PROLOGUE: AGHORAŚIVA’S LITTLE PROBLEM

As Aghoraśivācārya, the foremost proponent of the Śaivasiddhānta living in Cidambaram in the middle decades of the twelfth century, neared the conclusion to his commentary on the Ratnatrayaparīksā of Śrīkāṇṭhasūrya, he took up as his theme a topic beloved of his school, that of the sublime uninvolvement of Śiva with the created world. That Śiva, as pure consciousness, is utterly free of this contagion of material existence formed one of the fundamental theses of the Siddhānta, yet this was a transcendence that needed always to be reconciled with the equally central fact of God’s compassion and grace towards all beings. Accounting for this provides one of the principal motivations for the architecture of the Śaiva cosmos as seen by the Siddhāntins, and occupied most of the argument in Śrīkāṇṭha’s doctrinal précis.

What Aghora seeks to clarify ad Ratnatrayaparīksā 313 emerges from a corollary to this fundamental thesis: why is it that some beings achieve liberation while others remain caught in the snares of existence? Or, as he puts it, if Śiva creates the universe for the sole purpose of bestowing grace, “why is it that He gives liberation to some people and not to everyone? Is this His essential nature? In that case, He would be subject to inward passion and hatred.”1

1 ...śivaḥ katham keśāsid eva mokṣam karoti na sarvesām, ayam evāsya svabhāvo vā tairhya antah rāgadvēṣyayuktah syāt.
The Lord is like the sun, the text before Aghora reads (continuing an image begun several verses earlier): just as the sun is unaffected when its rays at once dry a patch of earth and melt a piece of beeswax, so too Śiva either binds or give liberation to souls because of their actions, deemed either good or wicked, are either in balance or imbalance with each other. Following Aghora’s reading:  

It is true that Śiva grants his grace to all. Furthermore, he has no passion or hatred, given that he is eternally free from Stain. Further, [he] is the agent of the bondage and liberation of souls, owing to [the souls”] fitness [scil. for their particular destinies]. This has already been explained. And therefore, just like the sun, precisely insofar as it possesses a single form, can, by virtue of its proximity, render liquid beeswax (i.e. something suited to liquification), while drying out earth (i.e. something suited to desiccation), Śiva too causes the liberation of those fit for liberation (i.e. those whose Stain has matured) and he causes the bondage of those fit for bondage (i.e. those whose Stain has not yet matured). [In the latter case, he does so] for the sake of [the Stain’s] maturation. Hence, there is no contradiction. And thus here by the use of the phrase ‘[works] said to be meritorious and un-meritorious’ [punyapuruṣākhyakṣaḥdenā], he refers to the pair of actions – either beneficial or harmful – in line with the principle that, ‘The man who is equal to all beings – who neither delights in benefits nor becomes angry at harm – that man is said to be liberated-in-life.’ Liberation occurs when there is an awareness of the equality of these two [kinds of actions] owing to the complete maturation of the Stain [malāparipākavāśāt]; when this is not the case, there is only bondage. However, [the text] should not be interpreted to say that it is the equality of two actions, one meritorious and the other not – such as performing a horse sacrifice and murdering a brahman – that is the cause of liberation, for this contradicts sāstra. [Also, this interpretation is incorrect] because this kind of the equality of action [karmāśānya] is possible even in the state of worldly existence. [Further this is incorrect],

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2 satyam sarvāṃgrāhakah śivaḥ. na cāṣya rāgadir vidyate anādimalarāhitavitāt, bandhamokṣakaritvam cārmatānaṃ eva yogyāvaitā iti uktaṃ. tatas ca yathaihākāra evābhy avasamādhanānaṃ dravatvayogayasya madhucañcitāsyā vṛttatām srotavayogāya nityāh śūkṣāvam ca karoti, tathā śiva ’pi pūkramulānām mokṣayogānām mokṣān karoty apakṣamulānām bandhayogānām tataḥ kāratedhavāṃ bandham karoṭi avirodhaḥ, atāś cātra punyapuruṣākhyakṣaḥdene: ‘ na hṛṣyatā upākāraṇa nāpakaṇaṇa kuṣyati, yah samah sarvasah jīvanamuktah sa ucyaṭe’ iti nyāyopakārāpaktārānāyaṃ karmādevam ucyaṭe. tayor malāparipākavāśāt sāmyabuddhau satyam mokṣo bhavati, tadahāvite tu bandha eva. na tv aśvamedhabrahmahatyādirūpa punyapuruṣau, tayoh sāmyaṃ mokṣahetur iti vyākhāyaṃ śātravirodhaḥ, tādṛśasya karmāśānyaśāya sāmāśravāśāyām api sambhavat svaṇāśāya eva ca itīrthāvatāt, samastakarmāśānyaśāpi vijñānaçevaiśaṃkārya eva hetuvat, mokṣahetuvāsambhavat, malāparipākasyaiva proktakarmāśāṇayacānunāmasya dīkṣādāvāreṇa mokṣahetuvāc ca.