

SELF AWARENESS  
OWN BEING  
AND  
EGOITY

*by*

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The thesis proposed in this paper can be simply stated in a few words. One of the most distinctive features of the monistic Saivism that developed in Kashmir from about the middle of the ninth century with the revelation of the *Sivasūtra* to Vasugupta was introduced some three generations later by Utpaladeva, one of the major exponents of the Pratyabhijñā school. This was the concept of what, for convenience, I will term the 'absolute ego'. It is a concept of the one absolute reality which is at once, Siva, the Self and pure consciousness understood as a self-reflective pure egoity (*ahambhāva*). It is the transcendental ground within which and through which the entire range of cosmic and individual principles in the sphere of the subject, object and means of knowledge are generated, sustained and destroyed through a process in which its transcendental nature immanentises itself even as it reverts back to transcendence.

The concern of this paper is to establish that it is with Utpaladeva that this subtle and complex intuition of the absolute first appears in the history of Indian philosophical thought. In order to support this conclusion and explain how I came to it, I will deal with a number of basic concepts, most historically prior to Utpaladeva, others new, that have led to its formulation.

Our point of departure are the earliest works that can be defined as Kashmir Saiva in the sense that they represent themselves as systematic treatises (*śāstra*) of avowedly purely human authorship rather than revealed scripture. These are the *Spandakārikā* (written either by Vasugupta or his direct disciple Kallaṭabhaṭṭa) and the *vṛtti* on the same that is universally attributed to the latter. The metaphysical, theological and soteriological views they present, are relatively simple compared to the complex systems worked out in the treatises that followed immediately afterwards in the most vigorous period of Kashmiri Saivism's development from the middle of the ninth to the middle of the eleventh centuries. Even so, they provide us with a fairly complete formulation of the nature of ultimate reality.



The first thing to notice here from the point of view of our present discussion is that neither the *Spandakārikā* nor *vṛtti* take the ego to be in any way absolute. They thus fall in line with all the other schools of thought that developed in India up to then which unanimously agree that the ego - the "I" - is relative.<sup>1</sup> From one point of view, the ego is understood as the *aḥamkāra* which is a part of the inner mental organ that processes, coordinates and identifies the sensory data supplied by the senses. From a different point of view it is the 'notion of self' - *aḥampratyaya*. As such it is the conceptualized counterpart of the notion formed of the object in such a way that when we say "I see and know this particular X" both "I" and "X" are part of a proposition formed at the conceptual, discursive level ( *vikalpa* ). It is also the 'feeling' one has of oneself as reacting subjectively to the object as pleasant or painful, that is, as involved in the play of the *guṇas* and so appears in the notions the perceiver forms of himself as happy, sad or dull. Although related to one's own deeper authentic nature in that this is the essential ground of such egoic notions, they are distinct from it. Thus in the *Spandakārikā* we read:

"No notions such as "I am happy", "I am miserable" or "I am attached" ( exist independently ). They all clearly reside elsewhere, namely, in that which threads through ( all ) the states of pleasure and the rest."

Kallaṭa comments :

"The ( subject ) threads through all the states ( of consciousness ). He connects them together ( in the continuity of the experience that ) : "I am the same ( person ) who is happy and sad, or who later becomes attached." ( They all reside ) 'elsewhere' in that state independent ( of all transitory perceptions ). As scripture ( declares ) : ' ( this ) one's own nature is considered to be the highest reality.'"<sup>2</sup>

This view does not posit a pure "Inness" outside and apart from relational, conceptual propositions referring to cognitive acts. The

ego-notion ( *aḥampratyaya* ) is the condition of the disturbed or disrupted ( *kyubdha* ) state of personal existence which is that of the individual soul subject to the innate impurity of ignorance and hence transmigratory existence. Thus the *Spandakārikā* declares:

"An individual who though desirous of doing various things but incapable of doing them due to his innate impurity, ( experiences ) the supreme state ( *param padam* ) when disruption ( *kṣobha* ) ceases."

Kallaṭa comments :

"( The individual soul ) pervaded by this innate impurity may desire to act, but even so cannot make contact with his inherent power. However, if the disturbance of his conceived notion of his own identity as "I" ( *aḥam iti pratyayabhāvarūpa* ) were to cease, he would be established in the supreme state."<sup>1</sup>

This disturbed condition which is the egoic notion of the fettered soul ( *paśu* ) prevents it from abiding in the state of permanent repose within itself which is its basic condition ( *svāmasthiti* ) considered, according to this monistic view, to be that of Śiva Himself. Freedom from bondage is thus understood as 'the attainment of one's own nature' ( *svātmalābha* ). This attainment ( *lābha* ) or 'laying hold of one's own nature' ( *svātmagraha* ) is a direct experience of one's own nature ( *svabhāva* ) which, though egoless, is not entirely impersonal as the avoidance of the term '*ātman*' in preference to the term '*svasvabhāva*' in the *Spandakārikā* indicates.

Thus the word '*ātman*' almost invariably figures in the text in compounds where it functions as a reflective pronoun in the sense of 'one's own' rather than meaning the 'Self'. Thus, for example, in the eighth *kārikā* we are told that the senses operate by virtue of the power inherent in one's own essential nature. The expression for this is '*ānnabala*' that one could, it seems at first sight, translate as 'the strength or power of the Self'. This, however, is not right as the use of the analogous form '*svabala*' in *kārikā* 36 indicates. There the author says that objects become progressively more evident to the subject as 'his own strength' i.e. the inherent power

1. For an extensive account of the concept of the ego according to the major schools of Indian Philosophy see M. Hulin 'Le Principe de l' Ego dans la Pensée Indienne Classique. La Notion D' 'Ahamkāra', Paris, 1978.

2. Sp. Kā., 4 and *vṛtti* on the same.

1. Sp. Kā., 9 and *vṛtti* on the same.

of his subjective consciousness, is applied to their perception.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, objects, perceptions, emotions, mental images and all else that manifests objectively acquire a nature of their own (*āmalābha*) because they are grounded in the universal vibration of consciousness - *Spanda* - with which one's own nature is identified. For the same reasons it would be wrong to translate the expression '*āmalābha*' as 'attainment of Self'. In *kārikā* 39 the yogi is instructed to be established within himself. Here too the expression '*svātmani*' should not be translated to mean "in his own Self."<sup>2</sup>

In the *vṛtti* the terms '*svabhāva*' and '*svasvabhāva*', meaning 'own nature' or 'own own nature', are recurrent. We also come across the synonyms '*ātmasvarūpa*'<sup>3</sup> and '*ātmavabhāva*'<sup>4</sup>. In one place, however, Kallaṭa writes: "sarvātmaka evāyamātmā" i.e. "this Self is indeed of the nature of all things". The Self referred to here is the individual living being (*jīva*). Here Kallaṭa seems to be making use of a standard expression drawn from the Upaniṣads well known to his literate readers generally to state that the individual soul himself, just as he is, is complete and perfect.

The 'own nature' of an entity is that which makes it what it is and accounts for all its inherent properties and causal efficacy. Śiva as one's own 'own nature' thus tends to personalize this inner identity as compared to the concept of Self worked out in other types of monism that tend towards a pure transcendentalism in which the Self is understood purely as the transcendental ground of the person and, as such, it has no inherent phenomenal properties or powers. Its causality or agency are adventitious qualities, they are secondary and non-essential, just as a jar can be blue or red without it being essentially affected thereby.

1. यथा ह्यर्थोऽस्फुटो दृष्टः सावधानेऽपि चेत्तसि ।  
भूयः स्फुटतरो भाति स्वबलोयोगभाविः ॥  
Sp. Kā., 36

2. अनेनापि स्थिते देहे यथा सर्वज्ञादयः ।  
तथा स्वात्मन्यपि स्थानात्सर्वज्ञैव भविष्यति ॥

"When the body is sustained by this, one knows everything that happens within it. Similarly, (this same omniscience) will prevail everywhere (when the yogi) finds his support in his own nature." Sp. Kā., 39.

3. *Vṛtti* on Sp. Kā. 5.  
4. Sp. Kā., 11 and 19.

The distinctive terminology points to a more personal view of the Self that is not just a passive perceiver but also the subject that is never known as an object but only through an act of self-awareness (*svasamvedanasamvedya*). It seems that once the individual Self which, as pure consciousness, is known through an act of self-awareness, is identified with Śiva Who is one's own 'own nature' and this self-awareness is understood as basic non-discursive awareness which precedes, sustains and generates discursive, individualized and individuating mental representations (*vikalpa*), we come very close to the intuitive insight of an absolute self-identity experienced as a pure "I" consciousness. But this need not necessarily be the case for virtually all Indian schools of thought accept that the distinctive feature of the subject is this capacity for self-awareness contrasted with the phenomenological status of the object which is never an object of its own awareness but always that of a subject. There is no need even to posit the existence of an absolute Self for this to be the case. Thus, the Buddhist Dinnāga, for example, also refers to the distinction between subject and object and their relation in these terms. The individual soul can be self-conscious without this implying any inherent egoity, even as this self-consciousness is the basis of an adventitious notion of "I". This is the view of the earlier Śaivasiddhānta texts. Thus, Śadyojyoti in his *Nareśvaraparīkṣā* in the course of his proof for the existence of the individual soul advances the argument that the individual Self exists because it is "the field of the notion of I" (*aṃpratyaya*). Rāmakaṇṭha comments:

"(Although) the notion of self (*aṃpratyaya*) is (distinct from the Self) which is the object of ascertainment, it is perceived concomitantly with it because it is a reflective awareness of the persisting perceiving subject and has the Self as its object (*viśaya*). Thus both are true as they are established to exist by their (common nature) as consciousness. Thus there is no non-existence of the Self."<sup>1</sup>

1. N.P., p. 38.



Rāmakaṇṭha continues, saying that both the Self and the notion of Self are invariably found together although the Self transcends thought constructs. Thus, even though the notion of Self is a thought construct, it cannot be said to be false in the sense that it can indicate something unreal. All reflective determination (*adhyavasāya*) of one's Self is invariably accompanied by this notion and thus, being an act of consciousness, it is as veridical as the Self which is consciousness. He goes on to add that the notion of Self may appear to be a projection of conceived egoic arrogation onto an object, namely, the body etc. and not the Self, in such a way that one thinks, "I am fat" or "I am thin". Countering this possible objection he says that the ego notion relating to the Self is non-specific i.e. it is not specified by objective qualities. This unspecified (*aviśiṣṭa*) notion is primary and as such applies to the Self.<sup>1</sup>

Kallaṭa and the *Spandakārikā*, teach an idealism according to which the individual soul as the enjoyer (*bhoktr*) is one with the object of enjoyment because the perceptive awareness (*saṃvedana*) which links them as subject and object and is the common reality of both is possessed by the former as its essential nature. This perceptive awareness focused open itself is the conscious state of the subject who contains and is all things.<sup>2</sup> The proximity of this notion to that of the Self or 'own nature' as a pure ego-consciousness is so close that it seems natural for the later commentators, who all quote Utpaladeva and so post-date him, to interpret the *Kārikā*'s view in this way. Thus Rājānaka Rāma insists that there are two egos which he contrasts, the one a notion and hence 'created' or 'artificial' (*kṛtrima*), and the other uncreated and hence one's own nature itself. Similarly, Abhinavagupta says:

"From the intellect arises the product of the ego which consists of the notion that this light generated by the individual soul reflected (in the intellect) and sullied by objectivity is (the true) ego..... Thus as is indicated by the word 'product', this

(created ego) is different from the essential nature of the ego which is uncreated and perfectly pure freedom".<sup>1</sup>

The artificial ego seemingly limits and binds the uncreated ego.<sup>2</sup> In this state of bondage the individual perceiver believes himself conditioned by the countless forms of diversity related to the divided field in which he operates, namely, the egoity (*ahampratīti*) established on the basis of mutual exclusion between differing egos.<sup>3</sup> It is egoity falsely projected onto the body which is the way in which, according to Utpaladeva also, we perceive the unfolding of the power of Māyā.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, as Rājānaka Rāma explains, the pure 'I' consciousness encompasses the series of pure principles from Siva to Suddhavidyā. It is one's own essential nature (*svasvabhāva*) as Paramaśiva who is free of all contact with duality.<sup>5</sup> Thus, an uninterrupted awareness of the egoity (*ahamkāra*) which is that of one's own true essential nature (*svasvabhāva*) is liberating. The egoity (*ahampratīti*) which takes its support from the body is destroyed when it is irradiated by the authentic ego.<sup>6</sup> 'It melts', to use Rājānaka Rāma's expression, 'like a heap of snow, by coming in contact with the light of the sun of the authentic ego (*svābhāvikāhampratīti*) that transcends all fictitious supports'.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, however, as Rājānaka Rāma says, the egoity (*ahampratīti*) projected onto the body is not false (*upapanna*) in that it ultimately abides in a reality which is not transitory.<sup>8</sup> Thus, according to him, whatever the Self sustains through the medium of the ego (*aham iti pratīpatti*) is its body. The fettered state is the projection of this notion onto a reality which is other than the Self, while the liberated state is that in which this ego nature is realised to be that of one's own authentic nature (*svasvabhāva*).<sup>9</sup> Thus, Rājānaka Rāma says of the awakened yogi:

1. T.Ā., 9/230-2.
2. Sp. Kā. vi. p. 113 and 137.
3. Ibid., p. 132.
4. I.P., 3/1/8.
5. Sp. Kā. vi., p. 128.
6. Ibid., p. 86 and 113.
7. Ibid., p. 49.
8. Ibid.,
9. Ibid., p. 112.

1. Ibid., p. 38-9.  
2. Sp. Kā., 28-29.

"When his ego-sense (*ahampratipatti*) is firmly established in the essential nature of his authentic identity (*āmasvabhāva*) which is distinct from the body etc. and manifests in brilliant evidence to the clear vision that unfolds by the enlightened awareness generated (in him) by the rays of energy which, emitted by Siva, the Sun (of consciousness), fall (upon him), it is then made manifest by the powers of the reflective awareness (*parāmarśasakti*) of the cognitive consciousness of things just as they are in reality. Then he realises Siva Who is the Wheel of Energies consisting of the manifestations of the wonderfully diverse universe sketched out (in this way) by (His own) will alone."<sup>1</sup>

Rājānaka Rāma was Utpaladeva's direct disciple and the profound influence that the Pratyabhijñā had on him is evident throughout his commentary. This is so not only in his presentation of the realisation of Spanda and its activity as an act of recognition but in his views on the two types of egoity. That this is his personal interpretation of Spanda doctrine and not originally to be found in it finds confirmation, partially at least, in the absence of this distinction in Bhagavadupala's commentary which, apparently more consistent with the *Kārikā* and *vṛtti*, invariably relegates all ego-consciousness to the level of a notion. He does this, it seems to me, not so much as a conscious attempt to keep Spanda doctrine 'pure', i.e. not to overlay it with higher hermeneutical interpretations, but because the view which particularly inspired him was not that of the Pratyabhijñā, although he quotes it several times, but the monistic Vaiṣṇava idealism of Vāmanadatta's *Samvitprakāśa*. In this work, the sense of 'I' is consistently relegated to the level of a thought construct: it is the notion of 'I' (*asmadvikalpa*) and nothing more.<sup>2</sup>

Kṣemarāja, the remaining major commentator, takes the 'I' sense to be absolute, adding to it further interpretations, which as we shall see, are a continuation of the views his teacher, Abhinavagupta, developed. Here absolute 'I' consciousness is

Sakti which Kṣemarāja identifies with Spanda, the power of Siva, one's own authentic nature, that infuses its energy into the body and mind. Thus he writes: "Even that which is insentient attains sentience because it is consecrated with drops of the juice (of the aesthetic delight-*rasa*) of Incess. Thus that principle not only renders the senses fit to operate once it has made them sentient but does the same also to the subject that one presumes is their impeller even though he is (merely) conceived to exist (*kalpita*), thus he presumes that it is he that impels the senses. But he also is nothing if he is not penetrated by the Spanda principle."<sup>1</sup>

But let's get back to Utpaladeva. It is well known to students of Kashmiri Saivism that Somānanda was his teacher and the first exponent of the philosophy which was to draw its name from Utpaladeva's work, the *Īśvarapratyabhijñā*. Somānanda wishes to trace the genealogy of his views to personalities associated with the propagation of Saivism in the Tantras.<sup>2</sup> In this way he not only tries to stamp his views with the seal of scriptural authority but also affirms that they are ultimately drawn from the Tantras. Now, it is in fact true that a number of basic concepts he presents are already taught in Tantric traditions which precede him. But even though he draws from this fund of ideas he nowhere posits the existence of an absolute ego and in this he is consistent with the Tantras.

When we get to Utpaladeva, even though he declares that the 'new end easy path' he expounds in his *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-kārikā* is that shown to him by his teacher Somānanda in the *Sivadr̥ṣṭi*,<sup>3</sup> he introduces an entirely new idea, namely, that the ego-sense that is relative when related to the body is ultimately grounded in an authentic, absolute ego. Thus as Abhinava tells us:

"The idea that, that which manifests as the 'I' is perfect, omnipresent, omnipotent and eternal being, that is, the idea that the 'I' is identical with the Lord, the subject, the lustrous one.....was not in vogue before because of (man's state of innate) ignorance. This *śāstra* makes people fit to live this

1. Ibid., p. 112.

2. See the introduction to my edition of this text.

1. Sp. Nir., p. 22.

2. S. Dr., 7/107-122.

3. I. P., 4/1/16.



idea in practice by bringing to light (Siva's) powers of knowledge, will and action. This happens by virtue of this treatise on the Pratyabhijñā which essentially consists of a series of proofs to justify this idea in practice.<sup>1</sup>

Utpaladeva develops the notions of the Self and absolute being that were already worked out before him to what he must have thought were their ultimate conclusion. Thus he writes that: "repose in one's own essential nature ( *svasvarūpa* ) is the reflective awareness ( *vimarśa* ) that 'I am'".<sup>2</sup> One might say that Utpaladeva is here explaining in his own Pratyabhijñā terms that the Spanda doctrine adopted from the Tantras of 'establishment in one's own essential nature' ( *svasvarūpasthiti* ) implies that this, the liberated condition, is that of the pure ego-identity.

Now in order to make this transition, Utpaladeva must introduce a concept which finds a precedent in Bhartṛhari but is unknown, it seems, to the Tantras. Thus Bhartṛhari declares that the universal light of consciousness which shines as all things, must be full of the power of speech, otherwise it would not be the one light but the darkness ( *aprakāśa* ) of its negation as the Māyic world of multiplicity. This power he defines as 'self-reflective awareness' ( *pratyaavamarśinī* ).<sup>3</sup> But while Bhartṛhari does not

explain this notion fully to reach the ultimate conclusion that absolute being, as self-reflective consciousness, is absolute egoity, Utpaladeva makes full use of it to indicate this. Thus according to him, *vimarśa* operates as the reflective awareness which is the non-discursive representation or judgement that consciousness has of its own infinite nature which is both its universal creative and cognitive power through which it forms itself into the All and through which the All is resolved back into it, on the one hand, and, on the other is the ground of all possible judgement or representation, conceptual ( *savikalpa* ) and intuitive ( *nirvikalpa* ) of the contents of consciousness in and through each cognitive act, even the most common, as the self-awareness of a pure non-discursive egoic consciousness. It is this inherent attribute which makes consciousness ultimate. Thus echoing Bhartṛhari, Utpaladeva says:

"If one were to consider the reflective awareness ( *vimarśa* ) of the light of consciousness ( *prakāśa* ) to be other than its own essential nature ( *svabhāva* ), it would be as insentient as crystal even when the light is coloured by (seemingly external) phenomena ( *artha* )."<sup>1</sup>

This reflective awareness ( *vimarśa* ) is explicitly identified by Utpaladeva with the reflective awareness of "I" ( *ahampratyavamarśa* ), a term which we can contrast with the earlier "notion of I" ( *ahampratyaya* ). It is the 'I' consciousness ( *aham itī vimarśa* ) which manifests as the subjectivity ( *pramāṇtrva* ) in the psycho-physical complex, as the notion ( *vikalpa* ) both of self and its opposite.<sup>2</sup> But as the reflective awareness of "I" is in itself the very nature of the light of consciousness ( *prakāśāman* ), it is free of all thought constructs ( *vikalpa* ) for these depend upon the duality of relative distinctions.<sup>3</sup>

An important aspect of the concept of *vimarśa* which, as we shall see, Abhinavagupta developed into a wide ranging

consciousness does so by virtue of the power of contemplation inherent in consciousness itself which is, as the *Triśirobhairavaśāntara* says, the 'abode of contemplation'.

1. I. P., 1/5/11.
2. Ibid. 1/6/4-5.
3. Ibid. 1/6/1.

1. Commentary on I. P., 2/3/17.

2. A. P. S., 15.

3. V.P., I/124. It is a notable fact that this term, so important in the technical vocabulary of the Pratyabhijñā, is not at all common in the Sāivāgama. It does not belong to the common terminology of the Tantric systems syncretised into Kashmiri Śaivism, at least as far as we can gather from the sources quoted by the Kashmiri authors themselves. As an example of the uncommon occurrence of the term *vimarśa* we can cite the *Kālikūla*: "The supreme power of the lord of the gods whose nature is supreme consciousness is reflective awareness ( *vimarśa* ) endowed with omniscient knowledge" (Quoted in N.T., J. p. 21). Abhinavagupta refers to the *Gomāntara* which says: "The deity of Mantra is considered to be reflective awareness ( *vimarśa* ) co-extensive in being with Great Consciousness." (T.Ā., 16/286). A passage quoted from the *Triśirobhairavaśāntara* reads: "The Supreme Sky ( *parakāśa* ) is said to be the well formed space ( *suśira* ), the lord of the principles of existence, the fourth state which pervades from above and the centre. It is the abode of contemplation ( *vimarśadhāman* )." (T.Ā., comm. 5/91). While in the third reference *vimarśa* clearly has a broad, generic sense denoting the contemplative consciousness that the fully developed yogi his of the supreme principle, the two former references equate *vimarśa* directly with Śakti. They do certainly refer quite clearly to a concept of consciousness in which it reflects upon itself. But these are the only passages out of several hundreds quoted in Kashmiri Śaiva works in which this term occurs and it seems that *vimarśa* in these passages also has a broader less specific sense than in the Pratyabhijñā. Thus, what appears to be the meaning here is that the yogi who contemplates the one absolute

hermeneutical key to interpret, or better to reinterpret, an important part of Tantric doctrine, is its identification with the supreme level of speech. Now, Somānanda had already done this before, but his concept of *vimarśa* was much more limited than that which Utpaladeva developed. Thus, in his refutation of what he took to be the grammarian's view that *paśyanti* is the supreme level of speech, he advances as one of his many arguments that *paśyanti*-the speech which "sees"-cannot view either itself as such or the supreme principle without this involving both in a subject-object relationship which degrades it and the ultimate principle to the level of an object which would then require another *paśyanti* to see that and that another leading to an unacceptable infinite regress.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the perceiver's subjective status as the seer (*dṛṣṭṛva*) precedes *paśyanti* as the supreme level of speech. Although Somānanda calls this subjective state '*vimarśa*', it is not, as it is for Utpaladeva, the awareness the light of consciousness has of itself as all things and as beyond them, for that would involve an unacceptable split into an internal subject-object relationship. Thus, Somānanda explains it as follows:

"Just as the product an agent like a potter (intends to generate) as, for example, a jar, abides as a reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) in the form of an intention (*icchā*), such is the case here also (with Supreme Speech). This (supreme level of speech) abides prior (to all things) for otherwise if consciousness were not to possess a subtle (inner) outpouring (*ullāsa*) which abides intent upon its task (*kāryonmukha*) how could that desire unfold (and reach fulfilment). Siva abides as the one who is endowed with the state of this (supreme level of speech) when in a condition of oneness (*sāmarasya*)....."<sup>2</sup>

This concept of absolute consciousness as charged inwardly with a power that flows through it even as it rests in itself and expresses itself as a tension towards its externalisation into the form of the phenomenal world in and through the act of perception, is known to the preceding Tantric traditions,

particularly those of the Kaula Tantras and similar traditions transmitted in some of the Bhairava Tantras. But what Utpaladeva says in the following passage in which a set of terms already known to these earlier views are brought together in the concept of *vimarśa*, identified with the supreme level of speech, presents it in a new more complex formulation. He writes:

"The nature of the power of consciousness (*citi*) is reflective awareness (*pratyavamarśa*) and is Supreme Speech which, spontaneously emergent, is the lordship of the Supreme Self, the freedom which is the intent (*aunmukhya* towards both immanence and transcendence). That pulsing radiance (*sphurattā*), the Great Being, unspecified by time and space, is the essence of the Supreme Lord and so is said to be His Heart."<sup>1</sup>

We might notice incidentally before moving on that this important passage leaves the way clear for Abhinavagupta in his subsequent detailed hermeneutics of the Tantras to expound the symbolism of the Heart as the dynamics of pure I-consciousness which he develops in particular in his commentaries on the *Parātrīśikā*. We shall return to this point later.

Now we must briefly attempt to tackle the vast sprawling mass of Tantric sources prior to Utpaladeva. Although I cannot claim, of course, to have read all the Tantras that predate Utpaladeva, in none of what little I have managed to study in print and manuscript is there any mention of an absolute ego. While all the other notions we have dealt with concerning the Self and its relation to the ego and ultimate reality are attested in the Tantras, this in not the case with the absolute ego. Barring one important exception which I shall deal with latter, which is anyway very ambiguous, our Kashmiri Saivites do not quote a single Āgamic source in which the concept appears. One could argue, perhaps, that they did not choose to do so, but this seems hardly likely if we consider the key role it assumes from Utpaladeva's time onwards. On the other hand, a host of other notions that are woven together in the fully developed notion of the absolute ego which we find in Abhinavagupta are found there, so much so that it seems hard to

1. S. Dr., 2/55-6.

2. S. Dr., 2/84-6a.

1. I. P., 1/5/13-14.



resist the conclusion that what has taken place is a higher hermeneutic in which there has not only been interpretation and presentation of single notions but a grand synthesis of various concepts of the absolute already found in the Tantras in this one.

There is no point in examining every detail of this process here, that would require an extensive study. All that can be done here is to point to a few key examples which can serve as representative illustrations of this hermeneutic method. As I said before, there is only one reference in all those quoted by Kashmiri Śaivite authors from earlier Tantras that can be construed to be a reference to an absolute ego. This is a verse which Abhinava quotes that is also quoted by Maheśvarānanda in his *Mahārthamanjarī* who attributes it to the *Śrīkañthiyasamhitā*,<sup>2</sup> in the original Sanskrit it reads :

आदिमान्त्यविहीनास्तु मन्त्राः स्युः शरदभ्रवत् ।  
गुरोर्लक्षणमेतावदादिमान्त्यं च वेदयेत् ॥<sup>2</sup>

Translated this means :

"Mantras devoid of the first letter and the last ( are barren ) like autumn clouds. Know that this consciousness of the first and last letters is the characteristic of the master."

This passage, although seemingly of little significance, is extremely important for it is the only one Kashmiri exegetes quote as being a reference to the absolute ego in the Tantras. One may however, understand this, admittedly cryptic verse, to mean simply that the adept must recite his Mantra mindful of each part, including its beginning and end. Once the adept can maintain an abiding, undistracted state of mindful concentration on the entire Mantra from the first to the last letters, he attains a level of spiritually mindful concentration that makes him fit to be a teacher of others. But Abhinava understands this verse in a quite different, more elevated, way which is explained as follows by Jayaratha in his commentary on this passage :

"The first ( letter ) is ( A symbolic of the ) absolute ( *anuttara* ) and the last is H ( which symbolizes the completion of its emission ), thus even Mantras if devoid of the reflective awareness of "I" which is ( encompassed by these ) the first and last letters ( of the alphabet ) and are not know to be of that nature are like autumn clouds, that is to say, they do nothing..... While if, on the contrary, they are known to be the supreme vitality of Mantra ( *paramantravīrya* ) which is the reflective awareness of "I", they perform their respective functions."<sup>1</sup>

What Jayaratha is saying becomes clear when we examine the context in which this reference appears. Abhinavagupta dedicates the third chapter of his *Tantrāloka* to a detailed exposition of *Mātrkācakra*. Simply, this is the series of the fifty letters of the alphabet which, in the Tantras, is understood to exist as fifty energies or aspects of the universal potency of the supreme level of speech connected with which Mantras are spiritually effective. In the *Śrītantrasadbhāva*, Siva says to his consort:

"O dear one, all Mantras consist of letters and energy is the soul of these ( letters ) while energy is *Mātrkā* and one should know her to be Siva's nature."<sup>2</sup>

The Tantras deal with this concept extensively. According to one purely Tantric<sup>3</sup> explanation, *Mātrkā* as Mantric energy is the source of the higher liberating knowledge of non-duality as the power of *Aghorā* which makes inner and outer manifestation one with Her own nature in the all embracing experience of liberated consciousness.<sup>4</sup> *Mātrkā* is also the basis of the lower binding knowledge associated with discursive thought when her true nature is unknown and functions as the power *Ghorā* which deprives man of the awareness of unity and obscures Siva's universal activity. Thus, in this sense too, Mantras devoid of the

1. M.M., p. 68.  
2. T.Ā., 3/223a-4b

1. T.Ā., II, p. 212.

2. S. Sū. vi., p. 89.

3. The expression 'Tantric' throughout this paper refers specifically to matters dealt with in the Tantras. Thus a 'Tantric explanation' is the way something is explained in the Tantras. Similarly, by 'Tantric symbols', I mean those symbols which are found in the Tantras.

4. S. Sū. vi., appendix p. 9 n. 82. K.S.T.S. edition.

first and last letter, and all those between them in *Mātrkācakra* are fruitless.

Now according to Abhinavagupta's higher hermeneutics *Mātrkācakra* represents the creative aspect of pure "I" consciousness - AHAM, that, like a wheel, rotates from A to Ha and back again around the hub of bindu - M. There is no point in dealing at length with this highly complex symbolism here which is worked out in Abhinava's commentaries on the *Parātrīṣikā*; a few remarks will suffice. Abhinavagupta introduces his explanation of the secret the goddess seeks to know from the god in the Tantric passage he comments, by quoting Utpaladeva as saying that: "egoity ( *ahambhāva* ) is said to be the repose of the light of consciousness has within its own nature"<sup>1</sup>. He identifies this pure "I" consciousness with the supreme level of speech, as does Utpaladeva, and goes on to say :

"The real I-feeling is that in which, in the process of withdrawal, all external objects like jar, cloth etc., being withdrawn from their manifoldness come to rest or final repose in their essential uninterrupted absolute ( *anuttara* ) aspect. This absolute ( *anuttara* ) aspect is the real I-feeling ( *ahambhāva* ). This is a secret, a great mystery. In the process of expansion, the changeless, unsurpassable, eternal, reposeful venerable Bhairava is of the form 'A' which is the natural primal sound, the life of the entire range of letter - energies ( *sakalakalājālaivaṇabhūta* ). He, in the process of expansion, assumes the 'Ha' form ( the symbol of Sakti ), for expansion ( *visarga* ) is of the form 'Ha' i.e. *Kuṇḍalinī* Sakti and then he expands into a dot symbolizing objective phenomena ( *nararūpeṇa* ) and indicative of the entire expansion of Sakti ( i.e. the entire manifestation starting with Bhairava ). Similarly, the lowest part of the last phase of objective manifestation ( *m* or *nara* ) with its three powers ( of will, knowledge and action ) whose life is the trident of *Parā*, *Parāparā* and *Aparā* śaktis, in its return movement through its union with *visarga* i.e. *Ha* śakti, penetrates *anuttara* i.e. A which is its

fundamental, unalterable state..... Thus there is AHAM in expansion and MAHA-A in withdrawal."<sup>1</sup>

Now, while Abhinava understands the reflective awareness of "I" as being Supreme Speech which is the Heart of consciousness as already posited by Utpaladeva, he adds that it is *Mātrkā* which is the vitality of Mantra ( *mantravīrya* ). Thus he writes :

"This reflective awareness of this ( Mantric ) nature, uncreated and unsullied, ( the Masters ) call the "I" ( *aham* ). It is this indeed that is the luminosity of the light ( of consciousness ). This is the vitality ( *vīrya* ) and heart of all Mantras without which they would be insentient, like living beings without a heart."<sup>2</sup>

Many more observations could be made concerning how Abhinava presents the absolute ego as the highest expression of the ultimate state conceived by the Tantric traditions he considers to be those that teach the highest doctrines. Thus, he overcodes in this way the Trika conception of reality. The Trika teachers refer to the *Siddhayaogēśvarīmata* as the supreme authority. Quoting this text, just before the reference we have cited above, he says: "The seed here ( of all things ) is *Kuṇḍalinī*, the life-principle of the nature of consciousness. From this is born the Triad ( *Trika* ) of the Absolute - ( A ), the Will ( I ) and Expansion ( U ) and from this all the other letters."<sup>3</sup>

Now as all the other letters together constitute the fifty aspects of the reflective awareness of "I" consciousness, this, the absolute, is grounded in this way in the supreme Triad, or one of its representations, which is taken as characteristic of the Trika view of the one reality.

Further on Abhinava similarly presents the absolute ego as the ultimate reality the Krama School expounds. This he does by first declaring that *Mātrkā* has a second aspect known as *Mālinī*. *Mātrkā* represents dynamic consciousness as perpetually creative; *Mālinī*

1. A.P.S., 22.

1. P.T.V., Jayadeva Singh's translation, p. 54-5.

2. T.A., 4/192-3. In the P.T.V., Abhinava similarly defines "I" consciousness as "wonder which is the very nature of the light of consciousness and the vitality of Mantra which is the Supreme Speech that is innate and uncreated". *प्रकाशस्य हि स्वाभाविकाकुत्रिमत्वाद्मन्त्रवैयर्थ्यत्वात् तस्य ह्यस्मिन्* P.T.V., p. 18 of the text printed with Jayadeva Singh's translation.

3. T.A., 3/220b-1a.



represents consciousness as perpetually withdrawing into itself all differentiation to fuse it into its universal oneness. This symbolism is supported by the Tantras, but in a much grosser sense, one could say, at a lower level of self-reflection. Thus, *Mārākācakra* figures as a symbolic cosmogram in which the letters of the alphabet are collocated in their normal serial order. *Mālinī* is a different collocation ( *prastara* ) of the alphabet in which the order is disarranged so that the vowels, symbolizing Siva's seed ( *bīja* ), are mixed with the consonants symbolizing Śakti's womb ( *yonī* ). In this way, Abhinava represents *Mālinī* both as the chaotic pleroma into which everything is withdrawn and, at the same time, as the one reality that, fertilizing itself, is adorned with the flux of emission.<sup>1</sup>

Now, just as the supreme form of speech, identified with *Mārkā*, is grounded in Trika as its expansion, so *Mālinī*, similarly identified with Supreme Speech is said to be *Kālakarṣiṇī*, one of the forms of Kālī worshipped as the embodiment of the dynamic power of consciousness according to the Kālikula, more commonly known as Krama. In this consciousness, Siva and Śakti, symbolized by the A and H of AHAM, unite. Thus Abhinava writes :

"This ( i.e. the energy *Mālinī* ) which is in reality one only, and supreme, is She Who Attracts Time ( *kālakarṣiṇī* ) and by union with the power-holder aspect ( of absolute consciousness ) assumes the nature of a couple ( *yāmala* ). The reflective awareness of this ( couple ) is completely full "I" ( consciousness ) which by virtue of this freedom manifests division within its own nature. Three-fold is said to be its form when division manifests, namely, ( the Speech ) of Vision ( *paśyanti* ), the Middle Voice ( *madhyamā* ) and gross Corporeal Speech ( *vaikharī* )."<sup>2</sup>

Although the identification of Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī with the supreme level of speech is attested in purely Krama sources, the identification of this, the supreme energy of consciousness, with absolute egoity is not, although to Abhivavagupta this seems

naturally implied. Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī is the pure conscious energy which courses through subject, object and means of knowledge whilst abiding in a fourth state beyond them ( *turiya* ) which is the one reality that dynamically regenerates itself perpetually, even as it rests in its own nature. Thus it seemed naturally identifiable to him with the absolute ego and its cosmic dynamism. But even so, this identification is far from the intentions of the teachings in the original Tantric Krama sources. The *Kālikrama* teaches that the ultimate state is egolessness and that it is attained by destroying the ego. Thus Aṇṇasimha writes of Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī that She is :

"Kālikā, the one ( reality Who is such ) by virtue of Her being the ( universal ) process ( of consciousness ) in the form of the mistress of the wheel of the cycle ( of consciousness ) She shines constantly and perfectly and Her inherent attribute is egolessness ( *nirahamkāradharmiṇī* )."<sup>1</sup>

Again, all Her powers are aspects of the Goddess, each of which is worshipped in this, the highest ritual procedure ( *pūjākrama* ) and are "emergent to withdraw ( all things into undifferentiated consciousness ), their forms ( the reality ) which is free of ego ( *nirahamkāravigraha* )."<sup>2</sup>

Finally, we notice how Kṣemarāja extends his teacher's hermeneutic to his treatment of the Spanda teachings. Kṣemarāja, like his predecessor, Rājānaka Rāma, considers the true nature of the subject to be the inner light of "I" consciousness. This is the inner form of Siva. While the outer form is perishable, the inner form is the subjective aspect which is supreme "I" consciousness for, as Kṣemarāja says, "even though the subject resides in its

1. This verse is drawn from an unpublished Krama work by Aṇṇasimha who traces the teachings he expounds to Sivananda, alias Jñānāneta, Cakrabhānu was the third teacher in the tradition after him. Then from Cakrabhānu, Aṇṇasimha traces two lineages ending with Somāvara and Nāga, both of whom were his teachers and are the fourth in line after Cakrabhānu. Thus if we date Sivananda as Rastogi does, as living 800-50 A.D., then Aṇṇasimha lived sometime between 950-1000 A.D.. Unfortunately the title of his work has been lost in the colophon of the sole manuscript recovered so far. It is deposited in the National Archives at Kathmandu and is numbered S-5183/151 reel number A 150/6. This reference appears on folio 32a; the edited text reads :

चक्रवर्धेश्वररूपक्रमेणैकैव कालिका ।  
विभक्त्यनाराता सम्यक् निरहंकारधर्मिणी ॥

2. Ibid., folio 30b : सहस्रमुद्रिता देव्यो निरहंकारविग्रहाः ।

1. T.A. 3/232-3.

2. T.A., 3/234-6.

body, it is still identical with the Lord (who is pure I consciousness)."<sup>1</sup> Kṣemarāja adds a further dimension to the notion of Spanda with respect to the commentators before him by identifying it squarely with the supreme energy of consciousness and this with Supreme Speech and the absolute ego, much as Abhinava does. Thus he says of Spanda that it is the creative autonomy of Siva ( *svātantrya* )<sup>2</sup> as "the perfect I-consciousness (of the Lord) ( *pūrnāhantā* ) consisting of the higher power-A- and the innate power-Ha-which encompass within themselves, as in a bowl, all the letters from A to KṢ. That ( *aham* ) is the power of Supreme Speech which is the supreme resonance of consciousness ( *paranāda* ) that is ever emergent (and eternal) although unutterable. It is the great Mantra, the life of all, and successionless awareness that contains within itself the uninterrupted series of creations and destructions and encloses within itself the entire aggregate of energies that constitute the cosmic order ( *śaḍadhvan* ) which consists of innumerable words and their referents....."<sup>3</sup>

To conclude we may note that others after Kṣemarāja went on to extend these reflections into the brilliantly diverse world of Tantric symbolism in many ways. Thus, Siva is identified with the light of consciousness ( *prakāśa* ) and Śakti with his reflective awareness ( *vimarśa* ) and the two are portrayed as locked together in the amorous and sportive play of *Kāmakalā*. This is a theme developed by Puṇyānanda and a number of other important exegetes of the Śrīvidyā tradition in their commentaries on the *Nityāśoḍaśikārnava* and *Yoginīhr̥daya* as well as in their independent works. Here we notice how, amongst other things, basic Tantric cosmological models are overcoded with this brilliant new concept. This becomes especially clear when we compare the cosmologies of the *Prapañcasāra* and *Sāradātīlaka*, for example, with that of the *Kāmakalāvīlāsa* of Puṇyānanda. Although all three, in variant forms, take up a symbolic cosmology in which ultimate reality is represented as splitting itself up initially into two and

three elements to then go on and develop out of itself throughout the entire gradient of cosmic and microcosmic principles, it is only the *Kāmakalāvīlāsa* which identifies these original elements with aspects of the pure absolute ego and sees in their interplay and development its cosmic and transcendent activity. This fact is all the more striking when we observe that the original symbol of *Kāmakalā*, that is, the triangle in the centre of *Śricakra*, as it appears in the *Nityāśoḍaśikārnava* and *Yoginīhr̥daya* is devoid of this representation. Thus we can clearly see how the concept of an absolute ego is projected onto an earlier symbolic structure overcoding it and thus lending it greater hermeneutical depth through a broader and more profound conception of the absolute. In this way the Śāktas drew substantially from their fellow Śaivites. Thus, Sīvānanda, the 12th century commentator on the *Nityāśoḍaśikārnava*, and one of the earliest teachers of this line, tells us that his tradition originated from Kashmir.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, not only was the concept and the associated Tantric symbolism of the absolute ego developed at the secondary exegetical level but it also found its way into later primary sources. Not only do a number of later Śākta and Śaiva Tantras take it for granted, but its strong appeal influenced the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra as well. Thus the *Ahīrbudhnyasamhitā* and, more particularly, the *Lakṣmītantra*, both of which are clearly influenced by Śaivism, take this as a fundamental conception of the absolute reality which the *Lakṣmītantra* in particular identifies with the goddess who is pure "Iness".

Thus the brilliant insight of one īnan, Utpaladeva, whose writings are more concerned with philosophical and theological issues than with the intricacies of Tantric symbolism is used to systematically recode it. In this way we find confirmed the view of the Tantras which declare that "this knowledge ( of reality ) has three source, namely, the teacher, the scripture ( *śāstra* ), and oneself."<sup>2</sup> Although the Indian tradition in general mistrusts new ideas and normally attempts to integrate them into what has gone

1. Commentary on Sp. Ka., 16.  
2. Commentary on Sp. Ka. 1.  
3. Commentary on Sp. Ka., 45.

1. N.S.A., p. 144.  
2. निप्रत्ययमिदं ज्ञानं गुरुतः शास्त्रतः स्वतः।  
quoted from the Kīranagama in T.A., 4/78b-9a.



before so that they may be sealed with the stamp of authority, great new ideas are born from what is, according to Abhinava, the greatest of the three sources of knowledge, namely, oneself.<sup>1</sup>

Abbreviations :

A.P.S.	Ajaḍapramāṣiddhi
ĪP.	Īśvarapratyabhijñānakārikā
T.Ā.	Tantrāloka
N.P.	Nareśvaraparīkṣā
N.T.V.	Netratantroddhota
N.S.Ā.	Nityāśoḍaśikāṇava
P.T.V.	Parātrīśikāvivarāṇa
M.M.	Mahārthamanjari
V.P.	Vākyaṇḍi
S.D.	Śvaṭṣi
ŚSūvi.	Śivasūtravimarśiṇī
Sp.Kā.	Spandakārikā
Sp.Kā.vi.	Spandakārikāvivṛti
Sp.Nir.	Spandanirṇaya

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1. Ibid., 4/41b-2b.