

assembles as the *maṇḍala* (*vāstupūjā*). The paradigm of the body of man also applies to the measurement of the main image in the central shrine of a temple. The height, width, and so on are measured by the forearm, hand, and digits of either patron (*yajamāna*) or main sculptor (*sthāpati*). *Puruṣa*, being measured and providing measure, is thus in many ways connected with the origin of form (Bäumer, 1982) and thus with the corporeal dimensions of existence, individual and cosmic.

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## Śakti

The term *śakti* stems from the Sanskrit root *śak-*, "to have power to effect," with a suffix *-ktin*, indicating the feminine gender. In general, the term refers to power, strength, or energy. In the religious context, Śakti stands for the Goddess (→ Mahādevī), or the powers of the deities. From Vedic Agni worship (→ Vedic gods) to later tantric emanations (→ Tantrism), the meaning of *śakti* is consistent as the divine power, inseparable from the power holder. In subsequent development, Śakti is presented as the consort of → Śiva, with her numerous manifestations. In puranic literature, *śakti* also appears as a specific weapon of the gods, of Subrahmaṇya in particular. Finally, the term *śakti* refers to the expressive power of language to describe reality through a direct signifier – signified relation, through indication, or through suggestion. Although at first glance these understandings do not appear interconnected, the concept of → *mantra* binds all these

meanings together. *Mantras* are a specific form of language: like language, they express reality, but unlike ordinary language, they possess magical power. Linguistic and cosmic powers are thus connected, as language is but an extension of the word principle (*śabdabrahman*; see → philosophy of language). Since *mantras* are also used as weapons, the relation of *śakti* with weaponry is explicit.

*Agni* or fire is the most common metaphor utilized to describe the ontological aspect of power. The Vedic deity Agni is invoked as having seven "tongues," such as → Kālī, Karālī, and so forth. Early Śāktism emerges from worshipping seven or eight "mothers" (*mātrkās*; see → Śiva). It is reasonable that early Śāktism, while keeping indigenous practices alive, borrowed from or evolved out of Vedic literature. The *Devīmāhātmya* describes the Vedic gods separating their powers from their body that in constellation manifests as a burning flame, from which emerges the mighty → Durgā.

The *Vijñānabhairava* describes the relation of Śiva and Śakti as inseparable, comparing it to fire and its burning power. → Tantras describe the rise of the serpentine power, *kuṇḍalini*, with metaphors of fire. Select terminology used in describing this power includes flame, heat, light, incineration, and the burning sensation that occurs in the practitioner's body. Shamans demonstrate their power by showing their control over fire in various ways.

In tantric cosmology, Śakti stands for both the inseparable power of the divine and a separate category, the manifestation of the power of autonomy inherent in Śiva. The Trika system (→ Kashmir Śaivism) identifies the three powers, Parā, Parāparā, and Aparā, resonating of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (6.7.61), where Parā is addressed as the power of → Viṣṇu and Aparā as the power in the form of individual selves (*kṣetrajñā*), and the power of action that is identified with ignorance (→ *avidyā*). With the blend of this concept of the divine triad and the → Sāṃkhya notion of three → *guṇas*, Tantras provide a vivid picture of the triadic form of Śakti. The triad of the Goddess described in *Devīmāhātmya* – Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī (→ Śrī Lakṣmī), and Mahāsarasvatī (→ Sarasvatī) – has received wide prominence.

The manifestation of Śakti is always found in pluralistic depiction (ŚvetU. 6.8; ViP. 1.3.2–3). *Mantras* construe the body of the deities, and each deity is invoked with various *mantras*. Consequently, each deity is endowed with multiple powers. This plurality of powers inherent in the deities is the fundamental reason behind depicting them with multiple arms adorned with various weapons and gestures. In order to indicate various powers intrinsic to the central deity, a deity in a → *maṇḍala* is always surrounded by various Śaktis.

Śaiva Tantras describe the fivefold powers of Śiva that carry out the acts of creation, sustenance, retrieval, concealment, and → grace. The concept of five Śaktis becomes prominent with the emergence of the “transmission” (*āmnāya*) system, where Śiva emanates in five different forms, each having its own counterpart Śakti. These powers, identified as awareness, bliss, will, knowledge, and action, are the first to emanate in the cosmic manifestation of tantric categories. Often depicted as the five faces of Śiva and sometimes found in → *liṅga* forms with five faces, the five Śaktis constitute the primary *maṇḍala*. This depiction of powers in a pentad is also common to Buddhist Tantras, with the *tathāgatamaṇḍala* consisting of

five Buddhas and their corresponding Śaktis (→ Buddhism and Hinduism).

The Goddess-worshipping tantric traditions culminate with the Krama and Mahārtha philosophical systems (see → Kashmir Śaivism), stemming from the worship of Kālī. Kashmiri philosophers such as Kallaṭa, → Abhinavagupta, Kṣemarāja, or Jayaratha, and the subsequent thinkers such as Amṛtānanda, Śivānanda, or Maheśvarānanda, write substantially on the philosophy and theology of Śakti, primarily in congruence with Trika Śaivism, pioneered by Vasugupta and Somānanda. Core texts in this tradition are *Parātrīṃśikā*, *Mālinīvijayottara*, *Vāmakeśvara*, *Yoginīhṛdaya*, *Tantrāloka*, *Spandakārikā*, *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, *Mahārthamañjarī*, and *Kāmakalāvīlāsa*. Philosophical hymns such as *Kramastava*, *Saundaryalaharī*, or *Cidgaganacandrikā* combine esoteric contemplations with devotional ardor. While early practices focused on the goddess Kālī, subsequent Śakta movements glorify the enchanting emanation of the Goddess, Tripurasundarī.

### Śakta Upāya and the Kuṇḍalini Śakti

Tantras describe three approaches to recognizing reality: the *sāmbhava*, *śakta*, and *āṇava* means (*upāya*). The sudden flash of the truth without any contemplation or by mere will is identified as *sāmbhava*; contemplation by mind without any utterance or physical effort, or realization by the mere effort of awareness is considered *śakta*; and external effort with the primacy of action is recognized as *āṇava*. The Trika understanding of Śakti is deeply rooted in this Śakta approach, as the philosophy of Krama that details the emergence of the Kālī *maṇḍala* relies on analyzing the sequential flow of consciousness from its pure and transcendent state to the state of mind formed as external entities. Abhinavagupta makes a direct link between Śakti and the Śakta approach by elaborating upon Krama while addressing the *śakta* means.

The inseparable link between Śakti and Śiva is quintessential to Tantras. As the text *Vijñānabhairava* suggests,

[The highest state of Bhairava is] transcendent to [the concepts of] space and the movement of time, and not particularized in terms of direction and designation. [This state] is impos-

sible to indicate. [This,] in reality, cannot be described. The saturated state of the self identical to Bhairava, [identified as] Bhairavī, is the self-experience of bliss in the heart that is experienced only when [one is] free from all the mental constructs... The state of Bhairava described as such is the transcendent state (*parā*), and also as the goddess Parā, due to it being the highest form. Just as the identity between power and power-holder is always established, due to the reason that one is the property belonging to the other [lit. property bearer], Parā is the power [inherent in] the supreme self. The power of fire to burn is not considered separate [from fire]. This [distinct identification] is merely the initial step towards the entry into the mere being of awareness. (*VijBhai*. 14–19)

The gnosis that arises through *śākta* means grants the experience of the oneness of the self and the totality, while retaining individuality. In this sense, the *śākta* approach is the recognition of duality as real, while confirming nonduality in the absolute sense. One returns to the self through *śākta* means, with the realization that all that appears is consciousness alone, and accepting consciousness as the essential nature of the Goddess. Thus the entire world, following the Śākta vision, is the very power that is inherent in Śiva. The Śākta approach, therefore, is a positive response in reaction to early renunciatory modes of Hinduism (see → *āśrama* and *saṃnyāsa*). Following this perspective, the world is the extension or the blissful play of Śiva, and the self is realized through purification of mental constructs by observing the rise and collapse of concepts, as all these concepts embody the very self-shining nature of Śakti. A widely distributed practice of embodied Śakti is that of *kuṇḍalinī*.

Tantras and the → Haṭha Yoga literature recognize that every individual is endowed with *kuṇḍalinī*, a serpentine power, sleeping coiled at the base of the spine. This energy awakens with the practice of *mantra*, various gestures and postures, and specific breathing exercises, and it eventually devours all the limiting factors. This process reflects the journey of the *kuṇḍalinī* through the central channel to the crown of the head, where she unites with Śiva. The meeting is described in plain terms such as *yoga* or “union” and is also depicted in the graphic imagery of sexual ecstasy. Although a single *kuṇḍalinī* abiding in the body is very common in later Tantras, a system of three

*kuṇḍalinīs* is also described, located in three different centers of the body. There is also a concept of cosmic *kuṇḍalinī*, the collective form of all the individual *kuṇḍalinīs*. Tantras identify the awakening of this serpentine energy and its union with Śiva as → liberation, describing this in terms of the surge of innate bliss.

Nātha *yogins* (→ Nāth Sampradāya) address this power as *kuṇḍalī*. Described in terms of *cidvilāsa* or “the play of → consciousness” and *piṇḍabrahmāṇḍa* or the doctrine that the → body is identical to the cosmos, these *yogins* follow the monistic worldview that all that exists is merely the manifold presentation of consciousness. The coiled form of the serpentine power in this depiction stands for the dormant consciousness that is intrinsic to all that exists. With its rise, a *yogin* is supposed to acquire the gnosis that his body and the cosmos that parallels the divine body are identical. It thus results in the *yogin* establishing identity between himself and Śiva.

Also related to the concept of *śakti* is the grace of this deified spontaneous pure awareness, addressed in terms of the “emission of energies” (*śaktipāta*). Essentially, this term refers to the will of Śiva to reveal himself to individuals, and his grace bestowed upon them. Depending upon the intensity of the emission of the powers of Śiva, individuals achieve their goal in a short or extended period of time. Even the rise of the desire for liberation or finding a mentor relies on this divine grace.

## Essential Śākta Philosophy

While the Śākta traditions unequivocally endorse a plurality of goddesses, they are philosophically monistic. The world in their depiction is the very emanation of the Goddess. She is often invoked as *saṃvid* or *citi*, meaning consciousness. Pure consciousness, in this depiction, is autonomous in manifesting the world, and it displays the world within itself by its own free will. Two terms, *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*, describe philosophical and theological aspects of this “consciousness” attaining manifoldness. *Prakāśa* means light, but here, it identifies the self-aware nature of consciousness. *Vimarśa* describes awareness of objects, or the judgmental aspect of consciousness. It also suggests the early epistemology where consciousness flows out and “touches” the objects so that

consciousness arises. These two aspects are inseparable, like fire and its burning power. Tantras use the union of Śiva and Śakti as a metaphor to describe this self-reflexive awareness that assumes manifoldness while retaining its true nature. *Prakāśa* is also described as the seminal drop (*bindu*), which simultaneously stands for individuality and the first phoneme in Sanskrit, *a*. The extension of this *bindu*, the self-aware cosmic drop, in the form of orgasmic bliss, expressed in terms of *ānanda*, gives rise to phonetic expression that culminates with the consonant “h” that stands for *vimarśa*. These two letters combined stand for subjective awareness, or *aham* (“I”), in the Trika system. In *maṇḍalas*, the central deity or the central drop refers to this very *prakāśa*, and the surrounding layers relate to the phenomenal aspects of the divine body. The deities in the outer circles of a *maṇḍala* are thus the limbs of the central divinity.

In addition to the philosophy of language promulgated by such prominent philosophers as → Bhartṛhari and Nāgeśa, the major Hindu philosophical systems of → Nyāya and → Mīmāṃsā address the concept of *śakti* while discussing the signifying power of language. Most commonly addressed are the three *śaktis* of language: literal significance (*abhidhā*), secondary indication (*lakṣaṇā*), and suggestion (*vyañjanā*). Although at first glance the theological and philosophical concepts of *śakti* appear distinct, they in fact have many resemblances. The early Naiyāyikas, followers of Nyāya, identify this linguistic power as “divine will.” Grammarians address the absolute in terms of the word principle (*śabdabrahman*) that assumes manifoldness due to the inherent powers of → *brahman*. The conceptual link between Bhartṛhari and the subsequent tantric philosopher Abhinavagupta allows us to further explore the common ground between the signifying power and the cosmic Śakti. The concept of *mantra* is the binding thread underlying both philosophical and theological concepts of *śakti*: *mantra*, the power inherent in the deities and expressed through their weapons, is a specific form of language.

In addition to the aforementioned reasons that relate cosmic and linguistic powers, the concept of *pratibhā*, the intuitive and spontaneous power of language, is at the core of both of these systems. Furthermore, both systems categorize speech as moving from its external and auditory form to the

inner cognitive modes. While the categories of *paśyantī* (seeing, the innermost verbalization that is identical to conceptualization), *madhyamā* (“the middle one,” the level of speech when the sound image is distinct from its reference, the concept), and *vaikhari* (articulated, the audible speech) are explicit in Bhartṛhari’s writings, Tantras add *parā* as the supreme speech and equate it with the goddess Parā. Beyond these similarities, the concept of the powers of time, central to linguistic philosophy, is parallel to the powers of Śiva. As Śiva is often addressed as Mahākāla and Kālī as the goddess who transcends time (*kāla*), this relation is not far-fetched. Ultimately, the elemental Krama philosophy is found in Bhartṛhari’s writings when addressing the manifold manifestation of the word principle. Besides these similarities, there are also some historical reasons to trace the early philosophy of Śakti in the linguistic philosophy of Bhartṛhari. Not only have Trika Śaivas closely read his philosophy, but Helārāja, the commentator upon Bhartṛhari’s works, is also the master of Abhinavagupta, the prominent Kashmiri philosopher.

A closer look at Bhartṛhari’s philosophy makes this connection more pronounced. For Bhartṛhari, *śaktis* in plurality give rise to duality (*VākPad.* 1.2). These *śaktis* are of a mutually exclusive character and are the very self of the word principle. As they are identical to *brahman*, they do not constitute duality (*VākPad.* 3.1.22). The two powers of the word principle, space and time, are parallel to the powers of consciousness (*VākPad.* 3.6.18). It is noteworthy that the Trika system divides its six categories into the “paths” of time and space. The *śaktis*, according to Bhartṛhari, allow the word principle to manifest successively by relying on the power of sequence (*VākPad.* 1.86). Entities, in this depiction, are a mere constellation of portions of *śakti* (*VākPad.* 3.7.2). These powers are innate to the word principle, revealed only at the moment of action (*VākPad.* 3.7.28). Bhartṛhari identifies direction or space (*dik*) as a separate *śakti* (*VākPad.* 3.6.3–27). This power of space in the philosophy of language parallels the energies of Śiva depicted in five-fold sequence. Following this Śakta depiction, Vāmeśvarī emits the world out of her own body while manifesting the sequence, Khecarīs operate in the sky of consciousness, Gocarīs operate on the planes characterized by speech, Dikcarīs operate in ten directions, and Bhūcarīs move on the earth. Along the same lines, Bhartṛhari’s pre-

sentation of *kriyāśakti*, the power of action that brings about transformation in form, is comparable to Śiva's power of action.

The criticism by Trika Śaivas of linguistic philosophy is that the grammarians place *paśyantī* as supreme, while they add another category, *parā*. This refers to awareness itself that is identified as speech due to its inner expressive nature and also identified as the Goddess. Explicitly, Trika Śaivas advanced and deified nuances of speech, while simply incorporating the early categories, the three tiers of speech, into their system. This relationship is vividly shown in Utpaladeva's identification of *paśyantī* speech with the goddess Parāparā (*ĪśPraKā*. 1.5.13–14). Further confirming this link, Abhinavagupta identifies Aparā as the *madhyamā* speech (*PaTrVi*. 17: 13–14).

Central to both Śākta philosophy and the philosophy of language is the concept of *pratibhā*. This term generates a wide range of applications, from the spontaneous power inherent in the word principle to the Śākta appropriation as the Goddess. Besides applying this term in a purely linguistic sense, Bhartṛhari also uses it to describe yogic intuition or poetic ability, and the spontaneous manifestation of particular qualities in a specific time. Creativity is at the core of all the applications of *pratibhā*. The most immediate mode of awareness, including the comprehension of sentence meaning, is nondual in this depiction, for awareness in this state is not separated into the form of subject and object. In the Śākta depiction, *pratibhā* stands for the autonomous power inherent in consciousness that gives rise to plurality, and this is identical to *Pratibhā*, the goddess.

Finally, time as the power of the word principle as depicted by Bhartṛhari parallels the concept of Kālī, the mighty goddess, the expression of the power of action and the embodiment of the sequence of both cognitive and cosmic manifestations. As the goddess devours time manifest in sequence and thus is transcendent, she is synonymous with *vimarśa*. The two powers of time

described by Bhartṛhari in terms of manifestation (*unmīlana*) and concealment (*nimīlana*; *VākPad*. 3.9.56) resonate of the entwined concepts of *unmeṣa* and *nimeṣa* (*SpKā*. 1.1) that stand for both the opening and closing of the eyes of Śiva and also for the manifestation and retrieval of the world.

Śākta rituals endeavor to vivify this philosophy through *maṇḍala* worship, visualizations, and *mantra* recitations, or through various yogic practices including the "piercing" (*vedha*) of the → *cakras* through the rise of *kuṇḍalinī*. Śākta rituals can include, although not exclusively, elements that are forbidden in → Smārta Hinduism, such as meat, liquor, dried grains, fish, and sexual union. Goddess worshippers, originally the Kaulas (→ Tantrism), are thus divided into two branches: the Pūrva (early) Kaula, whose practitioners are restrained in the symbolic application of forbidden elements, and the Uttara (later) Kaula, whose *yogins* seek union with the Goddess by finding identity of her manifestation in the feminine form.

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