

The Dialogical Manifestation of Reality in Āgamas¹

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Abstract: Tantric Āgamas, considered to be divine revelation, are in dialogical format. In their monistic philosophy, Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja exploit this unique aspect of Āgamas and apply it to address the nature of the self that is identical with consciousness as well as the supreme divinity, Śiva. This theological assumption derives from the linguistic philosophy where consciousness and speech are inseparable. When applied in the context of the mantra speech, this concept provides a theological foundation for explaining the eternal dialogue of Śiva and Śakti, where the truth is constantly expressing itself. This understanding contrasts not only with the idea that truth is revealed in a monologue by the transcendent entity, but it also makes the manifestation of the absolute an eternal process. In other words, truth is dynamic, is constantly being revealed, and is always manifest dialogically.

Preliminary remarks: Śrutis in the Āgama literature

Within the parameters of a broader discourse of what constitutes Hindu theology, this article addresses the way certain texts, *Śruti* or revelation in general, are considered authoritative. Even when we bracket the aspect of orthopraxy, Hindu traditions do not rely on a single text, and even when certain texts are considered authoritative, different theologians give different reasons for their validity. The issue here, therefore, is the way textual authority is framed within Hindu systems. A particular focus here is the authority of the Śaiva and Śākta Āgamas. Tantric theologians argue for the validity of the Āgamas based on the premise that these texts are a dialogical emanation of the absolute and therefore are the very absolute in a tangible form.

Tantras and Vedas broadly adopt the same cultural presuppositions with regard to the power and efficacy of *mantra* speech. This is not to argue that both are identical, as on many occasions, they also reflect a cultural shift.² It is thus not reasonable to address the concept of *Śruti* in the Tantras by isolating the broad parameters outlined in the Vedic tradition. This is just the beginning. Both Vedas

and Tantras do not give a single narrative regarding the origins of the revelations, or the manifestation of the *mantra* speech, otherwise addressed as Śruti. Without entering into technical detail, Hindu theological traditions in general consider Vedas as eternal, comparing them to the breaths of the creator God, or the expression of the absolute, the Brahman, in phonetic form. While Nyāya philosophers consider God as the author of the Vedas, the rest of the Hindu traditions that accept Vedic testimony consider it un-authored, as an expression of the truth on its own. The Vedas, following the Purāṇic understanding, are revealed to Brahmā, the creator god, who brings the world into reality by articulating the *mantras*. Brahmā shares this wisdom qua speech with ṛṣis, the ones who have recognised the reality. This Purāṇic depiction is itself a modification to the Vedic understanding, where, according to the *Puruṣasūkta*, the Vedas – Ṛg, Sāma, and Yajus, and also the Vedic meters – come into existence through the sacrifice of the cosmic being (*puruṣa*).³ In all accounts, there is no human endeavour in revealing the Vedas, as creation succeeds the Vedic manifestation. As Sāyaṇa states, Vedas are the breath of the supreme Lord and are the instruments in creating the entire world.⁴ Starting from Yāska's etymology of ṛṣis as the 'seers' [of the *mantras*],⁵ Sabara's standing that Vedas are not originated,⁶ or the Vedānta understanding of Śruti,⁷ the Vedic traditions in general maintain that the testimony of the Vedas comes from it being un-authored, that it is self-manifest in the beginning of creation, that words precede the world, and that there is no inter-subjectivity (not even subjectivity, except for the Naiyāyikas who consider the Vedas as authored by Īśvara) in the Vedic revelation.

The Āgamic depiction of Śruti also contains some of these nuances. The pre-eminence of *mantras*, where *mantras* are the expression of the very absolute, the transcendental reality, is common to both systems. *Mantras* or the manifest body of the transcendent reality, in both Vedic and Tantric Āgama (revelation) systems, are not categorically different from the supreme being, as they embody the absolute. Since creation follows the emanation of *mantras* and speakers succeed the formation of speech, there is no human agency in these paradigms. Where the Āgamic understanding varies is in the process: (i) the absolute assumes agency and in this sense becomes somewhat similar to Īśvara of the Naiyāyikas. However, this God (Śiva, Bhairava, etc.) is the very speech manifest, and so is not identical. (ii) The agency of Śiva or Bhairava in the Āgamic paradigm is inter-subjective and dialogical, and the collection of Āgamas (ten Śaiva + eighteen Raudra + sixty-four Bhairava = ninety-two) are revealed in dialogue with the supreme being, whether the subjects are 'seers', deities, or Śakti. Āgamas have an explicit teleology, whether it is for Śakti to recognise Śiva or for humans to realise the absolute reality. Following the Śaiva understanding, the body of Śiva is comprised of five seminal *mantras* (and of course all the *mantras* that emanate from these), and Śiva performs five acts of creation, sustenance, reabsorption, concealment, and grace, conceived of as the very expression of the *mantra* speech. Śruti, in this sense, is the self-reflexive nature of Śiva that manifests itself in its actualisation of being which

comes through a division, an interface between the manifesting aspect of Śiva matched by His own self-awareness, identified with Śakti. This understanding is non-dual, and so is the scope of this article. While I will trace the concept of Āgama as found in multiple Śaiva sources, the underlying philosophy in this discourse is non-dual, and in this sense Abhinavaguptian.

Śruti in Siddhānta literature

In order to limit the scope of this article, I will examine the way Āgamic revelation is outlined by Sadyojyoti (around eighth century) and address some key passages from other Siddhānta⁸ literature in this section, before initiating the discourse on Āgama in Trika literature. Although this examination is very brief, it provides a picture of the way the authority of the Āgamas is maintained in Śaiva traditions.

The most frequently cited passage from the *Svāyaṃbhuvāsūtrasaṅgraha* (SSS) regarding the revelation of the Āgamas follows:

*athātmamalamāyākhyakarmabandhavimuktaye |
vyaktaye ca śivatvasya śivāj jñānaṃ pravartate || SSS 1. 2.*

Now, in order to liberate the individual selves from the [threefold] bondage of *mala*, *māyā*, and *karma*, and to reveal the absolute (Śiva) nature, the wisdom is set in motion through Śiva.

Sadyojyoti's exposition of this passage is crucial to ground the status of Āgama. He maintains that the wisdom that liberates individuals suffering from bondage manifests through Pati, the Master, and since Śiva and the selves are of the same class (*samānājātīya*), the wisdom imparted by Śiva is capable of eradicating bondage (SṬ 1.2). This wisdom is revealing the self, and if the individual selves were not of the same class, Śiva's revelation of his essential nature would not assist the individual selves recognise their true identity. This wisdom, in Sadyojyoti's understanding, is twofold: of the character of speech (*śabda*) where *śabda* is referring to *mantra*, and of the character of realisation (*avabodha*). Superimposed upon the knowledge of the character of word, the wisdom of the character of realisation activates in the field of meaning.⁹ This hierarchy of wisdom outlined by Sadyojyoti in terms of word and meaning encompasses both ritual activities and contemplative practices. This twofold wisdom eliminates twofold ignorance (*avidyā*): the ignorance of the outside world, i.e. affecting intellect (*buddhi*) that provides false notions, and the ignorance of the self, i.e. the *avidyā* that is affecting the self (*pums*) and causing limitation to self-awareness.

After this brief exposition, Sadyojyoti introduces an alternative reading to the above passage with a new insight upon the concept of 'wisdom' (*jñāna*). This wisdom, according to Sadyojyoti, is the very Śakti of Śiva that manifests in twofold forms of realisation and ritual-initiation.¹⁰ Sadyojyoti compares this twofold

revelation of Śiva with the twofold energies of light and heat inherent to the sun that illuminates and burns objects. In this metaphor, ritual initiation is compared with the heat of the sun. Initiation, following the earlier comparison, is of *mantras*, and while these *mantras* are of the character of speech, they cut through the bondage and manifest Śiva nature, and are, in this sense, of the character of wisdom.¹¹

While commenting upon the above passage, Sadyojyoti raises the issue that if the grace of Śiva is possible only through twofold wisdom, the grace bestowed by Śiva by his mere will (*icchā*) will fall outside this scope. He responds to this objection by maintaining that even this will is the power of Śiva and thus falls under 'initiation', or *dīkṣā* that is etymologically analysed as bestowing knowledge and destroying bondage. Therefore even the will of Śiva, although a separate power, is still within a broader understanding of wisdom due to its self-revealing nature.¹²

Sadyojyoti adds: this wisdom is unitary, given the identity between Śiva and Śakti. It is singular, although this wisdom attains manifoldness due to its distinction in transcendent and immanent forms.¹³ What Śiva reveals, along these lines, is himself, and he carries this out by imparting his inherent power (*śakti*) to individual selves that are identified as belonging to the same class as Śiva (*śajātīya*). Āgama, along these lines, is the power of Śiva, where Śiva and his power are inherently linked and are not two distinct categories. And what this power in the form of wisdom contains is 'revelation' or manifestation of the self-nature of Śiva. In essence, Āgama is an extension of Śiva and thus can be considered the body of Śiva. Paving the path to the later development of the concept of *prakāśa* and *vimarśa* in Trika literature and the identity of consciousness with the self and Śiva, Sadyojyoti maintains that consciousness is the very act of knowing, a power of the self.¹⁴ This threefold relation of the self, consciousness, and the power in the form of action, provides the foundation that maintains that both the realisation and ritual acts that in consequence grant realisation are Śakti, the manifest body of Śiva.

Siddhānta literature categorises the power of Śiva identified as realisation (*ava-bodha*) into two: the power that is inherent to Śiva (*samavāyavartini*) and the power that surrounds Śiva or is in contact with the Lord (*parigrahavartini*). Between these two, even the first power inherent to Śiva is twofold: of the form of awareness (*bodha*) and action (*kriyā*). The first in them, the power of the character of awareness, circumscribes all objects, as all that exists has the potential to be cognised. The second in them, the power in the form of action, is twofold: of the form of grace (*anugraha*) and concealment (*tirodhāna*). Śiva, in the beginning of creation, manifests this wisdom of the character of realisation, assuming five forms. Since this wisdom of the nature of Śiva transmits or metaphorically 'flows' through five faces of Śiva, these are also called 'streams' (*srotas*). This wisdom in its original form is of the character of the cosmic sound (*nāda*) which is transformed by Sadāśiva in the form of Āgamas.¹⁵

In order to counter the argument that the wisdom imparted by Śiva is distinct from the means, speech, distilled in the form of Āgamas, Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha (1090 CE) identifies this wisdom with the Śāstras, or the revelatory texts.¹⁶ This interpretation adds yet another aspect to this discussion, that the Āgamic texts are the very Śakti of Śiva that he has revealed, or imparted to the subjects of his class so that they can actualise their true nature or realise that they belong to the same class as Śiva, and in so doing, embody the divine Śakti.

This Siddhānta position on Āgamas brings multiple factors into discourse. Following this understanding, when creation begins, or when Śiva emanates himself in the form of the world, the power of grace (*anugraha*) is embedded in the very act of creation, and this power causes Śiva to impart his liberating wisdom, which, in turn, is the very Śakti that is identical to Śiva. *Guru* and *śiṣya*, or the preceptor and the learner, are thus the one body of transcendent awareness that separates in the process of knowing, with one revealing the truth and the other, receiving this wisdom. This process begins with the separation of the transcendent being and culminates with an actualisation of the oneness of Śiva and Śakti. What has been cognised in this process of revelation and the very act of cognising, are both considered to be Śakti, an extension or aspect of Śiva. This identity of Śiva with *kriyāśakti*, the power of action or the power found in the form of dynamism, implies that both what is being revealed and the act of revelation are of Śiva nature.

It has been mentioned above that Śiva assumes fivefold forms to transmit the wisdom that manifests his essential nature. This numeric link has a maṇḍalic correlation in subsequent Tantric development. This also has a philosophical foundation: Śiva assumes the fivefold actions, from creation to grace, through these emanations; grace (*anugraha*) is embedded in each of these actions, as each of these faces reveal their own Āgamas. Each of these faces mirror the complete form of Śiva in that they all carry out the fivefold actions of Śiva. That each of the faces embodies the rest of the actions, and in essence, also the teachings of the other faces, is affirmed with twenty-five Śiva emanations, with five manifestations from each of Sadāśiva's faces.¹⁷ The wisdom transmitted through these faces involves the instructions identified as 'worldly' (*laukika*), Vedic, subjected to the self (*ādhyātmika*), trans-path (*atimārgika*), and *mantra* orders.¹⁸

In contrast to this horizontally spatialised transmission of the authoritative texts, there also is a vertical, fivefold order of transmission. This structure gives a hierarchy of teachings, where the wisdom flows from Śiva to Sadāśiva, and from him to Nidhaneśa, and successively from Nidhaneśa to Svayambhu, to Bālakhilyas (the seers), and through them to the humans. The twofold wisdom of *mantra* and realisation, along these lines, circulates from top to bottom in a dialogical order.¹⁹ As Dviveda (1983, p.120) points out, this sequence of revelation is rejected in the Trika/Anuttara system, which has a single 'transcendent' order of revelation reaching to all subjects, and Śiva is thus in dialogue with all

subjects simultaneously.²⁰ In both these sequences, the revelation of Āgamas, with Śiva assuming fivefold forms, does not rely on temporality.

The question is, can the pure wisdom manifest to the bottom of the strata, the humans, directly from the transcendent Śiva nature? As has been observed, there are two different positions regarding this issue. If we analyse further, the Śaiva texts overwhelmingly support a fivefold strata (Dviveda 1983, pp.120–21), with the single flash of awareness spreading to all subjects simultaneously is the concept predominant to the Trika system.

A further question arises: is this wisdom of Śiva that manifests in the form of the self-revealing awareness and the power of action (*kriyā-śakti*) expressed in the form of ritual-initiation (including the will of Śiva that directly reveals Śiva nature by His grace without going through a chain of initiation), somewhat different from the Śakti that gives rise to the material world? This question is due to not realising that Śiva and his fivefold actions are not two separate entities, as Śiva and Śakti are not two distinct categories. The fivefold energies inherent to Śiva – powers of awareness, bliss, will, cognition, and action – are expressed in each of the fivefold actions of creation, sustenance, reabsorption, concealment, and grace. Divine grace is embedded in this revelation, as both the receiving subject (i.e. the supreme Śakti) and what is being revealed (i.e. the *mantras* and the wisdom of the self) are in essence the ‘acts’ of Śiva’s grace. In conclusion, the power that gives rise to the world and the awareness of the self are two aspects of the grace of Śiva and therefore identical. Teleology thus becomes a meta-issue that weaves ontological and epistemological questions. Śiva’s grace, in this paradigm, is both the foundation and the act of dialogue, where the dialogue stands for the self-revelation of Śiva. Creation is no longer understood as a platform for grace, but as an act of grace itself. Accordingly, Śiva’s fivefold emanations and His acts are the expressed forms of His power of grace, *anugraha śakti*.

Another question emerges: if Śiva’s nature is purely gracious, why are individual souls bound in the world, transmigrating from one to another body and eternally suffering? Siddhānta and Trika texts have the same answer to this question and so do many other Dharma traditions, that this bondage is not given by the Lord, or that he did not create individual selves. Just like Śiva, individual selves are eternal, and applying Siddhānta terminology, they belong to the same class as Śiva. Following the Siddhānta pantheon, the difference lies in the individual selves being bound, with limited experience of powers that are found limitless in Śiva. Being in the world is the beginning of contemplation and the grace of Śiva is the path. For the infinite number of selves, Śiva thus provides a platform upon which they manifest their desires, actualise them, and eventually liberate from their attachments and desires. This schema of revelation also affirms a teleology of creation: not just that creation has a purpose but that the act of creation is itself a grace. It is in creation that Śiva manifests his powers and when these energies enter the heart, individual selves experience the gracious nature of Śiva. This is explained in varied terms: the emission of powers (*śakti-pāta*) or the

gaze of Śiva (*Śivadṛṣṭi*). This grace is at the foundation of individuals seeking liberation and seeking a master, receiving initiation and so on.

Śruti in Trika Śaiva literature²¹

Abhinava on Āgamic revelation

The status of Āgamic revelation in the Trika system is summed up in a single verse:

*guruśiṣyapade sthītvā svayaṃ devaḥ sadāśivaḥ ||
pūrvottaraṇadair vākyais tantram ādhārabhedataḥ | ST 8.31cd–32ab.*

By assuming the states of preceptor and disciple, the Lord Sadāśiva himself [revealed] Tantras according to different strata [of receivers] in sentences of question and answer.

The writings of Abhinava and Kṣemarāja upon the revelation of Āgamas can be considered a commentary upon the above passage. Explicit in this passage is the fact that the supreme being Himself assumes the roles of teacher and disciple and manifests Tantras according to the interests of different subjects. What is presumed here is, the first discourse, in which Śiva himself plays both roles, is not teleologically complete in itself, as it is ‘for’ the sentient beings. The sentient beings, though, are not intrinsically different from Śiva in this non-dual paradigm. What is the directionality of Śiva’s grace then? The answer is, from the enlightened perspective, or through the gaze of Śiva, it is just self-revelation, and the teleology is complete within itself. From the perspective of the non-realised subjects, there is externality in this teleology of revelation. Following the Trika paradigm, the Āgamic discourse is essentially the self-revealing act of Śiva where he is in dialogue with his own externalised form, the powers collectively called as Śakti, materialised in the form of His consort. The central metaphor to describe this primordial relation is that of *prakāśa* or consciousness/illumination and *vimarśa* or reflective awareness/touch.²² Even when the absolute is described in this dyadic form, the relation of these two is complementary and not that of binary opposites. Śiva and Śakti, or in this newly found terminology of *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*, are essentially identical, and their relationship describes the initial discourse. Along these lines, Śiva externalises his powers that are intrinsic to him and engages in dialogue, which simultaneously materialises the world and reveals the Āgamas.

This dialogue of self-manifestation, along these lines, is the most intimate state of awareness, and in this state, consciousness does not grasp entities as external. Āgamas are revealed in this state of consciousness externalising itself, where the externalised consciousness is inversely reflecting its own pure being. Since this state is not temporally bound, Āgamic revelation cannot be located in time.

Āgama, in this sense, is an eternally being-expressed divine language of grace that the subjects can grasp as they move to their inner core of being. This understanding is congruent with what Abhinavagupta has maintained:

The self is of the character of consciousness/light... this very [self] is the reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) which in essence is of the character of *aham* or I-ness... Awareness (*jñāna*) is of the character of illumination. In this very instance of awareness {*tatra*}, there lies the reflective awareness of the essential nature of autonomy, [and this is] the act [of knowing]. This reflective awareness is where the illuminating aspect of consciousness has been internalized, and therefore {*iti*} the very reflective mode of awareness is cognition and action in its transcendental state... In all contexts, the very *vimarśa* or reflective awareness is cognition [in various modes].²³

Following this understanding, the self and the illuminating aspect of consciousness are identical, and so there is no instance where the self can be isolated from this awareness.²⁴ Various modes of consciousness, in terms of cognition, experience, and sensation, are all identified with this autonomy of consciousness or its self-validating nature.²⁵ The argument of the eternal dialogue of Śiva and Śakti rests on the position that there is no illuminating mode of consciousness that is devoid of its reflexive mode that gives consciousness awareness of itself.²⁶

Abhinava's understanding of Āgama relies on this assumption of consciousness as *prakāśa-vimarśa*, following which there is no instance where the self is not revealing and not aware of itself. Due to this reflective inverse mode of consciousness, the I-sense of Śiva circumscribes all that exists in its self-awareness. This act of recognising *vimarśa* as the very expression of *prakāśa* is the twofold manifestation of grace, where the illuminating aspect of consciousness is in dialogue with its reflexive mode and this dialogue is captured in the form of Āgamas. There is no issue regarding the authority of the Āgamas either, as it is due to the authority of Āgamas, or the self-actualising mode of awareness, that all other instances of cognition are verified. In other words, every act of consciousness self-validates the Āgama, as this stands for the first flash of consciousness being reflexive and is presumed in all modes of consciousness. This intrinsic dialogue is therefore a precondition for the rise of the *prāmāṇa* activities such as perception and inference. This dialogue is thus both (i) a fundamental cosmic event, the primordial act that also is the blueprint of the cosmos, and (ii) is the backdrop of all conscious modes or epistemic activities. Since temporality has not arisen at this stage of consciousness, this dialogue is not temporal either. In the absence of localising this discourse in time, Śiva's self-intimation is eternal, and is embedded in both what has been manifest in the world, and the act of manifestation.

As grace (*anugraha*) is intrinsic to Śiva, creation or externalisation of self-awareness is inherently teleological and the primordial dialogue is an expression of this very power.²⁷ Furthermore, this power in the form of grace and Śiva are not

two distinct entities, and this is the supreme power (*parā śakti*) of Śiva prior to creation coming into being. This transcendental power of self-reflexive awareness is deified as Parā in Trika, and is also identified as the transcendental speech (*parā vāc*) which describes the potency of speech that has yet to be verbalised. Abhinava explains the manifestation of this power in the form of instructions in the following terms:

This [transcendental] power [of Śiva], which in essence is the reflective awareness of the grace of the world, is first resting in pure consciousness that has not been conditioned by space and time, and is of the character of the supreme *mantra* [of *aham*], [which] is ready {-*sānac*} to expand as [the speech of] seeing that is of the character of inward reflection [manifesting the self-nature], and is identical to hundreds of endless powers. At this stage, [this speech qua supreme Śakti] exists not being distinct in the form of question and answer that is yet to manifest as [the speech identical to] seeing.²⁸

The first expression of the transcendent speech qua consciousness-in-itself, the self-seeing or self-reflexive mode of speech called *paśyanti*, has the character of inverse-awareness or the awareness that is facing inward and not externalised in terms of grasping objects. This self-intimation of consciousness is what constitutes the dialogue, or, being in this state underlies the dialogical nature of the self. Speech, in this paradigm, is given to being, as there is no awareness that is exempt from speech. Reality bursts open through this, as if the petals of a lotus, existing within this speech even when not expressed in distinct forms. Bhartṛhari uses a metaphor of peacock egg to describe this latency, as all the colours of a peacock are latent in the yolk, although indistinguishable. In our context, this self-revelation of Śiva or reflexivity of consciousness or the inward-seeing of speech explains both the ontological process where consciousness materialises itself or finds its externality, and the epistemic process of the very self-awareness dividing itself as the transcendent self-awareness and the externalised modes of consciousness. Āgamic discourse needs to be understood in this light or we will fail to see the philosophical underpinning of *mantric* evolution. Abhinava reiterates that this speech or awareness manifesting itself is a-temporal: ‘this [speech] is devoid of distinction among all the cognising subjects and is eternally present.’²⁹ It is not just the expression of speech, Abhinava declares, all activities presume this very foundational consciousness and in so doing, the subjects in reality experience this very transcendental consciousness in all their cognitive modes.³⁰

The Āgamic revelation, along these lines, is at first the absolute experiencing itself, its own glory, or pure consciousness being reflexively aware of itself. This self-expression is described in terms of the Lord revealing His essential nature to the goddess and the goddess receiving that revelation from Śiva.³¹ This is what constitutes the primordial dialogue, the first expression of the truth revealing to itself, assuming both the form of speech and expressing itself as the speaker and

hearer of the truth. Since the power of grace is thus the foundation of being and permeates both speech and consciousness found as self-reflexive, it is permeating all beings, or in other words, the power of Śiva in the form of *anugraha* is dormant at the heart of all sentient beings. Or, it is what constitutes the foundational speech, the self-reflexive awareness that manifests in the form of expressed speech.³²

A question arises: can this be considered *śruti*? as the concept of *śruti* underlies the act of hearing. Like touching or tasting, hearing is a sensory mode and in the absence of conceptualisation, there is no hearing. This is because ‘hearing’ here means comprehending something expressed in terms of speech. All that speech expresses are concepts. If the essential revelation itself is ‘heard’, how can Āgamas reveal the non-conceptual, the truth that cannot be conditioned in language and concepts, and is above the mind? Abhinava states:

When manifested herself in the mode of hearing, the goddess [or the reflective mode of awareness {*tasyā*}] has the autonomy which can be explained as [establishing] connection (*anusandhāna*) by organizing [sounds] that gives unity to the mass of phonemes that are sequentially manifest in the form of pulsating entities (*sva*) [heard] in the eardrum. Without this [power to unite discrete phonemes and give coherent meaning], the cognizing subject reacts (*vyavaharati*) that ‘I do not hear’, even when hearing particular words that have been lost in the buzzing sound.³³

Following Abhinava, the transcendent consciousness that is also speech, due to it having all the potential of speech that is yet to be expressed, deified in the form of *Parā*, is what gives coherence to discrete sounds and constitutes meaning.³⁴ Meaning, accordingly, is the pure consciousness manifest, as it is consciousness that gives rise to sequentiality and meaning to discrete sounds. In essence, there is no dichotomy between the transcendental consciousness and its dyadic manifestation [1] in discrete forms of seeing, tasting, or touching, and also [2] as the phenomenal subject that navigates all these streams of consciousness and gives coherence. Manifestation in manifold forms is thus intrinsic to consciousness.³⁵ This process is also essentially meaning-making.

Hearing, as evident in the above discussion, is not just a mere coming-to-contact with discrete sound but the act of experiencing coherence and understanding meaning. Rather than recognising hearing as being aware of sounds, it needs to be understood as an act of or modification of consciousness that is thus not distinct from it. A passive hearing of sounds is not therefore what constitutes ‘hearing’ in a true sense. Abhinava elaborates upon this concept of hearing by saying that in the *madhyamā* state of speech, the very self hears and not the ears or other instruments of cognition.³⁶ *Śruti*, along these lines, is similar to self-witnessing awareness. As the common use of ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ does not apply at this stage of being self-aware, this needs to be understood as metaphoric.

Kṣemarāja on the revelation of Āgamas

Kṣemarāja's *Uddyota* commentary on ST gives valuable insights on Āgamic revelation. While his presentation is essentially an exposition of Abhinava's philosophy, the commentary is helpful to ground the monistic presentation of Āgamic revelation where the texts are rooted in self-expression, giving the teleology in Āgamic revelation. In this paradigm, speech is given primacy over human agency. According to Kṣemarāja, the dialogue between Śiva and Śakti is the 'reflection of complete I-awareness'.³⁷ Evident in this description is the sense of completeness in consciousness experiencing itself. He further explains, 'the auspicious collection of words is of the character of having awareness (*parāmarśa*) of this transcendental reality {*tat*} that is an acronym in the form of *a-h*, [which captures all the Sanskrit phonemes], that has circumscribed [*garbhīkr̥ta* = lit. been pregnant with] the entire world, and is the first sprout of the flow of all the instructions (*śāstra*)'.³⁸

Kṣemarāja reaffirms that this is the singular self expressed in dialogue, where the self turns itself into two agents to express and listen to the nature of reality. In this sense, the absolute expresses itself in two distinct forms, one as speech, and the other as hearing that involves two subjects, the narrator and listener. According to Kṣemarāja:

The Lord Bhairava, of the character of pure consciousness, reveals the teachings comprised of question and answer for the grace of the world prior to materializing in the forms of Sadāśiva etc. by assuming the roles of preceptor and disciple. [In this, He] assumes the blissful form of the Lord of Umā who is primary in permeating all the manifestations that rest on Him, and is of the character of Bhairava since He has reentered His [all-encompassing] existence, and [reveals the Āgamas to] the materialized form of the auspicious Umā who has assumed identical characters (*tathābhūtā*).³⁹

Kṣemarāja reaffirms this Āgamic revelation elsewhere (ST 8.27–32), highlighting its dialogical nature where he makes it explicit that Śiva as a category stands for transcendental consciousness.⁴⁰ The authoritative texts, along these lines, originate from the transcendental self, and like a stream, they flow through different channels and eventually reach to human subjects. This identifies the source of Āgamas as the transcendent self, since the passage here makes it explicit that the one who reveals the texts cannot be objectified but is of the character of the transcendent perceiver.⁴¹ Āgamic texts appear to have a dual purpose: while fulfilling various desires, they all collectively constitute a single meaning, revealing the self-nature and thus liberating the individuals.⁴² This citation is crucial to understanding opaque passages that are often times cited for their hedonism. First, texts are not supposed to be deciphered in isolation from other relevant texts and collectively, from the rubrics of Āgamas, and next, while assisting in

materialising desires, these passages are simultaneously effective in liberating the self.

This discourse on the revelation of Āgamas rests on multiple connections, where, besides the identity of Śiva and Śakti, the self is identified with Śiva, with consciousness, and eventually with transcendent speech. When manifested, it is Śiva's power of grace (*anugraha śakti*) that assumes the form of Āgamas. This can be traced in Kṣemarāja's writings, as he explains that this is speech itself, in its transcendent form, manifest in the form of 'seeing' (*paśyantī*) by splitting itself into two as the preceptor and disciple, or the speaker and hearer. *Pāśyantī*, along these lines, is the state where the Āgamas are revealed. This is also the state of the manifestation of speech, and in order to distinguish the flow of pure wisdom at this state, Kṣemarāja identifies this state as 'the power of speech in the form of the transcendent and supreme seeing'.⁴³ In his non-dual semiotics, there is no distinction between the expressive words and what has been expressed by these words.⁴⁴ Along these lines, what the texts reveal through words is Śiva, and while revealing the Śiva nature, these very words are also of the Śiva nature and thus are potent in the form of *mantras*. This parallels the understanding that the Āgamas reveal the transcendent nature of the Lord as identical to the self.⁴⁵

One issue needs clarification. While the first expression of speech in the form of Āgama is described as *paśyantī*, or the state of speech that assumes twofold forms of expression and what has been expressed, the texts also assign this in the form of *nāda*, and the state of sound or *nāda* is possible only in the external form of *madhyamā* speech. It needs to be understood, however, that the inner form of *nāda* is not an actual sound, it is just the cause of sound and has the intrinsic potency to manifest as sound and so is called *nāda*. Āgamas, accordingly, are the expression of *paśyantī*, the very self-seeing speech manifest in its pristine form revealing itself. The transcendent Śiva and the supreme speech (*parā vāc*) are identical. It is due to this intricate relation of the self, the absolute, and speech that Āgamas are considered to be revealing the truth in dialogue.

There is another challenge to this non-dual soteriology. It is common knowledge that cognition objectifies entities and entities thus become cognised. Here, cognition plays a role like that of a lamp in manifesting objects. If what has been revealed is the self or Śiva nature, and what is revealing is the awareness found in the modes of direct apprehension or revelation identified as Āgamas, then what is being revealed and what is revealing will be as distinct as the lamp and the objects illuminated by it.⁴⁶ Relying on Kṣemarāja's interpretation of ST 4.337–70, this relationship is non-dual and the metaphor of the lamp and the object does not fit. Kṣemarāja cites *Vijñānabhairava* (21) in this context, the verse that explains that through the glow of a lamp or through the rays of the sun, the location of the lamp or the sun is cognised. Rather than revealing external objects, the example given here is that of manifesting the source. And, what we call the lamp is but the light and the rays are the very sun itself, emanating as particles. As the text maintains, 'there is no entity without qualities and no quality without an entity'.⁴⁷ It is

through aspects that an entity is known, whether it is in direct apprehension or by inferential knowledge. When Śiva is recognised through Āgamas, he is in fact exposed through his own aspects. This epistemology rests on the assumption that consciousness found in the form of concepts, and flowing through various modes of *pramāṇa*, or the means through which entities are cognised, are but the aspects of the very self or consciousness-in-itself. While in other modes of *pramāṇa* consciousness, the transcendental non-objectified consciousness is found divided as cognising and cognised, with externality being superimposed upon what is cognised, but in the case of Āgamas, the object of cognition is the very self. Nonetheless, the dyadic relation is intact, with two subjects asking and responding to questions when in Āgamic revelation. This establishes also the relationship between the bestower and receiver of grace.⁴⁸

A passage from *Svacchanda* is relevant in this context: ‘Āgama is the very wisdom [found in] infinite categories of instructions’ (ST 4.340cd). What is intriguing, however, is the term *jñāna*, translated here as ‘wisdom’ or ‘realization’: it is used as synonymous to the cognitive modes as well as transcendental consciousness. Upon the question, what is Āgama? Kṣemarāja explains that it is the ‘realization’ (*jñāna*) of the absolute reality {*tat*} or the expression of the powers of the transcendent [reality, Śiva].⁴⁹ An often-cited passage that defines Āgama comes in this sequence:

ā samantād gamayaty abhedena vimṛśati pārameśaṃ svarūpam iti kṛtvā paraśaktir evāgamas tatpratipādakas tu śabdasaṅdarbhas tadupāyatvāt śāstrasya |

Uddyota in ST 4.340.

Āgama is identical to (*eva*), the supreme power that leads [the subject to], or reflexively cognizes the transcendental consciousness (Īśvara) as the very form of the self, [following the etymology] that it leads [subjects] from all directions [to the supreme Śiva]. The assembly of words or the Śāstra establishes this [reality] because it is the means to [reveal] it.

Āgamic revelation, along these lines, is the *śāktopāya* or the means to reveal the supreme reality identical to the very self by means of contemplation, or the process by which the reality is manifest in sequence.⁵⁰ Since Āgamas are considered not just the means but the very body of Śakti, the dialogical nature in Āgamas is intact and the recognition by means of these texts is also thus dialogical. The realisation of the self as a unitary experience comprised of illuminating *prakāśa* and reflexive *vimarśa* aspects is thus embedded to the very notion of Āgama. Therefore to say that Āgamas are dialogical is not just to maintain that the texts are in the form of question and answer but also to say that the intrinsic mode of consciousness that provides a platform for other cognitive modes is intrinsically dialogical. This is the self expressing itself, the self-intimating act of consciousness.

What about extrinsic validation? Can this self-enfolding/unfolding reflexive consciousness qua Śiva be questioned, or be established or even rejected, by the

cognitive modes that rest on externality, are subject to physicality, and are manifest in the form of perception or inference? One line from Abhinavagupta responds to this question directly:

The manifold [lit. web of] means do not reveal Śiva [or the absolute]. Can a jar reveal [the sun] with thousands of rays?⁵¹

The Āgamas, in this light, are a sequential and dialogical manifestation of the absolute that is self-revealing and dialogical in nature. All modes of cognition presuppose this self-awareness, and therefore, they cannot confirm or reject this foundational being, the essential self, consciousness-in-itself.

Jayaratha on Āgamic revelation

Jayaratha's *Viveka* commentary upon *Tantrāloka* (TĀ) reiterates the seminal concept of Abhinava that has been elaborated upon by Kṣemarāja. In his terms, the revelation of the instructional texts assumes the following sequence:

In this transcendental speech of the character of awareness which is essentially reflexive (*parāmarśa*), all the instructional texts (*sāstras*) manifest in the form of transcendental awareness because it is saturated with all the entities that exist. While this is the case {*sat*}, [the Āgamas] manifest inside [the heart] in the form of introverted reflexive awareness (*pratyavamarśa*) of the character of *aham* (I-am), because in this *paśyantī* [or the speech of the state of self-seeing, the speech has] the character of having no distinction in the form of signified and signifier. Due to this reason, the objects that are signified and are being cognized by the subject of the character of reflexive awareness manifest being circumscribed by *aham* (I-ness). After that, this very [speech] manifests at the level of *madhyamā* inside [the heart] in the form of signifier and signified that is distinct from the emergence of the cognizing subject and [the objects that are being] cognized. In this [very speech of the level of *madhyamā*], the supreme Lord, by assuming the status of the Lord Sadāśiva by adopting the sequence (*sūtra*) of the five faces comprised of pure consciousness, bliss, desire, cognition, and action, manifests the entire instructions comprised of five transmissions corresponding to the five faces which are filled with manifoldness in such and so distinctive forms characterized by the states of identity, identity in distinction, and distinction.⁵²

Following this understanding, the Āgamas that are revealed in the form of expressed speech (*vaikhari*) are the transcribed texts recording this primordial dialogue. All the Trika philosophers have consistently maintained that Āgamic revelation is at the foundation of speech and is dormant in the transcendent speech that is identical to consciousness. The first expression of this self or consciousness or Śiva is an extension of its inherent power of grace that gives rise to

paśyantī or self-seeing speech. This very speech transforms into words as the state evolves into *madhyamā*. In other words, the first dialogue is not in the manifest words but in a mutual experience of the inter-penetration of *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*. What is lost in translation, as the speech evolves from this inner dialogue to external expression, is the oneness of illumination and reflexivity as two modes of consciousness. When grasped in *madhyamā* or *vaikhari* levels, the words that signify and the entities that are signified are very distinct. A single Āgama of *aham* or the first expression of complete I-awareness that encompasses all that exists thus manifests in the form of multiple Āgamas through the distinctive faces of Śiva. The essence of the texts is experience and its essence is the self. In the absence of this awareness, Āgamas remain unknown. Distinctions in teachings found in Āgamas only reflect distinction in the subjects receiving instructions, as this is after all a single truth revealed in different ways.⁵³ Texts are thus the means to rediscover the self and not to find it, as what has been encoded in texts is the primordial dialogue of the self with itself. Although there lies no distinction between the revelation of the truth found in the Vedas and the Āgamas, the stress given in Āgamic literature on the dialogical nature of revelation remains unique, and this dialogical nature is not just a textual structure, but, as has been outlined, reveals the structures of consciousness, or the self at its most intrinsic level.⁵⁴

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Notes

- 1 *vande śaṅkaracaitanyaṃ prakāṣaṃ parabhairavam |
rāmānandātapam moharajanīdalanaprabhum || 1 ||
haṭhāt sarvārthanirdeśasamarthaṃ vrajavallabham |
vande bodhāmytodrekapūrṇenduṃ mantravigramam || 2 ||*
[I bow to Śaṅkara Caitanya, the supreme Bhairava in manifest form; to the brilliant sun Rāmānanda who is capable of smashing the darkness of delusion; and to Vraja Vallabha whose body is comprised of *mantras*, who is like the full moon saturated with the nectar of wisdom, and who is capable of instructing all there is to know in a single moment].
- 2 The term Āgama in this article refers to three sets of texts: *Śaivāgamas* (ten texts), *Raudrāgamas* (eighteen texts), and *Bhairavāgamas* (sixty-four texts). Although not a subject of discussion in this article, Vaiṣṇava Āgamas primarily follow the same assumptions that have been outlined here. The authoritative texts are addressed in the Āgamic tradition by terms such as Tantra, Śāstra, or Śruti, depending upon the context.
- 3 This often-cited passage from the Vedic literature comes in *Rgveda* (10.7.90.1–16); *Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā* (31.1–6), *Sāmaveda Saṃhitā* (6.4); *Atharvaveda Saṃhitā* (19.6); and the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* (3.12,13).
- 4 *yasya niḥśvasitaṃ vedā yo vedebhyo 'khilaṃ jagat | nirmame tam ahaṃ vande vidyātīrthamaheśvaram ||* Sāyaṇa in the *Upodghāta* of *Rgvedabhāṣya*, benedictory verse 2.
- 5 For discussion, see Holdrege 1996, p.228.
- 6 For discussion, see Clooney 1987; Myers 2001, pp.91–123.
- 7 For discussion, see Rambachan 1991; Murti 1959.
- 8 Ten Śaiva and eighteen Raudra Āgamas are collectively identified as Siddhānta Āgamas.
- 9 *tajjñānaṃ dvirūpaṃ śabdarūpaṃ avabodharūpaṃ ca | tad avabodharūpaṃ śabdarūpārūḍham artheṣu pravartate |* SṬ 1.2.
- 10 *yad vā śivāj jñānaṃ pravartata iti jñānaṃ śaktiḥ | sā ca dvirūpā avabodharūpā dikṣārūpā ca |* SṬ 1.2.
- 11 *yadā pāśānāṃ vinivṛttim ātmanaś ca śivatvavyaktiṃ ca karoti tadā dikṣyety ucyate, tatrāpi jñānarūpatāṃ na jahātīti tenobhayarūpāpi jñānam ity uktā |* SṬ 1.2.

- 12 *sā cecchā jñānenāvyaṃteti | icchāpi śivaśaktir eva | sā ca dānakṣaṇalakṣaṇatvād
dīkṣāntaḥpātīnīti bodharūpātvaṃparityāgāc ca jñānam ity anena vyāpata eveti | SṬ 1.2.*
- 13 *tat tu jñānam ekaṃ śivaśakter ekatvaśruteḥ | . . . tasmāi jñānasya kena bhedenānekatvaṃ
gacchati | parāpareṇa bhedena | SṬ 1.3.*
- 14 *caitanyaṃ jñānakartṛtvarūpaṃ balam ātmanaḥ | SṬ 1.6.*
- 15 For discussion, see Dviveda 1983, pp.112–13.
- 16 *jñāyanta anena vidyācaryākriyāyogā iti jñānaṃ śāstram | Mṛgendrantra (1.1), Vṛtti
thereon (p. 5, lines 11–12).*
- 17 See *Sūkṣmāgama*, Chapters 1–2.
- 18 This list rests on *Kāmikāgama*. Cited in Dviveda 1983, p.113.
- 19 See Dviveda 1983, pp.120–21 for discussion.
- 20 *evaṃ cānugrahaśaktiḥ satataṃ sarvapramātrṣu anastamitaiveti saṣa ṣaḍardhaśāstraik-
aprāṇaḥ para eva sambandhaḥ | atrānuttare saṃbandhāntarāṇaṃ mahadantarāladivy-
divyādīnāṃ uktopadeśena paraikamayavāt | Parātrīśikāvivaraṇa, p. 4, lines 23–25.*
- 21 I am using the term Trika to refer to the philosophical system that relies on sixty-four Bhairava Āgamas and was a development of Kashmiri thinking pioneered by Somānanda and Vasugupta and carried on by Abhinava, Kṣemarāja, Jayaratha, etc.
- 22 For an analysis of *vimarśa*, see Skora 2007.
- 23 *. . . prakāśalakṣaṇaḥ svāmā . . . saiva hy ahaṃbhāvātmā vimarśo . . . prakāśarūpātā jñānaṃ
tatraiva svātantryātā vimarśaḥ kriyā vimarśaś cāntaḥkṛtaprakāśa iti vimarśa
eva parāvasthāyāṃ jñānakriye . . . sarvathā tu vimarśa eva jñānam . . . | Īśvarapratyabhi-
jñāvimarśinī (ĪP 1.8.11, p. 423).*
- 24 *. . . prakāśasyānapahnavanīyatvāt | Īśvarapratyabhiñāvimarśinī I.1.1 (p. 24). prakāśa eva
hi saṃvidāṃ paramārthaḥ | Īśvarapratyabhiñā-Vivṛtti-Vimarśinī II, 433, line 3.*
- 25 *prakāśasvātantryam iha bodhasaṃvedanādisabdavācyam | Īśvarapratyabhiñā-Vivṛtti-
Vimarśinī I, 82, line 12.*
- 26 *prakāśaś ca vimarśasūnyo na bhavati | Īśvarapratyabhiñā-Vivṛtti-vimarśinī I, p. 5, line 24.*
- 27 *paramēśvaraḥ pañcakṛtyamayāḥ satataṃ anugrahamayyā parārūpāyā śaktiā ākrānto vas-
tuto'nugrahaikātmāiva na hi śaktiḥ śivād bhedaṃ āmarśayet | Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa in
verse 1.*
- 28 *sā ca śaktiḥ lokānugrahavimarśamayī prathamataḥ parāmarśamayyā paśyantyāsūtra-
yīyamāñā-nantaśaktiśatāvibhinā prathamataṃ paramahāmantramayyāṃ adeśakālaka-
litāyāṃ saṃvidi nirū-ḍhā tāvat paśyantyudbhaviṣyaduktīpratryuktyavibhāgenaiva vartate |
Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa in verse 1.*
- 29 *saiva ca sakalapramātrṣasaṃvidadvayamayī satatam eva vartamānarūpā | Parātrīśikā
Vivaraṇa in verse 1.*
- 30 *sarvakālam eva yatkiñcitkurvāṇa enām eva saṃvidam anupraveśya sarvavyavahāra-
bhājanaṃ bhavati, atas tām eva vastuto vimṛśati | Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa in verse 1.*
- 31 *. . . tāvad evoktaṃ bhavati devī uvāca iti | evam eva purastād bhairava uvāca iti mantavyam
| Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa in verse 1.*
- 32 *evaṃ cānugrahaśaktiḥ satataṃ sarvapramātrṣv anastamitaiva iti | Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa in
verse 1.*
- 33 *śravaṇākhyayā sattayā tiṣṭhantī tasyāḥ śravaṇasaṃpuṭasphuṭakramikasvaspandamay-
avarṇarāśi-niṣṭham āikātmīyāpādanarūpasāṅkalanānūsandhānākhyam svātantryam | tena
hi vinā kalakalāina-śabdaviśeṣaṃ śṛṇvann api na śṛṇomīti vyavaharati pramātā |
Parātrīśikā Vivaraṇa in verse 4.*

- 53 For a detailed analysis of the revelation of Śaiva, Raudra, and Bhairava Āgamas, see TĀV 1.18.
- 54 The dialogical revelation of the absolute reality, as has been explained in Trika literature, is a combined product of the early Āgamas, the Vedic literature (particularly Mīmāṃsā understanding of *mantras* and the Advaita understanding of the Upaniṣadic revelation), and the linguistic philosophy of Bhartṛhari. I am not able to address these nuances in this article, as this would initiate a much wider conversation.