

Nondualistic Śaivism of Kashmir

Raffaele Torella

Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy

If we look at full-fledged Śaiva nondualism of Kashmir (in contrast to Saiddhāntika Śaiva dualism of which it appears to be a later development) as expressed in the works of the four great masters SOMĀNANDA (c. 900–950), Utpaladeva (c. 925–975), Abhinavagupta (c. 975–1025), and Kṣemarāja (c. 1000–1050), we find that the individual soul fully coincides with Śiva; the material world is the free manifestation of Śiva himself; *māyā* is not an autonomous reality, but a power of Śiva; the stains (*mala*), which are responsible for the arising of the limited subject, are by no means substantial realities, but erroneous attitudes of the subject themselves based on their lack of knowledge (see below); the opposition knower–knowable is only provisional; and finally everything shines as dynamic I-ness.

Somānanda laid the foundation for the philosophy of nondual Śaivism (later called Pratyabhijñā “Recognition”) with his *Śivadr̥ṣṭi* (ŚD), an unflinching criticism of opposing doctrines with an emotionally aggressive overtone, deeply rooted in the Śaiva scriptures. Although the ŚD was a powerful source of inspiration for Utpaladeva (Torella and Bäumer 2016), it is only with his *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-kārikā* (ĪPK) that the Pratyabhijñā becomes a very original and elaborate philosophical system. The ĪPK and the author’s *Vṛtti* (“short commentary”), composed at the same time, were commented upon in a long and complex *Vivṛti* (“elaborate commentary”), which has come down to us only in fragments: the *Siddhitrāyī*, three terse treatises on specific subjects and a *Vṛtti* on the *Śivadr̥ṣṭi*. Besides authoring philosophical works, Utpaladeva was also a mystical poet, as expressed in his splendid hymn collection, *Śivastotrāvalī*. The Pratyabhijñā philosophy was continued by Utpaladeva’s disciple Lakṣmaṇagupta (of whom nothing has come down to us) and by the latter’s disciple, the great Abhinavagupta, who composed two extensive commentaries on the Pratyabhijñā, and took it as the theoretical frame for his Trika system in the *Tantrāloka* (TĀ), meant as a synthesis of the entire tantric Śaiva tradition; this synthesis was built around a single text, the *Mālinīvijayottara-tantra* (MVU), but at the same time included the teachings of many lineages of Śaiva tantras, organized according to a Trika-Krama model (Sanderson 2009). Abhinava’s work covers an astonishingly vast array of subjects, ranging from the exegesis of tantric scriptures to epistemology, to aesthetic speculation, this latter probably forming the very basis on which the whole edifice of his worldview rests. His most illustrious disciple, Kṣemarāja, was essentially the author of commentaries – a literary genre that in India was the actual seat of knowledge, much more than the few “original” sutra and *kārikā* texts – among which the *Śivasūtra-vimarsinī*, *Spanda-nirṇaya*, *Netra-uddiyota*, and *Svacchanda-uddiyota* stand out. While the

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Vimarśinī and the *Nirṇaya* comment on pure nondual texts, the two *Uddyotas* are the attempt to attract into the new Trika synthesis two fundamental tantras of popular devotion in Kashmir, which, owing to their ambiguous metaphysical orientation, were also exposed to dualistic interpretation.

In explaining the *samatā* (“sameness”) of all due to the universal Śiva-nature, Abhinavagupta (TĀ IV.274) refers to a passage on *samatā* from a comparatively early Trika scripture, the *Trikaśāsana*, quoted in full by Jayaratha in the *Viveka* thereon: “There is sameness of all beings and, by all means, of all conditions. There is sameness of all philosophies and, by all means, of all substances. All the stages are the same, and also all the lineages, all the goddesses, and by all means, all the castes.”

The *locus classicus* for Somānanda’s concept of universal *samatā* because of everything having the same Śiva-nature is ŚD I.48, to be read in the light of Utpaladeva’s comments:

Due to such experience of unity with the Śiva-nature, everything possesses a marvellous and indefinable state. Thus, since everything has intimate unity with the Śiva-nature, we can speak of things as differentiated into higher, lower, etc., of their having a pure or impure nature, etc., only on account of our non-awareness of such intimate unity.

The peculiar treatment that the purity–impurity issue – which is of highest relevance in the panorama of Indian religions – receives in Śaiva nondualism deserves a close examination (Torella 2015b). After quoting a dubious statement found in the very core text of the TĀ, the MVU, which seems to refer to the distinction between pure and impure, Abhinavagupta (TĀ XV.164cd–165ab) points out that

Impurity is to be considered as such only from the point of view of limited souls and their teachings, for everything resides in its own state either after a previous (impure) state or after a pure state.

But the MVU also contains passages in which the opposition of purity/impurity is strongly negated, such as XVIII.74: “Here there is neither purity nor impurity, nor deliberation about what may be eaten or not, neither duality nor nonduality, and not even adoration of *liṅga*, and so on.” The passage is commented on at length by Abhinavagupta in TĀ IV.212ff.

Even if we consider things as existing externally purity and impurity are not comparable to [existing objects, like] the blue colour. Purity and impurity are qualifications pertaining to the knower depending on whether he perceives the object as united with consciousness or not.

As an important Trika Kaula tantra, the now lost *Virāvalī*, says (the passage is quoted in TĀ IV.242):

The life principle is what sets in motion all entities; nothing exists that is destitute of such life principle. Whatever is destitute of such life principle you should consider as “impure.”

The life principle (*jīva*), says Abhinavagupta, is the supreme light of consciousness. He concludes: “Therefore what is not exceedingly distant from consciousness brings about purity.”

The coincidence of Śiva and the world might be taken in an “illusionistic” sense, as in some ADVAITA VEDĀNTA or Vijñānavāda approaches (Ratié 2010). If having the nature of Śiva in a sense “enhances” the reality of the world, in another it risks de-realizing it, i.e. flattening its multifarious aspects and finally making it fade altogether: realizing the ultimate Śiva nature might lead to the very disappearance of the universe as such. From its very beginnings, nondual Śaivism tackles this crucial issue. According to Somānanda (Torella 2013, 2014), it cannot be said that the universe is “imagined” as Śiva, or vice versa, for the one is directly the other. Just as gold is not “imagined” as such, neither in the simple jewel of solid gold nor in the earring in which the craftsmanship is so refined as to set aside, as it were, its nature of pure gold, so Śiva is “formed, arranged” as universe – in the sense that he has become such and such, i.e. freely presents himself as having the form of the world.

The Śiva-nature embraces everything (ŚD VI.127ab). Somānanda further specifies that the world’s having the nature of Śiva involves that all objects, like the jar and so on, have the same powers as Śiva (will, knowledge, action) and possess sentiency (Torella 2002). Somānanda denies that Śiva may be deprived of his powers even when he is not active, i.e. in his transcendent and quiescent state (*śānta*). Thus, everything is pervasive, incorporeal, and endowed with will, like consciousness (V.1). If things can be efficient, it is because they “want” one particular action that is peculiar to them (V.16, 37). And if they want it, they must also know it, in other words be conscious – first and foremost, of themselves. All things are, in all conditions, knowing their own self (V.105ab). This dignifies all levels of reality, including the surface level, made of human transactions and related verbal behavior.

The absolute identity of Śiva and the universe, being the outcome of his free self-expression, involves a reinterpretation of the role and status of *māyā*. The latter is seen by the dualistic Saiddhāntic scriptures as an external counterpart of Śiva from which the universe emanates and in which it finally dissolves. The otherness of *māyā*, according to Abhinavagupta and all nondual Śaivism, is only apparent (TĀ IX.149cd–150ab): “Māyā is the power of the god, inseparable from him, the freedom to make differentiation appear. In fact, this [appearing of differentiation] is caused by it.” This echoes Utpaladeva’s statement (ĪPK I.5.17): “By the power of māyā of Parameśvara, whose essence is light, the world – which consists of his own self – is manifested as differentiated.” Also the role of *māyā* as material cause of the universe, stated by Saiddhāntic scriptures, is rejected. As Utpaladeva says (ĪPK I.5.7): “Indeed, the Conscious Being, God, like the yogin, independently of material causes, in virtue of his volition alone, renders externally manifest the multitude of objects that reside within it.” Not only does Śiva not need a material cause, but according to ŚD III.80–82ab, he is the material cause himself as well as the efficient cause and the non-inherent cause.

Just as the universe ultimately coincides with Śiva, so there is no real difference between Śiva and the individual subjects. The individual I is no other than the I of

Śiva. Conceiving of the supreme reality as an absolute I, which is destined to become one of the central and most peculiar tenets of nondual Śaivism, is due to Utpaladeva. However, there is no substantial difference between Utpaladeva's I and Somānanda's dynamic Self-Śiva which underlies the whole universe and expresses himself in it. Utpaladeva is the one who chose to use this word and concept regardless of the negative associations generally attached to it in Indian thought, being aware of the fact that the risk of a reification that has always weighed heavily on the word *ātman* was even more concerning, and that this makes it less suitable for expressing the unpredictable overflowing of the divine personality. Somānanda remarks (III.95cd–96ab) that immediately after an action has been accomplished along with its result, the will for another action arises, the infiniteness of the powers of Śiva being the cause for this. These powers, which are perennially present, flow according to their own being. Therefore, Śiva is one whose nature is “flowing” (*saratprakṛtiḥ*).

The term “I” is implicitly aimed against the two conceptions that are after all closest to the Pratyabhijñā, and which it most aspires to differentiate itself from: the consciousness devoid of a subject of the VIJÑĀNAVĀDA and the static *ātman* of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika (or the *ātman-brahman* of the Vedānta). Utpaladeva's ĪPK is very clear about the basic identity of the individual subject and Śiva, but at the same time accounts for the difference that can be seen in ordinary reality, and the way to become fully aware of such real identity. The divine subject (*pati*) – whose body is constituted, as it were, by the universe – is counterposed with the “beast” (*paśu*), the fettered soul, in its various forms, depending on the stains that characterize it. In the conception outlined by Utpaladeva (Torella 2002) there are two components coming from different sources: the hierarchy of subjects – which is a peculiar tenet of the Śaivasiddhānta – but also included in Trika texts, like the MVU – and a version of the three stains which, though deriving from the analogous doctrine of the Śaivasiddhānta, has an utterly nondualistic qualification. The “minimal” (*āṇava*), “māyic” (*māyīya*), and karmic (*kārma*) stains completely lose their original nature of “substances” that physically obstruct the self of the *paśu* from without, and turn out to be erroneous attitudes of the individual consciousness. The *āṇava* stain, with its obliterating the one or the other of the components of subjectivity (consciousness and freedom) determines that identity crisis onto which the other two are grafted: the māyic one – which causes the I to see the world of objects as separate from himself – and the karmic one – which makes him consider his own actions as the causes of the series of rebirths, miring him in the *saṃsāra*. As Somānanda says (VII.87cd), it is the very belief in the actual existence of bond and liberation that constitutes the stain. The cause of all three is the power of *māyā*, which has its roots in the will itself of the Lord (ĪPK III.2.5 and *Vṛtti*). The aim of the “new and easy” way expounded by the Pratyabhijñā school is merely to trigger an act of identification in the individual, which does not reveal anything new but only rends the veils that hid the I from himself: a cognition is not created, but only the blur that prevented his use, its entering into life, is instantly removed.

The centrality of knowledge in the path to liberation had already been emphasized by Somānanda in the ŚD. However, Somānanda does not go beyond a

powerful affirmation of the identity of Śiva and the universe, the task of defining their relationship being assumed only later by his disciple Utpaladeva, who starts precisely from where Somānanda had stopped. The latter had not developed his own ideas about the ontological status of the manifested world, but had only asserted, strongly and repeatedly, its reality (*satyatā*) and its having the nature of Śiva (*śivarūpatā*). Things are “states” of Śiva, and their emergence is due solely to his will, brought about by nothing other than a natural overflowing of his energies, whose characteristic feature is “joy” as well as “play.” In the sixth chapter of the ŚD, Somānanda attacked those that in various ways claim that the external world is unreal, especially various types of Vedāntins (VI.3ff.), who consider it as an illusory manifestation (*vivarta*) of Brahman, caused by nescience, or the Vijñānavādins (VI.33–34), who affirm the reality of consciousness but make unreal objects arise from it, and, moreover, do not admit an agent subject of this consciousness, whereas for Somānanda every action, and therefore also the action of knowing, is necessarily dependent on an agent subject (Torella 2002). The later construction of the ontological-epistemological edifice of the Pratyabhijñā by Utpaladeva has to be seen within the context of his appointing precisely the Buddhists as the main adversaries (Torella 1992). For him, they – admired and attacked in an equally strong way – are so to speak the most intimate enemies; the criticism of their positions is a great help in building and refining Pratyabhijñā philosophy. This also holds for the model chosen for defining the relationship between Śiva and the world. Instead of resorting to one or another Brahmanical model, Utpaladeva basically refers to the Vijñānavāda doctrine, explaining the emergence of the external world by the multiform awakening of latent impressions within consciousness. Just as the “forms” (*ākāras*) of the Vijñānavāda do not have any separate existence from the consciousness in/from which they emerge, likewise for Utpaladeva the objects are nothing but “reflections,” or “manifestations” (*ābhāsas*) in the mirror of supreme consciousness. While the Buddhist model is clearly visible in Utpaladeva’s conception, as usually occurs in his philosophical strategy it acts only as a raw material to be aptly modified and adapted to an utterly different worldview: thus, the impersonal consciousness of the Vijñānavāda is substituted by the dynamic I-ness of Śiva, and, consequently, the divine will takes the place of the mechanical emergence of the *vāsanās*.

Utpaladeva envisages a dual pole in consciousness/Śiva, *prakāśa-vimarśa* – the first understood as the motionless cognitive light that constitutes the basic fabric, the founding structure of reality, of the “given”; the second as the spark that causes this luminous structure to pulsate by introducing self-awareness, dynamism, freedom of intervention, self-assertion, thus expressing in theoretical terms the nature of an unpredictable divine personality, like that of the violent and cheerful Śiva handed down in the scriptures whom Utpaladeva addresses in his mystical hymns. The two polarities are not to be seen as separate realities, but merely as two sides of a coin, like Śiva and Śakti: reflective awareness is the very own nature (*svabhāva*) of light (ĪPK I.5.11). “Light” (*prakāśa*) forms, together with a large group of synonyms or quasi-synonyms, a close-knit constellation of “luminous” terms indicating the

notions of being manifested, emerging from the dark, coming to consciousness or, more generally, of being the object of knowledge and finally simply “being,” whose use was already firmly established especially in Vedāntic and Buddhist contexts; *prakāśa* and synonyms frequently occur in the *Vākyapadīya* (VP) of BHARTṚHARI (c. V c.). Apart from isolated and uncertain cases in the Śaiva scriptural tradition (see also ŚD II.83d, 84c), *vimarśa* (and synonyms), in the specific sense Utpaladeva attributes to it, cannot but derive from Bhartṛhari’s teaching, especially if we consider its link with light, on the one hand, and the word, on the other. I am referring to the two very famous and most quoted stanzas of his VP (I.131–32), whose influence, though extending over the whole structure of the Pratyabhijñā (and nondual Śaiva philosophy as a whole), we find concentrated particularly on two closely connected aspects. One (ĪPK I.5.19) concerns the only way deemed possible to account for a common fact in everyday experience, such as the immediate and seemingly thoughtless action that still achieves its purpose – namely that of affirming the presence of a subtle reflective awareness even within the sensation or movement captured at its most direct and undifferentiated moment. The other regards the two solemn general formulations (I.5.11, 13) that define *vimarśa* as the essential nature of light and indissolubly link consciousness, reflective awareness, freedom, and the supreme word. The importance of Bhartṛhari in the structure of Śaiva nondualism may not be undervalued (Torella 2009). This may be surprising if we think how he had been heavily attacked by the very father of Pratyabhijñā, Utpaladeva’s guru Somānanda. In order to undermine the discontinuous universe of the Buddhists, Utpaladeva decides to avail himself precisely of Bhartṛhari’s main doctrine – the language-imbued nature of knowledge – which is meant to demolish one of the main foundation stones of the Buddhist edifice, the unsurpassable gulf between the moment of sensation and that of conceptual elaboration, representing, as it were, the very archetype of the Buddhist segmented reality. The omnipervasiveness of language is the epistemological version of the omnipervasiveness of Śiva, and at the same time calls for integration into the spiritually dynamic Śaiva universe.

In order to fully understand the matrix of the very peculiar attitude of nondual Śaivism to religious experience, one has to take into account the unusual fact that its main spiritual master is also the most important philosopher of aesthetics in premodern India. While in the past I took almost for granted that the grounds of Abhinavagupta’s aesthetic thought were to be found in his philosophical-religious speculation, now I am more and more inclined to give prominence to a basic aesthetic flavor as the more-or-less hidden background of his activity as a whole. This aesthetic flavor, already clearly noticeable in Utpaladeva’s work, goes hand in hand with an aristocratic attitude, the latter being allegedly the source of the former. A major characteristic of this aristocratic attitude 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. This can be detected in Abhinavagupta’s attitude to yoga or, to be more precise, to Pātañjala yoga (Torella 2019; see YOGA: CLASSICAL [PĀTAÑJALA]). In the summary of the topics of the TĀ, at the end of chapter 1,

he lists: “uselessness of the members of yoga” (*yogāṅgānupayogitvaṃ*) – and also “disregard for ‘artificial’ ritual, etc.” (*kalpitārcādyanādarah*). The uselessness of the *aṅgas* of yoga, though being a *leitmotif* of the entire work, receives a specific treatment in chapter 4, following the authority of the *Virāvalī-tantra*. After demolishing with a few disdainful words *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, and *prāṇāyāma* (the “external” *aṅgas*), he sets out on an apparently more difficult task, i.e. showing the uselessness also of the “internal” *aṅgas* – withdrawal (*pratyāhāra*), fixation (*dhāraṇā*), visualization (*dhyāna*), and absorption (*samādhi*). 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 (then, referring to what Abhinava says elsewhere, *pratyāhāra* has the additional negative effect of abdicating the function of the sensorial faculties, *saṃvid-devīs*, to assimilate external reality to consciousness); analogously, concentrating on a specific support ends up 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 dynamic tension between cognizer and cognized. But, even more subtly, for Abhinava two basic shortcomings are at work in the *aṅgas* of Pātañjala yoga. The very term *aṅga*, here taken in its other meaning of “ancillary part,” is to be understood as something which 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 means (*upāya*) to it. This evokes the image of a ladder going painfully higher and higher, and presupposes that consciousness can be realized bit by bit. To the earlier point a straightforward answer can be found in Abhinava’s treatment of the nature of the Absolute (Anuttara, lit. “that which nothing transcends,” *Parātrīṃśikā-vivaraṇa* [PTV p. 278]), while

Our view is so called in that there is in it no ascending (*an-uttara*), i.e. liberation conceived as progressive elevation from the body to *prāṇa* and so on, as conceived by dualistic doctrines ... For ascending is useless.

And again (*ibid.*):

[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 characterising the visualisation (*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 yoga (*sadodita*), devoid of contraction.

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, for repeated practice is of no use at all for consciousness. No slow and painful ascent step by step, but only an

elegant, powerful, and effortless jump is effective. One the recurring qualifications for Abhinavagupta's attitude to the spiritual path is precisely the absence of effort (*yatna*, *prayatna*), absence of exertion or fatigue (*āyāsa*, *prayāsa*), and easiness (*sukha*, *sughata*). This is especially connected by him with the Kula (TĀ IV.258ab): "In the Kula view all these [ritual prescriptions] are abandoned, since the Kula teaches an easy means." These qualifications can be found both in the definition of the special yoga taught by the Śaiva tradition (see e.g. the oft-quoted definition of yoga given in the MVU), and in the conclusion of the core text of the Pratyabhijñā, the ĪPK. Yet, one of the early texts of nondualistic Śaivism, the *Śivasūtra*, apparently praises *prayatna*, considered as the only means for realizing mantra (II.2 *prayatnaḥ sādhaḥ*). However, according to the oxymoron that Kṣemarāja uses in his *Vimarśinī*, this is a "non-constructed, spontaneous" (*akṛtaka*) effort, a kind of subtle inner tension in which *śakti* manifests itself. *Prayatna* understood in this way is assimilated to a constellation of terms with similar meanings, such as "(inner) endeavor" (*udyoga*), "strenuous (inner) exertion" (*udyama*), and "impetus" (*saṃrambha*).

The possible ambiguity of *sukha* is aptly underlined by the conflicting interpretations of a verse of *Mataṅgapārameśvara-āgama* (MPĀ), *vidyāpāda*, XV.8 given by Abhinavagupta and the Saiddhāntic Rāmakaṇṭha, respectively (Sanderson 1985). For Abhinavagupta, the verse says that ritual is an "easy" alternative for those who are unable to follow the path of knowledge owing to their spiritual impotence – an interpretation which cannot but sound unacceptable to Rāmakaṇṭha, staunch upholder of the primacy of ritual as a means for liberation. The same may be said about traditional yoga practices. As PTV (p. 281) says:

In this way the nature of Anuttara has been fully ascertained, in which there is no room for meditation/visualisation and so on, and which is accessible only through subtle spiritual contemplation (*prasamkhyāna*) up to the point it attains a firm grasp consisting of "penetrating the heart," i.e. firm inner savouring (*dṛḍhacamatkāra*). If, however, 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.

But even in the more widely accepted sense, is easiness really easy? Pure transformative knowledge is an "easy" *upāya*, but only for those who are qualified for it. In this way, they can get rid of the heavy burden (*āyāsa*) of repeated practice, etc. Interestingly, for those who are not qualified for knowledge, it is the way of knowledge to be hard and painful (TĀV vol. IX p. 5).

After dealing at length with the uselessness of yoga (and ritual) as a direct means to consciousness and with the necessity of an effortless *upāya*, etc., Abhinava concludes (TĀ IV.276): "By the smell of the *ketakī* flower only the tasteful bee is attracted, not the fly. Analogously, only some very special man, driven by the supreme Lord, feels attraction to the supremely non-dual worship of Bhairava."

Here, almost casually, one more element has been added to the portrait of the ideal recipient of these teachings: he must be "*rasika*," that is, aesthetically sensitive,

or to use a cognate term, which holds a central position in the philosophic and aesthetic thought of Abhinavagupta, *sahr̥daya* (lit. “endowed with heart”). This “aesthetic susceptibility” is the source of *camatkāra* (“deep inner savoring”), another key term of Abhinavagupta’s philosophy, and prior to him, of Utpaladeva’s, to be view as an enhanced form of *vimarśa* (“reflective awareness”) by which the knowing subject appropriates the object. This aesthetic attitude is not limited to the sphere of art, but is expected to embrace life itself in its entirety. Aesthetic experience achieves the uneasy task of making one accept and deeply taste the emotional lines of everyday life, while at same time creating a feeling of ineffable distance from them with the result of preventing the subject from being overwhelmed by them. On many an occasion, Abhinava carefully distinguishes aesthetic gustation (*rasāsvāda*) from religious gustation (*brahmāsvāda*) (see below) – the latter allegedly belonging to a higher order – but at the same time he includes aesthetic experience (*rasāsvāda* is “similar” to *brahmāsvāda*) in a wider context with respect to mere rejoicing for an intense poem or a moving theatrical representation. As he acutely remarks in *Abhinavabhāratī* (AbhBh) (vol. I, p. 271), *rasa* manifests itself as “fluidity, dilatation, expansion,” is a state of “intensification.” In a crucial passage, Abhinavagupta (AbhBh, vol. I p. 279) sharply distinguishes aesthetic gustation both from emotions we experience in everyday life and from yogic perception (in its turn divided into lower and higher): aesthetic gustation has beauty (*saundarya*) as its basis – beauty which is instead absent in everyday emotions and yogic perception (Torella forthcoming). There are three possible causes for the absence of beauty (*saundaryaviraha*), each of them characterizing ordinary emotional experience, lower yogic perception, and higher yogic perception, respectively. They are: i) The arising of a painful urge for appropriation, avoidance, etc. occurring in ordinary emotions; ii) non-involvement, which marks lower yogic perception – i.e. the yogin’s indifference vis-à-vis the feelings he is “reading” in the other’s mind; and iii) total dissolution of the difference between the self and the other, which characterizes higher yogic perception with his total merging into absolute bliss. This amounts to saying that beauty presupposes an “intermediate” state in which the object has lost its heaviness, but at the same time has not altogether waned. In the case of aesthetic emotions, this task is accomplished by their “generalization” (*sādhāraṇībhāva*). Such “generalization,” Abhinavagupta adds, is not limited (*parimita*), but expanded (*vitata*); in it, the I has neither disappeared nor is well outlined, the former condition corresponding to the state of liberation, the latter to ordinary life. Being in this world and not fully coinciding with it is precisely the ideal proposed to the *kaula* adept. One might object that this is precisely the lower kind of gustation (*āsvāda*), the aesthetic one (*rasāsvāda*), destined to be overcome by the religious *āsvāda* of the absolute (*brahmāsvāda*). But just as beauty needs the interference of the object, so the Śaiva absolute needs the continuous dissolving of the other into higher and higher unity. Thus, *brahmāsvāda* should not be seen as a higher state with regard to *rasāsvāda*, but only as its enlargement and universalization; in other words, *saundarya* is not a provisional step destined to be abandoned, but the prelude to a so-to-speak hyper-*saundarya*. Let’s keep in mind that Utpaladeva in ŚSĀ XVIII.21b,

quite unusually in Trika literature, addresses Śiva precisely as “hyper-beautiful” (*atisundara*) – which reminds us of ὑπέρκαλος in PLOTINUS and *superpulcher* in Thomas Aquinas (see AQUINAS, SAINT THOMAS). Admittedly, in other contexts Abhinavagupta appears as sharply contrasting *rasāsvāda* with *brahmāsvāda*. While in principle the “ontological” primacy of *brahmāsvāda* is beyond discussion, we could gather additional information on Abhinava’s personal leanings from another AbhBh passage (vol. I p. 284). Here, it is again a question of aesthetic relish contrasted with yogic cognition (*yogapratyaya*) and ordinary cognition (*laukikapratyaya*): here, Abhinava is distinguishing between pre-eminent “pleasantness, charmingness” (*hr̥dyatātīśaya*) of consensual gustation (*saṃviccarvaṇā*) and “harshness, stiffness, roughness” (*paraśa*) of yogic perception, a stiffness deriving directly from its being deprived of “gustation” of the objective world. It is hardly assumable that Abhinava might conceive of *brahmāsvāda* (“religious gustation”) in the terms of stiffness of yogic perception, however high.

To sum up, what Abhinavagupta affirms is that it is only a special way of approaching reality that “creates” beauty in the object. Thus, only our spiritual refinement is responsible for the emergence of beauty, and in turn the beauty-based experience – i.e. aesthetic experience (*rasa*, etc.) – nourishes our spiritual refinement, helping us evade *samsāra*.

The portrait of this very special religious figure resembles more and more the Indian concept of the ideal gentleman: in both we find an innate gracefulness, elegance, aesthetic resonance, disdain for plebeian efforts, and easiness. What we know about the aristocrats of the Indian court (Ali 2004), marked by the ideal of *dākṣiṇya* (“courtly refinement”), is very similar to the typically aristocratic virtues depicted in one of the masterworks of the Italian Renaissance, *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (*The Book of the Courtier*) by Count Baldesar Castiglione – the work, published in Venice in 1528, soon became the standard portrait of the ideal aristocrat, being quickly translated into all the major European languages. It is to be noted that in the Indian ideal gentleman (and in Castiglione’s *cortegiano* as well) gracefulness must be accompanied by resolve (*dhairya*), energy (*utsāha*), and valor (*śaurya*).

A significant example of aristocratic nonchalance applied to the spiritual path can be found in Abhinavagupta’s MVV. What Abhinavagupta thought about repeated practice by now we already know. Now it is the turn of the other pillar of Pātañjala yoga, *vairāgya* (“detachment”) (Torella 2015a), and also of another crucial theme in yoga: control. Abhinava says (MVV II.106–112):

In actual fact, no member of yoga can really serve as a means of achieving [the condition of Anuttara] ... The means to it is, in fact, a non-means, since it comprises neither ritual practices nor the blocking of mental functions. It is a boat designed for a light breeze, without exhalation or inhalation, which thereby carries itself beyond the ocean of duality, albeit in the meantime the mind is immersed in the fluid of the objective world ... Likewise, consider what is involved when one decides to put the natural course of the mind under control, i.e. when one wishes to put a bit on a wild horse. Owing to the violence of the procedures, the mind – like the horse – will start running here and

there, taking many wrong directions. Why does this occur? We all know that the mind can even delight in pain and, conversely, retreat disgusted from pleasure and knowledge. This is what the master demonstrates in various forms in his treatise: the impulses of the senses can be made to cease thanks to a highly special kind of detachment, a detachment practiced in elegant *souplesse*. If, on the contrary, one attempts to subjugate them, they end up becoming ungovernable.

This “detachment practiced in elegant *souplesse*,” as I rather freely translate *anādara-virakti*, may be paired with the *anādara-nyāsa* of *Nāṭyaśāstra* XXII.16, where a beautiful and complex arrangement of different elements is achieved by the aesthetically sensitive person giving the impression of a semi-casualty. The ideal nondual Tantric adept comes to be a delicate balance of alertness, determination, spontaneity, and nonchalance. But where does this aristocratic attitude of Abhinavagupta come from (Torella 2020)? Simply from the fact that he “is” an aristocrat, as the title “Rājānaka” accompanying his name reveals. But Abhinavagupta is neither the only one nor the first in this extraordinary chain of nondualistic Śaiva masters to have this title. The first was Utpaladeva, then his disciple Rāmakaṇṭha, Kṣemarāja, and Abhinava’s commentator Jayaratha, up to the last modern master of the Trika, Swami Lakṣman Joo. And we may even surmise that one of the reasons for the radical paradigm shift which took place between Utpaladeva and his master Somānanda is to be found in their coming from different social milieus: Bhaṭṭa (Śrī) Somānanda and Rājānaka Utpaladeva. This might help us explain the more relaxed and broader attitude towards opponents and allies of the latter and his tendency to create higher syntheses, vis-à-vis the philosophical and spiritual aggressiveness of Somānanda. In sum, this revolutionary worldview emerged from a small circle of aristocrats, and sometimes I wonder whether ordinary devotees have ever been aware of, or been able to understand, these highly refined doctrines, and what social impact they may have had. It is to be noted, for example, that no mention at all of Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta can be found in the *Rājatarāṅginī*, the famous “historical” account of Kashmir up to the twelfth century. Paradoxically, we can even surmise that it might be *because* of such “rootlessness” that the spiritual message of the Trika masters is able to appeal now, after more than a millennium, to Western seekers so intensely.

See also: ADVAITA VEDĀNTA; AESTHETICS AND INDIAN RELIGION; BHAKTI; BHARTRĀHARI; BUDDHISM; IGNORANCE AND ILLUSION IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHIES; INDIAN PHILOSOPHY; LIBERATION IN HINDUISM; NONDUALISM; OMNIPRESENCE; RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE; SELF AND NOT-SELF IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY; SOMĀNANDA; SVASAMVEDANA/SVASAMVITTI; TANTRA, PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF; VEDĀNTA; YOGA: CLASSICAL (PĀTAÑJALA); YOGĀCĀRA; YOGIC PERCEPTION

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