Metaphor, *Rasa*, and *Dhvani*:
Suggested Meaning in Tantric Esotericism[1]

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Abstract
Indian aesthetics provides a framework for reading Tantric traditions. Tantras describe the public and private domains of ritual in language that grounds esoteric experience while referring to commonsense entities. Their language is highly metaphoric, and uses conceptual blend, indication, and indirect suggestion. The experience transformed through meditation and ritual practice in this depiction parallels aesthetic bliss, and the theme of this description is the recognition of the true nature of the self, considered as concealed in mundane experience. The central argument of this paper is that the application of the aesthetic theories of *rasa* and *dhvani* to a reading of Tantra allows a deeper insight into Tantric rituals, their mystical writings, and esoteric practices. By studying two select cases of the description of esoteric bliss and consciousness, this essay contextualizes two aspects of aesthetics, *rasa* and *dhvani*, as tools for deciphering esoteric Tantric literature.

Introduction

This essay examines two aspects of classical Indian literature: esoteric Tantric materials and classical Indian aesthetics. Tantras have developed their own ontology and epistemology in the presentation of private and public rituals. The ritual dimension of Tantra is wide. It not only embraces the subject matter of Hinduism, but also includes Buddhist or Jain traditions. Through yogic practices and through dance, possession, and other forms of rituals, Tantra plays a direct role in common religious experience. The diversity of Tantric visualization, architecture, and its philosophy defies commonsense interpretation.

Classical Indian aesthetics emerge from the interpretation of dance and drama performed primarily in ritual settings. In addition to analysis of the metaphoric and literal dimensions of language, this aesthetic model relies on an understanding of psychological moods that are identified as *rasa*. Select Indian philosophers advanced this theory by propounding the doctrine of *dhvani*, by which the highest aesthetic bliss is experienced through suggestion.

The central argument of this paper is that the application of these aesthetic theories allows a deeper insight into Tantric rituals, their mystical writings, and esoteric private and public practices. The scope of this essay, therefore, is the cognitive and psychological aspects of ritual behavior, with the objective of interpreting religious experience through the lens of aesthetics. In order to ground the argument, this paper explores the scope of religious experience theorized in Tantras, specifically in the Trika doctrine of Kashmir, and the cognitive models found in classical Indian philosophy of aesthetics and utilizes the latter as a tool to interpret the first.

The Problem of Interpretation

Esoteric texts are notoriously cryptic. Unlike those describing phenomenal reality, these texts take for granted a subject matter rather unknown to the ordinary senses. If the scope of esoteric texts is nothing other than common-sense experience, it does not deserve a separate treatment. On the other hand, if it is suggested that these texts are describing something beyond the realm of mundane experience, this thesis has to confront multiple challenges, one being, is there really something to be described out of the range of ordinary experience? Even when metaphoric expression of something uncommon is considered possible, the description of mystical experience will be something similar to describing 'sweet' love to someone who is aware of only sweet mangos.

The issue can be framed in the following question: Does language reproduce, remind, or grant recognition of something already known, or can language break the barrier of that what is already experienced and touch something new? If language were to not grant new knowledge, the very application of language to describe esoteric experience would bear no fruit, and the above question is moot. The Tantric Trika doctrine, the philosophy under discussion, negotiates the ground by adopting the doctrine of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) where 'reality' is something already known. It is immediately cognized as the ground of cognition, hidden due to ignorance and revealed in self-reflective meditation by recognizing the essential nature of awareness. The problem,

then, is, how can this inner core of awareness be revealed? The application of metaphors and the aesthetic approach of suggestion (*dhvani*) allow negotiation between the realms of reality and appearance. Following this approach, that which is visible or the source, is capable of suggesting, if not referring to, the invisible. Although recognition may often be identified as a non-cognitive mode of awareness, the description of this ground reality utilizes multiple cognitive processes, fusing and blending different metaphors and thoughts.

Contemporary cognitive theories, particularly metaphor theory and conceptual blending, have opened the space that allows for interpretation of the creativity and ingenuity of human consciousness that elevates it above a simple functioning of neurons. Conceptual mapping, according to Fauconnier and Turner, includes aspects of integration, sculpting, compression, and inference.[2] Fauconnier and Turner also tell us that metaphors involve more than mapping or blending between two spaces. "They involve many spaces, and they involve emergent structure in the network."[3] These cognitive theories also bring into the paradigm that the structured distinction between the 'subjective' and the 'objective' disintegrates when dealing with the cognitive process, and that consciousness itself is not disembodied as presented in the dualistic models.

This paper does not intend to examine or elaborate upon the contemporary cognitive theories. Utilizing some tenets of these concepts as tools to excavate the classical Indian *rasa* and *dhvani* doctrines, this paper intends to examine the parameters of metaphor in Tantric literature, seeking the possibility of deconstructing these esoteric texts by applying the doctrine of suggestion (*dhvani*). Again, it is not possible to analyze the nature and scope of metaphors, *rasa* and *dhvani* in overall Tantric literature in one paper. Therefore, the scope here is to examine some central concepts and the application of metaphors in light of the doctrine of *dhvani*. The above-described cognitive theories of metaphor and blending dismantle the polarity imagined between literal meaning and metaphorical language. Conceptual blending, along the same lines, appears to be a normal phenomenon. The central argument of this paper lies in application of the doctrine of suggestion for revealing psychological aspects of experiencing aesthetic bliss (*rasa*), and the cognitive process

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[2] See Ray Gibbs (ed.). For contemporary metaphor theory, see George Lakoff (1990), and George Lakoff & Mark Johnson (1980).

[3] Gibbs (ed.) (2003: 5; pagination according to the web). This aphoristic statement allows us to later explain the concepts of megablend and the dracula network. See chapters 8 and 9 in Gilles Fauconnier & Mark Turner (2002).

of recognition through the application of suggestion (*dhvani*). These two aspects will be addressed by primarily examining the Tantric metaphors for describing bliss (*ānanda*) and awareness (*cid*).

Tantric texts are enticing: They intoxicate, drunk whichever way. The fluids, the mouth of *yoginī*, the substance of the clan, the union and the churning, the throbbing sound, to name a few: all of these can give literal meaning, and along these lines, reading texts as metaphors by uncovering the layers of conceptual blends and deciphering what is suggested may not be necessary. Tantric tradition, however, does not support the linear construction of meaning, with different Tantric sub-sects utilizing similar texts that generate different understandings. Reading texts such as 'Moonlight in the Sky of Consciousnes s'(*Cidgaganacandrikā*), 'The Bouquet of Great Meaning' (*Mahārthamañjarī*), or 'The Waves of Beauty'(*Saundaryalaharī*) dismantle the boundary between the poetic and philosophical, and compel a reader to accept the metaphorical as an inseparable aspect of this esoteric literature.

The argument here is not to establish that the unconscious and non-systematic flow of metaphors and blends found in everyday life also pervades the classical Indian Tantric texts. The point is to demonstrate a conscious, intentional application of metaphors in the mystical writings of scholars/mystics such as Abhinavagupta who, on one hand, is one of the central figures of Tantric writings, and on the other hand, synthesized the Indian aesthetic doctrine of suggestion (*dhvani*). By establishing the theoretical link between classical aesthetic theory and esoteric Tantric literature, we will be able to access the overlapping domain between the doctrine of *dhvani* and the doctrine of self-recognition (*pratyabhijñā*). The imprint of the doctrine of recognition is unmistakable in the *dhvani*-literature.[4] The scope here, then, is to analyze the application of suggestion as a tool to open the otherwise 'hidden' meaning of Tantric texts as applied by the exegetes such as Abhinavagupta, and to demonstrate a conscious application of suggestion as a tool to 'lock' the meaning by the composers of these texts.

It is traditionally claimed and easily noticeable that Tantric texts hide their real meaning with the overlay of apparent, alternative meanings. Metaphors, the application of *rasa*, and the meaning derived through suggestion (*dhvani*) open the path for the flow of meaning in both directions, allowing an exegete to discover what is hidden by the mystical writer that has used these literary tools to encode their hidden meaning. In our context, recognition of the self

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[4] See, *pratyabhijñāta…* in *Dhvanyāloka… ātmapratyabhijñāpanā*, in Locana. (Pathak, 1987: 75)

(*pratyabhijñā*) is *the* prominent category to discover meaning: we are left alone in the forest of metaphors to discover our true identity. As in the case of experiencing the sweetness of love and that of a mango, it is suggested that we, the speaker and hearer, live in two different realms. A mystic and an ordinary person are at odds: what is primary to 'his' experience is suggested for us, as that is not what our senses experience, or what we know our senses experience, and what we consider as suggested is primary to 'his' experience. Literal meaning cannot capture the sense when the hearer and speaker are negotiating a ground to share something unique to the speaker alone. Regarding the case of experiencing the sweetness of love and that of a mango, it is suggested that we, the speaker and hearer, live in two different realms. A mystic and an ordinary person are at odds: what is primary to 'his' experience is suggested for us, as that is not what our senses experience, or what we know our senses experience, and what we consider as suggested is primary to 'his' experience. Literal meaning cannot capture the sense when the hearer and speaker are negotiating a ground to share something unique to the speaker alone.

Reading mystical writings has revealed two distinct scholarly tendencies: one, the absolute is inexpressible in language and beyond concept, and so the appropriation of mystical experience in language is insufficient, or even radically inappropriate. The second tendency, with a focus upon the metaphors that refer to bodily-felt emotions, allows some scholars to find mystical experience bound within the body and so limit the horizon of metaphoric thinking. In this paradigm, transcendent and immanent are conceived of as two opposite binaries that never meet and never overlap. The contemporary concept that consciousness is 'embodied' has its own historical paradigm: it emerges from the Cartesian mind-body dualism. Classical Indian theory of suggestion (*dhvani*) and the doctrine of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) arise in their own historical context. If the concept of *viśvamayatā* is interpreted as extrovertive, expanded consciousness that infuses the body and the mind with a mystic experiencing his self-experience enveloping the entire existence, and *viśvottīrṇa* as a transcendental experience, then self-recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) is something that blends both. In the same way, suggested meaning spans the dichotomy found between the literal and the metaphoric.

Tantric Trika philosophy grounds itself on the very premise that the highest Bhairava experience or self-awareness is simultaneously resting (*śānta*) and rising (*udita*),[5] combining the experience of the transcendent (*viśvottīrṇa*) and

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[5] For reference, see Tantrāloka (TĀ) 5.36; 29.126.

immanent (*viśvamaya*).[6] The negotiated meaning of the apparently paradoxical statement of 'Bhairava experience' can be found through the application of suggestion (*dhvani*). The doctrine of *dhvani* allows the claim that texts speak for more than what is apprehended in the first reading. In essence, contradictions function as a hermeneutical tool directing the reader to discover something more. And, that which cannot be expressed in commonsense language can nonetheless be suggested. This is the assumption in which the doctrines of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) and suggestion (*dhvani*) interplay.

Aesthetic Framework

Before utilizing the classical Indian aesthetic concepts of metaphor, *rasa*, and *dhvani* in interpreting the rather esoteric Tantric literature, it is important to introduce these concepts in brief. It is also relevant to examine how these doctrines successively blend the concepts as a process of churning older meanings in order to reveal the essential experience. However, it is not the scope of this essay to examine these aesthetic theories in detail.[7]

Analogy or metaphoric expression maps different domains. Analyzing metaphors allows us to explain 'how' different concepts interact in a single expression. Suggestion (*dhvani*), on the other hand, allows us to unravel the deeper cognitive processes that provide the reasoning that underlies metaphoric thinking. The suggestibility of language unleashes it from the boundary of reproducing already cognized instances and opens anew horizon for language to interplay with metaphors, metonyms, and conceptual blends. An example found in classical Indian literature to describe *upamā* or analogy is that of *candramukhī* (moon-faced) which refers to a beautiful maiden. In this analogy, there are two domains, the moon and the face. The generic space that provides an interface between moon and face is the soothing beauty (*kamanīyatva*) that is felt in seeing moon or face. Within the framework of conceptual mapping, there is a blended space, the 'moon-face'. This is not the end of meaning, if this expression of 'moon-face' is to be interpreted through suggestion. The moon is too far away to be embraced and kissed. It is after all merely an icy rock. Two different domains discovered through the literal horizon are not sufficient to

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[6] For treatment of the concepts of the transcendent (*viśvottīrṇa*) and the immanent (*viśvamaya*), see TĀ, Chapter 11.

[7] For discussion of classical Indian aesthetic theories, see P. V. Kane (1994); K. C. Panedy (1963); G. T. Deshpande (1992); J. L. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan (1969).

establish this additional meaning. Suggestion or *dhvani*, along the line of this example, taps into the hidden spheres of meaning. This process of unraveling layered meaning allows the surge of aesthetic bliss experienced in successive levels of aesthetic experience.

Before entering into the theoretical domain of *rasa* and *dhvani*, one more aspect to consider is the application of multiple metaphors. In examples such as 'the master (*guru*) opens the eyes of one blinded by ignorance with the medicine of wisdom',[8] the eyes, blindness, and medicine are metaphorically referring to the eye of wisdom, ignorance, and knowledge. These all share generic space: just like ignorance and the dark have the same effect of not allowing one to properly see, the eye and wisdom allow the truth to be apprehended, and medicine and wisdom both have a healing effect in allowing one to see the reality. A single expression using multiple metaphors with multiple domains can map different aspects of one entity, or demonstrate the interface between multiple domains. Limiting literary meaning to metaphors, however, cannot unravel the suggested meaning that is realized in the very awareness of multiple, possible meanings. Texts overflow with meaning and a reader is always challenged to uncover the deeper meaning. Like the classical example of a pearl hunter, diving deep into the text allows one to collect precious meaning. This openness to the possibility of greater meaning allows the reader to discover his own true nature, awareness itself.

In the above examples, each of the metaphors is mapping its own entity. In other instances, multiple metaphors may describe the different generic spaces of a single entity. This phenomenon can be widely found: *guru* is not 'heavy', aesthetic '*rasa*' is not juice, suggestion (*dhvani*) is not 'sound,' neither is *tantra* 'spinning'. This is to say that suggested meaning can be found even at the level of the words themselves: what is considered as literal actually gives some other suggested meaning that can itself be an exalted meaning.

Let us examine another example: 'If there were anything devoid of you, that would be non-substantial.'[9] The non-existent entity (x) is counterfactual in this conceptual blend, and therefore constitutes a new paradigm.[10] The objective of the statement is not to describe the hypothetical non-substantial entity where there is no presence of the divine, but rather to affirm the all-pervasiveness of the divine through exclusive terms, creating a hypothetical domain of two

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[8] *Ajñānatimirāndhasya jñānāñjanaśalakayā / caksur unmīlitaṃ yena tasmai śrī gurave namaḥ //* Rudrayāmalatantra, Uttarakhanda, chapter 2.23.

[9] *Nissāram eva nikhilaṃ tvad ṛte yadi syāt /* Rudrayāmalatantra, Uttarakhaṇḍa, chapter 2.23.

[10] See Fauconnier & Turner (2002: 226-229).

non-existents. Metaphor, in these examples, describes something unique to the domain that is being mapped.

It has been established that mystical language is merely a part of daily language that utilizes complex metaphors. The goal of language is not merely to reproduce similar thought-patterns. Language can also produce a new experience. More relevant to our discussion is that language can stimulate feelings that produce sensation. This stimulation of inner emotion, however, is not a precondition for linguistic comprehension. A sentence, 'Your wife died,' has the potential to generate grief in the intended listener. The feeling of grief, however, is not a precondition of syntactic understanding. This experiential domain of awareness can be mapped through *rasa*, the aesthetic theory.

Rasa can mean many things: sap, juice, liquid, fluid, water, liquor, drink, potion, taste, flavor, relish, an object of taste, love, pleasure, beauty, sentiment, and so on. When used in the aesthetic sense, this term is less related to its literal meaning than to what it suggests: ultimately, an aesthetic bliss. In both juice or liquor and aesthetic sentiment, there is enjoyment, a relishing factor, which is the generic space that allows the conceptual blend and the metaphoric understanding of *rasa* as aesthetic mood. The polyvalence of the term *rasa* allows exegetes to compare aesthetic *rasa* with the absolute experience.[11]

A later classical aesthete, Jagannātha, defines *rasa* as *cidāvaraṇabhaṃga*,[12] or the removal of (*bhaṃga*) the cover to consciousness. In his opinion, neither is the true nature of consciousness revealed, nor is the blissful state always experienced in ordinary experience. The experience of aesthetic bliss (*rasa*), on the other hand, breaks this barrier, allowing the individual to be in his true nature, the essential self, identified as awareness-in-itself.

Before entering into the possibility of an application of *rasa* in reading Tantra, it is contextual to demonstrate the parallel between the aesthetics of *rasa* and the doctrine of Tantric philosophy. Rasa utilizes bodily-felt moods, systematizes aesthetic bliss experienced through a particular *rasa* experience, and grounds aesthetic bliss in commonsense experience. Tantra, on the other hand, although utilizing the same bodily-felt moods, nonetheless grounds the esoteric experience. This seeming incongruity diminishes when we understand esoteric experience as not out of the domain of the body. The alternative

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[11] Mahārthamañjarī Parimala, in verse 58. Mahesvarānanda interprets the term *rasa* as the very Absolute, following the upanisadic passage, *raso vai sa*. In his opinion, the *rasa*s included above such as erotic, comic, tragic, cruel, are considered as *rasa* only in the *upacāra* or accessory sense.

[12] Sanskrit transliteration note: velar nasal has been rendered as *ṃ* throughout.

solution to this conundrum is that the *rasa*-experience is uncommon and transcendent (*lokottara*). Either of these alternatives can be a response to the question surfaced above, although both options, that esoteric experience is corporeal and aesthetic experience is transcendental, cannot be simultaneously applied for the same purpose. This is only to say that *rasa* theory can rise above its overtly physical connection, and the mystical literature can shed its transcendental grandeur.

The *rasa*-experience and esoteric bliss have something in common: its generation is not bound by causal conditions. These experiences depend upon subjects. A play, a prayer, a song, or an effort of meditation: these have the potency to elevate one from normal consciousness to an aesthetic or mystical realm. But just as an aesthetic experience relies on a tender heart (*sahṛdaya*), so does the esoteric experience. Language can only 'suggest' bliss,[13]15 whether it is of an aesthetic or an esoteric nature. The non-dual experience of awareness-only (*cinmātra*), as propounded in the Trika texts, is not a precondition of syntactic comprehension.

The famous definition of experiencing *rasa* runs as:

> *Vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicārīsamyogād raṣanispattiḥ* |[14]
> Rasa is derived by the union of [the specific moods identified as] determinants (*vibhāva*), consequents (*anubhāva*), and transient moods (*vyabhicārin*)[*bhāva*].

We learn from this aphorism that *rasa* experience is already a fusion of multiple moods. In the *rasa* experience, determinants, consequents, and transient moods become one, giving rise to a single aesthetic bliss. Through the perspective of *rasa*-experience, this is an *ah-hah!*-moment, a non-dual experience where the mode of subjective awareness of the form of enjoyer and the mode of awareness of the form of an object (*prameya caitanya*) that is being enjoyed in the *rasa* experience break their barrier and become one in the aesthetic bliss-experience. This non-dual experience, however, is not identical to the concept of embodiment that arises in dismantling the dichotomy of the mind and the body. This is the non-duality of the awareness of object and the awareness of subject. The connection of this aesthetic experience with the esoteric

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[13] See *Sāhityadarpaṇa* 5.270, and the commentary thereon. The psychological aspect of 'suggestion' is examined by Lalita Pandit in her "Dhvani and the 'Full Word': Suggestion and Signification from Abhinavagupta to Jacques Lacan."

[14] *Nāṭyaśāstra*, chapter 6.32.

experience of self-recognition will become clearer when we discuss *abhivyakti*, or the doctrine of the revelation of *rasa*.

Classical Indian aesthetes identify eight or nine primary *rasa*s.[15] There are eight permanent moods (*bhāva*) that give rise to eight *rasa*s.[16] Of these determinant moods, two aspects, the objective (*ālambana*), and the stimulative (*uddīpana*), are associate moods. In experiencing love, two lovers are the objective determinants, and space, time, and condition all function as stimulative determinants. Scholars discussing *rasa* have counted 33 transient moods and eight physical symptoms; these are identified as *sāttvika bhāva*s. *Rasa* is experienced in the proper fusion of all of these constituents.[17]

This classical *rasa* theory comes from the traditional Indian theatre and drama. The proponent of *rasa*, Bharata, composed his text *Nātyaśāstra* (scripture of dance) where *nātya* primarily refers to aesthetic experience in the context of drama. Linking the theatrical with the spiritual implies a real connection between these two spheres, and highlights their differences. The theatrical experience is staged, while the esoteric experience of the divine or of the self is considered to be a direct encounter with the reality itself. Furthermore, *rasa* experience appears to be a blend of multiple moods, whereas the experience of the self is supposed to be fundamental, the bedrock of all other experiences.

These critiques, however, do not appear to shake the ground of the Tantric understanding of esoteric experience. Let us contemplate a few aphorisms from the Śiva Sūtras:

"The self is the dancer"[18]
"The inner self is the stage"[19]

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[15] See *The Number of Rasa-s*, by V. Raghavan (194). Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Center. The standard eight *rasa*s are: erotic (*śṛṃgāra*), the comic (*hāsya*), the tragic (*karuṇa*), the furious or cruel (*raudra*), the heroic (*vīra*), the fearful or timorous (*bhayānaka*), the loathsome (*vibhatsa*), and the wondrous (*adbhuta*). Bharata, the first Indian aesthete, explains that among these *rasa*s, four (*śṛṃgāra, raudra, vīra*, and *vibhatsa*) are considered to be the causal *rasa*s and the other four are considered to arise successively from each of the previous four *rasa*s. Ānandavardhana and particularly Abhinavagupta tend to accept a ninth, peaceful or *śānta*. Later dualistic and Bhakti traditions tend to accept religious devotion or *bhakti* as a separate *rasa*.

[16] The eight *rasa*s have eight permanent *bhāva*s or moods. The *vibhāva*s and *anubhāva*s are instrumental to the experience of the permanent moods (which are identical to the associated *rasa*).

[17] *The Dhvanyāloka of Anandavardhana with the Locana of Abhinavagupta* by Ingalls, Masson, and Patwardhan, *Dhvanisiddhānta tathā tulanīyasāhityacintana* (in Hindi); *Indian Literary Criticism* G. N. Devy (ed.) are few examples in this field.

[18] *nartaka ātmā* Śivasūtra (SS) 3.9.

[19] *raṃgo 'ntarātmā* SS 3.10.

"The senses are the spectators"[20]
"Accomplishment in inborn disposition is through the control of intelligence"[21]

The overlap between the two spheres continues: The Lord that Tantric practitioners worship is the Lord of dance (*Naṭeśa, Naṭarāja*). In Tantra, the eight *rasa*s are associated with eight specific Deities.[22] The Pāśupatas (one of the sectarian groups) carry out all life as a kind of drama: 'act' insane, the pretend to be a seducer, or behave stubbornly. Śaivites imitate the form of lord Śiva by wearing earrings, smearing ashes on their bodies or by carrying tridents. The very prayer to Lord Bhairava presents itself as 'Imitating Bhairava'.[23] Bondage and liberation, following these ascetics, are self-suggestions alone: in reality, there is neither bondage nor liberation. In all of these contexts, religious practices are dramatic or theatrical behaviors.

The Tantric use of meditation, or the use of liquor and sex, demonstrates that, instead of Tantra being only an intellectual property, aspects of Tantra pursue methods of altering states of consciousness. The meditation practices range from a focus on deities that demonstrate *śṛṃgāra*, an aesthetic mood of 'beauty', to attention on the fearsome Bhairava or Cāmuṇḍā, deities that generate fear and disgust. Tantric rituals have aspects of generating the heroic mood (*vīrabhāva*) as well as other emotions, suggesting the validity of applying *rasa* to interpret Tantric experience.

The presence of *rasa* in religious experience becomes pronounced when analyzing the later classical Bhakti tradition. This devotional theism, while accepting other *rasa*s, propounds devotional love (*bhakti*) as an additional *rasa*. Actually, the divine love becomes the predominant aesthetic mood in this theology. The other *rasa*s are auxiliaries, applicable if they are functioning as an instrument for the emergence of divine love, and negligible, if obstructing this experience. There may be some naturally devoted people; nonetheless, Bhakti tradition does not reject fostering devotional love. Actually, the whole purpose of listening to divine names and acts, singing songs of love, going on pilgrimage, or dancing and drumming are in order to stimulate the mood of devotion.

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[20] *prekṣakāṇīndriyāṇi* SS 3.11.
[21] *dhīvaśāt sattvasiddhiḥ* SS 3.12.
[22] Eight deities Viṣṇu, Pramatha, Yama, Rudra, Mahendra, Kāla, Mahākāla, and Brahman are associated with these eight rasas in sequence. The Nāṭyaśāstra also correlates colors with specific *rasa*: smoky (*śyāma*), white, brown (*kapota*), red, *gaura*, black, blue, and yellow colors are associated with eight rasas. *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6.42-45.
[23] I am referring to the *Bhairavānukaraṇastava* of Kṣemarāja.

The most serious criticism is, whether this esoteric experience, identified as self-recognition, is produced. Certainly, the theatrical experience is artificially produced by a skilled performer. Tantrics tend to believe that even a dramaturgical experience can reproduce real experience. As mentioned above, self-awareness is limited due to the conviction of the self as bound. Liberation or the recognition of completeness arises with the conviction of completeness. Furthermore, the esoteric experience of the Lordship of the self (*pratyabhijñā*) is not something newly generated. This is considered as the bedrock of all other experiences. Following this position, although the self-awareness in its real sense is not produced, a similar experience can be produced, and the dramaturgical (if this identification appeals) experience allows the experiencer to realize what the reality is like.

One of the most striking elements in this discussion is the generation of a specific bhāva or mood in the course of Tantric practice. A Bhairava practitioner imitates the moods that lead to *āveśa*, or possession by the deity, wherein the practitioner recognizes himself as Bhairava.[24] One meditating upon a beautiful deity will experience a different mood corresponding to the central mood that the deity depicts. A Tantric dictum urges that "one should worship a deity by becoming the deity."[25] Apparently, different moods are induced during the course of practice with an intention to experience the deity that the specific mood is representing.[26] The artificially-generated mood is supposed to transform into the real experience, and this time, to the divine experience. What is metaphoric becomes literal in its culmination. The mood that is bodily felt, in its suggested level of consciousness, is the deity, or the true nature of the self.

However, this is only a part of what Tantra has to offer. Tantric experience dismantles the boundary between this-worldly and that-worldly, between the spiritual and the corporeal. For the bound individual, there is just this world, for those who are liberated, there is reality shining in all instances of cognition: the dichotomy of aesthetic bliss and spiritual bliss, or the aesthetic awareness and self-awareness is for those unwilling to shatter mental constructions and recognize the magnitude of reality. Through the aesthetic perspective, *rasa*

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[24] Paul Muller-Ortega (2002: 213-230).

[25] *devo bhūtvā yajed devaṃ. nādevo devaṃ arcayet |*

[26] For the practice of different *bhāva*s, see *Puraścaryārṇava*, vol. 3: 248-290. This topic is widely addressed in other Tantras such as *Cīnācāratantra, Gandharvatantra, Nīlācāratantra*, and *Śaktisaṃgamatantra*. All of these Tantras appear to be of later medieval times.

refers to two states, one the absolute experience of reality, and two, the aesthetic experience of different moods. The second type of experience is explained as the grandeur of self-awareness. Aesthetic and mystical, in this sense, do not pose a distinction but rather function as different dimensions.

The Tantric proposition that self-awareness is at the core of all experience fits with the concept of the *abhivyakti* or revelation of *rasa*.[27] This revelation (*abhivyakti*) corresponds to the Trika Śaiva doctrine and is the point of agreement for both Tantric and aesthetic literature in Kashmir. Following the concept of *abhivyakti*, 'rasa' is dormant within individuals and is easily experienced by those whose heart is tender (*sahṛdaya*). Śaiva doctrine and is the point of agreement for both Tantric and aesthetic literature in Kashmir. Following the concept of abhivyakti, '*rasa*' is dormant within individuals and is easily experienced by those whose heart is tender (*sahṛdaya*).[28] What is unique to the aesthetic theory of revelation is that it accepts *rasa* as dormant and revealed when the causal conditions are met. The causal conditions are complex, as *rasa* arises with the blend of multiple moods. However, *rasa* is the essential foundation of all sensation. It is not created by any one specific act or accessory, but only revealed through the completeness of the theatrical production. This concept of *rasa* fits with the doctrine of self-recognition in the sense that the self, following the *pratyabhijñā* doctrine, is revealed in its real magnitude, although there is always an experience of the self in its limited and bound form. The description of the *rasa* experience as a fusion of multiple moods reveals that all the psychological states are not the *rasa* experience. In the complex causal condition of the fusion of different moods, the veil that hides the essential nature of awareness is removed, and the 'real' self is directly felt in the domain where the two modes of subjective and objective awareness are united in one *camatkāra*, or the *ah hah!*-moment.

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[27] There are four standard theories concerning the experience of rasa: 1. *Utpattivāda*: In Lollata's theory of the origination or 'arousal' of *rasa, rasa* is identical with the permanent mood and *vibhāva* causes its origination. This *rasa* is experienced by *anubhāva*, and is sustained by *vyabhicārin* mood. The identification of *niṣpatti*, as found in the original definition of the experience of *rasa* given by Bharata, with *utpatti* or origination, is not acceptable to many other critics. 2. *Anumitivāda*: According to this doctrine of Śaṃkuka, *rasa* is not directly known, but rather it is experienced through inference by the person who experiences it. 3. Bhuktivāda: According to this doctrine attributed to Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, rasa is 'consumed' (*bhukti*). Rasa is considered as a permanent mood because it is originated (*bhāvita*) by literature. 4. *Abhivyaktivāda*: The doctrine that *rasa* is 'revealed' (*abhivyakta*) was adopted by those propounding *Dhvani*, including Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta.

[28] For the Tantric understanding of the heart, see Paul Muller-Ortega (1989).

Following the *abhivyakti* doctrine of *rasa*: the experience of *rasa* results in the generalization of different moods.[29] In the state of aesthetic bliss engendered through the rise of *rasa*, different determinant and subsidiary moods are generalized, merging the subjective and objective horizons of experience. Except for the experience of *rasa*, there lies nothing else in this state. This aesthetic bliss envelops both the enjoyer and what is enjoyed. From the perspective of the external elements found in the rise of the *rasa* experience, this can be interpreted in terms of fusion or blend, as this is the state where all individualities are found in their generic form. On the experiential level, however, the *rasa* experience transcends these cognitive and psychological states. Although the constituents and the conditions of *rasa* experience are complex, the aesthetic bliss in itself revealed through these means is basic and all-embracing.

The *abhivyakti* concept considers the experience of *rasa* as *lokottara* or transcendental. This term lokottara needs to be understood on its own terms. The aesthetic experience of *rasa* is somehow different from common experiences: *rasa* exists within the parameter of the moods identified as *vibhāva* and so on, and *rasa* is revealed collectively by all these domains. The moment of this aesthetic experience is distinct also in a sense that, in the actual moment of this experience, there is as if the aesthetic bliss is flowing around in all directions, as if entering into heart, as if embracing the whole body, and as if subsuming all other experiences than that of *rasa* itself.

This model of transcendence also aligns with the Tantric doctrine of *Pratyabhijna*. The experience of the self differs from other common-sense experiences, which are described in similar terms: entering into the heart, embracing the entire body, subsuming all the rest in the natural flow of unsurpassable bliss. The bodily connection in the language of both the interpretation of *rasa* and also the interpretation of the self-experience is quite striking. The metaphors of embracing, subduing, entering or penetrating are commonly found in both the literature on aesthetics explaining the *Abhivyakti* of *rasa* and in the Tantric Kula and Trika writings. This model of transcendentalism is supported by this *Abhivyakti* doctrine.

This type of transcendentalism emerges against the backdrop of the aesthetic theory that accepts the actual causality (*kārakatva*) of the instruments of aesthetic experience in generating *rasa*. There are two ways this *kāraka* or causality is interpreted: as cause and effect, and as identifier (*jñāpaka*).

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[29] This *sādhāraṇikaraṇa*, or generalization, is of the primary *bhāva*s, *vibhāva, anubhāva*, and *vyabhicārin*.

Instruments such as stick or clay are 'causes' for making a pot and in the case of 'knowing' fire, smoke can be the identifier. In the case of the *rasa* experience, the causality of both of these instruments is not acceptable to those following the concept of abhivyakti. The *rasa* state is innate and so is not generated, and neither is it inferred by the identifying elements, in this case, the moods such as *vibhāva*.

The relevant question then is, how does this form of transcendentalism differ from any other form of transcendentalism? We argue, this application of *lokottara* in the aesthetic sense and *viśvottīrṇa* in the Tantric sense, both translated as 'transcendent', does not negate the existence of the world or of corporeality, as the world is where this reality is found and the body is where the aesthetic or the esoteric bliss is felt. This application only identifies the uniqueness of this experience, having nothing parallel to the aesthetic moment of bliss or the state of recognizing one's self-nature.

This transcendentalism rejects the early objection that the fundamental experience is a fusion in itself. This fusion is a precondition for a conscious manifestation of that particular moment. Or, when the causal conditions are met, the aesthetic bliss or the esoteric state of self-awareness is self-revealed. By adopting this stream of argument, although reality is not identified as the literal reference of language, the suggestibility of ordinary language to express something beyond its common reference has been established.

The Scope of Suggestion (*dhvani*)

The very assumption of the concept of suggestion (*dhvani*) is that there is something more than literal meaning to be found in language.[30] This can be compared with the beauty that cannot be reduced to the bodily parts of a beautiful maiden.[31] This metaphor describes two aspects of suggestion, 1) its holistic nature, and 2) its ability to provide new understanding without diminishing anything of the source. In other words, the experience of 'beauty' cannot be reduced to physiological knowledge. When something is seen as 'beautiful', this experience does not rise at the cost of the knowledge of the object itself.

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[30] *dhvanir nāma arthāntaram* | See *Kāvyaprakāśa* 3.2. For an introduction to *dhvani*, see V. K. Chari.

[31] This example is borrowed from *Dhvanyāloka* 1.4.

In contrast, in the case of indication (*lakṣaṇā*), the direct meaning comes into crisis and so a secondary meaning is naturally expected. If someone says, 'This boy is a real lion,' the hearer is not expecting a fierce, four-footed beast. The hearer immediately brings to mind the generic qualities such as strength and courage that can describe both the lion and the boy. On the contrary, in understanding the suggested meaning, 'literal' is subordinated, as the 'literal', in this case, does not directly align with the facts.[32]35 Indication is considered to be located in the "intermediate sense" (*sāntarārthaniṣṭha*). The scope of suggestion is not the same. According to Abhinavagupta, the regulative principles of the suggestive function are: a further meaning, relationship to the secondary meaning, and the inadequacy of the conventional meaning.[33]

There are two major distinctions within the category of suggestion: 1) *avivakṣitavācya*, and 2). *vivakṣitānyaparavācya*. The first, where the actual meaning is not what is spoken by language (*avivakṣitavācya*), is identified as *lakṣaṇāmulā dhvani* or suggestion grounded on indication (*lakṣaṇā*). This sub-category of suggestion based on indication can be further explained as having two distinct applications: when what is referred to transfers into another meaning (*arthāntarasaṃkramitavācya*), or what is referred to is completely subordinated (*atyantatiraskṛtavācya*). Because each of these two can describe a word or a sentence, the suggestion based on indication is generally analyzed in four categories.

The second major distinction within the category of suggestion, referring to that which is directly said while additionally addressing something else (*vivakṣitānyaparavācyā dhvani*), is identified as the suggestion that relies on literal meaning (*abhidhāmūlā*). This is primarily categorized into two: the suggestion where the meaning is cognized in sequence (*lakṣakramavyaṃgya*), and the suggestion where the meaning is cognized without any sequence (*asaṃlakṣakrama-vyaṃgya*).

The central argument of this article is the application of 'suggestion' in order to unlock esoteric Tantric texts. In deconstructing textual meaning, it is not inextricably essential to establish that the text being explained relies on the philosophy that has been applied as a tool for deconstruction: we can apply Freud or Foucault to read medieval court poetry. The case here is not to make an alternative approach supporting an agnostic or transcendental hypothesis that situates the text and its interpreter at permanent odds. The conjunction

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[32] This is identified as *upasarjanībhāva* or *guṇībhāva*.
[33] *Locana* of Abhinavagupta in *Dhvanyāloka* 3.33.

of aesthetic theory and Trika philosophy strives to speak more than that: it becomes its first voice. This can be compared with an application of existentialism to reading the novels of Jean Paul Sartre. First of all, Tantric Trika philosophy relies on the doctrine of *Ābhāsa*, or appearance. Following this doctrine, reality itself appears in manifoldness due to its intrinsic powers. In this understanding, what appears is not false or illusory. Borrowing this understanding, what is being suggested (pratīyamāna) in the case of experiencing *rasa* through *dhvani*, is the suggested meaning, which in itself is real. The power of 'word' in this case can be compared with the cosmic power, infinite and unbound.

Trika doctrine accepts that knowledge of the self is a form of 'recognition' (*pratyabhijñā*). This is not cognition of something new: knowledge of the self is ever-present, hidden due to ignorance and revealed by self-recognition. Ānandavardhana, while describing the suggestive nature of *dhvani*, states that:

> This meaning and whatever particular word has the capability of conveying it are the meaning and the word which should be carefully scrutinized (or recognized, *pratyabhijñeya*) by a great poet. (Ingalls, Massion, Patwardhan, 124)

The process of revealing the suggested meaning is identified in this statement as recognition (*pratyabhijñā*).

The following example from the writing of Utpala demonstrates the interconnectedness of the doctrines of suggestion and self-recognition:

> Just as a very lovable man, earnestly desired by a beautiful maiden as her lover, being urged on by her profusely eager yearnings, comes to her and stands by her side, but is not recognized and consequently appears [to her] just like any ordinary person, [and so] does not provide her with the immensely desired taste of mutual union, [just] so, the Self of a person, even though being Almighty God Himself, is not able to taste his own divine grandeur, just because he does not recognize [himself]. (Pandit, 207).

This single example of Utpala reveals multiple suggestions: the recognition of the self is interpreted in terms of union that is expressed as the physical union of two lovers; the self, deluded, being unable to recognize his true nature is the female partner unable to identify her lover and experience the bliss of union. The 'taste of mutual union' in this passage is a metaphor that suggests the recognition of the self, when the self in delusion recognizes its grandeur.

The metaphors applied here, like many other metaphors, have the same limitation: the source and the target are in two different realms. The inability

to identify oneself as 'lover,' and the recognition of the self as the 'lover' are the domains where this metaphor fits. There is, otherwise, no actual union possible of the self with itself in the process of self-recognition. Understanding the process of metaphoric thinking is not sufficient to reveal the highest possible meaning, or multiple meanings layered upon each other that cannot be reduced to a single understanding. This thirst for additional understanding is quenched through suggested meaning, as, 'what is being revealed' or suggested can be explained by utilizing 'suggestion' and *rasa*, that the language, while utilizing commonsense metaphor, is describing self-recognition. As experiencing oneself in love is subjective, so is self-recognition.

Two Esoteric Experiences

We have said that metaphors, as a part of esoteric language, can function through suggestion to refer to the unique experience of a mystic. While blending concepts through metaphors or moods in the aesthetic experience of *rasa*, common language does not lack the suggestibility of something beyond its common reference. Neither does common-sense experience lack its essential nature of being awareness itself. On these assumptions, we will examine two modes of esoteric experience: the experience of bliss (*ānanda*) and that of awareness (*cid*). Trika philosophy describes the self as of the essential nature of bliss and awareness alone. This is to say that the true nature of bliss and awareness is the self itself, or there is no other self than the very experience of bliss and awareness. In the following examples, we will examine how the texts utilize metaphors in order to suggest the esoteric self-nature.

While the experience of the bliss described in Tantric texts alludes to the mystical state of awareness, the metaphors used to describe this are bodily felt:

> At the time of sexual union with a woman, an absorption into her is brought about by excitement, and the final delight that ensues at orgasm betokens the delight of Brahman. This delight is (in reality) that of one's own Self. (*Vijñānabhairava* 69).

This description can be taken literally. One can explain this as a metaphorical expression of the experience of the Absolute. One can argue, specifically following the lines of Lakoff and Johnson, that this description cannot escape bodily experience while describing something that is transcendental. Applying the theory of blending metaphors, one can take this as an example where 'the

bliss' is generic, in both corporeal or sexual experience and the experience of the absolute, and so this detail blends two experiences. These theories either eliminate an alternative reading, or lead to an impasse demonstrating the limitations of language in revealing a possible meaning, and support one or another form of transcendentalism.

What is the nature of the self-experience following the Trika doctrine? K. emaraja describes that the highest reality is both transcendent (*viśvottīrṇa*) and immanent (*viśvamaya*).[34] The all-embracing singular reality, while remaining unstained by the limited vision found in the world, is nonetheless present and can be grasped. Instead of entering into a theological debate of how can something embrace both contradictory aspects, I would like to place the above-described experience within the contours of this doctrine: the experience of the Absolute does not preclude the corporeal experience of bliss one can have in the process of sexual union.

Reading a text only in a literal sense limits it to a level of meaning with which the very author of the text would not agree. Reading these descriptions as metaphors brings the text to another extreme, one in which the literal is rejected. A possible reason why classical Indian aesthetes proposed the doctrine of suggestion (*dhvani*) in addition to the doctrine of indication (*lakṣaṇā*) is that it exactly balances the two extremes of empiricism and transcendentalism; it creates a negotiated ground where both aspects can interplay. In the above example, the power of suggestion embodies both realms: it describes the absolute while embodying the corporeal.

Another example for the experience of bliss:

> When one experiences the expansion of joy of savour arising from the pleasure of eating and drinking, one should meditate on the perfect condition of this joy, then there will be supreme delight. (*Vijñānabhairava* 72).

The situation posed by the text is that sensual pleasure is the only pleasure that is commonly known. The approach of the text is to describe this mystical bliss by utilizing the physical pleasure that is commonly shared by both a mystic and his audience.

A text cannot be silent. Even silence, if it is textualized, becomes one language: it speaks for something. Whether the texts tend to reject language, or

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[34] *viśvottīrṇaṃ viśvamayaṅ. ceti trikādidarśanavidaḥ / Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* 8. auto-commentary of Kṣemarāja.

use metaphor or some other verbal form, it is used in the context of encoun-tering something, confronting something that may have not have been expe-rienced by the reader. The worst-case scenario, and the most likely scenario, is that this experience may be subjective or even solipsistic. However, while rejecting the applicability of language in describing mystical experience, what has been ignored is that language is always conventional and there can never be a language that is non-conventional. There may be shared subjective experi-ence integrated within language, but it is not as objective as some would like to find it. The words 'pain' or 'love' may evoke some resonance in the hearer; however, by hearing the word 'pain' the hearer will not panic, or by hearing 'love', the listener will not swoon. What specific words meant to Abhi-navagupta, for example, may never be known.

Can language refer to something that is beyond concepts? The response to this question can be found in the Advaita position that accepts the concept of the form of the absolute (*brahmākāravṛtti*) that one can consciously generate: this concept mediates the absolute and the concepts. This (although itself a concept) relates to all the other concepts and integrates them. Finally, this mode dissolves in absolute awareness. Mental modification, in conclusion, mediates the phenomenal world and absolute reality.

The context here is the description of 'bliss'. This bliss is not only a process, a rapture of revealing the truth, or a momentary pleasure experienced when getting rid of mental clutter. The context here of describing the bliss is that this very bliss that is considered as Brahman is identified as located within the body:

> *ānando brahmaṇo rūpaṃ tac ca dehe vyavasthitam |*[35]
> Bliss is the form of the Brahman [itself], and this is located in the body.

The bliss that has been identified with the Brahman is corporeally experienced and found in physical pleasure. However, to say that this is all the bliss that this text describes violates the text twice over, by not extracting the meaning to which the text refers, and by not considering the two domains, the Brah-man and the bliss, that the text identifies: the extension of the text is in describ-ing something generic to both Brahman and the corporeal experience of bliss. The most appropriate hermeneutical approach to these descriptions may be one where what is apparent in the text is not negated while the text is nonetheless

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[35] Cited in TĀ, *Viveka* 1.242; 3.72; 3.93; 4.139; 28.332; 29.98; 29.128.

understood as describing something beyond what appears in the literal reading. The doctrine of suggestion is the most appropriate tool for us to deconstruct these texts. It has been mentioned that the meaning derived through suggestion is not identical to finding multiple meanings of a term, and what is etymological is not what is derived through suggestion. Furthermore, the approach of suggestion is not to accept indication by negating the literal. As in the cases such as 'I am under fire' or 'She is all over me,' the literal is not possible: the narrator is neither literally under fire nor is she literally over him. In the case of indication (*lakṣaṇā*), the literal is simply impossible. The description of corporeal bliss, in some instances the analogy of orgasmic rapture, is not literal, as this literal understanding violates the very presumption of the text; nor is this an indication, a metaphoric expression of something that is not corporeal, as that a gain violates the instances described in this context. It is neither limited to corporeal, nor is transcendental. *Dhvani* is the best-negotiated ground where meanings can interplay from literal to metaphoric: describing something beyond while embracing what is phenomenal.

What is the Tantric hermeneutics of bliss? Tantras, specifically the text *Mālinīvijayottara-tantra* (MVT) and Abhinavagupta's *Vārttika* upon MVT (MVV)...[36] categorize bliss in seven levels:

1. *nijānanda* (the bliss pertaining to the self (i.e., the body)): This is the first level of bliss. This bliss is experienced when the individual feels emotion in his own heart. (TĀ 5.44)
2. *nirānanda* (transcendental bliss): This bliss is experienced when there is an experience of the void. In other words, when the subjective experience rests on void and there is no object to be cognized, this state is considered *nirānanda*. (TĀ 5.44)
3. *parānanda* (supreme bliss): This bliss is described as arising when there is the rise of the cognition of objects along with the rise of *prāṇa*. (TĀ 5.45) In this state, one is engaged in filling infinite parts of cognized objects in the *apāna* breath, and one reaches to the bliss identified as *parānanda* endowed with the moon of *apāna*. (TĀ 5.45-46)
4. *brahmānanda* (the bliss of the absolute): This bliss occurs when one reaches to the ground of the pranic flow of *samāna* where all the manifesting objects of cognition are united while the subject is experiencing the awareness that is devoid of any content. (TĀ 5.46-47)
5. *mahānanda* (great bliss): After the rise of *brahmānanda*, one willing to burn down the limitations of the collection of the means of knowledge and the objects of cog-

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[36] For further discussion on the hierarchy of bliss that culminates with *jagadānanda*, see MVV 1. 14-50; 1. 146-149; 1. 153-156; 1. 272; and 1. 280-281.

nition rests on the fire of *udāna* breath, experiences the bliss identified as *mahānanda*. (TĀ 5.47-48)

6. *cidānanda* (the bliss of awareness): Having achieved repose on *mahānanda*, when one pacifies the great fire, [there arises] the completeness that is free from all the conditions. Then there rises *cidānanda*, which is not occupied (*upabṛṃhita*) by an unconscious object. (TĀ 5.48-49)

The seventh bliss, *jagadānanda* (the collective bliss), is supposedly the ultimate bliss that one can experience in the ecstatic state. In this state, there is no limitation; it is experienced as 'surrounding'; it is endowed with the supreme nectar of the awareness of unstruck sound; in this state, there is no prominent sequence (*saṃgati*) of the meditation (*bhāvanā*) and so forth. (TĀ 5.50-51) In this supreme state of bliss, all other six states of bliss identified such as *nijānanda* are collectively found in the essential nature of the self of the form of awareness alone.

This presentation of the hermeneutics of bliss in this context serves two purposes: 1) with an understanding of the terms used, language can explain something that may not be present in form of experience; 2) language performs the same role when describing something that is paradoxical as it functions in describing a linear reality; 3) the rapture Abhinavagupta is describing here is esoteric; it is more than what is commonly found incorporeal bliss; and 4) this bliss is directly addressed as found in different pranic positions and are corporeal. Furthermore, the common description that the transcendental experience is closer to the absolute reality does not make sense to Abhinavagupta who positions multiple other levels of bliss above *nirānanda* and *parānanda*. The experience of void according to Abhinavagupta, is merely a level, a grade of which a practitioner seeking the true *jagadānanda* must rise above.

First of all, *jagadānanda* cannot be described without blending the multiple concepts identified as *nijānanda* and so on. *Jagadānanda*, as well as other levels of bliss, are not metaphoric expression of something that is beyond words or something that cannot be described by language. This concept allows us to describe esoteric bliss as something found in everyday experience, but with more to it. All experiences of bliss are the very experience of the self. Without *prāṇa* returning to heart, without the subjective being addressed in its subjective form, bliss is not experienced. However, the higher form of bliss is revealed when awareness, the self in itself, is manifest in its true form, enveloping both the domains of the subject and object of experience.

What is meant here by *ānanda* can be understood by exploiting literal meaning at the same time as utilizing the doctrine of *dhvani*. This approach also allows a negotiation between the transcendent and corporeal: something

that is more than bodily is found within the body. By creating the hierarchy of bliss, Tantric polemicists are negotiating the ground of that which is conceived of in opposite terms: the highest reality that can be found is not transcendental: transcendental experience is one step closer to the corporeal, but what exactly is the highest is that which embodies both. That which is conceived of as transcendental and beyond the body is found within the body; that which is conceived of as impossible to express in language is expressed, not only through negation, but also through suggestion.

The next metaphor to be analyzed is that of consciousness as fire. The supreme reality identified in Tantric literature, which corresponds to the description found in upanisadic traditions, is the self as of the character of bliss and awareness. Besides the metaphor of fire to describe consciousness, another term used in Tantric literature is *cid* as sky (*gagana, ākāsa*). These two metaphors, the metaphor of fire and that of sky, are not identical. These serve two different purposes in describing consciousness.

In the above application of *dhvani*, we have mainly experimented with one model of Indian aesthetic theory, *vivakṣitānyaparavācya*, one in which the reference is both explicit and implicit. Another type of *dhvani, avivakṣitavācya*, identifies the reference that is not explicit or literal. In examining the metaphor of consciousness, it is more appropriate to apply the second category of *dhvani*. If only the terms, fire, sky, or other metaphors are used, this metaphoric expression is not referring to both fire and the self, or sky and consciousness, but rather the literal, fire or sky, is abandoned and the referent of the metaphoric expression is recognized through *dhvani*. However, what is suggested is the property that fire or the sky has the property to incinerate, and the property of having no property, having no form.

These metaphors, fire, sky, fluid, if compared, do not share anything in common. Or, at least, what they commonly share is not what is referred to when these metaphors are applied in order to describe the self. Fire is not sky, neither is sky juicy. Their referent, awareness (*cid*), on the other hand, shares these properties when describing the role of consciousness in Tantric literature. These metaphors independently describe different aspects of the self or awareness.

It is contextual to cite some examples before proceeding further. Abhinavagupta writes that bhāva or entities are incinerated in the fire of awareness (*bodhāgni*).writes that bhāva or entities are incinerated in the fire of awareness (*bodhāgni*).[37] This internalized form of fire-oblation is found everywhere in

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[37] TĀ 4,202. For additional fire metaphors, see *Samvitprakāśa* 1.10.

Tantric literature. Jayaratha, while commenting upon this passage, cites another text: "Oblation into fire is incineration of the group of entities in the fire identified as awareness entangled in the web of the flames of seven senses."[38]

Here, in order to fit with the metaphor of fire whose flames are depicted as tongues, the author describes seven sense organs, although there are only five sense organs found in the body.[39] What is significant in this metaphor is the application of flames and fire to fit with awareness and senses. As the seven flames are not an illusory appearance of the fire, but rather, these are the very being, the essence of fire, this metaphor turns back, describing consciousness functioning through senses, and revealed through senses. In this depiction, sensory experience is not negated in describing self-awareness. The cognitive process that gives rise to knowledge of an object is compared with fire oblation, as the external entities are transformed into awareness in this process. In a metaphoric sense, the objective world turns into awareness through the ritual oblation of cognition.

Explaining the five sequential functions of awareness, Jayaratha describes *vilāpana*, or dissolution of the world, in terms of *cidagnisādbhāva*, or turning into the fire of awareness.[40] The metaphor of fire to describe the role of awareness is more vivid in another of his aphorisms:

> *citivahnir avarohapade channo 'pi mātrayā meyendhanaṃ pluṣyati* / PH 14.
> The fire of awareness, though covered in the stage of descent, partly burns the fuel of the objects of cognition.

Jayaratha justifies the metaphor of fire to describe awareness by saying that awareness is of the character of devouring the world.[41] This character of consciousness of consuming external entities is also found, the author writes, in the limited subjective state bound by illusion. This is to say that the subjective

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[38] Cited in TĀ *Viveka* 4.202.

[39] The depiction of seven tongues of fire is found in the Vedic texts. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣaḍ* identifies Kālī, Karalī, Manojavā, Sulohitā, Sudhumravarṇā, Sphulaṃginī, Viśvarucī, Lelāyamānā as seven tongues of fire. Some of these names are identical to those of Tantric divinities.

[40] PH 11, autocommentary of Kṣemarāja.

[41] *citir eva viśvagrasanaśīlatvāt vahniḥ.* Autocommentary of Kṣemarāja in PH 14. See also *cidagninaikyam . . .* in TĀ 15.413; the commentary of Kṣemarāja on the Śivasūtra 2.8; . . . *atidīpt-asaṃvijjvalane . . .* (Paramārthasāra 76); and *Cidagnisaṃhāramarīci-mantraḥ . . . Stotrabhaṭṭāraka,* cited in *Mahārthamañjarī Parimala* 49.

awareness in the state of bondage does have some characters or powers that the self, free from bondage, is endowed with. However, this common-sense awareness does not fully incinerate the 'externals', as there exists externality when an object is cognized: either awareness is in its non-dual state with no distinction between subject and object or there is an awareness found in the dichotomy in form of subject and object. By the metaphor of fire, what has been described is that awareness has the character to turn the external phenomena to its nature whether it is in its pure nature or in the conditioned state.

When this awareness is acknowledged as fire, the oblation into fire can be performed internally. In the Śrī-Vidyā texts, this internalized fire oblation comes with description such as:

> In the fire of awareness burning constantly inside without any fuel which is the opposite of the darkness of delusion, in the land of the expansion of the wonderful rays, I oblate the world, starting from earth and ending with Shiva....[42]

In retracing the history of the application of fire as a metaphor for awareness, the *Bhagavadgītā*, in one instance, states that the fire of knowledge incinerates all actions.[43] In another instance, the fire of *yoga* is identified as kindled by the light of knowledge.[44]

Besides awareness as fire, it is described as light. The self as light and awareness as light are the metaphors found in the *Upaniṣad*s. Tantric texts elaborate upon this metaphor, iterating that this 'light' not only describes the illuminating nature of consciousness, but also expresses the triad of subject, object, and cognition; the sequence of letters that gives rise to mantras; the sequence of the deities that correspond to the sequence of the triad of subject, the means of knowledge, and object of cognition; to describe the ritual diagram; the preparation of the fluid of libation; to name a few. In a graphic depiction of light, the light of fire refers to the self, identified as awareness; the light found in the sun corresponds to the means of cognition; and the moon refers to the objects of knowledge. The fire, in this metaphor, is the cosmic fire that gives rise to the sun, as even the sun is not in existence without the fire in it. The metaphors of moon and sun play the same role: as the light found in the moon is a reflection of the light of the sun, so is consciousness reflected in objects that are grasped

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[42] Cited in Setubandha, *Yoginīhṛdaya* 3.108-11.
[43] *Bhagavadgītā* (BG) 4.19, 4.37.
[44] See BG 4.27.

in the process of cognition.[45] Abhinavagupta describes this grasping of objects in terms of *pratibimba* (counter-image).[46]

The awareness-in-itself, described in terms of light, is identified with the deities in sequence of twelve Kālīs. The subjective awareness, identified with fire, is of the character of "I"-awareness alone. This, in process of cognizing objects, is found in twelve forms, with ten senses, mind, and cognition. This group of twelve, identified as the means of knowledge, is depicted by the sun. While in the rise of the objects of cognition, as the light of the sun is found reflected in the moon so is awareness of the senses found in the form of external objects.[47] The metaphor of a wheel with twelve spokes on one hand describes the twelve senses in the limited subjective state (*māyāpramātṛ*), on the other hand, it describes the ritual wheel of twelve Kālīs. The senses, or precisely, the awareness found when the senses function, is the meeting ground, or the confluence of the external and inner, the object and the self.[48]

The context here is the deconstruction of the metaphors. In order to actually discover the meaning of the text that describes self-awareness with the metaphors of light and explains the sequence of cognition with the metaphors of the fire, sun, and moon, both strategies are required. First, what is literally referred to by the terms fire, sun, and moon, is not what is described: *avivakṣitāvācya*, or the model of aesthetic theory in which the reference is suggested, not explicit or literal. Second, what is suggested by the term is not fixed, but rather, is fluid. It can suggest the sequence of letters, the sequence of *maṇḍala*,[49] 60 or the sequence of the deities identified as Kālīs. The suggested meaning, in this case, can be identified, as the deity is the letters, the *maṇḍala* is the deity, and so on. Although in the primary sense, a *maṇḍala*, for instance, is not a *mantra*, in the suggested level, however, all these refer to the same reality. In this case, when letters or *maṇḍala* are described, this description can

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[45] For the metaphor of sun for awareness, see *Saṃvitprakāśa* 1.39. For identification of the sun as the means of knowledge, moon as the objects of cognition and the fire as the subject of cognition, see TĀ 3.121-123; *Cidgaganacandrikā* 37. For the rise of the triad of the fire, sun and moon, see TĀ 5.22-25. For identification of the triad of fire, sun, and moon with letters, see TĀ 3.131-134; *Cidgaganacandrikā* 40-41. For the parallel made with the moonlight coming from the sunlight with the letters identified by moon, see TĀ 3.185-86. For identification of the moon and sun for *prāṇa* and *apāna*, see the passage *ūrdhve… layātmaka*, cited in *Viveka*, TĀ 3.170.

[46] TĀ 3.46.

[47] See TĀ 3.122-126, and the *Viveka* commentary of Jayaratha thereon.

[48] For the description of the rise of twelve Kālīs, see TĀ 4.148-176. For the description of the fire-oblation with the depiction of the triad of fire, sun, and moon, see TĀ 5.22-25.

[49] See TĀ 4.127-130.

function as *vivakṣitānyaparavācya*, which is the alternate model of aesthetic theory wherein the reference is both explicit and implicit. In this complicated picture of deciphering the metaphors, meaning can be derived by both approaches of *dhvani* simultaneously, where the primary is abandoned and not abandoned. When the terms refer to the physical moon and sun, the primary meaning is abandoned. When these terms describe one of the esoteric aspects such as *maṇḍala*, this meaning is not abandoned while exploiting additional meaning of the deity and so on.

Just as the metaphor of fire to describe awareness explains the nature of awareness to grasp objects and transform them into its own pure nature, the metaphor of sky or of avoid explains its natural state of having no objects, or its empty nature in relation to the world.[50] In the same way, the metaphor of 'fluid' used to describe awareness functions to demonstrate the nature of awareness with no fixed form of its own that naturally takes the shape of the object it grasps.[51]

Conclusion

The above discussion establishes multiple points. The first and foremost is the need for a proper hermeneutic tool capable of deciphering texts and the cultures that sustain, and are sustained by, these texts. Specifically, in the case of Tantras, as the term suggests, the rituals, the text itself, the various esoteric practices, are 'woven' together, or in other words, harmoniously blended. The theories that emerged in classical India, in the process of speculating about these phenomena, still have much to offer. The limitation of the application of other perspectives can be considered valid as long as they do not interfere with the inherent structure of meaning and contradict the central premise of the text.

Rasa and *dhvani* theories, developed by classical Indian exegetes, are tools provide a means to understand Tantric texts and practices. The textual link, the historical fact of their interconnectedness, and the common cultural

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[50] For consciousness as sky, see '*cidgagana*' in the *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, autocommentary 19; *cidvyoman* in the *Cidgaganacandrikā* 1; '*cidgagana*' in the very title of the book and also in verse 3 of *Cidgaganacandrikā*. See also *cidākāśa* in *Spandakārika, Viveka* 1.11, and 1.25. For application of '*vyoman*' in order to describe the self-nature, see *Cidgaganacandrikā* 54, 107, 195, 197, 202. For the visualization of the self of the form of void (*vyoman*), see *Vijñānabhairava* 92.

[51] See *cidrasa* in *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya*, autocommentary on 4 and 19.

ground allow a deeper reflection into the cultural phenomena. This approach does not limit these theories to a reading of Indian culture, or specifically, Tantric culture.

Metaphoric thinking and conceptual blend is a cross-cultural phenomenon. These cognitive tools allow the further deconstruction of otherwise complex and opaque symbols. The specific analysis of two modes, the expression of 'awareness' and 'bliss' support the arguments discussed in this paper. Application of 'suggestion' (*dhvani*) as a tool to deconstruct meaning properly fits with the discussion above: Tantric literature is highly suggestive; esoteric experience defies ordinary expression and requires different cognitive tools to be deciphered; and esoteric experience, unique in itself, begs for a different language for its description.

This application of *rasa* and *dhvani* for reading esoteric texts and mystical writings is an approach that can be tested in the broader cross-cultural context. Mystical writings commonly describe something rather uncommon to ordinary experience. Mystics utilize metaphors and blend multiple concepts to convey the rapture or the awareness that they experience in their inward cognitive states. The uniqueness of these experiences lies on their ability to change, enlarge, and alter subjective states. The "recognition of the self" (*pratyabhijñā*) is a theory that allows us to interpret the impact of esoteric experience. In both subjective and objective cognitive modes, the experience of bliss and awareness determine the validity of any cognition. As these two modes are experienced as one, bliss is identical with awareness; there appear to be no horizon left that can be divided as 'subjective' and 'objective' in the realm of this experience.

The consequence of reading texts through the lens of *rasa* and *dhvani* is to accept a text similar to living organism with the potency to reveal new meaning for different context and for different reader. This is to allow the unending possibility of newness in the flow of meaning. The soteriological and hermeneutic consequence of this liquidation of texts is to open a reader of awareness and not of one understanding. This approach allows the reader to open for unending possibility of suggestion encoded in language. Recognizing meaning itself becomes a meditative process for revealing awareness unbound in perspectives.

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