YOGA OF SYNTHESIS IN KASHMIR SHAIVISM

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Kashmir Shaivism, also known as Trika Shaivism, is a philosophical and theological system which has its roots in the Tantric worldview. What distinguishes it is its monistic vision which conceives the Highest Reality in terms of consciousness vibrating in every atom of the universe. Consciousness, it asserts, is an all-pervasive principle that forms the ground or substratum of all existent things, the phenomenal world with all its diversity being but its manifestation or expression. It is realization of one's true nature as Shiva or pure, undifferentiated consciousness that liberates man from the tyranny of finitude. And to bring about that realization Kashmir Shaivism lays across a whole array of means which include meditations, contemplations and yogic practices. In fact, Kashmir Shaivism is not mere speculation or an intellectual exercise about exploring the nature of Ultimate Reality but a unique synthesis of theory and practice, with speculation being constantly fed and nourished by practice. It is a philosophy and a path of yoga in one. In this paper we shall study the nature and pattern of the yoga of Kashmir Shaivism and try to identify the elements that it synthesizes in its sweep.

YOGA -- AN INTEGRAL PARADIGM OF KASHMIR SHAIVISM

Linked closely to the metaphysics of non-dualism, and often determining its shape, yoga emerges as an integral paradigm in Kashmiri Shaiva philosophy. This makes Mircea Eliade's description of yoga as "a characteristic dimension of the Indian mind" most relevant in its context. But it would perhaps be necessary to see first what exactly the term "yoga" connotes in Kashmir Shaiva traditions at conceptual as well as practical levels. Derived etymologically from the Skt. root 'yuj', it literally conveys the sense of "uniting" or "being yoked together", but the actual interpretation of this meaning varies from school to school and tradition to tradition. However, the commonly accepted meaning that it has come to acquire practically is that of a technique or means of achieving identity with one's transcendental self beyond psycho-physical existence. It is in this sense that Patañjali, the founder of the Classical School of yoga and author of its
foundational text, the "Yogasūtra", uses the term though he borrows his metaphysics mostly from the contemporary dualist school of Sāmkhya which does not contribute to the idea of any kind of union of "Spirit" (purusha) and Nature (prakriti) and its evolutes. This, however, makes little sense in the tradition of Kashmiri Shaivism which is unmistakably and emphatically non-dualistic in tone.

In what is regarded as a standard definition of "yoga", Patañjali defines it as the suppression or restriction of mental activity – “yogaschittavritti nirodah”. Vyāsa, the well known commentator of the Yogasūtra, elucidates this by equating yoga with samādhi – “yogah samādhih”.

What Vyāsa implies is that yoga is the technique of achieving the ecstatic state known as samādhi by yoking or interiorizing consciousness. By using the terms "chittavritti" and "nirodha" in defining yoga, Patañjali emphasizes the need for attaining a thought-free state of mind or a kind of "psycho-mental stoppage", as Georg Feuerstein calls it, through withdrawal of senses from their objects so that the Being shines forth as "transcendental-witness-consciousness". Kashmir Shaivism apparently seems to agree so far as identification of yoga as samādhi is concerned, but differs substantially with Classical Yoga in its interpretation of the word ‘samādhi’ itself. Samādhi according to it is “the yoga having for its content recognition and realization of the non-dual self that is pure awareness”, as Dr. Navjivan Rastogi puts it. Presenting the Shaiva point of view, Kshemarāja, one of the greatest interpreters of Trika philosophy and its praxis, describes yoga as “realization of the identity with the ultimate reality.”

So far as stopping of conceptual thinking is concerned, there is a wide difference in the approaches of Classical Yoga and the Shaiva system of Kashmir. Though Abhinavagupta and Kshemarāja both espouse cessation of mental states and talk of the blissful experience that arises from it, it is not through suppression or coercion that they consider attaining such a state of self-absorption as desirable. They alternatively ask for adoption of the methods of vṛitti kshaya or loss of mental states and vikalpa samskāra or refinement of thought constructs to deal with the problem of intervention and turbulence of the mind. As the mind keeps on creating vikalpas or thought forms, Kshemarāja asks the aspirant to keep focused on pure awareness and not to let
differentiating thought forms to take him away from his real nature. The idea is to keep mind still and free of thought forms so that there is no *kshoba* or mental agitation. This, says the *Spanda Kārikā*, is the highest state when revelation of the self occurs. The yoga of Kashmir Shaivism consists in concentrating on achieving this thought-free awareness not by strangling or suppressing the mind but by adopting the techniques of *vritti kshaya* (loss of mental states) and *vikalpa samskāra* (refinement of thought constructs), as stated above.

Patañjali’s classical yoga on the other hand “begins with withdrawing the outgoing tendencies of the mind” so that it is “tranquil and without an object”. It is then that it is “empty of form and reflects the form of consciousness”. Kashmir Shaiva yoga, according to Navjivan Rastogi, reconciles the “undertones” of Patanjali Yoga with “its own systemic approaches”, leading to the state of “supreme subjectivity”.

Patañjali’s yoga, however, adheres to strictly ascetic and austere principles in its practices bordering almost on rejection of life, which the Kashmir Shaivite with his strong links with the Tāntric milieu finds unacceptable. Monastic approach which calls for asceticism and renunciation makes yoga of the Patañjali’s school suitable for only those inclined to renounce the world. In contrast to its cold and self-denying approach which emphasizes the unreality of the world of senses, Kashmir Shaivism is life-affirmative and does not regard the material universe as different from Shiva or the Self. Kashmir Shaiva yoga offers techniques that lead to expansion of the self and can be practiced in the midst of ordinary family life and is, therefore, suitable to both the renunciate monk and the householder. It does not differentiate between mystical life and ordinary life, nor does it denigrate or de-emphasize everyday experience. It is through practical experience of daily life, says Abhinavagupta, that the yogi can elevate himself to the level where he can have the ultimate experience.

Discarding the ideology of rigorous asceticism and renunciation, Shaiva yoga adopts the method of sublimation of natural impulses and emotions instead of suppressing them and seeks to redirect and channelise their energy for spiritual transformation. For the Tantric
practitioner, the milieu to which the Kashmir Shaivite yogi also belongs, Shiva is everywhere and everything, including the body which is a "potential doorway to the infinite". So he does not pit sensuous enjoyment or bhoga against attainment of liberation or moksha, accepting both as legitimate goals of life and striving for a synthesis between them. For him liberation means attainment of fullness or pūrnatva which is practically nothing but equanimity or synthesis between the two – the state of bhoga-moksha sāmarasya. He does not run away in terror from sexuality but tries to understand it. It is in this context that the ritual sex practices of the Kaula school of Kashmir Shaivism can be viewed. In the Tantric traditions the yogi is allowed to take pleasure in sense objects provided he does so with full self-awareness, fixing his attention on the source of such pleasure. He is asked to venerate the senses and the body “as manifestations of the sacred powers of consciousness which emit them as the sun does its rays.” ¹² In the ‘De hasthad evatā chakra Stotra’ (Hymn to the Circle of Deities in the Body), Abhinavagupta personifies the senses as deities to be worshipped and depicts them as offering pleasing sensations to Ānanda Bhairava and Ānanda Bhairavī seated in the calyx of the lotus of the Heart (of pure I-consciousness).

Another characteristic that distinguishes the yoga of Kashmir Shaivism from Patañjali’s and other forms of classical yoga is that it does not recognize any dichotomy between knowledge and action (jnāna and kriyā); it attempts to synthesize the two. This too is perfectly in line with the Tantric tradition. Shaiva mysticism does not propound a path which is strictly that of knowledge alone, nor is it one in which action or devotion predominates without any role for understanding. It is a path where knowledge and action, wisdom and devotion meet in harmony. In fact, it is “a blending of various approaches” as Swami Shankarananda, a western scholar of Kashmir Shaivism, puts it. He writes:

“The Shaivite master would say that each of the classical yogas by themselves, bhakti yoga – the path of devotion, jnāna yoga – the path of wisdom, and rāja yoga – the path of mental and physical control, is
incomplete. Shaiva yoga is combination of all these yogas. It includes will, knowledge and action in a comprehensive whole.\textsuperscript{xxi}

THE FOUR SCHOOLS

The trajectory of the development of the yogic tradition in the non-dualist Shaivism of Kashmir can be traced in mythological times to the sage Durvāsā who asked his mind-born sons Tryambaka, Āmardaka and Shrinātha to spread the wisdom of Shaiva monism, dualism and dualism-cum-non-dualism. In historical times proper, different philosophical systems based on these came into being around the fourth century or so with the system founded by Tryambaka transmitting the non-dualist doctrine of Trika. By the 7\textsuperscript{th} century various Shaivāgamic schools inspired by the Bhairavatantras had arisen, most prominent of them being Krama and Kula with their own spiritual discipline and esoteric practices as well as preceptorial traditions. A further development took place with a new upsurge of Triadic Shaivism in the first half of the 9\textsuperscript{th} century when the Shivasūtras or Aphorisms of Shiva are said to have been revealed to the sage Vasugupta marking the beginning of its formal systemization. Regarded as “a unique treatise of yoga”, the Shivasūtras provided new insights into the nature of the Ultimate Reality which resulted in the emergence of two more schools in the non-dualist Shaivite milieu: the Pratyabhijñā school, expounding the philosophy of Recognition, and the Spanda school, concerned with the doctrine of Vibration.

It will be quite relevant to have a synoptic look at these major schools and systems as Kashmir Shaivism can be seen as a collective exposition of their doctrines, concepts and spiritual practices. Of these Kula and Krama can be said to form its Āgamic or Tāntric component, while Pratyabhijñā and Spanda constitute what is known as the “nava mārga” or the new school. It was the great Abhinavagupta who synthesized all these schools within the ambit of the Trika or Triadic system and shaped them according to his monistic vision into a coherent, well-reasoned and integrated philosophy of existence, bringing them together under a single exegetical scheme.
Kula: The Kula or Kaula school is one of the oldest and most important streams of the Tāntric system and is said to have been founded by the legendary yogi Matsyendranātha or Machhandā probably in the 7th century. It is generally associated with the five ‘M’s’ ritual which includes practices like ritual offering of meat and wine and indulgence in ritual sex. While the use of these secret practices was taken literally by practitioners of the left-hand path, those of the right-hand schools understood it metaphorically. Supposed to be antinomian and anti-conventional in character, the Kula school, however, does not aim at sensual gratification or hedonism but at achieving the highest level of consciousness while overcoming the dichotomy between pure and impure, body and spirit, sacred and profane, enjoyment and liberation. It derives its name from the term kula which literally means ‘family’ or ‘a grouping’, but actually refers to the Ultimate Reality in its dynamic or feminine aspect as Shakti. Shiva or the transcendent principle is referred to as akula in the terminology of this ‘familial school’ with emphasis on gaining liberation through ecstatic experience of identity of Shiva and Shakti.

Strongly non-dualistic in outlook, the Kula or Kaula School is thus essentially dedicated to Shakti. From the point of view of yoga, it has the arousal of kundalinī shakti or the coiled power of consciousness as its basic practice along with the attainment of the highest level of consciousness through mantravyāpti or the ‘pervasion of mantra’. Kula is also taken to mean the totality of cosmic powers into which the yogi enters by piercing all the circles of his body. The adept who achieves this feat becomes the master of the totality of things and is also called as kaula. What is important about the practices of the Kula tradition is that they are available for the householder also.

Though there are many Tāntric texts that are supposed to be associated with the exposition of the kula doctrine, its original textual tradition is not clearly known. In the context of Kashmir Shaivism, the Parātrimshikā is one of the main texts which deal with its basic tenets of akula (the principle that transcends differentiation), kula (family or totality) and kaulīkī shakti (familial energy). Somananda and Abhinavagupta both wrote commentaries on its teachings. Abhinava accords the Kula system an independent
identity and high importance, next to only Trika, contrasting kulaprakriyā or the Kula Method with tantraprakriyā or the basic Tantric Method.

Krama: Like Kula, Krama is also one of the oldest schools of the non-dualistic Shaiva system of Kashmir. The term krama denotes sequence or progression, pointing to the basic tenet of the school that the Ultimate Reality can be realized through a succession of stages. The school took its birth in Uttarakāśha or Kashmir towards the end of the 7th century and from there it spread to the South with Shivānanda -- Nishkriyānanda according to some -- as its earliest preceptor. According to Jayaratha, the teachings of the school, which has a long history and vast textual literature, were imparted by Shivānanda to his three female disciples Keyuravatī, Madanikā and Kalayānikā, who in turn passed on the knowledge to Govindarāja, Bhamuka and Erakanātha. Krama is distinguished from other schools of Shaivism by its unique concept of twelve Kālis or phases of the cycle of cognitive energies (shaktichakra). The system is also known as Kālinaya or the Kāli system, for worshiping Kāli as the highest Goddess of Consciousness, and mahārtha or the Great Meaning. There is another branch of the Krama school which upholds Shiva’s supremacy as the transcendent principle, with Kāli or the immanent principle as its essential expression. In any case, the school is concerned with Shakti as immanent reality. According to Abhinava’s interpretation of the Krama doctrine, the shaktichakra or Wheel of Energies or the cycle of 12 cognitive phases represents the assemblage of the cosmic shaktis of knowledge (jnāna), will (ichhā) and action (kriyā) engaged in the fourfold functionality of emanation (srishti), sustenance (sthiti), dissolution (samhāra) and grace (anugraha). In the centre of the shaktichakra is Shiva or the Self as chakresha or Lord of the Wheel. The yogi by contemplating on the Wheel becomes liberated and identifying with amuttara or the Absolute as the pair residing in the Heart of Consciousness experiences both bhoga or enjoyment and ānanda or bliss. Abhinava and his chief disciple Kshemarāja regard this practice as most important as by understanding the shaktichakra, the yogi himself enjoys its lordship. The practice, it needs be pointed out, is internal and contemplative rather than external.
Krama has also been defined in terms of kālakrama or time sequence. It is not simply sequential time but creative time signifying temporal as well as spatial succession in the context of Kālī Kālasankarshinī (The Attractress of Time), as the absolute reality or the supreme principle.

Spanda: Two more schools came into existence in the course of philosophical systemization of Shaiva monism, namely, the Spanda and the Pratyabhijña schools. Both these are idealistic schools and yet, despite differences in doctrine and terminology, both share a common philosophical ground, holding consciousness to be the definitive nature of absolute reality. The Spanda School derives its name from its root text, the Spanda Kārikā or Spanda Sūtra which is ascribed to Vasugupta or his disciple Kallata Bhatta and is said to have been written basically to explain and elucidate some of the concepts present in the Shiva Sūtra. Its teachings spread through its vast commentarial literature, in particular Kshemarāja’s excellent exposition through his two works, the Spanda Sāndoha (Essence of Vibration) and the Spanda Nirnaya (Determination of Vibration). There are also two more surviving commentaries – Spandapradīpikā or the Lamp of Spanda by Bhagvatotpala and the vivritti or an extensive commentary by Rājanaka Ramakanatha. The term spanda means the spontaneous vibration or pulsation of universal consciousness which is perceived as a subtle or slight movement “within the fundamental core of the absolute”. It is not a motion set in time and space but conveys the sense of an internal dynamism of the Supreme Reality itself which gives rise to the process of external manifestation. Using the words of Dyczkowski, it can therefore be described as a movement “which proceeds from the inner domain of undifferentiated consciousness, out to the exterior domain of its manifestation which is created as it moves outward and is destroyed when it returns to the inner state to of undifferentiated unity.”

The Spandakārikā uses the terms umnesha or unfolding and nimesha or involution to explain this pulsating movement of consciousness from the inner to the outer state of reality and back. The universe, it says, comes into existence when Shiva ‘opens his eyes’ to see it, as it were and is dissolved when He ‘closes his eyes’ to see His own nature. The two phases, also described as expansion (vikāsa) and contraction (samkocha), are actually
one, Shiva Himself manifesting as diversity of the phenomenal world through His power of pulsation and yet not sundering His unity. The Spanda yogi too sees the oneness of the two phases—expansion of the Self identified as Shiva assuming the form of the world of diversity and its contraction as withdrawal back into his own undivided nature—as the cosmic rhythm of the inner and outer movements of one absolute consciousness.

Spanda operates both in the form of particular pulsations of I-consciousness or visheshaspanda at the microcosmic or individual level and as universal vibration of consciousness or samānyaspanda at the macrocosmic or universal level. Shiva as internal reality holding together the outer manifestations is the ground of both these aspects.

According to the Spanda doctrine, by experiencing the vibration of universal consciousness within his own self, the yogi realizes his own essential nature (svasvabhāva) as Shiva. He then learns to recognize his own inner spanda energy in the outer world which flows in all its cognitions and activities. And thus through his perception of the totality of existence in his mind, he enjoys the bliss of undifferentiated awareness free of any thought constructs. The yogi finds that Shiva with whom he is identifying has another name—svātantrya or freedom.

Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega regards the Spanda doctrine as the “yogic-descriptive” aspect of the non-dual tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. We shall deal with the specific practices of the Spanda School at a later stage when we discuss the overall pattern of the means of liberation that characterize Shaiva yoga.

Pratyabhijñā: The Pratyabhijñā or Recognition School represents the most important upsurge in the development of monistic thought in Kashmir Shaiva tradition. The sage Somananda, who was probably a pupil of Vasugupta, wrote its foundational text the Shivadrishti (‘The Vision of Shiva’) in the 9th century and also a vritti or commentary on it which is now lost. It is his disciple Utpaladeva’s Ishwara-pratyabhijñā-kārikā, a work containing the fundamental tenets of the Doctrine of Recognition that became its key scripture and from which the school derives its name. Utpaladeva refers to Pratyabhijñā
as navamārga or the ‘New Path’, and justifiably so as like Spanda its origin cannot be directly traced to the scriptural tradition of the Āgamās. Utpaladeva wrote a commentary on his own work to elucidate his views, but the most remarkable and insightful commentaries on it are the Pratyabhijñā-vimarshini (Lōghavi Vṛtti) and the Pratyabhijñā-vivritti-vimarshinī (Bṛhatī Vṛtti) written by Abhinavagupta, the greatest interpreter of not only the Recognition School but of the whole of non-dual Kashmir Shaivism. Another important and very popular elucidatory work on the system, a virtual manual so to say, is Pratyabhijñā-hridayam by Kshemarāja, Abhinavagupta’s closest disciple and an authentic commentator on Kashmir Shaiva texts. It is through this commentatorial literature that the concepts introduced by Somananda and Utpaladeva of self-recognition, perfect I-consciousness, appearance etc. came to be authentically interpreted and analysed in the overall context of non-dual Kashmir Shaivism.

Pratyabhijñā is regarded as the philosophy proper of Kashmir Shaivism, stressing as it does with sound arguments and profound reasoning the non-duality of Shiva as absolute consciousness. Its core doctrine is that liberation consists of the ultimate recognition of one’s own true identity as Shiva through self-awareness. Its importance lies in the fact that it encompasses all the fundamental features common to different schools of non-dual Kashmir Shaivism and presents them as coherent system of philosophy and theology. The term pratyabhijñā does not just mean memory -- remembrance of something that is already known -- as Kamlākar Mishra points out. It is recognition in the sense of knowledge of real identity, which is of key importance in Kashmir Shaivism. Utpaladeva regards it as “intuitive capacity of consciousness to grasp its own nature”, which Earlier Somananda did not.

The Pratyabhijñā School uses the symbolism of light to explain the nature of the absolute. It represents the ultimate reality or Shiva as prakāsha or the light of universal consciousness and vimarsha or reflective awareness of that primordial light identified as Shakti. It is Vimarsha, the “self-referential capacity” or the power of consciousness, which makes the light of “consciousness conscious of itself”, to put it in the words of Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega. “Shakti”, says Muller-Ortega, is “responsible for the
process of manifestation of all finite appearances within the infinite light.” “The self-referential capacity of consciousness”, he adds, “lies at the basis of the yogic sādhanā. The techniques of Tantric meditation employed by the tradition engage this essential characteristic of the very nature of consciousness”.

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

All these schools were in fact contiguous and later got absorbed in the Trika or Triadic school in spite of having their intrinsic individual characteristics. It was actually Abhinavagupta, Shaivism’s greatest philosopher and theologian, who synthesized them together within the Trika and shaped them into a coherent, well reasoned and integrated theological system together with their doctrines and practices and brought them under the rubric of what is today known as non-dual Kashmir Shaivism. Originally Trika was an independent system with its roots in the Tāntric tradition and had such inclusiveness about it that it was said to encompass all the teachings of the Siddhānta, Vāma and Bhairava Tantras. Realizing its potential, Abhinavagupta, who called it Anuttarakulatrika, made it the focal point of his integral monistic vision which presents the relationship of the transcendental and the phenomenal as aspects of the same totality. All non-dual schools of Kashmir Shaivism have now come to be identified with Trika which is called so because its conceptual framework consists of several triads or threesomes. The primary triad comprises of the three goddesses Parā, Parāparā and Aparā representing various levels of Reality. The most significant triad is that of nara (conditioned individual human being seeking liberation), Shakti and Shiva whose interrelationship it seeks to explore:

\[\text{Nara- Shakti-Shivātmakam trikah}\]

“The Triadic school is coloured by yogic mysticism (absorption into an undifferentiated awareness) and so calls itself the Yogic School”, writes Paul E. Murphy.
The core concept of the *Trikä*, or Kashmir Shaivism as it is generally called, is that Shiva as universal consciousness is the ground and essence of everything, the highest reality. His creative and active power Shakti is the source from which the whole phenomenal world and all its entities have emanated. There is nothing that exists outside consciousness which though one also appears in the form of diversity. Being a manifestation of absolute consciousness, the world is not only real but also divine. We thus find Kashmir Shaivism to be a life-affirmative philosophy that validates the world and at the same time offers us an intuitive insight into our innate nature as inseparable from Shiva. It is recognition of this essential oneness that forms the basis of the yogic goal of the Kashmir Shaiva aspirant.

Another distinguishing feature of Kashmir Shaivism is its insistence that there is no dichotomy between *kriyā* or action and *jnāna* or knowledge. It recognizes both as two aspects of Shiva’s inherent Power, or Shakti. What this implies is that Shiva as absolute consciousness is both the ‘doer’ and the ‘knower’. As Kamalākar Mishra explains, “Shiva is absolute not only by being existent but also by being known. Awareness or knowledge (*jnāna*) is the very nature of Shiva for Shiva is consciousness.”<sup>xxiii</sup> Another meaning of absolute, as Mishra points out, is that which pervades all and is, therefore, everything, there being none else.<sup>xxiv</sup> In other words, there is nothing that is separate from Shiva, the universe being but his self-manifestation or extension (*prasāra*). Shiva or the absolute is thus, according to Kashmir Shaivism, independent as well as non-dual or the only reality. His self-awareness or consciousness about his own self is his very first activity.

The question arises if Shiva is the only reality, is the phenomenal world with all its diversity unreal then? The position of Kashmir Shaivism on this is that being a manifestation of Shiva as consciousness, the world is one with Shiva, and therefore anything but unreal. Shiva manifests the world, or rather “manifests himself as the world”, freely as his own projection or self-expression. The diversity of the world is there because the One appears as many out of his free will. This raises the question of the relation between unity and differentiation. An interesting analogy is given in the Shaiva
texts to explain how Shiva though himself indeterminate and without any form or variety, “all variety comes out of him”— the analogy of mayurānda rasa or the liquid present inside in the egg of a peacock. This liquid is without any colour itself but potentially contains all the colours of the peacock’s splendid plumage.

Shiva’s act of cosmic creation points to his complete freedom (svātantrya) to manifest variety out of his own consciousness without sundering his unity as the absolute. This is his spontaneous and natural activity (kriyā). Unlike the absolute of Advaita Vedanta, Shiva is not portrayed in Kashmir Shaivism as inert and passive. He is the vibrating, pulsating, wondrous light of consciousness which in Abhinavagupta’s words “unfolds itself everywhere” and makes “all the varied forms of the universe to appear”. Shiva’s conative, creative power, his natural dynamism, is what in Shaivite terms takes the form of Shakti, or the Goddess. Svātantrya (freedom), vimarsha (self-awareness), spanda (vibration), purnatā (fullness) are but her synonyms. The Goddess is, however, in no way different from Shiva, as Abhinavagupta makes abundantly clear. To put it in the words of Kamalākār Mishra, “the relation between Shiva and Shakti is one of identity.” As Shiva’s inherent power, Shakti is shown to have two aspects: the Power of Knowledge or jnāna shakti and the Power of Action or kriyā shakti. These two powers are not separate or incompatible but complimentary aspects of Shiva’s infinite power. Besides “power to know” and “power to act”, there is another power that the concept of Shakti is shown to connote: icchā shakti or the “Power to Will”. In fact there are two more denominations of Shakti in the Tantric tradition, chit-shakti or the “Power of Consciousness” and ānanda shakti or “Power of Bliss”, taking the total to five. These are actually different names of Shakti, given to her for the different role she plays. Of these powers of Shiva the triad of icchā-jnāna-kriyā is related to the process of Creation.

The Kashmir Shaiva yogi conceives of reality as Shiva and Shakti “united in the oneness of pure consciousness”. Simultaneously, they open out and evolve in the form of the universe, both mirroring each other as transcendence and immanence. It is here that the third side of the triad, nara or individual soul comes into the picture. Kashmir Shaivism holds that Shiva is his essential nature, as of all things, but ignorance of this truth makes
him suffer limitation, restricting his freedom of will, knowledge and action. He becomes, as Swami Shankarānanda calls him, "Shiva with amnesia". Still he is a finite symbol of the infinite and realization of his true identity can restore his Shivahood to him. And this is what the yoga of Kashmir Shaivism is all about -- it helps him abide in his true nature through a wide range of spiritual techniques and meditative practices it offers.

COSMIC MANIFESTATION

The drama of cosmic manifestation unfolds with pure undivided consciousness opening out and evolving spontaneously into the universe through a process of self-limitation or contraction. These stages or categories (tattvas), number 36 according to the Shaiva theory of cosmogenesis, ranging from the innermost states of subjectivity to the outermost objective forms of existence. The first five tattvas or categories are described as belonging to the realm of "pure creation" where there is still integration between the subject and the object. The highest among these are Shiva and Shakti, the Supreme Being and his Power of Self-awareness, both together representing the state of pure I-consciousness and expressing the sense of abhedā or total non-duality. In these two states there is no objectiveness, only the awareness of ahām or "I am" prevails unfolding chit shakti or the power of consciousness and ānandashakti or the power of joy. Then comes the category called Sadāshiva where the idea of idam or 'this' shows up for the first time. Yet 'I-consciousness' still prevails over 'this-consciousness' in this state with the dominant experience of the soul being ahām-idam or 'I am this'. Here jnānashakti or the power of knowledge predominates. Paul E. Murphy compares it to "the desire of an artist as the inspiration to paint a canvas arises within him or to the faint outlining sketch on the canvas before the paint is applied." The category of Ishvara comes next which corresponds to the awareness idam-ahām or 'this I am'. Here the consciousness of 'this' submerges the consciousness of "I" and ichhāshakti or the power of will prevails. The subject and the object are both clearly discernible in a state of perfect balance in the category shuddhavidyā or 'Pure knowledge'. Here there is an equal stress on the awareness of ahām-idam or 'I am this (universe)' and idam-ahām or 'this (universe) am I' and kriyāshakti or the power of action is emphasized. With this the categories
belonging to the realm of ‘Pure Creation’ come to an end and the domain of Māyā or self-obscuration begins. This is what Dyczkowski calls “the sequence of descent into matter”.

Māyā is the principle of limitation and obscuration that separates subject from object, the dotted line below which the “Impure Creation” begins creating contraction and confusion. With Māyā taking the centre stage, Shiva looses his svātantrya or freedom and becomes anu or limited individual with restricted powers of cognition and agency.

It is Shiva himself who though beyond Māyā initiates this process of self-coagulation (rodhama) as without it cosmic creation is not possible at all. He suffers atomicity of his own free will to become the bound person because he enjoys it as part of His sporting activity, His Lila or play of assuming diverse forms. But even while performing his part as the Cosmic Actor, Shiva remains Shiva, unaffected by limitation.

But the Māyā of Kashmir Shaivism is not the Māyā of Advaita Vedānta, an indefinable and inexplicable cosmic principle that creates the world of illusion superimposed on the reality of Brahman. Māyā in Kashmir Shaivism is Shiva’s own power of self-limitation that splits universal consciousness into subject and object and creates the delusion of separate identity.

Māyā accomplishes its act of obscuration with the help of sheaths or coverings called kañchukas. These evolutes of Māyā are five in number and are called kalā or limited action / aptitude, vidyā or limited knowledge, rāga or feeling of attachment, kāla or power of time and niyati or power of natural law. As Māyā plays her part through these pañcha-kañchukas or five powers of obscuration to mask “His undifferentiated luminosity”, the Supreme Shiva enters the spatio-temporal sphere of finitude “through myriad diverse manifestations”. Forgetting his infinite nature, he becomes the limited individual soul, bound and bereft of the ability to recognize his predicament. The kañchukas, it must be noted, are not ontological but conceptual entities.
The remaining 25 categories of existence have been adopted by Kashmir Shaiva metaphysics straight from the Sāmkhya system with some interpretative differences here and there. Beginning with purusha or the Person -- limited consciousness -- and prakriti or Nature, the chain ends at prithvi or the earth. While purusha or the Person is the witness of all activities of objectivity, prakriti or Nature is the principle of materiality. Prakriti provides purusha the three gunas or qualities that are the basic constituents of experience – sattva (purity, goodness), rajas (passion, activity) and tamas (darkness, ignorance). Both purusha and prakriti, according to Kashmir Shaivism are manifestations of Shiva and Shakti. Prakriti is the primordial principle of materiality and from it the remaining categories of existence evolve. First we have the triad of manas or mind, buddhi or intellect, and ahāmkāra or ego – the apparatus of subtle mental activities. From the threesome evolve jñānendriyas or the five perceptive faculties: eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin, and karmendriyas or the five motor faculties: voice, hands, nose, feet, anus and genitals. Lastly, there are the five subtle tattvas or the tanmatras: sound, touch, colour, taste and smell, and five gross tattvas or the mahābhūtas: ether (ākāśa), air (vāyu), fire (agni), water (jala) and earth (prithivi).

With all these Sāmkhya categories incorporated, the process of cosmic manifestation is complete with consciousness moving from inner to outer and subtle to gross and grosser form in its “descent into matter”. Conversely, in the case of “ascent into consciousness” the movement is from the gross to subtler forms of consciousness.

THE THREE MALAS

Shiva becomes the bound soul after going through the sweep of 36 tattvas due to the process of self-limitation or contraction set into motion by Māyā. This process of self-limitation is another name of ignorance-- ignorance which is regarded as a kind of impurity that stains consciousness. As individual souls we are enmeshed in a situation where we come into the grip of ignorance which conceals our true Shiva nature from us and binds us to the grind of karma. But in Kashmir Shaivism ignorance does not necessarily mean total lack of knowledge. It means wrong knowledge or incomplete
knowledge which hinders us from an insight into the reality of things – the non-duality of consciousness. We are led to think of duality as the real state of existence and loose our sense of unity with the rest of the world which we treat as the other. It is this state of ignorance or restricted vision that makes it difficult for us to recognize the truth of our predicament that is called mala or impurity in Shaiva terminology. In fact there are three types of impurity we have to deal with before we can realize our real self: ānava mala, māyiya mala and kārma mala. The three malas work havoc at our level of existence, causing a contraction of our powers of will, thought and action.

Ānava mala is the impurity of individuality which makes the individual soul to identify itself as a limited being. This impurity is responsible for giving rise in the individual soul a sense of being imperfect or incomplete due to his failure to recognize his purnatā or fullness, which in turn results in a craving for something that he desires but has not acquired as it is outside himself. It is a primordial impurity that causes the other two impurities as well. According to Utpaladeva, ānava-mala operates in two ways: “there is no freedom of consciousness” and “there is no consciousness of freedom”. It gives rise to a sense of self in the non-self as one is not aware of one’s real nature.

Māyiya mala reinforces ānava mala, the impurity of limited individuality and gives rise to a perception of duality or diversity everywhere. This sense of difference is caused by the limitation of the individual soul’s freedom of knowledge which separates him from the rest of the world. In a way all the impurities are the products of Māyā and can as such be called māyiya mala. Pointing to this discrepancy Abhinavagupta writes:

“The name māyiya given to the impurity of seeing difference is just a name; all three malas are also māyiya by virtue of being the products of māyā.”

Kārma mala is the impurity pertaining to karma or action that comes into play when the individual soul acts in a state of ignorance and imperfection. Loosing his freedom and will, he is “prompted by desires and fears for his personal gain” and subjects himself to
good and bad acts. This embroils him in the cycle of births and deaths. According to Utpaladeva, “kārma mala is the action done when the doer is ignorant of his real nature”.

The brief description above of the cosmology of Kashmir Shaivism and its concepts of three malas or impurities and five kañchukas or coverings became necessary to show how Shiva or the pure undifferentiated consciousness obscures His true nature with the help of māyā or the power of obscuration and becomes the soul in bondage. He empties Himself out as the manifested universe and conceals His identity. According to non-dual Kashmir Shaiva philosophy, obscuration or tirodāna is one of Shiva’s five cosmic functions, the other four being creation (srishti), sustenance (stīthi), dissolution (samhāra) and grace (anugraha). Liberation is recognition of his true nature as Shiva by the individual soul and it can be attained by removal of the impurity which is the obscuring factor. Making it clear that ‘one’s true nature’ means innate, pure “I-consciousness”, Abhinavagupta says that moksha or liberation is nothing else than awareness of one’s true nature: “mokṣho hi nāma naivānyah svarūpraprathanam hi tat”. However, pure I-consciousness or Shiva-consciousness can never be attained without Shiva’s anugraha or grace, which cannot be of the yogi’s own choosing but depends solely on Shiva’s will. To earn divine grace or shaktipāta the yogi in turn requires undergoing yoga or spiritual discipline.

BONDAGE AND LIBERATION – THE FOUR UPĀYAS

The movement from being a limited conditioned individual under the spell of māyā or spiritual ignorance to the realization of one’s essential self is a kind of return journey through the grosser tattvas (categories) back to the pure state of undifferentiation. The yogic means to achieve the state of liberation from duality are known as upāyas and these are regarded as the most important elements of Kashmir Shaiva praxis. In Tantrāloka Abhinavagupta divides practice into four basic categories which he calls jñānachatushka or upāyas. These four categories of means to liberation are: anupāya, which means literally No-Means or ‘the pathless path’, the prefix ‘an’ also meaning ‘little’,

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shāmbhavopāya or the Divine Means, shaktopāya or the Empowered Means and ānavopāya or the Individual Means.

Of these four, amupya, also called anuttaraopāya, is more a state of being than a means and requires practically no or little practice. It is based on direct insight into the supreme reality without any self-effort, with the yogi penetrating into his real nature in a state of uninterrupted awareness due to pure grace of highest intensity. The yogi in the realm of amupāya, therefore, has just to be aware of his transcendent nature through the guru’s word, and to repose in his own self. Nothing has to be done or achieved; no udyama or effort is needed as the goal and the means are the same. The shāmbhavopāya is not much different from the amupāya, as it does not need any exertion either, but only the visualization of one’s identity with Shiva without the interference of any thought constructs. The yogi in the realm of shāmbhavopāya subtly directs his power of will or ichchā and his reflective consciousness to recognize that his state is no different from Shiva’s own state of svātantrya or absolute freedom. It is therefore also called ichchhopāya. The shāktopāya or Empowered Means is associated with mental activity in which the yogi resorts to contemplative meditation to purify thought. He uses chit-shakti to free himself of the thought constructs arising out of ignorance. That is why it is called shāktopāya. With the help of one shuddha vikalpa or pure thought which the yogi holds in his mind, ashuddha vikalpa or impure thought is eliminated by constant contemplation and the true nature of the self is revealed. Ānavopāya or the Individual Means, as the name suggests, is concerned with amu, the limited individual, and is therefore associated with the physical body. Various external practices at the level of physical effort come within the scope of this upāya. As Navjivan Rastogi points out, “notions of mantra, mudrā, diagrams and mental installation (nyāsa) assume implicit importance” at the plane of the Individual Means.xxxvi

Before proceeding to discuss the four categories of practice in some detail, it would be necessary to make certain preliminary observations about their common as well as distinctive features. It would also be of interest to trace them historically to the original
textual sources where they were located before being incorporated into the overall systemic pattern of the yoga of Kashmir Shaivism.

Although all these four categories are regarded as what Abhinavagupta calls "the means to liberation", it need not be implied, as Mark S.G.Dytkowski points out, "that there is just one means to realization belonging to each category, but rather all forms of spiritual discipline are based on one or other of these principles."xxxvii Once we understand the basic approach of these categories, we can "identify the categories to which any given practice belongs".xxxviii The three means of liberation adopted by the Shaiva yogi (except anupāya, which is not associated with any practice) which we have outlined above are in fact basic formats or models of practice under which can include any number of possible means of self-realization can be classified. And though the three basic types are hierarchically divided into superior and inferior means, they all lead ultimately to the same goal, that is mystical immersion or absorption (samāvēsha) with Shiva and are interrelated in a manner that each can be regarded as continuation or extension of one another. As Jaidev Singh points out, "the three upāyas are not water-tight compartments."xxxix Thus the practices belonging to ānavopāya lead to shāktopāya which in turn culminates in shāmbhvopāya. The master generally begins with the highest means which is shāmhava, but if he fails to achieve liberation for the disciple, he tries with the next in order that is shāktopāya or the Empowered Means and in case that too does not work he resorts to ānava or the Individual Means. And even while practicing one of the means he can take recourse to the other. Thus, as Lilian Silburn points out, "certain apparently mystical experiences or practices are varied by connection with the different Ways".xl For example, there are several practices specific to ānavopāya or the Individual Means which are also used in other Means, though inspired by a different motive and involving a greater intensity of grace. In this way the three main categories of practice can be further sub-divided into "innumerable secondary varieties" corresponding to different levels of consciousness and suited to different psycho-spiritual dispositions of the aspirants. If the yogi fails to achieve the result by practicing one means, he has other means available to him to enable him to make progress. It is not as though the yogi has to spend all his life perfecting his ānavopāya, he can move up onto
the next yoga in the hierarchy because ānava can be a means to reach shāktopāya and shāktopāya culminates in shāmbhavopāya.

Yet each means has its own distinctive character and definitive traits that find expression in several specific terms that distinguish it. The first thing to be noted is that ānavopāya is related to the body and vital breath, shākttaopāya to mental activity and meditation and shāmbhavopāya to spiritual consciousness, while anupāya or the no-means is pure I-awareness. Thus, the three principle means can be projected as “three different modes-states of single cognition” marked by duality (ānavopāya), duality-cum-non-duality (shāktopāya) and non-duality (shāmbhavopāya), the fourth mode, anupāya being distinguished as ineffable. So far as the triad of powers icchā (will), jñāna (knowledge) and kriyā (action) is concerned, the power of action (kriyā shakti) operates in ānavopāya or the Individual Means, the power of knowledge (jñāna shakti) operates in shākttaopāya or the Empowered Means and the power of will (icchā shakti) in shāmbhavopāya or the Divine Means. The three main means are associated with kundalinī yoga as well. While the Individual Means is in tune with prāna kundalinī or the coiled energy at the level of vital breath, the Empowered Means with nādakundalinī or the coiled energy at the level of resonance and the Divine Means with bodhakundalinī or the coiled energy at the level of knowledge or consciousness.

The triple types of yogas can also be distinguished from the point of view of sequential development. Thus, while the shāmbhava yoga operates immediately without any gradations or intervening stages (akrama) in realization of its goal, shāktta yoga associated with mentation and ideation displays both directness of and progression (kramākrama) in its development and ānava yoga develops progressively only in successive stages (krama) as it is associated with physical activity. The three can be viewed from the perspective of the state of the mind also. In the Individual Means a complete repose of mind, chittavishrānti, is achieved through self-awareness; in the case of the Empowered Means, there is a “thorough grasp of such repose” called chittasambodha; and in the Divine means there is a withdrawal or dissolution of mind or chittapralaya. In the words of Navjivan Rastogi, “they correspond directly to the states
of dichotomy of thought, rescinding of dichotomic thought, and immediacy of plenary thought.”

Finally, all the three types are viewed as means leading to samāvesha or corresponding forms of mystical absorption in Shiva-consciousness, the final goal of Trika yoga. The shāmbhava or Divine form is marked by “an intense awakening of consciousness” free of thought-constructs; the shākta or Empowered form is attained by “pondering mindfully” (chetasā) on unmediated reality; the absorption attained by external yogic practices like the recitation of mantra, postures of the body (karma), meditation, the mystical letters (varna), formation of supports (sthānaprakalpanā) etc. is the aanava samaavesha or Individual form of absorption. In anupāya or the Null Means, samāvesha, possession or penetration is an insight into the true state of reality for the yogi where all the mental states are dissolved and constant awareness of oneness with undifferentiated consciousness emerges. This is what Trika or amuttara yoga means.

THE FOUR-FOLD UPĀYA YOGA AND THE CLASSICAL YOGA OF PATAṆJALI

The threefold / fourfold upāya-yoga was systematized and firmly established by Abhinavagupta in his Tantrāloka as the authentic praxis of Kashmir Shaivism. It has the Mālinīvijayottara Tantra as its earliest source-text, while the impact of the Vijñānabhairava Tantra, Netra Tantra, Svacchandatantra and the Shiva Sūtra has also been considerable in the development of this yogic tradition. Kshemarāja, Abhinavagupta’s chief disciple, has also immensely contributed to it through his brilliant commentatorial works like the Spanda Nirnaya and Shivasūtra Vimarshinī as well as the Pratyabhijñā Hridayam. Analyzing and elucidating some of its most important features and knotty aspects, Kshemarāja “reconciles Malinīvijayottara Tantra, Svacchandatantra, Vijñānabhairava and Netra Tantra with Spanda theories” on the one hand while on the other he “places the yogic process on a more solid footing by setting it against the backdrop of Patañjali’s yoga”, says Navjivan Rastogi. There is, however, some debate over the standard structure of Trika yoga, there being “an overt tendency to posit Tāntric yoga as six-limbed (shadānga), distinguished from the eight-limbed (ashāṅga) yoga of Patañjali”, to quote Rastogi again. Rastogi is of the view that though Jayaratha regards
Trika yoga as six-limbed and is supported by Kshemarāja in this, “there is a continued fidelity to Patañjali’s eight-fold system” in it.\textsuperscript{xliii} Whether or not the formal structure of Trika yoga is influenced by Patañjali’s eight-limbed model, the fact remains that the two yoga systems are substantially different in their approaches and even in their conception of the yogāngas or limbs of yoga. A few things need to be at once noted in this context. One that despite similarity of terms related to some of the limbs, the meanings that Trika attaches to them and the processes it describes to define them are widely different. Secondly, the importance Trika yoga attaches to sattarka or right logic (discrimination between what is to be accepted and what discarded) in the scheme of the limbs and its division of yoga into two categories of artificial and natural with yoga having prānāyāma as a part being relegated to the category of artificial gives it an altogether different dimension. Even the definition of prānāyāma and its processes are dissimilar in the four-fold yoga system of Trika and the eight-limbed Patañjali’s yoga. The concept of samādhi in the two systems also varies. Moreover, the shadāṅga or six-limbed scheme of Jayaratha has its roots in the long tradition of Tāntric yoga. It discards yama or restraint, niyama or discipline and āsana or bodily posture as yoga is meant for disciplining the mind. Besides, it stresses that these are tortuous for the body and unnecessarily cumbersome, and offers, therefore, a more convenient yet higher form of yoga. At the same time, it will be interesting to note that Patañjali’s yogic process is completely subsumed under ānavopāya in Trika yoga. What is more, as Dczkowski points out, Kshemarāja, one of Trika’s main interpreters “rejects Patañjali’s system because he believes it to be a form of yoga that can, at best, lead only to limited yogic attainments (mitasiddhi)”\textsuperscript{xliv}

Keeping all this in view, one would be inclined to view as interesting the conclusion that Navjivan Rastogi arrives at after a prolonged discussion on the nature and formal structure of non-dual Kashmiri Shaiva yoga. Rastogi writes:

“...The intrinsic character of the Tāntric current has lent a new framework, shape and thrust due to which Trika yoga represents a mixed form of Pātañjala and Hatha yoga, acquiring along the way a
transcendental disposition. This is because of its sole occupation with the immersion in or the rise of plenary awareness, which is nothing but the synthesis of knowledge and action.”

ANUPĀYA

With this we now turn our attention again to the four upāyas or Means to Liberation, which are the building blocks of the yoga of Kashmir Shaivism, and look at their salient features in more detail. It sounds like a paradox that anupāya which literally means ‘no-means’ is placed at the top in the hierarchy of means to achieve liberation. But the paradox is resolved when we see that it is, in a way, liberation itself, a state of enlightenment which comes spontaneously without any exertion or personal effort. From this perspective anupāya is direct experience or awareness of the true nature of reality independent of human action, making all practice redundant. In fact all means ultimately culminate in this non-practice. Abhinavagupta writes that it is as futile to discover this reality by practice as trying to see the sun by the light of a firefly. Not even innumerable means, he says, can reveal Shiva. At this level, therefore, anupāya is anākyha or something that can not be described or approached. It belongs to the realm of anuttara or the Transcendent, which is already pūrṇa or full in itself and nothing can be added to or taken away from it. In this realm there is nothing for one to do or not to do. The Self cannot be attained for it is eternally present; it cannot be revealed as it is ever revealed, shining in its pristine glory everywhere as the light of consciousness. There is no discovering it or covering it for it cannot be covered by anything whatsoever. There is no entering into it, for there is nobody separate from it that would enter into it. At this level, which is beyond anything and about which nothing can be said or done, all practice becomes redundant. Abhinava writes:

“Here there is no going anywhere, no applying of any technique, no contemplating, no meditating, no reciting (of mantra), no practicing anything, no making effort, nothing. Then what is the real thing to do? The real thing to do
One can, therefore, be just as one is, taking everything as it is. That is what anupāya is all about. Maheshvarānanda calls it vimarṣhopāya or the way of self-reflection. xlviii
According to Abhinavagupta it is the highest way — a synthesis of all the ways to liberation.¹

According to K.C. Pandey, anupāya or the No-Means yoga is called so “not because there is no use of means whatsoever, but because the elaborate means are of little importance.”¹ The prefix “an” in Sanskrit, he points out, also means “a little” and so the word “anupāya” can also be taken to mean “a little means” (ishat upāya). In other words there is hardly any use of means and that too not at all strenuous. When Shiva’s intense grace (śīvra shaktipāta) descends on a highly evolved and already enlightened soul, he recognizes in a flash of awareness reality as identified with his true divine grace that a yogi who is fit to receive it because of his fully purified consciousness becomes instantly identified with Shiva and is filled with the highest form of bliss. Shiva’s grace, it must be mentioned is unconditional and undetermined, freely available to anyone whom Shiva chooses to shower it upon. All that the yogi needs is to hear a specific word from the Master recalling to his mind his identity with Shiva and he gets absorbed in Shiva –consciousness, attaining self-realization through anupāya.

SHĀMBHAVOPĀYA

The next higher means — in fact, the highest as anupāya is not strictly counted as a means — is shāmbhavopāya or the Divine Means is also motivated by intense grace. While in anupāya there is practically no difference between the means (upāya) and the goal (upeya), in shāmbhavopāya there is a subtle difference between the two though like the former it too does not operate in sequential stages. In this upāya the yogi does not resort to observance of any external form of yogic practice but focuses attention on the “plenitude of infinite subjectivity” without the interference of any thought-forms. Not
by exertion but by mere exercise of his freedom of will (icchā), the yogi who practices shāmbhavopāya “penetrates directly into the universal egoity of pure consciousness”. This state of thought-free consciousness is “shāmbhavāsthā” or Shiva’s own state and the way to achieve it is what is called shāmbhavopāya or shāmbhava yoga. Through it the yogi comes to realize that this “pure consciousness, free of all thought-constructs (nirvikalpa), is his basic state.” This realization does not come in gradual stages but in a sudden flash of the I-consciousness of Shiva. Quoting Mālinīvijayatāntra, Jaideva Singh explains:

“When there is identification with Shiva without any mentation or thought-process, merely by an intensive orientation of Will power (icchā shakti) towards the inner Reality, then is there Shāmbhava-yoga or Shāmbhava samāvesha.”

As it is through the exercise of icchā shakti or mere willing that one enters in state of complete identification (samāvesha) with Shiva, this upāya is also known as icchopāya.

One dimension of the practice of identifying oneself with the cosmic Self, Shiva, is that one visualizes the entire world as a projection or expansion of the consciousness of one’s own self. This unifying visualization of the whole universe as an expansion of one’s own self in the form of a reflection or appearance (ābhāsa) in Shiva’s cosmic consciousness constitutes the essential core of shāmbhava yoga.

With his mind and senses introverted and empirical thought dissolved, the yogi cultivating shāmbhavopāya or the Divine Way experiences the light of consciousness uninterruptedly illumining his innermost being. An undifferentiated awareness of “pure ego manifest at the initial moment of perception” develops as intuition surges up from within, annulling the distinction between the subject and the object. It is a state in which the universe with all the categories of existence is absorbed in the yogi’s subjectivity as he is impelled towards Shiva with a strong mystical urge overtaking him.
Centering or madhyavikāsa: The emphasis in the practice of the śāmbhavopāya is on experiencing the Centre or the thought-free void of absolute consciousness from which all differentiated thoughts and perceptions emerge. The yogi seeks to discover the Centre “in the interval which divides two moments of differentiated perception (vikalpa)”, as Abhinavagupta explains. He says: “None can deny that a gap exists between perceptions as two moments of thought are invariably divided.”  

This junction-point between the two, adds Kshemarāja, “while one is engaged in one thought and another one arises is the unmesha (expansion of pure consciousness), that is revelation of the true nature of the Self which is the background of both the thoughts.” Krishnamurti calls unmesha the “creative moment”, which is not thought “but a flash of Understanding”. It is this point that forms the Centre (madhyā) or the space beyond thought where “the void (kha) of consciousness” resides. By developing an awareness of the Centre, the yogi moves from particular vibrations to the “universal throb of the Heart in the Centre” where all categories of existence are united and “life-giving elixir of Shiva’s consciousness” floods his inner nature. “By the expansion of the Centre”, writes Kshemarāja in the Pratyabhijñā Hridayam, "the yogi experiences the bliss of consciousness”. 

The unfoldment of the Centre means to experience expansion of awareness in a way that it embraces all things within itself, realizing pure ego, or the “universal vibration of pure subjectivity”, to be the same as one’s own pure consciousness or essential nature. This is a state which can be identified with the state of consciousness in the categories of Ishvara (‘this universe is me’) and Sadāśhiva (‘I am this universe’). To abide in this state as one’s own abode is to experience totality -- the void which contains everything within itself. 

The concept of void or emptiness needs to be understood a little more clearly from the Trika perspective. It is a concept that Trika has borrowed from the Mādhyamikā School of Buddhism which believes in the theory of momentariness. According to this theory, the phenomenal world is in a state of constant flux, with everything invariably undergoing change due to the continuous processes of creation, maintenance and destruction. These changes take place so rapidly that it is not possible for us to observe the various stages through which they pass every moment. Only the single moment exists and is available to us. If nothing is permanent the entire phenomenal world is transient.
and without any substance. And with every phenomenal entity being momentary, nothing has any essential nature as it lasts for only a single moment. It is in one single moment that both creation and dissolution take place.

Trika, or Kashmir Shaivism as it is more widely known, agrees with the basic premise of the Mādhyamikā School of Buddhism that everything in the world is constantly undergoing change, being subject to the process of creation, sustenance and dissolution every moment and therefore in a state of both being and non-being. But at the same time it rejects the Buddhist notion of time being a linear or homogenous entity that can be divided into past, present and future and that links one instant with other as the underlying reality. According to the Kashmir Shaiva point of view, time is not real, nor is it a connecting link between instants and, what is more, the yogi can disrupt its continuity by penetrating the gaps or the “interstitial void (madhya)”, to put it in the words of Paul E. Murphy. Abhinavagupta calls it “the rupture of past and future, the two modalities of time”:

“It is at this very instant ... at the present, actual moment that (mystical experience) is realized, while past and future are excluded. Then the present moment is also rejected as dependent upon the other two ...”

In śāṃbhavopāya terms, the Centre is viewed as “a rupture or interstitial void”—an interval between two acts of cognition. According to Kshemarāja, the Centre is consciousness itself, the source of both past and future. It abides in the eternal present as the innermost nature of everything. Abhinavagupta identifies the Self with the void, calling it the “expanse of ether”. This ether, he elaborates, is the emptiness that the consciousness experiences. In the Aphorisms of Vatūlanātha and the Vijnānabhairava the Absolute itself is viewed as a void, “free of duality and discursive thought”—a “non-dual void”. The Vijnānabhairava calls it śūnyatīshūnya or the Absolute Void.

But the Shaiva śūnya or emptiness unlike the Buddhist concept is anything but nothingness or non-being. It is interpreted as “fullness itself”, a positive reality without
any negative connotation. It is in the Absolute Void, the Pratyabhijñā Hridayam says, that “Shiva initially flashes forth as Light of Consciousness.” Without this void, it is not possible for Shiva to manifest the universe and unfold the categories and create “multiplicity of perceptions”. Freed from dualising or fragmenting indivisible consciousness, the Centre or the heart of consciousness reflects the universe in its totality and not as fragmented.

The practice of Shāmbhavopāya or the Divine Way unfolds the first mystical moment of awareness when the yogi in a sudden vibration of will is carried by an irresistible pull towards Shiva. This initial vibration passes from the stage of will to that of activity through the stage of knowledge. Writes Dyczkowski quoting Tantrāloka:

“When practice at this level proceeds smoothly and without interruption, the three powers of will, knowledge and action fuse into the Trident (trishūla) of power, which is the subject free of all obscuration (nirañjana), at one with the power of action in its most powerful form.”

In Shāmbhava yoga, the yogi is immersed in Shīva-samāvesha or Shiva-consciousness at will.

SHĀKTOPĀYA

The focus in Shāmbhavopāya is to achieve a direct realization of the unity of one’s essential nature with the Reality shining as the light of universal consciousness. This calls for a high degree of spiritual maturity for it is most difficult to outwit the “conceptual mind” in its own game of generating thought-constructs which tend to obscure the view of this Reality. To become thought-free is like trying to jump out of one’s own skin, as Jaidev Singh puts it, for “vikalpa-making” is the very nature of the mind. So for those who are not so highly evolved spiritually, Kashmir Shaivism offers an alternative way to get rid of viklapa or conceptualization -- Shāktopāya or the Energetic Means. It involves
the use of mental power (chitta-shakti or vimarsha-shakti) to go beyond the illusion of duality created by thought-constructs. Practicing it, the yogi has to bring mental activities like contemplation, creative imagination, reflection, conviction etc. into play to regain the awareness of the plenitude of pure subjective consciousness. Shāktopāya is also called jñānopāya or the Way of Knowledge because it calls for the use of knowledge or rather correct reasoning (sattarka or bhāvañā) to remove ignorance about the nature of one’s real self.

But the basic thrust of Shāktopāya is towards concentrating on and developing some pure positive idea or shuddha vikalpa to drive impure concepts or ashuddha vikalpas away from one’s mind. Abhinavagupta has given an example of what a shuddha vikalpa could be like:

“That which is unlimited consciousness transcending all limited expressions of Reality from earth right up to Shiva, that alone is the highest Reality; that am I. Therefore I am both transcendent to and immanent in the universe.”

It could be a powerful thought such as, “I am omnipotent and omniscient Shiva, and none other.” It is important for the yogi while developing this thought to eliminate all doubts and conflicting notions that may arise in his subconscious and achieve certainty about his awareness of his divine nature. He should therefore contemplate deeply on the idea and repeat it again and again so that “it is fixed in the mind” and becomes part of his existence.

Such psycho-spiritual techniques are employed in Shāktopāya to purify thought so that ignorance is removed and the true nature of the self is gradually revealed to the aspirant. One pure thought gives rise to another similar thought till his state of awareness is heightened through pure reasoning to realize the self. But thought as we know is associated intimately with speech, the medium through which we can communicate our image of the world around us. In fact the whole objective world of perceptions is a
juxtaposition or chain (prapañcha) of thought-constructs, and thought is but the unuttered form of speech or language which in turn emanates from consciousness and assumes the form of thought. Kashmir Shaivism displays a deep awareness of the role that speech plays in both formulating thought-constructs and their purification and emphasizes it in its praxis, of which shāktopāya forms an important category. Fundamental to its worldview is its theory of language according to which the whole drama of bondage and liberation and creation and dissolution is a linguistic process. As language is an essential expression of Consciousness, it is an innate capacity of man, points out Swami Shankarañanda quoting Noam Chomsky. And the way we use language, both inwardly and outwardly, affects our state, he adds.

The Four levels of speech: Language in non-dual Kashmir Shaivite view can act as a “primary delusional force” by concealing from us our real identity. It can also be a liberating force when it mirrors the reality of our life as a manifestation of universal Consciousness. According to its concept of visarga shakti, Shiva’s infinite reality itself is an “uttering” or “emitting”. As Paul Muller-Ortega points out, “...The daily world we inhabit and the language that we use to describe it are in some sense coextensive.” The process of this emission or manifestation is shown as occurring at four levels of speech or vāk – parā, pashyanī, madhyamā and vaikhari. At the highest level, it is described as parāvāk or supreme speech and is identified with the pure, reflective I-consciousness of the Divine (aham vimarsha) – the level where language is pure potentiality co-existent with Shiva’s “pure cosmic ideation (pratyaya)”. It is a level beyond speech and thought and yet the source of all language. The next level is that of pashyanī vāk or “visible speech”. Here word and meaning are undivided and indistinguishable, with speech at the stage of “mental image prior to thought”. Then there is the level of madhyamā vāk or “intermediary speech”. It is a subtle, inner discourse of thought with speech not having taken the distinct shape of words yet. The final level in this process is of vaikhari vāk or the “manifest speech”, the stage when vocal organs utter the gross everyday speech. The word and its object are now completely separate and distinct. In these four levels of speech we can see a correspondence between the manifestation of the tattvas (categories of creation) from the non-manifested supreme reality to the tangible world of daily
discourse and the evolution of language in terms of the relation between word and meaning that forms the basis of the linguistic philosophy of non-dual Kashmiri Shaivism. **Liberation through mantra:** As parāvāk or language at the highest level is regarded as identical with the Divine I-consciousness, Kashmir Shaivism holds that language, though it creates thought constructs, can be used as an instrument of liberation through mantra, its smallest unit. Mantras are made up of letters and every letter or word is derived and inseparable from Consciousness according to the Tāntric conception of language. The very etymology of the word ‘mantra’ points to its power to save and free us from the bonds of transmigration’. It consists of two syllables ‘man’ and ‘tra’, with the syllable ‘man’ meaning manana or ‘reflection’ and tra meaning ‘that which saves’. The word mantra therefore comes to mean ‘that which saves the mind by generating a reflective awareness of one’s identity with the Supreme Reality’. The ‘collective mass of sounds’ (shabdarāshi) articulated by our vocal organs to form words is given the name mātrikā in Kashmir Shaiva terminology which is regarded as the creative matrix containing all the phonemic units of which mantras are composed. It is the assemblage of the fifty phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet and AHAM, the word for ‘I’ in the language, is one of its most important mantras fully charged with the divine energy of I-consciousness (purnāhantā). The phoneme ‘a’ in the mantra, which is also the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet, stands for anuttara or Shiva, the infinite, absolute consciousness: the letter ‘ha’, which is also the last letter of the alphabet, stands for Shakti. The two letters contain between them all the letters of the Sanskrit language, the gross form of the phonemic energies residing in a potential state in consciousness. The phoneme ‘a-ha’ represents the visarga or emissional power of the Divine Shakti, while bindu, the dimensionless dot above ‘ha’, represents the “natural vimarsha” or reflective awareness of I-consciousness. The bindu is the pivot “around which the circle of energies from ‘a’ to ‘ha’ rotates”. This cycle of phonemic energies is known as mātrikāchakra representing the pure universal egoity of Shiva from which all speech emerges. The term mātrikā connotes the sense of the Divine Mother or creative matrix, which is the source of the fifty Sanskrit phonemes corresponding to the expansion of supreme consciousness.
The non-dual Kashmir Shaivism views mantra as a means that assures attainment of liberation when imparted by the guru. According to Abhinavagupta, it "causes consciousness to vibrate more quickly." At the shāktopāya level, the salvational power of the mantra, which it derives from reflective awareness of the supreme subjectivity, is harnessed to purify thought and elevate awareness to take the practitioner progressively towards experiencing the vibration of the universal Self. At this level the mind, freed from the constrictions imposed by impure thought and reaching the nirvikālpa condition, becomes one with the mantra. Describing the process, Mark C. Z. Dyczkowski writes:

"It leads the adept in stages along the rungs of the ladder of consciousness, ascending which he abandons the lower stages of conditioned awareness to reach the highest state of Shiva- hood, dense with the light of consciousness."

Sattarka: Sattarka or right reasoning forms another important constituent of the yogic process that comprises shāktopāya. It is said to be most effective in uprooting the tree of duality and guiding the aspiring yogi along the path to realization of his essential Self. Much more than mere logical argument, sattarka rids the mind of impure thought constructs. The yogi can develop it in three ways: through personal experience, through the word of the spiritual Master and through the guidance of the scripture. It matures gradually to what is called ‘bhāvanā’, a difficult to translate term which, according to Jaidev Singh, connotes the sense of “creative contemplation”. Making the use of “constructive imagination”, bhāvanā implants in the yogi’s mind the liberating idea of “sarvamevedam ahameva” or “I alone am all this”. Though itself of the nature of thought, it helps in clearing all doubts and strengthening conviction, leading ultimately to shuddha vidyā or the “Pure Knowledge” which reveals to him his true identity as Shiva. This pure vikalpa (purifying thought) culminates in the state of nirvikālpa (thought-free) consciousness, rendering all external worship, yāga, japa, homa, mudrā, dhyāna, mudrā etc. as superfluous. Thus sattarka causes annihilation of all dualistic perceptions, and the yogi comes to experience what is called samvitchakra or the cycle of consciousness. He
does not need any external prop or support now for whatever he says or does to strengthen this awareness of unity within himself becomes japa (repetition of mantra), dhyāna (meditation), homa (fire oblation) etc. for him. He pours his thought of identity with the gross psycho-physical body as oblations into the raging fire of his awakened consciousness. Nothing is of any consequence to him except keeping his attention fixed firmly on his own state of being as not different from Shiva. Ultimately all contradictions and polarities dissolve, leaving him immersed in the bliss that results from experiencing the universal pulsation of pure I-consciousness.

ĀNAVOPĀYA

Of basic importance in the schemata of Shaiva praxis laid out by Abhinavagupta is the method known as ānavopāya, or the “atomic” method of attaining liberation for it provides the ladder to ascend to higher stages of self-awareness. The very word “ānu” or atom associated with it shows that it refers to the limited, fragmented consciousness of the individual soul whose freedom from differentiation is its goal. Ānavopāya brings into play kriyā shakti or Shiva’s power of action to achieve this end, all its activity operating at the bodily plane. Like shāktopāya or the Empowered Means, ānavopāya or the Individual Means too is concerned with vikalpa samakāra or purification of thought, but for that it employs practices ranging from gross to subtle including physical postures, breathing exercises, utterance of mantra and elementary meditation.

The practices of ānava yoga are summed up in the following shloka of Mālinīvijayatántra as:

\[
\text{Uccāra-karana-dhyāna-varna-sthāna-prakalpanaīh} / \\
\text{Yo bhavettu samāveshah samyagānava uchyate //} \\
\text{(MVT II, 21)}
\]

“A perfect absorption into the essential divine Self that is achieved through uccāra (concentration on the source of breath), karana (the external or internal postures), dhyāna
(contemplative envisioning), varna (movement of phonemes in the breath), and sthānaprakalpanā (mental projection of the support of the ritual) is known as ānava.\textsuperscript{iii}

**Dhyāna:** Bhutashuddhi or “purification of the elements” invariably precedes all these practices of ānavopāya, the body through it being homologized with the macrocosm so that it qualifies for divinity to make its presence inside it. Dikṣā or initiation by the spiritual guide is another essential feature of Shaiva spiritual discipline. Of the five practices that characterize the upāya, dhyāna or meditation is regarded as the highest, focusing as it does one-pointed attention on identity of the individual self with the consciousness pervading the universe. One of the most common ānavopāya meditative techniques consists of contemplation of “dissolution of the individualized self into transcendental self”, called layabhāvanā. In this process the gross tattvas are resolved into subtler tattvas, the physical reality being resolved imaginatively into the senses, “then the senses into the mind, and the mind into the personal self” till the yogi “finally arrives at the transpersonal self”, as Swami Shankarānanda describes it.\textsuperscript{iv} “Through it”, writes Dyczkowski, “the progressive differentiation of consciousness from its causal, pre-cosmic form to its phenomenal manifestation is reversed.”\textsuperscript{v}

Abhinavagupta describes in Tantrāloka a meditative practice in which the yogi recognizes that the various objects of the senses are “identical with the wheel of supreme consciousness” (samvicchakra). The wheel, as it emerges from the senses in its totality, “cognizes in its own totality as present within the objects of the senses”, and in this manner dissolution of all the separate and finite objects in the wheel of consciousness takes place, even the residue or latent impressions being dissolved.\textsuperscript{vi}

As the yogi continues to meditate on the samvicchakra or the wheel of consciousness, it is appeased and thus calmed and pacified. He can now practice within himself Shiva’s ācosmic powers of creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe, becoming virtually Bhairava himself. He meditate on the amuttara, then on four, five, six, eight spokes of the wheel, six, fifteen spokes and gradually on sixty-four, hundred, one thousand spokes of the wheel. He can even meditate on any number of spokes for the
shaktis of Maheshvara in his universal form are innumerable – there is no limitation to his powers, the world itself being his manifestation as Shakti.

In another meditative practice, called dāhachintā, the yogi visualizes Kālagni Rudra, the Fire of Time, rising from the toe of the right foot and burning the whole body consciousness in its flames. The Tantrāloka, Shiva Sūtra, Pratyabhijñā Hridayam, Vijñāna Bhairava and other Shaivite texts contain quite a number of such meditations, the last alone giving as many as 112 meditative practices for merger into the Supreme Consciousness.

Uchchāra: The second ānavopāya practice is known as uchchāra or concentration on prāna, the life force. It is concerned with the ascent of the vital breath in the form of sound. The term prāna is used in two senses, general and specific. In the general sense it is understood to mean the vital breath and is employed in the yogic practice as a technique to unfold the Being. In the specific sense, it refers to the vital air in the form of prāna, apāna, samāna, udāna and vyāna with their various functions which are channelized through the medium of various yogic practices to approach the Supreme Reality. In this meditative practice the yogi focuses on the movement of the vital breath, experiencing bliss at six different levels. To begin with when the awareness reposes in the heart of the pramātā or the experient, he experiences nijānanda (personal or innate bliss). Again, he experiences nirānanda (a state devoid of bliss) when the mind comes to repose on emptiness resulting from the absence of knowable objects. Parānanda or the bliss that arises from the other (knowable object) occurs when the yogi's mind abides in the vital breath known as apāna and experiences the presence of all the knowable objects. This is followed by brahmānanda, the bliss of brahman that comes from the unification of various objects of experience, with the yogi's mind reposing in the vital breath samāna. What ensues is mahānanda or the great bliss which arises when all knowledge and knowable objects are dissolved in the Self and the mind rests on the vital breath udāna. Then the yogi, abiding in the vital breath called vyāna, experiences chidānanda or the bliss of consciousness in the state of mahāvyāpti or great pervasion when all limiting qualities are transcended. Finally the yogi experiences the highest bliss of all,
jagadānanda, or the universal bliss which is beyond all limitations with “universality of supreme consciousness” alone prevailing. It is a state, fed by parāmrśa or the supreme nectar, with “the joy of the ultimate unitary state overbrimming”, to put it in the words of Navajivan Rastogi.\textsuperscript{lxiv} To reach this state after experiencing these six different levels of bliss through uchchāra or ascendance of the vital breath is the eventual goal of the practitioner of Shaiva yoga.

\textbf{Varna:} The third type of ānāvopāya practice is related to varna or the ascent (uchchāra) of the vital breath or life force in general as subtle vibration of the inner, inarticulate sound. In fact by varna is meant the unstruck, mystic sound known in yogic terminology as anāhata shabda or anāhata nāda which the yogi can hear through deep meditation only. Abhinavagupta defines it in the \textit{Tantraśloka} in the following manner:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Ukto ya eva ucchāras-tatra yo’sau sphuran sthitah} /  
\textit{Avyakānikriti prāyodhvanirvarnah sa ucyate} //
\end{quote}

['From the uchchāra of this general prāna, there vibrates an imperceptible sound which is known as varna. \textit{Tantraśloka} V,131]

As Abhinavagupta further explains, “There is one varna in the form of nāda in which lie all the varnas (letters) latently in an undivided form. As it is ceaseless it is called anāhata, i.e. unstruck, natural, uncaused.”\textsuperscript{lxv} It is not sounded by anybody voluntarily, nor can anyone prevent it from being sounded, but vibrates automatically in the heart. This nāda is called varna as all the letters originate from it. It is reveals itself in two forms: srishti bija and samhāra bija or the seed mantras pertaining to creation and dissolution. Explaining what is meant by srishti bija and samhāra bija, Jaidev Singh says: “Sa is srishti bija or the mystic letter denoting expiration and ha is samhāra bija or the mystic letter denoting inspiration.” By meditating on them or by reciting them the yogi has the experience of oneness of consciousness. In fact it is a mantra automatically repeated by every living being with every exhaled and inhaled breath and is therefore called the \textit{hamsa mantra}. As Kshemarāja explains:
"The breath is exhaled with the sound ha and inhaled with the sound sa. Therefore the empirical individual always repeats the mantra hamsah. Throughout the day and night, he repeats this mantra 21,600 times."\textsuperscript{64}

Since this mantra is repeated automatically without any effort, it is known as ajapä gäyatrī. Both the exhaled and inhaled breaths, präna and apäna achieve an even rhythm and equilibrium by means of anusamadhāna or mental awareness of this automatic process and then kundalinī or the coiled energy lying dormant in the mulādhāra chakra at the base of the spinal column is aroused. The awakened kundalinī then pierces granthīs and six chakras or plexuses to reach the sahasrāra, the thousand-petal highest mystic centre in the brain where Shiva and Shakti unite and ambrosia flows down. By continuing to concentrate on the anāhata nāda, the yogi’s ego gets dissolved in pure consciousness. It is not difficult to see that this process is much different from pranāyāma or the practice of breath control that forms an essential part of Patañjali’s Yoga.

**Karana:** The fourth constituent of ānavopāya is karan or postures of the body or the mind. Seven types of karanas have been enumerated in the Shaiva texts. These are grāhya, grāhaka, chit or samvitti, vyāpti, tyāga, ākshepa and sannivesha. Abhinava says that one must acquire their knowledge only from the guru’s mouth. According to Jayaratha, these seven varieties are “meant to subordinate and ultimately assimilate all objective phenomena to the consciousness of the essential Self”.\textsuperscript{65} It would be better to turn to Jaidev Singh for explaining practices related to the karanas as not many details are available about them in the texts. Singh writes:

"The first four varieties come purely under ānavopāya. Assimilating the entire world of objects first into the empirical self and all these into samvitti or chit, the highest consciousness, and finally establishing them in to the essential divine consciousness constitute the first four karanas. The first process consists of assimilating grāhya or all objects of perception into grāhaka or the sense organs; the next practice consists of assimilating all
these into \textit{chit} or \textit{samvitti}; the third practice consists of being completely established in \textit{chit} or \textit{samvitti}. Being completely established in \textit{samvitti} is known as \textit{sannivesha}. In \textit{sannivesha} there is no trace of the object as something extraneous.” \textit{ibviii}

The other three \textit{karanas} viz. \textit{vyāapti}, \textit{tyāga} and \textit{ākshepa} are related to the \textit{shākta} yoga and \textit{shāmbhava} yoga. \textit{Vyāpti} is pervasion of universal consciousness in every object as experienced by the yogi through \textit{bhāvanā} or creative imagination, while \textit{tyāga} constitutes the stage in which all effort is finally given up as supreme consciousness now abides spontaneously. \textit{Ākshepa} means projection. Here universal consciousness is projected in the whole universe.

\textbf{Sthāna parikalpanā:} With this we come to \textit{sthāna prakalpā} or support placement, the fifth process in \textit{ānavopāya} practice. It is regarded as an “external means” (\textit{bhāya vidhi}) as in it the yogi relies on outer supports to fix his mind on for concentration. These supports are of three types: \textit{prānavāyu} or the flow of the vital breath, \textit{deha} or the physical body and \textit{bahih} or external objects. The process of \textit{sthāna prakalpā} involves fixing of the mind on any of these three which have further sub-divisions. By \textit{prānavāyu} is meant the vital breath in a sense somewhat different from the particular context in which it is used in \textit{uchchāra}. Here the term \textit{prāna} is used to mean the flow of breathing or the process of exhalation and inhalation on which the yogi fixes his mind. The exhaled breath rises from the centre of the body or the heart and moves right up to the point of internal \textit{dvādashānta}, twelve finger widths above the crown of the head where it merges into the void. From this point the inhaled breath goes back through the same distance up to the centre or the heart and is known as external \textit{dvādashānta}. By keeping attention fixed on these two points, \textit{vikalpas} or the discursive perceptions of the mind begin to get dissolved and the yogi overcomes temporal limitations and experiences \textit{ānava samāvesha} or absorption in one’s essential Self through Individual Means.

As for \textit{deha}, it is a term that refers to the gross elements constituting the outer body or the psycho-physical complex. If one cannot fix one’s mind on the subtle life-force, then one
should use the body as a support, concentrating one-pointedly on this network of nerves all of which are linked to the central channel *sushumna* which is the last external form of the inner vibrations of the power of consciousness. One can thus have an encounter with the Cosmic Self residing in this very body, perceiving one’s unity with its vibrating consciousness that pervades all things.

Under the category of objects external to the body are listed a large number of things including *mandala*, sacred ground (*sthendila*), receptacle, rosary, book, *Shivalinga*, skull (*tūra*), cloth (*pat*), painted image (*pusta*), idol (*pratimā*) and form (*mūrti*). Concentration of mind on any one of these can also lead to the experience of the essential unity of existence. And with this experience gained through the techniques of ānavopāya, thought constructs begin to dissolve and the nature of reality reveal itself more and more clearly till the yogi attains Shiva-consciousness which is his ultimate goal. It will not be difficult to see that the yoga at the ānavopāya level with its emphasis on the instrumentality of the aspirant’s body subsumes most of the constituents of Patañjali’s classical yoga.

SAMĀVESHA

All the three soteriological categories of practice lead progressively to the experience of mystical absorption (*samāvesha*) at different levels, depending upon the intensity of *shaktipāta* or descent of Shiva’s grace. At the level of *anupāya*, the goal and the path become one and *samāvesha* with Shiva is always experienced. Functioning in a complementary manner, the categories flow smoothly into each other. Thus, ānavopāya culminates into *shāktopāya* and *shāktopāya* in turn shades into *shāmbhava* which on its part fuses into *anupāya* which is almost synonymous with liberation, being based on direct and immediate intuition of reality. The aspirant can thus start from any of these means that suits his level of awareness, his eligibility depending on the degree of *shaktipāta* he has received. That is why Abhinavagupta characterizes this four-fold “*upāya-yoga*” as “a unique feature of the *Trika* path.” This model of yoga developed by
him on the basis of Mālinīvijayottara, and also impacted by the Vijñāna Bhairava and Svachchhanda Tantra, has come to be regarded as the standard format for the Trika yoga.

There is another model of yoga also which Kshemarāja introduces as a “higher and better” form for absorption with the Supreme. It is a three-fold system given in the Netra Tantra and divided into gross (sthūla), subtle (sūkshma) and ultimate (para) divisions with a variety of practices patterned on the eight-limbed structure of Patañjali’s yoga system. Yet, though the eight limbs have the same nomenclature, they are interpreted by Kshemarāja in terms of Trika metaphysics and conceptual framework and incorporated into Trika yoga. He eliminates the first two viz. yama and niyama and treats dhyāna as a limb of ānavopāya practice. Āsana or posture is another limb which is treated as the centre between the inhaled and exhaled breath on which the yogi fixes his attention. The pranic flow rises upward through the central channel and the yogi experiences the omniscience of Shiva’s infinite consciousness rising spontaneously within himself. It is this that becomes the “firm seat” for the yogi to sit on for practice.

Prānāyāma too takes a more sophisticated form than merely a process of control of breath as in Patañjali’s classical yoga. It begins with a watch over the outgoing and incoming breath till they become even and equal and then unite and merge as life force moving upward through sushumṇā, the central channel, when it reaches twelve finger-widths above the head (dvādashaṅta). Loosing its outer gross form, it transcends even this stage to become “one with the supreme vibration of consciousness”. The notions of rechaka (exhaler), pūraka (inhaler) and kumbhaka (holder) are also different in Tantra yoga with the Mālinīvijayottara having five varieties, points out Navijivan Rastogi: pūraka, rechaka, kumbhaka, apakarshaka (reverting) and utkarshaka (reaching out). In the Svachchhanda Tantra, Rastogi points out, rechaka, kumbhaka and puraka have two forms: internal and external, while in the Netra Tantra, there is another mode of prānāyāma called prashānta kumbhaka or motionless holding of breath.

Unmilana and nimūlana Samādhi: The quietude or serenity that the yogi attains through meditative practices culminates in absorption or compenetration in the Ultimate
Reality or Siva. It is a state of contemplation in which the world of senses is absorbed into the undifferentiated unity of the universal consciousness. The yogi’s awareness of this unity unimpeded by the flux of thought establishes effortlessly him in the essence of his real self. This is sahaja samādhi or Trika samādhi in which consciousness eventually synthesizes with even unconsciousness, subsuming it through progressive sublimation. The sense of ‘I-ness’ (aham) and ‘this-ness’ (idam) merge into one.

Liberation, stresses Kashmir Shaivism, can be achieved in two ways: through introverted contemplation or nimilana samādhi and extroverted contemplation or unmilana samādhi. In nimilana samādhi the yogi withdraws his gaze from the external world and turns it inwards, discovering universal consciousness within himself. He perceives the totality of existence reflected in his mind and experiences “the inner bliss of contemplative absorption” with his eyes closed as it were. In unmilana samādhi he opens his eyes to the finite reality of the world outside and discovers Shiva’s infinite reality pulsating in every object even if it is inert. It is a state of contemplative absorption in which the expansion of inner consciousness takes place with the eyes open.

A higher state of spiritual realization through which the yogi remains open to the inner world and yet is not closed to the finite realities of the external can be achieved through a practice known as the Bhairavi or Shāmbhavī Mudrā. To put it the words of Paul Muller-Ortega, the Bhairavi Mudrā consists of “the identification of the inner vibrating Self as constituting the visible essence of the external finite realities”.

Through the practice of this mudrā the yogi is initiated into the state of liberation which is nothing else but Shiva’s true nature.

The yoga of Kashmir Shaivism is characterized by the synthesis between the two samādhis, introvert and extrovert. This is realized by a related practice known as the krama mudrā which conjoins the inner world with the outer and the outer world with the inner, both being simultaneously pervaded by the unity of consciousness. In this practice the yogi first turns inward from the outward world in a state of contemplative absorption and then in an expansion of consciousness he exits the inner to enter the outer world.
This switching of the mind from the inner to the outer and then back leads to a state in which both eventually merge into one another with all polarities and differentiation dissolving.

Yogic contemplation or samādhi takes the Shaiva yogi beyond the three normal states of consciousness, waking, dream and deep sleep, into the fourth state called turīyā. It is a higher state of consciousness marked by a constant flow of pure bliss. This bliss takes the yogi to the threshold of the wonder of self-discovery. The Shiva Sūtra says: “vismayo yoga bhūmikā” (Shiva Sūtra, 1.12) — or, “Wonder is the threshold of yoga.”

Turīyā transcends the three lower states and yet encompasses them all. This is explained by the analogy of an oil-soaked rag which is permeated by oil but has at the same time the properties of cloth too. Having attained this state of awareness, he has to try to maintain it through yogic practice so that he can eventually ensure his entrance into the state Beyond the Fourth – the liberating state of turīyātitā, the universal consciousness which reflects the true nature of the Self. It is the supra-mundane state where all the states merge and everything is one with Shiva. As soon as the yogi enters this state he is liberated and becomes a jīvanamukta or liberated while alive, which is the highest goal of non-dual Shaiva yoga.

It must be noted that the yoga of Kashmir Shaivism does not stop with the attainment of liberation in which the yogi enjoys the nectar of bliss and wonder at the unfolding of the Self but goes beyond it to attain the state of Shiva or Bhairava himself – a state of svātantrya or absolute freedom. With his delusion of duality completely destroyed, he perceives nothing but undifferentiated consciousness, everywhere and always, enjoying the rapture of supreme subjectivity. For the Kashmir Shaivite yogi, thus, moksha does not have the negative connotation of freedom from something but means recognition of one’s essential Shiva nature which was always there but clouded by amnesia. Immersed in the blissfulness of samāvesha, he synthesizes doing and knowing, creates a “bione unity of subject and object” with the help of sattarka, attains sāmarasya or equanimity between
bhoga and moksha and “lives in eternal freedom”. For him what he previously perceived as bonds now become a “sport”.

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“Namu aṇāña shabadasya apiṁnam jñānamarthaḥ” / Tantrāloka-viveka 1:25.

“Ato jñeyasya tattvasya sāmatyenāprathāmakam/
Jñānameva tadajñānam ... ...// Tantrāloka 1:26.

Śvātantra hānibodhasya śvātantryasyābodhat /
Dvidhāṇavam malamidam svasvarūpāpahānantah! Ishvara-pratyabhijñā –kārikā 3.2.4.


Kartaryabodhe kārmam tu ...IPK 3.2.5.

T.A. 1 / 192

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Tantrasāra: 6 / 216.

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Ibid. Trans.

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Ibid.

The Triadic Heart of Shiva, p. 123.