

Utpaladeva,
Philosopher of Recognition

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Edited by
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Preface

UTPALADEVA or Utpalācārya (c. 925-975) is one of the greatest philosophers that India has produced, but he is hardly known in India itself. After Somānanda (c. 900-950) who laid the foundation for the philosophy of Recognition (Pratyabhijñā Darśana¹) with his *Śivadr̥ṣṭi*, Utpaladeva established this school by his philosophical works: *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-kārikā* and *Vṛtti*, composed at the same time, and, subsequently, in turn commented upon in a long and complex *Vivṛti*, which has come down to us only in fragments; the *Siddhitrayī*, three terse treatises on specific subjects (*Ajaḍapramāṭṛsiddhi* “Proof of the sentient knower”, *Sambandhasiddhi* “Proof of relation”; *Īśvarasiddhi* “Proof of the Lord”); and a *Vṛtti* on the *Śivadr̥ṣṭi*. Besides authoring philosophical works, Utpaladeva was also a mystical poet, as expressed in his splendid hymn collection, *Śivastotrāvalī*. The Pratyabhijñā philosophy was continued by Utpaladeva’s disciple Lakṣmaṇagupta (of whom nothing has come down to us) and by Lakṣmaṇagupta’s disciple, the great Abhinavagupta (c. 975–1025) who composed two extensive commentaries on the Pratyabhijñā, and took it as the theoretical basis for his Trika synthesis in the *Tantrāloka*.

On 20-21 August 2010, an international seminar was held at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS), Shimla, on “Utpaladeva, Philosopher of Recognition”, organized by Raffaele Torella and Bettina Bäumer, with the participation of scholars from India and Europe. The participants were R. Torella (Rome),

¹ On the Pratyabhijñā Darśana chapter in the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha*, see Torella 2011: 212-23.

B. Bäumer (Varanasi–Salzburg), K.D. Tripathi (Varanasi), G.C. Tripathi (Delhi), D. Cuneo (Cambridge), M.H. Zaffar (Srinagar) and A. Wenta (Shimla–Cracow). At the very last moment, other prospective participants — N. Rastogi (Lucknow), R. Tripathi (Delhi), I. Ratié (Leipzig) and Y. Kawajiri (Kyoto) — couldn't come, but have sent in their papers.

Two important articles by Raffaele Torella have been added as Appendices because they had been published earlier, but are of utmost importance for the appraisal of Utpaladeva. They contain studies on Utpaladeva's *Vivṛti* which was supposed to be lost but has been recovered in fragments. These fragments and their implication for understanding Abhinavagupta's *Vivṛtivimarsinī* have to be made known to a wider public.

It is high time that the genius of Utpaladeva is rediscovered, and he is given the due place in the history of Indian thought as well as in the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of our time.

Raffaele Torella
Bettina Bäumer

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Importance of Utpaladeva An Introduction

Raffaele Torella

THE Pratyabhijñā provides non-dual Śaivism of Kashmir with a “philosophy”. A presentation of the Pratyabhijñā doctrines involves, first and foremost, giving voice to one of the most original and peculiar components of India’s philosophical and religious scenario from medieval times down to our own: what is known in the West as “Tantrism”. It will be necessary to stretch a discreet veil over the incautious remarks of a well-known scholar like George Feurstein:¹

Tantrism’s contribution to philosophy is negligible. Its unicity lies wholly within the practical sphere, the *sādhana*. From a philosophical point of view, there is no hiatus between Tantrism and previous traditions. Buddhist Tantrism rests substantially on the foundations of the Mādhyamika school of Mahāyāna, and its Hindu counterpart on those of the cognate Advaita-Vedānta.

In actual fact, Pratyabhijñā, which provides the theoretical bases for all Hindu Tantrism, constitutes one of the highest and most original moments of Indian thought (it has, moreover, very little to do with Vedānta). The principal aim of the Pratyabhijñā philosophers was to allow the Tantric Śaiva sects to emerge from the dimension of restricted circles, often devoted to transgressive practices,

¹ Feuerstein 1974: 176-77. A very similar position is also maintained by Mircea Eliade. For a detailed presentation of Pratyabhijñā philosophy, cf. Torella 1992; 2002: ix-xlv; 2009; Ratié 2011.

and establish themselves in the stratum of social normality, by internalizing, or in any case circumscribing, their own specific differences. Their main addressees were no more the ascetics, but, typically, the householders. As a consequence, the Pratyabhijñā engages in a far-reaching dialogue with Indian philosophy of its time, accepting its modalities and rules. The initial nucleus comprises non-dualistic Śaivite scriptures, the Bhairava Tantras — Bhairava being the terrible form of the God Śiva, in whom cruelty and violence are metaphors for rampant energy, far distant from the unmoving and bloodless deities of Vedānta. Bhairava coincides with the “I” of every creature. In first addressing the notion of “I”, so much disliked by Brāhmanic thought, non-dualist Śivaism and *in primis* Utpaladeva implicitly state the centrality of free movement as against the always lurking reification connected to the notion of *ātman*, the I as substance. As compared to the I — the Supreme Consciousness — the flow of the phenomenal world is not a (bad) dream from which one must awake as soon as possible, but the spontaneous manifestation of the Absolute itself. The concept of *māyā*, central to Vedānta, is not eliminated: *māyā* is taken to be the power of the Lord, even his highest power, otherwise known as *svātantryaśakti* (power of freedom), and *svātantryavāda* (doctrine of freedom) becomes one of the favourite names for this school.

Utpaladeva inaugurates what was to become a salient feature of the whole Trika in Abhinavagupta’s synthesis: namely, the tendency not to constitute a monolithic doctrine and a world of religious experience to oppose en bloc everything that does not coincide with it (as in the *ekāntin* “absolutistic” trends) but to distinguish planes, which are hierarchically ordered but in which the “higher” does not automatically cancel the “lower” (as Somānanda had already said, Śiva is everywhere, even in differentiation, pain and hell). This is the perspective of the Paramādvaita “Supreme Non-Duality”, such an elevated viewpoint that it does not fear what is different from itself, is not put in a critical position by it, is not forced to make a choice.

While Somānanda is considered the founder of the Pratyabhijñā, its full-fledged elaboration is due to Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta. Somānanda's *Śivadṛṣṭi* is to be considered the first philosophical work of Kashmirian Śaiva Advaita,² its only predecessor being the *Spanda-Kārikā*, in which however the experiential and scriptural approach largely prevails over philosophical elaboration. The *Śivadṛṣṭi* is unanimously recognized as the first work of the Pratyabhijñā school, despite the fact that the word *pratyabhijñā* does not even occur in it (at least in its pregnant meaning). Abhinavagupta at the beginning of his *Vimarśinī* on the *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Kārikā* does not hesitate to say that Utpaladeva's masterwork is in fact only a "reflected image" of the *Śivadṛṣṭi*.³ This is, of course, not to be taken literally, for, although the *Śivadṛṣṭi* was a powerful source of inspiration for Utpaladeva, it is only with the *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Kārikā* that the Pratyabhijñā becomes a very original and elaborate philosophical system. In the Somānanda–Utpaladeva–(Lakṣmaṇagupta)–Abhinavagupta triad it was the latter who largely overshadowed his predecessors. Among the Pratyabhijñā texts, Abhinavagupta's *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Vimarśinī* became by far the most "popular" — if I may use this adjective for one of the profoundest and most sophisticated worldviews that India has ever produced. The main victim of the success of the *Vimarśinī* was the extraordinarily important *Vivṛti* or *Ṭikā* by Utpaladeva, of which only fragments have survived.

The works of Abhinavagupta are well known, and his *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Vimarśinī* and the *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Vivṛti-Vimarśinī* (a commentary on Utpaladeva's *Vivṛti* on his own *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Kārikā* and *Vṛtti*) are generally considered

² A somewhat problematic book has recently been devoted to this important work (Nemec 2011; on it see a review article in Torella 2013b). A survey of the textual and translation problems of the *Śivadṛṣṭi* can be found in Torella 2014b.

³ Vol. I, p. 2: *śrīsomānandanāthasya vijñānapratibimbakam*.

the standard works of the Pratyabhijñā.⁴ However, the role of Utpaladeva's *Vivṛti* as the real centre of gravity of Pratyabhijñā philosophy has become more and more evident, since my discovery of a long fragment of the *Vivṛti*, which I have edited and translated in a series of articles (Torella 2007a-d, 2012). Now that it is possible to look, however partially, into the *Vivṛti*, we realize that most of Abhinavagupta's ideas are just the development of what Utpaladeva had already expounded there. As a consequence, we are no longer allowed to consider Utpaladeva a mere predecessor of Abhinavagupta, as being the latter the great master of Pratyabhijñā, but we must rather take Utpaladeva, particularly with his *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Vivṛti*, as the real centre of gravity of the system (see Torella 2014a) and Abhinavagupta mainly as his brilliant commentator.

Highly interesting is Utpaladeva's philosophical strategy, which the later Pratyabhijñā authors will simply continue. Instead of dispersing Pratyabhijñā's philosophical energies against an indifferentiated multiplicity of opponents, he very lucidly selects one, the most prestigious philosophical and religious tradition of the Kashmir of that time. For various reasons (the principal one probably being the will to present the new Pratyabhijñā philosophers as the champions of the entire Śaiva tradition against the main common antagonist), these privileged opponents are the Buddhists, especially those belonging to the so-called logical–epistemological school.⁵ While for Somānanda the Buddhists are opponents just like many others, they are given a special status in the work of

⁴ Just to make an example, we can see that when Mādhava describes the Pratyabhijñā-Darśana in the *Sarva-Darśana-Saṁgraha* he presents passages coming only from Abhinava's *Vimarśinī*.

⁵ The main reference point for Utpaladeva is Dharmakīrti (then Dignāga and Dharmottara). Abhinavagupta gives a prominent place also to Śāṅkaranandana, a very interesting and peculiar post-Utpala thinker (see Bühnemann 1980; Krasser 2001; Eltschinger 2006; Torella 2011: 19 n. 12).

Utpaladeva, for whom they, admired and attacked in an equally strong way, are so to speak the most intimate enemies. The criticism of their positions is to Utpaladeva of a substantial help in building and refining the Pratyabhijñā philosophy.

The Buddhist epistemologists and Pratyabhijñā start from presuppositions that appear — and are — absolutely irreconcilable: an impersonal world of events on the one hand and, on the other, a world permeated and vivified even in its seemingly most inert crannies by the dynamism of the I (Śiva or Consciousness). Despite this, an undoubted fascination is exerted by the rigour of the Buddhist epistemologists' argumentation and their dauntless critical capacity that uses its sharp and original instruments on the doctrines of the most diverse opponents. The very air of superiority that may sometimes be glimpsed in their opposition to all others, though it does not fail occasionally to provoke a note of sarcasm in the Śaiva masters, ends up by further enhancing their image. This contributes toward causing them to be adopted by the Pratyabhijñā authors, partly, so to speak, as a touchstone to test the soundness of their theses, and partly as a whetstone to sharpen their dialectic arms.

Buddhist epistemology, in its struggle against realism (particularly of Nyāya, but also of Mīmāṃsā and Sāṃkhya), is constantly concerned with showing the fundamental importance of the mind in structuring reality, in contrast to those who, with the aim of underlining the independent nature of the external reality confronted by human experience, move in the opposite direction — reducing the creative and formative role of knowledge as far as possible and making it into a mere mirror that records readymade realities outside itself, resulting in an unending entification even of relations, qualities, etc. This reference to the centrality of the mind must have been felt by Utpaladeva to be a strong element of affinity, even though it was destined to have quite divergent developments. After letting the Buddhist philosophers demolish the Nyāya categories, he shows how the Buddhist alternative is in fact equally inadequate. It does overcome Nyāya, but remains as

though suspended in mid-air, since it is proved — in the Buddhist fragmented and isolated universe — to be incapable of accounting for the network and circularity of human experience. The only way to save the Buddhist view from its theoretical failure is to include it in a different field of reference, represented by the omnipervasive dynamism of a free and “personal” consciousness that coincides with the Supreme Lord, Śiva. In this way, Utpaladeva achieves the result of both showing the superiority of Pratyabhijñā to Buddhism and warning the Naiyāyikas (among whom the Śaiva faith was most prevalent) not to count too much on their forces alone, detached from those of the new Śaiva philosophers.

Through this subtle play of a declared basic disagreement with the doctrines of Buddhist philosophers, a limited acceptance and purely instrumental (or thought to be such) use of them, the masters of the Pratyabhijñā end up being somehow drawn into their orbit. The architecture of the Pratyabhijñā feels the effect of this. The very fact that many problems are posed, more or less unwittingly, in Buddhist terms to a certain extent prefigures their development and reduces possible alternatives as regards solutions.

Also very interesting is Utpaladeva’s choice of the main ally, the grammarian-philosopher Bhartṛhari, though the latter had been fiercely attacked precisely by Utpaladeva’s *guru* Somānanda (cf. Torella 2009). Such a change of attitude, which in a broader sense is also a paradigm change proper, does invest the problematic aspects of taking distance from one’s own *guru*, and, at the same time, shows how the choice of the opponents and allies may be the outcome of a definite plan rather than a fact of mere liking or disliking some worldview.⁶ In order to undermine the discontinuous universe of the Buddhists, Utpaladeva decides to avail himself precisely of Bhartṛhari’s doctrine, the language-imbued nature of knowledge,

⁶ Interestingly, though showing on all occasions to Bhartṛhari the highest respect and appreciation, Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta do not accept the theory of *sphoṭa*, indeed one of the cardinal points of his doctrine. The reasons for this denial are investigated in Torella 2004.

which is meant to demolish Buddhism's main foundation stone, i.e. the unsurpassable gulf between the moment of sensation and that of conceptual elaboration, representing, as it were, the very archetype of the Buddhist segmented reality.

As far as the metaphysical background is concerned, there is nothing essentially new in this doctrine — the scriptural *sarvaśaktivilolā* “effervescence of all powers (in any reality)” of the *Śivadṛṣṭi* (I.11b) implicitly already contained it. But what Utpaladeva wanted to resort to was not scriptural authority but an argument belonging to the shared philosophical debate. Thus, the omnipervasiveness of language is the epistemological version of the omnipervasiveness of Śiva, and at the same time calls for integration into the spiritually dynamic Śaiva universe.

Thus, some of the most famous, and crucial, verses of the *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Kārikā* originate.

The essential nature of light is reflective awareness; otherwise light, though ‘coloured’ by objects, would be similar to an insentient reality, such as the crystal and so on.

— I.V.11; cf. Torella 2002: 118.

Consciousness has as its essential nature reflective awareness; it is the supreme Word that arises freely. It is freedom in the absolute sense, the sovereignty of the supreme Self.

— I.V.13; cf. Torella 2002: 120

Even at the moment of direct perception there is a reflective awareness. How otherwise could one account for such actions as running and so on, if they were thought of as being devoid of determinate awareness?

— I.V.19; cf. Torella 2002: 125

Unlike what occurs here and there in Somānanda's *Śivadṛṣṭi*, in the *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Kārikā* any emotional colouring is banished. This does not mean that Utpaladeva was solely a philosopher: the extraordinary intensity of his hymns, which were later to be collected in the *Śiva-Stotrāvalī* and are still recited daily by the Śaivas of Kashmir, proves it.

The Shimla seminar has duly emphasized the universalistic approach of the Pratyabhijñā philosophy: the Śaiva Āgama is just the culmination peak of the universal Āgama, which, unlike the Veda, is not separated from mankind by an unsurpassable gulf, but inhabits in the very heart of any creature. The idea of the universality of revelation as the interplay of four closely related concepts *prasiddhi-āgama-pratibhā-śabdāna* is developed by Abhinavagupta in the *Tantrāloka*, *Tantrasāra* and *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Vivṛti-Vimarsinī* (cf. Torella 2013a). But once again this may be considered merely the development of what Utpaladeva says in his *Vivṛti*, while commenting upon two *ślokas* (we might even surmise Utpaladeva's authorship of them). It is worthwhile to delve at some length into this important, if comparatively less studied, aspect of Utpala's thought.

prasiddhir āgamo loke yuktimān athavetaraḥ |
vidyāyām apy avidyāyām pramāṇam avigānataḥ ||

prasiddhir avigītā hi satyā vāg aiśvarī matā |
tayā yatra yadā siddham yat tad grāhyam aśaṅkitaiḥ ||

Prasiddhi is what we commonly call *āgama*, which may be either congruent with reason or not; it is a source of valid knowledge in the domain both of *vidyā* and *avidyā*, provided that it is not contradicted. For the non-contradicted *prasiddhi* is to be considered the true Voice of the Lord. What is established by virtue of this Voice, within a certain spatial/temporal condition, is to be accepted by those who are trustful.⁷

In order to express such a concept, Utpaladeva needed a broader term than *pratibhā* and less connoted than *pratibhā* by typically “mysterious” overtones: *prasiddhi*, perhaps also because it furnished the occasion for critically addressing the Mīmāṃsā, was indeed the ideal candidate. A continuous line runs from the individually oriented *prasiddhis* which are at work in the everyday experience of living beings and the progressively higher *prasiddhis*, which give

⁷ For an assessing of the correct text of the two *ślokas* and elaborate explanation of their import, see Torella 2013a: 458-62.

shape to the various world-views, i.e. the various Āgamas — from the Veda to the Bauddha, the Pāñcarātra, the Śaiva — culminating in the all-encompassing *eka āgama* (*Tantrāloka* XXXV.24a, 30a, 35a, 37a). *Prasiddhi* (in Abhinava’s elaboration, based on the *Vivṛti*) is the paradox of something both coming from outside (*ā-gama*) and abiding in the depths of men’s interiority. It is a content of our individuality for which we are not responsible, since it is already present in the new-born creature. It is not a fixed content, but a varying one, due to its interaction with the other factors of individuality. In a sense, then, *prasiddhi* is not even a content, being instead more akin in its essence to a “container”. At the same time, rather than belonging to the “cognition” side it belongs to the “action” side; it is the object of belief and the belief itself. Again, it is not bound to remain an inner belief, but enacts specific practical behaviours (*Tantrāloka* XXXV.15cd *lokān vyavahārayet*). In the background lies the common Indian awareness that cognition alone is insufficient to set humans in motion. *Prasiddhi* is belief in something, adhesion to something; its most recurrent qualifications are *ḍṛḍha* (firm), *nirūḍha* (deeply rooted). However, this “firmness” does not derive from a conscious effort, but is innate, spontaneous, just as spontaneous as the insightful intuition (*pratibhā*) that plays such a great part in driving most of our actions. However, even this spontaneity does not belong to the creature individually, but to its shared background. Such a “background” of the creature is its being ultimately rooted in universal consciousness, Śiva. This active divine presence is what may also be called *āgama*, and has the form of the innate language principle which imbues all cognitions and actions. It is the divine Voice (*vāc*) of the Lord that speaks in living beings.

From Utpaladeva–Abhinavagupta’s conception of Āgama, any parochial bias is banned as it comprises all the existing Āgamas, from the Vaiṣṇava to the Buddhist (the Śaiva included). The immensely distant and undecipherable Āgama of Mīmāṃsā, the Veda, leaves here the place to the internal and variegated Āgamas

of the Śaivas. Along with *advaitācāra* (non-dual behaviour), such a far-reaching universalistic approach to revelation constitutes the most insidious attack by Śaiva Tantrism to Brāhmanical egemony.

The work of Utpaladeva can be viewed as the very icon of the integration of the rational and emotional sides of man: his extremely sophisticated philosophical arguments are to be viewed side by side with his passionate mystical poetry. His philosophy is characterized by this unique blend of epistemology, metaphysics, religious experience, linguistic philosophy and aesthetic speculation. Precisely to Utpaladeva we do owe the entrance of aesthetics into philosophical–religious speculation. His concept of *camatkāra* (wondrous enjoyment) marks a higher level of experience, which leaves the reality and beauty of the manifested world intact, but at same time projects it into a totality whose centre is Supreme Consciousness. This will be later developed by Abhinavagupta into a full-fledged aesthetic system, destined to become the main stream of aesthetical speculation of pre-modern India as a whole.

Lastly, Utpala's work is a most conspicuous example of an essential feature of Indian philosophy as a whole, which, however, has hardly been duly highlighted: ceaseless interchange among the different schools, lively confrontation with the opposite theories, tireless capacity of self-reshaping accordingly.

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