

Chapter 1

The Texts in their Religious and Intellectual Contexts

This book is an introduction to and translation of a circa twelfth century C.E. contemplative manual, the *Virūpākṣapañcāśikā* (VAP) with the commentary *Vivṛti* (VAPV) of Vidyācakravartin. The VAP purports to give the teachings of an incarnation of Śiva, under the name Virūpākṣa. Virūpākṣa, from *virūpa* and *akṣa*, meaning “the Odd-Eyed One,” is a common name for Śiva. It refers to the notion that Śiva’s eyes are odd in either number or form, as he possesses in his forehead a third eye that is also awry, perpendicular to the other two.¹

Whether or not either is actually from Kashmir, the VAP and VAPV may be situated within the Trika stream of tantric, monistic “Kashmiri Śaivism.” They are important historically as late works from the tradition of Trika philosophical theology called Pratyabhijñā, which was created by Utpaladeva (c. 900–950 C.E.) and further advanced by Abhinavagupta (c. 950–1025 C.E.). Substantively, the VAP and VAPV are valuable for their elucidation of the distinctive Pratyabhijñā psychological approach to empowering and divinizing the human ego and body.

The present chapter will provide basic information about the religious and intellectual contexts of the texts. The second chapter will discuss the narrative framing the VAP as a dialogue between Virūpākṣa and the Vedic deity Indra, and how this narrative continues the South Asian legacy of myths of the instruction of Indra. The third will exposit the basic teachings of the VAP and VAPV, and the fourth will make suggestions about how the texts may be engaged dialogically by means of comparative or intercultural philosophy. The short fifth chapter will address issues pertaining to the translation.

NAMES AND DATES

There is no evidence presently available to support the identification of Virūpākṣa with any known historical individual. I have wondered whether the narrative of the encounter of Indra with Virūpākṣa might, beyond its religious and philosophical significance, allude to the relationship of a royal patron with a monistic Śaiva scholar-practitioner. However, this is only a conjecture.

Textual references suggest that the VAP is from the eleventh or twelfth century C.E. The terminus a quo is indicated by the heavy use the text makes of the tenth to eleventh century writings of Abhinavagupta. The terminus ad quem is provided by the text's quotation in the twelfth century, South Indian *Mahārthamañjarīparimāla* of Maheśvarānanda.² The existence of a number of old Śāradā manuscripts of the text suggests that it may have come from the region of Kashmir.

There are more clues about the commentator, but they are again inconclusive. In the closing verses of the VAPV he proclaims, "This light commentary was composed by the glorious (Śrī) Vidyācakravartin, and placed on the touchstone named the intelligence of Govindacandra." Vidyācakravartin thus makes a contextual reference in naming someone who was perhaps his patron or guru. However, the identity of Govindacandra is another mystery. There was a twelfth century king of Kanauj with that name, who was the patron of Lakṣmīdhāra, author of the *Kṛtyakalpataru*. However, I am not aware of any evidence that Vidyācakravartin is referring to that Govindacandra.

There is some evidence suggesting, rather, that Vidyācakravartin was from South India. The only known manuscripts of his commentary have been found in that region, in scripts of South Indian languages. T. Ganapati Sastri for his 1910 edition used a manuscript in Malayalam script, from the Trivandrum Palace Library.³ Alexis Sanderson has also informed me of the existence of three manuscripts in Telugu script, in Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library in Thanjavur.⁴

The author of the VAPV is sometimes identified with a fourteenth century Vidyācakravartin thought to have belonged to the court of King Ballāla III of the Hoysala dynasty. Authorship of a number of works has been ascribed to that Vidyācakravartin, including the short monistic Śaiva text *Daśaślokī*, a *mahākāvya* titled *Rukminīkalyāṇa*, and commentaries on the poetics texts, Rucaka's *Alaṅkārasarvasva* and Mammaṭa's *Kāvya-prakāśa*.⁵ It is well established that monistic Śaiva, Śaiva Siddhānta, and other Kashmiri cultural traditions were transmitted to the region of South India during this period, and the aforementioned works are replete with refer-

ences to Kashmiri religion as well as poetics. However, I do not believe that it has yet been firmly demonstrated that one person was the author of all those texts as well as the VAPV. As an illustration of the complexity of the topic, it may be observed that S. S. Janaki has argued that the ostensible fourteenth century author was the last of a series of three Vidyācakravartins sponsored by the Hoysala dynasty!⁶

Sanderson has also thrown into some doubt the common assumption about the commentator's name. The concluding verses of the VAPV refer to the commentator as Śrī-Vidyācakravartin, which I have provisionally translated as "glorious Vidyācakravartin," but designate the patron or guru as Govindacandra. As Sanderson observes, if Śrī were the common honorific title, "glorious," and if Vidyācakravartin were the author of the final verses, it would have been markedly disrespectful for him to omit the honorific for Govindacandra. Sanderson suggests, therefore, that the commentator's proper name might actually have been Śrīvidyācakravartin.⁷

This argument is reasonable. However, I do not believe that it excludes the possible identity of the author of the VAPV with one or more authors from the court of Ballāla III or other Hoysala kings. I have found that the author of the *Saṃjivani* commentary on the *Alaṃkārasarvasva*, in what are presumably his own benedictory verses, refers to himself as Śrī-Vidyācakravartin and names Rucaka without the Śrī. Also of interest are Janaki's observations regarding that ostensible Vidyācakravartin that "an air of self-consciousness and pride is seen in our author"⁸ and that he refers to himself in "exaggerated terms of praise."⁹ One might be tempted to speculate whether his "pride" exemplifies the Pratyabhijñā philosophical psychology of perfected egoity that is taught in the VAP and VAPV. Again, however, this is ungrounded.

For the present study, I will continue provisionally to identify the commentator as Vidyācakravartin. I believe that there is a strong possibility that he was patronized by the Hoysala dynasty and that he wrote one or more of the other texts mentioned, but we cannot be certain.

MONISTIC KASHMIRI ŚAIVISM AND THE TANTRIC QUEST FOR POWER

What is commonly called Kashmir or Kashmiri Śaivism is actually a group of tantric and monistic Śaiva traditions that flourished in Kashmir from the latter centuries of the first millennium C.E. through the early centuries of the second. While these traditions have extended their influence throughout South Asia, they have survived only in a greatly attenuated form in Kashmir

itself. Recently, however, there have been efforts to revive them in India and globally. I prefer the designation monistic Śaivism or monistic Kashmiri Śaivism to distinguish these traditions from dualistic Śaivasiddhānta traditions that also flourished in medieval Kashmir.¹⁰

The classification of the monistic Śaiva traditions as “tantric” requires explanation. Asian and Western scholars have come to recognize that contemporary usages of the terms “tantra,” “tantrism,” and “tantric” do not agree in extension with those of any premodern South Asian traditions.¹¹ Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus among scholars toward using the terms to classify together religious movements on the basis of historical and thematic relations, regardless of their self-definitions.¹² Among the movements in the religious and philosophical dynamism of medieval Kashmir now classified as tantric are the interweaving Śaiva and Śākta lineages known as the Kaula, Krama, Spanda, and Trika; the Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra and Buddhist Vajrayāna.

What makes these traditions tantric? Probably the most generic and distinctive feature of these and other traditions that contemporary scholars call tantra is the pursuit of *power*. Hindu traditions understand this power as in essence Śakti, the Goddess herself. Tantric practitioners variously endeavor to identify with the Goddess, to be ecstatically possessed by her, or to become her possessor (*śaktiman*) in identifying with her consort (e.g., one of the forms of Śiva or Viṣṇu).¹³

A number of other features of Hindu tantrism are widely accepted by scholars, which may be understood as doctrinal and practical expressions of this quest for Śakti.¹⁴ These include cosmogonic myths of the sexual union of Śakti with a male deity, along with practices that recapitulate that union in contemplation or actual intercourse; circular diagrams of cosmogenesis and cosmocracy (*maṇḍala*); empowered speech formulas (*mantra*); theological schemes tracing homologies between the transcendent and immanent modalities of emanating Śakti; the divinization of the experience of embodiment; and the synthesis of embodied enjoyment (*bhoga*) with spiritual practice (*yoga*) and liberation (*mokṣa*).¹⁵

Much of the variety within tantrism derives from the particular modalities of Śakti that are pursued. Tantric powers range from the relatively limited yogic “proficiencies” (*siddhis*)¹⁶ of local “shamans,” through the sovereignty of kings (traditionally great sponsors of Hindu and Buddhist tantric traditions), to the omnipotence of the person who has become liberated by completely identifying with the deity.¹⁷

In his classic studies, Alexis Sanderson has illuminated the ways in which the tantric pursuit of powers transgresses orthodox, upper-caste

Hindu norms that delimit human agency for the sake of symbolic-ritual purity (*śuddhi*).¹⁸ Many of the tantric rites were originally performed in cremation grounds, which are traditionally viewed in South Asia as extremely impure. Prescriptions for the sexual ritual commonly advocate adultery and caste-mixing, and apparently sometimes even incest.¹⁹ David White has recently argued that tantra originated in ancient Siddha practices that endeavored to gain benefits from *yoginīs* through the transgressive offering and ingestion of sexual fluids.²⁰ In some traditions, there is the ingestion of urine, excrement, phlegm, and even, allegedly, human flesh.²¹

HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF KASHMIRI TANTRISM: THE PHILOSOPHICAL RATIONALIZATION OF MONISTIC ŚAIVA TRADITIONS

Sanderson, White, Mark Dyczkowski, Ronald Inden, and others have documented crucial historical trends in the early Kashmiri tantric traditions. One of these is the traditions' continual appropriation and subordination, which Sanderson calls "overcoding," of the symbolism and ritual of each other as well as of more established traditions.²² Of course, the hierarchizing aspects of culture have been a central concern throughout the contemporary humanities and social sciences, and analogous processes have been observed in other South Asian religions.²³ Tantric traditions are remarkable for the baroque complexity and convolutedness of this hierarchization.²⁴

Another important development was the tantric traditions' efforts to "domesticize" or "Sanskritize" (though their scriptures were already in Sanskrit) by assimilating to more established upper-caste Hindu orthopraxy.²⁵ Some of the more radical practices, such as those involving cremation grounds and sexual rituals, were toned down and internalized, and the emphasis became more gnoseological. An aspect of this trend that has been emphasized by White is the "dissimulation" by practitioners of their transgressive engagements under the guise of upper-caste, householder propriety.²⁶ Likewise, increasingly popular soteriologies aiming at identity with the omnipotent deity may be viewed as in a sense "sublimations" of pursuits of more concrete magical and political powers.

My own research has focused on another highly consequential expression of this process of domesticization, the enrichment and "philosophical rationalization" of monistic Śaivism through Sanskritic traditions of academic discourse and philosophical dialogue. Often candidly inspired with a sense of religious mission, monistic Śaiva writers began to consolidate their complex spiritual inheritance in increasingly systematic manuals (*śāstras*) of

doctrines and practices. An important expression of this development in the ninth century was the production by Vasugupta and his disciple Kallaṭa of the core texts of the “Spanda system,” the *Śiva Sūtra* and the *Spanda Kārikā*.²⁷ The commentaries on these works continued the project of systematization and justification.

It was a tradition of monistic Śaivism called Trika (“Triadism,” referring to its emphasis on various triads of modalities of Śakti and cosmic levels) that produced the first work of full-scale philosophical apologetics against rival schools of Hinduism and Buddhism. This was the *Śivadṛṣṭi*, “*Cognition of Śiva*,” by Somānanda (c. 900–950 C.E.). Somānanda’s pupil Utpaladeva (c. 900–950 C.E.) continued his teacher’s initiative with much greater sophistication in composing the foundational texts and commentaries of the *Īśvarapratyabhijñā* or simply *Pratyabhijñā* system, which became the authoritative system of monistic Śaiva philosophical theology.²⁸

The polymathic Abhinavagupta (c. 950–1020 C.E.), a disciple of a disciple of Utpaladeva, wrote long commentaries further elaborating Utpaladeva’s philosophical arguments.²⁹ Despite the paramount philosophical importance of those commentaries, Abhinavagupta’s greatest significance in the history of tantrism was his effort in his monumental *Tantrāloka*, “*Illumination of the Tantras*,”³⁰ and numerous other works, to systematize and provide a critical philosophical structure to *nonphilosophical* Trika theology. Abhinava utilized categories from the Pratyabhijñā philosophy to interpret and organize the diverse aspects of Trika symbolism, doctrine, and practice. And bringing to a sort of culmination the hermeneutics of overcoding, he synthesized under the rubric of this philosophically rationalized Trika an enormous range of symbolism and practice from Kaula, Krama, Spanda, and other Śaiva and Śākta traditions.³¹

Abhinavagupta is also renowned for his works on Sanskrit poetics, in which he interprets aesthetic experience as homologous to and practically approaching the monistic Śaiva soteriological realization. With Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, Hindu tantra reached its peak of intellectual sophistication. As further elaborated in the writings of their followers, their ideas had a tremendous influence on tantric as well as bhakti traditions throughout South Asia. The influence of Pratyabhijñā philosophy and soteriology is evident in most later Sanskritic traditions of Hindu tantrism.

Granting the practical antecedency of philology and descriptive history, with what theoretical methods should we endeavor further to understand the Pratyabhijñā philosophy as well as later philosophically rationalized Śaiva and Śākta tantric traditions? The dominant theoretical approaches of

the contemporary humanities and social sciences are inclined to explain culture in terms of the advancement, maintenance, and enjoyment of social, political, and economic power. I certainly would not deny the great influence of such motivations throughout world history, but would only question how far we should presuppose that influence to extend.

In South Asian studies it is becoming increasingly common to explain processes such as philosophical rationalization, overcoding, and domesticization exclusively in such terms. Thus, according to White, what he calls “the ‘high Hindu’ Tantric mysticism of the later Tantric exegetes” originated as “an effort to win a certain support base of high-caste householders in Kashmir and, later, in Tamil Nadu.”³² Accordingly, in their philosophical and soteriological aspects:

Exegetical or scholasticist Tantric works . . . constitute a secondary development, a hermeneutical transformation of an earlier body of practice into a mystical metaphysics, which often systematically distorts the meaning of the original practice itself.³³

White alleges that:

Abhinavagupta’s “packaging” of Tantra as a path to ecstatic, exalted god-consciousness was pitched at a leisured Kashmiri populace whose “bobo” profile was arguably homologous to the demographics of the twentieth- and twenty-first-century New Age seekers who treat “Tantric sex” as a consumer product.³⁴

Some of the most brilliant, erudite, and inspired writers in world history, along with centuries of their followers, are assimilated to the commodified banality of contemporary bourgeois bohemian culture.

While White’s and other studies founded on a similar paradigm provide a wealth of valuable knowledge, such claims are exaggerated and prejudicial. In tantra as elsewhere, sometimes it is a straightforward matter to distinguish hermeneutic distortion from creative insight, but often not. The same is the case in ascribing implicit motivations. We may be blinded, ironically, to an insidious hegemonic Orientalism or “ethos-centrism” in our critical reductions of other cultures to the counters of a globalized system obsessed with profit and consumption, political world order, marketing, and media spin. While the achievement and enjoyment of practical advantages have long been acknowledged among the possible benefits of

the tantric realization of Power (Śakti), why should we assume that soteriology and philosophy are epiphenomena?

Before pursuing reductionistic theories and social critiques, or endeavoring to debunk tantric *śāstras* by a postulation of pristine and authentic sexual transgression, we should extend the hermeneutic and dialogical charity of attempting seriously to engage with the stated religious and philosophical concerns of Sanskrit writers.³⁵ For us, as for those writers, attempting to critically understand the monistic Śaiva quest for Śakti leads to complex and fascinating epistemological, metaphysical, psychological, and ethical considerations.

DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES OF EMPOWERMENT IN MONISTIC KASHMIRI ŚAIVISM

As may be gathered from the appellation “monistic Śaivism,” a basic doctrinal position of this stream of tantric traditions is that the only reality is the God Śiva. Śiva is thus the true Self of all beings. These traditions overcode the fundamental tantric principle of power, Śakti, within Śiva’s metaphysical essence. Śiva is the *śaktiman*, the “possessor” of Śakti, encompassing her within his androgynous nature as his integral power and consort. According to the central monistic Śaiva myth, Śiva divides himself from Śakti and then in sexual union emanates and controls the universe through her.

Liberation, the realization of one’s true Self as Śiva, is accomplished through a great variety of ritual and contemplative practices. The basic pattern of praxis, which Sanderson has suggested also reflects the appropriation of Śāktism by Śaivism, is the *approach to Śiva through Śakti*. As the *Vijñāna Bhairava* states, Śakti is Śiva’s “door” or “face” (*mukha*).³⁶ The adept strives to attain identity with Śiva through the recapitulation of the myth, to become the *śaktiman*, the possessor and enjoyer of Śakti. Thus, in the Kaula sexual ritual a man realizes himself as the possessor of Śakti immanent within his partner.³⁷ In the monistic Śaiva appropriation of Kālī Krama tantrism, one contemplates oneself as the possessor of *śakticakras*, circles of Śaktis. The *Spanda* tradition pursues the possession of *śakticakras* understood as *Spanda*, “Creative Vibration.”

Within the historical elaboration of monistic Śaiva theology, and especially in the grand syntheses of Abhinavagupta, an astonishing number of what might be called secondary codes were propounded for the same basic mythic and ritual pattern—in the terms of philosophical theories, pantheons of higher and lower deities, hierarchies of emanating mantras

and cosmic principles, *maṇḍala* iconography, and various other symbols, metaphors, and analogies. In the remainder of this chapter, I will review certain of these expressions of monistic Śaiva doctrine and practice that will be helpful in understanding the background to the teachings of the VAP and VAPV.

PRATYABHIJÑĀ PHILOSOPHY AND THE PERFECTION OF EGOITY

Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, belying the Western dichotomy of faith (or mysticism) and reason, conceive the Pratyabhijñā system simultaneously as a philosophical apologetics and an internalized tantric ritual. They structure its discourse according to the most widely accepted Sanskrit standards for publicly assessable philosophical argument, which had been systematized as a set of sixteen categories by the Nyāya school of philosophy. Their proclaimed goal is through this discourse to lead students to the soteriological *recognition* (*pratyabhijñā*) “I am Śīva.”³⁸

Utpaladeva describes the primary modus operandi of the Pratyabhijñā in accordance with the basic monistic Śaiva mythico-ritual pattern described earlier, as the “revealing of Śakti” (*śaktyāviśkarana*). In this case, as Abhinavagupta explains, the process is rationalized as a Nyāya syllogism, known as the “inference for the sake of others” (*parārthānumāna*). The inferential subject is oneself, “I,” and the predicate is “Śīva.” Śakti is now the inferential reason, which is supposed to identify a quality in the subject known to be invariably concomitant with the predicate. Thus, the Pratyabhijñā demonstrates that I am Śīva because I have his quality, that is, Śakti, the capacity of emanating and controlling the universe.

The Pratyabhijñā thinkers also identify the insight gained by the revealing of Śakti with the experience comprehended in a monistic Śaiva cosmological principle called “Pure Wisdom” (*śuddhavidyā*).³⁹ According to them, Pure Wisdom is the awareness of oneself as the emanator of the universe, expressed “I am this.”⁴⁰ Abhinava further elaborates that this insight animates what he calls “good reasoning” (*sattarka*) which, counteracting ordinary deluded and dualistic thinking, leads to a “purification of conceptual constructions” (*vikalpasamskāra*).⁴¹

The central moment of the Pratyabhijñā system is the explanation of Śīva’s emanation and control of the universe through Śakti as an act self-recognition (*pratyabhijñā, ahampratyavamarśa*).⁴² As will be discussed further, Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta further identify Śīva’s self-recognition/Śakti with the principle of Supreme Speech (*parāvāk*), which

they derive from the linguistic philosopher Bhartṛhari. Another key category with which they identify it is omnipotent agency (*kartṛtā*).

According to Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, Śiva emanates through differentiating his self-recognition (or Speech or agency) into discrete acts of recognitive-linguistic apprehension⁴³ that idealistically constitute all objects of experience.⁴⁴ Śiva recognizes himself even through limited objective judgments such as “This is blue” and “This is yellow.” Various epistemological, metaphysical, and linguistic theories, by demonstrating the necessity and foundational status of the recognition “I am Śiva,” attempt to lead the student to experience and possess the recognition that “I am Śiva.”⁴⁵

In the area of philosophical psychology, the Pratyabhijñā thinkers describe the empowered Śiva-identity recognized by the practitioner as a higher sense of I (*aḥam*) or, more abstractly, I-hood (*aḥambhāva*), which also came to be called “perfect I-hood” (*pūrṇāḥantā*). Michel Hulin and Mark Dyczkowski have demonstrated the historical innovativeness of this theory and its great influence on later tantric traditions. Dyczkowski describes it as a conception of “absolute” or “super” “egoity” (not to be confused with the Freudian superego).⁴⁶ He explains:

This concept of Self as pure, absolute ego-consciousness is quite unique in the history of Indian thought. It is found only in monistic Kashmiri Śaiva schools and those traditions (like the Śākta *Śrīvidyā*) that have been directly influenced by them.⁴⁷

A sense of egoity precursory to the Pratyabhijñā theory is, in my view, found in earlier tantric and even some Upaniṣadic realizations of empowerment.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Dyczkowski’s contention is valid with regard to the Pratyabhijñā philosophical psychological understanding of egoity. Contrary to earlier Hindu and Buddhist thought, the Pratyabhijñā system and Pratyabhijñā-inspired tantrism do not advocate the surrender of ordinary egoistic identity, referred to by such terms as “I-concept” (*aḥamkāra*), “pride” or “self-conception” (*abhimāna*), “I-am-ness” (*asmitā*), and “I-hood” (*aḥantā*). For this mode of thinking, the human ego is an immanent expression of God’s identity *that must be universalized and transfigured into its essential nature as perfect I-hood*.⁴⁹

Abhinavagupta further elaborates that integral to the perfect egoity of God is a state of satiety he variously describes as “rest in the self” (*svātmaviśrānti*), “self-enjoyment” (*svātmopabhoga*), and “self-relishing” (*svātmacamatkāra*, *svaviśayāsvāda*). Through practices ranging from the Kaula

sexual ritual through aesthetic appreciation and philosophical and theological contemplations, ordinary selfish pleasures are transfigured into that divine satiety. The richness and profundity of the Pratyabhijñā interpretation of the divinization and empowerment of egoity account for much of the influence of the system on later tantric doctrine and practice.

SEMANTICS AND SYNTAX OF THE PERFECT I

As mentioned, the Pratyabhijñā thinkers identify the Śakti and self-recognition of the Self/Śiva with the principle, Supreme Speech, derived from the Grammarian Bhartṛhari. They accordingly follow Bhartṛhari in explaining emanation as occurring through a bifurcation of Supreme Speech into ordinary expressive speech (*vācaka*) and the objective referents of that speech (*vācya*). The origination of this polarity from a common superlinguistic source makes the entire universe of experience inherently linguistic, and provides the ground for the reconnection of words and objects in conventional linguistic reference.⁵⁰ The complete reversal of the cosmic fragmentation occurs in the soteriological recognition.

Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta expound many philosophical as well as “theosophical” ramifications of this theory throughout their writings. Important to the VAP and VAPV is Abhinava’s contemplation of the nature of perfect egoity as encompassing all speech and referents, in terms of an occult etymology of the word *aham*, “I,” itself. This also justifies the choice of *aham* as a favorite monistic Śaiva mantra. To mention the relevant aspects of this complex scheme, according to it, *aham* encompasses all Sanskrit phonemes from the first in the traditional enumeration, *a*, through the last, *ha*, and the graphemic *bindu*, *m*—along with the corresponding cosmic cycle of emission and reabsorption.

An overlapping scheme describes emanation and return in terms of two triads of cosmic courses (*adhvan*)—phonemes (*varṇa*), mantras and words (*pada*) on the side of expressive speech (*vācaka*), and cosmic segments (*kalā*), cosmic principles (*tattva*) and cosmic realms (*bhuvana*) as the referents of that speech (*vācya*).⁵¹ On the basis of the conception of semantically foundational Supreme Speech as the essence of scriptural traditions (*āgama*),⁵² Abhinavagupta also justifies the overcoding of the authoritative oral and written texts of competing schools of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. According to him, the scriptures of other traditions provide their followers with progressively more “perfect” or “complete” (*pūrṇa*) realizations of the monistic Śaiva perfect I-hood.⁵³

Such semantic speculations are only the beginning of the monistic Śaiva linguistic theory. Correlative to their identification of Śakti and self-recognition as Speech, Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta further interpret monistic Śaiva empowered identity with a philosophical theory of *syntax* that I have previously described as a “mythico-ritual syntax of omnipotence.”⁵⁴ The relevant considerations pertain to how verbs expressing action (*kriyā*) relate to declined nouns referring to the concomitants of action (*kāraṅkas*).⁵⁵

Edwin Gerow and I have separately argued that there is a tendency in many traditions of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy to denigrate the role of the agent in the syntactic nexus.⁵⁶ Among Hindu schools, this tendency appears to be strongest in Advaita Vedānta, while Buddhists from Nāgārjuna to Dharmakīrti entirely negate the role of the agent in the syntax of dependent origination. In Gerow’s view, this tendency culminated in the late Hindu grammarian Nāgeśa’s treatment of passive intransitive syntax as most paradigmatic. This denigration of agency seems to reflect not only the agent’s bondage to karma in rebirth for Hindus and Buddhists—as emphasized by Gerow⁵⁷—but also its subordination to the order of objective ritual behavior—pertaining to sacrifice, caste, life cycle, and so on—in orthodox Brahmanic norms.

Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta develop a grammar of omnipotence by taking up and radicalizing earlier understandings of the positive albeit delimited role of the agent, particularly from the Vyākaraṇa and Nyāya traditions. Through his self-recognition, Śiva forms the intention (*icchā*) for action, and is the instigator (*prayojaka*) and encompassing locus (*vyāpārāśraya*) of all processes in the universe along with all their accessories. Whereas God/the Self is “self-determined” or “independent” (*svatantra*) in relation to the operations of all the other factors of action, the latter are “determined by another” (*paratantra*), namely, the agent.⁵⁸

The Pratyabhijñā syntax of agency not only interprets the monistic Śaiva myth, but it is also ritually axiomatic. Utpaladeva describes the Pratyabhijñā philosophy as leading to salvation through the contemplation of one’s status as the agent of the universe. Abhinavagupta likewise explains that the aspirant’s goal in more concrete ritual action is identification with Śiva as the agent impelling all things indicated by nouns declined as nonagents—the ritual paraphernalia manipulated by the adept epitomizing all other cosmic entities.⁵⁹

There is more to the Pratyabhijñā grammar of empowered identity than the theory of noun-verb relations that I explicated in my first studies.

The VAP and VAPV also advert to Abhinavagupta's further elaboration of this grammar in terms of the semantics and syntax of *grammatical persons*. As expressed in conjugations, personal pronouns, and sometimes declensions, the grammatical persons are the familiar triad of He/She/It/They (called in Sanskrit the "first person" and in English the "third person"), You (Sanskrit "middle person," English "second person") and I/We (Sanskrit "final person," English "first person"). Abhinava's views about grammatical persons are remarkable for ways in which they anticipate theories of later thinkers such as Charles Peirce and Emile Benveniste, although his overarching intellectual and religious agenda is quite different.

Like contemporary thinkers, Abhinava acknowledges that the three persons in ordinary discourse are defined by their mutual distinctions and are arbitrary in their reference. However, he also ranks the persons hierarchically. He affirms the privilege of I/We as indicating the enunciator of discourse, over the addressee You and the noninterlocutory He/She/It, with an observation—anticipating Benveniste—about their degrees of extension. That is, what is called in English the second person You can include the third person He/She/It/They. The first person, as We, can also include You and He, She or They. The wider extension of the first person points to its still much greater, ultimate significance.

According to Abhinava, the ranking of the three persons reflects the basic triadic structure of emanation according to Trika: Śiva, Śakti, Human (*nara*). That is, I as the enunciator of discourse corresponds to the omnipotent Self as Śiva, as the whole universe is ultimately My Supreme Speech. The addressee, You, is identified with Śakti according to the model of Śiva's dialogues with Śakti in tantric scriptures. The noninterlocutory He/She/It represents the unenlightened human reduced to the condition of inert objects. Abhinava prescribes a contemplation of return in which all forms of He/She/It are *personalized* as absorbed into You as Śakti. And You as Śakti are realized to be *My* integral power and consort.⁶⁰

UNIVERSALIZATION OF THE BODY AND REFLECTED IDENTITY

Another approach to empowered identity in monistic Śaivism that is especially important to the VAP and VAPV is the transformation of the sense of embodiment. Tantric traditions resonate with contemporary cultural theories in conceiving *embodiment* as integral to human identity. They do not, however, celebrate the status quo experience of the human body. For them, rather, the ordinary experience of the body is an extremely limited

and inadequate realization of much greater possibilities. Developing precedents in the Vedas, Upaniṣads, Bhāgavad Gītā, and earlier tantrism, the monistic Śaivas interpret the Self's/Śiva's entire cosmic emanation through Śakti as the true *body*.⁶¹ The *Śiva Sūtra* thus proclaims that all that is observable (*dṛśya*), that is, the universe, is one's body.⁶²

The limited human body is a microcosm that replicates the macrocosmic body emanated by Śiva through Śakti. Gavin Flood explains how the fleshly body manifests the transcendent-cum-immanent Ultimate Reality:

The human body, which is a consequence of the contraction of consciousness, is thought to contain the higher universe beyond it and also the absolute consciousness of Śiva with which it is ultimately identical and of which it is a projected form. The human body is, therefore, homologous with the cosmical hierarchy, which we might call the 'manifest cosmic body,' and contains within its transcendent source, which we might call the 'essential cosmic body.'⁶³

By such reasoning the human body becomes one of the primary foci for monistic Śaiva transformative practices:

The body is regarded as the vehicle of transformation, being of central importance in Śaiva yoga and in the Trika liturgies, during which awareness of identity with supreme Śiva is thought to expand and to fill the body. Such an expansion of awareness is, for the Śaiva monist, an expansion of awareness through the cosmos and a recognition that both universe and absolute are identical with the body.⁶⁴

The monistic Śaivas thus employ various tantric techniques for what may be described equally as the "universalization" of the human body and the "corporification" of the universe. Such techniques in effect "overcode" the routine cultural techniques—of action, rest, washing, life cycle, and so on—that Marcel Mauss described as constituting the bodily "habitus" of ordinary men and women.⁶⁵ This transformation is evinced in the purification of the elements (*bhūtaśuddhi*) and the projection of divinizing mantric syllables (*nyāsa*) on the body and ritual implements, which are performed as preliminaries to worship. Through these practices, the adept resolves the gross elements of his or her physical body into their subtle

essences. The adept symbolically burns away the limitations of the physical body, and through the contemplative infusion of divine nectar manifests his or her divinized body.⁶⁶

A variety of tantric practices are conceived to awaken Śakti as Kuṇḍalinī, often symbolized in the form of a serpent, dormant in the energy center (*cakra*) at the base of the spine. As she ascends through higher energy centers she divinizes the subtle physiology of the human body.⁶⁷ In the sexual ritual, the male and female partners physically become Śiva and Śakti, and realize their primordial unity in their very genitalia and sexual fluids.⁶⁸ I also mention that the transformation of embodiment in tantric traditions is often understood greatly to improve the health or strength of the practitioner's human body, or even to make it immortal.⁶⁹

Another important monistic Kashmiri Śaiva code for the myth and ritual of Śakti possession, closely related to those of egoity and embodiment, makes use of the metaphor or analogy of reflection (*pratibimba*). Although this code is not directly addressed by the VAP and VAPV, I believe that a review of it will help us to understand those texts.

The analogy of reflection actually has a long and complex history in South Asian religious and philosophical traditions for explaining the relation of the Ultimate Reality, God, or the higher Self to the multiplicity of limited subjects and objects that constitute the universe. Moreover, as Phyllis Granoff has shown, reflection is often said to constitute the *body* of the Ultimate Reality or of the enlightened being. As manifest in *iconography or imaginary forms* the reflection (*pratibimba*, *pratimā*) provides Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions an accessible mode of approach to the Ultimate.⁷⁰

It was Abhinavagupta who fully established the use of the model of reflection to articulate the basic mythic and recapitulatory ritual structures of monistic Śaivism.⁷¹ The pattern is similar to that observed by Granoff regarding images or reflections as the body and immanent mode of access to the divine. For Abhinavagupta, however, just as the whole universe is the Śakti-body of the Self as Śiva, it is also one's *own* reflection.

Abhinava thus interprets various modes of practice as leading to identification with Śiva through the realization *that the entire emanated universe is one's reflection*. Techniques that he describes in this manner include the Pratyabhijñā philosophy itself, theosophical meditations in the *Tantrāloka*, *Tantrasāra*, and *Parātrīśikāvivarāṇa* on emanating mantric phonemes and cosmic principles,⁷² and even the Kaula congregation (*yoginīmelaka*) and aesthetic experience.

Abhinava's explanations of the myth and practice of empowered identity in terms of reflection were further diffused along with the rest of his theology to other intellectual traditions of Hindu tantrism. The authors of the VAP and VAPV would certainly have been aware of these interpretations, even though they do not mention them. It will be useful to keep these teachings on reflection in mind as we recount, in chapter 2, an Upaniṣadic teaching on reflected identity, and endeavor in chapter 4 to engage the Odd-Eyed One's instructions on divine egoity with Western conceptions of "narcissism."