

MAYA AND AESTHETICS IN KASHMIR SHAIVISM

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During full moonlit night, devotees of Swami Vivekanand were gazing at the resplendent sky from the yacht in the mid sea. They invited Swam'ji, who was inside, to share their joy at the fascinating sight.

Swamiji remarked, "If God's creation, His Maya Shakti is so fantastic, can we ever surmise His glory and His greatness"!

This message, indeed, should permeate all of us. We should endeavour to think - whether we think this way? The simple and frank answer is - no. Perhaps, we face insurmountable problems at individual, social and still higher levels, totally making us to lose our confidence. That is why we call the world a great paradox, a maze, beyond any body's comprehension.

We take the help of God to escape the stark realities of the World. We hold Him high with due eulogy, but we have unkind words for His Creation - the manifested World, called MAYA. We call it illusion,

deluding, transitory, etc. Still, we have to reconcile with this situation.

As an endeavor to understand this puzzle, we can take recourse to and seek guidance from our ancient philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism. This universal philosophy focuses on relation between God, Nature and Man, which transcends all the barriers of time, place and diverse human cultures. At individual level it provides the complete analysis of human personality and all the aspects of life are integrated and taken in totality.

To understand Maya as per Kashmir Shaivism first we have to seek the nature of Ultimate Reality called PARAM SHIVA who manifests the total Bliss and Who is all complete in Himself. From Him emanates everything. He is beyond description, beyond all manifestation, beyond limitation of form, time and space. He is eternal, infinite, all pervading, all knowing and all powerful. In fact, this reality is ineffable and beyond all descriptions.

PARAM SHIVA AND HIS UNIVERSAL MANIFESTATION.

This manifested material world called Maya is part of the great process of universal manifestation which we can call "evolution" and "involution". Kashmir Shaivism postulates 36 categories or "tattvas" to explain the process of cosmic evolution. Let us keenly focus our attention to this process of universal evolution or universal experience, i.e. from

God hood to Maya Shakti which is the veiling or obscuring force of nature leading to various psycho - physical elements and finally the Panch Mahabhutas - five great gross elements : Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether.

SHIVA TATTVA

The first outward manifestation of the divine creative energy in the process of cosmic evolution is called Shiva - Tattva. It is the initial creative movement of Paramasiva. It is the static aspect of consciousness or like support of all things in the manifest world. It is like the bed of a river or the canvas of a painting. It can never be seen, it can only be known by its effects. In this condition, the emphasis is on the subject without any awareness of the existence of the object.

SHAKTI TATTVA

Since the Shiva Tattva represents the passive aspect of the pure consciousness, it is dependent upon the active or dynamic aspect to bring it into being. This is called Shakti Tattva. Shakti is the active or kinetic aspect of consciousness.

This Shakti Tattva or cosmic energy represents the force that produces a strain or stress on the surface of the Universal consciousness. It is said to have three principal forms to account for the three fundamental psychological steps that precede every action. Technically the first one is called ICHCHA SHAKTI, the power of feeling oneself as supremely

able and of an Absolutely irresistible will. Second one is the JNANA SHAKTI, the power of knowledge or knowing of consciousness. The KRIYA SHAKTI is the power of supreme action, creating or assuming any and every form. One follows the other in logical succession.

Just as an artist pours out his delight in a poem, picture or song, even so the Supreme pours out his delight in this manifestation called Shakti. When Shakti is predominant, supreme bliss is experienced. Mahesvarananda puts it beautifully in Maharthamanjari. "He (i.e. Shiva) Himself full of joy enhanced by the honey of the three corners of His heart, viz ICCHA, JHANA AND KRIYA, raising up His face to gaze at His own splendor is called Shakti".

MAYA AND FIVE KANCUKAS (COVERINGS)

Now let us come to evolution of material universe. The power of consciousness to separate and divide is called Maya Shakti. This is the power to perceive differences. The term "Maya" means illusion. Here it is used to refer to the veiling or obscuring force of nature which creates a sense of differentiation. As such, it makes universal consciousness which is unity, appear as duality and multiplicity.

The category of Maya is postulated to account for the manifestation of "form" out of "Formless", the finite out of infinite. So Maya is considered not as a

separate reality, but as the gross power of consciousness and is referred to as Maya Shakti. Maya is defined as the limiting principle which reduces the universal powers of consciousness and produces the state of limited experience. It divides and disperses divine unity of the God head and brings into existence the mind and matter.

The products of Maya are the five kancukas or coverings which are KALAA (limitation of authorship or efficacy) VIDYA (limited knowledge), RAGA (from all satisfaction to feeling of interest and desire) KAALA (from eternity to limitation in respect of time i.e. past, present and future) NIYATI (limitation in respect of cause and effect).

PURUSHA AND PRAKRITI

The result of Maya and its five coverings as referred above are PURUSHA and PRAKRITI. Here the dual world of mind and matter is permanently established. In other words, although the Lord is absolutely free, He puts on Maya and her coverings (five cloaks), forgets His true nature, limits His power and reduces Himself to an individual soul which is called Purusha and its objective manifestation PRAKRITI.

BUDDHI, AHAMKARA AND MANAS

Now, let us come to the tattvas of mental operation i.e. BUDDHI, AHAMKARA AND MANAS. Buddhi is the ascertaining intelligence which can be external i.e. a

jar perceived through eye or internal, like images built out of the impression left on mind. Ahamkara is the product of buddhi. It is the I - making principle and the power of self - appropriation. Manas is the product of ahankara. It co-operates with the senses in building up perceptions, and by itself, it builds images and concepts.

We are continuing to focus on the cosmic manifestations. The products of AHAMKARA are five powers of sense perception or JNANENDRIYAS, five powers of action or KARMENDRIYAS and five primary elements of perception or TANMANTRAS. The process of in-evolution is complete finally with panch Mahabutas as referred earlier.

Frankly, very important position is given to Ahankara. In fact, it is the product of SHAKTI through the intermediate Prakriti which obviously is a mode of the Divine Energy. Rajas gunas is prominent here and other gunas are in subdued form. One can understand significance of Ahankara by the story of the Buddha Bhikshu Upasena. As he tried to over come this tattva by his "sadhana", his body got scattered because there was no Ahankara up-holding it.

It is Important to understand that, according to Kashmir Shaivism, this analysis of all phenomena into thirty-six tattavas has been worked out as a tool of understanding for the ever-active and inquiring

mind and as a form for contemplative meditation. At higher sadhana the number of tattvas may get reduced. Finally a highly advanced Shiva Yogin may see only the Shiva Tattva in the whole of creation.

DOCTRINE OF THE FOUR STAGES IN THE MANIFESTATION OF SPEECH.

To understand the manifestation of Maya Shakti from the level of Param Shiva, it is important to consider the process and stages in the manifestation of speech. Bharatrhari, the originator of the philosophy

of Sanskrit grammar, says in his Vakyapadiya: "The eternally existent Brahman, being the changeless essence of speech appears in the form of the phenomenal substance out of which the process of universal existence proceeds". The authors of Kashmir Shaivism have explained in detail the concept of SABDABRAHMAN.

Speech is not only the means to convey one's ideas to others, it is also a way to understand things personally. When we choose to convey ideas to others, we generally use spoken language, known as VAIKHARI. A finer form of speech that serves as the medium for thinking and understanding, through which a person forms definite and indefinite ideas about words and their meanings, is the mental speech called MADHYAMA. It is an internal reflection of manifestation of awareness taking the

form of ideas. There is a still finer level of speech, far subtler in character and resides in the inner-most part of our being. It is called PASYANTI. It is known as the "be-holding speech" because through its medium enlightened people can behold all objective existence within themselves. Beyond this is PARAVAC the supreme speech or the transcendental speech. This consists of pure awareness of the self. It is also called PARAVANI.

This doctrine can also be understood by the example of an artist's creation from the grossest to the finest level. His tangible creation like a painting etc. can be VAIKHARI and the images formed mentally, where his creation shines within him in the form of MADHYAMA. Before even this exists a subtle creative urge like a stir, or restlessness or inward flutter which is PASYANTI. Finally, at the most subtle level, the original seed of the artistic creation lies in the inner most center which is shining as PARAVAC, the Supreme speech.

MAYA AND WORLD

For centuries Indian philosophers have been debating whether this world is real or an illusion. Many schools of philosophy have interpreted the nature of Maya in various ways. As explained, Kashmir Shaivism maintains Maya is based neither on the imagination nor any finite being nor on any flux of mind. Maya is Siva-Mayi: Divine and perfectly real. The universe is not mithya. The universe is Siva-rupa and therefore real. It is a

display of the glory of the Divine.

Having recognized Maya as creation of God, we should accept the world in totality. No problem of society, state, nation and individual is to be ignored. A person cannot succeed in any aim of life if he shuts his eyes towards these problems. Besides, there should be greater understanding of others views based on sense of accommodation. This will develop correct perception and contribute to furthering of human understanding. Verily it can be called practical Shaivism.

AESTHETICS.

After a detailed analysis of Maya Shakti as per Kashmir Shaivism let us come to development of aesthetic principles in religious rituals. In fact, in Indian thought aesthetics has always played an important role in the development of various schools of philosophy. Frankly, we do not see God at some distant disciplinarian ruler of the universe. He is thought of as an intimate and loving master who is extremely beautiful and lovable.

Even in ancient times Indus Valley people worshiped their deities with dance. Vedic fire altars were constructed according to aesthetic norms. Rigvedic poetry, sung in praise of various forces of nature, personified as gods with human like forms, is rich in aesthetic value. Music and song are still a central part of the spiritual practice among Vaisnava

devotees. Cave paintings at Elora and Ajanta testify to the importance attached to beautiful religious images in India during the Buddhist age. Ancient temples and images at places like Khajuraho display a highly developed aesthetics sense in the art of stone carving.

Kashmir Shaivism is a philosophy that embraces life in its totality. Unlike puritanical systems it does not shy away from the pleasant and aesthetically pleasing aspects of life as somehow being unspiritual. On the contrary, great importance has been placed on the aesthetic quality of spiritual practice in Kashmir Shaivism. In fact, recognizing and celebrating the aesthetic aspect of the Absolute is one of the central principles of this philosophy.

In this way, the aesthetic outlook of Indian philosophers and theologians reached its full expansion in the Tantric system of sadhana or spiritual practice. It is indeed difficult to find any Tantric deity who does not possess some powerful aesthetic charm for the devotee.

Kashmir Shaivism is propagated a spiritual path that focused on the simultaneous attainment of enjoyment (bhukti), and liberation (mukti). It accepted both of them as the goal of human life, and developed philosophies and methods that could be followed equally by both monks and householders. It did not approve of any form of forcible control or repression of the mind, emotions,

and senses, but rather emphasized that such practices could create adverse reactions that might simply deepen a practitioner's bondage.

MUSIC

In aesthetics music has a very special role. The power of music is highly appreciated in Kashmir Shaivism. It is included as an important aid to spiritual attainment and forms an important sadhana in the process of spiritual growth. In the process of universal manifestation explained earlier, ETHER (Akasa) is the finest of the categories of physical objects (Panch Mahabutas). Similarly, sound is the finest of the five specific sense perceptions (tanmatras). Thus sound or music is most effective in subduing body - consciousness and arousing the dormant blissfulness of pure consciousness.

As per Vijnanabhairava, the pleasure aroused by song and music is accepted as a means to enter into the state of pure and blissful consciousness.

"Yogins, experiencing their oneness with some incomparable pleasure aroused by the experience of objects like sweet songs etc. and fixing their mental attentiveness on it, find unity with the Absolute Lord through a practice of absorption in this kind of phenomenon (Vijnanabhairava, 73)"

The great scholar Abhinavgupta always used to keep a vina by his side and would occasionally play it. He

must have found vijnā as powerful aid in the practice of withdrawing his awareness from the world around him and focusing within on the purer consciousness of the Self.

THE CAUTION

Concluding, it would be pertinent to add a word of caution. A practitioner should not fall into a web of sensual enjoyments and thereby lose sight of the higher spiritual goals of life. In fact whenever there is something of real merit and truth available, there are usually false forms of it being offered by hypocrites who may try to deceive people by ostentatious displays of Tantrism and through misleading information about these practices. False gurus existed even in ancient times.

CONCLUSION

Finally all of the blissful and beautiful aspects of the God are present in each and every person and living thing, but they remain dormant because they are hidden behind the mask of māyā. In other words, we are all blinded to this inner bliss and beauty by our limited sense of who we are, and by the habit of directing so much of our attention out into the world. We pursue the outer object in an attempt to rediscover

the blissful state, not realizing that the source of bliss is within and need not be attached to an outer stimulus or some outer source at all. This inner beauty can be discovered and contacted at will

through simply turning our attention within and through the various practices of Trika yoga.