

Abhinavagupta's Attitude towards Yoga

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A major characteristic of the aristocratic attitude—and I would not know how to better define the flavor that pervades the whole of Abhinavagupta's work—is the downgrading of all painful effort, seen as a plebeian feature. The aristocrat intends to show that what inferior people can achieve only at the cost of long and painful exercises is accessible to him promptly and very easily. One of the recurring qualifications for Abhinavagupta's attitude to the spiritual path is precisely absence of effort, absence of exertion or fatigue, easiness. This can be clearly detected in Abhinavagupta's attitude to yoga, or, to be more precise, to Pātañjala yoga. In the summary of the topics of the *Tantrāloka* (TĀ), at the end of Āhnika I, he lists “uselessness of *yogāṅgas*.” When all *yogāṅgas*, *abhyāsa*, *vairāgya*, etc., are viewed from the peak of the highest aesthetically marked spiritual experiencer, they are condemned unreservedly (following the lead of the *Virāvalī-tantra*). On the other hand, after delivering such a pitiless death sentence, Abhinavagupta seems to gracefully suspend it, and allow common people to follow *pāśavayoga* ‘yoga for limited souls’ in the context of the “minimal means” with the motivation that after all everything is made of everything, and, as the MVU teaches, “nothing is to be prescribed, nothing to be prohibited.”

A major characteristic of the aristocratic attitude—and I would not know how to better define the flavor that pervades the whole of Abhinavagupta's work (cf. Torella forthcoming a)—is the downgrading of all painful effort, seen as a plebeian feature. The aristocrat intends to show that what inferior people can achieve only at the cost of long and painful exercises is accessible to him promptly and very easily. No slow and painful ascent step by step, but only an elegant, powerful, and effortless jump is effective. One of the recurring qualifications for Abhinavagupta's attitude to the spiritual path is precisely absence of effort (*yatna*, *prayatna*), absence of exertion or fatigue (*āyāsa*, *prayāsa*), easiness (*sukha*, *sughṭa*). This can be clearly detected in Abhinavagupta's attitude to yoga, or, to be more precise, to Pātañjala yoga. In the summary of the topics of the *Tantrāloka* (TĀ), at the end of Āhnika I, he lists *yogāṅgānupayogitvaṃ* (and *kalpitārcādyanādarah*).

USELESSNESS OF THE AṄGAS OF YOGA. KNOWLEDGE VS. ACTION

The uselessness of Patañjali's *yogāṅgas* (and, more generally, of all *yogāṅgas* regardless of their specific character and the philosophical-religious context in which they are situated; see below) is restated at several points in the TĀ¹: e.g., IV.87 *iti pañca yamāḥ sāḥṣāt saṃvittau nopayoginah* “the five restraints are of no direct use for [realizing] consciousness”; IV.95 *tad eṣā dhāraṇādhyānasamādhitrityā parām | saṃvidam prati no kañcid upayogaṃ samaśnute* || “The three *aṅgas*—fixation, visualization, absorption—do not have any usefulness with regard to supreme consciousness.” The charge of uselessness is also specifically ascribed to one of the pillars of Pātañjala yoga, *abhyāsa* ‘repeated practice’: IV.104 *tad advayāyāṃ saṃvittāv abhyāso 'nupayogavān | kevalaṃ dvaitamālīnyasaṅkānirmūlanāya*

1. In fact, the topic is treated also in other works by Abhinavagupta, such as the PTV, MVV, etc.

saḥ || “Repeated practice is of no use for non-dual consciousness; it can only serve to uproot the presumption of the impurity of duality.” However, in the spiritual path (and perhaps in any human activity. . .) what is useless may also be obnoxious in that it involves wasting of energies or targeting a wrong aim, or even making one lose sight of the true aim or obscuring its nature. This is, according to Abhinavagupta, the case of the “internal” *yogāṅgas* (*pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*), which due to their appearing closer to the final aim may result in being even more insidious. But before delving into the *anupayogitvam* issue we should address a preliminary, and even more basic, question. Abhinava does it already in Āhnika I while giving the first account of the *upāya* doctrine as outlined in MVU. The lowest *upāya*, *ānava*, is also called *kriyopāya* (TĀ I.149c). However, the whole of non-dualistic Śaiva tradition agrees that only knowledge is entitled to be an *upāya* to liberation,² and, furthermore, what is the relationship, if any, between knowledge and action? (Cf. Brunner 1992; see also Brunner 1994.)

TĀV: *nanu jñānam eva upāyaḥ iti sāmānyena pratijñātam, tat katham ānave kriyopāyatvam uktam ity āśaṅkyāha*

yato nānyā kriyā nāma jñānam eva hi tat tathā |

rūḍher yogāntatām prāptam iti śrīgamaśāsane || I.150 ||

TĀV: *anyā iti arthāḥ jñānāt, yataḥ taj jñānam eva rūḍheḥ prarohāt yogasyāntaḥ parā kāṣṭhā tattvam prāptaṁ sat tathā kriyeti sarvatra abhidhīyate ity arthaḥ | nanu atra kiṁ pramaṇam ity āśaṅkyoktam iti śrīgamaśāsane iti, arthād uktam iti śeṣaḥ.*

[Objection:] It is generally accepted [in our system] that only knowledge can be a means; then, how is it possible to state that in the “minimal” [means] action can be a means? [Reply:] Because action is not different [from knowledge] in that this knowledge—once arrived, after its growing, at the point in which it results in yoga—becomes action. This is what the *Gamaśāsana* teaches. TĀV: Not different—it is understood: “from knowledge,” because knowledge itself having reached, after growing, i.e., evolving, at the end, i.e., at the ultimate level, the true essence of yoga, is called everywhere “action”: this is the meaning.³ [Objection:] But on what authority is this assertion based? It is [“said,” we add] in the *Gamaśāsana*.

Once established that there is no basic otherness between action and knowledge, Abhinava has to deal with the next issue: what is the precise connection between yoga, on the one hand, and *jñāna* and *kriyā*, on the other? (we will come back to this delicate question later on). Now, after yoga in the broadest sense has been somehow “accepted” as a means, let us consider whether Pātañjala yoga can deserve such, however cautious, inclusion.

The uselessness of the *aṅgas* of yoga, though being a leitmotif of the entire TĀ, receives a specific treatment in Āhnika IV, following the authority of the *Virāvalī-tantra*. Abhinava begins by liquidating with a few disdainful words *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, and *prāṇāyāma* (the “external” *aṅgas*).

aḥimsā satyam asteyabrahmacaryāparigrahāḥ |

iti pañca yamāḥ sākṣāt saṁvittau nopayoginaḥ || IV.87 ||

tapahprabhṛtayo ye ca niyamā yat tathāsanam |

prāṇāyāmas ca ye sarvam etad bāhyavijrmbhitam || IV.88 ||

2. The same position, and with similar arguments, is held by the Advaita Vedānta. Cf., e.g., Śaṅkara’s BSBh I pp. 82–3, I.1.4, *ato ’nyan mokṣam prati kriyānupraveśadvāraṁ na śakyam kenacid darśayitum | tasmāt jñānam ekaṁ muktā kriyāyā gandhamātrasyāpy anupraveśa iha nopapadyate* “And as nobody is able to show any other way in which Release could be connected with action, it is impossible that it should stand in any, even the slightest, relation to any action, excepting knowledge” (tr. Thibaut 1890: 34).

3. I am afraid that here the usually diligent Jayaratha missed the point, taking too lightly the fact that Abhinava says *°antatām* (not *°antam*), to be understood as the abstract of a *bahuvrīhi*, not of a *tatpuruṣa*. Also the expected meaning, confirmed by the rest of the argumentation, appears in tune with my own translation of the śloka.

Harmlessness, truthfulness, abstinence from theft, sexual continence, and absence of greed: these five restraints are not directly useful to consciousness. The observances, like penance etc., and also posture and regulation of breath, all these are manifestations concerning the external.

The *Virāvalī-tantra* passage quoted in TĀ does not even mention *yama* and *niyama*, and starts directly with *prāṇāyāma*:⁴

prāṇāyāmo na kartavyaḥ śarīraṃ yena pīḍyate | IV.90ab |

Regulation of breath should not be performed, since it [just] torments the body.

Then, again following the authority of the *Virāvalī*, Abhinava sets out to an apparently more difficult task: showing the uselessness also of the “internal” *aṅgas*: *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*.⁵ *Pratyāhāra* is useless, because withdrawing the senses from their objects results in reinforcing the bondage instead of loosening it, since it suggests the idea that consciousness resides in some places and not in others.

pratyāhāras ca nāmāyam arthebhyo 'kṣadhīyāṃ hi yaḥ |

anibaddhasya bandhasya tad antaḥ kila kīlanam || IV.92 ||

TĀV: *ayam hi nāma pratyāhāro yad arthebhyo rūpādibhyaḥ pratyāhṛtānām cakṣurādīndriyajñānānām antaḥ kīlanam cittasvarūpānukārāyamāṇatayā svātmāyatatāsādanam, yad uktam svaviśayāsaṃprayoge cittasya svarūpānukāra ivendriyāṇām pratyāhāra iti, tad eva ca anibaddhasya saṃsāro 'sti na tattvatas tanubhṛtām bandhasya vārttaiva kā ityādīnyāyena alabdha-prarohasyāpi bandhasya kīlanam dārḍhyāpādanam. parasyā hi saṃvidāḥ svasvātantryāt ghṛtasaṅkocāyā deśādyavacchinnatvaṃ nāma bandhaḥ sa eva cātra kutaścit pratyāhṛtānām indriyāṇām kutracid avasthāpanād upodbalikṛtaḥ, iti katham nāma pratyāhāradeḥ saṃvitsākṣātkārāyopayogaḥ, vyāpikāyā hi saṃvidāḥ katham nāma kutracid evopalambho bhavet iti bhāvaḥ. evaṃ dhāraṇādāv api avaseyam.*

The “withdrawing” at stake here is the withdrawing of sensorial faculties from their objects. This, in fact, amounts to internally tightening a knot which has not [yet] got tight.

TĀV: This is, in fact, “withdrawing”: internally fastening the sensorial cognitions, such as sight, which have been withdrawn from their objects, like form and so on—fastening in the sense of bringing them to self-dependence inasmuch as they are being made to imitate the own form of the mind. This is said in the *Yogasūtra* [II.54]: “The withdrawal of the senses is, as it were, the imitation of the mind-stuff itself on the part of the organs by disjoining themselves from their objects” (tr. Woods 1917: 197). And this very [withdrawal] is tightening, i.e., hardening, a bondage which had not yet fully developed, according to the principle: “saṃsāra has no real existence, [so] what talk can there be for humans about bondage?” Bondage is nothing else than the fact that supreme consciousness, having assumed contraction due to its own freedom, is limited by space, etc. Such bondage is reinforced if the sensorial faculties, withdrawn from some objects, are made to rest on some others. Hence, how can withdrawal, etc., serve for experiencing consciousness? For how can consciousness, pervasive as it is, be perceived in some places only? This is the meaning. The same can be applied also to “fixation,” etc.

Referring to what Abhinava says elsewhere, we may add that *pratyāhāra* has the additional negative effect of reducing the capacity of the sensorial faculties, that is, the Goddesses of

4. According to Jayaratha, with *prāṇāyāma* the *Virāvalī* implicitly refers also to all the previous *aṅgas* (on TĀ IV. 91, vol. III p. 97 *prāṇāyāmasya ānarthakyābhīdhāne yamādinām api daṇḍāpūpīyanyāyena tad arthasiddham, iti pṛthak noktam*).

5. TĀV vol. III p. 98 *nanu yamādi yadi bāhyavijrmbhitatvāt na saṃvittāv upayogī, tad astu, ko doṣaḥ, pratyāhārādi punar bāhyāt pratyāvṛttam sat, antar eva labdhapraroham, iti tad api katham na tatropayuktam* “[Objection:] If you say that restraints, etc., cannot serve for consciousness, since they are external manifestations, we may agree, no problem with this. But withdrawal, etc., being turned back from the external, do develop internally; then, how is it possible to consider them too (even them?*) of no use for consciousness, either?”

the Senses or Cognitions (*karāṇeśvarīs* or *saṃviddevīs*) to assimilate external reality to consciousness.⁶

Essentially the same criticism can be extended to the next two *aṅgas*, *dhāraṇā* ‘fixation’ and *dhyāna* ‘visualization’. At last, it is the turn of *samādhi* itself to be liquidated.

cittasya viṣaye kvāpi bandhanaṃ dhāraṇātmakam |
tatsadr̥g̃jñānaśamitāno dhyānam astamitā param [read: astamitāparam] || IV.93 ||
yadā tu jñeyatādātmyam eva saṃvidi jāyate |
grāhyagrahaṇatādvaitaśūnyateyaṃ samāhitiḥ || IV.94 ||

TĀV: *tatra hi kandādu niyata eva deśe cittasya bandho rūpam yad uktam deśabandhaś cittasya dhāraṇeti | dhyāne 'pi sajjātīyānām eva jñānānām pravahadrūpatvaṃ nāma rūpam, na vijātīyānām, ity atra niyatākārāvachinnatvam | yad uktam tatra pratyayaikaitānatā dhyānam iti, ata eva astamitā param [read: astamitāparam] ity uktam | samādhāv api jñānajñeyākhyarūpadvayatiraskāreṇa dhyeyātmajñeyamātrapratibhāsa eva rūpam, ity atra niyata evākāro 'vacchedakaḥ. yad uktam tad evārthamātranirbhāsaṃ svarūpaśūnyam iva samādhir iti.*

Binding the mind to a certain object is the *aṅga* called “fixation.” An uninterrupted series of cognitions similar to each other is the *aṅga* called “visualization” in which otherness has disappeared. When in consciousness the very identification with the knowable object arises, this is “absorption” (*samāhiti*), namely the condition of being devoid of the perceiver/perceived duality. TĀV: In it, the form is the binding of the mind on a particular place, such as the bulb, just as *Yogasūtra* [III.1] says: “Binding the mind-stuff to a place is fixed-attention” (tr. Woods 1917: 203). In visualization, too, the form is the continuous flowing of cognitions of the same kind, not of a different kind, whence the mind derives the condition of being limited by a definite form. As the *Yogasūtra* [III.2] says: “Visualization is focusedness of the flow of cognitions upon that place.” For this reason, the śloka adds: “in which the other has disappeared.” In absorption, too, the form is the appearance only of the knowable object, i.e., the object of visualization, due to the concealment of the cognition-cognized duality. Thus, in absorption there is a definite form acting as a limitator. This has been said [in *Yogasūtra* III.3]: “Absorption is this same [visualization] in which only the [intended] object appears and which is, as it were, emptied of itself.”

Let’s attempt to highlight the gist of what Abhinava is telling us by these terse words. Apparently, all the four internal *aṅgas* focus on unity, but this kind of unity is not praised at all, since it is characterized by “definiteness, restraint” (see the repetition of the adjective *niyata*⁷). Withdrawing the senses from their objects results in reinforcing the bondage instead of loosening it, in that it suggests the idea that consciousness resides in some places and not in others; analogously, concentrating on a specific support ends up by erroneously “localizing” the supreme consciousness; meditating on a single object (and only on the series of homogeneous cognitions related to it) would leave otherness outside; merging into the object of cognition deprives consciousness of the stimulus represented by the duality between cognizer and cognized. In

6. Cf. BhGAS p. 46: *devāḥ kṛḍanaśilā indriyavṛttayaḥ karāṇeśvāryo devatā rahasyaśāstraprasiddhāḥ tā anena karmaṇā tarpayata yathāśambhavaṃ viṣayān bhakṣayatety arthaḥ tṛptāś ca satyaḥ tā vo yuṣmān ātmana eva svarūpamātrocitāpavargān bhāvayantu svātmasthityogyatvāt* “The gods, i.e., “those used to taking pleasure,” are the sensorial functions, the Goddesses of the Senses, deities well known to the secret traditions [i.e., the Krama]; those you must satisfy with the [sacrificial] act; in other words, you must devour the objects of the senses as much as possible. Once satisfied, in your self these goddesses will bring about supreme bliss in accordance with what is their own nature, they being naturally inclined to resting in the self.” Or TĀ IV.201–2 *antarindhanasambhāram anapekṣyaiva nityaśaḥ | jājvality akhilākṣaughaprasṛto graśīkhaḥ śīkḥi || bodhāgnau tādr̥ṣe bhāvā viśantas tasya sanmahāḥ | udrecayanto gacchanti homakarmanimittatām ||* “Perennially, whatever the fuel provided, burns within us the blazing fire of all our senses. The various knowable things, entering this consensual fire and increasing its radiance, thereby become the cause of oblation.” Cf. Torella 2015: 65, 82–85.

7. *Niyata*, along with *saṃkucita*, etc., belongs to that constellation of terms that are diametrically opposed to the identifying characters of spiritual experience as envisaged by the Trika, such as *vitata* or *vikāṣita*.

other words, Abhinava is warning us against indulging in the quest for a too “early” unity, a unity reached through the mere elimination of one of the two terms of duality. The highest unity is made of the dynamic tension between the two poles, which is the very source of divine energy. This may remind us of the distinction between *ātmavyāpti* and *śivavyāpti* made in SvT IV. 387–90; 433–34. The “pervasion of the self” corresponds to the state of *kaivalya*, sought by the followers of the Sāṃkhya and Pātañjala yoga, in which “the self becomes aware of its own form having overcome the identification with the bonds” (IV. 434ab *pāsāvalokanaṃ tyaktvā svarūpālokaṃ hi yat*). But, as Kṣemarāja points out, this is only an intermediate step, a sort of liberation “in the negative”; quite dangerous for the spiritual evolution would be to feel satisfied with it (*Uddyota* on SvT IV.390, vol. I p. 243 *na caivātra saṃtoṣaḥ kāryaḥ*) and not set out for the all-inclusive “pervasion of Śiva” in which the world of the object is both included and transcended into the supreme divine freedom (*Uddyota* on SvT IV.391cd-392ab, vol. I p. 243 *paramaśivatā tu viśvottīrṇaviśvamayasvatantracidānandaghanānavacchidaiva* “The condition of the supreme Śiva is exempt from limitations, only made of consensual beatitude, free, [at the same time] made of all and transcending all”). The challenge posed by the external world can be eluded, but this retrenchment of the I within itself is not without consequences for spiritual advancement. Just as aesthetic experience needs the interference of the object (cf. Torella forthcoming b), the liberation process presupposes an “intermediate” state in which the object has lost its heaviness, but at the same time has not altogether waned, for the essential character of the Śaiva absolute is represented by the continuous dissolving of the other into higher and higher unity.

But two additional shortcomings are at work in the *aṅgas* of Pātañjala yoga, and are more or less explicitly deprecated. The very term *aṅga* is to be understood as something that has no value in itself, but only as a means to reach the immediately higher *aṅga*: none of them is by itself a means to consciousness, only *tarka* being a real *upāya* to it.

*yogāṅgatā yamādes tu samādhyantasya varṇyate |
svapūrvapūrvopāyatvād antyatarakopayogataḥ || IV.96 ||*

Yama, etc., up to *samādhi* are described as accessory parts of yoga, because they, being each a means to the next, serve for reaching the final [*aṅga*]: ‘spiritual reasoning’ (*tarka*).⁸

Behind this, an even more central question lies: does consciousness lend itself to gradual realization? And again: instead of acting as help, is it not that gradual steps end up doing the opposite, suggesting that the aim of the adept—identification with consciousness—is something distant? This is Abhinava’s reply:

śivatattvam ataḥ proktam antikaṃ sarvato ’mutaḥ | X.215ab |

TĀV: *ata iti bhedahrāsanimittakasamvinnaikaṭyāt antikaṃ proktam iti viśeṣānupādānāt sarvatra | yad uktam na sāvasthā na yā śivaḥ iti ||*

ataś ca sarvasya śivamayavāt tadāveśe mahātmanām upāyādīdḥaukanātmā na kaścid yatnaḥ sambhavet, viprakṛṣṭam evāsādayituṃ hi yatnayogaḥ syāt.

8. From Jayaratha’s comments it seems that this limited value of Patañjali’s *aṅgas* is also ascribed to the *aṅgas* of the Śaiva yoga, as presented by the MVU (Vasudeva 2004: 367–436; 2017: 3–5). If I understand correctly, Jayaratha says that if Abhinava has decided to target specifically Pātañjala yoga it is because it includes all the possible *aṅgas* (eight), thus making his criticism all-inclusive (TĀV III p. 102, on IV.96 *yan nāmātra yogasya svadarśanoktāni ṣaḍaṅgāny apahāya pātañjalīyaṃ yamādyāṅgāṣṭakam uktaṃ, tatrāyam āśayo yat kvacid api etadaṅgāṣṭakātiriktam anyad aṅgāntaram nāsti, iti sarvatra tarkasyaivāṅgāntarāny upāyah* “The meaning of the fact that here [only] the eight *aṅgas*—restraints, etc.—of Pātañjala yoga are taken into account, disregarding the six *aṅgas* mentioned in our system, consists of this: that nowhere else any other *aṅga* than these eight *aṅgas* can be found. Thus, all the possible *aṅgas* constitute a means to *tarka* only”). As is well known, the six *yogāṅgas* of the MVU are *prāṇāyāma*, *dhāraṇā*, *tarka*, *dhyāna*, *samādhi*, and *pratyāhāra*.

tad āha

ata eva prayatno 'yaṃ tatpraveśe na vidyate || X.215cd ||

yathā yathā hi dūratvaṃ yatnayogas tathā tathā | X.216ab |

Therefore, the Śiva principle has been said to be near, more than any other reality.

TĀV: Therefore, i.e., due to proximity of consciousness caused by the diminution of differentiation, it has been said to be “near,” and, since no qualification has been added, “near” means near to everything/everybody. As it has been said: “There is no condition which is not Śiva” [SK II.4ab]. For this, since everything is made of Śiva, for the great souls no effort, consisting in bringing near [consciousness] by specific means, etc., would be possible in order to enter it, for only to approach what is distant do we resort to effort. This has been said [in TĀ]:

Precisely for this, there is no such effort for penetrating into it.

[Only] to the extent that something is distant, resort to effort is needed. || X.216cd||⁹

The various steps of Pātañjala yoga presuppose temporal succession. In consciousness, however,

na ca bījānkuralatādalapuṣpaphalādivat || X.220 ||

kramikeyaṃ bhavet saṃvit sūtas tatra kilānkuraḥ |

bījāl latā tv aṅkurān no bījād iha tu sarvataḥ || X.221 ||

saṃvittattvaṃ bhāsamānaṃ paripūrṇaṃ hi sarvataḥ |

[. . .] there is no succession, as for the seed, sprout, creeper, flower, fruit, and so on. In their case, in fact, the sprout is born from the seed, but the creeper is not born from the seed, but from the sprout. On the contrary, the consciousness principle is shining always and everywhere, for it is full always and everywhere.

In individuals, the fullness of the consciousness principle does not derive from a gradual process of refinement, since, as Jayaratha says, consciousness cannot be “perfected” or “refined”:

TĀV on IV.97: *saṃvidi hi yamādeḥ prarohaḥ paṭiyastvam ucyate, sa eva ca nāma saṃskāraḥ, na ca saṃvit saṃskāryā, saṃskāro hy atiśayaḥ, sa ca nāsyāṃ sambhavet asaṃvidrūpatāpatteḥ, tena parādvayarūpāyāṃ nityoditāyāṃ asyāṃ yamāder na kiñcit prayojanam iti tātparyam*

The development of *yama* and the other *aṅgas* is said to create an increase of sharpness in consciousness, and this is precisely a refinement (*saṃskāra*). But consciousness cannot be refined (*na saṃskāryā*), because refinement means additional eminence (*atiśaya*), and this cannot be admitted for consciousness; otherwise it would lose its very nature of consciousness.¹⁰ There-

9. An analogous argument can be found in Śaṅkara: BSBh p. 883 (IV.3.14) *tad anupapannaṃ gantavyatvānupapatteḥ brahmaṇaḥ | yat sarvagataṃ sarvāntaraṃ sarvātmakaṃ ca paraṃ brahma 'ākāśavat sarvagataś ca nityaḥ' 'yat sākṣād aparokṣād brahma' 'ya ātmā sarvāntaraḥ' 'ātmaivedaṃ sarvaṃ' 'brahmaivedaṃ viśvam idaṃ varīṣṭhaṃ' ityādi śrutinirhdhārītaviśeṣaṃ tasya gantavyatā na kadācid apy upapadyate | na hi gatam eva gamyate | anyo hy anyad gacchati iti prasiddhaṃ loke.*

But this is impossible, because the highest Brahman cannot be the goal of any going. “Omnipresent and eternal like the ether” “The Brahman which is visible, not invisible, the Self that is within all” (*Bṛhadāranyaka Up.* III, 4, I); “Self only is all this” (*Chāndogya Up.* VII, 25, 2); “Brahman only is all this, it is the best” (*Muṇḍaka Up.* II, 2, II); from all these passages we ascertain that the highest Brahman is present everywhere, within everything, the Self of everything, and of such a Brahman it is altogether impossible that it ever should be the goal of going. For we do not go to what is already reached; ordinary experience rather tells us that a person goes to something different from him. (Tr. Thibaut 1890: II 394, with modifications.)

10. The theme that supreme reality (*brahman* and *mokṣa*) cannot be refined, or perfected, had already been treated extensively in Advaita Vedānta. See, e.g., BSBh p. 79–80 (I.1.4): *yasya tūtpādyo mokṣas tasya mānasaṃ vācikaṃ kāyikaṃ vā kāryam apekṣata iti yuktaṃ | tathā vikāryatve ca tayoḥ pakṣayor mokṣasya dhruvam anityatvaṃ | na hi dadhyādi vikāryaṃ, utpādyam vā ghaṭādi, nityaṃ dṛṣṭam loke | na cāpyatvenāpi kāryāpekṣā, svātmavarūpatve saty anāpyatvāt | svarūpavyatirikatve 'pi brahmaṇo nāpyatvaṃ, sarvagatatvena nityāptasvarūpatvāt sarveṇa*

fore, there is no scope for *yama*, etc., regarding a reality such as consciousness, which is always fully present and whose form is supreme nonduality.

This indirectly questions any progressive ascension, which is the shared character of most spiritual paths. Rather, only a *descent* from the height of consciousness, reached instantly and without effort, is possible—in the sense that identification with consciousness is to be gradually extended to any “inferior” reality, like the mind, body, sense, etc. Only in this perspective repeated practice (*abhyāsa*) may make sense: while it is obviously useless for realizing supreme consciousness,¹¹ it can help to gradually imbue “inferior” realities with the light of consciousness:

*antaḥ saṁvidi rūḍhaṁ hi taddvārā prānadehayoḥ |
buddhau vārpyaṁ tadabhyāsān naiṣa nyāyas tu saṁvidi || IV.97 ||*

For what is internally rooted in consciousness can, through it, be extended to the souffle, the body or the mind thanks to its repeated practice. This method, however, cannot apply to consciousness.

The *aṅga* system evokes the image of a ladder going painfully higher and higher. If most of Indian soteriologies envisage an ascending path, it is along very different lines that nondual Śaivism moves. An early text like the *Śivasūtra*¹² was already very clear regarding this point: it is not a question of reaching the highest spiritual peak, but, after reaching it, of being able to come back to the whole of ordinary reality in order to transplant such achievement into it: liberation does not consist of reaching a state, however high, but of an enlightened and dynamic moving through all the planes of reality. A straightforward statement of this attitude can be found in the *Parātriṃśikā-vivaraṇa* (PTV): “Our view is so called in that there is no ascending (*an-uttara*) in it, i.e., liberation conceived as progressive elevation from the body to *prāna* and so on, as conceived by dualistic doctrines. [. . .] For ascending is useless.”¹³

*brahmaṇaḥ, ākāśasyeva | nāpi saṁskāryo mokṣaḥ, yena vyāpāram apekṣeta | saṁskāro hi nāma saṁskāryasya
guṇādḥānena vā syād doṣāpanayanena vā | na tāvad guṇādḥānena saṁbhavati, anādheyātīśayabrahmasvarūpatvān
mokṣasya | nāpi doṣāpanayanena, nityaśuddhabrahmasvarūpatvān mokṣasya.*

Those, on the other hand, who consider release to be something to be effected properly maintain that it depends on the action of mind, speech, or body. So, likewise, those who consider it to be a mere modification. Non-eternality of release is the certain consequence of these two opinions; for we observe in common life that things which are modifications, such as sour milk and the like, and things which are effects, such as jars, &c., are non-eternal. Nor, again, can it be said that there is a dependance on action in consequence of (Brahman or release) being something which is to be obtained; for as Brahman constitutes a person's Self it is not something to be attained by that person. And even if Brahman were altogether different from a person's Self still it would not be something to be obtained; for as it is omnipresent it is part of its nature that it is ever present to every one; just as the (all-pervading) ether is. Nor, again, can it be maintained that release is something to be ‘perfected’ or ‘refined’ (*saṁskārya*), and as such depends on an activity. For perfecting (*saṁskāra*) results either from the accretion of some excellence (*atiśaya*) or from the removal of some blemish. The former alternative does not apply to release as it is of the nature of Brahman, to which no excellence can be added; nor, again, does the latter alternative apply, since release is of the nature of Brahman, which is eternally pure. (Tr. Thibaut 1890: I 32–33, with modifications.)

11. TĀ IV.104ab *tad advayāyāṁ saṁvittāv abhyāso 'nupayogavān.*

12. Cf. *Śivasūtra* I.7 *jāgratsvapnasusuptabhede turiyābhogasambhavaḥ* “In all various states of wake, dream, deep sleep, the expansion of the fourth state takes place”; III.20 *triṣu caturtham tailavad āsecyam* “On the three [states] the fourth is to be poured, like sesame oil.” Cf. Torella 2013: 119–20, 228–29.

13. Cf. PTV p. 193 (Gnoli ed.): *uttaraṅgam uttaro bhedavādābhīmato 'pavargaḥ | sa hi vastuto nīyatiprānatāṁ nātikrāmāti ! tathā hi prathamam śarīrāt prāṇabhūmāv anupraviśya, tato 'pi buddhibhuvam adhiśayya, tato 'pi spandanākhyāṁ jīvanarūpatām adhyāya, tato 'pi sarvavedyaparakṣayātmasūnyapadam adhiṣṭhāya, tato 'pi sakala malatānavatāratamāyātīśayadhārāprāptau śivatvavyaktyā anur apavṛjyate āropavyarthatvāt iti.*

And again:

PTV p. 278: *ārurukṣur etāvattrikārthābhilāṣukaś ca katham ārohatv iti cet kasyāyam arthibhāvaḥ | mā tarhi ārukṣat | siddhā[nta?]tantrādividhim eva tadāśayenaiva nirūpitataddhyānādisaṃkocam ālambatām | asaṃkocitānuttarapade hy anadhikṛta eva | eṣa eva sadodito yogaḥ.*

[Obj.:] But the one who wants to ascend and desires to know the sense of the Trika, how can he ascend? [Reply:] But whose is such desire? He should not ascend at all! If he has this intention, let him resort to the ritual procedure of the Siddhā[nta?]tantras, etc., and the contraction characterizing visualization (*dhyāna*), etc., described there. This person is not qualified for the Anuttara state, where there is no contraction. The yoga we are referring to is an ever-present (*sadodita*) yoga.

As to the second point, i.e., the gradual realization of consciousness, Abhinavagupta is equally categorical. What is already rooted in consciousness can be gradually transmitted to the *prāṇa*, body, mind, by the repeated practice of these *yogāṅgas*, whereas this procedure is not applicable to consciousness. In other words, if *abhyāsa* may be applied to the domain of the *yogāṅgas*, it is certainly of no use at all for consciousness.¹⁴

BUT ARE YOGĀṄGAS BY ALL MEANS USELESS?

So far, we have apparently been confronted with a disdainful liquidation of the whole fabric of yoga, especially of Pātāñjala yoga. But is it really so? Abhinava is aware that the spiritual path of Trika is primarily accessible by an élite,¹⁵ but what about the common Śaiva devotees? Looking for a cue, we may go back to the *jñāna-kriyā* issue. It is true that *jñānaśakti* occupies a higher ontological rank with respect to *kriyāśakti*, but after all *kriyāśakti* is just the form that *jñānaśakti* has to take on to operate within the lower *tattvas*; yoga is precisely the instrument belonging to *kriyāśakti*.

*yogo nānyaḥ kriyā nānyā tattvārūdhā hi yā matiḥ |
svacittavāsanāśāntau sā kriyety abhidhīyate || I.151 ||*

Yoga is not different, Action is not different, for Knowledge (*matiḥ*), reposing on the *tattvas* in order to extinguish the latent traces in one's own mind, is called Action.

This does not mean that Knowledge and Action are the same. In this connection, Abhinavagupta remarks that, though Action has the same essence as Knowledge, the former features a certain "grossness" (*sthūlatva*) with respect to the latter, and also a variegated,

14. Cf. PTV p. 263 *sarvatrātra sakṛdvibhātām prasamkhyānagamyam rūpaṃ mukhyataḥ tatra yogyānām tu paraśaktipātapavītrītānām* [I read *tatrāyogyānām tu paraśaktipātapavītrītānām* in place of *tatra yogyānām tu paraśaktipātapavītrītānām*, which however might also be possible] *vṛthaindrajālikakalanālālanānām vā yogābhyāsa iti mantavyam* "In all this, we have primarily a form shining everywhere and once for ever, only accessible through subtle spiritual contemplation. Alternatively, for those who are not qualified for such experience, not being purified by the descent of the supreme power, or are vainly longing for illusory magic achievements the repeated practice of yoga is meant. This is to be thought."

15. TĀV: *na cātra sarva eva pātraṃ, kiṃ tu kaścid eva tīvatamaśaktipātapavītrita ity āha ketakikusumasaurabhe bhṛṣaṃ bhṛṅga eva rasiko na makṣikā |
bhairavīyaparamādvayārcane ko 'pi rajyati maheśacoditaḥ || IV.276 ||*

And here it is not that anyone might be the recipient [of such teaching], but only some very special person, purified by an extremely intense descent of divine power. He says:

By the smell of the *ketakī* flower only the tasteful bee is attracted, not the flies. Analogously, only some very special man, driven by the supreme Lord, feels attraction to the supremely non-dual worship of Bhairava.

manifold nature (*citratā*). This is precisely what enables Action to operate in the manifested world.¹⁶ Then, Abhinavagupta adds:

etac ca svayam eva vyācaṣṭe
svacitte vāsanāḥ karmalamāyāprasūtayah |
tāsām śāntinimittaṃ yā matiḥ saṃvitsvabhāvikā || I.152 ||
sā dehārambhībāhyasthatattvavratādhiśāyinī |
kriyā saiva ca yogaḥ syāt tattvānām cillayikṛtau || I.153 ||

TĀV: This is how Abhinava himself comments on this verse [of the *Gamatantra*]:

In order to extinguish the latent traces born of the three stains—karma, māyā, and innate nescience—left in one's own mind, Knowledge, whose essential nature is consciousness, resting on the group of the external *tattvas*, responsible for the creation of the body, is Action, and in its turn Action is yoga, for it aims at making the *tattvas* dissolve into Consciousness.

The last statement is particularly interesting as it is a patent allusion to the well-known definition of yoga found in the MVU: *yogam ekatvam icchanti vastuno 'nyena vastunā* “They define yoga as unification of one reality with another reality.” We cannot know whether Abhinava's interpretation (yoga is the means for unifying the *tattvas* with Consciousness) of this passage is correct or not, but it certainly shows his interest in not distancing (too much) yoga from elitist knowledge, though remaining well aware that Patañjali's is a *pāśavayoga* “yoga for limited souls” (cf. Jayaratha on VIII.211 *pātañjalādipāśavayogābhyāsāt*).¹⁷ This can be seen from various hints. First, as we have seen, a continuity is stated between *jñānaśakti* and *kriyāśakti* in the sense that one fluidly merges into the other, and yoga is placed at the junction between them. For sure, the *aṅgas* of yoga cannot aspire to the role of ‘means’ (*upāya*) to consciousness, for only *tarka* may be considered a means to it (TĀ IV.86ab *evaṃ yogāṅgam iyati tarka eva na cāparam*). Nonetheless, as Jayaratha makes clear, the *yogāṅgas* serve to reach *tarka*, the latter being the only direct means to consciousness (TĀV III p. 111, on IV.105, *tarkasyaiva saṃvittau sākṣādūpāyatvaṃ*,¹⁸ *netareṣām ity uktaṃ bhavet*; TĀV III p. 102, on IV.96 *yathaiśām upeyarūpatvāt pāryantike tarke dvāradvāribhāvenopayogaḥ syāt* “Just as these [*yogāṅgas*] because of their being steps to be reached one after the other serve for reaching the ultimate [*aṅga*, i.e.,] ‘spiritual reasoning’ (*tarka*) according to a means/end relationship [. . .]”). If the flash of self-understanding arises in the yogin it is precisely because his mind has been “prepared” (*upaskṛta*) by the eight *yogāṅgas* (ibid. *yasmād aṣṭābhir api etair aṅgair upaskṛtamater yogina evaṃ svaparāmarśo jāyate*).¹⁹ The

16. I.163 *evaṃ jñānasvabhāvaiva kriyā sthūlatvam ātmani | yato vahati tenāsyām citratā drśyatām kila ||* TĀV: [. . .] *sthūlatvam ity antargrāhyagrāhakātmānaḥ bhedenollāsāt | tena iti sthūlatāvahanena hetunā | citratā iti tattadgrāhyādibhedavaicitryāt.*

17. See also MVU XVIII.19 (see below); MVU I.972cd-973ab *dharātattvagataṃ yogam abhyasya śivavidyayā || na tu pāśavasāmḥkhyiyavaiṣṇavādīdvitādrśā;* etc.

18. In the context of the classification of *upāyas*, *sākṣādūpāya* is taken as a synonym of *sāmbhāvopāya* (cf. TĀ I.142).

19. Once again a reference to the Advaita Vedānta position may prove useful. It is true, as Halbfass rightly points out (1992: 226), that even Śaṅkara after all recognizes the “greatness of yoga” (*yogamāhātmya*), but it is also clear that his appreciation does not go so far as to consider yoga as a means to liberation. BSBh p. 274, I.3.33, *api ca smaranti 'svādhyāyād iṣṭadevatāsaṃprayogaḥ' ityādi | yogo 'py aṇimādyaiśvaryaaprāptiphalaḥ smaryamāno na śakyate sāhasamātreṇa pratyākhyātum śrūtis ca yogamāhātmyaṃ prakhyāpayati 'pṛthivyapetejo nilakhe samutthite pañcātmake yogagune pravṛte | na tasya rogo na jarā na mṛtyuḥ prāptasya yogāgnimayaṃ śarīram' iti | “Smṛiti also declares that ‘from the personal recitation [of the Veda] there results intercourse with the favourite divinity’ (*Yoga Sūtra* II, 44). And that Yoga does, as *Smṛiti* declares, lead to the acquirement of extraordinary powers, such as subtlety of body, and so on, is a fact which cannot be set aside by a mere arbitrary denial. Scripture also proclaims the greatness of Yoga, ‘When, as earth, water, light, heat, and ether arise, the fivefold quality of Yoga takes place,*

repeated practice of the *yogāṅgas*, if unable to lead to the identification with consciousness, may have the limited scope of “uprooting the presumption of the impurity of duality” (TĀ IV.104cd *dvaitamālinyaśaṅkānirmūlanāya sah*). Their usefulness is, so to speak, an indirect one (Jayaratha: *pāramparyeṇa*): they can support the arising of *tarka* (IV.105cd *tattarkasādhānāyās tu yamādeḥ*). Then, after all, since all is made of all, we have to admit that even limited practices such as *yogāṅgas*, though focusing not on consciousness but on vital souffle, mind, etc., may have some effect—e.g., that of eliminating the opposites—on the basis of the principle that everything is made of everything (IV.98 *atha vāsmaddṛśi prāṇadhīdehāder api sphuṭam | sarvātmakatvāt tatrastho 'py abhyāso 'nyavyapohanam* ||). On the other hand, Abhinavagupta seems to tell us that *jñāna* is no doubt powerful, but is also very “delicate”: it needs *kriyā* to be strengthened (ĪPVV III p. 259 *kriyā tu jñānam vardhayatī*²⁰ [. . .]). More generally, a recognition of the limited usefulness of ritual and yogic practices is clearly stated in a passage of MVV:

*yathā lipyakṣarair bālāḥ satye varṇātmani sphuṭam
praveśyante tathā mūdhais tair aupāyikair kramāt* || II.122 ||
*tadartham eva cādvaite paratattve 'pi sādaram
pūjādhyānādi śāstre 'sminn ucitam kiṃcid ucyate* || II.123 ||

Just as men of limited capacity may be vividly introduced to the true reality of phonemes by the written letters, so they may be gradually introduced [to true reality] by those dull practices taken as means. Precisely for this, in our religious system adoration, visualization, etc., if performed with intentness (*sādaram*), are considered somehow appropriate even to reach the supreme non-dual reality.

WHICH YOGA? ABHYĀSA REVISITED

A last topic deserves to be examined (but we must defer an in-depth treatment of it to another occasion): side by side with an utterly derogatory attitude,²¹ the texts of non-dual Śaivism also address high praises to yoga. Let us assume that it is only (or primarily) Pātañjala yoga that is despised; then, which yoga is instead highly praised? We can briefly refer to the MVU definition quoted, for example, in TĀV vol. I p. 257: *anāyāsam anārambham anupāyam* [quoted in ĪPVV III p. 401 as: *sphuṭopāyam anāyāsam anārambham*] *mahāphalam | śrotum icchāmi yogeśa yogaṃ yogavidāṃ vara* “O Lord of yoga, the best among the knowers of yoga, I wish to hear a yoga that is exempt of fatigue, has no ‘constructive’ action, no means, [but nonetheless] yields great results”²² Or, again from MVU XVIII.19–20ab *na ca kṛtrimayogeṣu sa muktaḥ sarvabandhanair | prāṇāyāmādikair liṅgair yogāḥ syuḥ kṛtrimā*

then there is no longer illness, old age, or pain for him who has obtained a body produced by the fire of Yoga’ ” (Svet. Up. II, 12) (tr. Thibaut 1890: 233, with modifications).

20. Then Abhinava goes on: [. . .] *yadā tu kriyā nāma paraṃ tattvam api śarīraparyantībhāvena dṛḍhībhūto vimarśaḥ sakalam idaṃ hr̥dyakusumavilepanādi parameśvare 'rpayamś tadabheditayā vimr̥śāmīti pūjanam, tadā yuktaṃ ucyate arcanādikriyāvīrahitam jñānam na dṛḍhībhavatīti*.

21. Let us add one more passage (out of many): MVV II.106–107 *vastuto 'sti na kasyāpi yogāṅgasyābhyupāyatā | svarūpaḥ hy asya nīrūpam avacchedavivarjanāt* || *upāyo 'py anupāyo 'syāyāgavṛttinirodhataḥ | recanāpūraṇair eṣā rahitā tanuvātanauḥ* || “In actual fact, no *aṅga* of yoga can really serve as a means of achieving the condition of *anuttara* ‘that which nothing transcends.’ The means to it is, in fact, a non-means, since it comprises neither ritual practices nor suppression of the mental functions. It is a boat designed for a light breeze, without exhalation or inhalation [. . .].” Or PTV p. 281 *yatropāyadhaureyadhārādharan[m] nīdhatte siddhiprepsuḥ tu yogo vaktavyaḥ* “But if one lays down the sword represented by the nobleness of means, then with regard to those who strive for the various powers yoga is to be taught.”

22. This oft-quoted passage cannot be found in the edited text of the MVU.

matāḥ || *tena te 'kṛtakasyāsyā kalām nārhanti ṣoḍaśim* “And the adept is not freed from bondage by practicing factitious yogas: factitious yogas are considered those whose characterizing components are *prāṇāyāma* and so on. Therefore, these yogas are not worth the sixteenth part of our spontaneous yoga.” Thus, the non-dual Śaiva yoga (one of its most revered texts is the *Vijñānabhairava*) must be *anāyāsa*, *anārambha*, *anupāyaṃ*, *akṛtaka*, *sadodita*. It is to be noted that in the TĀ the competition between *jñāna* and *kriyā* (including yoga) is supplemented, in the footsteps of the MVU, by that between the *jñānin* and *yogin* gurus. In apparent contradiction, the MVU considers (*svabhyasta*)*jñāna* ‘well-practiced knowledge’ as the prime qualification,²³ and the (*siddha*)*yogin* guru as the ideal guru, with the motivation that the guru possessing *siddhayoga* must also possess *svabhyastajñāna*:

uttarottaravaiśiṣṭyam eteṣāṃ samudāhṛtam |

jñānināṃ yogināṃ caiva siddhayogavid²⁴ uttamaḥ || IV.39 ||

yato 'sya jñānam apy asti pūrvo yogaphalajjhitaḥ |

yataś ca mokṣadaḥ proktaḥ svabhyastajñānavān budhaiḥ || IV.40 ||

The respective pre-eminence of these [gurus] is stated, in ascending order, as follows. With respect to the *jñānin* guru and the *yogin* guru, the guru possessing perfect yoga is the best. For the latter possesses knowledge too, while the former is bereft of the fruit of yoga, and the wise say that the guru who bestows liberation is the one who possesses well-practiced knowledge.

Notably, *svabhyastajñāna* is sharply distinguished from mere *jñāna* (and yoga); see ĪPVV III p. 355: *tad eva saṅkṣepeṇa svabhyastajñānatva-jñānitva-yogitva-siddhaye bhāvanādyupayogitayā śiṣyadhiyī niveśayitum tattvārthasaṅgrahaṃ ślokaḥ pañcadaśabhir darśayati* “In order to impress this upon the mind of the disciple as being useful for mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*), etc., to the end of achieving the conditions of ‘possessor of well-practiced knowledge,’ ‘possessor of knowledge,’ ‘possessor of yoga,’ by fifteen ślokas the author illustrates the summary of the meanings of the principles.” The same passage underlines the connection of *svabhyastajñāna* with *bhāvanā* (see also Jayaratha on TĀ XIII.331 [. . .] *svabhyastabhāvanāmayavijñānaprasādāsādītabhairavībhāvo* [. . .] “[. . .] the guru who has become Bhairava by virtue of the clearness of his knowledge consisting of well-practiced mental cultivation (°*svabhyastabhāvanā*°) [. . .]”). Thus, *bhāvanā* is the means to realize the highest requirement (*svabhyastajñāna*) for the most effective guru, but we should not forget that in other contexts *bhāvanā* itself is underestimated with respect to “subtle spiritual contemplation” (*prasaṃkhyāna*).²⁵

PTV p. 281 *evam anuttarasvarūpaṃ vistarato nirṇītam, yatra bhāvanādyanavakāśaḥ prasaṃkhyānamātram eva dṛḍhacamatkāralakṣaṇahṛdayaṅgamatātmakapratipattidārḍhyaparyantam*

In this way, the nature of Anuttara has been fully ascertained, in which there is no room for mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) and so on, but only for subtle spiritual contemplation (*prasaṃkhyāna*) up to the point it attains a firm grasp consisting of “penetrating the heart,” i.e., firm wondrous savoring (*dṛḍhacamatkāra*).

23. Cf. TĀ XIII.333ab *tasmāt svabhyastavijñānataivaikaṃ gurulakṣaṇam | TĀV: ekam iti na dvitīyaṃ yogitvam apīty arthaḥ.*

24. I accept the reading *siddhayogavid* quoted and commented on by Jayaratha (KSTS ed. *siddho yogavid*, Vasudeva ed. *dvayor yogavid*).

25. Cf. Torella forthcoming a. Abhinava is here referring to the ancient term *prasaṃkhyāna*, apparently first occurring in YS IV.29 in close relation to *vivekakyāti* (see also YSBh I.2, p. 5; I.15, p. 19; II.2, p. 58; II.4, p. 60; II.11, p. 67; II.13, p. 69; IV.29, p. 202), then also mentioned in Advaita Vedānta texts. In Śaṅkara’s *Upadeśasāhasrī* (see Halbfass 1992: 227) it becomes a target of strong criticism owing to its repetitive character (*abhyāsa*), this obviously presupposing a different meaning from Abhinava’s *prasaṃkhyāna*. See also Endo 2000; O’Brien-Kop 2017: 132–40.

Here, an additional issue may arise: the relationship between *prasaṃkhyāna* and *tarka*, which under some aspects look similar to each other. Just as the PTV passage quoted above opposed *prasaṃkhyāna* to *bhāvanā*, the same text opposes elsewhere *prasaṃkhyāna* to *abhyāsa* (p. 262 *prasaṃkhyānenābhyāsena vā gamyaṃ bhairavātmano viśvahrdayam anuttaraṃ praviśet*). And both *abhyāsa* and *bhāvanā* are included in the sphere of *tarka* (TĀV on TĀ IV.14 *yas tarkaḥ, tāṃ bhāvanām āhuḥ*):

*durbhedapādapasyāsya mūlaṃ kṛntanti kovidāḥ |
dhārārūdhena sattarkakuṭhāreneti niścayaḥ || IV.13 ||*

TĀV: [. . .] *sa eva hi [. . .] abhyāsātīśayāt vikalpaśuddhim ādadhānaḥ, parāṃ kāśṭhām upāgataḥ san, bhāvanātmakatāṃ yāyāt, yena asphuṭam api saṃvidrūpaṃ sphuṭatām āśādayet*

The wise sever the root of this tree, so hard to cut down, by means of the axe of *sattarka*, brought to its highest peak: this is established with certainty.

TĀV: [. . .] In fact, this very *tarka*, performing the purification of the mental constructs thanks to the intensity of repeated practice, once arrived at its highest level, will become *bhāvanā*. Due to this *tarka*, the form of consciousness, which at first may not have been fully evident, finally becomes so.

CONCLUSION

In exploring Abhinava's works with a view to assessing his (and, more generally, non-dual Śaivism's) evaluation of yoga, we can find two sharply conflicting positions. On the one hand, Pātāñjala yoga is seen as a debased version of an ideal, *akṛtaka* yoga, this latter alone—as a subtle practice involving the interaction among body, senses, emotional and cognitive energies—being felt appropriate for the Śaiva Paramādvaita. What looks unacceptable to the refined non-dual spiritual master is the claim that liberation can be “constructed”—constructed step by step by resorting to practices whose shared feature is their looking at the phenomenal world as something to be simply overcome or eliminated rather than dynamically confronted and assimilated to consciousness. In the ordinary yoga career, the main ingredients are *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*. When all *yogāṅgas*, *abhyāsa*, *vairāgya*, etc., are viewed from the peak of the highest aesthetically marked spiritual experiencer, they are condemned unreservedly (this is the case of the *Virāvalī-tantra* (a *nirācāra* text), fully endorsed by Abhinavagupta). On the other hand, after delivering such a pitiless death sentence, Abhinavagupta seems to gracefully suspend it, and allow common people to follow *pāśava* yoga in the context of *āṇavopāya* with the motivation that after all everything is made of everything, and, as the MVU teaches, “nothing is to be prescribed, nothing to be prohibited.”²⁶ Then, after having repeatedly stated the primacy of knowledge over action and yoga, when he has to indicate which kind of master is to be considered the aptest “bestower of liberation,” quite unexpectedly he chooses the yogin endowed with *svabhyastajñāna* (that is, not the *jñānin* endowed with yoga!). In doing so, Abhinavagupta shows his openness to a “softer” view of the qualification of the Śaiva adept, who is not expected to be at any cost an extremist *anupāya* man. In this way, *abhyāsa* is somehow recovered, but in its subtler version of *bhāvanā* (being a component of the only direct *upāya*, *tarka*), which leads to “well-practiced knowledge,” while however being still looked down on by the privileged possessor of lofty *prasaṃkhyāna*.

26. 18.77cd–78ab: *nāsmiṃ vidhīyate kiṃcin na cāpi pratiśidhyate || vihitam sarvam evātra pratiśiddham athāpi vā |*

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