hide of the rut-blind elephant-Asura worn as his upper garment.

5. *lalāṭacatvarajvaladdhanañjayasphuliṅgayā
nīpītapañcasāyakaṃ namannilimpañāyakam
sudhāmayūkharekhaḥ virājamānaśekharaṃ
mahaḥ kapāli sampade sarijjaṭālam astu naḥ*

O skull-bearer (kapālin, Śiva), may your splendor in the form of the matted locks encircled by the river (Gaṅgā); of the crest resplendent with a crescent of the nectar-rayed (moon), of the annihilation of the five-arrowed (Pañcasāyaka, Kāmadeva) by the sparks of blazing fire (*dhanañjaya*) upon (your) forehead-altar; and of the veneration offered by the Lord of the celestial beings (Indra), endure for our prosperity.

6. *sahasralocanaprabhṛtyaśeṣalekhaśekhara-
prasūnadhūlidhoraṇīvidhūsarāṅghripīṭhabhūḥ
bhujāṅgarājamālayā nibaddhajāṭajūṭakaḥ
śriye cirāya jāyatāṃ cakorabandhuśekharaḥ*

May Lord Śiva, whose footstool is stained with the masses of pollen from the flowers adorning the crowns of the thousand-eyed (Indra) and other gods; who is adorned with matted locks tightly bound with a garland of mighty serpents; and who bears upon his head the crescent moon (cakorabandhu), ever manifest to bestow prosperity (upon us).

7. *karālabhālapaṭṭikādhagaddhagaddhagajjalad-
dhanañjayāhutīkṛtapracaṇḍapañcasāyake
dharādharendranandinīkucāgracitrapatraka-
prakalpanaikaśilpini trilocane ratir mama*

May my devotion (ever abide) in Trilocana (the three-eyed, Śiva), the sole divine artist who fashioned the decorative leaf patterns upon the nipples of Pārvatī, the daughter of the King of Mountains (Himalayas); and in whose ferociously blazing forehead-fire, resounding “*dhagad-dhagad*”, the aggressive Kāmadeva (Pañcasāyaka) was immolated as an offering.

8. *navīnameghamaṇḍalīniruddhadurdharasphurat-
kuhūnīśīthinītamaḥprabandhabaddhakandharaḥ
nilimpañirjharīdharas tanotu kṛttisundaraḥ
kalānidhānabandhuraḥ śriyaṃ jagaddhurandharaḥ*

May Lord Śiva, who is the bearer of the celestial river (Gaṅgā), resplendent in his antelope-hide attire, adorned with the crescent moon, sustaining the weight of the universe; and whose neck is perpetually enveloped in the impenetrable darkness of the new-moon night inevitably manifest like dense clusters of fresh rain clouds, grant us prosperity.

9. *praphullanīlapaṅkajaprapaṅcakālimaprabhā-
valambikaṇṭhakandalīruciprabaddhakandharam
smaracchidaṃ puracchidaṃ bhavacchidaṃ makhacchidaṃ
gajacchidāndhakacchidaṃ tam antakacchidaṃ bhaje*

I worship Śiva, whose neck is adorned with the lustrous radiance of his darkened throat, resembling the expansion of fully blossomed blue lotuses; who is the destroyer of Kāmadeva (smarāntaka), the demolisher of the (three) cities (purāntaka), the liberator from worldly existence (bhavāntaka), the annihilator of sacrificial ritual (makhāntaka), the slayer of Gajāśura (gajāntaka), the vanquisher of Andhakāśura (andhakāntaka), and the subduer of Yama ((antakacchida, the death of death itself).

10. *akharvasarvamaṅgalākālākadambamañjarī-
rasapravāhamādhurīvijṛmbhaṇāmadvuvratam
smarāntakaṃ purāntakaṃ bhavāntakaṃ makhāntakaṃ
gajāntakāndhakāntakaṃ tam antakāntakaṃ bhaje*

I worship Śiva, the destroyer of Kāmadeva (smarāntaka), the demolisher of the (three) cities (purāntaka), the liberator from worldly existence (bhavāntaka), the annihilator of sacrificial ritual (makhāntaka), the slayer of Gajāśura (gajāntaka), the vanquisher of Andhakāśura (andhakāntaka), the subduer of Yama (antakāntaka); and who (resembles) a bee intoxicated by the sweetness of nectar flowing from the full array of all-auspicious arts and sciences, which are (embodied as) clusters of Burflowery (Kadamba).

11. *jayatyadabhravibhramabhramadbhujaṅgamaśvasad-
vinīrgamakramasphuratkarālabhālahavyavāṭ
dhimiṃ dhimiṃ dhimiṃ dhvananmṛdaṅgatuṅgamaṅgala-
dhvanikramapravartitapracāṇḍatāṇḍavaḥ śivaḥ*

Victorious is Śiva, whose fierce Tāṇḍava dance is set in motion by the tumultuous (yet) auspicious succession of Mṛdaṅga drumbeats resounding “dhimiṃ-dhimiṃ”; and whose terrifying fire upon the forehead correspondingly blazes forth as the venomous serpents swaying swiftly (on his moving body) exhale.

12. *dṛṣadvicitratālpayorbhujaṅgamauktikasraja-
gariṣṭharatnaloṣṭhayoḥ suhṛdvipakṣapakṣayoḥ
tṛṇāravindacakṣuṣoḥ prajāmahīmahendrayoḥ
samapravṛttikaḥ kadā sadāśivaṃ bhajāmy aham*

When will I attain the state of worshiping the ever-auspicious one (sadāśiva), with equal regard toward a rough stone and a luxurious bed, toward a serpent and a garland of pearls, toward an extremely precious gem and a clod of earth, toward a friend and an enemy, toward a blade of grass and a lotus-like eye, and toward (ordinary) people and a mighty ruler of the entire world?

13. *kadā nilimpanirjharīnikuñjakoṭare vasan
vimuktadurmatiḥ sadā śiraḥsthamañjaliṃ vahan
vilolalalalocanālalāmabhālagnakam
śiveti mantram uccaran kadā sukhī bhavāmy aham*

When shall I, dwelling in the caves of the celestial river's groves, free from misguided or corrupt thinking, ever holding my folded hands upon my head, continuously chanting the mantra "Śiva", which is bound to the resplendent forehead of the one with playful, wandering eyes, when shall I truly become blissful?

14. *nilimpanāthanāgarīkadambamaulimallikā-
nigumphanirbharakṣaranmadhūṣṇikāmanoharaḥ
tanotu no manomudaṃ vinodinīm aharniśam
paraśriyaḥ param padaṃ tadaṅgajatviśāṃ cayaḥ*

May the resplendent multitude of radiance emanating from the limbs of the Supreme Lord, which enchant the mind (by being bathed in the) abundance of gently cascading pollens of the jasmine clusters on the heads of the Lord's retinue of divine consorts, confer upon us supreme amusement pleasing the heart, day and night.

15. *pracaṇḍavāḍavānalaprabhāśubhacāriṇī
mahāṣṭasiddhikāminījanāvahūtajalpanā
vimuktavāmalocanāvivāhakālikadhvaniḥ
śiveti mantrabhūṣaṇā jagajjayāya jāyatām*

May the sacred utterance of "Śiva", adorned as a mantra, which (resounds like) the sound especially emitted at the time of (the Lord's) wedding with the beautiful-eyed one (Pārvatī); the murmurs invoked by women (aspiring to) the eight great supernatural powers, and that which consumes the vicious in the fierce submarine fire's radiance, be victorious, for the welfare of the world!

16. (concluding stanza)

*pūjāvasānasamaye daśavaktragītam
yaḥ śambhūpūjanaparam paṭhati pradoṣe
tasya sthiram madagajendraturaṅgayuktam
lakṣmīm prasādasamaye pradadāti śambhuḥ*

Upon whoever recites this hymn (sung by) the ten-headed one (Rāvaṇa), which gives primacy to the worship of Śambhu (Śiva), at the conclusion of paying homage to Śiva during Pradoṣa (the auspicious 3-hour period extending one and a half hours before and after sunset on the 13th lunar day of each fortnight), Śiva bestows, at the moment of his divine grace, enduring prosperity inclusive of great rutting elephants and horses.

17. (additional stanza)

*idaṃ hi nityam evaṃ uktam uttamottamaṃ stavam
paṭhan smaran bruvan nara viśuddham eti santatam
hare gurau subhaktim āśu yāti nānyathāgatim
vimohanaṃ hi dehināṃ suśaṅkarasya cintanam*

Indeed, the person who often recites, remembers, and utters this supreme and excellent hymn composed in this manner, achieves the uninterrupted state of purity; quickly attains deep devotion to Lord Hara (Śiva) and (their) Guru; and never deviates onto any (unfavorable) course. For embodied beings, the contemplation of the auspicious Śaṅkara (Śiva) alone removes delusion.

Poetic Appreciation

A brief appreciation of Rāvaṇa's ŚTS is warranted to highlight its distinctive poetic dynamics and the fervent devotional energy it embodies. From the perspective of reader reception, it would never be exaggerative that this *stotra* captivates audiences not only through its rigorous metrical structure and vivid imagery but also by conveying an intense emotional devotion marked by both reverence and ferocity. The interplay between the *stotra*'s intricate rhythmic patterns and its evocative epithets of Śiva engages readers and listeners on multiple levels, invoking awe, spiritual fervour, and a profound sense of the divine's cosmic power. Such reception underscores the *stotra*'s enduring appeal across diverse cultural and religious contexts, where it continues to inspire both scholarly inquiry and devotional practice.

Rāvaṇa's ŚTS undoubtedly occupies a unique and exalted position in the Sanskrit devotional canon, not only for its theological depth but also for its artistic brilliance and performative power. As discussed already, it provides a rare literary and spiritual glimpse into the devotional consciousness of an archetypal antagonist in Hindu mythology. Its composition by fusing rigorous poetic craft with intense *bhakti* reveals a powerful aesthetic and spiritual synergy. Through an interdisciplinary lens that draws on classical Sanskrit poetics as well as modern reception theory, the *stotra* emerges as a layered and dynamic text, one whose meaning is co-constructed in the encounter between the text and its varied readers across time.

At the core of the ŚTS remains its vigorously kinetic style, which mirrors the *Tāṇḍava* cosmic dance of Lord Śiva that it seeks to both describe and invoke. As

obvious from the complete array of stanzas given above, the text's rhythm, soundscapes, and structure all seem to participate in a dance of their own. This is most vividly realised through the poet's masterful use of figures of speech, particularly alliteration and onomatopoeia. The oft-cited third hemistich of the first stanza "*ḍamaḍ-ḍamaḍ-ḍamaḍ-ḍaman-ninādavaḍ-ḍamarvayaṃ*" exemplifies this unique technique. The repetition of retroflex consonants combined with nasals imitates the pulsating beat of the *Ḍamaru* thereby transforming poetic language into auditory experience. The onomatopoeic expressions *dhagad-dhagad*^o (second stanza) and *dhimiṃ dhimiṃ*^o (11th stanza) and alliterations running throughout the poem exemplify the poet's skilful integration of sonic embroidery with vivid imagery, effectively capturing the dynamism of Śiva's cosmic dance. The poem's musicality is, therefore, inseparable from its meaning, highlighting that *nāda* (sound), as in Indian aesthetics, is not a mere embellishment but a path to the divine, a concept that the *stotra* enacts with precision and devotion. Furthermore, such sound devices are not random but deeply embedded within the poem's metrical architecture, which adheres, as discussed above, to the rhythmic Pañcacāmara meter that accelerates the delivery of syllables and adds to the poem's overall energetic cadence. The poetic meter amplifies the hymn's visceral intensity, enabling readers or listeners to feel, rather than merely understand, the divine dance. The confluence of form and meaning creates a kind of poetic embodiment, wherein Śiva's dance is not simply described but is performed within the language itself.

Similarly, Rāvaṇa's skilled choice of words and imagery in all the stanzas reflects a rare command of poetic convention yet simultaneously innovates within it. The frequent use of long, compound words, which remains a hallmark of ornate Sanskrit *kāvya*, serves both a semantic and symbolic function. These rich compounds demand active intellectual engagement, foregrounding the interpretive role of the reader in constructing and decoding meaning. Similarly, phrases such as "*smarāntakaṃ purāntakaṃ bhavāntakaṃ makhāntakaṃ*" (10th stanza) collapse multiple theological narratives into a single breathless sequence, reinforcing the omnipotence of Śiva while reflecting the boundlessness of divine form.

In this respect, reception theory, which emphasises the active role of the reader in the creation of textual meaning, provides a valuable framework for appreciating this *stotra*. For a devotee, especially one engaged in *japa* (repetition) or *pāṭha* (recitation), the poem functions as a performative spiritual act that transcends language, becoming a mode of internal transformation. For a literary reader, especially one schooled in the *alaṅkāraśāstra* (science of poetics), the text offers a sophisticated interplay of sound, meter, imagery, and structure, with each element reinforcing the theme of divine energy, creation and destruction. The text thus contains multiple registers of meaning: theological, aesthetic, emotional, and sonic, with which each reader constructs a unique interpretive horizon depending on their cultural, spiritual, and scholarly positioning.

From the devotional standpoint, the ŚTS undoubtedly expresses an unqualified surrender (*śaraṇāgata*) to Śiva. This is particularly significant given its ascription to Rāvaṇa, whose mythological persona is often defined by hubris and antagonism. In composing this hymn, Rāvaṇa is transformed into a devotee whose *bhakti* transcends moral binaries, revealing a more complex and deeply human

portrayal of a character traditionally cast as villainous. In this light, the ŚTS becomes not just an act of glorification but also one of self-effacement, a rare and profound moment of spiritual insight where Rāvaṇa recognises the supremacy of the cosmic order embodied in Śiva.

Furthermore, the emotional spectrum of the poem oscillating between *adbhuta* (wonder), *bhaya* (awe), and *bhakti* produces a compelling *rasa* experience for its audience. The repeated evocation of Śiva's terrible yet beautiful form (with blazing third eye, serpents as ornaments, skulls as garlands and so on) sustains a tension between the sublime and the fearsome. This dynamic fusion of aesthetic delight and spiritual awe encapsulates the paradox at the heart of Śiva's iconography, and by extension, at the heart of the poem itself.

Lastly, the ŚTS remains a text of ritual significance as much as of literary merit. It has endured through centuries of oral and textual transmission, gaining renewed layers of meaning in every context, being recited by ascetics and devotees during worship, enriched by devoted poets with their own compositions and commentaries, analysed in classical poetics, and studied in even contemporary classrooms. Its performative force, achieved through its orchestration of language, rhythm, and imagery, ensures that it continues to be a living text. The poem does not merely narrate the divine; it enacts divinity through its very structure.

Conclusion

Rāvaṇa's enduring legacy as an epic antagonist, a heroic figure for various ethnic minorities, and a polymath has continued to captivate scholarly attention across sociopolitical, religious, cultural, and intellectual histories of South Asia. His multifaceted persona continues to serve as a fertile ground for scholarly inquiry, inviting diverse interpretative frameworks and inspiring a tapestry of creative engagements even in contemporary times.

As the most renowned composition attributed to Rāvaṇa, the ŚTS alone suffices to affirm his exceptional stature as a gifted poet, despite being, as far as current evidence suggests, his sole extant work of poetic expression. While the presence of variant stanzas in its manuscripts raises legitimate questions about their inclusion in the archetypal version, and consequently, about Rāvaṇa's authorship of those specific verses, the very existence of these textual variations attests to the profound reverence with which devotees received the hymn and their enduring devotional aspiration to partake in the ecstatic union with Śiva.

Rāvaṇa's ŚTS is an exemplar of how devotion and literary artistry can converge into a transcendent poetic form. Its stylistic features, especially alliteration, onomatopoeia, and long compounds, demonstrate the poet's mastery over language as a medium for both aesthetic and spiritual elevation. Through a reception-theoretical lens, the *stotra* invites manifold readings, each shaped by the reader's experiential, cultural, and emotional framework. As such, Rāvaṇa's poem remains not just a hymn of praise, but an ever-renewing site of interpretive encounter, poetic force, and devotional immersion.

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