

Siva dances, not alone

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ANNUALLY, this is a moment of powerful energy convergence on our planet. The night of Siva — Sivaratri.

This past week has seen millions celebrate the eternal night of cosmic energy through prayer, dance, music and meditation throughout the day and night of February 12. Myths speak of Siva dancing atop Mount Kailasa and his celestial audience of all the mighty deities. Also in attendance are Patanjali, the father of Yoga and Vyagrapada, the founder of India's martial arts. Watching his Ananda Tandavam (the dance of ecstasy) has been a timeless source of inspiration for sculptors, painters, dancers and poets.

What does the dance symbolise? I had a chance to meet and question Sadguru Jaggi Vasudev, the inspirational founder of the beautiful Isha Yoga Centre near Coimbatore.

We spoke about the fickle nature of fame, creativity, dance, the tragedy of Michael Jackson, the Raas Leela of Krishna and Siva's Ananda Tandavam.

Seated amidst the lush forest providing the canopy, we were positioned for TV cameras on two giant rocks in the middle of a gurgling stream. Stroking his silver grey beard which concealed a sleek, invisible microphone nestled behind his ear, Sadguru shared his thoughts about the celestial dancer.

"It is the energy that cannot be contained. It does not heed rhythm or lyrics. It is pure energy manifested in kinetic action. It is the spurt of a young child who bounces up or jumps, oblivious to the surroundings.

The dance of Ananda is the surge of creativity that is sometimes inappropriate for a civilized society.

Siva's divine energy was seen as an organised dance by his amazed audience. Siva danced alone. None could join except watch in awe. In contrast, Krishna's dance with the milk maids was one of love. It needed men and women to participate in that ritual — 16,000 maidens, many men disguised as women, to congregate around Krishna — the sole Purusha. Even Siva had to drape himself in the garments of Yamuna Devi, the river Goddess to watch Krishna's dance.

On the night of Sivaratri, Siva danced atop the Himalayas and in our hearts. Elsewhere on this planet, many ancient rituals honoured the dance of creativity. The Native American Hopi Kochinas danced near the mountains in Arizona, Goddess Hathor danced in Egypt, Amaterasu in Japan, Brigid in Ireland, Hephaestus in Greece, and Freya in Teutonic myth. Medusa was murdered for her creativity and her son Pegasus, the winged horse, churned the sacred waters of inspiration with his hooves for the Muses. In turn, the Muses churn the creative impulse in all of us. Like the Ananda Tandavam of Siva, it lives inside all of us and waits to erupt and express itself.

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