

Experiencing the Goddess as the Phases of One's Own Awareness: An Introduction to the Kashmirian *Krama* through the writings of Śrī Nāga

by Christopher Tompkins, © 2009.

The Ecstatic Poetry of the *Krama* Masters

The experience of rapture indicative of the state of living liberation (*jīvanmuktiḥ*) is reverentially captured by several generations of Tantric masters belonging to the Śākta lineage known as the *Krama*. Their revelations were expressed in hymns (*stotras*) that praise the Goddess, Supreme Consciousness (*Saṁvit*) Herself, as the highest reality in which one can become consciously and joyfully immersed. The *Krama* is perhaps unique to Tantric Śaivism, and indeed to all other gnostic, non-dualistic schools of Hinduism in general, in that its poets, much like those of medieval Sufism, rather than deliberating on the *means* of reaching enlightenment (ritual yoga, etc.), seek to encapsulate in their poetry the actual *experience* of blissful euphoria which characterizes their own enlightened state:

My mind, wounded by the frightful sword of craving, became impoverished as it forgot its own glory. Now, it has utterly nothing left whatsoever to possess and reposes in a [state of] generosity that comes from experiencing the supreme thrill of self-awareness.

--A Hymn on "Delighting in Awareness" by Śrī Nāga (11th c.e.)

The Lineage of *Krama* Masters

The *Krama* lineage (see family tree, below) originates in the early 9th century with the revered Father of the tradition, **Jñānanetra** (ca. early 9th century, c.e.), also known as Śivānanda, Śivanātha, and Ādinātha ("primeval Lord"). He is said to have been initiated as the first *Krama* Master by a consortium of Cremation Goddesses (Yoginīs) in Uddiyāṇa, just north of Kaśmir near the border of Tibet. His official lineage extends over two and half centuries, down to Someśvara (ca. 12th centuries c.e.). As the first recognized guru of the lineage, it is Jñānanetra who originated the tradition of praising the Goddess through hymns (*stotras*) with the composition of his *Kalikāstotra*, "The Hymn to Kālī." Jñānanetra, his female disciple Keyūrvatī, and Hrasvanātha, author of the Hymn presented in this volume, the *Svabodhadayamañjarī* are the only three *Krama*

gurus belonging to the “Order of Human Masters” (*mānavaughah*), while the rest belong to the ‘Order of the Disciples’ (*śiṣyaughah*).

The Krama Hymns of Enlightenment

“I celebrate the manifestation of the Self, experienced as the bliss that arises from the awareness attained by a thorough investigation of consciousness that has realized the emptiness of [all] objects [of awareness].”

—from “The Flowering of One’s Own Enlightenment,” by Śrī Hrasvanātha

Implicit in the writings of Hrasvanātha and the Krama gurus is an extremely life-affirming, celebratory expression of what it really means to live in the state of enlightenment. How can such a state be captured in words? While the Krama poets themselves are well aware that their realizations cannot be expressed in any medium, they nevertheless joyfully and masterfully play with the Sanskrit language through the frequent use of rich metaphors and ornate double-entendre allusions in creating poetry that resonates into the reader’s heart and excites their senses. The unimaginable delight that comes with experiencing true spiritual freedom through the conscious realization of the one, playful Goddess pervading all things constitutes the essence of these aesthetically appealing hymns. In these poems, the Krama gurus have given us clues that inspire us to realize the true magnanimity of human life, that absolute, unimaginable freedom can come to us, in a flash, by surrendering to the play of life itself.

Śrī Nāga’s Life and Sacred Poetry: An Introduction to ‘Delighting in Awareness’

The Krama sage known simply as Śrī Nāga (‘Venerable Serpent’) lived in Kaśmir during the 11th century. Like all of the Krama masters, he descends from one of the three female disciples of the Krama founding father, Jñānanetra, known respectively as the three Krama matriarchs—Keyūrvatī (a.k.a. Kakāradevī), Madanikā, and Kalyāṇikā. Nāga’s beloved guru, Pañgu, whom he reveres as the cause of his own liberation in the first verse of his *Cittasamṭoṣatrimśikā*, belongs to the line of spiritual teachers that derive from the matriarch Keyurvati’s disciple Eraka (see family tree below). Thus he was probably a contemporary or spiritual ‘cousin’ of Abhinavagupta’s disciple Kṣemarāja (ca. 11th century), who descended from another of the matriarchs’ disciples, Bhānuka.

The subject of Nāga’s two surviving poems, the *Paramārcanatrimśikā* (‘30 verses on the art of Supreme Worship’) and the *Cittasamṭoṣatrimśikā* (‘30 verses on Delighting in Awareness’), focus on the attainment of enlightenment through

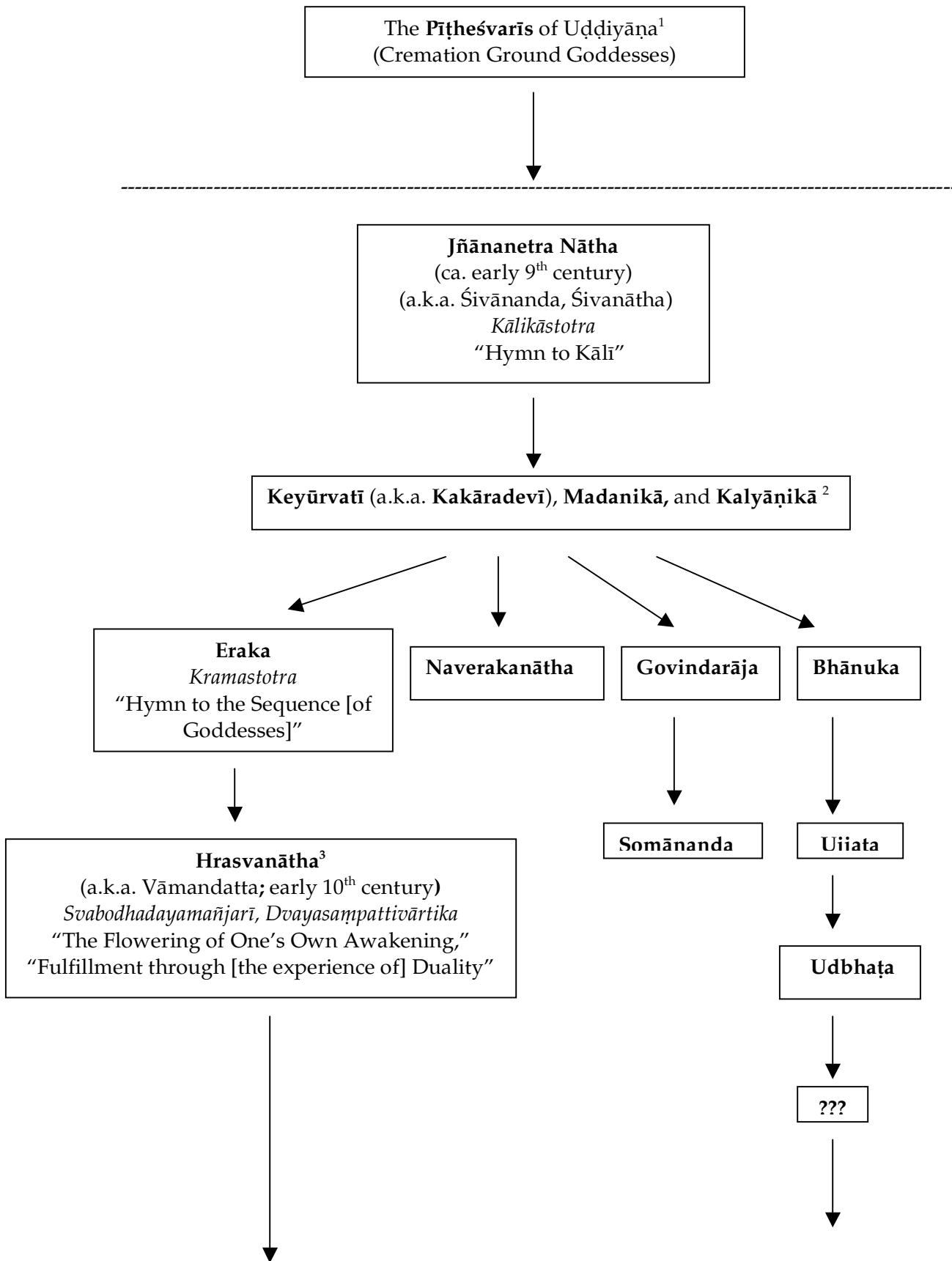
sudden immersion (*samāvesha*) into the dynamic purity of consciousness (*sāhasamādhiḥ*). *Delighting in Awareness* is an auto-biographical celebration of Nāga's experience of living liberation (*jīvan-mukti*). Having suffered like any one of us, his testimony reveals a man who has discovered in himself what is the *birthright* of all human beings to discover—that liberation is a living, realizable state that floods through the very mind that seemed to trigger all of our suffering before.

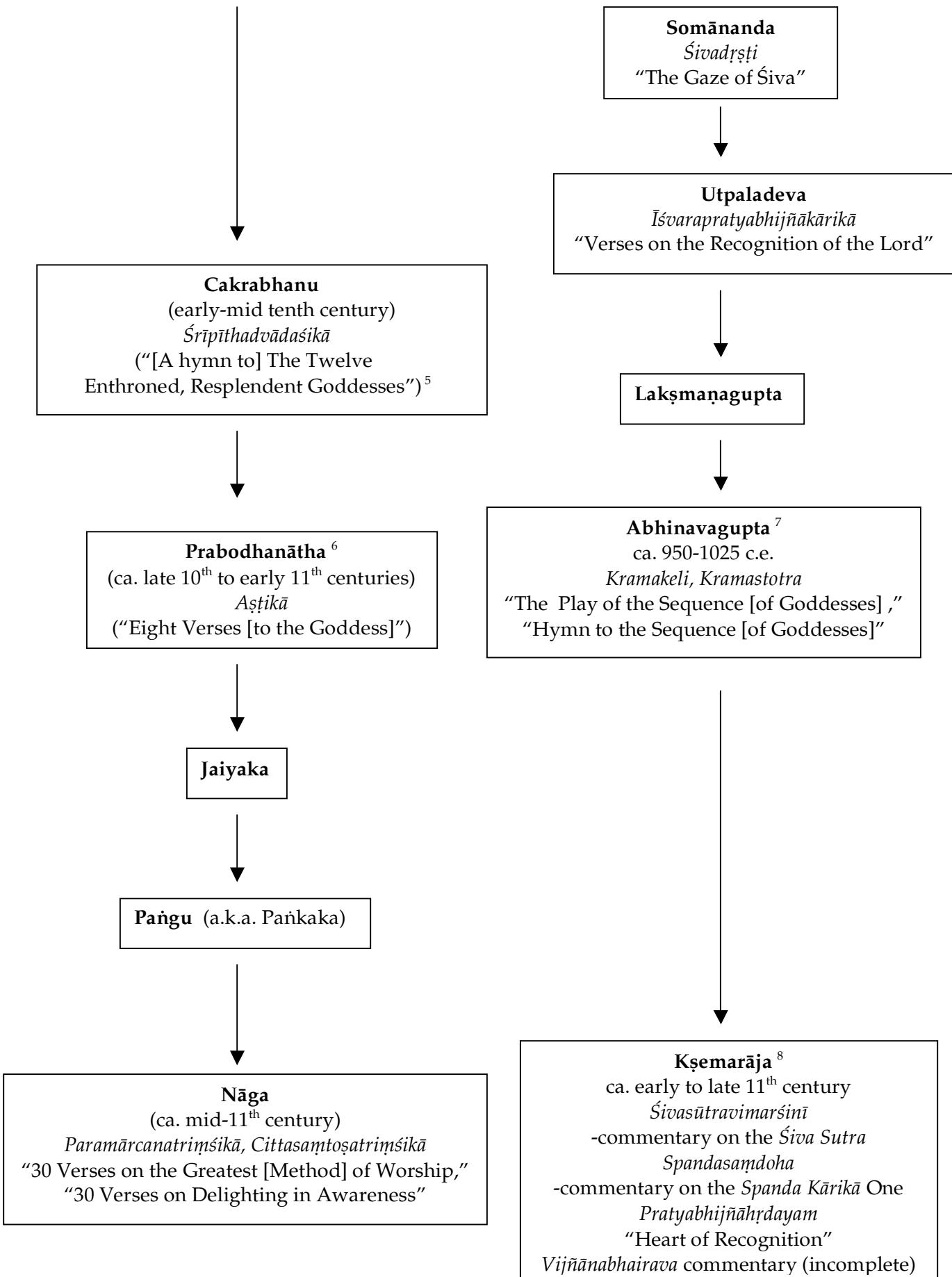
Nāga's stunning, visual, and evocative poem is meant to be a great inspiration for beings of all ages: as we hear his chanted song, revelling in the joyful cadence of Self-discovery, a forgotten memory of the Self returns to us—we realize: 'He is singing *about me*, about my own life, and about the Divine Power within me' which can and *must* be allowed to emerge through the very body, senses, and mind that connect us with all life.

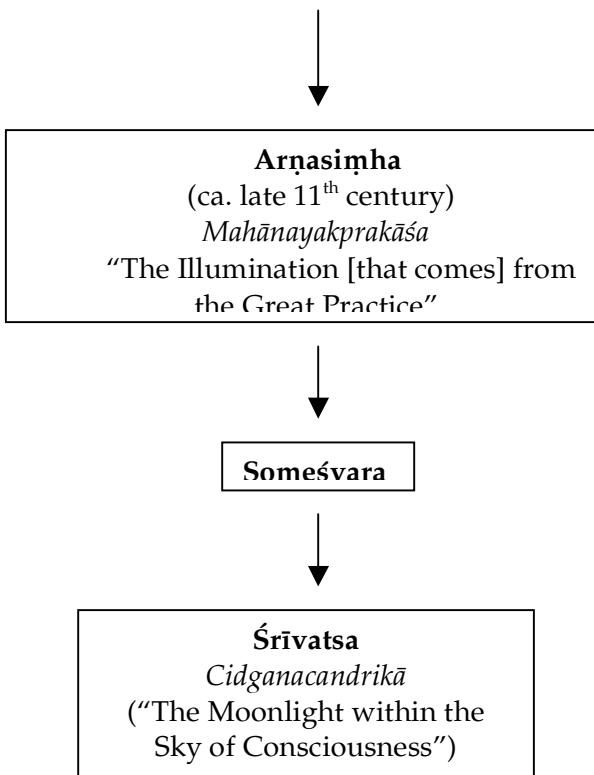
Nāga reveals that True Self-Recognition is gained not through laborious effort and hope for a better future, but in a sudden surge of Divine Nectar that can and will flood through us here and now, in *this* body, through *these* senses, through *these* thoughts, when we stop controlling the mind and learn to melt into its source, which lies behind, beyond, and inside of it. Nāga inspires us to truly 'Delight in our own Awareness,' and to thus experience the *timeless* dissolution of all separation, pain, and suffering.

-Christopher Tompkins, November 2008-March 2009.

THE LINEAGE OF KRAMA GURUS







Family Tree Notes

1. North of Kaśmir, on the border of Tibet. Another account has Jñānanetra initiated solely by the Goddess Maṅgalā.
2. These three women are the collective disciples of Jñānetra. Keyūrvatī is consistently recognized throughout the literature as the Matriarch of the Krama lineage.
3. **Hrasvanātha**, a.k.a. **Vāmandatta**, **Vīravāmaṇaka**, **Vāmanavīra**, and **Vīranātha**, lived in the court of King Yaśakara, ca. early 10th century Kaśmir. He appears to be the son of Eraka and is the uncle of **Cakrabhanu**. It is claimed that he had five or six disciples, including **Cakrabhanu**, his eventual successor.
4. **Cakrabhanu** is one of fix or six disciple of his uncle, **Hrasvanātha**. The names of the others are unknown to us.
5. The “twelve” Goddesses represent the twelve phases of awareness that are celebrated and worshipped as manifestations of Kāli in the Krama scriptures.
6. The *Aṣṭikā* was composed in 975 c.e.
7. Only Abhinavagupta’s writings that show a particular affinity towards the Krama are listed here.
8. Only Kṣemarāja’s writings that show a particular affinity towards the Krama are listed here.

