

Essays on the Indian Knowledge System

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Edited by

Anish Gupta, Vishnu Achutha Menon
and Shubham Sharma

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PREFACE

In reading the current discourse and examining proposed solutions to pressing issues, it became apparent that what we often face is not a lack of information but a lack of perspective. This book, then, is an attempt to provide that unique perspective to global readers which may help them make sense of the world in a much more deeper sense. The Indian Knowledge System, which is the central theme of this book, essentially offers that drishti or perspective. More than a way of seeing, drishti shapes how knowledge is approached—not as isolated facts but as interconnected insights that guide life and action.

The Indian Knowledge Systems Division has been working to bring this perspective into contemporary conversations by supporting research, pedagogy, and outreach. As part of one such effort, the Institute for Educational and Developmental Studies facilitated an internship programme under the Indian Knowledge Systems initiative. We worked with young scholars from across the country who brought with them a range of lived experiences and diverse ways of engaging with knowledge. Their inquiries were shaped not just by academic interest but also by personal and regional contexts, resulting in rich and varied explorations. These journeys of learning, nurtured through dialogue and mentorship, form the core of this book and are reflected in its various chapters.

While grounded in scholarly inquiry, the essays are written with the aim of inviting those unfamiliar with IKS into a meaningful engagement with its core concerns. It is important to note that engagement with the chapters presented in this book does not require any prior understanding of Indian Knowledge Systems. Rather, it is intended as an introductory yet critical gateway to ideas and traditions that have, for too long, been ignored in formal academic curricula both within India and abroad. The structure of the book is also designed with a particular purpose in mind and it reflects the spirit of the knowledge system it seeks to represent. Consequently, the chapters are not organised in a linear or hierarchical fashion. Readers may approach the text from any point of entry that aligns with their interests or curiosities. Much like the IKS worldview, which resists rigid categorisations, this book allows non-linear reading and relational understanding. Each

chapter stands independently, yet together, the essays form a composite that reflects the integrated character of knowledge in the Indian tradition.

It is crucial to note that the contributors did not approach their subjects as cultural artifacts or static repositories of ancient wisdom. Rather, their essays underscore the dynamic and evolving nature of Indian knowledge traditions. Whether discussing the performative aspects of classical theatre, the profound philosophical tradition, or the indigenous method of peace building, the authors approached these subjects as living traditions that continue to offer valuable insights into contemporary global challenges. At a time when global academic discourse is increasingly marked by specialisation, algorithmic reasoning, and disciplinary insulation, Indian Knowledge Systems remind us of an alternative model—one that is dialogical rather than didactic. They offer a framework that allows for the coexistence of scientific analysis and spiritual insight, theoretical clarity and experiential depth. In this sense, the contributions in this book do not merely represent discrete academic exercises; they embody an orientation towards knowledge that is fundamentally holistic.

Also, this book is intended not as a conclusion, but as an invitation. It opens a dialogue and extends a hand to those who may wish to explore further the depth and breadth of Indian knowledge traditions. If the book succeeds in piquing the curiosity of its readers, encouraging them to read more, think differently, or approach familiar problems from unfamiliar angles, it will have fulfilled its purpose. Such curiosity, we believe, is the first step toward reimagining how we understand knowledge itself—not merely as information, but as insight embedded in lived experience, practice, and ethical inquiry. The essays in this volume are not final answers, but starting points for deeper engagement, urging us to look beyond disciplinary boundaries and cultural assumptions.

In compiling and presenting these essays, we reaffirm our belief that Indian Knowledge Systems possess not only historical significance but also contemporary urgency. Through this book, we hope to contribute—however modestly—to introducing the global audience to a rich, holistic understanding of knowledge that transcends time and geography, offering valuable perspectives for addressing the challenges of our world today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book, like any significant academic work, owes its existence to the contributions of many individuals, whose efforts have taken shape in this collection of selected essays. It brings us immense joy to acknowledge their invaluable support and express our deepest gratitude.

First and foremost, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the Indian Knowledge Systems Division of the Ministry of Education, Government of India, for sponsoring the BG Samvahan Karyakram - 3 internship program. This initiative provided us the opportunity to collaborate with numerous young, creative minds, whose intellectual contributions are now reflected in the essays featured in this book.

We are especially grateful to Ganti Suryanarayana Murthy, National Coordinator of IKS, for his guidance and support, both during the internship program and throughout the subsequent research efforts, which have now culminated in the publication of this book.

Furthermore, we owe a deep debt of appreciation to our contributors, whose passion, dedication, and academic rigor have resulted in the rich diversity of perspectives presented in this collection. Their insightful essays reflect the depth of scholarship and strong commitment to Indian Knowledge Systems.

Finally, we extend our thanks in advance to our readers, whose engagement with this work will help sustain and advance the *Gyaan Parampara*—the timeless tradition of knowledge. We hope that this book will inspire further learning, reflection, and dialogue, ensuring that this rich tradition continues to thrive and flourish.

INTRODUCTION

In his celebrated book *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*, E.F. Schumacher wrote, “The modern world, despite its many technological advances, has failed to provide answers to the basic questions of human existence.” Though written in 1973, Schumacher’s words resonate even more strongly today, as many of the same issues, along with new, emerging challenges—continue to confront the modern world. The unprecedented progress in science and technology somehow failed to address some of the fundamental challenges threatening the very existence of human civilization. The prevailing models of education, development, and well-being have fallen short, perhaps due to a narrow and unidimensional approach that lacks the depth and multiplicity required to engage with the complex global challenges. As a result, there is a growing recognition of the need to view the world through a broader lens which does not see knowledge being fragmented in subject specific silos but as a unified, holistic entity. While adopting such a holistic approach to knowledge is essential, it is equally important to decentralize the ways in which knowledge is acquired and defined, allowing multiple perspectives to shape global discourse without being constrained by so-called gatekeepers of knowledge.

The Age of Enlightenment, undoubtedly one of the most influential intellectual movements in modern history, championed reason and science as the primary markers of knowledge. It argued that science and reasoning is the only path to human progress and these are universal truths. However, the later philosophical and intellectual movements especially the post-modernist movement vehemently challenged such claims of universality. Particularly, the French philosopher and sociologist Jean-François Lyotard, defined these claims of universal truth as *meta narratives* which is nothing but a grand story claiming to provide a totalizing explanation of reality. These metanarratives invariably override the plurality of localized and culturally specific knowledge systems. The idea of seeing knowledge as holistic entity but also not falling victim to reproducing the universal truth presents a challenging predicament which at first glance may seem contradictory as well. But for the moment let’s ask ourselves some other important questions about the nature of knowledge. What are the markers of knowledge that claim to produce universal truth? What qualifies as

knowledge? Who holds the authority to define these terms? More importantly, is knowledge truly as universally applicable as we have been led to believe, or does this supposed universality merely reflect the narrowed perspectives of those in power?

These questions are essential to address and worth contemplating because those who define knowledge also influence how it is created. This knowledge creation process often reflects a narrow perspective—shaped by what the knowledge-definers observe in their own surroundings and what their society has presented to them as the Truth. Since the world is complex, with many societies and their different realities, basing knowledge on only one specific reality (how real that reality actually is, that's a different question altogether) becomes problematic to say the very least. When knowledge is defined in a way that excludes diverse experiences, it can lead to dangerous oversimplifications of the complex and multifaceted world order. This process of exclusion highlights the dangers of a narrowly defined concept of knowledge. Knowledge contains multitudes and thrives on expansion, not the contraction brought about by rigid and crude notions of what it should be. If we must define knowledge, then it ought to be done in a way that encapsulates insights from various fields, reflecting the complexities of the world as understood by many.

In this context, it becomes essential to include voices from diverse societies and backgrounds in shaping knowledge systems. These voices should not only be heard but should also actively contribute to creating solutions, rather than leaving the task to a select few who impose a singular, rigid worldview. A powerful example of the risks posed by such narrow perspectives is illustrated in Edward Said's 1978 work *Orientalism*. Said highlights how a perceived superiority in knowledge creation leads to distorted truths. The "Orient," for example, was not an objective or accurate description, but a Western construct that homogenized diverse cultures, countries, and civilizations into one inferior, monolithic entity. As Said famously stated, "The Orient exists for the West, and is constructed by and in relation to the West. It is a mirror image of what is inferior and alien ('other') to the West." Much of contemporary challenges stem from similar issues, where global perspectives are shaped around a central point, often defined by a dominant worldview. The image of the world is then formed in relation to this "epicenter," overlooking the richness and diversity of multiple realities. However, the world shouldn't revolve around a single point; instead, the center must expand, growing to encompass and integrate all perspectives.

Peter Singer, in his seminal work *The Expanding Circle: Ethics, Evolution, and Moral Progress* (1981), discussed the enlarging moral circle of humanity. He argued that in the earliest stages of human civilization, the circle of individuals worthy of moral consideration was very small, limited to immediate family members—a stage he described as *The Innate Moral Core*. Over time, this moral concern extended to larger groups, including tribes, where early human societies cooperated and developed moral obligations toward members of their own community. With the rise of modern nation-states, the moral circle expanded further, encompassing entire nations and civilizations, as laws, political institutions, and organized religions played a role in shaping ethical behaviour. The next stage, *Global Humanitarianism*, saw thinkers like Kant and humanist movements advocating for universal moral consideration, arguing that all humans regardless of race, gender, or nationality deserve equal ethical concern.

Singer contended that this expansion follows a natural trajectory and will continue to grow and eventually embrace every creature within its hold including animals. However, when it comes to the knowledge system we don't see such enlarging circle, here the circle has always been contracted giving space only to a few powerful. Hence, recognizing and giving space to various knowledge systems is a crucial step in expanding the knowledge circle, ensuring that no culture or society is left out of the larger framework of knowledge creation.

This book can be seen as a humble attempt to expand the knowledge circle through the inclusion of the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). IKS refers to the body of knowledge developed in the Indian subcontinent over millennia, rooted in India's rich philosophical, scientific, and cultural traditions. It encompasses a wide range of disciplines, including medicine, mathematics, philosophy, art, and spirituality, providing an integrated way of making sense of the world. IKS encourages us to move beyond narrow, fragmented views of the world and, instead, adopt a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of humanity. To illustrate how IKS is distinct from the prevalent knowledge system, Foucault's idea of power and knowledge provides an interesting framework. Through his various works, he has argued that knowledge and power are not separate entities but work in tandem. One who defines knowledge holds power, and it also works the other way around: one who holds power defines knowledge. To borrow Foucault's own words:

“We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. We are also subject to truth in the sense that it is the law and produces discourse that we must respect. It determines the form we must take as political subjects.” Therefore, with truth being “produced,” knowledge is reduced to a political tool, and whoever wields power defines knowledge.

This contamination of knowledge by power is perhaps the root cause of many of our global challenges. Refreshingly, IKS offer an entirely different outlook on knowledge. As opposed to the fragmented knowledge divided into rigid disciplinary silos, IKS embodies a holistic worldview which is fundamentally different from the meta narratives rejected by the postmodernist thinkers. This different conception of knowledge stands in sharp contrast to the knowledge-power nexus that Foucault lays bare. While Foucault reveals how knowledge is entangled with systems of domination where truth is produced, managed, and circulated through institutions that maintain control, IKS views knowledge as a moral and collective pursuit. Instead of seeing knowledge as a weaponized manifestation of power, gyaan in IKS is oriented towards harmony, self-realization, and the betterment of society. It is not a tool to define and dominate the “other” but a means to recognize the self in the other and accepting all existence is interrelated.

Another noteworthy aspect of IKS is its approach to authorship and the underlying idea of claiming knowledge. Attributing a text to a specific author is, in itself, a form of assertion—a subtle claim that the knowledge originates from the individual and, hence, they “own” it. IKS questions this very premise. It regards knowledge not as something to be owned, but as something to be realized, preserved, and shared—where the identity of the author is often secondary, if not entirely absent. Foundational texts such as the Vedas are considered *apauruṣeya* (not of human origin), and even later philosophical and scientific works often remain anonymous or are attributed to sages who acted as vessels of insight rather than proprietors of ideas, reflecting inherent epistemic humility. IKS asserts that knowledge must remain rooted in context, ethics, and collective responsibility. It seeks not just to explain the world but to engage with it compassionately. It offers a timely and transformative alternative—one that encourages us to ask not just what we know, but how we know, why we know, and whom our knowing ultimately serves.

As may already be evident, IKS is vast—it covers everything from physics to metaphysics, from the material to the spiritual. It is a tradition that spans

every aspect of human inquiry and experience. To attempt to contain such an expansive tradition within the confines of a single book is, admittedly, an ambitious undertaking. However, this volume aspires to offer readers a glimpse into that vastness. It is our hope that the chapters presented here will serve as an engaging prism through which to view the world: to appreciate its beauty, to better understand its challenges, and, above all, to discover alternative ways of thinking, being, and coexisting. The selected essays do not follow a rigid thematic order, nor are they confined to one particular domain. True to the spirit of IKS, the book traverses multiple interconnected spheres of knowledge—from politics (Arthaśāstra), art (Citraśālā), music, and dance, to ethics (Nītiśāstra), agriculture, spirituality, science, arithmetic, astronomy, sociology (Dharma), warfare, and trade and commerce.

This book is merely an invitation to explore, to reflect, and to engage with a living tradition that continues to offer deep insights into contemporary global questions. If this volume succeeds in awakening curiosity, encouraging dialogue, and inspiring a more integrated view of knowledge, it will have served its purpose.

CHAPTER 1

PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES OF KASHMIR SHAIVISM

SHUBHAM SHARMA

Abstract

The Indian subcontinent is one of the most fertile lands for ancient philosophies to emerge and transform the lives of its followers. Kashmir Shaivism is one such philosophy, which originated in the spiritual land of Kashmir but has a philosophical foundation that encompasses every aspect of existence and beyond. This paper explores some of the core philosophical principles of Kashmir Shaivism, ranging from its unique metaphysical framework to its contribution to the broader landscape of Indian philosophy—and its distinct place within it. The major themes of this paper include the key concepts of Shiva as the ultimate reality, Shakti as the divine creative energy, the concept of Spanda, and the triadic approach to understanding reality. The paper also attempts to situate the key principles of Kashmir Shaivism in relation to other non-dualistic Indian philosophical traditions, in order to highlight its distinctive philosophical underpinnings. By examining primary texts and scholarly interpretations, it aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the philosophical core of Kashmir Shaivism, emphasizing both its non-dualistic vision and the practical implications of these principles in spiritual and meditative practices.

Keywords: *Paramshiva, Shakti, Spanda, Trika, Tattvas.*

Introduction to Kashmir Shaivism

Kashmir Shaivism finds its roots deeply embedded in the historical and cultural context of the Kashmir region. Emerging during the early centuries of the Common Era, this philosophical tradition reflects a rich amalgamation of Shaivism, *Tantric* practices, and local influences,

flourishing in the fertile cultural soil of Kashmir. The region, with its Himalayan backdrop, became a hub for the synthesis of diverse philosophical currents. But when we say it is a synthesis of diverse philosophical currents it is equally important to note that within this synthesis of thoughts Kashmir Shaivism emerged as a complete and coherent system which according to its own tradition was revealed by Divine inspiration (Chatterji 1986).

This distinct placement of Kashmir Shaivism within the broader Hindu philosophy is also important to highlight in relation to the larger tradition of Shaivism which is one of the major branches of Hinduism. Shaivism represents a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices centered around the worship of *Shiva*. It includes diverse philosophical schools like *Shaiva-Siddhanta*, which recognizes a dualistic relationship between the soul and Shiva, and a variety of practices ranging from external rituals to the meditative paths of *Yoga* (Sullivan 1957, 3-4). Movements like the *Lingayat* and ascetic traditions such as the *Dashnami Sannyasins* further reflect the social diversity within Shaivism. In contrast, Kashmir Shaivism, a specific philosophical and religious system within the broader Shaiva tradition, is distinctly monistic and idealistic. Unlike *Shaiva-Siddhanta's* dualism, Kashmir Shaivism posits that *Shiva* is the only reality, both the material and efficient cause of the universe. This philosophy emphasizes the recognition of the supreme reality's identity with the individual soul, leading to liberation through intense meditation on Shiva. In this context, the concept of *Pratyabhijnā* or Recognition holds significant position in Kashmir Shaivism which was propounded in the writings of Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta.

Abhinavagupta is one of the key figures who played a pivotal role in shaping Kashmir Shaivism. He is a renowned scholar of the 10th-11th century CE. His major work, the *Tantraloka*, offers a comprehensive understanding of the philosophy, rituals, and transformative aspects of Kashmir Shaivism. Additionally, Abhinavagupta's commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, titled *Gitartha Samgraha*, showcases his scholarly depth and further elucidates the philosophical underpinnings of this tradition. Apart from this, the contribution of Sage Vasugupta is crucial in providing the foundational base to Kashmir Shaivism through his work the *Shiva Sutras*. It consists of concise aphorisms that delve into the core of Kashmir Shaiva philosophy, exploring the relationship between the ultimate reality (*Paramashiva*) and the manifest world. The enduring wisdom contained within the *Shiva Sutras* has guided seekers on the path of self-realization. Apart from these prominent texts, it has been argued by many scholars that

the *Íśvara Pratyabhijñā Kārikā* by Utpaladeva is the most important philosophical work of Kashmir Shaivism. Its intent was mainly to present the important principles of the monistic Shaivism of Kashmir and secondarily to discuss and refute the arguments of the antagonists' theories of philosophy prevalent in that age.

This paper attempts to understand the profoundness of Kashmir Shaivism thought, and then to present some of this understanding to provide an explanation of key concepts of Kashmir Shaivism, with a particular focus on its metaphysical foundations, cosmological perspectives, and practical applications. The intricacies of this tradition are explored, shedding light on how it articulates the interplay between the finite and the infinite in the evolving journey of consciousness.

Literature Review

The study of Kashmir Shaivism has garnered significant scholarly attention, offering insights into its unique philosophical foundations and historical evolution. The work of various scholars has contributed to a comprehensive understanding of how this tradition emerged and differentiated itself from other forms of Shaivism.

Isayeva (1995) provides a crucial starting point for this exploration by examining the contributions of early Indian philosophers like Gaudapada and Bhartrhari, who she argues laid the groundwork for what would later become the theistic principles of Kashmir Shaivism. Isayeva's analysis is particularly insightful in highlighting how these thinkers, through their proto-*Vedantist* teachings, introduced ideas that diverged from the mainstream Vedantic thought of their time. She contrasts the early *Vedantists'* view of *Brahman*, conceptualized as a continuous phonic energy, with Shankara's *Advaita Vedanta*, which posits *Brahman* as an unchanging, formless reality. This differentiation is crucial in understanding the distinct path that Kashmir Shaivism would later take, emphasizing a more dynamic and energetic conception of the ultimate reality, which is a hallmark of this tradition.

Building on these early influences, the work of Abhinavagupta, particularly his magnum opus *Tantraloka*, becomes central to the philosophical articulation of Kashmir Shaivism. Singh's (2016) translation and analysis of *Tantraloka* offer a deep dive into the complex world of *Tantra*, which Abhinavagupta so intricately ties to the broader framework of Kashmir Shaivism. Singh's work illuminates the multifaceted nature of reality as

seen through the lens of *Tantraloka*, where concepts such as the interplay between *Shiva* and *Shakti*, the grades of consciousness, and the reconciliation of spiritual and material realities are explored in depth. *Tantraloka* not only serves as a guide to the practices and rituals associated with Tantra but also as a philosophical treatise that connects these practices to the overarching monistic vision of Kashmir Shaivism. This text is critical in understanding how Abhinavagupta synthesized earlier philosophical currents with the *Tantric* tradition, creating a cohesive system that elevates the human experience towards divine consciousness.

Marjanovic's (2004) work further enhances the understanding of Abhinavagupta's contributions by focusing on his *Gitartha Samgraha*, a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* that reflects the distinctive Kashmir Shaiva perspective. Marjanovic's translation is particularly valuable because it draws on the Kashmiri recension of the *Gita*, which includes unique verses not found in other versions. This recension, as Marjanovic points out, allows Abhinavagupta to incorporate Kashmir Shaiva principles directly into his interpretation of the *Gita*, offering a fresh perspective that contrasts sharply with the non-dualism of *Advaita Vedanta*. While *Advaita* sees the world as an illusion, Kashmir Shaivism embraces the reality of the universe as a manifestation of Shiva's dynamic energy. Marjanovic's work is instrumental in making these esoteric concepts accessible, highlighting the practical implications of Kashmir Shaivism's philosophical insights for both scholars and spiritual practitioners.

The process of manifestation within Kashmir Shaivism, from the highest reality of *Shiva tattva* to the material realm of *Prithvi tattva*, is another key aspect explored by scholars. Tantray et al. (2018) delve into this process through the lens of *Pratyabhijna* philosophy, which plays a central role in Kashmir Shaivism's metaphysical framework. Their study focuses on the descent from the universal self to the individual self (*Jiva*), drawing parallels with the theory of causation and exploring how the union of Shiva and *Shakti* with *Maya* gives rise to the manifest world. This analysis is crucial in understanding how Kashmir Shaivism integrates both transcendental and immanent aspects of reality, presenting a comprehensive cosmology that is distinct from other schools of Shaivism. By focusing on the philosophical underpinnings of the manifestation process, Tantray et al. contribute to a deeper understanding of how Kashmir Shaivism conceptualizes the relationship between the finite and infinite, the material and the spiritual.

Together, these scholarly contributions paint a detailed picture of Kashmir Shaivism's philosophical landscape. From its early roots in proto-*Vedantic* thought to its mature expression in the works of Abhinavagupta, the tradition emerges as a distinct and dynamic system within the broader *Shaiva* tradition. The integration of historical, textual, and philosophical analyses across these works highlights the unique features of Kashmir Shaivism, offering valuable insights into its monistic worldview and its approach to understanding the nature of existence and the path to liberation.

Epistemology in Kashmir Shaivism

The exploration of epistemology in Kashmir Shaivism is primarily informed by the seminal work *Ishvara Pratyabhijna Karika*, particularly its second book titled *Kriyadhikara*, where the third chapter offers important insights into the Shaiva perspective on knowledge. The text looks beyond the traditional means of knowledge, or *pramanas*, as outlined by the Mimamsa philosophy, which are generally accepted for understanding the material world but fall short in apprehending the divine or ultimate reality—*Shiva*, who is the foundation of all existence. Here, the emphasis is on the direct and self-authenticating nature of knowledge, which arises continuously within the consciousness of the individual (Utpaldeva and Vail 2004, 184–185).

According to *Ishvara Pratyabhijna Karika*, *Pramana* serves as the means to ascertain both the existence and the essential character of an object, but it is also understood as a divine manifestation of consciousness itself. This perspective aligns with the broader Shaiva view that consciousness is not a passive recipient of external information but an active, self-luminous force that continually renews its understanding of reality. Each momentary mental assertion, or *Pramana*, is a fresh revelation within the self, emphasizing the dynamic and ever-renewing nature of knowledge (Utpaldeva and Vail 2004, 186–187).

The text also delves into the subjective nature of perception, illustrating how a single object can be understood in multiple ways depending on the observer's perspective, context, and intentions. This multiplicity of perception is not seen as a flaw but as a reflection of the inherent complexities between the subjective and objective dimensions of reality. The way different individuals perceive and interact with an object—whether as a mere functional item, a valuable possession, or a symbol of spiritual significance—demonstrates the layered nature of reality as understood in

Kashmir Shaivism. This concept is further illustrated through analogies, such as the comparison of individual lights that merge to form a single, bright illumination or the confluence of small rivulets into the vastness of the ocean. These analogies underscore the idea that while perceptions may vary, they ultimately contribute to a unified understanding of the underlying reality.

In addition to this, the text addresses the idea that different types of cognition concerning a single object can focus on distinct aspects of that object, depending on the observer's aims and context. However, a holistic cognition that embraces all aspects of the object produces a more comprehensive understanding. This holistic approach is likened to the combined illumination of many lamps in a room or the unified flow of waves in the ocean, symbolizing how diverse perceptions can coalesce into a singular, deeper realization of the truth.

Moreover, the concept of *Svatah Pramana*, or self-evident knowledge, plays a crucial role in Kashmir Shaivism's epistemology. This form of knowledge does not rely on external validation; it is inherently self-authenticating, arising from direct experiential insight. This idea is central to understanding of how Kashmir Shaivism differentiates itself from other philosophical traditions, such as *Advaita Vedanta*, which may emphasize intellectual or scriptural validation of knowledge. Here, the direct experience of one's own consciousness as the ultimate reality is paramount. Additionally, Kashmir Shaivism rejects *Purva Paksha* as a valid means of knowledge, emphasizing that true knowledge cannot be attained through the dialectical process of opposing views, but must instead be realized through direct, unmediated experience.

In addition to *Svatah Pramana*, other means of knowledge in Kashmir Shaivism further illuminate its epistemological framework. *Aptavacana*, or the testimony of the wise, underscores the importance of guidance from realized beings in the pursuit of knowledge. This guidance is not merely instructional but is a critical element in the spiritual journey, offering insights that facilitate the deeper unfoldment of consciousness. Just as a seasoned guide leads individuals through a dense forest, the wisdom of enlightened masters helps to navigate the complexities of self-realization, showing the path with greater clarity.

Similarly, *Upamana*, or analogy, serves as a valuable tool for understanding abstract concepts within Kashmir Shaivism. Through the use of analogies, such as the reflection of the moon in water, this philosophical tradition

bridges the gap between the unfamiliar and the known, making complex ideas more accessible. *Upamana* connects intangible concepts to tangible examples, allowing for a deeper and more intuitive grasp of the principles of self-awareness. Another significant aspect is *Anupalabdhi*, or non-perception, which recognizes that certain truths can be realized through the absence of direct perception. This approach highlights the understanding that what is beyond ordinary perception, can unveil the true nature of consciousness. Just as space is not directly perceived but serves as the backdrop for all perceptions, *Anupalabdhi* emphasizes the recognition of the essence that transcends the limitations of sensory experience.

Lastly, *Pratyaksha*, or direct perception, plays a vital role in this epistemological structure. It emphasizes the immediacy of perception in realizing the essence of consciousness. Unlike knowledge mediated by intellectual or scriptural analysis, *Pratyaksha* is about direct, unmediated experience—like witnessing a sunrise. This immediate apprehension allows one to experience reality as it unfolds, bypassing conceptual filters and providing a pure, direct insight into the nature of existence.

Together, these means of knowledge—*Svatah Pramana*, *Aptavacana*, *Upamana*, *Anupalabdhi*, and *Pratyaksha*—form a comprehensive epistemological framework in Kashmir Shaivism. They underscore the tradition's emphasis on direct experiential realization, the guidance of wise beings, the use of analogical reasoning, the recognition of non-perceptual truths, and the immediacy of direct perception in the pursuit of ultimate knowledge.

Metaphysics in Kashmir Shaivism

Kashmir Shaivism's metaphysical exploration begins with an inquiry into *Paramashiva*, the ultimate reality that serves as the bedrock of this philosophical tradition. Central to the Shaiva non-dualistic framework, *Paramashiva* represents the foundation upon which all existence is built, the source from which everything originates and into which everything eventually dissolves. This ultimate state is beyond description, transcending all human faculties of understanding (Kuiken 2019, 8-9).

The *Shiva Sutras*, revealed to and written by the sage Vasugupta, serve as one of the key texts in Kashmir Shaivism. Considered mystical in origin, these sutras outline the teachings of Shaiva non-dualism. The primary focus of these teachings is attaining the realization of *Paramashiva*, the Ultimate Reality. The sutras emphasize that this realization is not an

intellectual endeavor but an experiential one, achieved through the awakening of inner consciousness. As the *Shiva Sutra* states, “Flying the state of Shiva is in the rising of knowledge arising from one’s own nature” (Kuiken 2019, 38). This declaration points to the idea that the Ultimate Reality is not external or separate but resides within, waiting to be realized through the process of self-awakening.

In Kashmir Shaivism, *Paramashiva* is not an aloof, impersonal force but an intimately connected reality, inextricably linked with the individual selves (*Atman*) and the manifested world. The relationship between the individual and the Ultimate Reality is one of profound unity. Abhinavagupta, one of the foremost exponents of Kashmir Shaivism, expounds on this interconnectedness in *Tantraloka*, explaining that *Paramashiva* is both immanent and transcendent, pervading every aspect of existence from the subtlest to the grossest (Abhinavagupta 2021, 72). This insight highlights that the Ultimate Reality is not only the source of all things, but is present within every aspect of creation, making the metaphysical inquiry of Kashmir Shaivism a deeply integrated one.

At the core of Kashmir Shaivism is the recognition that *Paramashiva* is both the source and substance of all that is. The relationship between *Paramashiva* and the manifest world is not one of separation or duality but of dynamic interplay, where the absolute and the relative continuously interact. This relationship is encapsulated in Abhinavagupta’s profound statement, “The Absolute is in the relative, and the relative is in the Absolute, like fire in heated iron and vice versa” (Abhinavagupta 2021, 87). Here, Abhinavagupta uses the analogy of fire and iron to illustrate the inseparable connection between the two. Just as fire permeates heated iron and becomes indistinguishable from it, *Paramashiva* permeates the manifest world, and yet, the essence of each part of the manifest world is none other than *Paramashiva* itself.

To further clarify this interconnectedness, the metaphor of the ocean and the wave is often used in the tradition. In this metaphor, the ocean represents *Paramashiva*, the vast, unbounded reality, while individual waves symbolize the diverse manifestations within the world. Just as waves arise from the ocean, so too does the manifest world emanate from *Paramashiva*. Yet, the essence of each wave is the ocean itself, which underscores the idea that the relative manifestations of reality are not separate from the ultimate, but are deeply interconnected with it.

This metaphysical inquiry is further enriched by the concept of *Spanda*, which plays a central role in Kashmir Shaivism. *Spanda*, often translated as the pulsation or throb of consciousness, signifies the dynamic energy or heartbeat that underlies the entire cosmos. *Spanda* is not merely a mechanical movement but the rhythmic pulse of divine consciousness, the dynamic will of *Paramashiva* that gives rise to the manifest world. *Spanda* is the inherent throb or pulse of the divine consciousness, emphasizing that this pulsation is a living, palpable reality within the metaphysical framework of Kashmir Shaivism (Dyczkowski 1987,28-29).

Spanda is understood as the dynamic force that precedes and drives the creation of the universe. It is not seen as a random or chaotic movement, but rather as the free and intentional play of consciousness, expressing the divine will through the manifestation of the universe. This concept highlights the purposeful and creative nature of *Spanda*, portraying it as the essential energy behind the processes of creation, sustenance, and dissolution in the cosmic order. (Dyczkowski 1992) The significance of *Spanda* can be better understood through an analogy from music. Just as music consists of rhythmic patterns and vibrational frequencies, *Spanda* represents the cosmic rhythm of existence. This pulsation can be likened to the beats of a drum, which set the tempo for the grand symphony of creation. Each beat is not isolated but is part of an intricate, harmonious pattern, illustrating the intentional and purposeful dance of consciousness. The rhythm of *Spanda* guides the unfolding of the cosmos, providing the framework for both the manifest and unmanifest aspects of reality.

To grasp the magnitude of *Spanda*, the metaphor of a heartbeat can be employed. In the human body, the heartbeat is not a random throb but a rhythmic and purposeful pulsation that sustains life. Similarly, *Spanda* is the heartbeat of the cosmos, maintaining the dynamic vitality of existence. It is the cosmic pulse that, when consciously attuned to, enables individuals to align themselves with the rhythm of the universe, facilitating a profound connection with the underlying consciousness. This alignment with *Spanda* is central to the metaphysical inquiry in Kashmir Shaivism, as it allows for a direct experience of the divine, bridging the gap between the relative and the absolute.

Through the metaphysical lens of Kashmir Shaivism, the universe is seen not as a static creation but as a dynamic and ever-evolving manifestation of consciousness. The interplay between *Paramashiva*, *Spanda*, and the manifest world encapsulates the essence of this tradition's metaphysical inquiry. Reality, in this view, is a continuous flow, a pulsating rhythm of

existence that emanates from and eventually merges back into the ultimate reality, *Paramashiva*.

Cosmology and Creation in Kashmir Shaivism

Kashmir Shaivism presents a distinctive understanding of cosmology and creation, setting it apart from other Shaiva and *Vedantic* traditions. Unlike dualistic systems where creation and the creator are considered separate, Kashmir Shaivism embraces a non-dualistic view where the entire universe is an expression of a single, all-encompassing reality, *Paramashiva*. Creation is not seen as an event but as a continuous and dynamic process, where the divine and material worlds are intertwined through the eternal play of *Shiva* and *Shakti*. Central to this philosophy is the *Trika* system, the doctrine of triads that shapes the cosmological vision and the path to spiritual liberation.

The *Trika* system is foundational to Kashmir Shaivism and represents a unique metaphysical model. Derived from the term “*Trika*”, meaning “triad” or “threefold”, it emphasizes the interconnectedness of three core principles: *Shiva*, *Shakti*, and *Anu*. *Shiva* is the absolute, unchanging consciousness; *Shakti* is the dynamic creative power that manifests the universe; and *Anu* represents the individual soul. These principles are not separate entities, but aspects of the same underlying reality.

Like mentioned previously, in Kashmir Shaivism *Paramashiva* is the ultimate reality which transcends all dualities and oppositions. *Shiva* is pure consciousness, formless, and beyond the grasp of human comprehension. It is in his absolute state that he contains the potential for creation. However, this potential remains unmanifest until it is expressed through his active power, *Shakti*. *Shakti* is the feminine, dynamic energy that initiates and sustains the process of creation. She is often described as the pulsating, vibrating force that brings all things into existence. The existence of *Shiva* is inseparable from *Shakti*, as they are intrinsically bound, much like the concept of *Samaveta Samavaya*, where the qualities of one cannot exist without the other. In this sense, *Shiva* without *Shakti* is inert, and *Shakti* without *Shiva* is unmanifest.

Anu, or the individual soul, represents the contracted form of consciousness. While *Shiva* and *Shakti* are boundless, *Anu* experiences limitations due to ignorance and the false identification with the body and mind. In the cosmology of Kashmir Shaivism, the individual soul's journey involves

realizing its essential unity with *Shiva* and *Shakti*, transcending its limitations, and attaining spiritual liberation.

(i) The 36 *Tattvas*: Stages of Manifestation

In Kashmir Shaivism, one of the most detailed aspects of its cosmology is the doctrine of the 36 *Tattvas*, or levels of reality. These *Tattvas* provide a map of how the absolute reality of *Shiva* gradually manifests as the differentiated universe we experience. The first *Tattva* is *Shiva Tattva*, which represents the highest, undivided form of pure consciousness. It is the unmanifest aspect of reality, embodying the potential of existence. Following this is the *Shakti Tattva*, which introduces the dynamic, pulsating energy of *Shakti*. *Shakti* is not separate from *Shiva* but rather, is the initiating force behind creation. Together, *Shiva* and *Shakti* represent the union of consciousness and energy that underpins the entire process of manifestation. (Tantray, Rafeeq, and Rather 2018, 4-6).

Moving deeper into the process of creation, the *Sadashiva Tattva*, *Ishvara Tattva*, and *Shuddhavidya Tattva* emerge. These stages reflect the progressive manifestation of divine will, knowledge, and action. At these subtle levels, the differentiation between the subject (*Shiva*) and the object (the universe) starts to emerge, yet there remains a sense of unity and non-duality. The creation has not yet taken on its fully differentiated form, but the seeds of multiplicity are present.

The *Maya Tattva* is a pivotal stage in this cosmology, as it introduces the principle of illusion. *Maya* is what causes the infinite consciousness of *Shiva* to become veiled, creating the perception of duality and separation between the individual and the divine. It is through *Maya* that the experience of limitation and diversity arises, marking the beginning of the individual's perception of the world as a place of multiplicity.

From *Maya*, five additional principles known as the *Kanchukas* emerge. These are *Vidya*, *Raga*, *Kala* (time), and *Niyati*, which further limit the infinite consciousness of *Shiva*, creating the sense of limited power, knowledge, desire, time, and space. These limiting forces are responsible for the contraction of the boundless reality of *Shiva*, shaping the way individuals experience the world. Through this contraction, infinite knowledge becomes finite, infinite power is reduced, and the timeless, spaceless reality of *Shiva* appears within the confines of time and space.

As the process of manifestation continues, the mental faculties begin to emerge. These include the mind, intellect, and ego, which are responsible for individual cognition and perception. The five senses also manifest, allowing individuals to interact with the world of gross physical matter. Finally, the five physical elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space) come into being, forming the material world as we know it. The 36th and final *Tattva* is *Prithvi*, the earth element, which represents the most solid and concrete aspect of creation. (Lakshman Jee 1988, 1-10)

This doctrine of *Tattvas* in Kashmir Shaivism provides a detailed description of how the infinite, undifferentiated consciousness of Shiva manifests as the physical universe. The movement from the subtle to the gross, from unity to multiplicity, and from consciousness to matter, is explained through these 36 *Tattvas*, offering a profound understanding of the relationship between the absolute and the relative, the divine and the material. Each stage represents a contraction of consciousness, gradually leading to the experience of limited individuality and the perception of the world as we experience it.

(ii) *Shakti*: The Dynamic Power of Creation

In the cosmology of Kashmir Shaivism, *Shakti* is not merely a divine force or abstract energy but the very essence of creation, intimately bound to *Shiva*. Unlike many traditions that treat *Shiva* and *Shakti* as separate or hierarchical, Kashmir Shaivism envisions them as co-essential and co-equal aspects of a singular, non-dual reality. This metaphysical framework is essential to understanding the role of *Shakti*: she is the power through which the universe is manifest, sustained, and ultimately dissolved, while *Shiva* represents the pure, unchanging consciousness that remains beyond form. The essence of their relationship can be captured in the term *Shiva-Shakti-Samarasya*—the harmonious union of *Shiva* and *Shakti*, where the static and the dynamic, the absolute and the relative, are intertwined without division.

From this perspective, *Shakti* is the active principle that brings forth all phenomena, from the most subtle realms of consciousness to the gross material world. Yet, she is not separate from *Shiva*; rather, she is his inherent power of manifestation. In this non-dualistic view, *Shiva* is pure *Prakasha*—the self-luminous, formless awareness that pervades everything—while *Shakti* is *Vimarsha*, the reflective self-awareness that gives this consciousness its ability to know itself and express itself as the cosmos. The universe, then, is a continuous unfolding of *Shakti*'s dynamic

energy, with *Shiva* as its silent, immutable ground. This distinction between *Shiva* and *Shakti*, often viewed through a lens of dualism, dissolves in Kashmir Shaivism's recognition that they are two faces of the same reality, constantly engaged in an interplay that is both creative and revelatory.

Shakti, however, is not only seen as a cosmic force or a metaphysical principle; she is also personified and symbolized in numerous ways. Mythologically, she is represented as the feminine divine, but in this case, "feminine" should not be interpreted as merely gendered. Instead, it reflects the nurturing, generative aspect of the divine, in contrast to the stillness of *Shiva*. In Kashmir Shaivism, the feminine represents the world's active, creative side, while the masculine represents the unmanifest, passive consciousness. This symbolic interplay between the masculine and feminine reflects a deeper metaphysical truth—the cosmos as a dance of opposites that are, at their core, non-dual. (Chitkara 2002, 89-93)

Shakti's relationship with *Shiva* is often compared to that of fire and its ability to burn: the two are inseparable, and yet their functions differ. Without *Shakti*, *Shiva* remains pure potentiality—absolute consciousness with no expression. It is through *Shakti* that *Shiva's* boundless energy manifests into the tangible and intangible universe. In essence, *Shakti* is not simply a reflection of *Shiva's* power; she is the very embodiment of his creative potential. This conceptualization of *Shakti* as the dynamic aspect of divinity can be seen as an extension of the doctrine of *Spanda*, the subtle vibration or pulsation that is considered the fundamental nature of the universe. The *Spanda* doctrine posits that all of existence is a result of this ceaseless vibratory movement, which is none other than *Shakti* herself.

At the core of *Shakti's* cosmological role are her five primary functions, the *Pancha Kritis*, which govern the cycles of creation, sustenance, dissolution, concealment, and grace. These fivefold acts illustrate the continuous, cyclical nature of the universe and reveal *Shakti* as the dynamic force that animates the cosmos. Each function corresponds to a particular aspect of the cosmic process, beginning with *Srishti*—the act of creation, where *Shakti* transforms the formless, unmanifest potential of *Shiva* into the myriad forms of the universe. This creation is not merely a singular event but an ongoing process, where the universe is continually being brought into existence through *Shakti's* inexhaustible creative power. Every moment of perception, every experience, is an act of creation, as the world is renewed through *Shakti's* ceaseless activity.

Following creation, *Sthiti*, or sustenance, takes place, where *Shakti* ensures the continuity and stability of the cosmos. This function preserves the balance and coherence of existence, maintaining the intricate interrelations between all beings. *Shakti*'s sustaining power is not static; it involves the constant adjustment and adaptation of forms, ensuring that the universe remains dynamic and evolutionary. Yet, just as creation must be sustained, it must also eventually dissolve, and this is where the function of *Samhara* comes into play. In this process of dissolution, *Shakti* withdraws the manifest universe back into its original, undifferentiated state, merging all forms and experiences back into the boundless consciousness of *Shiva*. Rather than being seen as a destructive act, *Samhara* is understood as a necessary phase in the cosmic cycle—an act of regeneration that makes room for new creations.

Beyond these cycles of creation, sustenance, and dissolution, *Shakti* also exercises the function of *Tirodhana*, or concealment. This act of veiling is crucial for the experience of individual existence, as it allows the soul to perceive itself as separate from the divine. Through *Tirodhana*, *Shakti* creates the illusion of duality, allowing for the play of consciousness in the world of form. This is not a mere obfuscation, however, but a purposeful limitation that enables the soul's journey through the material world. The experience of limitation, ignorance, and separation is necessary for self-awareness to emerge. Without this concealment, the diversity of the universe, with its myriad forms and experiences, would not be possible. Paradoxically, *Shakti* conceals the true nature of reality so that beings may eventually come to recognize it.

Ultimately, however, *Shakti* also reveals the truth through the function of *Anugraha*, or grace. Grace is the benevolent aspect of *Shakti* that dispels the veils of illusion, allowing the individual soul to realize its inherent unity with *Shiva*. This process of revelation is not a passive experience but the culmination of a deep spiritual practice where the individual aligns with the divine through disciplines such as *yoga*, *meditation*, and *tantra*. It is through *Anugraha* that the soul attains *moksha*, or liberation, as the distinctions between self and other, individual and divine, dissolve in the recognition of oneness. *Shakti*'s grace is not bestowed arbitrarily but is inherent in the cosmic process itself, guiding all beings toward their ultimate realization (Shankarananda 2003, 271-273).

The practical dimension of *Shakti* in Kashmir Shaivism is perhaps most vividly expressed in the concept of *Kundalini Shakti*, the dormant energy said to reside at the base of the spine in each individual. This Kundalini

energy represents *Shakti* in her microcosmic form, the individual counterpart to the cosmic *Shakti* that governs the universe. Through spiritual practices, particularly in the *Tantric* tradition, practitioners seek to awaken this dormant energy and guide it upward through the central channel of the subtle body. As *Kundalini* ascends through the *chakras*, it dissolves the limitations imposed by *Tirodhana* and leads to the direct experience of unity with *Shiva*. This journey of the individual soul, from ignorance to enlightenment, mirrors the cosmic cycles governed by *Shakti*, showing how the universal processes of creation, sustenance, and dissolution are reflected within the individual consciousness (Scott 2006, 1-3).

The awakening of *Kundalini* is not a personal achievement but is considered an expression of the divine play (*lila*) of *Shakti* herself. Just as she brings forth the universe from *Shiva's* formless potential, she also brings the individual soul to the realization of its inherent divinity. In this way, *Shakti's* cosmic role is not divorced from human experience; rather, it is through her dynamic power that the soul moves toward liberation. The individual's realization of the non-dual nature of reality is a microcosmic reflection of the cosmic dance of *Shiva* and *Shakti*, where the entire universe is recognized as a manifestation of their inseparable unity.

This profound integration of metaphysics, cosmology, and spiritual practice sets Kashmir Shaivism apart from other Indian traditions. While *Vedanta*, for instance, emphasizes the transcendent, impersonal nature of *Brahman* as the ultimate reality, Kashmir Shaivism offers a more immanent view, where the world is not seen as an illusion (*maya*) to be transcended but as a direct expression of divine consciousness. Similarly, while *Shakti* traditions focus on the worship of the Goddess as a distinct deity, Kashmir Shaivism presents *Shakti* as the inherent power of *Shiva*, inseparable from his nature. This non-dual approach elevates *Shakti* beyond the role of a separate divine being and instead sees her as the dynamic pulse of existence itself.

Beyond the conception of *Shakti*, the cosmological understanding of Kashmir Shaivism remains incomplete without exploring its foundational concept of *Lila*, which lies at the heart of the tradition's vision. This term encapsulates Kashmir Shaivism's unique understanding of creation—not as a mechanical process driven by necessity or a predetermined purpose, but as an expression of *Paramashiva's* infinite freedom and joy. In this tradition, creation unfolds as a spontaneous and joyous act, a dance of divine consciousness, unrestrained by any fixed rules or goals. The universe is not constructed out of obligation, nor does it exist to fulfill a

predetermined plan; it arises purely from the delight (*ananda*) that *Paramashiva* experiences in his own boundless potential.

This idea of creation as play challenges conventional metaphysical frameworks, which often posit a goal-driven or hierarchical cosmology. In many theistic traditions, creation is imbued with a sense of teleology—an unfolding directed toward a specific end, such as the fulfillment of divine will or the manifestation of certain cosmic laws. However, Kashmir Shaivism departs from this view by emphasizing that the cosmos exists for no reason other than the joy of *Lila*. Just as a dancer does not dance with the goal of reaching a destination but as an expression of movement and rhythm, so too does the universe arise from the infinite potential of divine consciousness. In this vision, creation is not merely a singular event located in the distant past but an ongoing, ever-renewing process. Each moment, the universe is continuously created, sustained, and dissolved through the dynamic interplay of *Shiva* and *Shakti*. (Olson 2022, 843-845)

This emphasis on the playful, purposeless nature of creation, underscores the non-dual character of reality in Kashmir Shaivism. The distinction between creator and creation, or subject and object, dissolves in the light of *Lila*. There is no real separation between the divine source and its expressions; every form, every event, every experience is an embodiment of this cosmic dance, where creator and creation are intertwined.

Moreover, *Lila* suggests that creation is not burdened by any inherent purpose or teleological aim. Unlike the idea that the universe exists to achieve some ultimate divine plan, Kashmir Shaivism posits that creation is an expression of freedom. The universe exists because it can—because the infinite nature of consciousness is to explore its limitless possibilities. This spontaneity stands in contrast to the notion of a predetermined cosmic order. It reflects a worldview that embraces the boundless creativity of the divine, free from constraints or limitations. The cosmos, in this view, is a playground of consciousness, where the infinite potential of *Paramashiva* is brought into form not because it must be, but because it is an act of pure freedom.

However, while the universe is a manifestation of divine play, individual souls (*Anu*) do not always experience this freedom. The human experience is often characterized by limitations, ignorance, and suffering, which arise from the influence of the *Malas*—the three impurities that obscure the soul's true nature. These *Malas*—*Anava Mala*, *Mayiya Mala*, and *Karma Mala*—bind the soul to the cycle of *samsara*, the endless cycle of birth,