

# COSMOS ENCRUSTED: ŚIVA, ANDHAKA, BHRŪGIN, AND THE EMPTYING OF INFINITY

**Don Handelman**  
Jerusalem

Here I address in brief a Śaiva myth of the creation of Andhaka, a demonic son of Śiva. In my interpretation, this myth is concerned with the integrity of Śiva's cosmos, and with the inevitability that in its evolution this cosmos will compromise its own existence through encrustation and fragmentation. My perspective opens timespace to the introduction of a conception of infinity into the cosmologies of Śiva. And, though in this paper I will not discuss this, my view points to an understanding of Southern Hindu myths of Śiva's visit to the Pine Forest as a way for his cosmos to do away with its own self-destruction. Below, I first outline this perspective on Śiva's cosmologies, and then take up the myth of Andhaka in relation to the implications of this view.<sup>1</sup>

## HOLISM AND INFINITY

The integrity of Śiva's cosmos emphasizes holism. Wholeness, I would argue, exists only through infinity, by having infinity within itself. If cosmic holism intimates (rather than contains) all possibilities, then an external view of holism is not possible. Therefore holism must be known from its inside. Yet its inside intimates all possibilities – including those that have yet to happen and those that may never happen. Therefore the interior of the cosmic whole is unbounded. Indeed, the cosmic whole opens within itself into infinity, and is itself “contained” within infinity. Cosmos comes into being within infinity, rather than from infinity.

In Śiva's cosmos, infinity is akin to pure possibility. Infinity takes in all possibilities and their potentialities, those that are known and those that are not, those that have materialized and those that may never do so. Infinity, in other words, is open-

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<sup>1</sup> The study of a corpus of Pine Forest myths is being done together with David Shulman.

ended; possibility as such is not enclosed. Cosmos, as configurations of materialized being, emerges from the possibilities of cosmic infinity. The possibility of god, Śiva, begins somehow within his own infinity; and god, coming into Being, encompassing the cosmos identified with him, emerges from within infinity that is the (paradoxically) endless ground of any emergence into Being. Śiva is that possibility, emerging within infinity, that moves in certain ways between infinity and cosmos, transforming their relationship and that of lived existence. The existence of Śiva as Being is a movement from deep within his own infinite being – a movement outward, a movement that is exteriorizing, that is pushing itself into the materialization of form. Śiva is driven towards his own exteriorization of self, towards becoming other to his self, yet always existing on some emergent axis (of which there are a great many) that relates materialization to its infinite grounds of possibility.

### ENCRUSTING AND MELTING

Within the moment that emergence begins, some possibility of Being is *encrusting* within infinity – that is, this possibility of Being is coming into being. Śiva, his cosmos, its beings, are all encrustations within infinity. Encrustation is a hardening, a forming, within utterly dense, utterly fluid infinity. A forming that is losing the lability and malleability of possibility. As form is taking shape, cosmic process is slowing down. There are degrees of encrustation, of exteriorization and hardening into form. Yet all sentience, including Śiva's, is subject to this coming into Being as, simultaneously, loss of being (see also Handelman 1987). Nonetheless, as an axis of emergence congeals into shape and direction, slowing, losing its transformative fluidity, it drives towards its own extremity, becoming (as it were) so encrusted, so hardened, that it shatters, fragmenting itself, breaking itself off from all possibility. Encysted within cosmos (that itself is opening into infinity), the condition of such an axis of ongoing emergence is one of stasis, the loss of movement, self-paralysis and blindness towards possibility and potentiality. In effect, stasis as the cessation of dynamism and change is the death of cosmos, is its self-closure to infinity and its infinite possibilities. Therefore the recursive destruction of stasis (of what may be called its melting) is crucial to the ongoing existence of cosmos (as is, of course, cosmos encrusting itself into being). Yet, if this melting into movement drives to its own extremity (as it tends to do), cosmos, including Śiva, will be sucked into infinity, perhaps never to reappear in the same configuration.

There are severe consequences that follow from this inside out movement, from sheer possibility into congelation and the shaping of form, and so into the hardening of form, encrustation, brittleness, and fragmentation. These are inevitable consequences for Śiva, his cosmos, and the beings that inhabit it; yet these are not

the results of god's choice, for they follow inevitably from all processes of coming into existence and from the living of existence, and they have their effects on both god and human beings.

Śiva dances (He is the Master of the Dance, *Naṭarāja*) the (non-existent) edges "between" infinite possibility and materialization, exteriorizing himself within himself (generating a "damaged" cosmos, in the sense that all exteriorization is damaged), and sucking himself into himself (the re-generation or rebirth of a "limited" holism). As noted, this dancing movement is precarious: over-exteriorization (from its own perspective) produces disintegration and the loss of a sense of the true inter-relatedness of all beings (within the encompassment of emergent Being). Over-interiorization may produce the loss of beings and Being – god's self sucked into infinity – lost – turning into a possibility that may never return, the end of consciousness and of conscious existence.

Over-exteriorization is akin to emptying infinity, emptying, or blinding infinity (from the perspective of cosmos) to its possibilities, making these non-existent. Over-interiorization is akin to filling infinity, filling this with its own possibilities of being, thereby turning everything into pure possibility without being certain that the very same axis of Being will re-emerge once more – perhaps other possibilities will materialize. Perhaps god (and cosmos) will become another (or not). Both emptying and filling are dangerous to the lived-in world. Indeed, in the course of this brief discussion I argue that existence, as exteriorized encrustation (of both Śiva and human beings), inevitably endangers itself through its own evolution. Living, encrustation, empties being of the dynamism, the movement that relates it to all other beings. Yet, to live, being must fill itself with movement, doing away (momentarily) with its own self-stasis.

I turn to one moment of Śiva's existence, that of self-emptying. To address the emptying of infinity, I discuss a myth of Śiva's play with his wife, *Pārvatī*, and its outcome, the creation of their blind son, *Andhaka*. Elsewhere (Handelman, n.d.) I address the filling of infinity, through a myth of Śiva's visit to the Pine Forest. These moments are responses to the same existential problem – the loss of infinite possibility, and thus the inevitable attrition of the connectivity that enables cosmic holism within infinity. Both moments – *Andhaka* and the Forest – are integral to, indeed constitutive of, the life-loops of god, the dangerous processuality of Being.

### **EMPTYING INFINITY: PLAY, THE EXTERIORIZATION OF ANDHAKA, AND THE ENCRUSTATION OF COSMOS**

Play and game exteriorize and materialize possibility within Śiva's cosmos. I emphasize again the forcefulness of this process of exteriorization, since every movement in this cosmos towards emergence and yet further emergence increases

its phenomenal reification. Emergence (the movement of exteriorization) is the appearance of phenomenal reality. Without this movement, nothing exists. Yet this movement is always petrifying. Thus, this movement and its self-encrustation simultaneously generate one another. Both are, as it were, the same side of the same coin.

Petrification is a known loss, an absence in the endless possibilities of infinity. Every emergence into appearance – whether of god or other entities – is then a momentary tear in infinity. But every emergence is a movement into consciousness, indeed, self-consciousness. So, too, degrees of consciousness and petrification are intimately linked – one may say, co-variant. The holes in infinity are the existence of cosmos – extruded, empty petrifications. The movement of emergence within infinity – the movement towards a petrifying and conscious cosmos – is again one of loss (and perhaps terror).

Play is the most labile of media. Play is closely related to ideas of uncertainty. Play introduces uncertainty into – puts a question mark inside – the apparent coherence and integrity of the interior of any phenomenon, thereby opening it to transformation from within. The playful mode of Being is fluid and flexible; its sole constant is ongoing change (Handelman 1998). As noted, infinity is pure possibility whose fluid possibilities are continually transmuting through their permutations. The playful mode within cosmos introduces the deep interiority of the infinitely possible, the imaginary, into the exteriorized world. The effect is to slow down the deep interiority of the possible, exteriorizing this, making it actual and turning it into part of the cosmos. In Śiva's cosmos, the ludic (*līlā*) is continually moving, transforming, and exteriorizing – play, exteriorization, and petrification are linked inextricably. The petrifying effects of the fluid ludic within Śiva's cosmos are infinitely ironic (On the relevance of ideas of play to the fluid, transformative Indic cosmos, see Handelman & Shulman 1997: 45–61).

Play and game occupy much of Śiva's time. In particular, he plays with his wife, Pārvatī. Inevitably, Śiva, the cosmic encompassment, is surprised by Pārvatī's play or he loses to her in games of dice (for an extended interpretation of a dice game between Śiva and Pārvatī, see Handelman & Shulman 1997: 17–25). The game (and other modes of play) are exteriorizations of the endless interiority of infinite possibility. The ludic is the process by which exteriorization takes space. When god enters the game, the possibility of his losing is exteriorized from deep within himself, from among the infinity of possibilities, and is hardened into actuality. The very existence of the game in the cosmos is the further exteriorization of structures which limit the possibilities of god the player. Through god's loss the infinity of possibilities is somewhat emptied. God, previously all-knowing (or close to this), now exists in a more exteriorized reality of loss. God is diminished.

The moment of Andhaka brings to the fore the consequences of god shifting through an instant of exteriorization, here an instant of the petrifying fluidity of play, and the destructive consequences of this exteriorization. Here is one version of the Andhaka story, taken from the *Śivapurāṇa* (*Rudrasaṃhitā* 5.42–49; Handelman & Shulman 1997: 122–130).

Once Śiva, eager to amuse himself [*vihartukāma*], came to Kāśī [Benares] and made it his capital; he set a dreadful Bhairava form of himself as its guardian at the border. Then he gave himself over to playing with Pārvatī ... As they played, Pārvatī, in jest, closed Śiva's eyes with her two hands, delicate as golden lotuses. At once, a vast darkness engulfed the world.

The hands of the goddess were drenched in fluid born of passion [*madāmba*]. This fluid, heated by contact with the god's body and by the fiery eye on his forehead [Śiva's third eye], became a drop [*bindu*] that grew to an embryo [*garbha*], that turned into something not human – something blind and fearsome, angry, ungrateful, deformed, black, covered with matted hair and also beautiful body hairs. It made a lot of noise, singing and laughing and dancing and weeping, licking with its tongue.

Śiva said to the goddess: "Why are you frightened of this creature? You did this by covering my eyes." She smiled and released his eyes, and the world was lit by a great light, which made the creature look even more horrible. She asked her husband, "Who is this deformed being that has appeared right in front of us? Why was he created and by whom? Whose son is he?" Śiva, the gamester [*līlākara*], said to the playful goddess: "This is Andhaka [from *andha*, 'blind'], born of my sweat when you closed my eyes. You created him and you and your friends should care for him." Out of compassion, Pārvatī accepted this task. (*Rudrasaṃhitā* 5.42.13–27.)<sup>2</sup>

Pārvatī playfully closes Śiva's eyes. Darkness engulfs the world. The cosmos is momentarily blinded. A black hole or gap opens within the exteriorization that is cosmos. This hole is the locus of further emergence. Within this hole there appears a monstrous being. The son of the playful Śiva, he is a diminishment, lacking human qualities, permanently blind, enraged. His lack of sight is the absence of perception. The absence of perception – the ability to see others as a net of linkages in relation to oneself – blocks the fluid connectedness upon which cosmos depends. Andhaka himself is black, homologous with the dark vacancy, a further tear in infinity, from which he emerges.

Andhaka is an encrustation of Śiva's playful fluidity. This encrustation is petrified (and petrifying, frightening). Even as the tear or hole seems to close – Pārvatī releases Śiva's eyes, and sight and light return – Andhaka remains, able to move and act, but as we will see, only within his limitations, emptied of all fluidity, incapable of change. Moreover, Andhaka's petrified presence has powerful effects on the world – their damage goes far beyond the conditions that gave him birth. Each subsequent exteriorization (the closing of Śiva's eyes, the black hole of Andhaka's birth, the emergence of Andhaka and, still later, the appearance of Bhṛṅgin) adds a layer of encrustation, further encysting the tear, the hole, the

<sup>2</sup> Translation by David Shulman.

absence of connectivity in the cosmos. The fully encysted fragment (that Andhaka is on his way to becoming) loses the perception and the consciousness of its connectivity to the greater cosmos, and thus behaves as an autonomous entity, a cosmos in itself. God, Śiva, empties himself further and further, losing himself through exteriorization and petrification.

The Andhaka story continues as follows. Performing terrible self-tortures, he was given the boon of being all-conquering and immune to death unless he should desire his mother (Pārvatī, whom of course he could not see). He conquered the universe, took thousands of beautiful women, and upended the moral order (*dharma*) of the cosmos. Told of Pārvatī's beauty, he lusted for her. Fearful battles ensued between the forces of father and son. With his forces decimated, Andhaka fought on alone, striking with his palms and knees, his feet, nails, and head. At the climax of the battle, Śiva impaled Andhaka on his trident, through the heart; while the god, Viṣṇu, took female form and hungrily drank the blood dripping from Andhaka's body. Andhaka dangled there in the sky like a pillar. The flesh was burned from his body by the sun's rays – his form was akin to snowflakes in the face of the cruel sun. Satisfied and compassionate, Śiva named him Bhṛṅgin and made him the chief of his terrifying followers, the *gaṇas*.

In the Śaiva cosmos, Śiva is the male principle and Pārvatī the female. Their most interiorized, unified form is that of the androgyne (*ardhanariśvara*). When the androgyne is separated into two and exteriorized as Śiva and Pārvatī, their playful relationship verges on erotic union (a movement of interiorization), though this seems rarely consummated (Handelman & Shulman 1997). Nonetheless, the interaction of male and female is fluid, creative, and potentially fruitful. Andhaka, on the other hand, is solely the offspring of the male principle, Śiva. Andhaka is an exteriorized, diminished version of Śiva. Andhaka is a dark, inchoate, disarticulated male, lacking yet madly longing for the female principle (Pārvatī) that is absent from his being, yet promised destruction if he desires her. Himself an encysted, petrified hole in the more fluid cosmic weave, any movement on his part only widens this tear. The more he tries to undo his problem of gender imbalance the more reverberating cosmic exteriorization and deterioration become.<sup>3</sup> Andhaka can only ruin the universe. His being is constricted to those shrunken qualities of sex that were included in his making. He is merely his father's son in a cosmos that depends for its fruitfulness and holism on the joining of the sexes. Andhaka is more of an exteriorization, more of an encrusted, static being. Trapped within his own

<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere (Handelman 1995) I have argued, in relation to the Gaṅgāmma Jatra in Tirupati, that gender in South India in metaphysical terms is more akin to a continuum of possible configurations of male and female. The continuum of gender takes issue with Western ideas of any hard and fast division between the sexes; and with other views, like that of medieval Europe, when there was a sense of a gender continuum. Yet there the female end lacked crucial properties of being that were present in the male end (Bynum 1991).



being, within his own encysted emptiness, Andhaka is destroyed by his own deeper interiorization, by Śiva, his father.

As Śiva destroys his son, Andhaka undergoes a reverse procreation through which he is taken apart, his own male and female parts rended, rendered, and separated from one another and returned to their origins. Dangling from the trident, Andhaka's body is burnt to the bone by the sun's rays, while Viṣṇu in female form drinks his blood. The soft bodily substances – blood, flesh – often are thought of as qualities contributed to procreation by the female; while the hard substances – skeletal materials – are given by the male. Hung on the hardness of his father, Andhaka's form is decomposed, losing its flesh, its blood returning to the female. Left attached to Śiva is the utter maleness of the skeleton that has lost even the desire for its female complement. The skeleton of course is full of holes, indeed, of empty space, and is highly fragmented in relation to the holism of the body. The skeleton's petrified fragments are at best stiffly articulated. The skeleton emerges as an exteriorization of parts from deep within the possibilities of the whole body.

As Andhaka is pacified and saved by Śiva, the gap opened by Andhaka's birth not only does not seal but spreads even wider in its frightening effects. The separation of Andhaka into male and female parts is a further encrustation of a cosmic life-cycle within the possibilities of infinity. From the splitting of the Ardhanarīśvara into Śiva and Pārvatī (Handelman & Shulman 1997), through the creation of blind Andhaka from Śiva alone, to the remaking of Andhaka as sheer bone, the cosmos becomes an increasingly holey, encrusted, petrified, and static entity; a hole on the surface of infinity. This emerging structure, as I describe it, is not composed of parts of a single story. The androgyne and Andhaka appear in different stories. Yet the disparate parts of this sequence, as I am developing this, are informed by a consistent logic of emergence, encrustation, and petrification which can be said to characterize aspects of the life-cycle of Śiva.

This logic continues as Śiva turns the desiccated, bony remnants of Andhaka into Bhṛṅgin. In terms of his gender, Bhṛṅgin is even more full of holes than is Andhaka. The latter had a personal history of flesh and blood. But Bhṛṅgin begins as skeleton, lacking all flesh and blood. He is completely and only male; even more so, a caricature of the male. His extreme maleness is so lopsided that he cannot stand upright without an additional extremity, the bony third leg (the caricature of a phallus) that Śiva gives him. While Andhaka lacks the female yet lusts for her, Bhṛṅgin hates the female and is repelled by her. One story has it that Bhṛṅgin arrived at Kailāsa to worship Śiva but found only the form of the Ardhanarīśvara. Loath to worship Śiva's female side, Bhṛṅgin turned himself into a borer beetle and drilled a hole through the Ardhanarīśvara, between Śiva and Pārvatī, and then circumambulated only Śiva. A skeleton full of holes and gaps, Bhṛṅgin is the embodiment of exteriorized and emptied being. Apparently the emptied gaps in

infinity that are the phenomenal cosmos cannot be completely closed without endangering cosmos by interiorizing it completely. The very movement towards sealing the hole opens it, and continues the fragmentation of the encrusting cosmos.

Bhṛṅgin, then, is a still further exteriorization and emptying of Śiva/Andhaka, one now utterly barren – a dead end in the exteriorization and evolution of cosmos. Nonetheless this kind of directionality is the constitutive nature of the living cosmos. Ongoing encrustation and exteriorization – holes that open, empty, and congeal within infinity – is that which enables cosmos (that is, god) to exist as *zeitgeist* and form. The continuing emergence, the coming into existence of cosmos, is also its own recursive destruction as its petrification and fragmentation increase.

## CONCLUSION

Here I continue the argument about the emptying of infinity – the emptying of possibility – and the exteriorization, petrification, and shattering of conscious Being. Scholars are increasingly pointing to the significance of ideas of processuality in Indian life. Stasis, cosmic and social, is undesirable, perhaps even abhorrent (Lannoy 1971; Östör 1980; and see Kapferer 1983, on Buddhist Sri Lanka). Stasis in living is the end of life. Personhood, relationships, and matter itself are perceived as fluid, mutual, and mutable in ongoing ways that are always relational (Daniels 1984; Marriott 1989: 17–18; Trawick 1990). There are ongoing debates as to whether the traditional Indian individual has the value of an autonomous being in the Western sense (Dumont 1970; Marriott 1976; Appadurai 1988). And there are arguments to the effect that Indian ritual makes cosmic and social order; bringing these orders into existence from the beginning, day after day, time after time ... rather than simply reproducing them (Davis 1991).

Being human requires consciousness. Yet the agency of consciousness depends upon possibility, upon the capacity to imagine infinitely (indeed, to imagine God). Nonetheless, in this cosmos, conscious existence in the Indian sense also depends on the interconnectedness and mutuality of all beings, all life. This connectedness depends on an openness of beings to the imaginings of one within the other, one another, one to the other, one about the other, one without the other ... another one. Consciousness that does not stop at the borders of individual beings, but that is rather the consciousness of interconnectedness – the net of Being. In this regard, beings flows through one another, changing one another, human beings no less than gods. To slow down the flows of the imaginary, of possibility, of mutually affecting and effecting interconnectivities – or to stop them altogether – is to kill (ramifying) consciousness. Yet the argument of this paper is that the death of cosmos is inherent in the very processes through which cosmos lives. As cosmos lives, it dies.



In terms of the logic I have been developing, the southern Pine Forest stories begin when/where those of Andhaka and Bhr̥ṅgin leave off. The Andhaka story tells of Śiva's movement towards exteriorization and self-petrification. Over-exteriorization empties infinity, empties possibility, forming the empty solidity of the petrified, destroyed self. The southern Pine Forest stories tell of Śiva somewhat emptied (perhaps partially petrified), and of his reinteriorizing the lost fragments of his self. However, over-interiorization fills infinity, generating the full fluidity of the self that may then flow away, perhaps lost forever, within sheer possibility.

Between them, emptying and filling condense cosmic process. The exteriorized encrustation (of both Śiva and human beings) inevitably endangers itself, though this process is integral to the evolution of Śiva's cosmos. Living (encrustation and hardening) empties being of the fluid connectedness and the mutuality of movement that relates it to all other beings – thus, living puts being at risk. Yet to live, being must fill itself with movement, doing away (momentarily) with its own encrustation. To repeat this point, those very processes that are necessary for existence are dangerous to existence.

Despite the inevitable movement towards exteriorization, there is an abhorrence of surface, of encrustation, in this cosmos. The extrusion of surface, of phenomenal reality, slows down the simultaneity of all possibilities, the simultaneity of infinity, its god, his cosmos. Surface is stasis. Stasis generates fragmentation; fragmentation destroys connectivity. The death of connecting movement is again the annihilation of cosmos no less than its being sucked utterly into infinity. There is a strong sense of Śiva and his cosmos trying to exist without surface, without encrustation. Perhaps one can argue that Śiva/cosmos continually whirls and swirls inwards, trying to elude and erase his own surface, seeking the flow of possibility. Yet, recursively and simultaneously, this flow inevitably turns outward on itself, slowing and hardening into surface, so long as there is the impulse for the phenomenal.

In myths of Śiva, Naṭarāja dances his Tāṇḍava dance, whirling through himself, forming himself through continuous movement as a recursively flowing pillar (*sthānu*) without top or bottom, beginning or end (Kramrisch 1981; Smith 1996), exteriorizing, emptying himself to fill the cosmos; interiorizing, emptying the cosmos to fill himself. Both of these processes – emptying and filling – have prominence in myths of Śiva. These processes are inescapable moments that are always on Śiva's horizons of Being, always before him. They are moments that keep this cosmos in existence, looping the world into the exteriority of cosmos, away (as it were) from infinity; and into the interiority of cosmos, on the nonexistent edges of infinity.

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