

Trika Saivism

Trika Saivism is a sect that developed in Kashmir around 8th-9th century, but it is not certain that it had its origins there. Prior to the 8th century, Kashmir has been an important Buddhist cultural center. In this region, many Asian religions intersected and impacted each other over the years. Political expansion and cultural consolidation made Kashmir fertile for Saivism in the 8th and 9th century. Saivism in the area was reconsolidated and took two main directions: one led by Vasagupta, focusing on the “vibration” of Siva and his consciousness; and the other, led by Somananta dealing with the idea of “recognition”. These two traditions taken together are referred to as Trika. In the 10th and 11th centuries, right before Kashmir came under the influence of Muslims, Trika Saivism reached its peak under Abhinavagupta. (see Larson* 372-3)

As its name indicates, the god that is worshiped in this religious philosophy is Siva. Although Kashmir Saivism is often equated with the Trika School, there are actually several Siva schools that developed in Kashmir. (see Benard 372). Trika is a school of monistic idealism, which refers to Consciousness being the one and only reality. It teaches that one can find Siva’s omnipresence at the intersection between any two states of awareness, no matter how opposite they appear to be. The concept of Siva as Consciousness is a critique of Advaita Vedanta and other Vedic traditions. It draws from teachings from *srutis* such as the *Bhairava Tantra* [tantras on meditation], the *Siva Sutras* [also known as *Mahesvara Sutras*, revealed to Panini by Siva in his sleep; probably one of the most important texts of Kashmir Saivism] and *Gitartha Samgraha* [this translation of *Bhagavat Gita* helps explain its external meaning and the effects it has on the individual’s inner well-being]. The primary god in Trika Saivism is Paramasiva, which means “Supreme Auspiciousness”, which also has an active and creative

side, named Sakti. Siva, through his many functions, liberates polluted souls by making them pure and able to achieve *moksa*. (see Good 281).

Eastern sages focus on certain crucial functions of consciousness: sustenance, reabsorption, creation, concealment and revelation. Absolute Consciousness or Siva is interpreted as active and dynamic, rather than a passive and non-interfering entity, such as found in Buddhism or other philosophical systems. For instance, the positive outcome that Siva has on our consciousness and livelihood, contrasts with the concepts of “emptiness” and “illusion” found in Buddhist metaphysics. Kashmir Saivism expands on the two concepts of “vibration” and “recognition”. Siva resonates through all of our activities and we must eventually “recognize that our nature and the whole world is nothing else than the Absolute Consciousness or Siva (see Larson 259). Abhinavagupta taught that Absolute Consciousness or Siva is reflected in our every action and leads to a fuller and more concrete understanding of the meaning of our life. In context, the Advaita school uses language to move one towards a more abstract understanding of consciousness (see Larson* 383)

Vasagupta wrote out the Kashmiri philosophies a few centuries after Sankara formed his Advaita Vedanta school. Although both are non-dualist and similar at a first glance, after a closer examination we can find several key distinctions. Trika Saivism focuses on the Absolute as all encompassing beings (i.e, Siva), rather than on Brahman which is uncharacterizable. They also perceive everyday experiences as real, not as *maya* or illusion, as according to Advaita Vedanta. The textual authorities in Trika Saivism are the Saiva Agamas, not the triad of the *Vedanta Sutras*, the *Upanisads* and the *Bhagavagita*, like in the case of Sankara’s school. Because Kashmir Saivism is a non-dualist school, they focus more on internalized contemplation and not as much on external displays of devotion (see Davis 425).

The founder of Trika Saivism was Vasugupta and the most influential teacher was Abhinavagupta whose writings include the *Tantraloka*. These were only some of the sages who developed the “Philosophy of Recognition”, also known as the Pratyabhijna Darsana. They perceive Siva not as the destroyer god, as he is known by most people, but as a presence that is within all of us and in everything we do. According to Abhinavagupta, the main reason for human suffering is our own ignorance, which is not an “illusion” as it is understood in Buddhism and Vedanta teachings. Trika Saivas refer to ignorance as incomplete knowledge. We need to expand our consciousness to understand the cause for our ignorance in order to surpass it. Once a person gains insight and is one with Siva, only then can he or she achieve *moksa*, or ultimate liberation. This is liberation not only from the world, but also from one’s own limited nature, freeing one to reflect the intentions of Siva through their own actions. In order to gain universal knowledge and leave behind one’s selfish nature, Abhinavagupta offers four paths together with certain tantric rituals that accompany these (see Wulff 675-6).

The Tantraloka expands on all three branches of non-dual Kashmir Saivism: Agama, Spanda and Pratyabhijna, but in a synthesized form. Although Vasugupta played the key role in developing the basic tenets of Trika, his follower, Abhinavagupta is generally recognized as the more influential figure in Kashmir Saivism. Though centuries of development, the non-dualist Kashmir Saivism increasingly focused on Siva, rather than all the other deities in the Hindu pantheon. Research does not uncover a linear progression of Siva groups, making it difficult to trace their historical development.

There have been no rituals or traditions found in any form of text left behind from these Saiviste groups. The only inscriptions left behind have been the ones on temples or the Siva symbol itself, seen as a influential and frightful figure.

Although it rejected the world view of other influential traditions at the time, such as Buddhism, for example, Trika still incorporated some aspects into its rituals or beliefs. Many of the texts that they drew their concepts from were dualistic, so Trika reinterpreted them in a non-dualistic manner and then incorporated them into Saivism.

In Kashmir, there was more than one form of Saivism. Among these were: Trika, Kula and Krama. Trika and Kaula are Siva-oriented, whereas Krama is Sakti oriented. Kula and Krama are both tantric systems giving them a mystical aspect and making Saivism be understood as monistic. To them the subject of reality relative, hence taking a dualistic or non-dualistic stance is irrelevant. Kula and Trika seek immediate self-realization which make it harder to achieve, according to Krama supporters.

Trika Saivism originally was a cremation cult, with monistic basis which appealed to the Brahmins and they reinterpreted it in a non-dualistic way according to Hindu main traditions.

REFERENCES

- Davis, Richard (1990) "The Doctrine of Vibration: An Analysis of the Doctrines and Practices of Kashmir Shaivism". *History of Religion*
- Good, Anthony (2002) "Congealing Divinity: Time, Worship and Kinship in South Indian Hinduism". *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*
- Larson, Gerald James (1976) "The Aesthetic (Rasasvada) and the Religious (Brahmasvada) in Abhinavagupta's Kashmir Saivism". *Philosophy East and West*
- Larson, Gerald James(1997) "Kashmir Saivism: The Central Philosophy of Tantrism". *Philosophy East and West*.
- Wulff, Donna M. (1986) "Religion in a New Mode: The Convergence of the Aesthetic and the Religious in Medieval India". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.

Related Topics for Further Investigation:

Advaita school

Sankara

Bhairava Tantras

Somananta

Abhinavagupta

Websites related to topic

<http://www.lorinroche.com/page13/page13.html>

<http://www.exoticindiaart.com/book/details/IDD714/>

Written by Ana Mosoi (Spring 2008) who is solely responsible for its content