

Chapter One

Śiva's Triple Emission and the Three Aspects of Kuṇḍalinī

In the third chapter of the *Tantrāloka*, Abhinavagupta describes the phases of the universal emission in relation to the various aspects of Kuṇḍalinī.

“The supreme energy of the Deity, the *akula*, is [the energy] *kaulikī*, through whom the supreme Consciousness, or *kula*, expands.

The Lord is inseparable from her” (67).

Jayaratha glosses: *Kula*, the supreme Consciousness whence arises the diversified universe and whither it withdraws, is free of Śiva and his energy. This is *anuttara* (*A*), the ineffable, pure light and ultimate Reality, giving birth within itself to the essence of the couple Śiva-Śakti when, out of its absolute freedom, it wishes to manifest the universe.

Akula, on the other hand, characterizes Śiva as light (*prakāśa*), transcendent, and unequalled (*anuttara*).

He becomes emitting through his *kaulikī* energy, namely “self-awareness (*vimarśa*).” That supreme subtle energy, Kuṇḍalinī, joins with Śiva in a unifying friction of mutual delight, and

then rises and assumes the form of the energies of will, knowledge and activity (p. 17).

“The merging, that of the couple (*yāmala*) Śiva and Śakti, is the energy of bliss (*ānandaśakti, Ā*) wherefrom the entire universe comes into being: a reality beyond the supreme and the nonsupreme, it is called Goddess, essence and (glorious) Heart: this is the emission, the supreme Lord” (68-69).

According to the gloss, the unifying friction is a surging forth, a vibration, a blissful energy originating the universal flow. At this stage Śiva and the energy appear to be distinct: Śiva is transcendent in relation to the universe, while the energy remains immanent, without her plenitude being diminished.

So *kaulikī* is a wish to emit, an awareness, forever one with the supreme conscious Subject. As the effervescence¹ incites a move outward, she starts emitting. Then bliss awakens gradually as the surging forth of the Self is revealed and extends as far as the energy of activity.²

The absolute energy, identical with eminent Consciousness (*parasamvit*), is also called *amākalā*, the seventeenth energy, supreme bliss, self-awareness, and complete freedom. Without her nothing would exist. Identical with Śiva, she manifests as Life and universal glory.

Abhinavagupta quotes from the *Triśirobhairava* about this: “The seventeenth *kalā* has ambrosia (*amṛta*) for her essence and mode. Spreading through the movement of the point (*bindu*), which becomes twofold as a supreme-non-supreme emission, she constitutes the manifested effulgence of all things.

“When she does not emit, Kuṇḍalinī assumes the form of pure, quiescent energy, *śaktikuṇḍalikā*. Subsequently she becomes *prānakūṇḍalinī*, vital or breath energy. Even when she has reached the extreme point of emission, she remains supreme Kuṇḍalinī, called supreme Brahman, firmament of Śiva and abode of the Self. The alternate movements of emanation and resorption are solely the emission of the Lord.”³

In quoting from the same Tantra, Jayaratha glosses: the abode of the Self transcending all the ways is called “energy, *kūṇḍalī*, supreme firmament of Consciousness”; undifferentiated, unparalleled, it is beyond the scope of the criteria of knowledge. In this supreme realm, at the peak of the firmament of Conscious-

1. *Procchalantī sthiti*.

2. Comm. of śl.136-137, p. 138-140.

3. III. śl.137-141.

ness, things or notions never arise. Let this highest peak be regarded as the firmament of Śiva, the universal receptacle. As that which grows and makes grow while turned inward, thus appears the supreme Brahman, qualifying everything but not qualified by anything.⁴

Sovereign Consciousness encompasses the movements of emanation and of resorption of the universe in the aspects of knower, knowledge and known, all this being nothing but the Lord's emission.

The Triple Emission (*visarga*)

The term *visarga* refers both to the creative emission (*viṣṛj-*) and the two points, a mark of the alphabet indicating a slight aspiration at the end of a vowel. Creative emission takes place through a double movement: the unifying friction of Śiva and the energy. In humans also this same movement takes place, in the friction of inhaled and exhaled breaths within the median channel or, as well, in sexual union.

So, *visarga* is the origin and consummation of the flow of virile capacity (*vīrya*) and of Kuṅḍalinī's ascent.

Supreme Emission

Abhinavagupta defines the emitting state (*vaisargikī sthiti*), which is bliss, as "the projection of the Self into the Self and by the Self" (141).

According to Jayaratha, this pure emission of the Lord in which everything proceeds from the Self is a dazzling unfoldment (*parisphūraṇa*) that assumes inner and outer aspects.

Intermediate Emission

Simultaneously supreme and nonsupreme, the emission peculiar to *śaktikuṅḍalinī* pertains to the *kula* energy or *śaktivi-sarga*. It is Kuṅḍalinī as consciousness (*vimarśakuṅḍalinī*).

The initial movement prior to the actual emission is when

4. Comm. pp. 140-143.

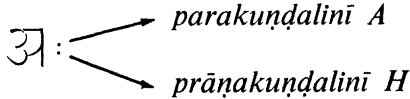
kulakuṇḍalinī begins to stir; she is said to be “swollen”⁵ like a seed about to germinate. Pure quiescent energy, *śaktikuṇḍalinī*, not turned outward yet, lies dormant and rests within herself in the form of consciousness (*samvit*). Although free from any emitting flow, she is characterized as *visarjanīya*, because a subtle tendency can be traced in her toward the emission of the universe. It appears as some stirring but still immersed in undivided plenitude, that of perfect interiority, the objective energy being absorbed in and merged with the subjective energy. The single point, *bindu*⁶ or *akula Śiva*, starts fissuring, which gives rise to the two points of the *visarga*.

In *śaktikuṇḍalinī* these two points balance perfectly, but should they start to become unbalanced, one predominating over the other, a faint tendency to manifest appears. As soon as one of the points withdraws, the other one becomes visible. If the energy makes the universe arise, Śiva remains unrevealed and without equal; if she resorbs the universe, Śiva shines forth in all his glory. Still the immutable Śiva is never subject to any alteration.

Because of this double point, *śaktikuṇḍalinī* is expressed as the *visarga*, namely the phoneme *H*, free from manifestation and transcribed in the form of two superposed dots representing the twofold tendency peculiar to this energy:

Ā, bliss (*ānanda*) and *H*, the expression of the act of emitting which ends in vital rhythm or breath (*prāṇa*).

Śiva, bindu, akula = ॐ

śaktikuṇḍalinī = ॐ : 

Since *śaktikuṇḍalinī* participates in the level characterized as both supreme and non-supreme, she is intermediate between the two Kuṇḍalinī described as follows: if her point is turned inward (*āntarkoṭī*), she merges into Śiva and regains her essence as the seventeenth *kalā*, pure consciousness or supreme Kuṇḍalinī. If her point is turned outward and she begins to stir (*kṣobha*), she becomes, at the lower stage of emission, *H*, the energy of vital

5. *Ucchūnantī*.

6. *Anusvāra*, nasal resonance indicated by a point above a consonant symbolizing the condensed energy of speech.

breath, *prāṇakuṇḍalinī*; and, this emission getting more dense, the breath is called *haṁsa* (swan), a consonant.⁷

Lower Emission and *Prāṇakuṇḍalinī*

The Kuṇḍalinī of vital breath precedes the emanation itself, from which emerge the levels of reality (*tattva*).

Situated at the dawn of the cosmic unfoldment, she is still only the first throb of the objective manifestation, a mere tendency to exteriorize, hence the expression “*ādikoṭi*”—point turned toward the origin, namely, the manifestation of the universe.

Kṣemarāja⁸ shows how Consciousness transforms itself into vital energy. Although it is the innermost Reality and the universal substratum, the supreme Consciousness, concealing its true essence at the stage of illusion (*māyā*), keeps on exteriorizing, and when it reaches the point (the *bindu* in *H*), its movement comes to an end; then it has unfolded itself into *prāṇa*, as expressed by the famous statement: “Initially Consciousness unfolded itself into vital breath.”⁹

Having made vital energy (*prāṇasakti*) its own during a gradual descent, Consciousness rests at the stages of intelligence, body, etc., following the course of thousands of channels (*nāḍī*). Then it assumes the aspect of the central channel¹⁰ when, taking breath energy for support, it descends from the crown of the head to the lower opening at the base of the spine.¹¹ It is compared to the central vein of the leaf of the *dhāka* or *palāśa* tree, to which the other ribs connect, for it is from this channel that all functions spring forth, and also within it that they come to rest. This channel is empty (*śūnya*) and it is named *haṁsa*, swan or central breath.¹² In this way, it not only corresponds to the manifestation of the energy, but also to its return to the vital, phonic and cosmic source.

7. Cf. III p. 142 and śl 142.

8. Cf. P.H. sūtra 1, comm.

9. *Prāk samvit prāṇa parinatā*. T.A. VI.8 quoting Kallaṭa.

10. *Suṣumnā* or *madhyānāḍī*.

11. From the *brahmarandhra* to the *adhovaktra*.

12. Cf. here p. 49, the enunciation of *OM* as spontaneous and eternal movement. According to the S.S.v. III.27, simply breathing means continuous repetition of the breath mantra, viz. *haṁsa*.

Parā or Pūrṇākuṇḍalinī

However, in a move toward her origin, Kuṇḍalinī, after having become *śaktikuṇḍalinī*, then *prāṇakuṇḍalinī*, spontaneously returns to plenitude though not deprived of the emitting tendency for, in such plenitude,¹³ there is nothing but act and movement; the entire universe, inseparable from Śiva, abides in the supreme energy, *parakuṇḍalinī*.

It is to be noted that this return is an enrichment in comparison to the point of departure, since Kuṇḍalinī then encompasses the whole world. For Śiva to reveal himself as Paramaśiva, the All, beyond immanence and transcendence, Kuṇḍalinī must emerge from him and return to him.

Thus in the Kula system Kuṇḍalinī is regarded as the origin, the substance and the consummation of everything.

13. That of the absolute I (*pūrṇāhantā*) where Śiva and Śakti are inseparably united. Triple *visarga*: (1) *Paravisarga*: *vaisargikā sthiti*, Śiva, *akula*, *bindu*, *prakāśa* = *śaktivimarśa*; (2) *Parāparavisarga*: *śaktivisarga*, *śaktikuṇḍalinī*, *H*, *vimarśakuṇḍalinī*. *visarjanīya* and *kulakuṇḍalinī*; (3) *Aparavisarga*: *prāṇakuṇḍalinī*, *H*, *haṃsa*, vital breath.