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Languages of the Self: Convergences in Approaches of Ibn ‘Arabī and Abhinavgupta

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There is no state which is not Siva, either in word, object or thought. The Experiencer at all times and in all places abides in the objects experienced.

Spanadakarika 2.4

Abstract

This paper argues that Śaivism and Sufism, when approached through their mystical–metaphysical dimensions, transcend exclusivist theological boundaries and reveal a profound convergence of insight. Drawing on the metaphysical frameworks of Abhinavgupta and Ibn ‘Arabī, it examines key notions such as Infinity, All-Possibility, Divine Relativity, and Māyā to uncover a shared vision of transcendental unity underlying their doctrinal diversity. The study shows that a properly metaphysical interpretation of these principles clarifies the Śaiva understanding of manifestation, divine self-limitation, and the problem of evil, while harmonizing apparently conflicting dualist, monotheist, and non-dualist readings. By recovering the traditional metaphysical foundations common to both traditions, the paper underscores the

need for a comprehensive comparative study of Abhinavagupta and Ibn ‘Arabī to illuminate the evolution of the Rishi–Sufi synthesis in Kashmir.

Keywords: Abhinavagupta, Ibn ‘Arabī, Kashmir, Śaivism, Sufism, Languages of the Self.

Introduction

It is remarkable how similar are the languages of the Self across traditions. It is more remarkable how little is known about this convergence in the discipline of comparative philosophy and mysticism. This remark applies particularly to case of largely ignored Abhinavagupta and towering Sufi metaphysician Ibn ‘Arabī (for academic institutions teaching philosophy and comparative religion and mysticism) and cross current of their thought that shaped unique contours of Kashmir Sufi culture and great experiment in interfaith dialogue that was carried out in Kashmir. The paper attempts to foreground the seminal importance of fateful convergence of traditions of Kashmir Saivism and Sufism and its implications for a host of debates today in the field of comparative philosophy and mysticism. I begin with introductory notes on Ibn Arabi and Abhinavagupta highlighting their catholicity and synthetic though not syncretist vision and then discuss more points of comparison between respective traditions they espoused.

Ibn ‘Arabī: Expositor of Islamic Tradition

Encyclopaedic scholar, mystical philosopher, mystic, theologian, “the Seal of the Muhammeden Saints,” Ibn ‘Arabī, known as the “Greatest Master,” is the most influential Sufi-metaphysician and has been described as the greatest exponent of Divine Love in the history of Islam. His works are arguably the deepest and densest explorations of varied dimensions of the Islamic Tradition. Though an exponent

of mystical unveiling he appropriates the religion of reason of Late Antiquity and builds one of the most imposing “systems” of thought, at once rational, mystical and religious directed towards attaining the supreme aim of *eudaimonia*, *sa'âda* which has been the prerogative of traditional philosophies, religions and wisdom traditions of the world. He is, self avowedly, the heir of the prophetic and mystical wisdom it appears that God hid nothing from him – as it has been remarked about Meister Eckhart – and he is undoubtedly unrivalled in unpacking multidimensional meanings and significance of Islamic tradition. Combining in himself all the traditionally recognized paths to the Ultimate Reality –mysticism, philosophy, poetry and religion – he is a man of all seasons representing Islam’s multidimensional – theological, mystical, metaphysical and aesthetical – genius and is, arguably, the medieval Islam’s greatest contribution to the world. His work has found many admirers and advocates from non-Islamic background. Ibn ‘Arabî has impacted upon history of Islam in so decisive a way that none can separate the two. Last eight hundred years of a great current of Islamic thought may be read as an engagement with some of his key themes. His *Fusus* alone has received more than hundred commentaries by the best minds of Islam. His integral spirituality appropriates all the traditional paths to God, all the basic forms of yoga – bhaktic, jñanic and karmic. Every orthodox tradition can claim him. He has resonances everywhere, in the universe of faiths and philosophies. His notion of man is one of the most comprehensive in world history. Here one may only summarily state some of his key points to allow one an estimate and comparison.

Distinguishing between the Principle (Essence) and manifestation (form), the Absolute and the relative, Ibn ‘Arabî places absoluteness at the level of the Absolute and this means transcendence of purely theological plane. Contradictory claims of different religions have a warrant only at the theological plane. His perspective though rooted in one tradition honours all of the prophetic traditions – known and unknown – and has a place for even those who seem to profess no faith and no morality. He grants that atheists too have a *tawhid* of

their own though it must be a truncated view of it. Man as such is the locus of divine manifestations for him and wherever he and in whatever state God finds him and he is in fact, in a manner unknown to him, seeking to adore God. He disallows condemning sinners such as those addicted to carnal appetites in *Nasab al-khirqah* and warns against comparing mystics famous for piety with those ordinary sinners notorious for moral weaknesses in his *Kitāb al-Nasā'ih*. He rejects elitism that is parasitic on the notion of ego. Only ontological/spiritual ranks are higher or lower and not the individuals themselves possessing those ranks. Approaching from the gnostic rather than the voluntaristic perspective the Akbarian “mysticism of infinity” shows how in our denial of truth we nonetheless affirm it – a curved path too is a straight path (more precisely we don't need to travel at all on any path, to think of taking the straight path is to wrongly imagine a distance between the Real and its “children” which we are) – we are always equally close/distant from the center called God/Reality. All things are on the straight path upon even if it deviates for, as Ibn 'Arabī says in the *Futūhāt*: “... curvature is straight in reality, like the curvature of a bow since the straightness which is desired from it is curvature ... and all movement and rest in existence is divine because it is in the hand of the Real” (Qtd in Twinch, 2004). Akbarian views converge with such conceptions as Jaina theory of Syadvada and postmodern distrust of metanarratives and system-making and deconstruction of pseudo-absolutes and centrism as he formulates his notion of *hairah* and personal lord and ultimate mysteriousness and unknowability/inaccessibility at a rational-empirical plane of the Essence of which everything is the manifestation or symbol. This is a vision of spiritual democracy too profound to be assimilated for even the most catholic and tolerant of theologies. He ingenious reinterpretation of key terms of exclusion such as *kafir*, *fajir*, *zalim* shows his catholicity. Even Iblis is ultimately no outsider. How can there be any exclusion or marginalization in a perspective of complete nondualism Adopting basically metaphysical instead of religious perspective allows him to transcend dogmatic exclusivism that has traditionally been associated with religious perspective and in fact all exclusivism based on

anything less than the Absolute and there is nothing which is Absolute. With him the question is of man and his happiness or felicity and traditional religion, if properly read, is a means to that end rather than an end in itself in the name of which men could be divided or killed. His concerns are basically existential and thus universal to which everyone could relate. He submits to Truth only (that is his definition of a Muslim) and Truth is his only God (for whom he uses the Divine Name *al-Haqq*, the Real), much in the manner of Gandhi who emphasized the Vedantic equation of *Sat* with Brahman. He finds Truth/ Reality of the substance of Joy and one with man and that is the good news he brings to the despairing nihilistic world. He has ultimately no dogmas to preach except openness to the reality without any imposition from conjectural self or mind. He brings the glad tidings that the world is indeed our home or we are the world and we are loved and Love is the be all and end all of all existence, all endeavors. The Real is, it can't and needn't be found or searched – rather it finds us. Wherever one turns there is the face of God as the Quran puts it and Ibn 'Arabī reiterates time and again. Realizing this one becomes a flute and God the flute player. A love affair with the Real commences and one enjoys orgasm with the whole universe. This overwhelming desire for love can't stop at any human substitute as the *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* narrates.

Ibn 'Arabī's perfect man is open to all forms, to infinite disclosures of God which change every instant. He lives moment to moment as he is *abd al-waqt*, the servant of the Instant. For him, as for Zen, ultimately, there is no distinction between the immediate and the ultimate and there is no goal as such, each step is the goal, each moment is the goal. A blade of grass is inwardly the Absolute. There is no particular or exclusive way to salvation because all ways are already blessed. There is no need of salvation because all alienation or bondage is really illusory. All are saved; all are embraced by God because none has ever left God or the Garden of Eden except in his imagination. And it is that cursed mind and imagination which is the bane of man. Man needs to be saved because he suffers from the (terribly real) delusion that he needs to be saved. God is loving

enough (*Wudood*) and strong enough to overcome all resistance on the part of man and willynilly arranges his return to Himself. If everything is in way perfect as it should be what point is in sending prophets and exhorting people to truth? Ibn 'Arabī's commentator who authored *Bursevi Fusūs* answers the question thus: "This one cannot say, because this invitation is the invitation from the Name Misleader (*mudill*) to the Name Guide (*hādī*) to Truth, and the invitation from the Name Compeller (*jabbār*) to the Name Just ('*adl*)." We can add that it is, in general, an invitation from the Names of Majesty to the Names of Beauty, from what necessitates suffering on a human plane to that which engenders peace and bliss. We need to invoke the Names of Beauty to be relieved of the effect of the Names of Majesty. To Ibn 'Arabī are credited, like Sankara, great devotional hymns and invocatory prayers (for instance, *al-Dawr al-a la* (*Hizb al-wiqaya*). For Ibn 'Arabī the great samśaric drama has a climax in universal salvation as Mercy overcomes all resistance in the end. Evil is noughted as it has always been parasitic on good possessing no real existence. The Goodness of God (understood in ontological rather than moral terms) has the final word. Ibn 'Arabī shows how much wisdom and how profound meanings are hidden in dogmas, rituals and narratives of exoteric religion meriting him the title of the Master of secrets. God is both the Outward and the Inward as he often reminds us even if modern man is often sceptical of the beauty of the exterior dimension of religion. All exclusivist ideologies are ultimately blind to all comprehensiveness of the Name Allah which the perfect man represents/appropriates. Their ideologues worship particular names only (postmodernism, for instance, seems to be under the Name *mudhill*). Ibn 'Arabī invites the world torn by ideological conflicts and religious exclusivism to the Muhammedan station of no-station where no particular name/belief/form is absolutized. The only exclusivity or hierarchy that he recognizes is the Quranic one of those who know and those who are ignorant and asks God refuge from being amongst the latter. Piety or righteousness follows from knowledge. Indeed *Avidya* or ignorance is *the* sin in Ibn 'Arabī's view and it is in knowledge that lasting peace and blessedness lies. Suffering is consequence of

avidya. Perversion of will or moral sin too follows ignorance. No man is willfully bad, says Socrates. So sinners are not to be hated but pitied and given eyes to see. This is the task Ibn ‘Arabī proposes himself as a teacher. He doesn’t make a joke of religion and its threat of hell in the name of Unitarianism and vastness of Mercy. That there is *dukkha* in the world, that people are terribly ignorant of the joy and peace that God is, none can dispute. We need the religion’s glad tidings that Reality/ Truth is one with us and thus sorrow can be conquered and ignorance or alienation can be overcome. The wisdom of the prophets is not dispensable as long as man is man and seeks joy, love and peace. What is God but Beauty and Truth (for both Divine Plato (as Ibn ‘Arabī would remember him) and Ibn ‘Arabī and who doesn’t worship them? God is also Bliss (Ananda). Life seeks joy and that is the meaning of life. No absurdist can deny this. Yes Mercy encompasses all things. One can easily understand the Akbarian perception of the universality of worship, a thesis that earned him much notoriety in certain circles. The very choice to be is a mode of worship – for thereby we choose life and Mercy as Ibn ‘Arabī understand it and God is the ground of Life and Mercy.

Abhinavgupta: Expositor of Saivist Tradition

Abhinavgupta, one of the greatest systematizers and traditional commentators, is the principal figure who presented in systematic form the integral tradition of Saivism and made original contributions to a host of disciplines besides literary criticism and aesthetics. He is amongst the most prolific mystical philosophers of history. His systematized nondualistic Kashmir Saivism is a unique school of philosophy that can be compared to any major philosophical school which developed in the world in terms of rigour, consistency, breadth and applications. He is universally acknowledged as the greatest authority of this tradition and by virtue of this fact alone we can treat him as traditional sage/philosopher/metaphysician or inspired expositor of Tradition which is broadly understood in Lord

Nourbourne's words as that which binds man to Heaven. We hardly find traditional authorities speaking anything from their personal point of view but on behalf of Tradition they represent has the same relation to his own tradition of Kashmir Saivism as Nagarjuna has to Mahayana Buddhism, Sankara to Hinduism, Aquinas to Catholicism, Ibn 'Arabī to Islam and Chuang Tzu to Taoism. What distinguishes Abhinavagupta is his great synthesis of different schools of Saivism which prefigure much of other philosophical schools of other traditions. He upheld possibility of liberation to everyone and everywhere and emphatically denied the caste and gender restrictions and the prevalent belief that spiritual practice was only possible in the "pure and monastic" environments. He effectively and emphatically stated that ascetics had no monopoly on the same right and capacity for liberation. His works lay out more than hundred means traditionally transmitted by which this freedom is attained. He elaborated on the received thesis that equated art with fifth Veda and demonstrated how it is akin to other spiritual methods as an aid to spiritual development and thus democratized the otherwise elitist understanding of possibility of enlightenment/liberation to all and sundry. For those not given to the spiritual adventures he has enough room as well and his assertion that stipulates that one can follow one's heart's calling can be considered to be the most daring statement in his spiritual democracy. Even non-Aryans are not excluded. All – including the atheists and slaves of desires – are travellers on the path. All paths are blessed though not equal or the same in terms of man's ultimate fulfilment. All acts are *sadhna* or preparations for it. All are on the straight path as Ibn 'Arabī would like to put it. His doctrine of art in relation to transcendence is one of the best arguments in favour of his catholicity of outlook that follows from one's assimilation of traditional point of view.

Kashmir Saivist philosophy has been seen as intellectually a robust dynamic approach that bypasses typical deconstructive and other criticisms that have problematized more popular formulations of supposedly logocentric Western philosophy and theology. The problems in understanding the Fall, the Sin and Guilt in the Christian

West during last two or three hundred years are also dissolved by turning to refreshing metaphysical approach of nondualistic Saivism. The path to salvation in the age of skepticism through the aesthetic or artistic route is made more comprehensible by turning to treasures of Kashmir Saivist metaphysics and aesthetics. The formula of *bhog* (enjoyment) is yoga (union with the divine) as expounded in Tantric Saivism, so dear to modern mindset that has suffered from the campaign against flesh and body would offer alternative path to transcendence or religion. What has been our legacy seems to have been either forgotten or rejected without examination and what we are losing is something that appears to me a catastrophe. It is instructive to compare Saivist-Sufi heritage that was part of our culture to current situation. As a sage who systematized Saivism as a mystical religion, his legacy has been, to a great extent, lost and can't be easily revived as this requires continuous transmission through a living practicing community. However as vast majority of Kashmiris continue to be Muslims and Ibn 'Arabi's universe of forms continues to be relevant it would not be difficult or unwarranted to strive for reviving him in the capacity of a great bridge builder and providing a framework for dialogue between religions and sects. Both dualistic and non-dualistic schools assert it although the former does not see merger in God and loss of individuality as the necessary end of the path. However, it hardly matters really because God has been conceived as an Ego, as an "I" (and in fact God alone can say "I") by both Sufism and Saivism. Human ego is a distant reflection of this Divine Ego. Man's perfection demands developing/actualizing divine attributes. Jiva or limited self, being a microcosmos, performs all the activities that Siva does, though in a limited manner. Dualists aren't wrong in emphasizing that man never becomes God because it is only the spirit that in united with Him and as body in space and time he remains, do what he may, a slave, a limited self. Self realization is realization of the self, the Divine I within us rather than a mere negative process of self-negation.

Epistemology

The epistemology of Saivism and Sufism taking the direct experience of the divine as the highest knowledge is hardly distinguishable. *Pratybjina* and gnosis of Sufis are fundamentally indistinguishable. In Sufism, as in Kashmir Saivism, the only knower and the only known is God. God is veiled in every form and to be an *aarif* (gnostic) is to see God alone everywhere to see him as the essence of everything, as essentially nondifferent from whatever is, to see Him as the Only Knower. God is the Light of the World. God is *Shahid* (Witness). Metaphysically it is God who alone can be a witness and thus it is He who says the declaration by which one enters in the fold of Islam. God is not a common substratum of every existent but that very essence. On this point monistic Saivism and Unitarian Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī are in agreement. The way to attain the vision of God or Siva is the old and familiar mystical discipline. Here we see yet another important convergence between Sufism and Kashmir Saivism and that concerns exoteric-esoteric division and mutual relationship between them. Abhinavgupta in *Tantraloka* discusses in detail rituals thus conceding importance of exoterism. According to the Kashmir Saivism a traveler (*salik*) on the way to Siva to observe all Vedic rituals. It also respects ritual observance even for those who have reached the other shore. Sufism too has generally been respectful of law though its relativity has also been emphasized and esoterism, according to the traditionalists, is best observed or best fructifies in integral religious traditions which incorporate law or rituals. Libertine spirituality has generally been dismissed by Saivite and Sufi authorities. Epistemology is subsumed by ontology and the goal is to be achieved by transformation of the self/view. The identity of every knower as Siva is a matter of faith that is to be actualized through initiation or other modes. The key notion of *pratybjina* in nondualist Saivism is to be understood as gnosis, as intellectual intuition, a vision of intellect (*Nous*, as distinct from reason or ratio, a supra-individual faculty unclouded by passion).

Absolute / Reality

Svatantra, the freedom of the absolutely independent and “capricious” or self dependent divine will figures prominently in Saivism and Islam. Both Siva and Islamic God are absolved of all conditions and free to do anything He wills. Everything is produced by the mere will of God and that will follows apparently no logic. Ash’arism, the dominant theological school of Islam and which many Sufis have respectfully followed, can also be characterized as emphasizing Svatantra. However perennialists would question theological voluntarism as being the ultimate position of any integral tradition. We must properly situate the Absolute as Will and Absolute as Knowledge in relation to Absolute or Beyond-Being that can’t be characterized at all. Capriciousness can’t be admitted in a system as an Ultimate and unless we read omnipotence as All-Possibility we find ourselves in an embarrassing position.

Zat, Essence, paramśiva, undifferentiated unity of Siva and *Sakti* is above manifestation. This is also called *Ahdiyāt* by Ibn ‘Arabī. The first descent of the Absolute, technically called *Wahdiyāh* and the Light of Muhammad has correspondence with *Sudhaaddhava* or Supramundance Manifestation. *Sadasiva* i.e. ever benevolent, *Isvara* i.e. the Lord and *Vidya* or *Sudhavidya* i.e., pure unlimited knowledge – the three *tattvas* can be seen in Ibn ‘Arabī or al-Jili’s description of Divinity. Names and Attributes and the doctrine of *tanazullat* (Descents of Absolute) belong to the realm of divine relativity. After pure being, the impersonal Absolute, the unmanifest consciousness as we descend to supramundance manifestation, the first descent of the traditional six stages of descent from the Absolute to the material world, we are no longer in the domain of Essence but what is called as Relativity *indivinis*. Personal God of theism is situated here. Here we can see that tussle between theistic (theistic Saivism) and Unitarian schools (Vedānta of Sankara) is misfounded. Theism is true but it falls short of the pure truth, the truth of Beyond-Being. God as the Reality figures in monism but in monism the personal aspect of the Absolute stands affirmed but then transcended as Sankara has

made clear. Theology is different from pure metaphysics. It is unable to fully transcend or avoid anthropomorphization of Divine principle. It is human appropriation of that which is never conceptualizable or experientable or desirable. Names and attributes belong to the perceiving eye rather than to essence in itself. These are the windows to the Divine and these windows are required by man. The Essence has never manifested. None has known it. It is Void for human subject which approaches it conceptually. For the *purusa*, the limited experient, the subject of cognition, situated in *Asuidhaaddhva* or mundane manifestation where Maya reigns the subject-object duality operates. Godhead is never approachable. It is approachable when we rise above all Relativity, when individuality is wholly transcended, when God alone remains and the separate human subject is gone. It is only God's eye that can see God as the Sufi authorities such as AbuYazid assert. *Parmsiva* as *prakasa* or luminous consciousness is Beyond-Being, *Zat-uz-zat*. Self consciousness or pure I consciousness or *Vimarsa* is a movement or descent of the Absolute. The Supreme Principle cannot be spoken as Ego but as soon as we take manifestation into consideration and speak of the world in relation to the Absolute we need to speak in terms of self-consciousness and then desire to manifest. *Vimarsa* assumes three forms, viz., going out of itself (*srsti*), manifesting its continued existence (*sthiti*) and then returning to itself (*samhara*). Pure Being does not know all this. It is Unmanifest. In it we cannot speak of the Spanda (vibration) or the *iccha* of any kind. When certain authors speak of the ultimate as Ego as self with five fold functions they commit category mistake. The Beyond-Being is neither creator nor preserver nor destroyer nor revealer. One needs to be very clear about the distinction between Being and Beyond-Being as otherwise we mix up theology with metaphysics. Anthropomorphic parmatma or paramśiva is monstrosity as traditionalists note. Without the crucial notion of relatively Absolute (that term we owe to Schuon) we make a mess of Saivism. A host of confusions and rivalries between different schools of Saivism and Muslim theology are put in a proper context by keeping these things in view. Dualist schools are correct descriptions for all practical purposes. However, they stop short of

pure metaphysics but this fact hardly affects efficacy of their realizational path. Siddhanta Saivism does take the traveler in proximity of the Lord though the merger doesn't occur. Seen from one angle, merger never occurs as long as existentiating dimension that is donned by the servant remains. Finitude in certain respects is never transcended. The servant-Lord polarity is transcended both in Sufism and Kashmir Saivism but Relativity is not negated at its own level when Absolute is approached. The servant remains the servant how far a Saivite or a Sufi may ascend to Lord as Ibn 'Arabī maintains. Unitarians never compromise on divine transcendence. Consistent dualism faces insurmountable problems and it is pure metaphysics which is non-dualist that resolves them. But dualism concerns itself to make sense of antimonies of life encountered at every point of time. The following remarks by Ibn 'Arabī express the Unity in clear terms.

When the mystery of the oneness of the soul and the Divine is revealed to you, you will understand that you are no other than God. ... Then you will see all your actions to be His actions and all your attributes to be His attributes and your essence to be His essence.

... Thus, instead of [your own] essence, there is the essence of God and in place of [your own] attributes, there are the attributes of God. He who knows himself sees his whole existence to be the Divine existence, but does not experience that any change has taken place in his own nature or qualities. For when you know yourself, your sense of a limited identity vanishes, and you know that you and God are one and the same
(Landau, 1959; pp. 83-84).

Affirmative Transcendence

Properly contextualized Tantricism is only a concrete application of metaphysics of affirmative transcendence. In Kaliyuga ascetic spirituality is not an attractive option for many. So Sufism with its

music and dance and dynamic meditations and Tantric Saivism with its positive appropriation of pleasures of the world in the cause of the spirit seem to be efficacious for many. Islam had never endorsed asceticism understood as rejection of pleasures of the world. Sexual experience gives a foretaste of the bliss of union with God according to such Sufi authorities as Ghazali. All pleasurable experiences are celebrated as gifts from heaven. Islam rejects traditional soul-body dualism and takes the material world as symbol (*ayat*) of God. *Purusa-Prakiti* dualism seen in *Sankhya-yoga* is challenged by Tantrism. Islam sees the world as charged with the grandeur of God. It only asks to see everything temporal in the light of Eternity, with the eyes of God or what is called as being a witness. It means enjoying everything in God and not outside God which it sees as sin or transgression. This is not unlike Tantric position as understood by masters like Abhinavagupta. In fact, even Christian metaphysicians and mystics like Eckhart would accept all enjoyments if enjoyed in God. Choiceless awareness is what seeing with the knower's (*aarif's*) eyes is. *Zikr* or *Japa* is geared towards developing that contemplative vision. Inward turning that Sufism cultivates is not opposed to lawful enjoyment of senses. Detachment or poverty – the virtue emphasized by Islam – is not identical with renunciation and shutting of senses. For Islam Muhammad symbolizes the positivity of the world of manifestation. Muslims are enjoined to bless the prophet and that means blessing the existence. *Tawhid* understood metaphysically implies oneness of existence. The whole world is an enchanted garden, a reflection of the Edenic Garden, a veritable sanctuary, a mosque, a theophany, or in Saivist terms garden of bliss. It is God's visible face (*az-Zahir*). Islam consecrates the world of matter rather than dismisses it as illusory or seductive temptress. Islam, like Tantrism, does not see any contradiction between the pleasures of the body and the esoteric liberation. Aesthetic pleasure, as an activity of the senses, signifies the pulsation of the cosmic consciousness of Siva. Islamic aesthetics based on God's beauty and Sufi celebration of nature of earthy symbols of the Beloved, the haunting music of Sufi verse and beauty of Islamic architecture all are the feast of senses. Islamic metaphysics gives important place to God as *Jameel*

(Beautiful). Ibn ‘Arabī has devoted much energy to explicating this. Sufis have been criticized for venerating earthy beauty of women and young boys. Ibn ‘Arabī’s case had caused a scandal. From the Sufi metaphysical viewpoint God is the real enjoyer all experience. He is the only Beauty that there is. He is Bliss. The vision of God is a kind of highest aesthetic pleasure so Sufis take almost a Tantric view of pleasure (*bhoga*).

Tantric celebration of the world of matter reflects the metaphysical view that the world is the extension (*Prasara*) or emission (*visarga*) of the Absolute. The world is real being grounded in the Absolute. Like Tantrism Islam does not take a passive view of the Absolute. Islam, like Kashmir Saivism/Tantrism foregrounds positive divine unlike Buddhism. Allah’s personal dimension is much foregrounded in the Quran. All this has direct consequence in affirmation of human individuality. Dynamism inherent in the Islamic conception of deity is reflected also in Islam’s eulogization of change as sign of God. Islam sees time as a moving image of Eternity of God. Like Kashmir Saivism which interprets the non-dual Absolute in terms of I-consciousness Islamic theism looks at Reality in personal terms. Sufism, even though sharing a Unitarian (or monistic) metaphysics has produced intensely devotional poetry that takes God as a Person, the Beloved with whom the over communes. Sufi and Tantric absolutisms are theistic because the Absolute is predicated with such powers as will, knowledge and action. Islamic and Tantric theisms find best expression in their idea of liberation. They do not look at liberation as an escape from life in the world. “I” consciousness expresses itself through its energetic powers, in the form of the subject, means of experience and the object of experience at all the levels of existence. Kashmir Saivism has taken bipolar view of the Absolute the couple of Siva and *Sakti*. The dynamic aspect implies an affirmative view of the world.

Sufism accepts neither pure identity nor pure ‘otherness.’ Dualistic schools of Saivism reject the first alternative of pure identity while as the Unitarian interpretation is a critique of the alternative of pure

otherness. Sufi position subsumes the essential position of Kashmir Saivism as a whole which maintains simultaneous transcendence and immanence of the divine principle. Approaching the issue keeping in consideration the distinction between mystical and metaphysical realization and the distinction between soul and Spirit on which the perennialists stress resolves the apparent conflict between different Saivite and Sufi schools on this key issue.

Sufi metaphysicians have rejected the view that attributes are really separate from essence. The Trika view is similar. For the Trika attribute is the very being of the substance. The power of knowledge, for instance, constitutes the very essence of the substance. The distinction between the substance (or the Essence for the Sufis) and attributes is an imaginary one. The various powers of the Absolute are aspects of the Absolute. In the language of the Trika, these powers are “the *vimarsa* or the *Svantantra Sakti* of the Absolute.”

Diversity and multiplicity or the world of difference does find its origin and end in the non-dual Absolute and is in essence that non-dual Reality but that does not mean that the world of dualities and Maya are unreal epistemically if not ontologically. Both Saivism and Sufism take the world of name and form, the world of Maya, the world of relativity as real at its own plane, as the expression or manifestation of the Real. The human ego too has its metaphysical foundation in the Divine “I am.” From a strictly Unitarian perspective the world of colour and smell almost disappears as illusion, as it is deceptive appearance, as shadow. Extreme subjective idealism such as that of Vijñānavāda Buddhism encounters many problems that Kashmir Saivism or Sufism which take the world as real doesn't. The fact that the eternal consciousness is ever active, *Nityodita*, ever wake in the Quranic phrase, that there is always *spanda* or vibration in it is catered by the metaphysical understanding of All-Possibility and infinitude. God creates not as if He had a choice not to create, as if He decides at some particular whim or *iccha*. It is His very nature to manifest. There is no creation from His perspective. Divine Nature being Infinite necessarily actualizes possible existences. The further

question as to why the Self manifests the *abhasa* is dismissed by Abhinavgupta who says that the nature of a thing can't be questioned. It is absurd to ask why fire burns. To burn belongs to the very nature of fire and so to manifest without what lies within is the very nature of the Self. Similar argument is put forward in Sufism in explaining the rationale of qualities of things and the tricky – misleading – question of why of existence.

Transcendence of God is not compromised in either Sufism or Trika. The creation of the world doesn't at all infringe on Divine transcendence. However, "pantheism" is qualified by simultaneous affirmation of transcendence rather than outrightly negated at its own place. The self realization or Recognition has the prerequisite of self-negation. This is fundamental enunciation of all religions and mysticism. Both dualistic and non-dualistic schools assert it although the former does not see merger in God and loss of individuality as the necessary end of the path. However, it hardly matters really because God has been conceived as an Ego, as an "I" (and in fact God alone can say "I") by both Sufism and Saivism. Human ego is a distant reflection of this Divine Ego. Man's perfection demands developing divine attributes. *Jiva* or limited self, being a microcosmos performs all the activities that Siva does, though in a limited manner. Dualists aren't wrong in emphasizing that man never becomes God because it is only the spirit that is united with Him and as body in space and time he remains, do what he may, a contingent creature, a limited self. Self realization is realization of the Divine I within us rather than a mere negative process of self-negation.

Technique

Most of the Sufi techniques have equivalents in Saiva mysticism. *Japa*, *pranayamas*, *mudras*, night vigils, fasting, *vratas* or vows, disciple-guru (Sheikh) relationship are common to both Sufism and Saivism and within them between their different schools.

Metaphysics of Pen and Point

One can point out to numerous correspondences between doctrines or symbols of respective traditions of Saivism and Sufism. Frithjof Schuon, the great exponent of *Sophia Perennis* in the twentieth century, sees the symbol of *Shiv linga* and Quranic Calamus or Pen mentioned in the first five revealed verses of the Quran. The exoteric authorities are unaware of the significance of such correspondences. A few points may suffice here. *Paravac* is the unmanifest Sakti or Logos or cosmic ideation. The Sufi conception of the Light of Muhammad is also as Logos, the Principle of manifestation. *Prakasa* corresponds to the light of Muhammad. *Prakasa*, literally light, is the principle of Self-revelation, the principle by which everything else is known. The concept of *bindu*, a metaphysical point, creative force compacted into a point, a point in which lies undifferentiated Reality 'a' and 'na' joined into *aha* together sum up the entire manifestation. 'A' represents Siva, 'na' represents *Sakti*. This point, *anusvara* indicates the fact that Siva in spite of the manifestation of the universe remains undivided. Such speculations correspond with a Prophetic tradition about the point of *Ba* of *Bismillah*, and Sufis have made good use of this imagery. Ibn 'Arabī in his *Meccan Revelations* devotes many chapters to explication of the same point and derives cosmos from the point representing Absolute.

Efficacy of Mantras

The use of mantras and belief in their deeper significance and potency is common to Saivism and Sufism. According to the Tantrism there is a correspondence between the *para-sakti* the ultimate divine creative power and the *paravak* which is the ultimate divine word bringing about the sum total or words. Mantras can establish contact with the various *sakties* or powers. The mystic and astrological symbolism of words and their healing power has been common to Sufis and Savites, especially Tantric Savites.

Why Existence?

Sufism gives the same reason for the existence of universe that Saivism has given. Abhnivgupta in his Bodhapanchadashika seems to echo the famous Prophetic tradition that Sufis are fond of which states that “I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known and so created the world.” To quote him “The collective state of the universe is His Supreme Energy (*Sakti*), which He created in order to recognize His own nature.”

To the tricky question if all is Siva where from has come ignorance Trika reply is quite straight forward. It is the Lord himself who is the cause of ignorance. The Lord, while concealing his divine nature appears as bound self which, on account of ignorance thinks of itself as being different from everything that is in the world as well as from the Lord. Islam also takes the Lord to be responsible for leading servants astray. Ibn ‘Arabī’s explication of the problem of disbelief or ignorance is superb and converges with Saiva view.

More Correspondences

In Pasputism there are practices similar to those used by the sect of Malamatya of Sufis. To shed off one’s ego or self-esteem which is the greatest veil between man and God the *Sadhaka* poses to behave in public in such a manner outwardly as will incur censure and insults. However inwardly the Sadhana must be pure, self controlled and reasonable.

Though Saiva sects differ from each other in the concept of moksha they unanimously acknowledge *bhakti* as the path to *moksha*. It is *bhakti* that is the royal road to God in Sufism.

Problems with Philosophy and Theology

Philosophical reduction of metaphysical content is as dangerous and unwarranted as that of theological appropriation or reduction. To discuss Saivism as a philosophical school in the manner of modern academic discipline of philosophy and to use the terms current from Aristotle in the Western philosophical tradition that is largely oblivious of their complete metaphysic which is the prerogative of the East as has been done in many studies is a gross error and ends in endless confusion rather than a meaningful comparative dialogue. Like Indian *darsanas* which again are mistranslated as philosophical schools Saivism represents an alternative *darsana*, fundamentally not different from Vedānta and can't be discussed in the terms of modern Western philosophical framework. Philosophy here is tied to *moksha* ideal and is not a merely rational treatment of the question. The traditionalists have revolted against using such terms as pantheism or even monism in describing different *darsanas*. To assert that Saivism is theistic while as absolutistic Vedānta is not is to misunderstand both. Theism is put in the proper perspective with both its limitations and strengths by the traditionalists who see it as a translation though not an exact one or always indispensable one of the truths of pure metaphysics. Theology caters to sentimentality and individual variation. Pure metaphysics transcends all individualistic or sentimental appropriations. Theism is transcended by esoterism and metaphysics. The Absolute can't be correctly described in theistic terms. It is transtheist. In fact all integral traditions including all Semitic religions approached from a metaphysical perspective are seen to be rooted in the Absolute and thus really absolutistic or transtheistic. However all those traditions that are generally supposed to be nontheistic or transtheistic or absolutistic don't exclude or delegitimize a theistic reading. Theism stands appropriated by them though clearly transcended. So theistic-absolutistic dichotomy is deconstructed in all religious traditions. A clarification of proper relationship between theology and metaphysics on one hand and philosophy and metaphysics on the other hand is crucial to a study of both Sufism and Saivism. Without crucial distinctions between soul

and spirit, reason and intellect, Being and Beyond-Being, God and Godhead we can't properly understand various theological, philosophical and metaphysical dimensions of Saivism.

Integral Yoga

Kashmir Saivism has given three hierarchical categories of *sadhnas* or ways called *upayas* which are different possible ways to spiritual realization. These are *anavopaya* or *kriyapaya* which includes all physical and external forms of worship and *sadhna*, *shaktipaya* or *jnanapaya* which comprises all mental forms of *sadhna* such as meditations, *sambhavupaya* or *icchopaya*, contains all spiritual *sadhnas* such as surrender of the ego, realization of universal unity. Sufism, as an integral tradition, combines all these ways. It recognizes the value of *kriyapaya* in its respect for the exoteric discipline and rituals. Its emphasis on devotion, surrender, *fana*, *raza*(acceptance of divine will) and love appropriates *sambhupaya*. Its retreats and *zikrs* and different meditational techniques and its result in gnosis constitute *jnanupaya*. Sufism combines in itself *bhakti* yoga, *jnana* yoga and karma yoga. All integral traditions cater to different types of mentalities and sensibilities. Advocacy of different methods in both Saivism and Sufism shows their integral synthetic character. It is no wonder that Abhinavgupta had so many teachers of different schools and he could put all of them in perspective. Great sages and traditional philosophers of other traditions have similarly been great assimilators. Ibn 'Arabī's view of other paths and recognition of truth in every belief – and of course ultimately arguing for transcendence of all beliefs and actions – is a subtle epistemological move that could be appreciated in Abhinavguptan scheme.

Historical Concordance

The present attempt at comparison is not conceived on the basis of mere abstraction severed from historical reality. It is not to cash on certain similarities between two divergent traditions but understand how, historically speaking, Sufism came to be accepted by the masses just a couple of centuries after great thinkers of Kashmir Saivism were busy consolidating the tradition. I see it as really a continuation of Saivist heritage. Reshis of Kashmir assimilated key terms and even many practices of indigenous Saivism and it could do so easily because of inherent catholicity and absorption power of Sufism. To this day the debate whether Lalla was a Saivite or a Muslim is not settled. This only shows that saints transcend theological/philosophical labels. The fact that Nuruddin and Lalla could co-exist and the former ask God to give him the same knowledge that He gave to Lalla shows Saivism and Sufism are, not only metaphysically or esoterically but have also been in concrete history, mutually compatible. In fact Kashmir history shows us Saivism fertilizing the culture of Kashmir even after its supposed oblivion in history. It is no wonder that for most people the message of Nooruddin and Lalla is hardly distinguishable. Kashmir Saivism comes close to Islamic metaphysical doctrines and "*wahdat al-wajoodi*" thought and that accounts for Lalla being at home in either of them. Sufi poets to this day have been liberally appropriating typical Saivist terminology.

Conclusion

Thus, we have argued that Saivism and Sufism resist reduction into exclusivist theological shibboleths and are best comparable on mystical-metaphysical planes. Their ethics is hardly distinguishable. Accepting metaphysical reading of key theological notions and eschatological data presented in the scriptures (that both Ibn 'Arabī and Abhinavagupta plead for) we can decipher a fundamental transcendental unity between doctrinally divergent universes of

Islam and Saivism. The proper understanding of the metaphysical notion of Infinity and All-Possibility and Divine Relativity (that is metaphysical understanding of Maya) that we find in perennialists or Ibn ‘Arabī will solve many tricky problems of usual presentations of Saivism especially the problem of manifestation and what is called as Saiva falling to sleep and that out of His own free will limiting Himself in the form of soul and also the problem of evil. Unearthing of pure traditional metaphysical foundation of Saivism will also resolve the tension between the apparently conflicting dualist, monotheist and nondualist or “monist” interpretations or schools of Saivism and relation between Vedanta and Saivism and with Sufism. So far, no comprehensive comparative study of Abhinavagupta and Ibn ‘Arabī has been published. Such type of work is quite necessary to understand evolution of Reshi-Sufi tradition in Kashmir.

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