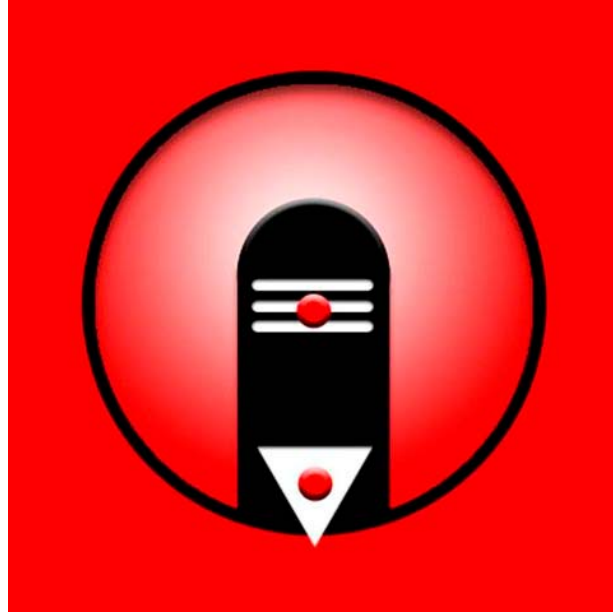


# ***PRATYABHIJNAKARIKA***



**‘The Doctrine of Recognition’  
(*Pratyabhijna*) Re-Cognised**

**Acharya Peter Wilberg**

**2008**

**“I who have obtained, thanks to the benevolence of the Supreme Lord, the benefits that derive from being His servant – a state it is very difficult to achieve – being ashamed of my solitary success, shall by the method that will here be described, enable the whole of humanity to recognise their Lord, in order to gain my complete fulfilment through the attainment also by them of the Supreme Reality.”**

Introduction to the *Ishvarapratyabhijnakarika* of Utpaladeva,  
as translated by Raffaele Torrella, Motilal Banarsidass, 1994

**“...as the multiplicity of all things are cognitively apprehended in awareness, so they exist. This is because Being depends on Awareness.”**

Abhinavagupta *Ishvarapratyabhijnavimarshini*

## Acknowledgements

... to David Peter Lawrence, without whose sensitive and in-depth insights<sup>1</sup> into the doctrine of Divine Self-Recognition enunciated by Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, and its place in Kashmiri Shaiva philosophy, the new summation of this doctrine in the *karika* that follow would not have been inspired.

... to Andrew Gara, without whose appreciation of my 'solitary success' and its potential significance for 'the whole of humanity' I would not have been so quickly inspired to write these *karika*.

Peter Wilberg

## Introduction

Given Abhinavagupta's assertion that "the being of things that are recognised in awareness in turn depends on awareness" I have always felt dissatisfied with labelling Kashmiri Shaivist theology as a form of 'monistic theism'. For this is a term which, though used in a way that is usually left vague and undefined, nevertheless implies that ultimate reality (*Anuttara*) and with it, the ultimate nature of Divinity, is constituted by a singular and supreme *being* rather than by a supreme *awareness* of the sort upon which "the being of all things" – and thus *all beings* – "depend" as their source and essence. It is because of this discomfort that I came to understand *all* things as sentient or aware beings, whilst at the same time recognising all 'beings' to be *individualised portions, expressions or personifications* of a divine or ultimate *awareness* – one that is *not itself a being* and that does not have or 'possess' awareness but rather *is* awareness, absolute and unbounded. It is in this way also that I formulated the notion of *subjectivity without a subject* to define the very essence of awareness as such in its ultimate and divine nature. At the same time however, I was aware that both Abhinavagupta himself and his principle teachers and disciples tended more readily to speak of the divine (*Shiva*) as a singular and supreme 'subject' or 'I' (implying a type of supreme being) whilst at the same time *qualifying* this very notion with the oft-repeated assertion that this 'I' is one that "has the nature of awareness". The linguistic and conceptual *ambivalence* as to whether the *supreme* subject is a 'subject' like any other in the sense of 'possessing' awareness (for example as a *Shakti* or power of *Shiva*) remains - since to speak of the supreme subject or 'I' as 'having the nature of awareness' suggests rather that it does not 'have' but 'is' awareness. Yet the notion of *Shiva* 'being' awareness rather than 'having' awareness raises again the fundamental question of the relation and relative primordality - or equiprimordality - of Being and Awareness as such. Here, Abhinavagupta's recognition of the dependence of Being on Awareness confirmed my understanding - shared with other thinkers such as J.L. Mehta - that part of the philosophical uniqueness of Kashmiri Shaivist theology lies in the way in which, in contrast to that of Vedanta, it privileges Awareness (*Chit*) over Being (*Sat*) whilst at the same time recognising their inseparability, and therefore by implication, their *equiprimordality*. It was in search of a satisfactory way of expressing the 'non-duality' of Being and Awareness, and in this way also the non-duality of the notions of 'monistic theism' on the one hand and what could be termed 'absolute subjectivism or 'noetic absolutism' on the other (the principle of subjectivity without a subject) that I have found a closer examination and deeper way of thinking the so-called 'Doctrine of Recognition' most useful - in a way that the following *karika* seek to articulate.

## Pratyabhijnakarika

The pure radiant light (*Prakasha*) of the ultimate awareness that is the ‘Supreme Reality’ (*Anuttara*) is what first brings the colourations of all things to light out of colourless darkness, that womb of inexhaustible potentiality that is the Great Goddess (*Mahadevi*).

The pure radiant light of the ultimate awareness is that which, by pervading all things, allows all things to experience and revel in their unique individual tints or colourations.

Without the pure, radiant light of the ultimate awareness to illuminate its individual colouration, nothing would be aware of being that colour - nothing would be aware of being.

The being of all things is their individuality – comparable to a unique colouration of awareness.

The radiant light of the ultimate awareness is that which brings to light, pervades and shines through the infinitely differentiated unique tints or colouration of all things.

Like ‘white’ light which contains all colours, the ultimate awareness *recognises* itself in all its infinite colourations, in all beings.

It recognises itself not just *as* those individual colourations or beings however, but as that pure ‘colourless’ light which is not bound to any colour. For only a pure ‘full spectrum light’ can be filtered or reflected as any *specific* colour or wavelength of light.

The self-recognition (*Vimarsha*) of the pure, radiant light of awareness (*Prakasha*) in all its infinite hues is what alone gives everything an awareness of its own individual hue - an awareness of its *individual* being or ‘selfhood’.

The self-recognition of the pure, radiant light of awareness in its own *absolute purity* however - as that which alone allows it to shine and manifest in all its infinitely differentiated hues - is its *supreme self-hood* or 'I-consciousness'.

The recognition by all things of the pure light of awareness as that which alone *allows* them to shine in their individual hues is their own true *self-recognition* - their recognition of that pure light as their divine 'I' or self.

The recognition *by* all things of the pure light of awareness as their divine self is at the same time the self-recognition *of* that light itself.

'Our' process of coming to *recognise* our selves as identical with the supreme 'I'-consciousness or selfhood of the ultimate awareness, is also *its self-recognition* - albeit a self-recognition whose process is already and eternally *complete*.

*Anuttara*, the absolute or ultimate reality, is not God in the sense of a being or self 'with' awareness. It does not 'have' or 'possess' awareness but *is* awareness - ultimate, absolute and unbounded.

The very *essence* of awareness however, is its *recognitive* character, its character of recognising itself in all things, recognising them as manifestations and reflections of its light.

The recognitive character of awareness is Shiva-Shakti, the relation of inseparable distinction between pure awareness (Shiva) and its self-recognition in all that there is to be aware *of* (Shakti).

The Self-recognition of Shiva is itself a Supreme Shakti - the Shakti by which awareness experiences itself as the Supreme Self.

Thus, whilst the "Supreme Reality" or ultimate awareness called *Anuttara* is not 'God' but 'Godhead', it is nevertheless inseparable from its own 'Godhood'. For its 'Divine Self-Recognition' is a recognitive awareness of 'itself' *as* 'God' or "Supreme Lord".

The self-recognition of the light of the ultimate awareness in and as all things *is* the recognition of its own 'Selfhood', 'Divinity', 'Godhood' or 'Lordship'.

That is why 'The Doctrine of Recognition' is a doctrine of 'Divine Self-Recognition'.

The Doctrine of Recognition is also innately self-reflexive, being *itself* the recognition that both thoughts and things themselves are reflections and manifestations of the light of a Divine Awareness - which can thus recognise itself in them all.

Any doctrine is necessarily couched in discriminatory verbal concepts (*Vikalpa*). Yet verbal concepts (*Vikalpa*) are not just a form of 'reflective' or 'reflected' awareness - the mental mirror or reflection of a non-verbal and a-conceptual awareness (*Nirvikalpa*).

Instead, each concept *is* an awareness itself - a *recognitive awareness* of something. Words and concepts are, in themselves, the *recognition* of a *wordless, a-conceptual awareness*.

Thus the verbal thought or 'judgement' that 'I am now walking' is not merely the mental reflection in words of a wordless awareness of walking. Instead the mental words and intellectual judgement are themselves a *recognition* of that wordless awareness - in the form of a *recognitive judgement*.

Since the *recognitive awareness* of all things is identical with the *self-recognition* of the ultimate awareness in and through all things, it is *recognitive awareness as such* that constitutes our unity with the divine.

Since every verbal concept *is* a recognitive awareness, the greater the discrimination, differentiation and refinement of awareness in words and concepts, the more deeply we are lead into an experience of pure, wordless and a-conceptual awareness.

In particular, the more refined our concept is of the *recognitive character* of awareness, the more this *conceptual awareness* will itself transform itself into a pure, *a-conceptual experience* of Divine Self-Recognition.

Therefore the doctrine of ‘Divine Self-Recognition’ is both *means and end* – being an expression of its truth, which, if fully refined and understood, is at the same time an experience of that truth and no mere ‘means’ to such an experience.

The doctrine of Divine Self-Recognition, being itself a *medium* of Divine Self-Recognition, is thus no mere artificially constructed *human* doctrine, but rather both the human revelation and human realisation of its own Divine Truth.

“... only the foolish strive to establish or deny the Lord.” *Utpaladeva*

Thus re-cognised, the doctrine of recognition transcends the duality between understanding the divine (*Shiva*) as an absolute subject that is ‘Lord’ or ‘God’ (‘monistic theism’) or as a ‘Godhead’ (*Anuttara*) which is nothing but ‘absolute subjectivity’ - an ultimate, singular, non-theistic awareness (‘noetic absolutism’ or ‘nootheism’) that is at the same time personified in multiple gods (‘monistic polytheism’).

Human beings too are, in their essence, both ‘Gods’ and ‘God’ – being *unique portions and personifications* (‘Gods’) of the ultimate or divine awareness *in its entirety* (‘God’). Central to *its* nature therefore, is its innate power to personify itself in countless forms.

This being the case, even in its ultimate nature as ‘subjectivity without a subject’, (*Anuttara*) the Supreme Reality that is ‘Divinity’ is neither a person nor a purely ‘impersonal’ Godhead - for it recognises itself in all its personifications.

#### References:

1. Lawrence, David Peter *Rediscovering God with Transcendental Argument, A Contemporary Interpretation of Monistic Kashmiri Shaiva Philosophy* State University of New York Press, 1999