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Shiva As The Epistemic Being: An Analytical Exploration Of Divine Knowledge And Consciousness

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Abstract

This paper examines the notion of Shiva as an epistemic being, focusing on the relationship between divine knowledge and consciousness. Within various philosophical traditions, especially Kashmir Shaivism, Shiva is not only seen as a supreme deity but also as the ultimate consciousness and the source of all knowledge. The analysis investigates how Shiva embodies key epistemic principles such as self-awareness, transcendence, and omniscience, highlighting the dynamic interplay between the knower, the known, and the process of knowing. By exploring foundational texts like the Shiva Sutras and the works of scholars such as Abhinavagupta, the paper explores Shiva's role as both the origin and ultimate realization of knowledge, situating this within the broader context of epistemology. The study seeks to reveal how divine consciousness provides valuable insights into the nature of knowledge, perception, and understanding, proposing a new framework for rethinking the philosophical foundations of knowing.

Key words: *shaivism, pratyabhijna, sadaka, nirvikalpa, savikalpa.*

Introduction

A closer look at Shaiva Tantra reveals the fundamental difference between 'being' and 'becoming'. Kashmiri Shaivism is mainly interpreted in two ways, one Agama and second Nigama. In this, the Agamas are the teachings of Lord Shiva to Parvati. Parvati is advised of the means to lead her from ordinary consciousness (material consciousness) to Shivatva, i.e. Parabrahman. Tirumala Nayanar says importance of agamas in his work *Thirumantiram*, he blue-bodied Parshvavakthran (shiva) recited twenty-eight Agamas for these lokas, all of which were recited in his fifth face. Tirumala Nayanar states that there are nine Agamas in the Guru series.

1) Karana, 2) Kamikam, 3) Veeram, 4) Chintya, 4) Vatulam, 6) Yamalam 7) Kalatharam, 8) Subharam 9) Makudam.

In the Tantraloka, agama has been defined as a well-known fact of old, as prasiddhi. It also emphasizes the point that even agreement and contrariety (anvaya and vyatireka), which are the very life of inference also depend on prasiddhi. Similarly, perception looks for prasiddhi as its support; for without its help, which is thought to be of the nature of self-reflection (svatmavimarsatmika prasiddhi), it would not be possible to consider anything as acceptable or avoidable. Therefore, prasiddhi lies at the root of every worldly transaction. The great Lord, who is all-perfect, with the characteristic of I-consciousness, and who is omniscient, is the source of all prasiddhis. He, the Lord, is adorned with a multitude of prasiddhis in the form of enjoyment (bhoga) and release (apavarga)¹.

The entire universe is of the nature of consciousness, which is nothing but reflective nature, and that again is, in essence, sound. The reflection (vimarsa) of objects contained by the universe, and of the diverse relations of past deeds and their results, is known as holy texts (sastra). All the sastras are not really different from the nature of Parameevara. The holy texts have a single aim; yet, because of the limiting condition of niyati, people are strongly attached to only a portion of them. Therefore, some follow the dual system and others are attached to the non-dual. In the end, the author concludes that a particular agama should be resorted to only after it has been shown to produce excellent results².

But Nigama Tantras, Shiva knows the philosophy from Parvati. Shiva gives Tattvajnana by clearly understanding this world i.e. external universe. Shiva reminds Parvati that the existence of knowledge from the external world comes from the senses. That's what we need to know.

Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta ambitiously conceive the Pratyabhijna system as both a philosophical apologetics (which follows Sanskrit standards of scholastic argument) and an internalized form of tantric ritual that leads students directly to identification with Shiva. They explain the basic means by which the system conveys Shiva identity according to the same basic ritual pattern described above, as shaktyavishkarana, "the revealing of Shakti". The Pratyabhijna philosophers, however, also frame Shakti as the reason of a publicly assessable inference, or "inference for the sake of others" (pararthanumana). According to the scholastic logic, the reason identifies a quality in the inferential subject 'I' known to be invariably concomitant with the predicate, 'Shiva'. Thus I am Shiva because I have his quality, that is, Shakti, the capacity of emanating and controlling the universe.

As regards the faculty of knowing, we may divide consciousness into two levels, ordinary and extraordinary stages or Normal and abnormal. The ordinary plane is that of the limited soul (pasu). At the finite

¹ Chakravarty, H. N. Tantrasāra of Abhinavagupta. Rudra Press, 2012, p. 46.

² Ibid 20

level, consciousness, or impurity (mala), is covered, so knowledge at this stage is limited. The level of limited knowledge is sense experiences. The knowledge we see, hear, and experience is limited. Epistemological philosophy deals that perception of this infinite world through the sense experience.

Utpaladeva's Isvara Pratyabhijna Karika, book two, chapter three, deals with the epistemology of Kashmir Shaivism. There is no dispute that the Mimasakas have explained the six types of pramana's based on facts accepted even by modern Indian philosophy about the proper means of knowledge and how it is acquired. But these precepts cannot prove the existence of God. Beyond all precepts, Shiva exists as the fundamental precept where the epistemological view of transcending all limits is emphasized. The first two couplets in the chapter present the Saivite definition of pramana as well as its general character and results.

idam etā-drg ity evam yad vaśād vyavasthate/ vastu pramānam tat so 'pi svābhāso 'bhinavodayah .

An entity is known as a pramana (the means of correct knowledge) when through it a conclusion is reached about an object of knowledge, such as 'This is, and it is like this'. Such an entity is even self-evident and newly arises (in each instance of knowing)³. Pramanas are prescribed to correct knowledge of the existence or truth, or rather the basic nature of object. The existence of an object and its material conditions are clarified by the pramana. But if we want to know (Shiva) is existence, all the pramana must be reduced to him. That is, we must bring our senses to the invisible essence of the seen object. Understanding the essence is also sense knowledge.

Becoming a Conscious Knower: Exploring the Intersection of Awareness and Epistemology

The concept of consciousness is used in different ways in Western and Eastern philosophy. In Eastern culture, consciousness is thought of as self-illuminated. And when I say I'm conscious, I mean I'm conscious of it. We can become conscious in two ways. One is that I can be conscious of material objects in the external world that appear to me. And another is I can be aware of myself. The fundamental problem of all philosophies is how to become conscious. But in Eastern philosophy the concept of consciousness is universal. The concept of consciousness is seen in the sense that it 'encompasses everything'. Consciousness is used both in the sense of; 'aware' and at the same time in the sense of 'totality'. When I say that I am conscious of it, I mean that I am fully aware of that particular object or event. For example, a great potter can achieve perfection in that work only if he is conscious of the pottery. In short, to become conscious means to 'attain perfection'. But in the field of Eastern philosophy, don't believe that 'consciousness' is the perfection of material things, but

³ Pandit, B. Isvara-Pratyabhijñākārika of Utpaladeva. Motilal Banarsidass, 2004, p. 121.

‘consciousness’ here means the eternal essence that exists without us. It is the self-illuminated supreme truth that exists beyond the mind. The perfection of that supreme truth is what consciousness means here.

By examining the Saivagama tantras, these two meanings of the term consciousness can be understood very clearly. Agamatantras are Shiva’s way of answering Parvati’s questions. Questions arise out of curiosity. Therefore, Parvati’s consciousness is subjective and not comprehensive. Parvati asks questions with great anxiety and curiosity. This concern indicates that Parvati has a comprehensive knowledge of about that.

O Supreme Lord, in spite of everything that I have heard, even today my doubts are not dispelled. What is your reality, O Divine One? Are you the power or energy contained in sound from which all the mantras have originated?⁴

‘(Is your reality) transcendent and immanent or is it completely immanent or completely transcendental? If it is immanent (then the very) nature of transcendence is contradicted’⁵

Agamic Knowledge: Unveiling Epistemological Insights from Tradition

There may be some epistemological confusion when Trika is described as Pratyabhijna and Spandakarika, namely a monistic ontology that everything is identical with, or an emanation of pure consciousness (Caitanya, Samvit), that the essential and manifest cosmic bodies are one; Nothing in the universe stands apart from the Supreme Consciousness. All living and non-living things are only a manifestation of this pure consciousness. The ultimate truth, which is eternal and eternal without change must be considered as one and only. A monistic epistemology which maintains that object, means, and subject of cognition are ultimately not distinct (that is, it reduces epistemology to ontology); and a hierarchical cosmology in which, as we have seen, lower levels are coagulations of and reflects the higher. Twenty-eight Agamas are mainly recognized in Saivism. Kamika is the most important Agama in it. Kamika is the most important Agama in it. Agamas are also the basis of pratyabhijna system as far as the knowing capacity is concerned, we may broadly divide consciousness into two levels, or stages the ordinary and extra ordinary. The ordinary level is that of the bounded soul. At the bounded level, consciousness is, or covered with impurity; therefore, knowledge at this stage is limited. The basis of limited knowledge is our senses. It is impossible to perceive the infinite cosmic consciousness through sense experiences. Therefore, the knowledge through sense contact is limited and incomplete. This is the level of ordinary knowledge where we use the empirical means of knowledge -perception, inference, and so on. There are apparently at least four elements in perception: (1) the perceiver, me; (2) the object, the field I see; (3) the sensory experience, say my visual experience of colors and shapes; and (4) the relation between the object and the subject, commonly taken to be

⁴ Vijnanabhairavatantra pag 2

⁵ Ibid 4

a causal relation by which the object produces the sensory experience in the perceiver. To see the field is apparently to have a certain sensory experience as a result of the impact of the field on our vision.

Extraordinary knowledge or agamic knowledge is entirely different from objective knowledge that we acquire as a result of contact with the senses. Here, we see things as unique creations without singling out anything. It is sudden knowledge without the presence of the senses. Intuition-based knowledge arises not from the senses or symbols, but from the mind's intimate relationship with reality. When it comes to that, the extraordinary level is that the freed consciousness. Here one need not use the empirical means of knowledge because at this level consciousness, freed from impurity, is independent of the physical means of knowledge. This is the stage of direct (agama) knowledge. Agama is another name for the deep, inner, intuitive experience of the seer who has risen to the level of Shiva consciousness.

Tantra does not have much to say about the empirical means of knowledge like perception and inference, as it is not interested in ordinary knowledge as much as intuitive (agama) knowledge. It is intuitive knowledge that reveals reality. The tantric therefore attempt to deal with intuitive rather than empirical means of knowledge. Therefore we will direct our attention to the agamas. It should be made clear from the beginning that an agama is not merely a scripture or text; it is the record of higher experience. Agama primarily means the knowledge or experience of consciousness at the intuitive level. As mentioned above, Abhinavagupta interprets the dialogue between Sankara and Parvathi that form the structure of the agama as the inner dialogue within our own consciousness. Agama is really particular level of knowledge, or consciousness. Thirumula Nayanar explains importance of Agamas in *Thirumandiram*. Agama means (Agama) 'Aa' means life and 'Gamam' means fulfill. Existence of Lord Shiva can be achieved through bhaktimarga and jnanamarga. Bhaktimarga is Saguna and it realized through Anahatha chakra, it is a kind of meditation. The path of wisdom (jnanamarga) is Nirguna. If you understand these two paths, you can feel the light of wisdom on your forehead through the spinal cord. This is 'Shiva Yoga' or 'Shivattva'.

Even if the agamas are taken to be revelation, it makes no deference, because in Indian tradition revelation and higher experience are one and the same. The Indian concept of revelation is different from the Semitic one. In the Semitic religion such as Christianity and Islam, revelation is understood as knowledge given by God to humanity through the prophets. One cannot obtain it through one's own effort, or sadhana; it is wholly prerogative of God. In Indian tradition, however, revelation is taken to be the knowledge of one's own higher self, which can be acquired through sadhana. Since God is the higher self of humanity, revelation is the voice of one's own self. This is why it is natural for Abhinavagupta to interpret the agamic dialogue of Sankara and Parvathi as the interaction between the higher and lower selves within our own consciousness. Revelation in the Semitic tradition is, more or less, a one-way affair. God reveals the truth of humankind. We cannot verify it; we have to accept it on faith. But in the Indian concept of revelation there is the premise that it can be verified in

actual experience by anyone who follows the required path..the aspirant, by perfection his or her sadhana, can come to know the truth of revelation; it will not remain an object of faith.

Conclusion

The idea of Shiva as an epistemic being creates a distinctive connection between divine knowledge and consciousness, especially within the context of Kashmir Shaivism. In this view, Shiva is more than a deity; he is the ultimate consciousness, embodying self-awareness, omniscience, and transcendence. As both the origin and culmination of all knowledge, Shiva symbolizes the interplay between the knower, the known, and the process of knowing. This analysis investigates how Shiva's divine consciousness functions as the source and ultimate expression of knowledge, offering deep insights into the nature of perception, awareness, and understanding. By examining essential philosophical texts like the Shiva Sutras and the teachings of Abhinavagupta, this study aims to reshape our understanding of knowledge, presenting Shiva as the archetype of epistemic wisdom, with significant implications for both spiritual and philosophical perspectives on knowledge.

Reference

- 1 Chakravarty, H. N. Tantrasāra of Abhinavagupta. Rudra Press, 2012.
- 2 Pandit, B. Ísvara-Pratyabhijñākārika of Utpaladeva. Motilal Banarsidass, 2004.
- 3 Vijnanabhairavatantra (Sanskrit and English translation)
- 4 Feuerstein George, tantra the path of Ecstasy, shambhala pub, London (1998).