

## THE WORD (VĀC) IN THE COSMOLOGY AND SOTERIOLOGY OF KASHMIR ŚAIVISM

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Vilniaus universiteto  
Orientalistikos centras

*The article deals with the meaning of the Divine Word in the agamic Kashmiri Śaiva tradition. At first, making a brief overview of the history of the sacred word in Indian culture, attention is drawn to the fact, that the function of word and oral language as an agent of transformation from the human realm to the divine has been perennial concern of Indian theological speculation, since language in Hinduism is nearly always identified with both human consciousness and the divine cosmos. It has been pointed out, that an elaborate mysticism of the word found in the Śaiva Tantras has Vedic precedents and presupposes the philosophy of Bhartṛhari. Tantra has the assumption that man and the universe correspond as microcosm and macrocosm and that both are subject to the mysterious power of words and letters. The Tantric Kashmiri tradition, while building upon the Śaiva-Āgamas and Grammarians tradition, formulates its own unique rational theology of traidic monism and of complex verbal cosmology, wherein sacred Verbum is fundamental to both the creation of the universe and to the reintegration of the soul into the cosmos. The climax of a hermeneutics of synthesis and the sacred word exegesis is represented in Abhinavagupta's works. Abhinavagupta's subtle speculation on the Word extends from its mystical dimension to the intricacies of Sanskrit alphabet and linguistic speculation, from psychological subtleties to philosophical reasoning\*.*

“In the beginning was the Word, and  
the Word was with God, and the Word was  
God. The same was in the beginning with God.  
All things were made by him; and without him  
was not any thing made that was made”.  
(*The Gospel according to St. John* 1.1-3)

From the earliest period of Indian culture, speech, which may be rendered as ‘the Word’, has always been considered as essential, as of divine origin and has remained at its very center. All scholastic speculations and religious practices always concerned, and still concern, the oral field mainly. Referring to the active conception of language in Indian civilisation, where speech is energy, Frits J. Stall once even said that, in India, “language is not something with which you name something, but in general something with which you do something”<sup>1</sup>. Whereas, in the

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\* I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Debabrata Sen Sharma (RM Institute of Culture, Calcutta) for introducing me to the fascinating world of Kashmiri Śaiva philosophy.

<sup>1</sup> See Frits J. Stall, “Oriental Ideas on the Origin of Language”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, New Haven, 1979, No 99, 9. Almost the same is pointed out by Thomas J. Hopkins; “Sanskrit words were not just arbitrary labels assigned to phenomena; they were the sound forms of object, actions, and attributes, related to the corresponding reality in the same way as visual forms, and different only in being perceived by the ear and not by the eye”. Thomas J. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, Encino, California: Dickinson, 1971, 20.

Indian tradition language is thought to be truly and most fully experienced in its oral form, the modern linguistic philosophy sees the word only as a carrier of information and tends to restrict language to the printed word and then analyse it for a one-to-one correspondence with objective reality.

While language in India was almost never conceived as separate from the oral word, the power of transformation inherent in sacred sound continued to operate in ways that were true to accept canons of execution yet remained mysterious in its inability to be described, classified, or defined by common consensus. According to Guy L. Beck, "Sacred sound, in theory and practice, indeed forms a 'central mystery' of the Hindu tradition and functions as a common thread connecting a number of outwardly different sectors within it. As the Hindu experience of the divine is shown to be fundamentally sonic, or oral/aural, the theological position of sacred sound constitutes a kind of *mysterium magnum* of Hinduism"<sup>2</sup>. What is essential is not what is physically pronounced, but what these sounds are taken as representing in terms of the phonological structure of our language. So, the actual teachings in Indian education are mainly phonetic rather than semantic and it makes clear the sense of the sacred words or mantras and gives meaning to what otherwise could appear as mindless repetition and recitation. Recently the oral dimension of language has been highlighted by Western scholars of Hinduism: "Holy words have been operative in human history.... The way that they have found their way into human lives is not through the eye, but through the ear; Hindus have affirmed that the holiness of the Word is intrinsic, and that one participates in it, not by understanding but by hearing and reciting it."<sup>3</sup>

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Let's look, at first, briefly to the history of the sacred word in Indian culture.

The function of word and oral language as an agent of transformation from the human realm to the divine has been perennial concern of Indian theological speculation, since language in Hinduism is nearly always identified with both human consciousness and the divine cosmos. In trying to thematize the position of *Vāk* in the *Ṛgveda* we find three kinds of references which are useful for us and not totally distinct from each other: the Goddesses *Vāk* as the revealing Word, *Vāk* as speech in general, and *Vāk* in the symbolism of the cow<sup>4</sup>. In the latter case appears that *Vāk* referred to an underlying 'language' of nature in which the sounds of cows, animals, birds, drums and even inanimate objects participated. As many of the male characteristics were being gathered under the Vedic *Puruṣa* and ultimately the *Brāhmaṇic*

<sup>2</sup> Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology. Hinduism and Sacred Sound*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1995, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas B. Coburn, "Scripture in India: Towards a Typology of the Word in Hindu life", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 52, Nr. 3, September, 1984, 437. Jacques Ellul, for example, claims that the West has become an extremely visually oriented culture, with the consequent devaluation of the sonic or verbal dimension: "The invasion of the verbal realm by images results in the role reversal and domination, leading us to another characteristic of our modern reality; the humiliation of the word". See Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1985, 155.

<sup>4</sup> Concerning the understanding of speech and word in the Vedic world see an extended study of Jan Gonda, *The Vision of the Vedic Poets*, The Hague: Mouton and Co, 1963.

*Prajāpati*, the various female energies, or *Śaktis*, included the metrical power of the mantras<sup>5</sup>. As W. D. O’Flaherty suggests, *Vāk*-as-women might have been treated mythically with the same ambivalence as was *Vāk*-as-language. Whereas, mythically, she was the procreator who was potentially a destroyer, epistemologically she was the creator of name and form but thereby a seducer<sup>6</sup>.

*Vāk* in the *Brāhmaṇas* became identified with the evolving concept of Brahman (*vāg vai brahman*), the power of speech in the Vedic ritual. The role of sacred word in the Vedic period was bound up with the Vedic sacrifice. The notions of *vāk* and *Vāk*, the Goddess of Speech were among many implements to be coordinated in a rather complex ritual detail outlined in the Vedic texts. It is the emerging notion of ‘speech as power’ inherent in the pronunciation and metrical structure of mantras, or ‘ritually applied *Vāk*’, which is striking. “The mantras became more powerful than the gods themselves, who were dependent on the sacrificial offerings, and invited access to the unseen world of supernatural forces and energies.”<sup>7</sup> In the ritual everything – the oral recitation of ritual language, the fires, the sacrificial plot, ritual action, and offerings of various kind – were woven together into an elaborate structure that heavily depended on the mantras which established the basic identities and correspondences. *Vāk* in the Vedic ritual is not only the personification of incoherent external speech but a complete entity of creative speech energy holding together her subjective and objective aspects in perfect synthesis<sup>8</sup>.

In the most famous verse of *Ṛgveda* is said: “The wise Brahmanas know that the word consists of four parts of speech (*vāk*). The three parts are hidden and fourth is called the human speech”<sup>9</sup>. *Patañjali*, a Sanskrit grammarian who wrote the most authoritative commentary on the work of *Pāṇini*, the *Mahābhāṣya* (2–1 B.C.E.) argues, that the word *catvāri* therein to mean not the four aspects of speech but four types of word: noun, verb, prefix and particle<sup>10</sup>. However, *Sāyaṇa* in his commentary on the *Ṛgveda* (14 CE) has referred to the existence of meaning, called the spiritual interpretation (*ādhyātmika artha*) of the Vedic mantras which was probably lost soon after the compilation of the mantras into *Saṃhitā* texts, but he has hinted at this meaning in his commentary at many places while giving the *ādhidāivika artha* and *ādhibautika artha* meanings

<sup>5</sup> In the *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa* (5.1.7,2) various Vedic meters as *Gāyatrī*, *Anuṣṭubh*, *Triṣṭubh*, *Jagati* are called as the ‘wives of the gods’ and represented living creative forces. came to be associated with the name *Vāk*. As *Vāk* is given a feminine personification as the goddesses of speech in the *Vedas* and *Brāhmaṇas*, it serves as a precursor for the Hindu theistic and Tantric speculations on the divine female power of language known as *Śakti*. (However, it seems that the earliest document of the personification of speech as a productive principle of energy is *Atharvaveda* (4.30.1–8).

<sup>6</sup> Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980, 430–431.

<sup>7</sup> Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology. Hinduism and Sacred Sound*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1995, 204.

<sup>8</sup> Sudhenu Kumar Das *Śakti or Divine Power*, Calcutta, University of Calcutta, 1934, 30–34.

<sup>9</sup> *catvāri vāk parimītā padāni tāni vidur brāhmaṇā ye manīṣiṇaḥ/guḥā trīni nihāta neṅgayanti turīyaṃ vācām manīṣyā vadantīll Ṛgveda* I.164.45. According to the lexicon, *vāk* is a feminine noun meaning “speech, voice, talk, language (also of animals), sounds (also of inanimate objects as of the stones used for pressing, of the drum), a word, saying, phrase, sentence, statement, and speech personified”. Sir M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993, 936.

<sup>10</sup> *catvāri padajātāni nāmākhyātopasarganipātāśca – Mahābhāṣya* 37.

of the mantras which were traditionally available to him. The probable reason for the disappearance of the tradition of spiritual interpretation was, perhaps, that more attention was paid to the preservation of the purity and sanctity of the mantras rather than trying to understand their true meaning.

Gradually, as the natural metaphors and powers associated with the Vedic mythological notion of *vāk* became compacted into the metaphysical, seed-syllable *Om* or *Aum* of the *Upaniṣads*, the notion of *Śabda-Brahman* emerged. Upanisadic *Śabda-Brahman* signifies the merging of Brahman with the mystic syllable *Om* (*praṇava*), such that *Om* in triplicate as *Aum* is the Sound Brahman. The *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* contains a short glorification of the sacred word *Om*: “*Om* is Brahman, *Om* is the whole world”<sup>11</sup>. *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* also declares: “all speech is held together by *Om*”<sup>12</sup>. And the Upanisadic mantra *Om* reveals us its increasingly important role in theistic meditation: to invoke or verbally ignite the inferior manifestation of God, or Brahman, in the human heart prior to the external, visual perception of the deity. The Vedic and *Upanisadic* notions of word and sound are forerunners of the many esoteric notions prevalent in the Yoga and Tantric methods for meditation on sacred sound, methods wherein *Nāda-Brahman* has largely replaced *Śabda-Brahman* as the Vedic *vāk* as the essence of sound both in cosmos, (*ākāśa*), and within the human heart (*hṛdayākāśa*).

Drawing his inspiration from this particular mantra, a celebrated grammarian philosopher *Bhartrhari* (5 CE) built up his philosophy of Primordial Word, *Vāk*. *Bhartrhari* begins the *Vākyapadiya* by stating that the essence of Brahman is of the nature of the word (*śabda*) and the word is understood by *Bhartrhari* to be synonymous with meaning. Although unitary in nature, this divine word-consciousness manifests itself in the diversity of words that make up speech<sup>13</sup>. Fundamental is the notion that language and consciousness are inextricably intertwined. “There is no cognition in the world in which the world does not figure. All knowledge is, as it were, intertwined with the world... If the world were absent, everything would be insentient, like a piece of wood”<sup>14</sup>. According to him, the four levels of speech in the descending order of grossness are *Parā*, *Paśyantī*, *Madhyamā* and *Vaikharī*. While *Vaikharī* represents the *vāk* in grossest form, the form we use for our communication in our daily life, the rest of the three forms are subtle, beyond the reach of mind, representing the potency underlying the gross form of words and which remains hidden to us. Thus, *Bhartrhari*’s describes the monistic Absolute as *Śabda-Brahman*.

The Grammarians developed the notion *sphoṭa* to explain the mysterious manner by which meaning is conveyed in sentences. The *Sphoṭavāda* of the Grammarians holds that the meaning

<sup>11</sup> *om iti brahma, om itīdam sarvam – Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* 1.8.

<sup>12</sup> *omkāreṇa sarva vāk – Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 2.23.3.

<sup>13</sup> The *Vākyapadiya* of *Bhartrhari*, translated by K. A. Subramania Iyer, Poona: Deccan College, 1965, I.1. For a clear demonstration of how far *Bhartrhari*’s *śabda* is synonymous with meaning see also: Raja K. Kunjuni, *Indian Theories of Meaning*, Madras: Adyar Library and Research Center, 1963; Harold Coward and K. Kunjuni Raja, “The Philosophy of the Grammarians”, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies*, Vol. 5, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidas, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> *Vākyapadiya* I.123–126.

of a sentence is conveyed in a 'flash' or 'burst' of cognition known as *sphoṭa*<sup>15</sup>, which is objectively real, eternal and said to operate over and above the individual words. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The universal categories of meaning inhere in a Universal Absolute (*Śabda-Brahman*), which is both material and efficient cause of creation and manifests itself in the form of *sphoṭa*, a kind of meaning-bearing sound revelation both in the cosmos and within human consciousness<sup>16</sup>.

Another, influential *Mīmāṃsā* school has argued, that the divine potencies of languages are compacted into the text of the Veda, that is, the syllables themselves (*varṇas*) as the prime substance of *vāk*. This position is called *Varṇavāda*. The *Varṇavāda* doctrine maintains that the meaning of a sentence is conveyed by the sum total of the meanings of the individual letters (*varṇa*). The whole results from the sum of its parts. That is, the main unit of language is the phoneme, or meaning bearing syllable, which is real and eternal. According to *Mīmāṃsā* the Eternal Verbum exists only as the external text of the Veda and does not manifest in any other form apart from the specific linguistic constructions found there.

These two positions form the polemical substructure for the discussion of the Indian philosophy of language and later serve to inform the *Yoga*, *Śaiva*, *Śākta*, and *Vaiṣṇava* traditions, nearly all of which share in common much of the nomenclature about sacred word. Among the schools who do subscribe to the eternal Word as *Śabda-Brahman*, a major division exists between those who conceive of Ultimate Reality itself as Absolute Sound (*Sphoṭavāda*) and those who conceive of sacred sound as embodied only in a text, the Veda, without the addition of any other Ultimate Reality (*Varṇavāda*). For the Grammarians meaning (*artha*) is always something mental, which does not depend on objective existence. A distinction is made between the existence of an object in the external world and its being in the form of mental cognition (*artha*). It is his relation between the word and its mental cognition that *Bhartṛhari* argues is eternal, whereas the *Mīmāṃsā* accepts the eternity of the relation between words and their direct physical referent. Soteriology, for *Bhartṛhari* and the Grammarians, involves a progression through correct grammatical usage, upward to the level where word and meaning are nondifferentiated and finally to the region of pure unalloyed cosmic sound, as *Śabda-Brahman* or *Vāk*: "As creation consists of the inherent power of this *Vāk* to become manifold..., salvation consists in the equally inherent power of man as partaker of *Vāk* to return to this stage of oneness."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Betty Heimann explores the nature of the root word from which *sphoṭa* derives and its relation to natural processes of ebullience "Sphuṭ, to burst into view, to rent [sic] asunder, pictures in its very onomatopoeical form the suddenness, abruptness and forcefulness of the process. It is no accident that other terms derived from the very same root *sphuṭ* all indicate the same dynamic explosive function." Betty Heimann, "Sphoṭa and Artha", *A Volume of Studies in Indology Presented to Prof. P. V. Kane*, ed. by S. M. Katre and P. K. Gode, Poona, Oriental Book Agency, 1941, 225.

<sup>16</sup> Harold G. Coward in his work *Sphoṭa Theory of Language*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1986) provides a thorough elucidation of the arguments in the debate over the value of the *Sphoṭa* doctrine.

<sup>17</sup> Klaus Klostermaier, "The Creative Function of the Word", *Language in Indian Philosophy and Religion*, ed. by H. Coward, Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978, 8.

*Varṇavāda*, though often tacitly accepted by theists, cannot be squared with Hindu theism in the strict sense either. Theists mostly acknowledge *Varṇavāda* on the basis of its emphasis on the power of individual letters or syllables. Theistic Hinduism accepted that sacred potencies are indeed contained in the syllables of mantras, Vedic or otherwise, but that particular energies in particular syllables are mandated by a Supreme being for the purpose of bringing about salvation for human beings. *Varṇavāda* not only claims that the Veda is authorless (*apauruṣeya*), but also proscribes any arbitrary 'illumination' as bestowed by divine benefaction and represented by the interior notion of *Paśyantī* or *Pratibhā*.

The theory of *Sphoṭavāda* has been refuted by all the major Indian philosophical and religious schools: *Advaita-Vedānta*, *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Nyāya*, *Vaiśeṣika*, nonmonistic *Pāñcarātra* texts, *Śrī-Vaiṣṇavism*, *Dvaitādvaita-Vedānta*, *Gauḍīya-Vaiṣṇavism*, *Śaiva-Siddhānta*, some varieties of Kashmiri *Śaiva* and *Śakta-Tantras*. It is only the Yoga system of Patañjali which has lent support to the *sphoṭa* theory. The concept of *Varṇavāda* and the notion of the three internal speech levels are philosophically irreconcilable, at least without some outstanding feats of logic and sophistry by sectarian proponents. Most of the Hindu sectarian traditions overtly align themselves with the *Mīmāṃsā* standpoint of *Varṇavāda* yet coopt the *Bhartṛhari* speech levels in the explication of their particular salvic theories of mantra and *Om* recitation.

The linguistic monism of *Bhartṛhari* represents a philosophical development of ancient Indian understandings of sacred language articulated in the context of grammatical and linguistic speculations of the *Pāṇinian* school. *Bhartṛhari*'s concept of *Sphoṭa* as being identical with Brahman and *Praṇava*<sup>18</sup> assures us to his ties to Vedic orthodoxy, yet the question of *Bhartṛharis* indebtedness to *Āgamic* or Tantric sources for other aspects is still unanswered<sup>19</sup>. Since the nature of *Sphoṭa* is explained and understood by the Grammarians in reference to *Paśyantī*, *Madhyamā* and *Vaikharī* levels of consciousness, the acceptance of the latter without the former by so many traditions is perplexing. Nevertheless, the study of *Bhartṛhari* provides us with a kind of missing link between articulation of *Sphoṭavāda* and the levels of language apprehension. A major contribution of *Bhartṛhari* lies first in his providing fresh insight into the Vedic revelation of Divine *Vāk* as an all-pervading feature of both human consciousness and the divine. Vedic *Vāk* and ritual language as mantra are never meaningless or 'nonsense', since each word of the Veda (*śabda*) has its corresponding meaning (*artha*) in the form of its object. Even as Vedic sound becomes unified and congealed in the *Upaniṣads* as *Śabda-Brahman* and developed further in the Grammarian theories of *Sphoṭa* and *Paśyantī*, *artha* is still present because all language is attached to human consciousness. It is only in the Yoga, Tantra and music tradition wherein *Śabda-Brahman* is recast as *Nāda-Brahman* that the idea of pure cosmic sound, detached from linguistic meaning emerges.

<sup>18</sup> Prabhatchandra Chakravarti was convinced that "*Sphoṭa*, taken as an imperishable unit of *Vāk* ... which finally accounts for the evolution of speech, is analogous to *Praṇava*". P. Chakravarti, *The Philosophy of Sanskrit Grammar*, Calcutta, Calcutta University, 1930, 89.

<sup>19</sup> In the words of Agehananda Bharati: "The real difference between tantric and non-tantric traditions is methodological: tantra is the psycho-experimental interpretation of non-tantric lore". *The Tantric Tradition*, New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1970, 20.

Unlike *Mīmāṃsā*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Nyāya* and Grammarians, the *Yoga* tradition has continually affirmed the existence of a personal Supreme Being, *Īśvara*. This being, closer to a paradigmatic role model for other *Yogis* to emulate, is signified by the syllable OM, responds to devotion, or *bhakti*: “The sacred word connotes him [*Īśvara*], its repetition and the understanding of its meaning should be done”<sup>20</sup>. *Patañjali* and the *Yoga-Sūtra* commentarial tradition, including the work of *Vyāsa*, *Vācaspati* and *Vijñāna Bhikṣu*, endorses the practice of *Om* meditation and provides a solid ground for the development of *Yoga* techniques of *Nāda-Brahman* meditation<sup>21</sup>. The terminology of *Nāda-Brahman* is foreign to the Vedic and *Upaniṣadic* canon, appearing as it does only in *Yogic* and *Āgamic* (Tantric) sources. *Nāda-Yoga* forms the basis for a large variety of sonic meditational techniques that are shared by many other tradition. As the classical *Yoga* school propounded the merit of *Om* meditation and seemed to accept the doctrine of *Sphoṭavāda*, the tentative equation of:

$$\text{Prāṇava} = \text{Sphoṭa} = \text{Nāda} = \text{Brahman} = \text{Tūrīya} = \text{Paśyantī}$$

to designate the highest reality seemed virtually unavoidable. The texts and doctrines of the *Gorakhnāth* *Yogi* tradition as the largest and most important *Yoga* lineage disclosed a previously unrecognized fidelity to the principle of *Nāda Brahman*, adopted the levels of *Paśyantī* and enlarged upon the physiological and sideral dimensions of sacred sound. An intriguing aspect of the *Nāth* contribution to Indian linguistics is the addition of the fifth stage of language apprehension, which is called *mātrkā*. *Mātrkā* refers to the ultimate phonetic constituents of a certain number of ultimate verbal sounds of *Vaikhari-Vāk*. These verbal sounds are represented by *varṇa* or *akṣara* (letters) and are the undivided units of vocal, articulate speech<sup>22</sup>. The three major *Hatha-Yoga* texts, *Śiva-Saṃhitā*, *Gheraṇḍ-a-Saṃhitā* and *Hatha-Yoga-Pradīpikā* also exhibited an overwhelming concern for meditation on *nāda* by practitioners of *Yoga* and, in fact, continue to form *Nāda-Yoga* today. According to Guy L. Beck, “The extra-Vedic *Nāda-Brahman* – *Aum* with its fourth (*tūrīya*) stage of *Nāda-Bindu* as Sound-Brahman – thus gradually overshadowed *Śabda-Brahman* and became the dominant cosmological and psychological characterization of sacred sound in the Hindu tradition, in which it is connected to either *Śiva*, *Viṣṇu*, or the Goddess in a number of ways.”<sup>23</sup> The concept of *Nāda-Brahman* seems to act as a kind of synthesis, fusing the basic ingredients of *varṇa*, external *Śabda-Brahman*, and *sphoṭa*, internal *Śabda-Brahman* into one essential concept that forms a conspicuous bridge between the sectarian movements, including the tradition of classical music.

<sup>20</sup> *tasya vācakaḥ prāṇavaḥ/ taj japas tad artha bhāvanam* – *Yoga-Sūtra* 1.27–28. *Vyāsa* comments on the second verse and stresses the need for the practice of mantra meditation: “The *Yogī* who has come to know well the relation between word and meaning must constantly repeat it, and habituate the mind to the manifestation therein of its meaning. The constant repetition is to be of the *prāṇava* (OM) and the habitual mental manifestations is to be what it signifies, *Īśvara*. The mind of the *Yogī* who constantly repeats *prāṇava*, and habituates the to the constant manifestation of the idea it carries, becomes one-pointed (*ekāgra*).” *Patañjali’s Yoga Sūtras with the Commentary of Vyāsa and the Gloss of Vācaspati Miśra*, translated by Rama Prasada Allahabad: Panini Office, 1912, 51.

<sup>21</sup> According to the lexicon *nāda* is: “m, a loud sound, roaring, belowing, crying, any sound or the tone; in *Yoga* the nasal sound represented by a semicircle and used as an abbreviation in Mystical words.” Sir M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993, 534.

<sup>22</sup> A. K. Banerjea, *Philosophy of Gorakhnāth with Goraksha-Vacana-Samgraha*, Gorakhpur: Goranath Temple, 1962, 150.

<sup>23</sup> Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology. Hinduism and Sacred Sound*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1995, 48.

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During the first millenium of the Hindu religion evolution (between 600 BC and 400 AD) *Śaivism* emerged as a popular, pan-Indian form of Hinduism drawing selectively upon the Veda as well as upon the uncodified ritual, social and iconic traditions of 'vilage India'. Central to the ritualism of the *Śaivāgamas* was an implicitly theological preoccupation with "the power of Speech... the power of the energy concealed in the Divine Word."<sup>24</sup> The *Śaivāgamic* tradition inherited and developed the conviction that mantras were soteriologically central. The sophisticated theological reflection sought to elucidate the sort of religious experience assumed to be *summum bonum* in *Śaiva* Tantra. Tantra has the assumption that man and the universe correspond as microcosm and macrocosm and that both are subject to the mysterious power of words and letters. The homology between the human and the cosmic processes is especially visible, or audible, in the domain of sacred word. "From this central idea ensues the entire impressive development of the metaphysics of the Word, of the phonic and phonetic cosmogonies, and of the practices which are achieved through the use of speech or word, and more specifically through its most efficacious and usable form, the mantras and *bījas*. That is essential to Tantrism."<sup>25</sup>

The non-dualist school of Kashmiri *Śaivism* is the most important school of *Śaivism* in north India, which includes the philosophy of Abhinavagupta, Krama Tantrism, Kashmiri *Kuṇḍalinī-Yoga*, Spanda theory and *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy. The main emphasis of this school is soteriology. The Religious philosophy of Kashmiri has been termed 'Trika', or 'Triadism' by Western scholars for various reasons having to do with there being a trinity, or triad of concepts, categories, scriptures, goddesses or sages<sup>26</sup>. One of the three categories is non-dualism (*abheda*), said to be a special revelation for this age. J. C. Chatterjee, referring to the account in Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*, explains the advent of this 'new' *Śaivism* as being due to the growing influence of the degenerate Kali age. As such, *Śiva* took compassion on people and, appearing on the *Kailāsa* mountain in the form of *Śrīkaṇṭha*, commanded the sage *Durvāsa* to spread in the world the knowledge of the lost *Śiva-Āgamas* and *Śiva-Śāstras* again. *Durvāsa* then created three sons by the power of his mind – *Tryambaka*, *Amardaka*, and *Śrīnātha*. He entrusted them with the mission of teaching human beings over again the ancient and eternal *Śaiva* faith and doctrine in the three aspects of Unity (*abheda*), Diversity (*bheda*) and Diversity-in-Unity (*bhedābheda*). *Tryambaka* was to teach the first, *Amardaka* the second, while *Śrīnātha* was to have the charge of the last. It is this nondual *Abheda*, or *Advaya Śaiva*, teaching retaught to the world by *Tryambaka*. which is spoken of as the Trika<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Jan Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977, 167.

<sup>25</sup> André Padoux, "A Survey of Tantric Hinduism for the Historian of Religions", *History of Religions* 20, No. 4, May 1981, 357.

<sup>26</sup> K. C. Pandey did not wish to consider the Trika a separate system, nor did he succumb to the view prevalent in Kashmir nowadays, and supported by the writings of J. C. Chatterjee and others, that Trika is Kashmiri *Śaivism in toto*. In fact, as Pandey rightly remarks, "Trika" stands for the entire Saiva thought as presented by Abhinavagupta in his *Tantrāloka*. See: K. C. Pandey, *Abhinavagupta: An Historical and Philosophical Study*, Benares, Chowkhamba, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1963, 295. Although Abhinavagupta takes the *Mālinīvijayottara-Tantra* as the prime authority for his Trika, this Tantra nowhere refers to Trika as an independent school, much less to itself as a Trikatantra. Even so, it most certainly deals with specifically Trika matters, such as the Mantric system centered on the Trika goddesses *Parā*, *Parāparā* and *Aparā*. See: R. Gnoli, *Luce delle Sacre Scritture (Tantrāloka) di Abhinavagupta*, Torino: Classici Utet, 1972, 715-730.

<sup>27</sup> J. C. Chatterjee, *Kashmir Shaivism*, 1914. Reprint: Albany, Suny Press, 1986, 133.



Trika accepts the authority of the traditional twenty-eight Śaiva-Āgamas, among them the most important treatises are: *Mālinī-vijaya*, *Svacchandra*, *Vijñāna-bhairava*, *Mṛgendra*, *Netra*, *Rudra-yāmala*, *Matanga*, *Vidyārṇava*<sup>28</sup>. In addition, it accepts the conclusion of its own Agama tradition as well as that of the *Spanda* and *Pratyabhijñā* philosophical doctrines, all three of which developed particularly in Kashmir during the ninth through eleventh centuries A. D. The general thrust of the outstanding scholars and yogis of this period – *Vasugupta*, *Kallaṭa*, *Somānanda*, *Utpala*, *Abhinavagupta*, *Kṣemarāja*, *Yogārja*, *Jayaratha* – had been to reinterpret the Śaiva-Āgamas along their peculiar monistic tendency, a kind of triadic monism. In the attempt to reinterpret the pluralistic Āgamas in the light of Śaṅkara's and Bhartṛhari's monism and idealism, Vasugupta (9<sup>th</sup> century) is credited with the promulgation of the first uniquely Kashmiri Śaivite Āgama, the *Śiva-Sūtra* which laid the foundation of Advaita Śaivism. This nondual Āgama was said to have been revealed by Śrīkaṇṭha (Śiva himself) to Vasugupta directly, therefore giving rise to the classification of āgama (lit. 'coming near', 'appearing', 'handed down')<sup>29</sup>. Jan Gonda further explains these revelations as emanating from Śiva himself through his energy, or Śakti: "The authoritative texts, having the *Parā-Vāk* as their source, flow out as spoken words from God's five faces, which represent his fivefold Śakti. The five systems of revelation which owe their existence to this process, are traditionally held to constitute the Śaivite schools or systems. These are divisible into three classes, viz., the Śiva class (ten dualist systems), the Rudra class (eighteen duality-unity systems), and the Bhairava class (sixty-four monist systems)"<sup>30</sup>.

Very soon Śaiva-Āgamas of the variety of hindu sectarian developments became serious alternatives to the common assumption that "everything comes from the Vedas". Kashmiri Śaivism, tending toward non-dualism, offers some interesting developments of vowel, or phoneme, mysticism as well as the novel theories of *Parā-Vāk* (*Parā-Nāda*) via *Bhartṛhari* and *Spanda*, or cosmic vibration. The utilization of the *Bhartṛharian* levels of language apprehension (*Paśyantī*), as well as the equation of Śiva with either *Nāda*, *Bindu* or *Prāṇava*, is indisputable within nearly all of Śaivism.

In the Kashmiri Śaivism introduces the term and concept of *Parā-Vāk*, also referred to as *Parā-Nāda*, which is coterminous with Āgamas themselves and the original spoken Word of Śiva. According to the greatest living exponent of Kashmiri Śaivism, Śaivāchārya Swami Laksman Jee: "At the basis of these speculations is the conviction that the Highest or All-Transcending Word (*Parā-Vāk*), which is God's unspoken Thought, germinally contains all the Āgamas in a supersensuous form. It gradually materializes into a physical form as syllables and vocables so as to form the units of speech."<sup>31</sup> Whereas in the first stage of development (*Paśyantī*) the

<sup>28</sup> As is pointed out by André Padoux, concerning the term āgama some classification is needed in order to avoid confusion: "Usually the Āgamas of Śaivas are called Āgama, those of the Śāktas are called Tantra, and those of the Vaiṣṇavas are known as Samhita". André Padoux, "Hindu Tantric Literature", *Encyclopedia of Religions*, ed. by Mircea Eliade, New York: Macmillan, 1987, Vol. VI, 365.

<sup>29</sup> For a more detailed treatment of the Śaiva canon, the reader is referred to the following studies: Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Canon of The Śaivāgama*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1987; and Teun Goudriaan, Sanjukta Gupta *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature*, Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981.

<sup>30</sup> Jan Gonda, *Medieval Religious Literature in Sanskrit*, Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977, 162.

<sup>31</sup> Swami Laksman, Jee *Kashmir Shaivism: The Secret Supreme*, Albany: Universal Shaiva Trust, 1988, 62.

words and their meanings are not differentiated, in the last stage (*Vaikhari*) it expresses itself through the audible words. In this final stage of its manifestation, speech/language is discerned as divided into syllables, words, and sentences, and its separation from its referents is complete.

The *Pratyabhijñā* represents the fullest expression of *Śaiva* monism, systematically worked out into a rational theology of *Śiva* and philosophy of absolute consciousness with which He is identified. The *Pratyabhijñā* takes its name from *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Kārikā* written by Utpaladeva towards the beginning of the tenth century<sup>32</sup>. Utpaladeva understood the ultimate experience of enlightenment to consist essentially of a profound and irreversible recognition that one's own authentic identity is *Śiva* himself. According to him: "The man blinded by ignorance (*māyā*) and bound by his actions (*karma*) is fettered to the round of birth and death, but when knowledge inspires the recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) of his divine sovereignty and power (*aiśvarya*) he, full of consciousness alone, is a liberated soul"<sup>33</sup>.

Just as the philosophy of the *Pratyabhijñā* focuses on the liberating recognition of the soul's authentic identity as *Śiva*, the Doctrine of Vibration (*spanda*) stresses instead the importance of experiencing Spanda, the vibration or pulse of consciousness. The mainstay of the Doctrine of vibration is the contemplative experience the awakened yogi has of his true nature as the universal perceiving and acting consciousness. Man can realise his true nature to be *Śiva* by experiencing the dynamic, recurrent and creating activity of the absolute who is the pure conscious agent and perceiver. The Stanzas on Vibration (*Spandakārikā*) are, according to some Kashmiri *Śaiva* authors<sup>34</sup>, the work of *Kallaṭabhāṭṭa* who wrote them with the intention of summarizing the teachings of the Aphorisms of Siva (*Śivasūtra*) written in the first half of the ninth century by a *Śaiva* ascetic called Vasugupta<sup>35</sup>. The quintessential nature of the Kashmiri *Śaiva* Absolute consciousness is described in the *Spanda-Kārikā* as a pulsating, dynamic, ecstatic, throbbing force called *spanda* or vibration. In the words of Jaidev Singh: "*Spanda* ... in the case of the Supreme is neither physical motion, nor psychological activity like pain and pleasure, nor pranic activity like hunger or thirst. It is the throb of the ecstasy of the Divine I-consciousness (*vimarśa*). The Divine I-consciousness is a piritual dynamism. It is the Divine creative pulsation. It is the throb of *Śiva*'s *svāntarya* or absolute freedom."<sup>36</sup> The process of self-manifestation of the Spanda begins with subtle vibrations of the vowels, followed by the remaining phonemes along with the thirty-six *tattvas*, and ends with the slowest and grossest vibrations of the inert

<sup>32</sup> The best among the contemporary studies in the *Pratyabhijñā* philosophical speculations is that by David P. Lawrence, *Rediscovering God with Transcendental Argument: A Contemporary Interpretation of Monistic Kashmiri Saiva Philosophy*, State University of New York, 1999.

<sup>33</sup> *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Kārikā* -3.2.2.

<sup>34</sup> Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration: An Analysis of the Doctrine and Practices of Kashmir Shaivism*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1989, 21.

<sup>35</sup> *Kṣemarāja* tells us, that Vasugupta received a revelation from *Śiva* Himself in a dream in which he was told that an important message for all mankind lay hidden on Mount *Mahādeva* in Kashmir. Going to the spot indicated to him, he found a boulder on which were inscribed *Śivasūtra*. It is the first Kashmiri *Śaiva* work which, consisting of some eighty brief statements, summarizes the essentials of monistic *Śaiva* Yoga. See: *Śivasūtravimarśini by Kṣemarāja*. English translation named *Śivasūtras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity*, by Jaideva Singh, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979.

<sup>36</sup> *Spanda-Kārikās: The Divine Creative Pulsation*, tr. by Jaidev Singh Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980. XVII.

rock. Consciousness spontaneously evolves through a series of stages ranging from the most subjective or 'inner' states of Śīva-consciousness to the most 'outer' or objective forms of awareness. The process of descending into matter is a progressive self-limitation (*rodhana*) of consciousness.

The fundamental concept of consciousness as a universally active and absolute principle is common to both Spanda and *Pratyabhijñā*. It is not just a consciousness which observes but one that actively perceives itself as its object through and as, each act of perception. Absolute consciousness understood as the unchanging ontological ground of all appearing is termed *Prakāśa*. As the creative awareness of its own being, the absolute is called *Vimarśa*. *Prakāśa* and *Vimarśa* – the Divine Light of consciousness and the reflective awareness this light has of its own nature – together constitute the all-embracing fullness (*pūrṇatā*) of consciousness. Kashmiri Śaivas view the universe as a phonic emanation, a sounding forth from original silence. "The non-dual Kashmiri Śaivas view the process by which our daily reality is manifested from the infinite reality of Śīva as a 'sounding' forth.... This power is the *Visarga Śakti* (expansive energy)."<sup>37</sup> The process of the sounding forth of reality occurs on four levels, the latter three of which are indebted to *Bhartṛhari*: *Parā*, the supreme level; *Paśyantī*, the first 'vision' of what is to come; *Madhyamā*, the intermediate stage; and *Vaikharī*, the fully embodied stage of everyday speech. In consonance with the teachings of *Śākta-Tantra* reality and entire universe is described in Trika philosophy according to a system of letters (*varṇamālā*). In its role as the origin of both vowels and consonants *Nāda-Brahman* is described by the Kashmiri savant Abhinavagupta in the *Tantrāloka* as *anāhata-nāda* – 'unstruck sound'. He says: "There is only one *varṇa* in the form of *Nāda* (sound vibration) in which lie all the *varṇas* (letters) latently in a undivided form. As it is ceaseless, is it called *varṇa* proleptically [*eko nādātmako varṇaḥ*]"<sup>38</sup> Regarding the qualifying adjective *anāhata* attached to *Nāda*, Pardoux explained that "only a sound that is not caused by a 'shock', that is to say a material means, can be everlasting"<sup>39</sup>.

There is however an important and often subtle difference between the Trika philosophy and that of *Bhartṛhari* regarding the status of *Parā-Vāk* (*Śabda-Brahman*). Kashmiri Śaivas place *Parā-Vāk* as feminine *Śakti* just below the *Parama-Śīva*. The Grammarians hold that *Paśyantī* is equivalent to *Sphoṭa* and constitutes the Highest Reality. Both *Paśyantī* and *Sphoṭa* are admitted by the Grammarians as eternal (*nitya*) and display one and the same significance expressed by two different terms. According to the school of *Bhartṛhari*, *Parā-Vāk* is the Supreme Reality, while in the opinion of the Trika philosophers, *Parā-Vāk* is the power of *Parama-Śīva* which is maintained to be the highest principle. As noted by Gaurinath Sastri: "It is of course true that the Trika philosophers entertain the view that *Parama-Śīva* and his power known as *Vimarśa* are not different – the two are held to be identical in essence. Still, it cannot be denied that when the two are described as the powerful and power, they stand in the relation of the

<sup>37</sup> Paul E. Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śīva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-dual Shaivism of Kashmir*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1989, 172.

<sup>38</sup> *Tantrāloka* – 6.217.

<sup>39</sup> André Pardoux, *Vāc: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, 100.

substantive and its attribute.”<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the latter should be looked upon as subordinate to the former. Thus *Vimarśa* or *Parā-Vāk* cannot be viewed as an independent and self-subsistent principle in the same way in which it is conceived in the systems of the grammarian. More recently the same difference has been repeated by K.Sivaraman: “The difference in the conception of *Parā-Vāk* in the two systems is, briefly, that while in the Grammarian’s system *Parā-Vāk* is Brahman, for the Śaiva philosopher it is the power of *Parama-Śiva*.... In soteriological terms, it is the difference between achieving of transcendence ‘in’ language and achieving of transcendence ‘of’ language itself.”<sup>41</sup>

The highest level of *Paśyantī* is an internal state of pure cognition and apprehension of *Śabda-Brahman* in which there is no necessity of sequence in language. “*Paśyantī-Vāk* is that state where a person is experiencing, observing the world, but not seeing anything; it is only pure sensation without any differentiation (*nirvikalpa*), without any thought”<sup>42</sup>. In *Varṇavāda* is no intuitive revelation of truth since the Veda is an external body of revelation dependent upon its unique sequence of syllables. A proper hermeneutic for the study of mantra recitation, as the flow of meaningful syllables, has to face this difference in any tradition, especially those that accept both *Varṇavāda* and *Paśyantī*. The Grammarians never transcend language because Ultimate Reality is *Śabda-Brahman* itself. Though the dualistic, theistic sects of Hinduism also never advocate a transcendence of language resulting in a silent beatific vision of their respective deity: mantras and corresponding *Nāda-Brahman* meditation are never given up or discarded even after liberation. It is only with Kashmiri Śaivas, along with *Advaita-Vedānta* and Buddhism, that language is ultimately replaced by silent contemplation, as characterized by André Pardoux: “Thus moving from language to its original levels, one ultimately arrives at its source, at silence: *Om* merges into the resonance, *Nāda*, which in turn gradually dissolves in the pure light of consciousness, in the silence of the supreme and transcendent Godhead.”<sup>43</sup>

Despite the appropriation of technical terms from *Bhartṛhari*, Kashmiri Śaivism has rejected the linguistic Absolute of the Grammarians. The most poignant criticism of the Grammarian *Sphoṭavāda* theory by Kashmiri is found in the *Śiva-Dṛṣṭi* of *Somānanda* (10 A. D.)<sup>44</sup>. Rather than a simple rejection of *Bhartṛhari*’s linguistic scheme, this work builds upon and modifies its structure in a way that suggests that the Grammarians theory presages and influences the Trika system. The originator of monistic Śaiva philosophical apologetics, *Somānanda* attempts to show that *Paśyantī* is not the Supreme Reality since it lacks certain qualities of *Śiva*. “The doctrine of the Grammarians, according to which *Paśyantī* is the Supreme Cause of the universe, says *Somānanda*, is acceptable to us if they attribute to it the powers of will (*icchā*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and action (*kriyā*) in subtle forms before it is materialized in the form of the actual creation. In this case it is identical with our *Śiva*.... “But as long as they do not this, *Śiva* and not

<sup>40</sup> Gaurinath Sastri, *The Philosophy of Word and Meaning*, Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1959, 77.

<sup>41</sup> K. Sivaraman, “The Shaiva and the Grammarian Perspectives of Language”, *Language in Indian Philosophy and Religion*, ed. by H. Coward, Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978, 27.

<sup>42</sup> Swami Laksman Jee, *Kashmir Shaivism: The Secret Supreme*, Albany: Universal Shaiva Trust, 1988, 42.

<sup>43</sup> André Pardoux, *Vāc: The Concept of the Word in Selected Hindu Tantras*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1990, 426.

<sup>44</sup> *Śiva-Dṛṣṭi* -3.58-61. Non-dualist Śaivism is characterized by *Somānanda* as a ‘secret doctrine’ (*rahasyaṃ śāstram*) in danger of being lost in a world given over to dualism in the Kali age.

*Paśyantī* is the Supreme Being.”<sup>45</sup> Thus *Somānanda* encompasses or ‘imperializes’ *Bhartṛhari* by identifying Supreme Speech with Śiva’s Śakti.

For the Grammarian *Parā-Vāk* is the same as *Paśyantī*, the Highest Truth, but in *Somānanda*’s view *Parā-Vāk*, is a stage higher than *Paśyantī* and also represents *vimarsa*, or the self-reflective power of *Parama-Śiva*. “For what reasons the grammarians holds the *Paśyantī* to be the highest aspect of speech, the Śaiva, thanks to the grammarian, can see it as but the power of knowledge which in his categorical scheme constitutes the *Sadāśiva-tattva*. For him, *Parā* as the highest aspect of speech beyond *Paśyantī*, is the power of self-awareness or of consciousness being self-aware (*vimarśa*).”<sup>46</sup> Despite the differences between the Grammarian and Kashmiri Śaivism is evident that the school of *Bhartṛhari* has significantly influenced the Trika philosophy. “*Bhartṛhari*’s work is evidently prior to those of the philosophical classics of the Śaiva and Śākta schools and it is natural that they have been influenced by the former.”<sup>47</sup>

It can be said that the climax of a hermeneutics of synthesis and the sacred word exegesis of the Śaivāgama initiated by the revelation of the Śiva-Sūtra to Vasugupta represents Abhinavagupta’s works. Abhinavagupta lived in Kashmir from about the middle of the tenth century into the eleventh. He was, without a doubt, the most brilliant of the Kashmiri Śaiva teachers and one of the greatest spiritual and intellectual giants India has produced. He wrote more than sixty works in the vast fields of aesthetics, philosophy, poetry, tantric exegesis and developed Indian studies of literature, literary and linguistic theory. Some of his treatises are very extensive, and all remarkable for the beauty of their Sanskrit and profundity of thought<sup>48</sup>. In his the *magnum opus*, the *Tantrāloka*, Abhinavagupta critically structured the Trika in the light of *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy and synthesized under its rubric an enormous range of symbolism and ritual which derive from diverse Tantric traditions. Actually, the *Tantrāloka* is an encyclopedia or ‘systematic theology’ of Hindu Tantric doctrines and gives the summary of contents of *Advaita* Tantras which existed in Kashmir in the author’s time. His aim was to bring together the philosophy and tantric practice of major Śaivāgama schools – Kula, Krama, *Pratyabhijñā*, Spanda, – couched in the monistic philosophy of Trika Śaivism<sup>49</sup>.

The most effective instrument of release for Kaula Śaivism, as in other Hindu traditions, is the linguistic device of a mantra. But just what are mantras and why do they have such an important function? In the words of Harvey P. Alper: “Indeed, the history of the religious life of the Indian people might plausibly be read as a history of mantras.”<sup>50</sup> Nowadays the term

<sup>45</sup> R. K. Kaw, *The Doctrine of Recognition. (Pratyabhijñā Philosophy)*, Hoshiapur, Visvesvarananda Institute, 1967, 87.

<sup>46</sup> André Pardoux, *op. cit.*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Gaurinath Sastri, *The Philosophy of Word and Meaning*, Calcutta: Sanskrit College, 1959, 82.

<sup>48</sup> Concerning the life and works of Abhinavagupta see K. C. Pandey, *Abhinavagupta: An Historical and Philosophical Study*, Benares, Chowkhamba, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1963; Rastogi Navjivan, *An Introduction the Tantrāloka: A Study in Structure*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987; V. Raghavan, *Abhinavagupta and His Works*, Varanasi: Chaukhambha Orientalia, 1981.

<sup>49</sup> For a historical survey of the Krama system represented in the works of Kashmiri Saiva authors, see Rastogi Navjivan, *The Krama Tantricism of Kashmir. Historical and General Sources* Vol.1, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979.

<sup>50</sup> *Understanding Mantras*, ed. Harvey P. Alper, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, State University of New York, 1989, 2.

*mantra* is not printed in italics, it is a word in common use because the term is both impossible to translate and very difficult to define properly. The scholastic definition of mantra given by Jan Gonda reflects the complexity of the evolving concept of sacred word from the Vedas to Hindu theism and Tantrism. He defines mantra as “word(s) believed to be of ‘superhuman origin’ received, fashioned and spoken by the ‘inspired’ seers, poets and reciters in order to invoke divine power(s) and especially conceived as means of creating, conveying, concentrating and realizing intentional and efficient thought, and of coming into touch or identifying oneself with the essence of the divinity which is present in the mantra.... Mantra is a power (*śakti*) in the form of formulated and expressed thought”<sup>51</sup>. Both the real and the traditional etymology of the word *mantra* focuses attention on its intellectual nature. According to the former, a mantra is an instrument (*-tra*) of reflection (*man-*); according to the latter a mantra is a thought (*manana*) that saves (*trā-*). In both cases allusion is made to the extraordinary intellectual objectivity attributed to mantras. That’s why Harvey P. Alper discerns the chief three epistemological characteristics of mantric utterance: 1) mantras are tools of cognition; 2) mantras are elements in a system of discourse that depends upon certain root metaphors; 3) mantric utterance is experienced as disclosive<sup>52</sup>.

From a scholastic point of view, probably the most interesting example of the association of Sanskrit alphabet (*varṇamālā*) with the cosmology and activity of consciousness is Abhinava’s esoteric exegesis of the symbolic significance of the mantra *A h a ṃ*, which in Sanskrit means ‘I’ and symbolises by its form the dynamic nature of the Self. The objective world of perceptions is essentially a chain of thought-constructs (*prapañca*) closely linked to one another and woven into the fabric of diversity (*vicitratā*). This thought (*vikalpa*) is a form of speech (*vāk*) uttered internally by the mind (*citta*), which is itself an outpouring of consciousness. Consciousness also, in its turn, resounds with the silent, supreme form of speech (*parā vāk*) which is the reflective awareness through which it expresses itself to itself. Consequently, the fifty letters of Sanskrit alphabet, which are the smallest phonemic units into which speech can be analysed, are symbolic of the principal elements of the activity of consciousness<sup>53</sup>. Letters come together

<sup>51</sup> Jan Gonda, *The Indian Mantra*, Oriens, 1963, 16:249, 272. This essay remains the single most important contribution to the study of the subject. One of the most comprehensive and concise description of mantra is given by Mircea Eliade: “The practical value and philosophical implications of mantras rest upon two orders of facts: first, the yogic function of the phonemes used as ‘supports’ for concentration; second – and this is the peculiarly tantric contribution – the elaboration of a gnostic system and an interiorized liturgy through revalorization of the archaic traditions concerning ‘mystical sound.” (Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, tr. from French by W. R. Trask, Princeton University Press, 1971, 212–213). Agehananda Bharati offers his own more linguistic definition of mantra: “A mantra is a quasi-morpheme or a series of quasi-morphemes, or a series of mixed genuine and quasi-morphemes arranged in conventional patterns, based on codified esoteric traditions, and passed on from one preceptor to one disciple in the course of a prescribed initiation”. (Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1970, 111.)

<sup>52</sup> Harvey P. Alper, “The Cosmos as Śiva’s Language-Game: ‘Mantra’ According to Ksemarāja’s Śivasūtravimarśinī”, *Understanding Mantras*, ed. Harvey P. Alper, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, 268. Of immeasurable worth for the study of mantrasastras is the comprehensive bibliographical and methodological essay and list contributed by Professor Harvey P. Alper in that book and covering more than 1600 items and situating mantra contextually in Indian history, society, and culture.

<sup>53</sup> Although it is conventional to speak in this context of an ‘alphabet’, this somewhat misleading. Rather, one has the primal matrix, an ordered cosmogonic procession of phonemes understood to be the eternal, primordial sounds that are the building blocks of the cosmos in its entirety. For this purpose *kṣ* is considered an independent *akṣara* rather than a conjunct of *k* and *ṣ*, yielding fifty rather than forty-nine *varṇas*. See below.

to generate words and words go on to form sentences. In the same way: “the fifty phases in the cycle of consciousness represent, in the realms of denoted meaning (*vācya*), the sum total of its universal activity (*kriyā*) corresponding to the principal forces (*kalā*) which come together to form the metaphysical categories of experience, which in their turn appear in the grossest, most explicitly ‘articulate’ form as the one hundred and eighteen world-systems (*bhuvana*).”<sup>54</sup>

‘A’, the first letter of both *A h a ṁ* and the Sanskrit alphabet, is the point of departure or initial emergence of all other letters and hence denotes *Anuttara* – the highest principle, Absolute. ‘Ha’, is the final letter of the alphabet and represents the point of completion when all the letters have emerged and is called *Anuttarā*<sup>55</sup>. It represents the state in which all the elements of experience, in the domains of both inner consciousness and outer unconsciousness, are fully displayed. It is also the generative, emission (*visarga*) which like the breath, casts the inner into outer, and draws what is outside inward. The two letters ‘A’ and ‘Ha’ thus represent *Śiva*, the transcendental source and *Śakti*, His cosmic outpouring that flows back to him. The combined ‘A-Ha’ contains within itself all the letters of the alphabet – every phase of consciousness, both transcendental and universal.

‘M’, the final letter of *A h a ṁ*, is written as a dot placed above the letter which precedes it. It comes at the end of the vowel series and before the consonants and so is called *anusvāra* (lit. ‘that which follows the vowels’) and also *bindu* (lit. ‘dot’, ‘drop’, ‘point’, ‘zero’). While the consonant ‘M’ symbolises the individual soul (*puruṣa*), *bindu* represents the subtle vibration of ‘I’, which is the life force (*jīvakalā*) and essence of the soul’s subjectivity manifest at the transcendental, supramental level (*unmanā*)<sup>56</sup>. *Bindu*, as a point without area, symbolises the non-finite nature of the pure awareness (*pramītibhāva*) of *A h a ṁ*. It is the pivot around which the cycle of energies from ‘A’ to ‘Ha’ rotates, the Void in the centre from which all powers emanate (*prasara*) and into which they collapse. Each letter of the alphabet stands for an aspect or phase in the cycle of cosmic manifestation and withdrawal. As such, it, according to the text of the *Śākta Śrīvidyā/Śrīcakra* tradition *Kāmakalāvīlāsa*, symbolises the union of *Śiva* and *Śakti* (*śivaśaktimithunapiṇḍa*)<sup>57</sup> in a state of heightened potency in which this divine couple (*yāmalarūpa*) is united by their passion (*kāma*) in the totality of *A h a ṁ* and have not yet divided to generate the world of diversity<sup>58</sup>. When *Śiva* and *Śakti* unite, the universe, formerly experienced as a reality set apart from consciousness, ceases to exist. The emission of cosmic

<sup>54</sup> Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration: An Analysis of the Doctrine and Practices of Kashmir Shaivism*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989, 185–186.

<sup>55</sup> *Tantrāloka* – II.74.

<sup>56</sup> *Yoginīśādaya with commentaries Dipaka by Amṣṭānanda and Setubandha by Bhāskara Rāya*, ed. by G. Kaviraj, Benares, 1963, 1.35

<sup>57</sup> *Kāmakalāvīlāsa by Puṇyānandanātha with the commentary of Naṭanādanātha*. tr. with com. by Sir John Woodroffe, Madras: Ganesh and Co., 1971, V. 5. *Śiva* and *Śakti* are represented in this work as the universal subject and His cosmic object. Their infinite nature is symbolized by two transdimensional points of absolute consciousness (*bindu*). *Śiva* is represented by a white point (*śuklabindu*) and *Śakti* by a red point (*soṅṅitabindu*): both expand and contract – ‘White *Śiva*’ penetrates ‘Red *Śakti*’. This results in the creation of the universe and *Śiva*’s transformation into *Śiva* and *Śakti* transformation into *Śiva*. Despite their essential philosophical identity, the *Śaivite* stresses *Śiva*’s superiority over *Śakti* and the *Śākta* follower that of His power. The Spanda school, however, maintains that power and power-holder are equally important.

<sup>58</sup> *Tantrāloka* – II.81.

manifestation (*visarga*) pours out between these two poles. When outer objectivity is reabsorbed into its transcendent source, *bindu* is the point into which all the manifest powers of consciousness are gathered and fused together. The universal potency of all the letters is thus contained in *bindu* which, as the reflective awareness of supreme 'I' consciousness (*parā-vāk*), gives them all life<sup>59</sup>. Thus all the cycles of creation and destruction are contained within *A h a ṃ*. through which they are experienced simultaneously as the spontaneous play of (*krīda*) the absolute. As *Kṣemarāja*, underscoring the esoteric and soteric value of this *mahāmantra* of Śaiva Tantra, puts it: "All embracing I-ness (*pūrṇāhantā*) is the mistress of all the letters from 'A' to 'Kṣa' which, as the absolute (*anuttara*) power of unstruck sound (*anāhata*), it contains and encapsulates. Thus it is a pure immutable awareness even though it has absorbed into itself every cycle of creation and destruction in the play of the Wheel of Energies constituting the unfolding cosmic order (*śadadhvan*) of countless words and all that they denote. It is the *Parā-Vāk*, the great unspoken mantra which, eternally manifested, is the life of all beings."<sup>60</sup>

Of all mantras Abhinavagupta recommends the Heart-Mantra, *S a u ḥ*, which contains the *Visarga* (:) and accomplishes the task of liberation by focusing the attention of the aspirant on the expansive aspect of his own heart. The mantra he recites is the eternal resonance of the awareness which is the pulsation of the Heart of his own consciousness<sup>61</sup>. The Heart-Mantra connects the soul with the 'flow' of universal processes and thus liberates the individual. "He alone truly knows the emergence of the mantra who, in this very resonance (*Nāda*), with a wish to obtain such fruits of emergence, remains absorbed in his own mantra."<sup>62</sup> In accordance with the teaching of one's guru, the continuous practice of mantra repetition, *japa* is then advised in order to sustain the *Nāda* within the flow of sound (*dhvani*).

While the Vedic mantras are comprised of complete sentences, the Tantric mantras are in the form of monosyllabic vocables only, technically called the *bījamantras*, in theory, are sonic manifestations of basic cosmic powers; literally, seeds of the fundamental constituents of the universe<sup>63</sup>. The tantric *bījamantras* are collection of certain speech sounds coalesced together and put in the encased form, *saṃputita*. Most of them are found listed in the *Mantrābhidhānaśāstra*, dictionaries or other digests of Tantric mantras<sup>64</sup>. According to the Śaiva Tantric tradition, the *bījamantras* consist of certain speech sounds which are actually *mātṛkā varṇas*,

<sup>59</sup> *Tantrāloka* – III.125.

<sup>60</sup> *Spandanīya* by *Kṣemarāja*, ed. with English translation by M. S. Kaul, Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, No. 43, 1925, 66.

<sup>61</sup> *Tantrāloka* – IV.181–182.

<sup>62</sup> *Tantrāloka* – XXIII.149. In the *Parātrāsikā-Vivaraṇa* (P203) mantra *S a u ḥ* is also called *amṛtabīja* – 'the seed of immortality'.

<sup>63</sup> The *bījas* used in the in the Tantric *bhūtaśudhi pūjā* (ritual of purification of the elements) are formed from the series of four semivowels in the Sanskrit alphabet, each standing for one of the four basic cosmic elements. Thus, one repeats (or mediates) on *yaṃ*, the *bīja* of wind, and visualizes the desiccation of the body, followed by multiple repetition of *raṃ*, standing for fire, then (in some cases) *laṃ*, the earth-*bīja*, and finally repetition of *vaṃ*, bringing forth the refreshing cosmic waters. This correlation is discussed by A. Avalon, *The Garland of Letters*, Madras: Ganesh and Co, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 1963, 43.

<sup>64</sup> See, for instance, a sixteenth century synthetic treatise on *Mantrasāstra* called *Mantramahodadhi of Mahidhara with commentary Nauka*, eng. tr. by a board of scholars, Sri Satguru Publications, 1984.



letters symbolising the consciousness power or the spiritual energy and is a very compact, condensed form of god or power that it 'is' in essence. In *Śiva-Sūtra*, the *bīja* is portrayed as the womb of the multiplicity (*anekadhā*) of the Śaktic universe<sup>65</sup>. The origin of the *bijamantras* is not known but can be likened to the seed which, when implanted in the pure *ādhāra* of the spiritual adept, is sure to produce in the tantric mode of *pūjā* the desired results.

While referring to the first *āhnikā* of Abhinavagupta's *Tantrāloka*, Debabrata Sen Sharma has suggested, that the mantras originated from *sañjalpa*, sounds escaping involuntarily from the lips of a yogin during the transition period from the state of *samādhi* trance to normal state of consciousness or awareness<sup>66</sup>. The yogin then is in a state of half *samādhi* and half waking state having no conscious control over his faculties. It is believed that during *savikalpa samādhi* yogin has wonderful experiences or visions which he is not able to communicate in verbal form. He only mutters something which apparently does not appear to convey any meaning but reveals energy of the divine pure consciousness (*cit ānanda śakti*) corresponding to *Parā-Vāk* level. These apparently meaningless, spontaneous sounds are condensed or coalesced one over the other later by himself or by those who happen to be near him and hear them. During the initiation, though the guru utters the mantra using the *Vaikharī*, the audible form of speech, he awakens the mantra with the help of *Parā-Vāk* ascending to the level of *Śiva-Tattva*; he arouses the power, *śakti* lying latent in the mantra by peeling off, as it were, the 'shells' covering it. As a result of this exercise, he makes the mantra 'alive', otherwise the mantras in *Vaikharī-Vāk* are incapable of producing any result, they are simply 'dead'. In *Śivasūtravimarśinī Kṣemarāja* it is clearly described what a disciple obtains through a guru: "From a guru who is favorably disposed (*prasannāt*) a disciple gains perfect understanding of the circle of powers that emerges from *Mātṛkā* (*mātṛkācakrasambodhaḥ*)"<sup>67</sup>.

It is said that when the yogin utters mantra in audible form, so called *śaśabdajapa*, the mantras then are in the form of *Vaikharī-Vāk*. The silent repetition, low intonation of mantra, called *upāṅśujapa* is performed on *Madhyamā-Vāk* level. In the *mānasajapa*, silent, mental repetition, mantra is repeated effortlessly and spontaneously<sup>68</sup>. At this stage the *japa* begins to coalesce with the subtle plane of speech, the *Paśyantī-Vāk*. Hence it represents the fusion of word and its meaning and is devoid of every kind of differentiation. André Padoux summarizes this presupposition clearly: "Two powers are associated with every mantra: one power (*vācakaśakti*), which 'expresses' or 'signifies', is the mantra itself. [The other] (*vācyaśakti*), which is 'to be expressed' or 'signified', is the *devatā* [the god or object of the mantra]. Here as elsewhere the second aspect follows from the first, for it is the Word which is primal, the fecundator who precedes her object."<sup>69</sup> It follows, that the right mantra used in the proper way by the qualified

<sup>65</sup> *Śiva-Sūtra* 3.15.

<sup>66</sup> Debabrata Sen Sharma, *Spiritual Significance of the Mantra*, Unpublished paper, 9-10.

<sup>67</sup> *Kṣemarāja's Śivasūtravimarśinī* 2.7.

<sup>68</sup> *Parātrīśikā-Vivaraṇa*, 69.

<sup>69</sup> André Padoux, *Recherches sur la symbolique et l'énergie de la parole dans certains textes tantriques*, Paris: Editions de Boccard, 1975, 29; quoted from Harvey P. Alper, "The Cosmos as Śiva's Language-Game: 'Mantra' According to Kṣemarāja's Śivasūtravimarśinī", *Understanding Mantras*, ed. Harvey P. Alper, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, 267.

person is believed to be a key that unlocks the *Śaktic* structure of the cosmos. It means also that the practice of a Tantric discipline in a cosmos believed to be *Śaktic* turns the syllables of a mantra into a subtle, linguistic tool for apprehending that the cosmos is nothing but *Śiva's* language game or a playful verbal His self-expression. "He, who has this undersanding (viz., that the universe is identical with the Self), regards the whole world as a play (*krīdātvena*) of the Divine, and thus being ever united with the universal consciousness is, without doubt, liberated while alive"<sup>70</sup>.

Under the spell of the metaphor of 'World as Word' both the organic unity and the diversity of the world are understood as the articulation, the expression (*vācya*), of *Śiva-who-is-Transcendental-Speech* (*Parā-Vāk*). In his capacity to speak transcendently *Śiva* is the one, who articulates, expresses (*vācaka*), the world. Mantric utterance gets singled out as the one form of discourse that enables a human being to assert, to recognize (*pratyabhijñā*) his freedom within the cosmic process by identifying himself with *Śiva*. "The vitality of mantra (*mantravīrya*) is *Śiva's* power, the undivided reality of mantra and mind (*cetas*) both when they arise and when they fall away. It emerges from *Śiva* both as mantra and as adept's mind (*citta*) in the form of phonemes and thought-constructs (*sankalpa*). The mantric power manifest [this way] is capable of producing only limited (*niyata*) results for those yogis who have not come in contact with the power of their own nature."<sup>71</sup>

*Śankara's Advaita-Vedānta* tradition also recognises the necessity of uttering by the guru *mahāvākya*, which is called *upadeśavākya* – *tat tvam asi* and that produces the realisation that the aspirant is the Brahman himself (*aham brahma asmi*). This realisation is called *anubhavavākya* because the guru's utterance of mantra contains the potency which is released just by hearing the *upadeśa*. So, the important steps of Advaitic *sādhana*, like *manana* and *nididhyāsana*, can follow only after *ātmadarśana* on hearing the *upadeśavākya*. But it is true that *Advaita-vedānta* tradition does not directly talk about *śakti of mantra* lying latent in the *upadeśavākya* because the *Śankara's Advaita* does not admit the existence of *Śakti* on the transcendental plane, and because they look upon spiritual discipline, *sādhana* to be an exercise in the acquisition of knowledge (*jñāna*), and not action (*kriyā*).

In his *Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa*, one of the most fascinating but also most difficult mystical texts of the Kashmir *Śaiva* philosophy dealing with the theory and practice of mantra, Abhinavagupta presents a penetrating metaphysics of language and its various stages in relation to consciousness. Metaphysically speaking, the *Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa* explains and illustrates the Tantric principle or dictum: "everything is related to everything else" (*sarvaṃ sarvātmakaṃ*). Abhinava has equated the Supreme consciousness with the *Parā-Vāk*, Logos and has shown the correspondence between the involution of the Supreme Lord *Parama-Śiva* in the form of

<sup>70</sup> *Spanda-Kārikā* II.5. Compare it with Johan Huizinga: "Behind every abstract expression there [lies] the boldest of metaphors, and every metaphor is a play on words. Thus giving expression to life man creates a second, poetic world alongside the world of nature." (Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture*, New York, Beacon Press, 1955, 4).

<sup>71</sup> *Spandakārikāvivṛti* by *Rājānaka Rāma*, ed. by J. C. Chatterjee, Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, No. 6, 1916, 83–84.

*Sadāśiva*, *Īśvara* and *Śuddha-Vidyā* during the creation. According to him, *Pūrṇahaṅta* is the natural mantra revealed on the level of *Śiva tattva* which corresponds to the *Parā-Vāk*. This level is described as a pure subject '*ahaṅ*' having no external object of knowledge and is identical to the pure, Absolute consciousness in the form of unity of *Śiva* and *Śakti*. Accordingly, there is no distinction between the word (*śabda*) and its object (*artha*) and there is rooted the spiritual seed of scriptures, *āgamas*<sup>72</sup>. When *Sadāśiva* tattva emerges from the Supreme Lord in the course of involution, then *Parā-Vāk* is revealed in the form of *Paśyantī*. The *icchā-śakti* is dominant on that level. When the Supreme Lord appears as the *Īśvara tattva* on the succeeding level, then the *Parā-Vāk* is revealed in the form of *Madhyamā-Vāk* and the *jñāna-śakti* is said to be dominant *śakti*. The difference between the word and its referent is, in the stage of *Madhyamā*, only in a subtle mental state or the inner psychic apparatus (*antaḥkaraṇa*), it has not yet been externalized. Again, when the *Parama-Śiva* assumes grosser form below the level of *Māyā*, the *Vāk* is revealed in the *Vaikharī* form which is the differentiated gross form of the speech. The *Vaikharī-Vāk* is characterised by experience of duality and there is a clear difference between the word and its referent, and the *kriyā-śakti* is said to be dominant *śakti*.

Beyond the realms of language, it is the transcendental consciousness (*Parā-Vāk*) in which all language is rooted and pervades all that language denotes as its essential being. This unity on the highest level of *Vāk* and consciousness explains why the *Śiva-Sūtra* describes the mantra as consciousness<sup>73</sup>. As Utpaladeva writes: "The Supreme Word is consciousness. It is self-awareness spontaneously arisen, the highest freedom and sovereignty of the Supreme lord Siva. That pulsing radiance (*sphurattā*) is pure Being, unqualified by time and space. As the essence [of all things] it is said to be the heart of the Supreme Lord."<sup>74</sup> When the intention arises within consciousness to discern its own brilliance manifest in the world of denotations and denoted meanings of language, speech turns from the supreme transcendental level to that of immanence and assumes the form of a pure intuitive awareness (*pratibhā*) which perceives and comprehends its universal manifestation. This is the voice of intuition (*paśyantī*), which grasps the meaning inherent inwardly in all words and externally in all that they denote. It is pure generic perception in an indeterminate form (*nirvikalpa*) and not yet formed into language in which the act of denotation, its object and what which denotes it are indistinguishable. On this stage of manifestation the nondual divine I-consciousness does differentiate itself by the power of knowledge (*jñāna śakti*) into the questioner and answerer: "The Self, who is the natural state of all existents, who is Self-luminous, amusing Himself with question-answer which is yet not different from Himself, and in which both the questioner (as *Devī*) and the answerer (as *Bhairava*) are only Himself"<sup>75</sup>.

<sup>72</sup> *Parātrīśikā-Vivaraṇa*, 8.

<sup>73</sup> '*cittaṅṅ mantrah*' – *Śiva-Sūtra* 2.1.

<sup>74</sup> *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Kārikā* 1.5.13–14.

<sup>75</sup> *Parātrīśikā-Vivaraṇa*, 15. This explains us why the all Tantric treatises are written in the form of discussion between *Siva* and *Devī*: "The God *Sadāśiva* Himself, assuming the position of both teacher and pupil, revealed the Tantra by means of former and later sentences, i.e. by means of question and answer". *Svacchandabhairava-Tantra with Uddyota by Kṣemarāja*, ed. by M. S. Kaul, 1921–1955, Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, Vol. IV, 20. It reminds a dialogue between *Arjuna* and *Kṛṣṇa* in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.

The third level of manifestation is the outer corporal speech (*vaikharī*) and the fourth, the subtler, inner discourse (*antaḥsanjalpa*) of thought that forms at the intermediate level (*madhyamā*) where the ratiocinating mind stands between the higher levels of intuition and its outer verbal expression in determinate form (*savikalpa*). Outer, articulate speech consists, of a series of ordered phonemic elements (*mālinī*), produced and combined by the vocal organs to form meaningful *māyīya* letters, words and sentences. In order for this to be possible, these elements must also be grounded in consciousness (*pramā*). The articulated phonemes are merely outer, gross manifestations of the phonemic energies (*varṇagrāma*) held in a potential state within consciousness. In the words of Mark S. G. Dyczkowski: “This ‘mass of sounds’ (*śabdarāśi*) is the light of consciousness (*prakāśa*) which makes the universe manifest and contain all things within itself. It is the totality of consciousness expressed as the collective awareness symbolised by all the letters corresponding to the introverted subjectivity of Śiva Himself.”<sup>76</sup>

The power through which this potential actualises itself into speech and the word of denotation is technically called *Mātṛkā*. *Mātṛkācakra* is the theory of Sanskrit alphabet, reflecting the parallelism between the processes of creation of the universe and the structure of the thirty-six elements or *tattvas*. The last major Kashmiri Śaiva author *Kṣemarāja* in his commentary *Vimarśinī* on *Śiva Sūtra*<sup>77</sup> explains that all mantras consist of letters (*varṇas*) which are regarded as *mātṛkā* (lit. ‘little mother’). The *mātṛkās* embody the creative energy (*vīrya*) of the lord Śiva manifested in the form of the mass of speech sounds (*śabdarāśi*). In supporting his view he quotes from a now lost text called *Śrītantrasadbhāva* where is said that the letters constituting mantra are not ordinary alphabets forming word, used by us, they symbolise the divine energy or divine *Śakti* inherent in the pure consciousness. According to *Kṣemarāja*, it is the reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) and radiance (*sphurattā*) of the supreme subject – the ‘mass of sound’ (*śabdarāśi*) – and the undivided wonder (*camatkāra*) Śiva experiences when He contemplates the universe He gathers up into Himself in the form of countless words (*vācaka*) and their meanings (*vācya*)<sup>79</sup>. *Mātṛkā*, as *Parā-vāk-śakti* that generates the world, contains within itself the various aspects of objectivity that, although not yet manifest, are ready to issue forth. Thus this power, at one with Śiva, is called *Mātṛkā* because she is the mother of the universe that she contains within herself as, in the words of Abhinavagupta, does a pregnant woman her child<sup>79</sup>.

The circle of the powers *Mātṛkā* (*mātṛkācakra*) consists of the phonemic energies contained in *A h a ṃ*, the universal Self. When grasped in its entirety at its source, these energies elevate the consciousness of the enlightened, but when split up and dispersed give rise to the obscuring forces (*kalā*) which lead the ignorant away from realisation. Thought constructions (*vikalpa*) are the play of *mātṛkās* which go on creating thoughts or concepts that are ever engaged in veiling the real nature of being: “He who is deprived of his power by the forces of obscuration

<sup>76</sup> Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Doctrine of Vibration: An Analysis of the Doctrine and Practices of Kashmir Shaivism*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1989, 198.

<sup>77</sup> *Jñānādhiṣṭhānam mātṛkā sūtra* – I.4.

<sup>78</sup> *Svacchandabhairava-Tantra with Uddyota* by *Kṣemarāja*, ed. by M. S. Kaul, Vol. I–VII, 1921–1955, Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, Vol. XI, 199.

<sup>79</sup> *Tantrāloka* – XV.130–131.

(*kalā*) and a victim of the powers arising from the mass of sounds (*śabdārāśi*) is called the fettered soul. The powers [of speech] are always ready to obscure his true nature as no mental representation can arise that is not penetrated by *Vāk*<sup>80</sup>. The rays of phonemic energies emanate from the light of Śiva, the 'mass of sounds' in eight groups. From Śaivāgamic perspective, the entire cosmos may be experienced through ritual and in meditation exactly as it is envisioned metaphorically, as animated by circles upon circles of goddesses. They constitute the powers of the inner mental organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*) and the five senses, figuratively arranged in a circle around the sacred shrine (*pīṭha*) of *Mātrkācakra* who manifests externally as the body. The eight classes and the names of the goddesses presiding over them are as follows<sup>81</sup>:

<i>'Mass of sounds'</i>	<i>Goddesses</i>	<i>Parts of Body</i>
Gutturals (क <i>ka</i> , ख <i>kha</i> , ग <i>ga</i> , घ <i>gha</i> , ङ <i>ṅa</i> )	<i>Brāhmaṇī</i>	<i>Buddhi</i> (Intelekt)
Palatals (च <i>ca</i> , छ <i>cha</i> , ज <i>ja</i> , झ <i>jha</i> , ञ <i>ṅa</i> )	<i>Māheśvarī</i>	<i>Ahaṁkāra</i> (Ego)
Cerebrals (ट <i>ṭa</i> , ठ <i>ṭha</i> , ड <i>ḍa</i> , ढ <i>ḍha</i> , ण <i>ṇa</i> )	<i>Kaumārī</i>	<i>Manas</i> (Mind)
Dentals (त <i>ta</i> , थ <i>tha</i> , द <i>da</i> , ध <i>dha</i> , न <i>na</i> )	<i>Vaiṣṇavī</i> or <i>Nārāyaṇī</i>	Hearing
Labials (प <i>pa</i> , फ <i>pha</i> , ब <i>ba</i> , भ <i>bha</i> , म <i>ma</i> )	<i>Vārāhī</i>	Touch
Semivowels (य <i>ya</i> , र <i>ra</i> , ल <i>la</i> , व <i>va</i> )	<i>Aindrī</i> or <i>Indrāṇī</i>	Sight
Sibilants (श <i>śa</i> , ष <i>ṣa</i> , स <i>sa</i> , ह <i>ha</i> , क्ष <i>kṣa</i> )	<i>Camundā</i>	Taste
Vowels (अ <i>a</i> , आ <i>ā</i> , इ <i>i</i> , ई <i>ī</i> , उ <i>u</i> , ऊ <i>ū</i> , ऋ <i>r</i> , ॠ <i>ṛ</i> , ए <i>e</i> , ऐ <i>ai</i> , ओ <i>o</i> , औ <i>au</i> , ः <i>aṅ</i> ( <i>anusvāra</i> ) : अḥ ( <i>visarga</i> )	<i>Mahālakṣmī</i> or <i>Yogīśvarī</i>	Smell

Another important symbolical understanding of the letters is that the vowels are called *bīja* (seed) and are identified with Śiva (*Śivatattva*), while the consonants are *yoni* (womb) and are identified with Śakti which is called 'the Divine Freedom' (*svātantrya*). This implies inseparability of Śiva and Śakti, of vowels and consonants in language<sup>82</sup>. Vowels as expressions of *Parā-Śakti* are identified with the five main Śaktis of Śiva: *Cit* or *Anuttara*, *Ānanda*, *Ichā*, *Jñāna* and *Kriyā Śakti* in the following way:

अ <i>a</i>	– denotes <i>Cit-śakti</i> or consciousness,
आ <i>ā</i>	– denotes <i>Ānanda-śakti</i> or bliss,
इ <i>i</i>	– denotes <i>Ichā-śakti</i> or will to manifest, but still unaffected by objectivity,
ई <i>ī</i>	– denotes <i>Īśanā</i> or mastery where <i>icchā-śakti</i> is colored by objectivity,
उ <i>u</i>	– denotes <i>Unmeṣa</i> or <i>jñāna-śakti</i> , power of knowledge,
ऊ <i>ū</i>	– denotes <i>Ūnatā</i> or deficiency of knowledge, the cause of objectivity,
ऋ <i>r</i>	– denotes <i>Amṛtabīja</i> , imperishable letter, not subject to any change,
ॠ <i>ṛ</i>	– --/--
ए <i>e</i>	– --/--
ऐ <i>ai</i>	– --/--

<sup>80</sup> *Spanda-Kārikā* – 45–47.

<sup>81</sup> See: *Kṣemarāja's Pratyabhijñānyāyāyam: The Secret of Self-Recognition*, Sanskrit text with English translation by Jaideva Singh, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, 141.

<sup>82</sup> *Spanda-Kārikās: The Divine Creative Pulsation*, tr. by Jaidev Singh, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980, 156.

- ए *e* – denotes *Asphuṭa kriyā-śakti* or indistinct power of activity,  
 ऐ *ai* – denotes *Sphuṭa kriyā-śakti* or distinct power of activity,  
 औ *o* – denotes *Sphuṭatara kriyā-śakti* or more distinct power of activity,  
 औ *au* – denotes *Sphuṭatama kriyā-śakti* or most distinct power of activity,  
 ॐ *am* – denotes *Śiva bindu (anusvāra)* or undivided knowledge of the universe,  
 : *ah* – denotes *Visarga*, where the lower dot, symbolizing *Śakti* means that there is an expansion, of an objective world. The upper dot, symbolizing *Śiva*, means that the entire universe rests in the I-consciousness of *Śiva*.

Twenty-five consonants of the Sanskrit alphabetical system from gutturals (*ka-varga*) upto labials (*pa-varga*) represent twenty-five categories (*tattvas*) of *Sāṃkhya* system:

- क *ka* – *Prthivī* (earth), ख *kha* – *Jala* (water), ग *ga* – *Agni* (fire), घ *gha* – *Vāyu* (weather),  
 ङ *ṅa* – *Ākāśa* (space), च *ca* – *Gandha* (odour), छ *cha* – *Rasa* (flavour), ज *ja* – *Rūpa* (form)  
 झ *jha* – *Sparśa* (touch), ञ *ṅa* – *Śabda* (sound), ट *ṭa* – *Upastha* (sexual action),  
 ठ *ṭha* – *Pāyu* (excreting), ड *ḍa* – *Pāda* (locomotion), ढ *ḍha* – *Pāṇi* (handling),  
 ण *ṇa* – *Vāk* (speaking), त *ta* – *Ghrāṇa* (smelling), थ *tha* – *Rasanā* (tasting),  
 द *da* – *Cakṣu* (seeing), ध *dha* – *Tvak* (touching), न *na* – *Śrotra* (hearing)

The next five *tattvas* are of the level of limited individual experience:

- प *pa* – *Manas* (mind),  
 फ *pha* – *Ahaṅkāra* (egoity),  
 ब *ba* – *Buddhi* (intellect),  
 भ *bha* – *Prakṛti* (objective manifestation of *Śivatattva*, consisting of three *guṇas*),  
 म *ma* – *Puruṣa* (empirical subject),

The last nine letters of the Sanskrit alphabetical system from semivowels (*ya-varga*) upto sybilants (*sa-varga*) represents the particular categories of *Śaiva Trika* philosophy, namely, five coverings or limitations (*kañcukas*) of *māyā* and four *tattvas* of the level of universal experience:

- य *ya* – *Rāga* (limitation of desire),  
 र *ra* – *Vidyā* (limitation in regard of knowledge),  
 ल *la* – *Kalā* (limitation as regards agency) and *kāla* (limitation of time),  
 व *va* – *Niyati* (limitation in regard to space),  
 श *śa* – *Mahānāyā* (differentiating and self-forgetting power),  
 ष *ṣa* – *Śuddha vidyā* ('true knowledge', the Principle of correlation in the universal experience between experiencer and experienced),  
 स *sa* – *Īśvara* ('lordliness', the Principle of identification in the universal experience between what are thus correlated),  
 ह *ha* – *Sadāśiva* (the Principle of Being, from which the experience of Being begins),  
 क्ष *kṣa* – *Śakti* (the Principle of potentialisation of the universal experience)<sup>83</sup>,

<sup>83</sup> For the detailed analysis of the system *tattvas* in the philosophy of Kashmir *Śaivism* see: *Satttriṅśattattva-sandoha. (A Text of Trika Philosophy of Kashmir) With the commentary of Rājānaka Ananda Kavi*, tr. in English with explanatory notes and introduction by Dr. Debabrata Sen Sharma, B. N. Chakravarty University, Kurukshetra.

As we see, of all letters 'A', the representative of *anuttara śakti*, is the most important and is constituent of all letter. As *Jayaratha* puts it in his commentary *Viveka* on *Tantrāloka*: "A resides in all the letters as their inner controller (*antaryāmitayā*)". Hence *mātrkā* refers at once to a mythic figure, the mother of the constellation of potencies (*śaktis*) that are understood to be the hidden controllers (*adhīṣṭhātr*) of the cosmos, and to the linguisticity of the experienced cosmos as such. The secret of mantras (*mantrarahasyam*) is unfolded, as *Kṣemarāja* quotes us from the *Tantrasadbhāva*: "All mantras consist of Transcendental Phonemes (*varṇas*) and [thus], my dear, they are really *Śakti*. However, *Śakti* should be known as the mother (*mātrkā*) [of the cosmos] and she should be known as really *Śiva*."<sup>84</sup> The alphabetic form of *Śaktis*, her mantric form is conceived of as the womb of cosmic multiplicity (*anekadhā*). That's why the *Śaktic Kālī-Tantra* literary corpus iconographically describes Mother *Kālī* with the garland (*akṣaramālā*) of fifty human heads denoting the fifty Sanskrit letters and she is called 'the Mother of the universe'<sup>85</sup>. Such mantra is a path of return to the cosmic unity through the maze of the *Śaktic* world. Mantras are simply something 'given', after all, they are *Śiva*-who-becomes-the-cosmos and possess the characteristic of being *Śiva* (*śivadharmin*). *Abhinavagupta* points out, that the yogi who grasps the true nature of the power of *Mātrkā* and its phonemic forces is liberated by the recognising that the activity of the senses and the discursive representations of the mind are in fact emanations of universal consciousness<sup>86</sup>.

Although mantras may convey an intelligible meaning, they are not bound to a convention (*sanketa*) as is common speech. In the Buddhist tradition *Vasubandhu* even states that meaninglessness is the real meaning of the mantra<sup>87</sup>. Mantra has meaning and serves a purpose to the degree in which it is possible to intuit through it the power of consciousness which gives it, and all things, being. Serving as a means to concentration, they free the mind of discursive representations<sup>88</sup>. The outer forms of mantra are expressions of the powers experienced inwardly. Mantras are charged with the vibration (*spanda*) of consciousness and in their turn, make consciousness vibrate. "Mantras are pure in the sense that they are not tainted by a conventionally accepted meaning (*vācya*) and transcends the usual form of awareness created by reflection on the phonemes" – writes *Rājānaka Rāma*<sup>89</sup>. At root the mantra represents the pure significance of all possible sentences and words relating to the world of particulars. Mantric

<sup>84</sup> *sarve varṇātmakā mantrās te ca śaktyātmakāḥ prīye śaktis tu mātrkā jñeyā sa ca jñeyā śivātmikā* – *Tantrasadbhāva* 51.

<sup>85</sup> See *Śakti-Saṅgama-Tantra*, ed. by Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, 4 Vols., Baroda: Oriental Institute, Vol. 2, 1941.

<sup>86</sup> *Abhinavagupta's Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa. The Secret of Tantric Mysticism*, skr. text, English translation and notes by Jaideva Singh, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988, 44. *Kṣemarāja* supports this by saying: "There is no science higher than *Mātrkā*" (*na vidyā mātrkāparā*). The term *mātrkā* also means the arrangement of letters in a regular grammarian order, i.e. the vowels come first and the consonants come next in a serial order. The arrangement of letters in irregular way, when the vowels and consonants are mixed and no serial order is observed, is called *mālinī*.

<sup>87</sup> S. B. Dasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Calcutta: Firma K.L.M., 1962, 21f. Similar alinguistic approach we find in the methodology of F. Staal's interpretation of mantra as meaningless, just as a practical matter of Vedic rituals. He has argued that the syntax of the ritual action formed the basis for the development of ordinary language and that original language of the Vedic ritual was meaningless and not language at all. Semantics – the system of meanings that are attached to words, signs, and expressions – represents for Staal a stage posterior to the use of language in ritual, while nonsemantic chant, music, gesture, and perhaps dance represent an earlier stage. See F. Staal, *Rules Without Meaning. Essays on Ritual, Mantras and the Science of Man*, New York: Peter Lang, 1988.

<sup>88</sup> *Tantrāloka* V.140–141.

<sup>89</sup> *Spandakārikāvivṛti by Rājānaka Rāma*, ed. by J. C. Chatterjee, Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, No. 6, 1916. 82.

energy is not to be sought in the actual sound or form of the mantra directly. The ordering of its phonemic constituent (*varṇasanniveśa*) is a merely a channel through which the yogi can tap the energy of his own consciousness. But the mantra and the reciter must be rooted in the one conscious reality, otherwise mantra will be a mere flux of powerless phonemic sounds. As Abhinavagupta explains: “O beloved, the mantras whose seed phonemic power (*bīja*) lie dormant will bear no fruit, while those mantras which are filled with consciousness are said to accomplish all things.”<sup>90</sup> We must remember also that mantras, even in their higher, supposedly redemptive forms, are always part of a precise and compulsory ritual context, outside which they are useless and powerless. A mantra may be a liberating word but only in accordance to precise and binding rules<sup>91</sup>.

\* \* \*

Thus, as we have seen, elaborate mysticism of the word found in the *Śaiva* Tantras has Vedic precedents and presupposes the philosophy of *Bhartṛhari*. Extending *Bhartṛhari*'s approach to the new problematics, representatives of *Śaivism* explained their cosmogonic myth of *Śiva* emanating the universe through *Śakti* as His self-recognition. Abhinavagupta's subtle speculation on the Word extends from its mystical dimension to the intricacies of Sanskrit grammar and linguistic speculation, from psychological subtleties to philosophical reasoning. The Tantric Kashmiri tradition, while building upon the *Śaiva-Āgamas* and Grammarian tradition, formulates its own unique rational theology of traidic monism and of complex verbal cosmology, wherein sacred *Verbum* is fundamental to both the creation of the universe and to the reintegration of the soul or heart into the cosmos.

We may best understand the *Śaiva* concept of the Word in making a brief comparisons between the notion of Word of God for Christianity and for Hinduism. According to H. Coward: “The scholarly study of scriptures of the various religions will remain seriously limited and one-sided if it does not become more sensitive to the fundamental oral character of scriptures such as the Veda, the Qur'an, and even the Gospels.”<sup>92</sup> Just a few points of distinction there need to be made. Whereas in Hinduism language and sacred sound are intimately bound up with the divine, in Christianity any special kind of sacred language or sacred sound is ultimately suspect, since only the person of Jesus Christ is defined precisely as the Word of God, “not the words of Jesus but he himself is the ‘Word of God’”<sup>93</sup>. The striving to reach an ultimate truth beyond

<sup>90</sup> *Tantrāloka* XV.60.

<sup>91</sup> Concerning the practise of mantras in the Kashmiri *Śaiva* Yoga tradition a reader may refer to the highly esteemed *āgama* – *Vijñāna Bhairava*, which is considered to be the quintessence of *Rudrayāmala Tantra* and is an excellent exposition of *Śaiva's yogaja mārga*. See *Vijñāna Bhairava or Divine Consciousness: A Treasury of 112 Types of Yoga*, text and English translation by Jaideva Singh, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993. The *Śaiva sādhanā* is discussed also by Debabrata Sen Sharma, *The Philosophy of Sādhanā: With Special Reference to Trika Philosophy of Kāśmīra*, Karnal, Haryana: Natraj Publishing House, 1983.

<sup>92</sup> Harold Coward, *Sacred Word and Sacred Text: Scripture in World Religions*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988, X.

<sup>93</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Word of God”, *Language: An Inquiry into its Meaning and Function*, ed. by Ruth Nanda Anshen, New York, Harper & Row, 1957, 125.



language is an implicit factor of Christian practice, which separates it from most Hindu aspirations wherein language or the name of the deity as a verbal formula, or mantra, being identical with the deity itself, is never 'shaken off' or discarded and the devotee remains enveloped in sacred sound and the deity's holy name. Contrary to the Vedic revelation, in which sound or language is the revealed and thus divine, or Hindu theism, in which sound or language is the revealed feminine energy of God, in Christianity something 'wholly other' which is nonlinguistic or nonsonic appears to quicken ordinary language at will in order to make it sacred.

It seems, that if hermeneutics is based originally on the principle that the Word is what opens up and mediates understanding, then the oral world itself has a hermeneutical function. The hermeneutic aid can only consist in removing hindrances in order to let the word perform its own hermeneutic function. In the words of Gerhard Ebeling: "For hermeneutics is of course not a departure from the linguistic realm in order to understand by means of language... The primary phenomenon in the realm of understanding is not understanding of language, but understanding through language the word is what opens up and mediates understanding, i.e., brings something to understanding. The word has a hermeneutic function."<sup>94</sup>

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## ŽODIS (VĀC) KAŠMYRO ŠAIVIZMO KOSMOLOGIJOJE IR SOTERIOLOGIJOJE

**Audrius Beinorius**

Santrauka

Straipsnyje pirmiausia atkreipiamas dėmesys į žodinės kultūros svarbą Indijos tradicijoje ir ypatingą transformacinę galią, suteikiamą žodžiui įvairiuose scholastiniuose indų samprotavimuose. Pradžioje glaudžiai apžvelgiama kalbos filosofijos raida nuo Vedų egzegetų ligi dviejų įtakingiausių kalbos sampratos tradicijų (*vaṃavāda* ir *sphoṭavāda*) polemikos. Remiantis pirminiais sanskrito šaltiniais, tantrinio Kašmyro šaivizmo ir jo patriarcho Abhinavaguptos (XI a.) tekstais analizuojama transcendentinio Žodžio samprata ir jo kosmologinė raiška įvairiais būties lygmenimis. Išryškinama žymaus filosofinės gramatikų mokyklos lyderio *Bhartrharīo* (V a.) įtaka tantrinės žodžio metafizikos formavimuisi ir pabrėžiami esminiai doktrininiai gramatikų ir šaivizmo atstovų skirtumai. Straipsnyje bandoma atsakyti į klausimą, kodėl Kašmyro šaivismas tokį ypatingą dėmesį skiria žodžio ir garso vaidmeniui soteriologinėse tantrinėse pratybose, ir parodoma, kad būtent ši mokykla pateikia scholastiškai niansuotą sakralių formulių, mantrų mechanizmo pagrindimą, kuris glaudžiai susijęs su sanskrito raidyno struktūros kosmologizavimu, suteikiant pavieniams balsiams ir priebalsiams tam tikrų kosmopsichinių galių (*śaktis*). Sanskrito raidynas tampa mikrovysata, kurią perpratus galima kontroliuoti ir makrokosminius vyksmus. Tantrinėje sadhanaoje mantros tampa adepto tapatumą Dieviškojo Žodžio (*vāc*) savininkui Parama-Šivai atskleidžiančiais instrumentais, kurie kosmologinę žodžio raiškos schemą paverčia soteriologine sistema. Kosmologiniu lygmeniu šaivismas teigia, kad aukščiausia tikrovė yra transcendentaliai lingvistinė struktūra, o soteriologiniu – byloja, jog žemiška kalba yra tos tikrovės atpažinimo savyje (*pratyabhijñā*) priemonė.