

Introduction

THE SETTING

Utpaladeva (ca. A.D. 900-950), well known as a founder of the Pratyabhijñā school of philosophy¹ in Kashmir, is best remembered for his philosophical treatises, most notably the *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā*, which, with its commentary, *Vimarśinī*, of Abhinavagupta, constitutes a major contribution to Indian philosophy in general. But Utpaladeva was, foremost, a highly realized devotee of Śiva, and is considered in Kashmiri tradition to have been a *siddha* (“perfected being”). The recitation of the *stotras*, or songs, of the *Śivastotrāvalī* features in the worship of the Śaiva community of Kashmir, even to this day. Since the time of their composition they have been chanted in the same style, and it has only been in the last fifty years that a more modern, though still beautiful, style has been adopted.

The *Śivastotrāvalī* survives with the commentary of Kṣemarāja, who notes that these songs were not composed by Utpaladeva as a single, structured work, but rather were written sporadically, during particular moods of devotional joy, anguish, praise, or of the mere reflection of his own philosophical ideas. After Utpala’s death, his disciples Śrīrāma and Ādityarāja are said to have been responsible for collecting the songs, which another disciple, Viśvāvartta, then divided into twenty chapters and provided with individual titles.

It is in the *stotras* of the *Śivastotrāvalī* that the material of Utpaladeva’s treatises is experienced firsthand by their author. This is not, of course, to say that a philosopher does not “experience” his material on some—usually intellectual—level. But it is in these songs that we are

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provided as though through a spiritual diary, the ups and downs of one who not only speculates about the path toward realization, but has tread it himself. Following him through the journey, indeed, from the very beginning, we have the sense that we are accompanying Utpala on the wanderings on a marvelous pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage, of course, is through his own interior landscape, testimony to the cosmic truth that he repeatedly strives to retain as a constant realization: that his own body is united with the body of Śiva, that is, the whole world. In his journeys we experience the wilderness that is both frightening and awe-inspiring, that makes the poet wonder desperately whether his is just a voice crying out in the vast darkness. The geography of Utpaladeva's interior pilgrimage, not surprisingly, resembles the land of Kashmir, with mountains and forests, and quite prominently, lakes with water lotuses. Along the dusty journey the wanderer seeks deep peace of mind, likened to the cool depths of a mountain lake or to a hidden mountain recess.

We may regard the opening verse of the *Śivastotrāvalī* as a benediction at the outset of the journey. A standardized obeisance to the deity or a supplication for protection might be expected before the actual subject of the piece begins. Observe, however, the object of homage in this first verse:

We praise the one who is filled with devotion,
Who meditates not nor recites by the rule,
And yet without any effort at all
Attains the splendor of Śiva. (1.1)

It is as though the opening is the very *śaktipāta* of the piece: an initial, shocking understanding is put to us, that is, to honor the devotee foremost, for the true devotee has identified completely with Śiva. This is a state that has come through the grace of Śiva and through the devotion of the individual, and therefore, in the highest realization it is indeed a eulogy of Śiva as well as the path itself, the supreme path, according to Utpaladeva, of devotion.

By setting the focus as such from the opening verse, Utpala reflects that already has he acquired insight into the reality of Śiva-consciousness. But an inkling of that vision is just beginning, and the songs of the entire *Śivastotrāvalī* are testimony to the joyful as well as painful realities of

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spiritual progression in an individual's life. Similarly is the pilgrim compelled by his awakened spirituality to set forth and find more.

Background of the Sanskrit Text

This book began as a doctoral dissertation² that presented a translation of a selection of the songs and constituted an in-depth inquiry into the status of the manuscripts and the preservation of the textual tradition of the *Śivastotrāvalī*. Between 1981 and 1983 I closely examined seven manuscripts, two in *devanāgarī* and the other five in *śāradā*, the script traditionally used in Kashmir for writing in Sanskrit. I collected the manuscripts from as wide a geographical range as possible, although, understandably, the greatest concentration of these manuscripts was to be found in Kashmir itself. (The manuscript library in the University of Kashmir, Srinagar, contains a total of thirty-four.) After careful examination I concluded that there were no major variants in any of the manuscripts that I studied, and that the textual tradition of the *Śivastotrāvalī* remained intact, without varying recensions.

The Sanskrit text of the *Śivastotrāvalī* was first published in 1902 in the Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, and was reissued in 1964, edited by the late Swami Laksman Joo of Srinagar.³ I did encounter some differences among the available texts—the seven manuscripts plus the 1964 published edition, which was based upon “five or six” unidentified manuscripts—but these were for the most part simply errors in *saṁdhi* or the use of synonymous terms that fit into the meter exactly, and that for the most part did not detract from the message of the verse.⁴ For this book, therefore, I have followed the text as printed by the Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series.

THE PILGRIM SETS FORTH

Selecting a Path

The system put forth by Utpaladeva is essentially a religion of the householder. Thus can the spiritual quest be seen to be modeled on the activities of the pilgrim—a householder who has taken a spiritual leave of

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absence from worldly functions—rather than an ascetic, who has severed with them altogether.

As a heuristic device to categorize the range of experience expressed in these songs, it is useful to look at the broad categories representative of the *upāyas* (“ways, means, expedients, paths”) of spiritual progress. There are three actual *upāyas*, plus a fourth, transcendent one; they can be thought of as a psychological ranking of an individual’s present spiritual inclinations and his potentials. Kashmir Śaivism is often praised⁵ for this psychological perceptiveness of the realities of just how each person can go about his spiritual progress and meet with neither too much challenge nor too much boredom.

The theory of the *upāyas* carries an inherent acknowledgement that the community of those following the path is comprised of a wide array of individuals; one must not wait an unknown number of lifetimes to be born into a high caste or as a male in order to worship Śiva or even dream of attaining his immediate realization; rather, the way is open not only to the high castes but also to low and even outcastes; not only to men but to women and indeed to children; not only to the renunciants but to the householder:

Hundreds indeed are those, O Lord,
Who through your inspiration
While living the lives of average people
Perceive just through these very eyes
Your form ever before them. (12.21)

Just the mere thought—even a negative one—is enough to set the process into motion:

Even for him whose thought of worshiping you
Arises only hypocritically,
Inevitably he acquires an appropriate
Closeness to you. (12.10)

That the way is open to all creatures is another way of acknowledging the conviction that with the body of Śiva as the whole universe and all in it, what or who indeed is not the same as the worshiper himself?

What, then, are the different *upāyas*? The first, *ānava upāya* (“the

path of minuteness”) is for those individuals most subject to *āṇava*, or minuteness, and whose consciousness has therefore become highly limited or bound. In this *upāya* much emphasis is placed on personal effort, focused particularly on the realm of the senses. Thus ritual (i.e., the sights and smells of flowers, bells, incense, abstract and concrete images, statues, etc.), repetition of *mantras* (for control of the mind), and *prāṇāyāma* (for control of the breath and the subtle channels called *nāḍīs*) are prescribed.

The second, *śākta upāya* (“the way of power”), or *jñāna upāya* (“the way of knowledge”) places a greater emphasis on mental awareness. The practitioner’s sense of duality begins to fade, but he is still fixed with a dualist vision; for this reason this way is also called *bhedābheda upāya* (“the way of difference and nondifference”).

The third *upāya* is *śāmbhava upāya* (“the way of Śambhu or Śiva”). It entails a highly evolved consciousness whereby the will (*icchā*) predominates; it is thus also called *icchā upāya* (“the way of the will”). In this *upāya* the practitioner can induce at will and retain for long periods a fixed awareness of the universe as pure consciousness.

The fourth and highest *upāya*, like the fourth constituent of other Indian mystical progressions, is not a true *upāya* as such but represents the transcendence of the *upāyas* themselves. Thus it is called *anupāya* (“wayless, without a way”), or *ānanda upāya* (“the way of bliss”). It requires almost no spiritual discipline, for the practitioner has entered into a state of absolute realization, where, as we saw in the opening verse of the *Śivastotrāvalī*, the practitioner is beyond the need for meditation or the counting of prayer beads. Thus it is also known as *pratyabhijñā upāya* (“the way of recognition”).

Using the categories of the *upāyas* facilitates encompassing the broad range of experiences of one on the path. More than anything, the *upāyas* are categories of psychological tendency, each of which is expressed throughout the *Śivastotrāvalī*. Unlike a philosophical treatise, it does not guide the reader through a steady progression, as, for example, the *Yogasūtra* of Patañjali, which delineates the stages of yoga from “lowest” to “highest.” The *Śivastotrāvalī*, rather, takes the reader along the winding path of discovery. In several places Utpala calls this path of devotion a creeper, that is, a vine that haltingly makes its way but that bears marvelous fruits.

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In the Realm of the Senses

Beginning with the realm of the senses, we can now take a longer look at the imagery of the sensual world as it appears in these songs. We have already considered the image of the pilgrim roaming about in the world of Śiva. Every place, indeed, becomes a sacred *tīrtha*, a ford for crossing over into Śiva's realm. Thus, in the midst of the ordinary world, one need only to shift perspective—a shift toward Śiva-consciousness—to experience the difference; such a difference is possible for the true devotee:

Even the path of worldly living
Becomes blissful for the devotees
Who have obtained your blessing, O Lord,
And who live inside your realm. (1.3)

Thus it is along the journey through the ordinary world, by means of the faculties of sense, that the devotee searches for a vision of Śiva-consciousness. But like the journeyer through the wilderness fearful of dacoits, Utpala recognizes the threat of ever-lurking “sense-thieves” along the way:

O Celestial One, grant that I may overcome
The enemies along your path,
The sense-thieves
Who conceal the highest reality. (19.11)

Indeed, the sensual world consists of Citi, divine consciousness as the body of Śakti; the senses and the physical body that confine one to bondage also constitute the vehicle for liberation. Thus the well-known tantric adage: “The very poison that kills becomes the elixir of life when used by the wise.”⁶

It is for this reason that not only are the senses acknowledged, but they are to be strengthened:

Nourished by the nectar
Of pure devotion rippling within,
Let my body become fit for your worship. (17.26)

It is for two reasons that the senses are to be strengthened: first, so that

they be a strong vehicle for the descent of the power of Śiva, which constitutes not just a feeling of emotional wellbeing, but a true force of the power of nature; *śaktipāta* is the descent of *śakti*, or power, of Śiva in the form of the natural world. This *śakti* is akin to lightning, electricity, and ultimately the atomic energy that Śiva “dances up” in the dissolution of the universe. Second, by becoming a vessel for divine power, the practitioner is also emulating nature itself, just a step away from the body of Śiva, made of pure consciousness. Embodied by Śakti, nature is also then a vessel; Utpala refers to Devī as the “treasury of all powers” (14.13).

But if the senses are to be strengthened, they are to be dedicated to Śiva: giving up one’s senses is but losing them, and thus the devotee beseeches:

While incessantly drinking in through the senses
The heady wine of your worship
From the overflowing goblets of all objects,
Let madness overtake me. (13.8)

The field of worship, then, is the individual himself. The turning inward to perform the sacrifice is similar to the concept in the Upaniṣads whereby the external elements of Vedic sacrifice—the animals, plants, and special locale—were redesignated to interior ones, in the human body and psyche. But whereas the Upaniṣads had the practice retreat from society, the Pratyabhijñā Śāstra brings it back: thus worship, though not *of* the world, flourishes in its very midst.

Pratyabhijñā Śāstra speaks of the five *kañcukas*, or coverings of *māyā*, that is, the limitations on the individual consciousness. They are a false sense in regard to *rāga* (enjoyment), *kāla* (time or mortality), *niyati* (pervasiveness of space), *vidyā* (knowledge), and *kalā* (authorship).

Rāga relates directly to man as a *paśu*, a “beast” tethered by his deepest uncontrollable desires, attachments, and illusions. One must seek to overcome the limitation of *rāga* by redirecting it and putting it to one’s use toward furthering an understanding of his true nature. Gaining control over the false sense of enjoyment in this way, the devotee ultimately learns to live fully within the world of *saṃsāra* while remaining unattached to it. The devotee understands that the task of redirecting *rāga* and the other limitations is beyond his own means; he recognizes that the *kañcukas* are manifestations of Śiva and that Śiva has ultimate mastery over them.

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Thus he offers them in sacrifice to the Lord:

Accept false enjoyment and the other limitations
That I offer unto you, O Lord.
Having transformed them into immortal nectar,
Enjoy them together with the devotees. (5.13)

By giving up worldly enjoyment one does not give up pleasures; he discovers instead a different source of delight, the joy that emanates from becoming centered in the identification of one's true self. The farther one comes from the bondage of his false viewpoint, the deeper becomes his enjoyment of unification with the Lord.

Rāga has a wide range of related interpretations; it indicates color, redness, inflammation, and thus passion, enjoyment, attachment, delight, and love. In certain respects, *rāga* as such is not a hindrance to liberation, but rather qualifies an instrument towards it. As joy, delight, love, and even attachment, *rāga* is a quality not to be extinguished but understood and nourished appropriately:

O Lord, enlighten my heart!
Help me to discriminate between
The base delight in false enjoyments
And the superior delight in your lotus feet. (5.20)

As a color, *rāga* is seen as a stain that, when offered to Śiva, becomes lost in and purified by the white brilliance of the god's impeccable splendor.

The Pratyabhijñā Śāstra recognizes five *indriyas*, or faculties of sense: *rasa* (taste), *ghrāṇa* (smell), *darśana* (sight), *śravaṇa* (hearing), and *sparsā* (touch). In the process of merging with the Lord, the devotee requests that in addition to *rāga*, the *indriyas* also maintain their worldly functions, but that they no longer create a hindrance to true recognition of the self. Rather, says Utpala:

Let the sense faculties, full of delight,
Be attached to their respective objects.
But may there not be, even for an instant,
Any loss of the joy
Of your nonduality. (8.5)

The joy of such a vision is not readily attained, however, when the senses remain stubbornly immersed in self-consciousness. Without the energy of Śakti to operate them, the faculties of sense cannot function. But the individual self persists, through its pride, in reverting to the attitude that the senses belong to, and operate for the benefit of, the limited self alone:

Enlivened by you, these senses quiver
Though they be like lumps of clay.
They dance, like feathery fluffs of cotton
Raised up by the breeze.
If, O Lord, the senses were not
Endowed with self-consciousness,
Then who would forsake the realization
That the world is one with you? (10.18,19)

Each of the senses receives separate attention in the *Śivastotrāvalī*, but the sense of taste (*rasa*) has special significance, particularly as regards what Utpala points out as *rasa* in varying situations. *Rasa* is one of those Sanskrit words that almost defies translation by virtue of its rich and varied multiplicity of equivalent words in English. In one respect, *rasa* means *sentiment*; what is called the “*rasa* of devotion” in these poems denotes a sentiment felt by the devotee toward the object of devotion. *Rasa* also means *taste, flavor, or savor*, and thus the “*rasa* of devotion” in this respect indicates a pleasurable sensory experience—indeed, a taste—that is an outcome of devotion. Thus as sentiment, *rasa* is that which the devotee “puts into” his act of worship; as flavor, it is that which he receives, or “gets out” of it. Thirdly, *rasa* is syrup, sap, pith, resin, or nectar, and Utpala makes frequent use of the image of *rasa* as the extract of a plant. When in a state of mystic union, the aspirant is said to taste a sweet and intoxicating nectar, sometimes called *amṛta* and at other times called *rasa*. Finally, Pratyabhijñā has a special connotation for the term: the essential “stuff” of Paramaśiva from which Śiva and Śakti become manifest is known as *śivarasa*.

The connotations of sentiment, savor, juice, pith, and the core essence of Śiva all are called to mind with the term as Utpala uses it—as he does often—in the *Stotrāvalī*. In some instances I have chosen to translate *rasa* as somewhere between *sentiment* (as effusive emotion), *pith* (as extract),

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and *nectar* (as sweet or intoxicating) with the English word *spirit*.

Just as he learns to redirect and thus reintegrate his sensory faculties, the aspirant learns that he must perceive the forms within the world of *saṃsāra* as manifestations of the body of Śiva. That the universe is inlaid with the form of Śiva is further expressed with the concept of that form as a city; the body of Śiva consists of a pattern, a map with the paths and subtle currents (*nāḍīs*, meaning the veins, arteries, and pulses of the physical and subtle bodies, into which we may read the geographical connection with rivers) along which the devotee travels in meditation. This is a type of *maṇḍala*, or mystic diagram representing both the universe without and the universe that exists within the individual. Utpaladeva indicates that by treading the path within the city of Śiva, the devotee can change in a positive way his movements along the path through the world of *saṃsāra*. Thus the devotee sometimes expresses his wish for union as dwelling inside of the Lord, and at other times, he depicts this specifically as dwelling inside the city of Śiva.

While in the state of perceiving the difference between subject and object, the devotee remains outside of the city of Śiva; the city is a *pur*, that is, a town or fortress enclosed by a wall in every direction, and accessible only by a huge, reinforced gate. As such the *pur* of Śiva is also the body of the individual *puruṣa*. Within, it contains eight *cakras*, and as entranceways, it has nine orifices, or “city gates.”⁷

Even the aspirant who approaches with utmost devotion encounters difficulty in gaining access to the innermost heart of that city:

This terrible world is about to be ended.
The deep stain of my mind has melted away.
Still the gates of your city
Are bolted shut
And do not unlatch even slightly. (4.15)

Even though the devotee may overcome the “stains” of the memory of the false attachment to worldly objects, the gates to the center of the city do not easily open. But since the city is located within the individual himself, Utpaladeva is saying here that the aspirant’s devotion is not yet strong enough to break the latches, for if the gates circumscribe Śiva’s city, they define the boundaries of the human heart as well. The “unlatching,” then, is also the piercing of the heart *cakra* (*anāhatacakra*), and either action

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requires both the will of Śiva and the incentive of the individual. Thus the devotee asks the Lord not only to bestow grace, but to help deepen his own devotion:

When shall my mind
Indifferent to all else through love's intensity
Tear open the great door latch
With a loud bang
And finally arrive in your presence, O Lord? (9.3)

A related image is that of the royal chamber, and with this Utpaladeva shows that even the supreme Vedic gods are denied access to the inner heart of Śiva. Here, Viṣṇu, Indra, and Brahmā cannot be admitted because they are not devotees; this reflects also Utpala's view of the inadequacy of Vedic worship in which ritual overrides devotion:

Forever may I sing my praises
Loudly to you,
Located in that place where Hari,
Haryaśva, and Viriñca are waiting outside. (7.7)

The only deity to dwell there is Devī, one of the many personifications of Śakti. Śakti is the primal energy of the universe, and Śiva is the universal consciousness; as such they are two complementary aspects of the universal Paramaśiva, seemingly separate but constantly united. When personified as deities, Śiva and Śakti are recognized as being eternally united through mutual devotion; they dwell always in the same place:

May I live in that sanctuary, O Lord,
Where, taking many forms,
You reside with Devī
From the palace up to the city gates. (5.7)

Just as the latched gates of the city of Śiva are a tantric image representing the as yet unliberated state of the aspirant, so also is the image of the knot with which the soul has been bound. Utpaladeva speaks of the knot that fastens the devotee into bondage; the knot keeps the devotee from realizing his true nature, and as such is a form of illusion. But the

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efficacy of that illusion is all the more powerful because it, too, is an aspect of Śiva. Utpala reiterates that liberation must be sought by the very force that causes bondage:

Alas, O Lord, this knot of the soul
Prevents your realization.
But fashioned and concealed by you,
That knot is strong indeed—
So strong that, disregarding you,
It slackens not a bit. (4.24)

Thus the devotee understands, intellectually, the source of his feeling of separation from the Lord. He understands also that to transform his false viewpoint of self-identification, he must perceive enjoyment, the faculties of sense, the individual body, and indeed the form of the whole world as manifestations of Śiva and thus of himself. He thus petitions:

In speech, in thought,
In the perceptions of the mind,
And in the gestures of the body,
May the sentiment of devotion be my companion
At all times, in all places. (5.22)

The experience of merging with Śiva is often described in these songs as sweetened with *amṛta*, or celestial nectar, and the path of the devotee is said repeatedly to be sweetened with the “nectar of devotion.” This nectar is also an intoxicating wine, as, for example:

With my eyes closed
At the touch of your lotus feet,
May I rejoice,
Reeling with drunkenness
From the wine of your devotion. (5.5)

By offering up the restrictive, worldly-bound senses, the devotee takes leave of them: this is the joy of delightful worship. And that intoxication, according to Utpala, will never be experienced by one treading on any other path, even the revered path of *jñāna* (intellectual knowledge). On the contrary:

The highest state of intellectual knowledge
Has none of the taste of the nectar
Of your devotion.
To me, O Lord, it is like sour wine. (1.11)

In some of the songs the sense of sight is interpreted literally. Yearning for a vision, which in a higher sense indicates spiritual realization, also takes the form of an ecstatic vision, as a visitation of the beloved deity:

Ardently I desire to behold
Your ever-blossoming lotus face.
O Lord, may you appear to me,
Howsoever faintly,
Face to face. (4.16)

The *Śivastotrāvalī* is filled with expressions of how the devotee seeks to redirect these senses as well as those of touch, smell, and hearing toward the wholistic experience of Śiva-consciousness.

MANY PATHS, ONE PATH

At a certain point the aspirant begins to take hold more securely in his practice. These positive gains are spoken of in terms of undoing, of dissolution: he begins to *lose* his sense of duality, he *unties* the knots that bind him, he *breaks open* the latch to the gate of the city that is Śiva. These things begin to happen, that is, his awareness of his true identity begins to become more apparent, by means of his perseverance to the task, which, in this system, comes down to the faith and devotion (*bhakti*) that he cultivates in his heart.

This stage, which we may equate with the level of *śākta upāya* (“the way of power”), or *jñāna upāya* (“the way of knowledge”), entails the development of both power and knowledge: *śakti* is power, that is, the constrictive power of the natural world, as well as the power to overcome that world. Knowledge involves a higher intellectual understanding of the spiritual endeavor.

The powers developed by the aspirant are called *siddhis*

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(“perfections”). The *siddhis* are powers to manipulate and transcend nature and the natural world; they are, then, supernatural powers. They consist of *śakti* (the manifestation of nature, the first evolute, personified as Śakti); thus to acquire them means to identify with Śakti herself, and consequently with Śiva-consciousness.

The natural world, or Śakti, is also called *māyā* (personified as Māyā), from which derives the English word *magic*. The *siddhis* are “magical” powers in both ways in which magic is understood: They are sleight of hand, the art of illusion, and they are, as perhaps the most distinctive feature of primal religions, manipulation of the elements of nature.

The acquisition and accumulation of these powers is recognized as a byproduct of many spiritual paths. As in Patañjali’s *Yogasūtra*, for example, Pratyabhijñā stresses the necessity for the ethical cultivation of these powers. Undue attachment to an accumulation of *siddhis* detracts from the ultimate goal of the *siddhis*, liberation itself. And misguided attachments to the *siddhis*, that is, using them for malicious purposes, degenerates into black magic.

Referred to collectively, they are known as *aṣṭasiddhi*, or the “eight perfections”; Utpaladeva refers to them as *aṇimādi*, or “*aṇimā* and the other [powers].” They are, in their traditional order, the faculty or ability to acquire (1) *aṇimā* (infinitely small size); (2) *mahimā* (infinitely large size); (3) *laghimā* (infinitely light weight); (4) *garimā* (infinite heaviness); (5) *prāpti* (transporting oneself by mere thought); (6) *prākāmya* (having everything in plenty); (7) *īśitva* (overlordship, domination); and (8) *vaśitva* (ability to subjugate anyone or anything).

The *siddhis* exist so that the aspirant can strengthen himself in his spiritual pursuit: that pursuit, then, is also an adventure into the higher realms of the natural world; awareness becomes strengthened and nourished as one crosses into this realm that exists at the fringes of completely worldly consciousness at one extreme and at the other, the absolute consciousness of Śiva. This is a crossing place, a ford, indeed, the very definition of a twilight zone. Here one goes back and forth between a consciousness fixed in duality and nonduality; thus it is called *bhedābheda*.

Grace and Devotion

It is said that the heart’s spiritual yearnings are brought about either by an innate desire or by some shocking experience or realization. In several

places Utpaladeva attributes his treading the spiritual path to Śiva—sometimes rejoicing in the fact, and sometimes lamenting it.

The process of how the *siddhis* come about serves as a paradigm for the very process of spiritual evolution itself. In introducing the concept, I use the term “come about” in a purposeful avoidance, for the moment, of either the phrase “how the aspirant develops his powers” or “how the powers are acquired.” For inherent in such language would have been the implied agent of action, and this points to the very crux of the question, not only as regards the evolution of the *siddhis*, but of liberation itself. How does one set foot on the path? How does one reach its highest goal? Here we encounter the enigma that lies at the core of the *Śivastotrāvalī*—the ambiguous relationship between *anugraha* (“grace”) and *bhakti* (“devotion”).

If we take a second look at that “dissolution” terminology of the spiritually progressing aspirant, we will see that in some places he is said to lose his sense of duality, in others, that the duality *is removed*; here he unties the knots, elsewhere they *are untied*; sometimes he must break open the latch, at others, the door *swings open* for him.

On an even more subtle level, Utpaladeva expresses this brilliantly with his use of the term *tvadbhakti*, perhaps, along with *tvadbhaktirasa*, the most frequently occurring phrase in the *Śivastotrāvalī*. The simplest way to render *tvadbhakti* into English is, literally, “your devotion,” a phrase that carries the original ambiguity: it denotes both “x’s devotion to you” and “your devotion to x.” In just one of many examples, Utpala implores:

Just as Devī,
Your most beloved, endless pool of bliss,
Is inseparable from you,
So may your devotion alone
Be inseparable from me. (1.9)

For Utpaladeva the path of devotion is the most supreme and efficacious form of worship; thus he asks that his devotion to the Lord be a strong, integral part of himself. But equally apparent—by its intentional ambiguity—is the prayer that the Lord, in the same way that he sheds devotion upon Devī, shed devotion on the devotee. Perhaps at the heart of this ambiguity lies the very concept of *bhakti* itself: literally a “share” or

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“allotment,” its original meaning focuses on the apportionment itself, not on who does the apportioning.

Utpala has another term for the other side of this process, however: *anugraha*, or grace. It is Utpala’s conviction that one cannot even experience devotion without an initial stroke of grace. The two—devotion and grace—operate together as two aspects of the same entity, ultimately showing their common goal, or, from a different viewpoint, their common source. Through a dualistic consciousness, the two are separate processes: in one, the devotee (as subject) extends the feeling of devotion toward the Lord (as object); in the other, the Lord (as subject) bestows grace upon the devotee (as object). The dualistic process is a means to achieve the realization that the two are united in their common goal as well as in their common source, the body of Śiva:

When will that small amount of grace
Abiding with the Lord
And that small amount of devotion
That has come to me
Unite to become like that unique form—
The blissful body of Śiva? (8.1)

Utpala is the first to admit, however, that the true relationship between grace and devotion remains a mystery:

You are pleased, O Lord, with devotion,
And devotion arises at your will.
You alone understand
How these are connected. (16.21)

In the state of absolute realization one perceives the process of devotion and grace as two aspects of one divine process. The sense of duality that is perceived is the same that is produced when the universe is manifested as the complementary aspects of Śiva and Śakti, typified in turn by the complementary qualities of the manifest universe, *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*: *Prakāśa* is illumination, the placid, transcendent Śiva. *Vimarśa* is the dynamic, immanent Śakti; they may be considered, in Arambinda Basu’s words, the “background” and “foreground,” respectively.⁸ Beyond the personifications of Śiva and Śakti lie the cosmological images of

prakāśa and *vimarśa*. Harvey P. Alper points out just two of the images evoked by *prakāśa*:

... *prakāśa* as spacial effervescence, and *prakāśa* as the sea at the heart of all things. . . . The theology of *prakāśa* hints at the dissolution of ordinary ego consciousness, at immersion in the cave, the bottomless center of all phenomena; it seems to speak of overflowing, being brimful, of being afloat in the depths of the sea.⁹

Before going on to observe the further importance of *prakāśa* and *vimarśa* in light of the *Śivastotrāvalī*, it is necessary here to mention the phenomenon in Pratyabhijñā known as *spanda*. *Spanda* is the initial vibration of the universe, its very heartbeat. In the *Śivadṛṣṭi* Somānanda explains *spanda*:

This tension is perceptible in the locus of the heart when one remembers suddenly a thing that must be done at the moment, when one receives good news, when one experiences fear unexpectedly, when he sees a dear one whom he had not seen for a long time, when one pronounces emission, when one reads quickly, when one runs fast, etc. On each of these occasions there is a mingling of all the powers (*sarvaśakti vilolatā*).¹⁰

This “mingling of all the powers” is a characteristic of practice on the path of *śākta upāya*; thus the aspirant begins to get to the very essence of the cosmic vibration, that is, consciousness itself.

The key to the whole process—the initial vibration (*spanda*) that drums up, as it were, the two opposing entities of *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*, and, in turn, how these universal principles relate on the individual level as grace and devotion—is presented in the *Anubhāva Sūtra*:

Śiva’s innate power Spanda is wholly responsible for the entire creation of the Universe and the same power reacting in the individual leading to final liberation is called Bhakti (devotion). The same power, Spanda, in the reverse trend is liberation. *In reality there is no difference between Śakti and Bhakti—the operating forces of Spanda.* [Italics mine]¹¹

Thus grace may be seen as a manifestation of *prakāśa*, emanating from the

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world as Śiva, transcendent, constant, and eternal. Devotion, in turn, is *vimarśa*; it is the sense of “I” or the individual expression through infinite variations. Devotion is dynamic, ever-seeking, ever-changing, while at the same time complemented by the steady illumination that is grace.

The philosophy of Pratyabhijñā considers *anugraha* as the only one of the five eternal processes of Śiva that is absolutely necessary for the liberation of the individual self. Thus in the *Śivastotrāvalī* Utpaladeva focuses on grace and on its complementary aspect, manifest in the individual as devotion. At times he beseeches the Lord for grace; at others, where we might expect to find him asking for grace, the prayer instead is for a strengthening of devotion:

When shall my yearning for devotion—
The highest state of knowledge and
The highest state of yoga—
Become fulfilled, O Lord? (9.9)

“Tremblings along the Journey”

We have explored, then, what the Pratyabhijñā philosophers would tell us about grace and devotion, *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*, the personifications of Śiva and Śakti, and the divine, eternal vibration that is *spanda*. How does all of this fit into the experiences of our spiritual seeker continuing his way on his pilgrimage?

At this point he has developed enough of an awareness to have gotten an inkling into his true identity, but has not acquired the spiritual acumen to increase these glimpses at will. These albeit brief experiences of his true nature provide such a contrast to his mundane vision that the acknowledgement of the difference between the states causes great spiritual anguish. He understands that although he seeks liberation from the state of dualistic perception, he constantly loses his way:

There is no other happiness here in this world
Than to be free of the thought
That I am different from you.
What other happiness is there?
How is it, then, that still this devotee of yours
Treads the wrong path? (4.17)

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The sixth song, entitled “Tremblings along the Journey,” laments repeatedly the anguish caused by the unsteadiness of this vision; the splendor of the vision makes it all the more difficult to live without:

From the center of the world
Let there be visible to me
Your magnificent jewel
That dispels the depths of darkness
With its radiant luster.

On what site do you not dwell?
What exists that does not exist in your body?
I am wearied!
Therefore let me reach you everywhere,
Without difficulty. (6.8, 9)

A devotee anxiously awaiting recognition is the image depicted in the entire ninth song; each verse contains the plaintive cry, “When shall . . . ?” It is with such plaintiveness that the songs take on the tone of an intimate relationship, with the Lord as the elusive lover, a motif known to Tamil *bhakti* poetry and that would several centuries later sweep across northern India with the great *bhakti* poets of the middle ages. Here Utpaladeva addresses the Lord as the beloved, cornering him, finally, and disrobing him—of his veil of *māyā*:

When shall that moment come, O Lord,
When all of a sudden I recognize you,
The Fearless, Exalted, Whole, Without Cause,
The One, indeed, to have veiled himself—
And in so doing make you ashamed? (9.6)

In this stage, or realm, where all is flickering, wavering, where the Lord is sometimes depicted as an abstract object of beauty and at others personified as a lover, the mood of the devotee also ranges from high to low. The devotee has glimpsed ecstasy:

I roar! Oh, and I dance!
My heart’s desires are fulfilled
Now that you, Lord,

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Infinitely splendid,
Have come to me. (3.11)

He now begs to “firmly clasp” that realization:

When shall I become helplessly enraptured
And reveal to everyone my joy,
Having suddenly obtained and firmly clasped
The treasure of your most precious feet? (9.10)

In *jñāna upāya* the individual has some, but not complete understanding:

When I touch the soles of your feet,
It sometimes flashes in my mind
That this whole world
Has merged into a lake of nectar.
Lord! Grant this to me always! (5.26)

But caught up in the world, hindered by the darkness of his own stubborn mind, Utpala laments that the realization is not yet constant, and repeatedly we encounter verses that reflect the depression and anguish of one who cannot sustain that beatific vision:

Endless is the cycle of birth and death.
These slender limbs are consumed
By diseases harsh and diverse.
I have derived no real enjoyment
From pleasures of the senses.
What happiness encountered was not long lasting.
Thus, my existence has become useless.
Grant me, O Lord,
Those sublime and everlasting treasures
So that I may become your devotee
With my head illumined by touching the feet
Of the One adorned with the moon. (15.19)

In this wavering stage the devotee is thus fraught with contradictions. In some verses he begs for *aṅimā* and the other powers; in others, he boasts that he has no use for them. Similarly, in some places he extols the benefits

of meditation; in others, that, too, has no use. In several instances he separates himself, as a devotee, from the (lowlier) ordinary people of the world; other verses have him begging to lead a normal life. And although Utpaladeva ever extols the ease with which the Lord is attained through devotion (as opposed to other paths), still, time and again he laments not being able to sustain that vision.

THE HIGHEST PATH AND BEYOND

We come now to the path of *śāmbhava upāya*, the path of Śiva, also called *icchā upāya*, or the way of the will, for here, the vision of absolute identity can be induced at will. Here the world is understood as the emanation of Śiva and Śakti through play (*kriḍā*); thus everything is seen as vibrating with the delightful sensation of the cosmic pulse, *spanda*. Thus do the true devotees partake of this playfulness:

O Lord of the Universe!
How lucky are your devotees,
Worthy of being adored by you.
For them, this turbulent ocean of the world
Is like a great pleasure-lake
For their amusement. (3.15)

In *śāmbhava upāya* worship becomes automatic, a sweet habit “unsullied” by the mere petitions that characterize the less advanced stages. Thus Utpala praises the highly attained devotee:

Whose consciousness is expanded
With intense devotion
Has a unique, praiseworthy style of worship
Unsullied by entreaties, O Granter of Boons. (17.24)

Śiva Immanent and Transcendent

Having transcended the need for the accoutrements of worship, and thus of any path at all, the devotee enjoys *svātantrya*, the true freedom of realization; this is the fourth way, *anupāya*, the supreme condition of

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having no path at all. Unencumbered by worldly attachments, and having surpassed the flickerings of an unsteady mind and perceptions, the perfected worshiper surpasses the realm of lamentations. Instead, his worship becomes spontaneous praise and glorification.

The fourteenth song consists solely of glorifications, and it is no wonder that in Kashmir it is the best-loved song of the *Śivastotrāvalī*. The imagery of these glorification *stotras* reflects that, by having transcended the vision of duality in the world, that is, by having identified with the absolute consciousness of Śiva, one is free then to come full circle—to adore Śiva in his many names and forms without the fear of becoming only attached to that singular image: for the realized devotee, Śiva is at once both immanent and transcendent.

Thus it is in these songs that we encounter some of the richest imagery in the *Śivastotrāvalī* as regards iconography and the particulars of mythological episodes. For example:

May you be glorified, anointed with moonlight
Reflected in the vast ocean of milk.
May you be glorified, O Lord whose ornaments
Are snakes dazzling with jewels
Begotten at your touch. (14.6)

Also lauded here are the salvific powers of Śiva:

May you be glorified,
The only lamp for worldly beings
Blinded by the darkness of delusion.
May you be glorified, O Supreme Person,
Ever awake in the midst of a sleeping world. (14.18)

In the state of highest realization, the true path of Śiva is no path at all, that is, one wanders about at will, no longer having to rely on the techniques of counting beads, of retaining the breath, or even, as we saw in the very first verse, of meditation. The special quality of devotion is that it is both the means and the end; it is the one means that is not discarded at the end of the journey, for it constitutes the journey as well as its highest goal. The process of treading the path itself entails the *becoming* of a devotee; thus is the well-known adage here reworded:

“One should worship Śiva by becoming Śiva”
Is the old saying. But the devotees say,
“One should worship Śiva by becoming a devotee.”
For they can recognize your essence as nondual,
Even when it is in bodily form. (1.14)

The pilgrim roams about the whole world, with every act consecrated and every place a sacred spot, a ford between the world of limitation and the world of freedom. The true wanderer in spirit is beyond fear; he is not threatened by bonds to the senses or by the surprises of the wilderness into which he has ventured. In a cosmic sense he enters the realm of the transcendent body of Śiva-consciousness. In a “name-and-form” sense, this indicates the wild realm that belongs to Śiva: the vast, dark forests full of wild animals, where ghosts linger in craggy trees.

At the end of the *Śivastotrāvalī* Utpaladeva thus calls the truly realized beings *vīrajana*: the valiant, the brave, the adventurers. They are beyond the ordinary person’s abhorrence of ghosts, fearsome reminders of the chilly existence between hearty life and peaceful death. The realm of ghosts could only be presided over by Śiva, who pounds the world into dissolution with the fury of his cosmic dance. Thus is he glorified:

Homage to the one wearing as raiment
His own lustrous halo of radiant beams,
Bedecked with a glittering garland of skulls
For the festival of dance at the end of the world. (20.2)

Only the true devotee of Śiva could revel in what for those bound by limitation is a horrifying prospect:

As though saturated with the wine
Of the nectar of devotion,
With vital organs radiating with delight,
The adventurous ones dance through the night
With Śiva’s attendants, a party of ghosts. (20.20)

And so has the accomplished devotee become a *siddha*, having mastered, by his devotion and by divine grace, the vision of true identity, abounding in freedom and beyond all fear.

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THE PROVINCE OF SACRED POETRY

Beyond the images and ideas presented in the songs of the *Śivastotrāvalī* lies the vessel for the thoughts themselves: the literary form of the *stotra*. It has been traditionally understood that *stotra* literature is composed by those of a highly evolved spiritual as well as poetic awareness.

Indeed, we do not for a moment question the spirituality of Utpaladeva. We have seen, on the other hand, the array of poetic imagery throughout the *Śivastotrāvalī*. In addition, Utpala experimented with—and employed to a perfection—a variety of complex Sanskrit meters, both syllabic (*śloka*, *sikharīṇī*, *prthvī*, *rathoddhatā*, and *śārdūlavikrīḍita*) and moraic (*āryā* and *vaitāliya*).

The classic *stotrakāra* (literally, “hymn-maker”) had the gift of insight into the divine realms and could communicate this insight through verse. Mariasui Dhavamony says of the *stotra* literature:

There is undoubtedly an appeal to the deepening of the religious sense of man. Over and above this visible, so to say, aspect of man's communion with the Deity, there is also the invisible aspect that underlies these hymns. In order to understand and interpret this spiritual aspect, we have to enter into the secret and mystical world of these hymns, a world that is beyond the grasp of ordinary human beings but nonetheless the presence of it is felt very strongly by the hymnologists.¹²

This “secret and mystical world” represents the place or faculty by which one experiences communion with the deity; Dhavamony continues:

The Indian mind is constantly seeking hidden correspondences between the world of men and the world of the gods, as is evident in the early religious literature of India. . . .¹³

The recitation or singing of the *stotra* is beneficial for the devotee, for it is a medium through which one can both vent a spiritual longing as well as rejoice in spiritual satisfaction. The very act of participating in the *stotra*, either by listening or by joining in the recitation, induces the mood of devotion. It is when the devotional mood is aroused and sustained that one can open one's heart toward divine union, which can be known about,

but never experienced, through the mind.

The purpose of chanting is not only for the benefit of the devotee, but for the pleasure of the gods. Indeed, the first activity of the day in the Hindu temple is to wake up the deity by singing a devotional song before the image, and the last one at night is to sing the deity to sleep. The devotee expresses love of the deity by thus cherishing and nurturing him, and similarly, the deity, entertained by the sound of the poetry and pleased by the devotion in the heart of the worshiper, bestows on him his grace. Indeed, Śiva is said to enjoy singing and dancing in his worship:

May you be glorified, who delight in offerings
Drenched in the sentiment of devotion.
May you be glorified, pleased with the singing
And dancing of devotees drunk on your wine. (14.10)

Something there is that connects the realm of the deity and that of the worshiper, something that acts as a conduit between grace and devotion. The *Śivastotrāvalī* has been called a sacred stream that flows between this world and the world of the gods, consecrating everything along its course. Madhurāja-yogin, a disciple of Abhinavagupta (and thereby a direct preceptorial descendent of Utpaladeva) so praises the *Śivastotrāvalī*:

Though there are over thousands of
Streams of beautiful verses,
None at all compares to that
Celestial river, the *Stotrāvalī*.
As soon as it passes through the *tīrtha* of the ear
It purifies the soul of man,
And flows on to the throat,
Where lies the city of Śrikanṭha.¹⁴

Thus in describing the inner journeys of the spiritual pilgrim, the *Śivastotrāvalī* itself is called a river that flows from one realm to the next. From without, it touches on the water-shrine (*tīrtha*) of the ear, flowing down, onwards to the city of Śrikanṭha, that is, Śiva as the Lord of the Throat (that has turned blue from drinking the poison of the ills of the world): one's soul becomes purified, says the devotee, by merely hearing the verses of the *Śivastotrāvalī*.