

Vijñānabhairava

or

Divine Consciousness

A Treasury of 112 Types of Yoga

*Sanskrit Text with English Translation,
Expository Notes, Introduction and
Glossary of Technical Terms*

by

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INTRODUCTION

IMPORTANCE OF VIJÑĀNABHAIRAVA

There have been, in India, two main ways of approach to Reality or the Essential Nature of Self, viz., Vivekaja mārṅa and Yogaja mārṅa—the path of distinction or discrimination and the path of union or integration. Pātañjala yoga and Śāṅkara Vedānta have adopted the Vivekaja mārṅa by which the Puruṣa or Ātmā (the Self) is isolated from Prakṛti (in the case of Pātañjala Yoga) or from Māyā (in the case of Vedānta). The word Yoga does not mean union in Patañjali's system; it means *samādhi* or intense abstract meditation (as Vyāsa puts it in his commentary, 'yuji samādhau'). Śaivāgama has adopted the Yogaja mārṅa in which the goal is not isolation of the Self from Prakṛti or Māyā but the integration of the individual Self to the Universal Self or Bhairava and the realization of the universe as the expression of His Śakti or spiritual Energy. The ideal of Śaivāgama is not the rejection of the universe but its assimilation to its Source.

Vijñānabhairava is an excellent exposition of the *yogaja mārṅa*. Hence its importance. It has been referred to as Āgama,¹ Śivavijñānopaniṣad,² and Rudrayāmalaśāra³ by Abhinavagupta. Yogarāja has referred to it as Śaivopaniṣad.⁴ Kṣemarāja has referred to it at many places in his commentary on Śiva-sūtras.

It is clear that it has been acknowledged by the great exponents of **Śaivāgama** as a very authentic work on **yoga**.

THE TEXT

Vijñānabhairava has been published in the Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies with an incomplete commentary of Kṣemarāja, and complete commentaries of Śivopādhyāya and Bhaṭṭa Ānanda.

In the above text, the following remark appears on page 16, after the 23rd verse, "ita uttaram Śrī Śivopādhyāyakṛtā vivṛtiḥ"

1. I.P.V.V.I, p. 207.
2. I.P.V.V. II, p. 405.
3. I.P.V.V., p. 285.
4. *Vivṛti Paramārtha-śāra*.

i.e. "after this, the commentary is by Śivopādhyāya. "Even in the life-time of Śivopādhyāya, the full commentary of Kṣemarāja was not available. It is not known whether Kṣemarāja did not live to complete his commentary, or whether his commentary after the above verse has been lost. All that can be said is that it has not been so far traced."

Śivopādhyāya is greatly influenced by Śāṅkara Vedānta. So his commentary is not reliable. Bhaṭṭa Ānanda is even more avowedly a follower of Śāṅkara Vedānta. His commentary is, therefore, even far more removed from the original intention of the text. In the preparation of the present edition, these commentaries have not been translated.

THE DATE OF VIJÑĀNABHAIRAVA AND THE COMMENTARIES

Vijñānabhairava is a part of the ancient Tantras. It is held in high esteem in **Śaivāgama**. Abhinavagupta calls it Śiva-vijñāna-upaniṣad.

The text of Vijñānabhairava claims to be the quintessence of Rudrayāmala Tantra which means union of Rudra with His Śakti (Spiritual Energy). The authentic text of Rudrayāmala Tantra is not available. So it is not possible to say how far the text of Vijñānabhairava corresponds to that of Rudrayāmala Tantra.

Tantras contain descriptions of ritual practices, sacred formulae (*mantras*), mystical diagrams (*yantras*), gestures (*mudrās*), postures (*āsanas*), initiations (*dīkṣā*), *yoga* or mystic practices. Vijñānabhairava is purely a manual of mystic practices in accordance with Śaivāgama.

In the present state of our knowledge, it is impossible to give the exact date of Vijñānabhairava. The earliest reference to it is found in Vāmananāth's Advayasampatti-vārttika. It is likely that Vāmananātha may be the same as Vāmana, the celebrated writer on Poetics who flourished during the reign of King Jayāpīḍa of Kashmir (779---813 A.D.) If that be so, then it can be easily said that Vijñānabhairava was very well known in the 8th century A.D. Perhaps, it may have been compiled a century earlier.

or thought — constructs. *Vikalpa* is the very nature of mind. If that is so, the aspirant should mentally seize one *śuddha* or pure *vikalpa*, viz. of the highest I-consciousness, of the real Self as being *Śiva*. He has to practise the *bhāvanā* of this pure *vikalpa*. *Bhāvanā* is creative contemplation. Imagination plays a very large part in it. One has to imagine oneself with all the faith and fervour at his command that he is *Śiva*. This *śuddha vikalpa* eliminates all other *vikalpas*, or thoughts and a time comes when the *śuddha vikalpa* also ceases. Then the empirical, psychological self is dissolved, and one is landed in one's real, metempirical, metaphysical Self.

Abhinavagupta traces the following steps to *Bhāvanā*. A *sadguru* or Self-realized spiritual director initiates the aspirant into the mysteries of the *āgama*, into the irrefutable conviction of the essential Self being *Śiva*. The second step consists in *sat-tarka*. *Sat-tarka* in this context does not mean logic-chopping, but training the mind in harmonious consonance with the truth of the essential Self being *Śiva*. This culminates in *Bhāvanā*. *Bhāvanā* is the power of spiritual attention, a total dedication of the mind to one central thought, a nostalgia of the soul, a spiritual thrust towards the source of one's being.

Bhāvanā is finally metamorphosed into *śuddha vidyā* whereby the psychological I is swallowed up into the essential metaphysical I. Verse 49 lays down the *bhāvanā* of the essential Self. In a few other verses also, the verb form of *bhāvanā*, e.g. *bhāvayet*, *bhāvyaḥ*, etc. has been used. The *bhāvanā* of *laya* or dissolution of the various *tattvas* in a regressive order, of the gross into the subtle, of the subtle into the subtler, of the subtler into the subtlest, etc. is recommended in verse 54.

4. *Śūnya* (void) :

Contemplation of *śūnya* or void is another basis of *dhāraṇā* recommended. Verses 39, 40, 45, 58, 122, etc. refer to the contemplation of the void. Contemplation over *śūnya* or the void is explained in some detail under a separate heading.

5. Experience of Vastness or Extensive Space :

Experience of a vast, extensive space without any trees, etc. has no definite, concrete object as *ālambana* or support for the

individual empirical consciousness is transformed into *citi* or the the met-empirical consciousness.

ŚŪNYA :

The word *śūnya* means void, a state in which no object is experienced. It has, however, been used in various senses in this system.

Madhyadhāma or the central channel in the interior of the spinal column has generally been called *śūnya* or sometimes even *śūnyātiśūnya* (absolute void). The word *śūnya* occurring in the verse No. 42 of Vijñānabhairava has been interpreted as *unmanā* by Śivopādhyāya. In verse 61 *madhya* has been interpreted as *śūnya* by Śivopādhyāya. Kṣemarāja has interpreted *śūnya* as *māyā* and *śūnyātiśūnya* as *mahāmāyā* in his commentary on VII, 57 in Svacchanda Tantra. At some places, Śiva is said to be *śūnya* or *śūnyāti-śūnya*.

The main philosophical sense of *śūnya*, however, is given in the following verse quoted by Śivopādhyāya in his commentary on verse 127 of Vijñānabhairava :

“सर्वालम्बनधर्मेष्वच सर्वतत्त्वैरशेषतः ।

सर्वक्लेशाशयैः शून्यं न शून्यं परमार्थतः” ॥

That which is free of all supports whether external existents like jar or flower or internal existents like pleasure, pain or thought, that which is free of all *tattvas* or constitutive principles, of the residual traces of all *kleśas*, that is *śūnya*. In the highest sense, it is not *śūnya* as such (i.e. as non-existence)”. *Avidyā*, *asmitā*, *rāga*, *dveṣa*, and *abhiniveśa* i.e. primal ignorance, the feeling of I-ness, attraction, repulsion and fear of death are considered to be *kleśas*.

Sivopādhyāya has further given a long quotation from *Vimarsa-dīpikā* which means that Śiva is full and free and fundamental ground of all that is known as void, from whom all the *tattvas* arise and in whom they are all dissolved. Since Śiva or the foundational consciousness cannot be described in words or any determination of thought, therefore, is He called *śūnya*.

[Dhāraṇā 9]

VERSE 32

शिखिपक्षैश्चित्ररूपैर्मण्डलैः शून्यपञ्चकम् ।

ध्यायतोऽनुत्तरे शून्ये प्रवेशो हृदये भवेत् ॥ ३२ ॥

Śikhipakṣaiś citrarūpair maṇḍalaiḥ śūnyapañcakam /
Dhyāyato' nuttare śūnye praveśo hṛdaye bhavet // 32

TRANSLATION

The *yogī* should meditate in his heart on the five voids¹ of the five senses which are like the five voids appearing in the circles² of motley feathers of peacocks. Thus will he be absorbed in the Absolute void.³

NOTES

1. Five voids or *śūnya-pañcakam*. This means that the *yogī* should meditate on the five ultimate sources of the five senses, i.e. the five *tanmātras*, sound as such, form as such, etc. which have no concrete appearance and are mere voids.

There is also a *double entendre* in *śūnyapañcakam*. Just as there are five holes in the circles of the feathers of the peacocks—one above, one below, one in the middle, and one on each side, even so the *yogī* should meditate on the five ultimate sources of the sense i.e. the five *tanmātras* as five voids.

2. Circles—*maṇḍalas*. There is a *double entendre* in the word *maṇḍala* also. In the case of the peacock, it means the circles in the feather; in the case of the *yogī*, it means the senses. (*maṇḍam rasasāram lānti iti maṇḍalāni*—those that carry the quintessence of the five objects of sense are *maṇḍalas*, i.e. the five senses).

3. The Absolute void is *Bhairava* who is beyond the senses and the mind, beyond all the categories of these instruments. From the point of view of the human mind, He is most void. From the point of view of Reality, He is most full, for He is the source of all manifestation.

which was the basis of that memory) and makes his body supportless, then the Lord (who as the experience was the basis of the memory) appears.

NOTES

On remembering a particular object, the aspirant should ignore the memory of the object and fix his mind on the original experience which is the basis of the memory. At the same time, he should detach himself mentally from the body, i.e. the psychosomatic organism in which the memory and the residual impressions are stored. In this state, his mind will be freed of I-consciousness and the deposit of the residual impressions (vāsanā) and will be restored to its pristine form of pure Experience, pure Consciousness. This pure Consciousness or Experience is the nature of Bhairava.

This is *Śāktopāya*.

[Dhāraṇā 95]

VERSE 120

क्वचिद्वस्तुनि विन्यस्य शनैर्दृष्टिं निवर्तयेत् ।
तज्ज्ञानं चित्तसहितं देवि शून्यालयो भवेत् ॥ १२० ॥

Kvacid vastuṇi vinyasya śanair dṛṣṭim nivartayet /
Taj jñānaṃ cittasahitaṃ devi śūnyālayo bhavet //120

TRANSLATION

O goddess, if one, after casting one's gaze on some object, withdraws it and slowly eliminates the knowledge of that object along with the thought and impression of it, he abides in the void.

NOTES

The aspirant can eliminate the knowledge of the object along with its impression either (1) by *śūnyabhāvanā* or (2) by *bhairavi mudrā*.

1. *Śūnyabhāvanā* is the imaginative contemplation that the whole world is unsubstantial, mere void. When the whole world

is believed to be void, naturally a particular object in the world will also become void.

2. *Bhairavīmudrā* is a pose in which the eyes are open externally without blinking, but the attention is turned to the inner essential Self. Though the eyes are open, the aspirant sees nothing of the external world.

This *dhāraṇā* teaches that the aspirant should fix his attention only on his essential Self and withdraw it from everything else so that the external world loses its hold on him.

This is *Śāktopāya*.

[Dhāraṇā 96]

VERSE 121

भक्त्युद्रेकाद्विरक्तस्य यादृशी जायते मतिः ।

सा शक्तिः शाङ्करी नित्यं भावयेत्तां ततः शिवः ॥ १२१ ॥

Bhaktyudrekād viraktasya yādrśī jāyate matiḥ /

Sā śaktiḥ śāṅkarī nityam bhāvayet tām tataḥ śivaḥ // 121

TRANSLATION

The sort of intuition (*mati*) that emerges through the intensity of devotion in one who is perfectly detached is known as the *śakti* of *śāṅkara*. One should contemplate on it perpetually. Then he becomes *Śiva* Himself.

NOTES

One who is perfectly detached i.e. is not attached to sensuous pleasures and is devoted to God develops *mati*. The word *mati* is used in a technical sense here. It means pure spiritual intuition that is dynamic. This *mati* is full of beneficent power (*śāṅkarī śakti*) that can transform and consecrate life. That is why this *dhāraṇā* recommends contemplation on *mati*.

There are four steps in this *dhāraṇā*. (1) one's value of life has to be totally changed. He should be completely detached from sensuous pleasures and trinkets of life. (2) He should be devoted to God. (3) Through the above two, the mind of the aspirant

As Maheśvarānanda puts it :

“यं जानन्ति जडा अपि जलहार्योऽपि यं विजानन्ति ।

यस्यैव नमस्कारः स कस्य स्फुटो न भवति कुलनाथः ॥”

(Mahārthamañjarī, verse—4)

“He whom even ignormuses know, whom even portresses of water know well enough, to whom alone every one makes a bow, who is Master of śakti (power)—where is the person to whom He is not evident.”

How does every person know Him ? He knows Him in the I-consciousness which is common to all. The pseudo-I which every body has to use willy-nilly is only a symbol of the non-dual Eternal ‘I’ throbbing in the heart of every creature. This Eternal ‘I’ is *vijñāna* or *cidānanda*—consciousness-bliss. This is *Bhairava*. Thus He is known internally to every body.

2. He is known externally also through His Śakti—power or Energy, His manifestation in the cosmos.

He who thus knows *Bhairava* both internally and externally is fully convinced of the fact that there is nothing else than *Bhairava*. He is a God-intoxicated person. To him, *Bhairava* is an ever-present Reality. He is identified with *Bhairava* and thus enjoys the non-dual state perpetually.

This dhāraṇā is an example of *anupāya*.

[Dhāraṇā 100]

VERSE 125

समः शत्रौ च मित्रे च समो मानावमानयोः ।

ब्रह्मणः परिपूर्णत्वादिति ज्ञात्वा सुखी भवेत् ॥ १२५ ॥

Samah śatrau ca mitre ca samo mānāvamānayoh /

Brahmaṇaḥ paripūrṇatvāt iti jñātvā sukhī bhavet // 125

TRANSLATION

Because of the conviction that everything is full of *Brahman* (who is also the essential Self of all), the aspirant has the same attitude towards friend and foe, remains the same both in honour and dishonour, and thus because of this conviction (viz.,

essential Self. Kṣemarāja in his commentary on III, 27 of the Śiva-sūtras puts the idea of *japa* beautifully in the following words : “स्वात्मदेवताविमर्शनवरतावर्तनात्मा जपो जायते”। “*Japa* consists in the repetition of constant contemplation on the deity that is one’s own essential Self.” In that connexion, he quotes the present verse of Vijñānabhairava.

Abhinavagupta also gives expression to the same idea about *japa* in Tantrāloka (I, 90).

“तत्स्वरूपं जपः प्रोक्तो भावाभावपदच्युतः ।”

“*Japa* freed of all ideas of ens and non-ens is the constant contemplation of Śiva’s nature.”

Jayaratha commenting on this verse says :

“तस्य शिवस्य स्वरूपं परावाक्स्वभावम् आत्मरूपम् भूयोभूयः परामृश्यमानं जपः । अत एव भावाभावपदच्युतः पूर्वोक्तनीत्या तन्मध्यस्फुरत् परामर्शमात्रसारः इत्यर्थः ।” (I. p. 315).

“Constant mindfulness of the nature of Śiva which is *parāvāk* or Self is *japa*, the essence of which consists in the mindfulness of the reality which shines in between both *bhāva* (ens) and *abhāva* (non-ens)”. Immediately after this, Jayaratha also quotes the present verse of Vijñānabhairava.

3. *Japa* (recitation) consists in the repetition of *mantra*. What is the *mantra* here. The second half of the verse clarifies what this *mantra* is. It is the *svayaṃnāda*, i.e. it is the *mantra so’ ham* (I am Śiva) which the inward *prāṇaśakti* ceaselessly goes on sounding by itself in every living creature. It is this automatic *mantra* which has to be contemplated on, and it is this that is real *japa*.

VERSE 146

ध्यानं हि निश्चला बुद्धिनिराकारा निराश्रया ।

न तु ध्यानं शरीराक्षिमुखहस्तादिकल्पना ॥ १४६ ॥

Dhyānaṃ hi niścālā buddhir nirākārā nirāśrayā /

Na tu dhyānaṃ śarīrākṣimukhahastādikalpanā // 146

TRANSLATION

Unswerving *buddhi*¹ without any image² or support³ constitutes meditation. Concentration on an imaginative representation

of the divine with a body, eyes, mouth, hands, etc. is not meditation.

NOTES

1. Buddhi is the immediate and determinative aspect of consciousness.

2. Without any image means without an idol or *yantra* (diagram), etc.

3. *Nirāśrayā* or without support means without the help of a particular spot to meditate on such as *hṛdaya* (centre) *mūlādhāra* or *nābhi* (navel), etc.

Abhinavagupta has defined *dhyāna* (meditation) in a similar strain in *Tantrāloka* (I, 89). Jayaratha in his commentary on *dhyāyate paramaṃ dhyeyam* occurring in verse 89 says, *paramaṃ dhyeyam śivalakṣaṇam paramakāraṇam dhyāyate svātmābhedenā parāmṛśyate* i.e. "the object of meditation is Śiva who is the supreme source of all manifestation and who is to be meditated on as non-different from one's own essential Self." This is what is meant by *dhyāna* or meditation in this system. Immediately after the above comment, Jayaratha quotes the present verse of *Vijñānabhairava*.

VERSE 147

पूजा नाम न पुष्पाद्यैर्या मतिः क्रियते वृद्धा ।

निर्विकल्पे महाव्योम्नि सा पूजा ह्यादरालयः ॥ १४७ ॥

Pūjā nāma na puṣpādyair yā matiḥ kriyate dṛḍhā /

Nirvikalpe mahāvvyomni sā pūjā hy ādarāt layaḥ // 147

TRANSLATION

Worship does not mean offering of flowers, etc.¹ It rather consists in setting one's heart on that highest ether of consciousness which is above all thought-constructs.² It really means dissolution of self with perfect ardour (in the Supreme Consciousness known as *Bhairava*).