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Chapter 5

Panentheism and Hindu Tantra: Abhinavagupta’s Grammatical Cosmology

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It would probably not be an overstatement to say that with Hinduism, we are in knee-deep, swimming in panentheisms. Indeed, of all the world’s major religious traditions, Hinduism, with its fluid multiplicities, offers one of the easiest, most fluent representations of a panentheistic worldview anywhere. Hinduism’s legendary 330 million gods shower us with an embarrassment of possibilities for the divine, as powers in the natural world, wind, thunder, fire. Moreover, the panentheistic bent of Hindu thought makes its appearance early in the tradition, in the well-known hymn to the primeval man, the *Puruṣa Sūkta* in the Ṛg Veda, written perhaps more than three thousand years ago. Scripting the divine as both immanent here and simultaneously transcendent, this still-popular Ṛg Vedic hymn declares: “Such is his greatness; greater indeed, than this is the primeval man. All creatures constitute but one-quarter of him. Three-quarters of him are the immortal in heaven. With his three-quarters did the primeval man rise up, one-quarter of him again remains here.”¹

For this ancient and still-quoted Hindu prayer, the divine is always already beyond our physical world, with one foot here and three more in a transcendent, timeless realm.² In this chapter, I focus on this legacy through Hinduism’s later Tantric

traditions. Panentheism in Hindu Tantrism relies particularly on this polysemous and enigmatic capacity to involve the body here and to point at the same time to the presence of something transcendent, the three-quarters immortal above.

In fact, Tantric practice works precisely to call the divine down from its transcendent perch into the inanimate stuff, rocks and bodies, the matter that makes up our familiar world. One might suggest that a Tantric appreciation of divinity always involves an oscillation, alighting back and forth between an aporia of presence here and an unseen transcendence. This vacillation is both contradictory and fully revelatory, offering up the magic and power that come precisely from the impossibility of being both here and still beyond, in the realm of spirit. The apparent oxymoron of a present transcendence entails a kind of mystical apprehension, to be here and not here at the same time.

This is a specialty of Tantric practice and the reward of Tantric power: to trap a divinity, a being properly transcendent, to capture such a being into a bodily (and hence manipulable) form. For instance, in the nefarious cremation practices, one goal is to coax the Goddess into the dead corpse, to wake it up, so that one might imbibe the power that emanates from this properly disembodied being as she floods into mere matter.³ Similarly, the Tantric sexual practice also strives to call the disembodied transcendent Goddess into the body of the ordinary woman who sits before the practitioner. One might suggest, then, that the panentheism of Tantra operates with a kind of principle of having one's cake and eating it, too. This is something the tradition is not shy about; there is a well-known maxim that Tantra and Tantric deities, such as the

fierce Bhairava who guards the city of Kashi, offer both: *bhukti-mukti dāyakam*, giving both worldly enjoyment and liberation at the same time.⁴

Likewise, from the other side, from the view of body and matter in praxis, the Tantric *yogi* and *yoginī* strive to transform the ordinary human body into a divine body, the body of a god or goddess, by inserting the secret syllabic codes of the deity into the physical body in a practice called *nyāsa*. Yet here, too, there is not the conviction that the god can ever really be entirely trapped in the human body or the rock. Instead, one finds always a sense that the immanent deity playing among humans leaves some portion of divinity elsewhere, above. Just as we saw with the three-quarters of the primeval man still immortal in heaven, so also with Tantric cosmology. Even when the human seeker successfully manages to identify fully with the great God Śiva, for instance, thereby attaining liberation, this metaphysical success does not exhaust the ever-full pervasiveness here and in the beyond of the transcendent God Śiva..

The foundational principle undergirding this double dipping into both transcendence and immanence—the impossible capacity for a cake all eaten, and still there it is—gets articulated in one compelling manner by the Tantric philosopher Abhinavagupta. I suggest in this chapter that the fulcrum of this double-dipping panentheism, of a deity both immanent here and transcending the here and now, derives from Abhinavagupta’s understanding of panentheism within a cosmic grammatology. I also propose that Abhinavagupta thinks through the difficulties of a multivalent simultaneous transcendence and immanence entailed in panentheism by rewriting the idea of the transcendent, ever so slightly, to incorporate within the heart

of transcendent divinity an idea of time. This is a radical position to take. The very idea of the transcendent is such that it is supposed to be outside of time, outside of history, not subject to the forces of change. Yet Abhinavagupta's vision entails just this fusion.

This makes his panentheistic vision of the divine important for another reason, which this paper will not address in the interests of time constraints and focus but which I will briefly mention here: that his position makes possible a notion of evolution, which I suspect is a fundamental feature of panentheism and perhaps a reason we first see a full-blown Western articulation of panentheism after Darwin's articulation of evolutionary theory. Moreover, Abhinavagupta's cosmological scheme does entail a kind of progression, a hierarchical model that might be read to contain an incipient evolutionary component.

Along these lines, Abhinavagupta's Tantra is also particularly interesting because it promulgates a panentheism that addresses head-on a problem that plagues contemporary scientific discussions trying to map out the relationship between mind and matter: how do we understand the relationship between mere matter, the body particularly, and consciousness? As Abhinavagupta frames it, quoting from a text called the *Śrī Kiraṇā*: "How can the essence that is *Śiva* which is first, chief, and beyond *Māyā* shine forth, and manifest on the level of the human mind?" He answers this question by stating: "*Śiva*, whose light is his own, pervades below."⁵ The state, the quality of his own self-luminousness is in fact this very freedom to act. Pervading below refers just to this creation, the world here. This is the meaning of the verse."⁶

Abhinavagupta posits a panentheism that manages to keep both matter and consciousness. He epistemologically fuses the transcendent divine with the world as object, as inanimate matter, proposing a nondualistic framework that retains the messiness of matter. For Abhinavagupta, the presence of the divine here below in matter is what makes possible a nondeterministic world. This is the condition of freedom. To put this another way, the presence of consciousness within matter, within the body here, is the visible proof of freedom. Moreover, the divine as transcendent, by definition, can become present here, immanent in our untidy world precisely because there is no real difference between the transcendent and the immanent, between that far-off heaven of timeless truth and the gritty complexity of the world here.

I suggest that Abhinavagupta retains an idea of the divine that is both immanent and transcendent by appealing to two structural conceptions. First, Abhinavagupta frames the relationship between mind and body grammatically. It is a relationship between a subject, a grammatical doer, and the object, the recipient of action, which Abhinavagupta names, respectively, the states of “I-ness” and “this-ness.”⁷ These two states map onto consciousness and matter, where “I” is the essence of consciousness and “this” is its counterpart in matter. A grammatical model entails a logic of syntax that implicitly operates within a system of time. A spoken sentence naturally unfolds in the course of seconds that it takes to speak the words, which then convey the idea. And even as an idea may arrive in a flash, as a fully formed insight from nowhere, the process of articulating the idea in language involves a syntax wedded to time. I suggest that Abhinavagupta’s panentheism works precisely because he pulls the plug on the

timelessness of the transcendent. He injects an idea of time into the very heart of the divine. He also does this explicitly, apart from his grammatical map of divinity, yet this is a feature of his cosmology that may perhaps be understood to derive from his grammatical model. These two features, a grammatical understanding of the relationship between matter and consciousness and the insertion of a notion of time in Abhinavagupta's panentheism, help to facilitate a bridge between the transcendent and the immanent poles of existence. Abhinavagupta's formulation of the role of time in his model affords a seamless nondualist vision enfolding both transcendence and immanence. That is, his incorporation of both transcendence and immanence does not entail a metaphysical hopping back and forth between the two as two voices in dialogue, but instead, by embedding time at the very heart of the divine, he offers a fusion, allowing a simultaneous embrace of both immanence and transcendence in a dizzy, if hierarchical and occasionally nonlocal, panentheistic reflection on the human condition.

Who Is Abhinavagupta?

Not so well known in the West, Abhinavagupta has iconic status in India, particularly for his work on aesthetics. He wrote in the tenth and eleventh centuries in Kashmir in India, and a panned portrait, a written visual description by his disciple Madhurāja in the eleventh century depicts this erudite Tantric with his eyes rolling in bliss, hair tied up in a garland of flowers, women at each side with the aphrodisiac betel nut, as he eloquently teaches a novel conception of the divine as both immanent and transcendent.⁸ Indeed, his name, Abhinava, meaning "new," "fresh," "modern," was

actually a kind of title bestowed on him in recognition of the newness of his philosophical discourse, and in particular his mastery of philosophy and grammar.⁹ Coming from India, where philosophers traditionally spent considerable effort downplaying and disguising the novelty of their ideas, this is saying quite a lot.

Abhinavagupta presents a kind of anti-ascetic in both the portrait we see of him and his teachings. Some scholarship has associated him with a turn away from the macabre and gruesome practice of Tantra, in the cremation grounds among the corpses, toward a shift into a philosophical interpretation of Tantric praxis as describing the inner movement of energies.¹⁰ His later work, which I draw from especially here, in his *Discourse on Suddenly Recognizing God*,¹¹ offers a Tantric map of the cosmos, proposing a seamless unification of the divine with the world. Famous as a master of philosophy and ritual practice, he was considered enlightened, a *jīvanmukta*, someone who had reached the highest possible attainment while still living. His teachings are expressly panentheistic, emphasizing a need to formulate a conception of deity that does not reject the world.

Abhinavagupta's Panentheism

Abhinavagupta's panentheism proposes an idea of deity that sits easily with Charles Hartshorne's now-classic twentieth-century formulation, where the divine is conscious and knows the world and, indeed, includes the world within the purview of deity. The *cidghanānanda*, the dense, blissful mass of consciousness that characterizes Śiva, the highest deity in Abhinavagupta's cosmology, contains within itself the whole that is the world. In the opening laudatory verses of the *Discourse on Suddenly Recognizing God*,

“The Teaching on Cosmology,”¹² Abhinavagupta presents the epigraphic *maṅgalācaraṇa*,¹³ the pithy opening that reveals in compact form the essence of the teaching that will follow. He says here, “I bow to him who pierces through and pervades with his own essence this whole, from top to bottom, and makes this whole world to consist of Śiva, himself.”¹⁴ In a panentheistic move, Abhinavagupta locates Śiva, the highest form of deity, the one who completely transcends the world as the very essence of the world, pervading it through and through. The question the subsequent text addresses, then, is just how does Śiva do this? How does pure divinity untainted by the world come to pervade the world entirely, in a rhymed fullness, *otaprotā*, from “top to bottom”?

This is a properly panentheistic question. Śiva is transcendent, beyond the world, beyond bodies and minds. Yet at the same time, Abhinavagupta is keen to modify the element of transcendence in his Śaiva cosmological inheritance. His primary goal in the “Teaching on Cosmology” is to demonstrate precisely how this transcendent reality, which is the supreme Lord, does not remain only transcendent but instead reaches all the way down through to the very bottom of the *māyā*, the illusion of the world.¹⁵ The problem becomes for him in this text to demonstrate plausibly this versatility, the capacity for the transcendent deity also to be immanent.

Of course, this problem is a crucial one for a monistic theology. In order for this cosmos to be truly one substance-reality, there cannot be an ultimate difference between the transcendent and the world here. This is, after all, the problem that plagues Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta. The eighth-century Indian philosopher Śaṅkara

winds up with two worlds: the real, if not readily apparent, world of Brahman and our habitually experienced world here, that of *Māyā*. And one of these—our world here—must be rejected. This is also the problem that scientific reductionism faces, coming from the opposite end of the spectrum. In the consistently, monistically physical world of molecules and atoms, neutrons and neurons, making the jump to a cosmology that incorporates something as unsubstantial as subjective mental states, that is, consciousness, becomes a tricky endeavor. A reductionist scientific approach frequently finds itself in a dilemma that mirrors Śāṅkara's. Instead of rejecting the world of matter, like Śāṅkara, the scientist today rejects the idea of spirit as the basis for reality. A fully physicalist reductionist position is constrained to deny the dualism entailed in a system in which consciousness—"mind"—exists beyond the technical functions of biochemistry and physics, that is, beyond the realm of the physical body.¹⁶

Abhinavagupta avoids both of these dilemmas. In this case, he rejects an answer that involves paradox, appealing to a mysterious capacity of God to defy the law of the excluded middle. He rejects also an answer that supposes a dialogue as the means for the shift between immanence and transcendence, between the world and God, where the apparent difference between the two is a *līlā*, a play of back-and-forth, the kind of answer we see fleshed out in the relationship between the devotee and God that Francis X. Clooney presents in chapter 3 in this volume.

Grammatical Cosmology

Instead, Abhinavagupta answers with a grammatical solution. He frames the duality of transcendence and immanence in terms of syntactical subjectivity and objectivity, the

first grammatical person and the third grammatical person. “I-ness” (*ahantā*), the first grammatical person, refers to the subjective pole of experience, and “it-ness” or “this-ness” (*idantā*), the third grammatical person, refers to the state of being object. Śiva, the highest transcendent deity, is the essence of subjectivity, the “I.” When an ordinary person says “I,” that person touches upon the essence of the transcendent Śiva that is the self, accessible even to an ordinary person.

Perhaps counterintuitively for us, the transcendent pole—which we might expect to be far away in some timeless heaven—is the one most near to us, as the “I,” subjective awareness. Meanwhile, the pole of immanence, the mundane world, is the “this,” the world made into object. Thus, our ordinary habitual world, which seems real and near because so apparently factually present, is an object, an “it” that exists because we have alienated it, extroverted it out from our sense of identity, of “I-ness.” I won’t digress here to dwell on the psychological implications of the world existing as excrescence of our selves. In any case, in Abhinavagupta’s system, the world exists because our apprehension shifts from “I” to “this,” from a subjective mode of awareness to an objective mode, seeing the world as object “out there.” *Mokṣa*, enlightenment, happens when we turn inward and recognize an essential subjectivity, our “I-ness” in everything we encounter “out there.” To put this another way, to become enlightened, then, means to recognize our oneness with the whole world.

Moreover, the “I” that is the transcendent Śiva, the highest deity, is not in any way fundamentally different from the limited sense of self that we mere mortals entertain. As Abhinavagupta tells us, “Even then, the essence that is the limited subject,

an ordinary person, also is at base just the very essence of *Śiva*. By a twofold method, by analogy and through being coessential, because of its universality and because of its having one single form, ultimately, the ordinary subject and the highest Lord rest in one essence.”¹⁷ We participate in the transcendence of the highest God because we are like God, one might say, made in the image of God, that is, by analogy. We also participate in God’s transcendence because, in fact, we share the same essence with the highest God. In any case, in Abhinavagupta’s thought, the transcendent retains a primacy. The “I” has the capacity to enfold both the subjective mode and the objective mode. The “I” is the self, the *ātman*; as such, it has a unique capacity to move back and forth between the the first grammatical person as subject and the third grammatical person as object. Abhinavagupta tells us that “the particular term *ātman*—‘self’—has been used to point to the Subject, the Subject with its capacity to know, as it has this capacity of swinging between both the object of action and the doer of action.”¹⁸ The subject can be both object and subject. The “I,” the transcendent perspective, has a particular capacity that the object lacks. As the self, the “I” can shift back and forth between the mode of object, the grammatical object in a sentence, and the mode of doer, the subject of action within a sentence. This grammatical application is for Abhinavagupta not mere grammar but more than this, a way of explaining how consciousness works. Our own consciousness, which is none other than God’s consciousness at base, can be both immanent in the world as object and the real subject, the transcendent “I.”

It is this dual capacity that fundamentally enables Abhinavagupta’s panentheism to attain a true monism that does not need to reject one realm of experience. He can

embrace both the transcendent absolute, Śāṅkara's monistic *brahman* as spirit, which is beyond the reach of decay and mortality, *and* the multiplicity of the world of matter, which for a contemporary reductionist-scientific monism, which puts faith only in molecules and atoms, is taken as the sole reality. This dual capacity allows Abhinavagupta's panentheism to span the gap between matter and mind. It facilitates the *en of panentheism*, the "all in deity." Subjectivity is, in fact, the primary mode for God and us. My own sense of subjectivity is none other than the transcendent God, and each of us recognizes this primary and divine transcendence every time we say "I." In reference to the quote given earlier, Abhinavagupta emphasizes that "what is intended here is the ordinary form of all knowing Subjects in the world, comprising the specific activity of the hands and feet, and so on, of the agent, because this idea is generally accepted in the world."¹⁹ Interestingly, Abhinavagupta's brand of panentheism suggests that the state of enlightenment promised by a *prima facie* dualist theology—such as a dualistic theism, as we might construe of a popular Judeo-Christian notion of God, or the classical dualist Indian *Sāṃkhya* philosophy, and even a nondualistic theology of enlightenment, such as Śāṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, which understands the world to be illusion or *Māyā*—only describe a middling stage in the journey, at best only up to the state of the *vijñānākala*, literally, the stage where one reaches a transcendent knowledge, abstracted from the world. This is because at best, they can only promise an impotent omniscience, which, even as it comprehends the highest truth, is unable to reflect back to engage our world here. That is, Śāṅkara's Vedāntin may eventually escape the clutches of an illusory *Māyā*, but because *Māyā* and world are rejected,²⁰ the

full attainment, *samasta sampat* (IPVV 256), which incorporates power in the world, is not possible.

How, then, one might ask, does the subject manage to swing back and forth, to be both subject and object? How does the shift in mode occur? In this case, the transcendent pole takes precedence. As subject, it contains within itself both the subject and the object. The object then arises out of the subject. As Abhinavagupta puts it: "The Subject's form, which is a unity of consciousness, contains also an excess, an abundance of awareness. This is deposited into the side of the object that is going to be created. So inwardly the object has the attribute of *śakti*, Energy which is none other than the form of consciousness." This is what he points out with the words "having the nature of consciousness" with reference to the object.²¹ The object is generated out of the subject; it takes its life from an excess of consciousness that is the subject. Thus, the secret inner life of things is none other than an abundance of awareness, though dormant. This awareness is itself energy, and in Abhinavagupta's conceptual model, energy is the basis of consciousness. Energy, and here the Sanskrit word is the feminine *śakti*, is consciousness. Ordinary objects, then, like tables and chairs in their essence, hidden from view, contain a surplus, which is an underlying, if mostly dormant, consciousness. With this, there is no real divide between mind and matter and no real gap between the transcendent divine and the world. Lying at the core of all matter is the surplus of consciousness that is born out of the subjective awareness of the world, out of the "I."

So the object takes its life from the subject as an excess of awareness that concretes into solid material form. However, the pure subjectivity of the transcendent divine is not a single or uniform reality in Abhinavagupta's conception. Enfolded within it are internal distinctions, which then unfold in a process that generates the world. Abhinavagupta says: "It is true, the *Śiva* Archetype is the one single existing reality, but even so there is some internal distinction. That is what is being stated. The *Śiva* Archetype alone by its own energy in its own self causes its own multiple reflections to shine as reflections. As this variety manifests, so time and space should then also manifest because this multiplicity consists of differences, divisions in forms (with reference to space) and actions (with reference to time)."²² The objects that consist of the world arise out of the single transcendent God. God as pure "I," the state of subjectivity, unfolds into a multiplicity of reflections. This unfolding generates time and space out of the very fabric of the divine. The process of unfolding, *unmeṣa* in the Sanskrit, is an externalizing impulse. What causes the impulse is the very nature of subjectivity; it contains within itself a subtle vibration, the throb of life called *spanda*. Abhinavagupta tells us:

The principle of consciousness, even though unmoving, still has as a part of its essential nature a slight quality of movement by which it manifests motion. This is called "pure vibration," a "throb" [*spanda*]. In fact, all the archetypes, all the categories of the cosmos, are simply forms of the Energy of God and are nothing but *spanda*, just this throb alone. And so it is said: "Because they rest in the universal aspect of vibration, the

qualities and so on²³ trickle down in a stream as vibrations, as this throb, obtaining their innate characteristics” [*Spanda Kārikās* 19]. However, the Energy, having thrown down innumerable Energies, sometimes manifests near to God, but other energies are a little farther and some quite remote from God.²⁴

What drives the whole process of creation is a barely perceptible movement, a throb that rests at the very heart of the “I.” As this throb unfolds, it trickles down, moving from a state of subject to becoming object. With this arises the world; some parts are close to the divine, and others are farther away. Even so, all the different objects that take life retain inwardly the trace of subjectivity, the “I” that is the transcendent divine.

In Abhinavagupta’s grammatical cosmology, then, there is not a fundamental distinction between the subject and the object. The object is born out of the subject and retains the trace of its origin. I might venture that he chooses a grammatical model to map the relationship between subject and object, between the divine and the world, precisely because in a grammatical context, the parts of speech, subject and object, are modes, not essential substance. One can shift modes without necessarily entailing a shift in essence or substance. And while grammar is the basic model, what a grammatical model points to, in fact, is a conceptual template, a mapping of how we think. The grammatical turn is at its essence a psychologizing of creation and dissolution on a cosmic scale. What happens on the level of the macrocosm also happens in the microcosm on the level of mind.

In any case, the states of subject and object are at base not even separate realities. For Abhinavagupta, they refer to a single state; the difference between the two is really just one of attitude. The state of subjectivity, the “I,” is looking inward; the state of being object is looking outward. Abhinavagupta says: “the ‘I’ is an expanse of Light shining and active awareness and not intent upon looking toward something other, external to itself. The “This” is gazing toward the other. . . . And within the limited soul, these two take form as the one who grasps—the subject—and that thing which is grasped—the object.”²⁵ Here we can also note that the very same process that happens on the level of deity recapitulates itself on our level, the level of ordinary humans. Moreover, this recapitulation occurs on all levels. The world and its myriad objects are simply the innumerable Energies trickling out, some close to God, some far, as the transcendent deity unfolds. Abhinavagupta tells us, “In fact, the categories of earth and so on are only just forms of the Energy of the Supreme Lord.”²⁶ Matter at its most dense is really just divine energy, that is, none other than divine consciousness. Abhinavagupta diverges on this point from his famous compatriot Śaṅkara. For Śaṅkara’s nondual Advaita Vedanta, the world is *Māyā*, illusion. Abhinavagupta tells us instead, “the category of *Māyā* is not accepted merely as the material cause in the body and as separate from the Lord but rather is considered as the inseparable Energy [*śakti*] of the Supreme Lord.”²⁷ *Māyā*, the matrix of the world, is not simply inert matter; she is inseparable from the transcendent God.

Indeed, in a telling moment, Abhinavagupta goes so far as to repudiate the idea of the object altogether. Explaining the notion of the object as derived through the

process of perception, he tells us: “The process of perception, when it is not concealed, contains within it the essence of the object perceived. And the power of Lordship, which belongs to this process, by its own freedom removes the relation of outer and inner, joins and separates the images, the appearances of the objects within the process of knowing. And Lordship and its capacity to be the object are entirely its own self-shining light. But here for foolish people, the notion of the object is taught.”²⁸ It is when we look that we find the object; that is, the very process of looking contains the essence of the object.²⁹ The capacity to be object is a power of God; the object appears—in Abhinavagupta’s language, it shines (*ābhāsa*)—because it is the power of God to freely choose to appear as a thing, as object. Here the word *ābhāsa* connotes a sense of light shining and also of appearance as mere semblance, looking like something while having a different essence from what its appearance might suggest. Thus, the object is in a sense a phantom. Moreover, talking about objects, teaching the idea of inert matter, is simply pedagogy for foolish folks.

Why Are We Bound?

Beyond pedagogy, beyond philosophy, the state of object has other pitfalls. It is precisely when we confuse the sense of “I” with the object, by identifying with the object, that we become bound. We lose our sense of innate knowledge and freedom. This identification keeps us trapped in the revolving door of *saṃsāra*, caught again and again in the round of birth and death. Bondage is simply a kind of grammatical confusion; the copula fuses the subject with object, limiting the sense of “I” to a fixed

and false identity of suffering. Scripting the misidentification of the “I” with each of the basic elements, earth and so on, Abhinavagupta says,

“I am hungry”; “I am thirsty”—this type of thought and also when one bursts into burning anger—these, in fact, indicate the increase of the element fire misapprehended as the Self. When one says, “I know inwardly I am happy” or “I am sad,” “I am a fool,” and so on, then in these states, the intellect, like clear water flowing, is identified with the Self. In statements like “I am lean” or “fat” or “fair,” and so on, the body alone, which is predominantly earth, is identified with the Self. And here, even though in reality pure consciousness alone exists, when it appears as some external object, then it is said to be the first type of misapprehension caused by *Māyā*.³⁰

We become limited, bound by wrongly misidentifying the self, the sense of “I,” with the excrescence of matter. Thus, even though matter at its core is not different from consciousness, coming as it does out from the “I,” nevertheless, when we identify with this limited dormant sense of consciousness, we make ourselves smaller; we bind ourselves. This identification occurs through thought, through conceptualizing the “I” and linking it with object.

The Problem of Time

Hartshorne’s formulation of panentheism includes two other characteristics, which Abhinavagupta also addresses in his panentheistic cosmology. These involve the notion that the divine should be both eternal and temporal. However—and this is something

that Abhinavagupta points out—the idea of eternity is a tricky one. It may even be something of a conceptual oxymoron for Hartshorne’s understanding of panentheism. That is, how is it possible to have a God who is transcendent, which by definition tends to imply out of time, and yet still have this God fully present in our world, which is continually subjected to change, to decay? In other words, the very idea of change implicates a notion of time, sequence. Any God who can manage these both necessarily must be not amenable to our ordinary rules of logic. If God is not subject to change, decay, if God is then beyond time, then such a God is simply transcendent. An emanationist model, where God evolves into the world, is a frequent response, a way of getting around this difficulty, and this is what Abhinavagupta essentially chooses. Yet, as he points out, any emanationist model of the divine must incorporate a notion of time, at the very beginning of creation, at the very heart of the divine. To put this another way, the process of emanation also takes time.

Abhinavagupta is aware of this difficulty and spends a good deal of space demonstrating that the divine indeed contains a notion of time, even before the category of time is born, unfolding out of the evolving deity. Demonstrating this is not an easy task for him, particularly since his scriptural sources tend to go against his interpretation, positing instead a notion of deity that can *prima facie* be beyond time, transcendent and at the same time panentheistically embedded in the world. Being able to have one’s cake and eat it, too, to be in the world and time and also beyond it, appears to be a divine prerogative, a divine will to flout our ordinary logical expectations. Abhinavagupta is not satisfied with this solution, in part perhaps because

of what might be an aesthetic preoccupation with the homology between the human and the divine. A fundamental proposition of this system of “suddenly recognizing God” (*Pratyabhijñā*) is precisely that the divine is readily discernible in ordinary life. One of the root scriptures of the tradition that Abhinavagupta cites frequently is the *Vijñāna Bhairava*, a text that lists 112 methods for suddenly recognizing God, and many of these methods include seemingly mundane activities—listening to beautiful music, sitting in an odd way on one’s chair. Thus, for Abhinavagupta, the microcosm mirrors the macrocosm. What we see happening on the level of deity must also have a counterpart on the level of the human, and vice versa. Premised on the maxim of “as above, so below,” Abhinavagupta’s system offers a simple yet psychologically profound familiarity for the actions of the divine in the world.

The solution, then, for Abhinavagupta is to incorporate time at the very heart of the divine. With this, he proposes two types of time. One is the time that we see unfolding out of *Māyā* as the world as object is created in the process of the divine “I-ness” becoming the “this-ness” that is the world. Abhinavagupta tells us through the complaint of his interlocutor: “You might complain—while it’s fine to have sequence in the creation of *Māyā* because of the unfolding of the category of time, but how can it be said that the creation above this, the pure creation, could have sequence, since there *Māyā* has not emerged?”³¹ As we saw with the idea of the object, teaching an idea of eternity is merely pedagogy. Here, since the idea of time arises out of the divine and moreover occurs well beyond the early stages of unfolding, Abhinavagupta’s interlocutor wants to restrict the idea of time to creation after the duality of *Māyā* sets

in. This would free up the divine, allowing the highest reality to maintain a sense of timelessness and transcendence. Expanding on this, Abhinavagupta makes his insistence on placing time at the very heart, at the very beginnings, more explicit:

Supporting this, we find written in the *Śiva Dṛṣṭi*: “When, however, the creation of the Lord happens, delight spreads open in a glorious consciousness, resulting in a variety of effects in a multicolored design, then there exists the mind-stuff poised, just about to act. That intent of the will is the first instant of time” [*Śivadṛṣṭi* 1/7–1/8]. Even the highest Reality, *Śiva*, the energy of bliss—which is that form where unfolding is just about to happen—has priority, that is, primacy, and prior existence with regard to the energy of will. The word *tuṭi* is explained as a unit of time. Otherwise, in the absence of sequence, how could there be states of priority and posterity? However, with reference to those who are to be instructed and to those limited souls who are completely within the grip of *Māyā*, there the notion of a lack of sequence is appropriate.³²

Again, we see that for the sake of pedagogy, some secrets must be kept. One should not reveal to someone completely in the grip of *Māyā*'s duality this higher and secret truth, that the highest divinity necessarily contains within it, transcendence and eternity notwithstanding, the movement of time. Time here is not the record of seconds and hours as we understand it but is simply the “mind-stuff poised, just about to act.” That instant, the *tuṭi*, is the first movement of time, and it occurs at the level of the highest transcendent deity. That very first instant is contained within the divine as internal folds,

a throb within, the *spanda*, as we saw earlier: “The principle of consciousness, even though unmoving, still has as a part of its essential nature a slight quality of movement by which it manifests motion. This is called ‘pure vibration,’ a ‘throb’ [*spanda*].” Lying within the highest deity is a slight, barely perceptible impulse toward movement, a throb, which is the essence of sequence and time. With this, Abhinavagupta’s deity is no longer timeless but instead incorporates within the conditions that make it possible for deity to emerge with us, in us, in the world.

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¹ *Puruṣa Sūkta*, Ṛg Veda, 10.90.3–4, in Muller, F. Max, ed. 1892. *Rig-Veda-Samhitā*:

The Sacred Hymns of the Brāhmins together with the Commentary of Sāyanākārya, 2nd ed., Vol. IV, Maṇḍala X. London: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press Warehouse; also available at the GRETIL Sanskrit Archive: http://fiindolo.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/1_sanskrit/1_veda/1_sam/1_rv/rv_hn10u.htm. All translations from the Sanskrit are my own.

² Likewise, around the 8th century BCE, in a text called the "Great Secret Forest Teaching," Bṛhadaranyaka Upaniṣad 3.9.1–27, the sage Yajñavalkya patiently explains that the dizzying abundance of gods, the 3,306 gods referred to by the Vedic ritual sacrifice, translate ultimately to the one being who dwells in the human heart. With this, he advances an implicit panentheistic conviction.

³ *Bṛhannīla Tantra*, 6.283-286..

⁴ From the *KālaBhairavāṣṭakam*, in Anonymous. 1997. *Bṛhatstotraratnākaraḥ*, edited by Śivadatta Mīśra Śāstri, (Varanasi: Jyotiṣa Prakāśan, 1997) 192-3.

⁵ Or "Śiva's own light pervades below."

⁶ IPVV 257. A point of clarification by way of digression: we should keep in mind here that "mind" in the quote above is *manas* and is squarely understood in this and most Indian systems as belonging to the material world, to *prakṛti*. As such, it is more akin to a Western notion of body and is typically understood to be insentient matter, a part of the body, and is not considered to be aligned with consciousness.

This role, which we typically assign to mind in the West, would be termed “spirit”—*puruṣa*, *ātman*, or *cit*, *samvit*.

⁷ In order to avoid an infelicitous allusion to Freud’s categories of ego and id, I translate the third person as “this” rather than “it” through most of this chapter.

⁸ Pandey 1963, 20.

⁹ See *ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰ Sanderson 1988, 661-2.

¹¹ The *Īśvara Pratyabhijñā Vivṛti Vimarsinī* (IPVV) is published in three volumes in the Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies (KSTS) edition, which my edition reprints. The text itself follows a traditional model of four sections or books, the Book on Knowledge (*Jñānādhikāra*), the Book on Action (*Kriyādhikāra*), the Book on Revelation (*Āgamādhikāra*), and the Book on the Collection of the Archetypes (*Tattvasaṅgrahādhikāra*). I draw from the third book, the Book on Revelation, *Āgamādhikāra*, which discusses cosmology within a nondual emanationist model.

¹²

¹³ A *maṅgalācarana* is not quite an epigraph, since it is actually composed by the author, yet it functions in a similar heightened manner to express in toto, in a pithy and poetic manner, an essential theme of the work as a whole.

¹⁴ IPVV 255.

¹⁵ He tells us explicitly, “the purport of this book is to show the interconnection, from highest to lowest, of this whole creation.” *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁶ For a discussion of mediate and various positions taken in response to this problem, see Clayton 2004, especially 54–57.

¹⁷ IPVV 258.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Perhaps we should say “abjected.” The very vehemence with which *Māyā* is rejected suggests, in fact, a Freudian repression, with its inevitable return. In an astute psychological assessment of nirvana as emptiness, *śūnyatā*, Abhinavagupta suggests this eventual resurfacing of that which is only apparently wiped away. Ibid., 332–333.

²¹ Ibid., 258.

²² Ibid., 263.

²³ The qualities are the *guṇas*, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. Here Abhinavagupta takes “and so on” to include the cosmological categories of his own system.

²⁴ IPVV 265.

²⁵ Ibid., 265–266.

²⁶ Ibid., 270.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 297.

²⁹ This element of Abhinavagupta’s thought and his emphasis on indeterminacy, indistinction in the inward directed states of consciousness—which I do not address in this chapter—are both tantalizingly suggestive of quantum theory, even if the comparison is incomplete.

³⁰ IPVV 280.

³¹ Ibid., 262.

³² Ibid., 262–263.