

# I

## *The Integral Monism of Kashmiri Śaivism*

In India, metaphysics serves as a theoretical framework supporting a body of spiritual discipline; it is never merely abstract speculation. More than a reasoned opinion, it indicates the seeker's attitude to his own experience, an attitude that forms the path he treads to salvation. When the seeker acts upon the conclusions he has reached, philosophy blends imperceptibly into religion. To the degree in which he participates in this new attitude, death yields to immortality and the darkness of doubt and ignorance is banished by the light of spiritual illumination. Underpinning the quest is the ultimate goal: gnosis, which is not a knowledge of things but insight into their essential nature. Metaphysical insight is the pinnacle of knowledge. Long ago those who attained this absolute knowledge exclaimed: "no longer can anyone bring before us anything that we have not already found understood or known."<sup>1</sup> It is essentially a state or experience of recognition.

The ways to this realisation are various. We can tread the Path of Wisdom (*jñānamārga*) and seek to intuit the Real, illumined by its own brilliance, in the directness of (an essentially mystical) insight developed through meditative practice and disciplined reasoning (*viveka*). Another way is that of Devotion (*bhaktimārga*) to the embodiment of truth experienced with religious awe and wonder as Deity. A third way is to follow the Path of Yoga and seek freedom directly through mastery (*aiśvarya*) of the Self and with it the All which it contains and governs. From the yogi's point of view this is

the most direct approach, for all paths tend towards this achievement. As Karl Potter remarks:

The ultimate value recognised by classical Hinduism in its most sophisticated sources is not morality but freedom, not rational self-control in the interests of the community's welfare but complete control over one's environment—something which includes self-control but also involves control of others and even control of the physical sources of power in the universe.<sup>2</sup>

Freedom (*svātantrya*) in the sense of both autonomy (*kaivalya*) and mastery (*aiśvarya*) is the goal. It can be attained only if we manage to rid ourselves of outer constraints and limitations. To do this we must be able to homologise with a single, all-embracing reality from which nothing is excluded—neither the world nor ourselves. The dualism of most devotional approaches, however tempered, understands reality in terms which preclude the possibility of ultimate release. If we are to attain salvation, reality can only be one and absolute. In the Hindu tradition the nature of this absolute has been understood in a wide variety of ways. Here we shall consider only two. One is embodied in the metaphysics of Kashmiri Śaivism and the other in that of Advaita Vedānta.

Advaita Vedānta emerged, to a large extent, as a critique of Sāṃkhya dualism. Classical Sāṃkhya posits two realities, both eternal but of contrary nature. One is *Puruṣa*, 'the Person', the other *Prakṛti* or 'Nature'. The Person is the Self who, as pure sentient consciousness, is the witness of the activity of all that lies in the sphere of objectivity. The latter includes not only the outer physical world but also the body and mind the Person inhabits, vitalising and illumining it with his conscious presence. Although varied and constantly changing, all that lies in the sphere of objectivity shares a common nature. All thoughts, perceptions or physical phenomena are equally part of the play of Nature—*Prakṛti*—which manifests in this way to fulfil the need of the Person for phenomenal experience. In this experience the Person represents the principle of sentience and Nature that of change and activity. Just as insentient Nature cannot view itself, and so is as if blind, similarly the Person does not act or change, and so is as if lame.<sup>3</sup> The two together make experience possible. The content of this experience is real but unsatisfactory. The Person is bound by Nature; it experiences the changes in Nature as if they were its own and so suffers their painful consequences. The Person is freed when he discriminates between himself and Nature. The latter then retires into its original unmanifest

state severing its association with the Person.

Īśvarakṛṣṇa explains:

Just as a dancing girl retires from her dance after performing for the audience, in the same way Nature (*Prakṛti*) retires after exhibiting herself to the Person.<sup>4</sup>

In this way the Person achieves a state of transcendental detachment (*kaivalya*). But because the Person is an independent reality, already separate from Nature, he can in fact neither be bound nor released.

Therefore, no one is actually bound, no one released and no one transmigrates. [It is] Nature, the abode of diversity that transmigrates, is bound and released.<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, bondage is unreal and no relationship is possible between an eternal subject and an equally eternal object. The problem is that they cannot be related to one another unless this relationship is also eternal. In order to preserve the transcendental integrity of the Person, the reality of Nature must be denied. Not only does the Advaita Vedānta do this, but it also denies that there is a plurality of Persons. The Self, each individual's most authentic identity, is beyond the specifications of the qualities of Nature, and so nothing can distinguish one 'self' from another. The Self is one only and hence none other than the Brahman, the absolute, free of all specification. From this point of view the one reality can only be grasped through negation.<sup>6</sup> However, although this safeguards it from predication it also implies that the empirical (*vyavahāra*) is itself a negation of absolute reality. As Kṣemarāja puts it: "the Brahman is what the world is not."<sup>7</sup> And so the world is less than real. The Brahman is always empirically unmanifest (*avyakta*).<sup>8</sup> It is beyond the reach of the senses but, like the Person, is the witness (*sākṣin*) of all things. It can never be an object of knowledge for "who can know the knower?"<sup>9</sup> Ultimately it is that which cannot be grasped or perceived. The world which is 'grasped' and 'perceived' cannot be the Brahman and is consequently less than real.

Absolute Being is not an existing quality to be found in things; it is not an object of thought or the result of production. It is that from which both speech and mind turn back, unable to comprehend its fullness.<sup>10</sup> To make this point Śaṅkara quotes a passage from a lost Upaniṣad in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*. Baṣkali, an Upaniṣadic sage, is being questioned by his disciple about the nature of the absolute. He sits motionless and silent. "Teach me, sir," prayed the disciple.

The teacher continued to be silent. When addressed a second and third time he said: "I am teaching, but you do not follow. The Self is silence."<sup>11</sup>

The undetermined and unthinkable character of the Brahman is a consequence of the absolutes's eternal and immutable nature.<sup>12</sup> To concede the existence of a real universe is, from the Vedāntin's point of view,<sup>13</sup> to posit the existence of a reality apart from the Brahman. Nor can we simply identify a real universe with the absolute unless we are prepared to compromise its unchanging, absolute status. The criterion of authenticity is immutability. Reality never changes; only that which is less than real can appear to do so. Reality is constant in the midst of change. What this means essentially is that there is change although nothing changes. This impossible situation is reflected in the ultimate impossibility of change itself. That which does not exist prior to its changing and at the end, after it has changed, must be equally non-existent between these two moments. Although the world of change appears to be real, it cannot be so.<sup>14</sup> Change, according to the Vedāntin, presupposes a loss of identity. Reality cannot suffer transformation; if it were to do so, it would become something else and the real would be deprived of its reality. The immortal can never become mortal, nor can the mortal become immortal. The ultimate nature of anything cannot change.<sup>15</sup> Change of any sort is merely apparent (*vivarta*); the world of change and becoming is a false superimposition (*adhyāropa*, *adhyāsa*) on the absolute.<sup>16</sup>

In cosmic terms, the mistake (*bhrānti*) consists of the supposition that the real Brahman is the unreal universe and the unreal universe is the real Brahman. In microcosmic terms, it is the mistake of falsely conceiving the body, mind or even one's personality to be the Self. In the same way as the image of a snake is falsely superimposed on a rope, similarly the universe is falsely projected onto the real substratum, the Brahman. Ignorance is not merely a personal lack of knowledge, but a cosmic principle. As such it is called "Māyā," the undefinable factor (*anirvacanīyā*) that brings this mistake in identity about. The reality status of this cosmic illusion is also undefinable: on the one hand it is not Brahman, the sole reality; on the other hand it is not absolutely non-existent like a hare's horn or the son of a barren woman.

Brahman is the source of world appearances only in the sense of being their unconditioned ground or essential nature. The universe is false not because it has no nature of its own but because it does have one. Just as the illusion of a snake disappears when one sees that it is nothing but a rope, similarly cancellation (*bādha*) of the empirically real occurs when the absolute reality of the Brahman is realised. Thus, according to Vedānta, appearance implies the real, while the real need not imply

appearance. To appear is essentially to appear in place of the real, but to be real is not necessarily to appear. All things exist because the absolute exists. It is their Being. Thus the very existence of phenomena implies their non-existence as independent realities. When they are known to be as they are, in the fullest sense of their existence, their phenomenal nature disappears leaving the ground of Being naked and accessible. This approach was validated by a critique of experience. The Vedānta established that space, time and the other primary categories of our daily experience can have no absolute existence. It was therefore necessary to make a distinction between a relative truth—that accepted by the precritical common man—and an absolute truth discovered at a higher level of consciousness.

The Śaiva absolutist<sup>17</sup> rejects any theory that maintains that the universe is less than real. From his point of view a doctrine of two truths, one absolute and the other relative, endangers the very foundation of monism. The Kashmiri Śaiva approach is integral:<sup>18</sup> everything is given a place in the economy of the whole. It is equally wrong to say that reality is either one or diverse. Those who do so fail to grasp the true nature of things which is neither as well as both.<sup>19</sup>

“We, do not” says Abhinavagupta, “base our contention that [reality] is one because of the contradictions inherent in saying that it is dual. It is your approach (*pakṣa*) that accepts this [method]. [While], if [duality and oneness] were in fact [to contradict each other], they would clearly be two [distinct realities].”<sup>20</sup>

The Vedāntin, who maintains that non-duality is the true nature of the absolute by rejecting duality as only provisionally real, is ultimately landed in a dualism between the real and illusory by the foolishness of his own excessive sophistry (*vācāṭadurvidyā*). Oneness is better understood as the coextensive unity (*ekarasa*) of both duality and unity.<sup>21</sup> They are equally expressions of the absolute.<sup>22</sup> As Gopinath Kaviraj says:

According to Śaṅkara, Brahman is truth and Māyā is inexplicable (*anirvacanīyā*). Hence the [Advaitin’s] endeavour to demonstrate the superiority of Advaita philosophy is turned against his own system. It tarnishes the picture of its philosophical perfection and profundity. He cannot accept Māyā to be a reality, therefore his non-dualism is exclusive. The whole system is based on renunciation and elimination and thus is not all-embracing . . . . By accepting Māyā to be Brahman (*brahmamayi*), eternal (*nityā*) and real (*satyarūpa*), Brahman and Māyā [in the Tantra] become one and coextensive.<sup>23</sup>

The Vedāntin seeks to preserve the integrity of the absolute by safeguarding it from all possible predication. The Śaiva<sup>24</sup> defends the absolute status of the absolute by ensuring that it is in every way self-subsistent (*svatantra*) and all-embracing (*pūrṇa*). The integral nature of the absolute allows for the existence of the world of objectively perceivable phenomena along with the pure subjectivity of consciousness. The two represent opposite polarities of a single reality. Of these two, objectivity is insignificant (*tuccha*) with respect to the ultimacy (*paramārthaiva*) of the subject.<sup>25</sup> It is the sphere of negation, in which objectivity presents itself as a void (*śūnya*) in relation to the fullness of the subject.<sup>26</sup> Thus it appears in some Kashmiri Śaiva works that objectivity is said to be false with respect to the ultimate reality of absolute consciousness.<sup>27</sup> What is meant, however, is that nothing can exist apart from the absolute; not merely in the sense that only the absolute exists, but also that nothing exists separated from it. All things are as if nothing in themselves apart from the absolute in this sense alone—it does not mean that they do not exist.<sup>28</sup> The world, in other words, represents a level of manifestation within the absolute which in the process of its emanation must, at a certain stage, radically contrast one aspect of its nature with another to appear as the duality and multiplicity of manifestation.<sup>29</sup> The One is not any one thing because it is all things;<sup>30</sup> excluding nothing from its omniformity, it cannot be defined in any other way than as the Supremely Real (*paramārtha*).

The Real is, from this point of view, the All (*nikhila*). It is the pure absolute because nothing stands outside it which can in any way qualify its absoluteness; on this point at least, Śaiva and Vedāntin are in agreement. It is the Śaiva's approach to establishing the absoluteness of the absolute which differs from the Vedānta. The Śaiva method is one of an ever widening inclusion of phenomena mistakenly thought to be outside the absolute. The Vedāntin, on the other hand, seeks to understand the nature of the absolute by excluding (*niśedha*) every element of experience which does not conform to the criterion of absoluteness, until all that remains is the unqualified Brahman. The Śaiva's approach is one of affirmation and the Vedāntin's one of negation. They arrive at the absolute from opposite directions. The Vedāntin's way is a path of renunciation founded on dispassion (*vairāgya*) born of discrimination (*viveka*) between the absolutely real and the provisionally relative. It is only when all attachment and, ultimately, perception and thought of the illusory world of phenomena—*Māyā*—have been abandoned, that the true nature of the absolute is realised to be as it really is, that is, free of all phenomenality. The realisation of the true nature of the relative accompanies the realisation of the absolute.

It is to realise that the world never existed, just as it does not at present, nor ever will.<sup>31</sup> It is just a magic show.

One could say that in this approach the field of consciousness is increasingly restricted to exclude the 'unreal' and focus on the real. It is the Way of Transcendence, and we progress along it by denying all ultimate significance to the transitory. The doctrine is one of world denial. Thus Gauḍapāda, Śaṅkara's teacher, says:

Constantly reflecting that everything is full of misery, (*sarvaṃ duḥkham*) one should withdraw the mind from the pleasures nurtured by desire. Recalling constantly that the birthless Brahman is all things, one no longer perceives creation.<sup>32</sup>

The Advaitic path leads to a freedom 'from'. Desire is denied because it individualises attention, dispersing it among the objects of desire which are defined as impure matter and ultimately unreal as opposed to the absolute, which is spirit and reality itself. Freedom is ignorance of 'matter-unreality'; conversely, ignorance of the spirit is equivalent to knowledge of matter. These correspond to:

- A) A knowledge of qualities and conditions through acts of determining knowledge (*vikalpa*).
- B) A direct experience (*sākṣātkāra*) of the unqualified (*nirguna*) free of determinate perception (*nirvikalpa*).

Case A implies a contrast between subject and object, which is unreal or illusory; case B implies the disappearance of the subject-object distinction by denying the reality of the object, and thus expresses the real state of affairs. A and B are not really opposites because A is unreal; consequently the contrast between A and B comes under category A and so is illusory. In other words, our spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*) consists of the false conception that there is a real relationship between the finite and the infinite. Herein we find the philosophical justification for an attitude of detachment. The relationless absolute is realised by the elimination of the finite.

The New Way (*navamārga*)<sup>33</sup> taught in Kashmiri Śaiva doctrine is transcendence through active participation. Not freedom 'from', but freedom 'to'. Desire is not denied, but accepted at a higher level as the pure will or freedom (*svātantrya*) of the absolute. Desire is to be eliminated only if it is desire 'for' (*ākāṅkṣā*), rather than desire 'to' (*icchā*). Matter cannot sully the absolute, nor is it unreal. Freedom is achieved by knowing 'matter-unreality' completely; ignorance of the spirit is

ignorance of the true nature of matter. From this point of view ignorance is failure to experience directly the intimate connection (*sambandha*) between the infinite and the finite, thus justifying an active participation in the infinite-finite continuum. Following this New Way the transition from the finite to the infinite does not require that we postulate any ontological distinction between them. The finite is a symbol of the infinite. The infinite stamps its seal (*mudrā*) onto its own nature replete with all possible forms of the finite.<sup>34</sup> This is the transcendental attitude of the absolute, namely its impending manifestation as the finite. Reality is the state of eternal emergence (*satatodita*) of the finite from the infinite and vice versa. Expansion of the relative distinction (*bhedā*) between the elements constituting the All is equivalent to contraction of the undivided (*abheda*) awareness of its totality and vice versa. Neither excludes the other, but together they participate in the all-embracing fullness (*pūrṇatā*) of the pulsation (*spanda*) of the absolute in its different phases of being. True knowledge (*sadvidyā*) from this point of view, is to know that the apparent opposites normally contrasted with one another, such as subject and object, unity and diversity, absolute and relative, are aspects of the one reality.

The Vedāntin's way is one of withdrawal from the finite in order to achieve a return (*nivṛtti*) to the infinite. This process, however, from the Śaiva point of view is only the first stage. The next stage is the outward journey (*pravṛtti*) from the infinite to the finite. When perfection is achieved in both movements, that is, from the finite to the infinite and back, man participates in the universal vibration of the absolute and shares in its essential freedom. Thenceforth, he no longer travels 'to' and 'from' but eternally 'through' the absolute, realised to be at once both infinite and finite.<sup>35</sup> The highest level of dispassion (*paravairāgya*) is not attained by turning away from appearance but by realising that the absolute manifests as all things.<sup>36</sup> The absolute freely makes diversity (*bhedā*) manifest through its infinite power. The wise know that this power pours into the completeness of the All (*viśvamaṇḍala*) and in so doing, flows only into itself.<sup>37</sup> Standing at the summit of Being (*parakāśhā*) the absolute is brimming over with phenomena. The streams of cosmic manifestation flow everywhere from it as does water from a tank full to overflowing.<sup>38</sup> Replenished inwardly by its own power, it emerges spontaneously as the universe, and makes manifest each part of the cosmic totality as one with its own nature.<sup>39</sup>

The involution of phenomena and their reassimilation into the absolute is not enough. True knowledge and perfect dispassion can only be achieved when we realise that the universe is the expansion (*vikāsa*) of the absolute void of content (*śūnyarūpa*).<sup>40</sup> The absolute will



(*icchā*) is the driving force behind this cosmic expansion. It is the pure intent of Being to act and exist which although, in a sense, is similar to mundane desire is unsullied by any object of its intent (*iṣyamāna*)<sup>41</sup> and so differs fundamentally from it. The absolute yearns for nothing other than itself. Desire is not to be abandoned but elevated to the level of this pure will (*icchāmātra*). This is achieved not by restraint or suppression of desire, but by merging it with the divine creative will of the absolute. This is the spontaneity of the Way of Wholeness. Quotes Jayaratha:

Those who went before said that [desire] is checked by the practice of dispassion; we teach that this is achieved by desisting from all effort.<sup>42</sup>

The absolute oscillates between a 'passion' (*rāga*) to create and 'dispassion' (*virāga*) from the created. This is the eternal pulsation—Spanda—of the absolute. Through it the absolute transforms itself into all things and then returns back into the emptiness (*śūnya*) of its undifferentiated nature. Both poles of this movement are equally real; both are equally absolute. Allowing for the reality of manifestation, the Śaiva absolute is called the Great Oneness (*mahādvaya*).<sup>43</sup> An experienced music lover, hearing a fast sequence of notes played on the *viṇā* can distinguish whether the microtones are high or low.<sup>44</sup> Similarly the well-practiced yogi can discern the unity of reality while phenomena are manifest to him. If duality and unity were in fact absolute contraries, the moment they appeared together, they would cancel each other out. This, however, is not the case. We continue to experience the diversity of daily life (*vyavahāra*).<sup>45</sup> The Vedāntin who distinguishes between duality and unity, saying that the former is false while the latter is true, is under the spell of *Māyā*—the ignorance he seeks so hard to overcome. All forms of relative distinction, even that between the dual and the non-dual, are due to *Māyā*; none of them are applicable to the uncreated, self-existent reality, free of all limitation.<sup>46</sup> Abhinava writes:

Where duality, unity and both unity and duality are equally manifest is said to be [true] unity. To those who object that in that case diversity (*bheda*) must also exist, [we say:] so be it: we do not want to speak overmuch. We neither shun nor accept [anything] that [manifests to us] here [in this world] as you do. If you wish to be supported by the view that favours all then resort to the doctrine of Supreme Unity, the great refuge you should adopt.<sup>47</sup>

The one reality is manifest both as unity and diversity. There can

be no real unity unless diverse elements are united in the wholeness of totality. On the other hand, without unity, diversity would be unintelligible. A total dispersion of elements does not constitute diversity but a number of single, unrelated units.<sup>48</sup> Just as everything that falls into a salt mine becomes salty, so all this diversity, grounded in unity, shares in the single flavour of oneness.<sup>49</sup> There is an undeniable difference between individual phenomena, but the distinction we perceive between two entities which leads us to think that one differs from the other is merely external.<sup>50</sup> Relative distinction is not an inherent quality of things that can divide their innate nature, not because this division (*bheda*) is in any way unreal, but because it operates within the domain of the real, which appears as phenomenally manifest. Division (*bheda*) is merely the relative distinction between two manifest entities; it is based on the difference between their manifest form.

“Relative distinction between two realities (*tattva*),” writes Abhinava, “is not impossible. This is the doctrine of Supreme Unity in which relative distinction is neither shunned nor accepted. While there is [an external] difference between phenomena, there is none [inwardly], established as they are in their own essential nature.”<sup>51</sup>

Reality is the One (*eka*) which becomes manifest as the many (*bahu*). Universal Being moves between two poles, viz., diversification of the one and unification of the many. Thought (*vikalpa*) interferes with our direct intuitive understanding of this fact and splits up the two aspects of this movement into separate categories. Reality is a structured whole consisting of a graded hierarchy (*tāratamya*) of metaphysical principles corresponding to the planes of existence (*daśā*). On the lowest planes up to the level of Māyā, we experience division (*bheda*) between objects and ourselves; at the highest level we reach the plane of unity (*abheda*) which pervades and contains within itself all the others. Maheśvarānanda writes:

We maintain that the basis of duality (*bheda*) in the [empirical] universe is a phase (*vibhāga*) [of reality]. The separation between things is certainly not adventitious (*upādhi*) for then they [i.e., the object and its separatedness] being two, unity would stand contradicted.<sup>52</sup>

He goes on to say:

The various categories of existence (*padārtha*), though distinct from one another in their [outer form] must be, in terms of their essential specific nature, a single collective reality.<sup>53</sup>

This understanding of reality allows for a range of insights into its nature which complement and sustain each other without conflict. Almost every school of Indian thought aspires to lead us to a plane of being and an experience which it believes to be the most complete and satisfying. This is the liberation it offers. All these views are correct insofar as they correspond to an actual experience. But this is because the absolute, through its inherent power, assumes the form of all the levels of realisation (*bhūmikā*) which correspond to the ultimate view (*sthitī*) each system upholds.<sup>54</sup> Dualism is not an incorrect view of reality although it corresponds to only one of the levels within the absolute.

Citing the well-known Jaina example, Abhinava explains that the exponents of different systems are like blind men who, presented with an elephant, touch one part or another and argue amongst themselves about what it could be. This is not because they disagree completely but because their agreement is only partial.<sup>55</sup> Ultimately, differing views of reality are the result of the capacity (*śakti*) of the absolute to appear in different forms.<sup>56</sup> Rather than reject all views as incorrect because they are not completely true, the Kashmiri Śaiva prefers to accept them all because they are partially true. System builders are all equally concerned with reality, but are like children of feeble intellect (*sukumāramati*) who have not yet reached the supreme summit (*parakāṣṭhā*) of the absolute, the experience of Supreme Oneness. They cannot, as yet, look down to the lower planes and see their role within the whole. Accordingly Maheśvarānanda says:

Not accepting each others' point of view they talk of Your universal nature in terms of that which is to be refuted and that which refutes it in order to reject [their] opponents' position.<sup>57</sup>

Why does this phasing or hierarchy of planes not divide the absolute? The answer to this question will emerge through a closer examination of the nature of the Śaiva absolute. Śaivism equates the absolute wholly with consciousness. Reality is pure consciousness alone (*saṃvid*). Consciousness and Being are synonymous.<sup>58</sup> To experience the essential identity between them is to enjoy the bliss (*ānanda*) of realisation.<sup>59</sup> The Advaita Vedāntin maintains that in a primary sense reality cannot be characterised in any particular way, but affirms that secondarily we can conceive it to be 'Being-Consciousness-Bliss (*saccidānanda*). Being, understood as an absolute substance (which is not substantial in a material sense), is the model for the Advaita conception of consciousness. Monistic Śaivism, on the other hand, considers consciousness to be the basic model through which we understand Being. Consciousness

from the Vedāntin's point of view is the microcosmic parallel of macrocosmic Being. Being is the real substratum of the universe and consciousness that of the individual personality (*jīva*). Hence consciousness, like Being, is perfectly inactive, a pure noetic plenum: knowledge as such, without an object of knowledge or even self-awareness. He maintains that consciousness is autonomous; it is an eternal reality that does not depend on the mind or body for its existence. On this point, the Śaivite and Vedāntin agree. Abhinava pours scorn on materialist views; making no pretence at politeness, he says,

Some fools consider that nothing apart from the body exists because movement arises from the body, whose property is consciousness, which in its turn is one with the vital breath. This conception, peculiar to individuals (of low status) such as children, women and idiots is, by the materialists, elevated to the status of a system.<sup>60</sup>

The concept of consciousness is the firm foundation upon which Kashmiri Śaiva metaphysics is constructed. One could almost describe it as a psychology of absolute consciousness. Consciousness is more than the awareness an individual has of himself and his environment; it is an eternal all-pervasive principle. It is the highest reality (*paramārtha*) and all things are a manifestation of this consciousness (*cidvyakti*).<sup>61</sup> All entities, without distinction, are of the nature of consciousness<sup>62</sup> and hence reality can be positively affirmed to be a 'compact mass of consciousness and bliss' (*cidānandaghana*). There are no holes or gaps anywhere in reality where consciousness is absent. It is eternally and blissfully at rest within its own nature (*svātmaviśrānta*), free of all association with anything outside itself.<sup>63</sup> Free of all craving for anything (*nirākāṅkṣa*) and independent (*nirapekṣa*), it looks to none other but itself (*ananyamukhaprekṣin*).

The essential nature (*svabhāva*) of this pure universal consciousness is the true nature of the Self. As the supreme subject who illumines and knows all things, it is called the 'Great Light' (*mahāprakāśa*) which is uncreated and can never be taught (*aśrauta*). Figuratively described as the sun of consciousness, its light absorbs duality in its brilliance, bathing the whole universe with the splendour of its divine radiance. Making all things one with its nature, it transforms them into the sacred circle (*maṇḍala*) of its own rays.<sup>64</sup> Not only is consciousness absolute, it is also divine. It is Śiva, the Lord (*cinnātha*) of the universe.<sup>65</sup> As the authentic identity (*ātman*) of all living beings, consciousness is the supreme object of worship, the true nature of Deity.<sup>66</sup> Consciousness is God and God is consciousness by virtue of its very nature; omnipotence,

omniscience and all the other divine attributes are in fact attributes of consciousness. Bhagavatopala, commenting on the *Stanzas on Vibration*, quotes:

In none of Your states [O Lord] is consciousness absent. Therefore, You are worshipped as the yogi's dense mass of consciousness alone.<sup>67</sup>

Consciousness is not a passive witness (*sākṣin*), but is full of the conscious activity (*citikriyā*) through which it generates the universe<sup>68</sup> and reabsorbs it into itself at the end of each cycle of creation. The freedom (*svātantrya*) of consciousness to do this is its sovereign power (*aiśvarya*) by virtue of which it is the one God Who governs the entire universe. Absolute freedom to know and do all things is the primary characteristic of Deity:

The governing power of the Supreme Lord Whose nature is His own unique eternal nature as pure agency (*karṭṛtā*) whose essence is the divine pulsing radiance (*sphurattā*) of the light of consciousness.<sup>69</sup>

Both dynamic and creative, this divine power is Spanda—the vibration of consciousness. Its universal activity is the basis of Śiva's divine sovereign status. Indeed, Spanda is Śiva's most essential nature for without it He would not be God. As Kṣemarāja says:

Thus God (*bhagavat*) is always the Spanda principle with its dependent categories—He is not motionless (*aspanda*) as those who say, 'the supreme reality is perfectly inactive (*aspanda*)'. If that were so, His nature would be a self-confined stasis (*śāntasvarūpa*) and so He would not be God at all.<sup>70</sup>

The supreme reality which is 'perfectly inactive' is like the Vedāntin's Brahman. Although the Vedāntin says that 'God alone is the source of all things',<sup>71</sup> Brahman cannot be a creator God (*īśvara*) for His supposed creation is unreal. A creator implies that His creation is a separate reality and this would contravene the fundamental principles on which Advaita Vedānta bases its concept of non-duality. Accordingly, Śaṅkara says:

God's rulership, omniscience and omnipotence are contingent to limiting adjuncts conjured up by nescience: in reality such terms as ruler and ruled, omniscience etc., cannot be used with regard to the Self shining in its own nature.<sup>72</sup>

Kashmiri Śaivism, on the contrary, believes in a personal absolute God Who is the one reality (*īśvarādvayavāda*). The planes within the absolute correspond to a hierarchy of deities which rule over them, empowered to do so by the Supreme Deity: consciousness. Absolute Deity is the highest level of consciousness which stands at the supreme summit of Being (*parakāṣṭhā*). It is attained by a process of ascent through higher levels or, in other words, through increasingly expanded states of consciousness, until we reach the highest and most complete state of expansion possible (*pūrṇavikāsa*). The Supreme Lord rests at the end of the expansion or evolution of objectivity from the lowest level to the supramental state (*unmanā*) of pure consciousness.<sup>73</sup>

This supreme state is named variously in the differing traditions syncretised into Kashmiri Śaivism. Thus Bhairava (the 'wrathful' form of Śiva) figures as the supreme God in Abhinavagupta's works when he deals with the doctrine and ritual of the Kaula schools (including Trika and Krama) and those in various ways linked to them. This male principle is associated with corresponding female ones such as Kālī, Kālasaṅkarṣiṇī (the 'Attractress of Time'), Mātṛsadbhāva (the 'Essence of Subjectivity') and Parā (the 'Supreme'). In the Spanda school the supreme male deity is Śiva Who is also called Śaṅkara, while Spanda is by some identified with the Goddess. When no sectarian distinctions are intended, the supreme is simply called Parameśvara (the Supreme Lord), Paramaśiva or just Śiva.<sup>74</sup>

### Śaiva Idealism

Interiority (*antaratva*) is the keynote of both Kashmiri Śaiva metaphysics and practice: it is a 'doctrine which maintains that everything is internal' (*antarārthavāda*).<sup>75</sup> Everything, according to this view, resides within one absolute consciousness. It is the great abode of the universe.<sup>76</sup> Full (*pūrṇa*) of all things, it sustains them all and embraces them within its infinite, all-pervasive nature. Utpaladeva writes:

O Lord, some, greatly troubled, move perplexed (*bhramanti*) within themselves while others, well established [in themselves], wander in that which is their own Self alone.<sup>77</sup>

All events are consciously experienced happenings. According to Somānanda, only that which hypothetically exists outside consciousness can be said to be non-existent (*avastu*) and hence false. Daily life carried

on without knowledge that everything is manifest within consciousness is illusory or unreal in that sense alone.<sup>78</sup> Things are more real or more tangibly experienced according to their own essential nature (*svabhāva*) to the degree in which we recognise that they are appearances (*ābhāsa*) within absolute consciousness. As Jayaratha says:

Just as images manifest in a mirror, for example, are essentially mere appearances, so too are [phenomena] manifest within consciousness. Thus, because they are external, [phenomena] have no being (*sattva*) of their own. The Lord says this [not with the intention of saying anything about the nature of things] but in order to raise the level of consciousness of those people who are attached to outer things; thus everything in this sense is essentially a mere appearance. [Knowing this], in order to quell the delusion of duality, one should not be attached to anything external.<sup>79</sup>

The ultimate experience is the realisation that everything is contained within consciousness. We can discover this in two ways. Either we merge the external world into the inner subject, or we look upon the outer as a gross form of the inner. In these two ways we come to recognise that all things reside within our own consciousness just as consciousness resides within them.

This all-embracing inwardness is only possible if there is an essential identity between the universe and consciousness. The events which constitute the universe are always internal events happening within consciousness because their essential nature is consciousness itself.<sup>80</sup> We can only account for the fact that things appear if there is an essential identity between consciousness and the object perceived.<sup>81</sup> If a physical object were really totally material, that is, part of a reality independent of, and external to, consciousness, it could never be experienced.<sup>82</sup> Abhinava says:

The existence or non-existence of phenomena within the domain of the empirical (*iha*) cannot be established unless they rest within consciousness. In fact, phenomena which rest within consciousness are apparent (*prakāśamāna*). And the fact of their appearing is itself their oneness (*abheda*) with consciousness because consciousness is nothing but the fact of appearing (*prakāśa*). If one were to say that they were separate from the light of [that consciousness] and that they appeared [it would be tantamount to saying that] 'blue' is separate from its own nature. However, [insofar as it appears and is known as such] one says: 'this is blue'. Thus, in this sense, [phenomena] rest in consciousness; they are not separate from consciousness.<sup>83</sup>

The universe and consciousness are two aspects of the whole, just as quality and substance constitute two aspects of a single entity. The universe is an attribute (*dharmā*) of consciousness which bears (*dharmin*) it as its substance.

It is said that 'substance' is that resting in which this entire group of categories manifests and is made effective. Now, if you don't get angry [we insist that] this entire class of worlds, entities, elements and categories (*tattva*) rests in consciousness and [resting in it] is as it is.<sup>84</sup>

Thus consciousness contains everything in the sense that it is the ground or basis (*ādihāra*) of all things, their very being (*sattā*) and substance from which they are made. But, unlike the Brahman of the Advaita Vedānta, it is not the real basis (*adhiṣṭhāna*) of an unreal projection or illusion. Consciousness and its contents are essentially identical and equally real. They are two forms of the same reality. Consciousness is both the substratum and what it supports: The perceiving awareness and its object.<sup>85</sup> In this respect, the Kashmiri Śaiva is frankly and without reserve an idealist. Although he does not deny the reality of the object, his position is at odds with most commonly accepted forms of realism. The realist maintains that the content perceived is independent of the act of perception. The content is only accidentally an object of perception and undergoes no change in the process of being perceived. His contention, however, is essentially unverifiable; to verify it, we would have to know an object without perceiving it. This, from the Kashmiri Śaiva point of view, is not possible. Objects of which we have no knowledge may indeed exist, but they are knowable as objects only if they are related to subjects who perceive them. In this sense, if there were no subjects, there could be no objects.<sup>86</sup> The subject, however, as opposed to the object is, in terms of the phenomenology of perception, apparent to himself. He is self-luminous (*svaprakāśa*). Thus, consciousness (the essence of subjectivity) is one's own awareness by virtue of which all things exist.<sup>87</sup>

The realist maintains that consciousness clearly differs from its object insofar as their properties are contrary to each other. The Śaivite idealist, however, says that the object is a form of awareness (*vijñānākāra*).<sup>88</sup> The objective status of the object is cognition itself.<sup>89</sup> Perception manifests its object and renders it immediately apparent (*sphuṭa*) to those who perceive it.<sup>90</sup> It does not appear at any other time.<sup>91</sup> If 'blue' were to exist apart from the cognition of 'blue', two things would appear: 'blue' and its cognition, which is not the case.<sup>92</sup> It is the perception of the object which constitutes its manifest nature. An entity becomes an



object of knowledge not by virtue of the entity itself but by our knowledge of it. If objects had the property of making other objects appear, it would be possible for one object to make another appear in its own likeness. 'Blue' is perceived to be 'blue' because it is manifest as such to the perceiver.<sup>93</sup> As Abhinava points out:

The [nature of an] object of knowledge could not be established through a means of knowledge totally unrelated to it—a crow does not become white because a swan [sitting next to it] is white.<sup>94</sup>

Perception, on the other hand, is immediately apparent to consciousness. It is self-luminous in the sense that it is directly known without need of being known by any ulterior acts of perception and makes its object known at the same time.<sup>95</sup> Adopting the Buddhist Yogācāra doctrine that things necessarily perceived together are the same (*sahopalambhaniyamavāda*), the Śaivite affirms that because the perceived is never found apart from perception, they are in fact identical.<sup>96</sup> Reality (*satya*) is the point where the intelligible and the sensible meet in the common unity of being; it cannot be said to exist in itself outside, and apart from, knowledge or vision. Bhagavatopala in his commentary on the *Stanzas on Vibration* quotes:

Once the object is reduced to its authentic nature, one knows [the true nature of] consciousness. What then [remains of] objectivity? What [indeed could be] higher than consciousness?<sup>97</sup>

Consciousness is essentially active. Full of the vibration of its own energy engaged in the act of perception, it manifests itself externally as its own object. When the act of perception is over, consciousness reabsorbs the object and turns in on itself to resume its undifferentiated inner nature.<sup>98</sup>

Knowledge (*jñāna*) manifests internally and externally as each individual entity . . . . Once knowledge has assumed that form it falls back [into itself].<sup>99</sup>

The Yogācāra Buddhist similarly maintains that consciousness creates its own forms. But, according to him, because the perceived and perception are identical, there is no perceived object at all. The so-called outer world is merely a flux of cognitions, it is not real. He is firmly committed to a doctrine of illusion. The reality of consciousness from

his point of view is established by proving the unreality of the universe.

“All this consists of the act of consciousness alone”, says Vasubandhu, “because unreal entities appear, just as a man with defective vision sees unreal hair or a moon, etc.”.<sup>100</sup>

He points to dreams as examples of purely subjective constructs which appear to be objective realities. The apparent reality dreams possess is not derived from any concrete, objective world, but merely from the idea of objectivity. While the Yogācāra does not say that an idea has, for example, spatial attributes, it does have a form manifesting them. While he agrees with the Śaiva idealist that appearances have no independent existence apart from their appearing to consciousness, he maintains that for this reason they are unreal. The creativity of consciousness consists in its diversification in many modes having apparent externality; it is not a creation of objects.

While the Kashmiri Śaivite agrees that the world is pure consciousness alone, he maintains that it is such because it is a real creation of consciousness. The effect is essentially identical with the cause and shares in its reality. Matter and the entire universe are absolutely real, as ‘congealed’ (*styāna*) or ‘contracted’ (*saṃkucīta*) forms of consciousness. “This God of consciousness”, writes Kṣemarāja, “generates the universe and its form is a condensation of His own essence (*rasa*).”<sup>101</sup> By boiling sugarcane juice it condenses to form treacle, brown sugar and candy which retains its sweetness. Similarly, consciousness abides unchanged even though it assumes the concrete material form of the five gross elements.<sup>102</sup> The same reality thus abides equally in gross and subtle forms.<sup>103</sup> Consequently no object is totally insentient. Even stones bear a trace (*vāsanā*) of consciousness, although it is not clearly apparent because it is not associated with the vital breath (*prāṇa*) and other components of a psycho-physical organism.<sup>104</sup> Somānanda goes so far as to affirm that physical objects, far from being insentient, can only exist insofar as they are aware of themselves as existing.<sup>105</sup> The jar performs its function because it knows itself to be its agent.<sup>106</sup> Indeed, all things are pervaded by consciousness and at one with it and hence share in its omniscience.<sup>107</sup> Thus, Śiva, Who perceives Himself in the form of physical objects, is the one ultimate reality.<sup>108</sup>

“The jar knows because it is of my nature”, writes Somānanda, “and I know it because I am of the jar’s nature. I know because I am of Sadāśiva’s nature and He knows because He is of my nature; Yajñadatta [knows] because he is of Śiva’s nature and Śiva [knows] because He is of Yajñadatta’s nature”.<sup>109</sup>

Everything in this sense is directly perceived by absolute consciousness, and this direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) unifies the knowable into a single, undivided whole. This is the central concept behind a doctrine originally expounded by Narasiṃha called 'the non-dualism of direct perception' (*pratyakṣādvaita*).<sup>110</sup> This states that consciousness is essentially perceptive and that its perception of all things operates throughout the universe.<sup>111</sup> Insofar as phenomena are clearly evident (*sphuṭa*) to us, everything is directly perceived by absolute consciousness, with which our individual consciousness is identical. This direct perception unfolds everywhere; the one true reality, it is alone and without companion or rival (*niḥsapatna*). Even though it remains one, it can, by its very nature, perceive distinctions (*bheda*) between one entity and another, without this engendering any division within it.<sup>112</sup>

We distinguish between two entities in empirical terms on the basis of their mutual exclusion (*anyonyābhāva*). The relative distinction (*bheda*) between them is essentially the perceived difference between their respective characteristics. Despite this difference they are united within the purview of a single cognition insofar as they are equally both manifest appearances. This cognition is the undivided essence (*rasa*) or 'own nature' (*svabhāva*) of both. Encompassed by the 'fire of consciousness', there is no essential difference between them. Just as when an emerald and ruby reflect each other's light, the ruby is reddish-green and the emerald greenish-red, similarly everything is connected with everything else as part of the single variegated (*vicitra*) cognition of absolute consciousness.<sup>113</sup> Maheśvarānanda writes:

The Supreme Lord's unique state of emotivity (*aśādhāraṇabhāva*) is the outpouring of pure Being (*mahāsattā*). It is manifest as the brilliance (*sphurattā*) of the universe which, if we ponder deeply, [is realized to be] the single flavour (*ekarasa*) of the essence of Beauty which is the vibration of the bliss of one's own nature.<sup>114</sup>

In this way all things are in reality one although divided from the one another sharing as they do the 'single flavour' (*ekarasa*) of the pure vibration of consciousness.

### Kashmiri Śaiva Realism

Kashmiri Śaivism as a whole has been variously called a form of 'realistic idealism',<sup>115</sup> 'monistic idealism',<sup>116</sup> 'idealistic monism'<sup>117</sup> and 'concrete monism'.<sup>118</sup> It is easy to understand why Kashmiri Śaivism is

said to be 'idealistic' and 'monistic', but in what sense is it also 'realistic'? The answer to this question is of no small importance in trying to understand the central idea behind its metaphysics and the fundamental importance of the concept of Spanda, in this seemingly impossible marriage between monistic idealism and pluralistic realism.

The Kashmiri Śaiva approach understands the world to be a symbol of the absolute, that is, as the manner in which it presents itself to us. Again we can contrast this view with that of the Advaita Vedānta. The Advaita Vedānta understands the world to be an expression of the absolute insofar as it exists by virtue of the absolute's Being. Being is understood to be the real unity which underlies empirically manifest separateness and as such is never empirically manifest. It is only transcendently actual as 'being-in-itself'. The Kashmiri Śaiva position represents, in a sense, a reversal of this point of view. The nature of the absolute, and also that of Being, is conceived as an eternal becoming (*satatodita*), a dynamic flux or Spanda,<sup>119</sup> 'the agency of the act of being'.<sup>120</sup> It is identified with the concrete actuality of the fact of appearing, not passive unmanifest Being. Appearance (*ābhāsa*) alone is real.<sup>121</sup> Appearing (*prakāśamānava*) is equivalent to the fact of being (*astitva*).<sup>122</sup> Kṣemarāja writes in his commentary on the *Stanzas on Vibration*:

Indeed, all things are manifest because they are nothing but manifestation. The point being that nothing is manifest apart from manifestation.<sup>123</sup>

The absolutely unmanifest, from this point of view, can have as little existence as the space in a lattice window of a sky-palace. Nay, even less, because even that space can appear as an imagined image manifest within consciousness.<sup>124</sup> Everything is real according to the manner in which it appears.<sup>125</sup> Even an illusion is in this sense real, insofar as it appears and is known in the manner in which it appears. The empirical and the real are identical categories of thought. As Abhinava says:

Thus this is the supreme doctrine (*upaniṣad*), namely that, whenever and in whatever form [an entity] appears, that then is its particular nature.<sup>126</sup>

Perhaps at this stage a brief comparison with Heidegger's ideas might prove to be enlightening and not altogether out of place. According to Heidegger's phenomenology of Being, reality is intelligible in a two-fold

manner as 'phenomenon' and 'logos'. Heidegger defines what he means by 'phenomenon' as: "that-which-shows-itself. The manifest . . . phenomena are then the collection of that which lies open in broad daylight or can be brought to the light of day—what the Greeks at times implicitly identified as 'ta onta' (the things-which-are)".<sup>127</sup> In his later writings Heidegger drops the term 'phenomenon' in preference for the verbal form 'phainesthai' in order to emphasize even more the actuality or presentational property of Being. Explaining this new form of the term he writes: "Being disclosed itself to the ancient Greeks as 'physis'. The etymological roots 'phy-' and 'pha-' designate the same thing: 'phyein', the rising-up or upsurge which resides within itself as 'phainesthai', lighting-up, self-showing, coming-out, appearing-forth."<sup>128</sup>

Heidegger contrasted his notion of phenomenon with semblance (*Schein*) and with appearing (*Erscheinung*). In the case of semblance a thing can show itself as that which it is not, as when fool's gold shows itself to be gold. The ancients always allied semblance with non-being. Heidegger points out, however, that semblances are grounded in showings, and so does Abhinava. Both Heidegger and Abhinava consequently maintain that all semblances have a real basis and are to be treated as instances of phenomena along with the so-called real showing or manifestation of non-deceptive objects. So Heidegger states that: 'however much seeming, just that much being'.<sup>129</sup> Thus self-showing or appearing defines Being as phenomenon, but this definition of Being is as yet incomplete. Being is not only self-showing but 'logos' which Heidegger explains means 'discourse' (*Rede*) in the sense of 'apophansis': 'letting-be-seen'. Phenomenology, which according to Heidegger is the only correct study of Being, means 'letting-be-seen-that-which-shows-itself'. This is true of Śaiva *Paramādvaita* as well.

The reality of the world demands recognition; we are forced to accept the direct presentation of the fact of our daily experience. As Abhinava says: "if practical life, which is useful to all persons at all times, places and conditions were not real, then there would be nothing left which could be said to be real."<sup>130</sup> A thousand proofs could not make 'blue' other than the colour blue.<sup>131</sup> The reality of whatever appears in consciousness cannot be denied. Objects appear; they do not cease to do so by a mere emphatic denial.<sup>132</sup> The manifestation of an entity in its own specific form is a fact at one level of consciousness; it is real. The appearing of the same entity in the same form but recognised to be a direct representation of the absolute is also a fact, but at another level of consciousness.<sup>133</sup> It is no more or less real than the first. 'As is the state of consciousness, so is the experience,' says Abhinava.<sup>134</sup> Although the nature of the absolute is discovered at a higher level of consciousness,

nonetheless it presents itself to us directly in the specific form in which we perceive things; otherwise there would be no way in which we could penetrate from the level of appearing to that of its source and basis. Abhinava writes:

Real is the entity (*vastu*) that appears in the moment of direct perception (*sākṣātkāra*), that is to say, within our experience of it. Once its own specific form has been clearly determined one should, with effort, induce it to penetrate into its pure conscious nature.<sup>135</sup>

All things are known to be just as they present themselves. The concrete actuality of being known (*pramiti*), irrespective of content, is itself the vibrant (*spanda*) actuality of the absolute. Liberating knowledge is gained not by going beyond appearances but by attending closely to them. "The secret," Maheśvarānanda says, "is that liberation while alive (*jīvanmukti*) is the profound contemplation of Māyā's nature."<sup>136</sup> No ontological distinction can be drawn between the absolute and its manifestations because both are an appearing (*ābhāsa*), the latter of diversity and the former of 'the true light of consciousness which is beyond Māyā and is the category Śiva'.<sup>137</sup>

Those who have attained the category of Pure Knowledge above Māyā and have thus gone beyond the category of Māyā, see the entire universe as the light of consciousness . . . Just as the markings [on a feather] are nothing apart from the feather, the feather [is nothing apart from] them, similarly, when the light of consciousness is manifest, the whole group of phenomena is manifest as the light of consciousness itself.<sup>138</sup>

Within the sphere of Māyā, every entity's 'own nature' (*svabhāva*) corresponds to its specific manifest form. Accordingly it is defined as that which distinguishes it from all else and from which it never deviates.<sup>139</sup> Above the sphere of Māyā, that is, above the level of objectivity, is the domain of the subject. At this level, everything is realised to be part of the fullness of the experiencer<sup>140</sup> and hence no longer bound by the conditions which impinge on the object. Here the part is discovered to be the whole, that is, consciousness *in toto*. In this sphere beyond relative distinctions, the yogi realises that (all) the categories of existence are present in every single category.<sup>141</sup> The yogi experiences every individual particular as the sum total of everything else. He recognises that all things have one nature and that every particular is all things.<sup>142</sup> This is the 'essence' (*sāra*) or co-extensive unity (*sāmarasya*) of all things.

We have established that reality is manifest according to how [and the degree in which] the freedom of consciousness reveals it and that [this freedom] is the womb of all forms. Just as 'sweetness' is present in its entirety in every atom of the sugarcane, so each and every atom [of the universe] bears within itself the emanation of all things.<sup>143</sup>

This is the level of consciousness in which the absolute reflects on itself realising to its eternal delight and astonishment (*camatkāra*) its own integral nature.<sup>144</sup> The reality of the world of diversity is not denied, but experienced in a new mode of awareness free of time and space in the eternal omnipresence of the Here and Now.

[Phenomenal forms of awareness] such as 'this [exists]', born of the colouring [imparted to the absolute] by the limitations engendered by the diversifying power of time (*kālakalanā*) also emanate within the Supreme Principle. There [at that level], Fullness (*pūrṇatā*) is the one nature [of all things] and so everything is omnipresent; otherwise, associated with division (*khaṇḍana*), the Fullness [of the absolute] would not be full.<sup>145</sup>

The content of absolute consciousness consists of diverse appearings (*ābhāsa*) which, because they are manifest through it in this way, do not compromise the wholeness of consciousness. Everything we perceive is a momentary collocation of a number of such manifestations which combine together like 'a row of altar lamps' (*dīpāvali*) to form the single radiant picture of the universe. The individual objects which constitute the universe are specific collocations of such 'atomic' appearings. Together they form a single unified particular which appears according to its own defining features (*svalakṣaṇa*). A jar, for example, consists of a number of appearances such as 'round', 'fat', 'earthen', 'red', etc., which together discharge a single function (*arthakriyā*), in this case, that of carrying the appearance 'water'. They unite with each other much as the scattered rays of a lamp come together when focused, or as the various currents of the sea together give rise to waves.<sup>146</sup> Atomic appearings can combine in any number of ways, provided that they are not contrary to one another as established by the dictates of natural law (*niyati*). An appearance of 'form', for example, cannot combine with that of 'air'.<sup>147</sup>

Insofar as they share a common basis (*sāmānyādhikarānya*), a given cluster of appearances appears as a single whole. This common basis is the most prominent member of the group; the appearance 'jar' is such in the example quoted above. Any one appearance in a cluster may assume a more important or subordinate role. The result is a specific

awareness of an object of the form: 'here this is such.'<sup>148</sup> While individual appearances do not lose their separate identity (*svarūpabheda*) when they rest on a common basis, even so the particular object which appears according to its own characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*) is an individual reality in its own right. It is a different kind of appearance characterised by its association with the appearance of the specific location and time in which it is made manifest.<sup>149</sup> The form of our experience is thus 'I now see this here',<sup>150</sup> But when we perceive each particular constituent appearance separately, each assumes a separate fixed function. Abhinava cites the following colourful example to illustrate how the various combinations of appearances account for the variety of experience:

Thus even though the appearance of the beloved may manifest externally, it is as if far away in the absence of another appearance, namely, that of 'embracing'. So when the [appearing of the beloved] is associated with another appearance [namely that of 'far away'] the power (*arthakriyā*) it formerly had of giving pleasure appears as its contrary.<sup>151</sup>

The form our experience assumes depends, not only on the nature of the object perceived, but also on personal factors entirely peculiar to ourselves. This theory explains this in two ways. In one sense, the object remains the same, but one or other of its constituent appearances comes to the fore according to the inclinations of the perceiver. From another point of view, we can say that the perceived object is different for each perceiver according to the difference in the prominent appearance manifest to him. Abhinava, citing as an example a golden jar, illustrates how the same object appears differently to different perceivers according to the use they wish to make of it and to their state of mind:

When a person who is depressed and feels that there is nothing [of value for him in the world] sees the jar, he merely perceives the appearance 'exists' [in the form of the awareness that] 'it is'. He is not conscious of any other [of its constituent appearances] at all. An individual who desires to fetch water [perceives] the appearance 'jar'. The man who simply wants something that can be taken somewhere and then brought back, [perceives] the appearance 'thing'. The man who desires money [perceives] the appearance 'gold'. The man who desires a pleasing object [perceives] the appearance 'brightness' while he who wants something solid sees the appearance 'hardness'.<sup>152</sup>

These 'atomic events' or appearances emerge from the pure subject's consciousness and combine together to form a total event at each moment.



Daily life (*vyavahāra*) goes on by virtue of this ever renewed flux of appearances.<sup>153</sup> They are connected together and work towards a single unified experience because they appear within the field of consciousness of the universal subject.

The aggregate of appearances arises in the [supreme] subject as do [sprouts in] a rice field. Even though each sprout germinates from its own seed, they are perceived as a collective whole.<sup>154</sup>

Appearances rest in this way within the universal subject. 'Externality' is itself another appearance;<sup>155</sup> it arises from a distinction between appearances and the individual subject.<sup>156</sup> So, although all manifestation always occurs within the subject, it appears to be external due to the power of *Māyā*<sup>157</sup> which separates the individual subject from his object. This split must occur for daily life to be possible. Only externally manifest appearances can perform their functions; when they are merged within the subject and at one with him, they cannot do so.<sup>158</sup> Daily life proceeds on the basis of the operation and withdrawal of the conditions necessary for fruitful action to be possible. Appearance in this sense represents the actualisation of a potential hidden in consciousness made possible by virtue of its dynamic, Spanda nature which is both the flow from inner to outer and back as well as the power that impels it. The emergence from, and submergence into, pure consciousness of each individual appearance is a particular pulsation (*viśeṣaspanda*) of differentiated awareness. Together these individual pulsations constitute the universal pulse (*sāmānyaspanda*) of cosmic creation and destruction. Thus, every single thing in this way forms a part of the radiant vibration (*sphurattā, sphuraṇa*) of the light of absolute consciousness.