



INTRODUCTION

The *Aphorisms of Śiva* (*Śivasūtra*) have been translated a number of times into several languages along with Kṣemarāja's commentary.¹ Up to now, however, no English translation of Bhāskara's commentary on the *Aphorisms* has been published nor has an analysis been made of the many differences between them. The present work is intended to fill that gap.

The Aphorisms of Śiva and the Stanzas on Vibration

In my *Doctrine of Vibration*² I have already discussed the history of the *Aphorisms of Śiva* and how they were revealed to the Master Vasugupta in the middle of the ninth century in Kashmir. More information will be supplied in my forthcoming *Stanzas on Vibration* to which the reader is referred. Suffice it to say here that the *Aphorisms*, despite their brevity and cryptic form, are very important in the history of Kashmiri Śaivism as they represent the first of a series of works composed in Kashmir by monistic Kashmiri Śaivites from the middle of the ninth to the thirteenth century that together constitute the greater part of the corpus of Kashmiri Śaiva literature. Inspired by the Śaiva Tantras and the earlier dualistic Śaiva philosophy of the *Śaivasiddhānta*, they are a monument to the brilliance of the Kashmiri teachers of those days. Especially great among them was Abhinavagupta who lived from approximately the middle of the eleventh century into the first quarter of the twelfth. The importance of this great polymath's contribution to the monistic philosophy of Kashmiri Śaivism, the Pratyabhijñā, the exegesis of the Tantras prevalent in the Kashmir of his day and Indian poetics and aesthetics, cannot be exaggerated. His greatest disciple was

Kṣemarāja who wrote a number of important works, among the first of which were his commentaries on the *Aphorisms of Śiva* and the *Stanzas on Vibration* (*Spandakarikā*) to which they were closely related.

Utpaladeva, the author of the *Stanzas on Recognition*, the *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā*, was, along with his teacher Somānanda, the founder of the monistic Śaiva philosophy of Kashmir, the Pratyabhijñā, that drew its name from his work. He was Abhinavagupta's grand-teacher and a major source of inspiration for him. Bhāskara, who wrote one of the commentaries translated for this volume, was either his contemporary or lived soon after him, as we know from the fact that he paraphrases one of the verses in the *Stanzas on Recognition* in his commentary on the *Aphorisms*.³ He was known to Abhinavagupta who quotes him in his works⁴ and so must have lived sometime in the middle of the eleventh century. We know nothing else about him except that he was the son of one Divākarabhaṭṭa and was, therefore, like the other Kashmiri Śaiva authors, a Brahmin by caste, as *bhaṭṭa* was a title bestowed to learned Brahmins in Kashmir at that time.

In his introductory remarks to his commentary, Bhāskara links his spiritual lineage directly to Vasugupta and his direct disciple Kallaṭabhaṭṭa. Kṣemarāja nowhere does so in his commentaries but simply acknowledges Abhinavagupta as his teacher. He was, moreover, critical of Kallaṭa's interpretation of the *Stanzas on Vibration* thus clearly indicating that he had chosen a different line of interpretation not only of the *Stanzas* but also of the *Aphorisms* which were consistently characterised by later Kashmiri Śaivites as related more or less directly to them.⁵ Indeed, both Kṣemarāja and Bhāskara refer to them throughout their commentaries.⁶

Bhāskara and Kṣemarāja: Two Visions, One Truth

This is not the place to go extensively into an exposition of the metaphysics and theology that these works presuppose. I have already done this in my previous work, the *Doctrine of Vibration*, and will add further remarks in my forthcoming translation of the *Stanzas on Vibration* and their

commentaries to which the reader is referred. The exposition I have added to each aphorism should supply the reader with the necessary theoretical background as he proceeds through the work. One or two preliminary remarks are, however, necessary here.

Kashmiri Śaivism is a form of monism which teaches that there is only one reality identified with one universal consciousness adored as Śiva, the one God. It is also an idealism in so far as it teaches that things exist as objects in the external world because they are perceived to exist. In other words, 'to be is to be perceived' (*esse est percipi*). Both these views are also held by other schools of Indian thought. The most famous exponent of the former is Advaita Vedānta and of the latter the idealist school of Buddhism known as the Yogācāra.

The most distinctive feature of Kashmiri Śaivism is not, therefore, its monistic idealism but the doctrine that this one reality is a universal egoity. It is a pure 'I' consciousness that we can, and do, experience by simply being aware that 'I am'. This egoity is contrasted with the petty ego which is based on a false notion of oneself as the body or a particular temporal personality, which we strive to support and protect by the exertion of our trivial pride and selfishness and that is, therefore, the cause of man's many troubles both with himself and in relation to his fellow man. The authentic ego, this pure sense of 'I am', on the contrary, does not cling to self and personal ambitions. It has no fear of being less than anyone or of anything else. It makes room for others and does not deny their place and value in the economy of life. It is not a victim nor does it victimize. It is not foolish, selfish, proud, full of desire, ambitious or fearful but the very opposite of all these things. Moreover, it is infinite, eternal, all-powerful and omniscient. It is, in other words, not only free of everything which limits us and cuts us off from one another and God, Who is Himself this pure 'I am', but actively creates, sustains and withdraws all things in and through its perception of them and itself.

This important teaching was first expounded by Utpaladeva⁷ and was so quickly assimilated by later Kash-

miri Śaivites and others who accepted their teachings that few have noticed the fact that this was his own distinctive contribution. This is largely because within a few decades of its formulation Abhinavagupta had already applied it systematically throughout his extensive interpretation of the Tantra, notably in his *Light of the Tantras*, the *Tantrāloka*, but also throughout his works, including those on aesthetics and poetics. We should not be surprised, therefore, to notice that this important concept is missing in both *Stanzas* and *Aphorisms*. Scholars have failed to miss this absence largely because they have viewed these works through the interpretation of them offered by Kṣemarāja who, as one would expect, followed in his Master's footsteps by systematically encoding this concept into them at every possible turn. This is one major difference between his commentary on the *Aphorisms* and the one translated here by Bhāskara. The latter, despite the fact he knew of Utpaladeva's work, seems totally oblivious of this important idea.

Another point of divergence between Bhāskara's commentary and Kṣemarāja's is the absence in the former of the teachings of another important school of Kashmiri Śaivism, namely, Krama. Unlike the Pratyabhijñā, which is a purely philosophical-cum-theological school of thought that, therefore, rightly belongs to the history of Indian philosophy rather than religion, the Krama system is a distillate of a purely Tantric tradition or, to be more precise, several closely related traditions. By this I mean that it finds its original formulation in the Tantras and was transmitted for several generations by teachers who were initiated into these specific Tantras and were initiating their disciples into them, and handing down interpretations of their meaning to them. They also wrote independent works of their own. The earliest of these works were short tracts that portrayed themselves as Tantras in their own right that were 'brought into the world' by their exponents. One of the earliest figures in this development that marked the initial emergence out of the anonymity of the Tantras was Jñānāneta. Also known as Śivānanda, he probably lived sometime in the middle of the ninth century. He was, therefore, if our dating is correct, a

close contemporary of Vasugupta. Śivānanda felt himself to be simply a vehicle of a higher revelation through which the Tantras were brought into the world. Similarly, according to tradition, Vasugupta did not write the *Aphorisms* himself but was merely the recipient of a revelation the authorship of which is ultimately attributed to Śiva, as are the Tantras. One could say that Vasugupta, like Śivānanda, marks a point of transition from scripture to the learned treatise technically called *śāstra*.

The treatises of the Krama school developed independently and a number of them have come down to us. Mostly relatively short tracts, they deal with the sophisticated symbolism of a number of 'Wheels' (*cakra*) or aggregates of energies that are responsible for the manifestation of the spheres of existence. These are understood in idealistic terms as spheres of the manifestation of the one energy of consciousness that ranges from that of pure awareness through the mental and sensory right down to the physical level. All these energies and their deployment through, and as, the flux of time and space are part of an infinite, unconditioned flux of energy known as the Great Sequence (*Mahākrama*) from which this school draws its name. The energies are worshipped in a sequence (*Krama*) as aspects and forms of the Supreme Deity which is the Goddess, rather than the God. She is variously named in the different allied Krama traditions but all Her forms are essentially characterizations of the Goddess Kālī, the Goddess of Time (*kāla*). Such ideas are not at all alien to Bhāskara who also understands manifest reality in terms of flux which is a 'non-flux' of energy, but his characterizations of it fall in line with general representations that agree with an archetype common to a number of notions found in the earlier Tantras, particularly, but not exclusively, the more monistically oriented ones.

Just as common notions link Kṣemarāja's specifically Krama orientated interpretations with the less sectarian ones in Bhāskara's commentary, similarly the former's presentation of universal 'I' consciousness is linked with the latter's more loosely defined presentation of the Self and one's 'own nature' (*svasvabhāva*) which he takes over from the earlier

teachers in his lineage, particularly Kallaṭabhaṭṭa. The 'abiding in one's own nature' central to the teachings of the *Stanzas on Vibration* as the goal and ultimate ground of all conditioned existence, perception and the ego is here given a brilliant new dimension. Bhāskara presents us with a mysticism of Light. The Divine, our true nature, our 'own Being', is Light. Its realisation is therefore a powerful vision of Light, expanding and unfolding as all things. To realise this is to acquire 'Pure Knowledge', to miss it is to be subject to the impure knowledge of thought constructs that, far from revealing reality, hide it. The attentive reader will notice Bhāskara's continuous reference to this Light throughout his commentary. This approach distinguishes him from Kṣemarāja who does not ignore this important mystical experience but prefers not to treat it as his guiding theme in the way Bhāskara does.

About This Translation

The printed edition of Bhāskara's commentary is accompanied by another commentary the origin of which is not noted by the editor of the text. Apparently, this commentary was found in the manuscripts used for this edition and was added by the editor as an aid to understanding Bhāskara's interpretation of the *Aphorisms*. I have chosen to translate this commentary as well, as it does in fact serve its purpose in this respect. Moreover, it often serves as a bridge between Bhāskara's and Kṣemarāja's interpretations drawing as it does from both, although tending to stick to the former rather than the latter. This is true even though the anonymous commentator takes the notion of the absolute ego, to which we have referred above, as axiomatic much the same way that Kṣemarāja does. The commentary on each aphorism is thus in three layers. First comes Bhāskara's commentary, the translation of which has been printed here in bold characters. This is followed by the second anonymous commentary in normal type after which I add my own exposition where, among other things, I compare Bhāskara's commentary with Kṣemarāja's.

In making my translation I have avoided including Sanskrit terms wherever possible in the running text. But, in deference to the fact that the terminology in these works is highly distinctive and each term carries a wealth of meaning that no single word, or even phrase, in English could capture entirely, I have supplied the original term in parentheses. The reader who is not interested can simply ignore them. Like all languages, Sanskrit has its own peculiar forms of syntax and turns of phrase that translated literally do not make good reading in English. Moreover, not infrequently, one can express in a few words of Sanskrit what would require a long sentence in English. Inevitably, therefore, any translator must make additions and alterations to the literal meaning of the Sanskrit in order to present it in reasonably good English. These additions may, at times, become interpretations, which is also virtually inevitable. My own way out of this dilemma is to place these additions in parentheses. The reader should not allow himself to be distracted by these parentheses but read the text in continuity as if they were not there. Those who are interested can see what I have done to make the original sound right in English and those who are not need not bother.

Concluding Remarks

Finally, the reader who has a personal spiritual commitment to Kashmiri Śaivism may well ask himself what the presentation of such elevated experiences and Yogic practises has to do with him. As most of us are far from the developed spirituality that lends access to these mystical experiences, the question is certainly quite valid.

From the Kashmiri Śaiva point of view, the seeker after truth who sincerely seeks spiritual growth is first and foremost a yogi. He is, in other words, a person who practises Yoga in one or more of its many forms, and it is a very special form of Yoga that the *Aphorisms* teach. Yoga means union. This union is taught here in many ways, all of which essentially amount to the realisation of our true inherent nature which is infinitely greater than our thoughts could

ever conceive. Ultimately, the ancient Kashmiri Masters teach we will realise that we are, and have always been, as we always will be, perfect, free, eternal, blissful and infinitely spiritually conscious. We are, in short, ourselves the ultimate goal of all spiritual endeavour, the very same God Śaivites call Śiva or Bhairava Who has helped us throughout whether we know it or not. This realisation does not make us more proud or selfish but less so because as Abhinavagupta beautifully puts it :

People, occupied as they are with their own affairs, normally do nothing for others. The activity of those in whom every stain of phenomenal existence has been destroyed and are identified with Bhairava, full of Him, is intended only for the benefit of the world.⁸

Although it seems to most of us that we are very far from this, the supreme realisation, yet we are as close as one could ever be. This is all the more true of the many and wonderful states that lead up to it and so they relate to all of us however underdeveloped we may seem to be. In other words, we are as close or as far away as we want be at any time. Some teachers prefer to leave these matters for later when their disciples are more developed for fear that they may be misguided or seek something that is less than ultimate, but others, like the ancient Masters of Kashmir, felt that it was right to reveal these secrets, trusting in that inner purity that nothing can sully. Their revelation is not an invitation to simply take pleasure in their often strange and wonderful descriptions, far from it. As the attentive reader will notice, the yogi is constantly admonished to be attentive, to press on beyond his present state. That is the great secret of growth: whatever level of development we have reached, we must keep on growing.