

Brief introduction to Tantra and Kashmir Śaivism

Selection of fragments from different authors: Kamalakar Mishra, Kanti Chandra Pandey, Deba Brata SenSharma and Swami Lakshman Joo.

(...) ... Tantra ... stands for a **particular conception of Reality** and subsequently a particular way of life. (...) Tantra shows how to accept and use the world and worldly values so that they become a means of Self-realization. It presents an integral view of life that synthesizes enjoyment (*bhoga*) and liberation (*mokṣa*) as well as worldly involvement (*pravṛtti*) and renunciation (*nivṛtti*). It advocates a positive yoga that embraces all and makes everything holy and good. The message of Tantra is both timely and timeless.¹

(...) Tantra is based on the actual experience of seers, yogins, and spiritual experimenters. They sought to investigate the inner nature and potentialities of humanity and make wide experiments at the individuals and social level. (...) ... they did not adopt prosaic scientific language, but expressed their findings in poetic terms using metaphors, symbols, and allegories. The findings of the Tantric seers are verified and confirmed by along-standing tradition of yogins reaching up to the present. (...) ... Tantra is a science - a spiritual science. (...) The technology of spiritual science is called yoga.²

The **Tantric life** is basically spiritual, with the material life carried out as the free expression of the spirit. Tantric spirituality is inclusive of materiality. Tantra presents a way of life in which the profane becomes sacred and material life itself becomes spiritual. The distinction between the sacred and the profane is abolished. *“In the Tantric way of life, enjoyment (bhoga) becomes yoga, so-called vice becomes virtue, and the otherwise bondage-creating world becomes the means of liberation.”*³
Kulārṇava Tantra 2.24

(...) It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to present a **historical picture** of the Tantric tradition. What are set out by historians as the so-called facts of Tantric history are broad conjectures based on highly inadequate data. The popular theory of Dravidian origin of Tantra, coupled with the popular theory that Aryans came to India from outside and that the Vedic tradition of the Aryans stood in antagonism to the Tantric tradition, is nothing more than a broad guesswork of historical anthropologists.⁴ (...) ... the orthodox scholars [believe] that the Tantric philosophy existed in oral form from the time of the Vedas, if not earlier, and was only *written down* after the time of the Vedas. The Tantric tradition is sometimes identified with the Śaiva tradition and ascribed to the Dravidians, who are considered the original natives of India, whereas the Vedic tradition is considered Aryan.⁵ The **Śaiva philosophy** is an outgrowth of the religion, the distinctive feature of which is the worship of the phallic form of God Śiva. Śaivism as a religion has persisted since the prehistoric time of the archaeological finds of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. It has a continuous history of at least five thousand years.⁶

In India there are several **traditions and sub-traditions of Tantra**. Some have become extinct; some are still living. We can classify them all under three major denominations: (a) Śaiva-Śākta Tantrism, (b) Buddhist Tantrism, and (c) Vaiṣṇava Tantrism. (...) The cults of Śaiva-Śākta Tantrism are divided into two lineages; the Girnārī and the Newārī. Girnār, which is a mountain in Gujarat state, is the seat of Lord Dattātreya. Lord Dattātreya is regarded as the original teacher of the Śaiva-Śākta Tantrism. Paraśurāma and Durvāsā, who are legendary teachers of Śaivism, are in the same lineage.⁷

¹ Kamalakar Mishra; *Kashmir Śaivism. The Central Philosophy of Tantrism*, p. 21

² *Ibidem*, p. 27

³ *Ibidem*, p. 36

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 32

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 33

⁶ Kanti Chandra Pandey; *Outline of History of Śaiva Philosophy*, p. I.

In **Bhāskari**. The *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī* in the light of Bhāskari.

⁷ Kamalakar Mishra, *Ibidem* p. 38-39

There are **two principal characteristics of Tantrism** common to all these Tantric denominations. **The first** is the concept of spontaneous activity, or dynamism, in Consciousness, Consciousness being accepted as Ultimate Reality. This dynamism is called śakti or kriyā. Sentience, illumination or knowledge (*jñāna*) is generally accepted as the essential characteristics of Consciousness; it is this that differentiates consciousness from insentient matter. But Consciousness is not an inert principle; it has an active element in the form of thinking or creative imagination. Tantra conceives Consciousness not merely as a knowing principle, but also as an energy, in fact, *the energy*, which not only knows but also acts. (...) The knowing or illuminating aspect of Consciousness is called *jñāna*, *prakāśa*, or *Śiva*, and the dynamic or active aspect is called *kriyā*, *spanda*, *vimarśa*, or *Śakti*. It is also called *svātantrya* (freedom), as the activity is perfectly free. (...) Tantrism conceives Reality as knowledge and activity in one. That is why Reality is called Śiva-Śakti, Prakāśa-Vimarśa, or Jñāna-kriyā. (...) **The second** common feature of Tantrism is the positive attitude towards life and the world, and the philosophy of using the world and the worldly enjoyment in such a way that they become the means of attaining the ultimate spiritual goal, Self-realization.⁸

Although the three denominations of Śaiva-Śākta, Buddhist and Vaiṣṇava all have forms of Tantrism, **the Śaiva-Śākta tradition** surpasses the other and forms the most complete model of Tantrism. (...) The philosophy of Tantrism, or Śiva-Tantrism, is fully elucidated and expounded in a systematic, logical, and rational way in the philosophical system called Trika or Pratyabhijñā, popularly known as **Kashmir Śaivism***. The philosophers of Kashmir Śaivism, especially Abhinavagupta, have explained all the issues of Tantrism, both in its philosophical or theoretical and religious or practical aspects. They have also drawn the Tantric philosophy to its logical perfection. On this basis, we venture to propose that Kashmir Śaivism is the culmination of the Tantric tradition, or is the central philosophy of Tantrism.⁹

* In medieval times in the beautiful valley of Kashmir, a very wide range of mystically inclined religious and philosophical currents met and interacted, mutually influencing each other. Prominent religio-philosophical schools that prevailed there before the rise of the monistic Śaivism of Kashmir where Yogācāra Buddhism, Vaiṣṇavism, Śāktism, dualist Śaivism, Sāṅkhya, and Nyāya Vaiśeṣika.¹⁰

(...) ... the Tantra advocates **three metaphysical positions** – difference (*bheda*), unity-in-difference (*bhedābheda*), and unity (*abheda*). Technically, the *bheda* corpus is called *Śiva Āgama*, the *bhedābheda* works are known as *Rudra Āgama*, and the *abheda* texts fall under the rubric of *Bhairava Āgama**.¹¹ [The] **Bhairava Tantras*** filled only with monistic thought (*abheda*) ... are the *Tantras* connected to Kashmir Śaivism.¹²

* The terms 'Tantra' and 'Āgama' are used synonymously. Although connotatively different, the two are denotatively one; both denote the same corpus of scripture called Tantra or Āgama.¹³ The word *āgamas* refers to the sacred teachings that exists within Lord Śiva. And so, these scriptures, as *Āgamas*, are understood to be Śiva's revelation.¹⁴ ... we find a very subtle definition of *Āgama* by Abhinavagupta as: “*the inner discourse (or internal word) of the Lord whose nature is pure consciousness, consisting of a firm act of reflection, which is the very life of any (other) means of knowledge such as direct perception.*” *Īśvarapratyabhijñā Vimarśiṇī*, Vol II. p. 80¹⁵

⁸ Ibidem, p. 41_43

⁹ Ibidem, p. 51-52

¹⁰ Deba Brata SenSharma, p. xix Historical Context in **Paramārthasāra** of Abhinavagupta.

¹¹ Kamalakar Mishra, Ibidem, p. 52

¹² Swami Lakshman Jee; **Kashmir Shaivism. The Secret Supreme**, p. 90

¹³ Kamalakar Mishra, Ibidem, p. 57

¹⁴ Swami Lakshmanjoo; **Śiva Sūtras. The Supreme Awakening**, p. 4

¹⁵ **Viiñāna Bhairava. The Practice of Centring Awareness.** Commentary of Swami Lakshman Joo. p. 15-16

Kashmir Śaivism

Swami Lakshman Jee; **Kashmir Shaivism. The Secret Supreme**, Chapter Nineteen, p. 131_137

Kashmir Śaivism is known as the Pure Trika System. The word ‘trika’ means “the three fold signs of man and his world”. In the thought of *trika* there are **three energies**, *parā* (supreme), *aparā* (lowest), and *parāparā* (combination of the lowest and the highest). These three primary energies represent the three fold activities of the world. In the thought of the Trika, therefore, it is admitted that this whole universe and every action in it, whether spiritual, physical, or wordly, is existing in these three energies. The Trika Philosophy is meant for any human being without any restriction of caste, creed, or color. Its purpose is to enable you to rise from individuality to univesality.

The Trika System is comprised of **four systems**, the Pratyabhijñā system, the Kula system, the Krama system, and the Spanda system. These four systems, which form the one thought of the Trika system, all accept and are based on the same scriptures. These **scriptures**, which in Śaivism are called *āgamas*, are **the ninety two āgamas of Śaivism**: the monistic *Bhairava Śāstras*¹⁶ which are supreme (*parā*) and which are 64 in number, the mono-dualistic *Rūdra Śāstras* which are medium (*parāparā*) and which are 18 in number, and the dualistic *Śiva Śāstras* which are inferior (*aparā*) and which are 10 in number.

Pratyabhijñā System

The word *pratyabhijñā* means “to recognize, to realize your Self spontaneously once again”. (...) You must simply recognize who you are. Wherever you are, whether you are at the level of Supreme Being, at the level of yoga, or at the level which is disgusting, you can recognize your own Nature there and then without moving anywhere or doing anything. (...) The moment recognition (*pratyabhijñāna*) dawns not only do you instantaneously become divine, but also realize that you were already divine. At that moment you realize that you were already the Lord but did not know it because you had misunderstood yourself. In Pratyabhijñā philosophy it is your Master who tells you that you are the same person for which you are longing and teaches you to reach the goal there and then without adopting any means. This teaching, therefore, is situated chiefly in *anupāya*, which is that means where there are no means at all. It is the recognition that there was nothing to be done and nowhere to go. Here there is no practice, no concentration, no meditation. By the grace of your Master you realize it and you are there.

The Pratyabhijñā System was flourishing in the **beginning of Kali yuga**. As time passed, however, it became veiled due to misunderstanding. It wasn’t until the **end of the eighth century A.D.** that the great Master **Somānanda** reintroduced the Pratyabhijñā System in Kashmir. Somānanda’s disciple was **Utpaladeva**, and his disciple was **Lakṣmaṇagupta**, and his disciple was the very great **Abhinavagupta**.

Kula System

The Kula System teaches you how you can live in *caitanya* (Universal Consciousness), the real nature of yourself, in both the ascending and the descending act. While you rise from the lowest to the highest you realize your nature, and while you descend from the highest to the lowest you realize your nature. In the Kula System there is no break in the realization of your own nature either in the highest circle or in the lowest circle. This system, therefore, teaches you how you can live in totality.¹⁷ In fact, the word *kula* means “totality”. In the practice of the Kula System you have to realize the totality of the universe in one particle. (...) The totality energy is found in one particle. Everything is full of one thing and one thing is full of all things.¹⁸ The difference between the Pratyabhijñā System and the Kula System is only that the Pratyabhijñā System teaches you how to realize you own nature in one place and exist there, reside there, while the Kula System teaches you how you can rise from the lowest degree to the highest degree and all the while experience the nature of your Self on the same level and

¹⁶ *Śāstrā*: Treatise, book, work; scripture (it is whether a specialized treatise or a religious scripture).

Also: doctrine, science, discipline; teaching, instruction. [Dictionary Sanscrit-Català, Oscar Pujol, p. 947]

¹⁷ (...) Totality is that state where knowledge and ignorance exist together, when there is knowledge there is ignorance and when there is ignorance there is knowledg. Both knowledg and ignorance are digested in the totaliy, nothing is excluded.

¹⁸ *ekaikatrāṇi tattve’ni sattriṁśattattvarūpatā* : “In anv one element you will find all of the thirtv six elements.”

state. Śīva, which is realized in *pr̥thvī tattva*¹⁹ is the same level, the same reality of Śīva which is realized in *Śīva tattva*. Here there is complete realization in every act of the world.

The Kula System was introduced in Kashmir in the **beginning of the 5th century A.D.** by **Śrīmacchandanaṭha**. Later, in the **9th century**, because its teachings had become distorted, it was reintroduced by **Sumatināṭha**. In the line of Masters that followed from Sumatināṭha, **Somanāṭha** was his disciple. **Śambhunāṭha** was the disciple of Somanāṭha, and the great **Abhinavagupta** was the disciple of Śambhunāṭha.

Krama System

The Krama System does not recognize either the ways of Pratyabhijñā System or of the Kula System. In the Krama System you have to rise step by step in succession. This system teaches that step by step realization makes your realization firm. As the Krama System is concerned with successive realization it is primarily concerned with space and time because where there is succession there you will find the existence of space and time. In both the Pratyabhijñā System and the Kula System you are beyond space and time. In the Krama System it is in the end, not in its process, that you are beyond time and space because it also carries you to that timeless and spaceless state.

The Krama system is primarily attributed to *śaktopāya* and to the twelve *kālīs*. The twelve *kālīs* are said to be the twelve movements of any one cognition. For example if you look at any object such as a pot, the sensation travels from your thought to the place of the pot and then returns again from the place of the pot to your thought giving you the sensation whereby you realize this pot. You do not realize this pot at the place of the pot, you realize this pot in your mind. Your perception has moved from inside to the pot and then returned again from the pot to your thought. And these movements are distributed in twelve ways as the twelve *kālīs* in the Krama System. The rise of *prāṇa kuṇḍalinī* is also described in the Krama System because in *prāṇa kuṇḍalinī* you rise from one *cakra* to another *cakra*, from one state to another state. As this is a successive process it is found in the Krama System.

Although the Krama System existed in the **beginning of Kali yuga**, having been introduced by the sage **Durvāsā**, it was reintroduced at the **end of the 7th century A.D.** in Kashmir by the sage **Erakanāṭha** who was also known as Śīvanandanāṭha. Śīvanandanāṭha had only three chief disciples which he initiated into the Krama System and all three were females, because in this system predominance is given only to śakti.²⁰ Their names were **Keyūravatī**, **Madanikā**, and **Kalyāṇikā**. They were quite prominent and were completely informed in the Krama System. Afterwards these ladies also initiated disciples which were both male and female.

Spanda System

The fourth system which comprises the Trika philosophy is called the Spanda System. The word *spanda* means “movement” and the Spanda School recognize that nothing can exist without movement. Where there is movement there is life and where there is no movement that is lifelessness. They realize that there is movement in wakefulness, dreaming, deep sleep, and *turya*²¹. Though some thinkers argue that there is no movement in deep sleep, the philosophers of the Spanda System realize that nothing can exist without movement. The teachings of the Spanda System, which is an important practical system, are found embodied in the “*Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*”, the “*Svacchanda Tantra*”, and in the 6th chapter of the “*Tantrāloka*”.

The Spanda System was introduced in Kashmir by the great sage **Vasuguptanāṭha** in the **beginning of the 8th century A.D.** Vasuguptanāṭha is the author of both the “*Śīva Sūtras*” and the “*Spanda Kārikās*”.²² The disciple of Vasuguptanāṭha was **Kallaṭa**.

¹⁹ [According to the Trika cosmology, the universe is manifested in 36 principles, categories, realities or elements (*tattvas*), from the grossest and material to the subtler and transcendental. *Pr̥thvī tattva* is the element earth being considered the grossest, and *Śīva tattva* is the last element, in ascending order, being the purest and transcendent.]

²⁰ In this system you will find Tantras where Pārvati initiates Śīva and Śīva becomes the disciple.

²¹ [Turya or fourth state of consciousness, free of conditionings.]

²² Some teachers think that the “*Spanda Kārikās*” were not composed by Vasuguptanāṭha, instead they were composed by his disciple Kallaṭa. This theory, however, is absolutely wrong.