

TRANSCULTURAL DIALOGUES

ISSUE 03 • DECEMBER 2019

WINTER SOLSTICE

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INTELLECTUAL
DIALOGUE

Table of Contents

- 3** **Adrián Navigante**
PHYSIS AND ANTIPHYSIS:
RECONSIDERING RELATIONS
BETWEEN HUMANS AND NON-
HUMANS
- 13** **Amanda Viana**
A PERSPECTIVIST APPROACH
TO THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
OF THE AMAZONIAN FOREST
- 24** **Valentina Barnabei**
YĀTRĀ VRTTĀNT: DIFFERENT
PERCEPTIONS OF THE
HIMALAYAN REGIONS IN
THE TRAVEL NARRATIVES OF
GAGAN GILL AND ANIL YĀDAV
- 32** **Gioia Lussana**
YOGA IS LIFE.
THE FLOWING COURSE OF
CONSCIOUSNESS IN KĀŚMĪRĪ
ŚĀIVISM
- 42** **Alain Daniélou**
MANTRA: THE PRINCIPLES
OF LANGUAGE AND MUSIC
ACCORDING TO HINDU
COSMOLOGY SECOND PART



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PHYSIS AND ANTIPHYSIS: RECONSIDERING RELATIONS BETWEEN HUMANS AND NON- HUMANS

This text was composed as an introductory talk to the FIND Forum *Transcultural Encounters 2019*, in which the conceptual opposition physis and antiphysis was discussed from a transcultural point of view. It is now published with minor changes in order to emphasize FIND's commitment to urgent and fundamental questions concerning ecology, but going way beyond the usual instrumentalist approach and tackling important philosophical, religious and spiritual problems behind it that point to a change of paradigm in today's humanity.

All photos belonging to this article are taken by the author.

EPIGRAPH: A VOICE FROM ELSEWHERE (WITHIN)

*Mes dessins donc reproduisent [...] ces mondes de prodiges [...] / où la Voie / est faite
 et ce qu'on / appelait le Grand Œuvre [...] / car nous ne / sommes plus dans
 la chimie / mais dans la / nature / et je crois bien / que la / nature / va parler
 (Thus my drawings reproduce these worlds of wonders / where the Path / is traced
 as well as / what is called the Great Work / since we are no / longer in
 the field of chemistry / but in / nature / and I really believe / that nature / will speak)*

Antonin Artaud, 31 January 1948

With these verses, I would like to open a possible perspective that is incommensurable to its context (meaning that, at the same time, it exists potentially in the context that rejects it). After an unparalleled catastrophe (World War II) and in a pathetic state (after three years at the psychiatric clinic of Rodez), Antonin Artaud proclaims – with his “magic drawings” – a reversal of things: chemistry, having condemned as superstition any spiritual technique concerning matter, known as “alchemy”, can preserve its power position only if the world adapts itself to a “unique” perspective in which the elements are detached from their source (Nature). But Artaud tells us that, in reality, the world cannot be reduced to such a decoding method. There is a path *already traced*, a path that re-traces the steps and reshapes time against chronology to re-enact the powers and latent forces from the abyss to which they were confined. “I really believe that nature will speak.” Artaud anticipates a crisis, the crisis of the blindness of the West, which has become flagrant today, though not in the sense that retrograde traditionalists believe. We could ask ourselves what his destiny would have been if he hadn’t been treated by Gaston Ferdière (with his psychiatric reduction of energy to the brain, epitomized by electroshock), but by Tobie Nathan (with his ethno-psychiatric amplifica-

tion fed upon a profoundly artistic bent). In any case, this question does not concern the destiny of a single individual, but rather that of life on this planet as a Life source, a planet whose mythological name (Gaia) was paradoxically rescued by an English chemist, James Lovelock, and associated with the proliferation of new forms of religiosity. Religiosity and religion. The usage I make of the term relates to a global crisis, since with the new-age phenomenon, religion has become deranged. I would therefore venture a provisional definition partially linked to a controversial etymology: I would like to consider religion a system of techniques (both in the sense of “individual techniques” and “collective techniques”) to reconnect with a source of Life going beyond human individuality – which presupposes that the individual has severed himself from that source.

Physis and Anti-Physis: the Dispositive

Allow me to trace a figure of thought that will at the same time introduce the story of the impasse of the European-Christian West and its reverse side, since it is at this point of inexpressible fluctuation between the two that the transcultural exercise of FIND seeks dialogical accomplishment. I begin with Martin Heidegger, whose obsession was to recapture the

original Greek modality of thinking prior to Plato's metaphysical closure. To simplify matters: the metaphysical closure is a radical division between the sensible (i.e. the domain of world immanence) and the supersensible (i.e. the domain of transcendence with regard to the limitations of the material world). This division can already be seen in the term "metaphysics", since the Greek phrase *tà metὰ tà physiká* presupposes that "physical things", that is, things related to nature, are limited and do not enable us to realise the truth of our being. According to Heidegger, one must reconstitute the original meaning of the word *physis*, which concerns being in its totality, that is, encompassing all events that make up what is called "cosmic dynamics"¹. Heidegger does not ignore the etymology of the term, related to the notion of "growth" and "expansion". *Physis* is therefore an expansive and perpetual modification of an originary power (*arché*) that knows no exteriority. In the expression "metaphysics", there is a displacement and a transformation of the idea of *physis*: it is fixed and reduced to "physical things" (*tà physiká*), the limit of which also implies an exteriority – where the power of origin is transferred. For this reason, Heidegger's critique of metaphysical thought is at the same time a critique of epistemic thinking (unable to think of being without objectifying it) and a clear shift of focus away from a religion based on the idea of a transcendent God who cannot be confused with His creation.

But Heidegger does not only try to think differently about (pure) being; he criticizes a whole civilisation project, since the effects

of the Platonic division between the sensible and the intelligible (or supersensible) play a decisive role in the history of the Christian religion and have essentially contributed to the configuration of Western thought. *Physis*, reduced to the domain of limited, imperfect and perishable things, was placed on the side of Evil by the religious thought of the Middle Ages. In modern thought, the situation has not improved much. In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), Kant reduces nature to a set of objects the intelligibility of which depends on sensible intuition, framed in its turn by the coordinates of space and time². Even when Kant shows a certain sensitivity towards the beauty of nature, for example in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790), he says that the products of nature are not *opus* but only *effectus*, that is, not creative work but only mechanical effect³. The real catastrophe comes with Hegel. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837), he places "nature" and "Spirit" in opposition. In the light of this opposition, the whole transformational dynamics of nature appears as nothing but a blind mechanics of repetition – his sentence ends with the Biblical phrase "nothing new under the sun"⁴–, whereas he declares that the essence of the Spirit is freedom. Hegel re-enacts herewith the Kantian opposition between the sphere of instincts (*Natur*) and the domain of reason (*Vernunft*) and at the same time couples human reason with divine providence. Religion has nothing to do with nature, but with culture, that is, with the development of the Spirit. With such reflections, Hegel resumes the monotheistic motif summarised in the Latin phrase *homo imago Dei* and turns a philosophical truth

*Physis, reduced to the domain of limited, imperfect
and perishable things, was placed on the side of evil in
the Christian Middle Age.*



The Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, a place of symbolic condensation of the divine from fertility powers (*vallis pinguedinum*) to the radical transcendent god of ancient Israel and its subsequent incarnation in human agency.

on universal history into the anthropocentric dimension of biblical heritage: humans are the centre of creation with nature at their disposal.

The development of this figure of thought leads me to consider the term *anti-physis*. Although this term has already been used by François Rabelais with the meaning of something antagonistic to nature, I prefer to emphasize the modern meaning of the term, which blossomed in the avant-gardist arts of the XX century and in modern theories to indicate culture in radical opposition to nature. In this sense, *anti-physis* points to the domain of subjectivity, that is, to the constructions and creations of the Spirit whose aim is its indefinite expansion (as in Marxism, where *physis* means the domain of necessity as opposed to anti-physis as the reign of freedom). But the purpose of this brief reconstruction of the oblivion or repression of *physis* is to show that the cultural roots of *anti-physis* are in fact prior to the modern age, that they may perhaps be traced back to the ancient

separation between the sensible and the supersensible⁵.

Physis, Antiphysis, Religion: some paradoxes

There can be no *meta-physics* without a reduction of the domain of nature (*physis* as an expansive, ordered and totalising dynamics) to something limited that needs an external source to be completed and well-grounded. In the context of monotheism, this source is God, the one and only Creator of the universe (which makes nature a mere *ens creatum*, that is, it deprives it of all its intrinsic forces). In secular modern thought, human beings are the depositary of the order of the Spirit (or culture), as opposed to the material (objectifiable and quantifiable) reality of nature. We could say that the transcendence of the divine Spirit is introjected into human beings, with the result that the latter become the masters of living beings.

This becomes quite evident in the context of liberalism (in the XVIII and XIX centuries), where the order to culture becomes absolute and turns into a “second nature” – that is, a new source for human beings, but in this case (as many thinkers have pointed out, from Max Weber to Karl Marx), rather a source of alienation. This historical moment is also characterized by the rise of secular religions and colonial expansion – which, interestingly enough, replace the imposition of monotheistic truth on local religions outside European territory by the imposition of the only form of valid civilisation upon the “barbarity of strangers”.

In his book *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* (1991), French sociologist Bruno Latour says that modernity was simultaneously the birth and the death of humans, because with the consolidation of European humanism, non-humanity was also born⁶. Nature, a domain of living beings (with magic, mystery, spirits

The examples given by Latour are quite clear: “natural facts” as exclusivist truth criterion (naturalisation, cf. Jean-Pierre Changeaux and his “neuronal man”), “power” as an all-encompassing hermeneutical device (sociologisation, cf. Pierre Bourdieu and his “social absolute”), and “discourse” as the constitutive instance of the real (deconstruction, cf. Jacques Derrida and his “archi-textuality”)⁷. The dispositive of conquest employed by modernity is totalising but also fragmentary, since one single discourse cannot re-unite the three domains of the tripartite structure. Latour’s central point is that this problem is not epistemological but ideological. It suffices to analyse a product of colonialism that became its radical opposite: ethnology. It is by this science that the crisis of modernity is triggered.

The first paradox is that ethnology could do what modernity forbade, but with other civilisations. It produced a scholarly discourse in

One of the main aspects of Daniélou’s view on Shiva and Dionysos is his insistence that Nature is not only a quantifiable set of objects (trees, plants, animals, etc.), but a mystery-field full of divine forces.

and gods), was transformed into an inventory of “things”, and God was crossed out of the game. What did the modern project consist of? According to Latour, a double operation characterises modernity: on the one hand a tripartite structure of critical knowledge: naturalisation, socialisation and deconstruction; on the other hand, a basic dichotomy: the human as the subjective domain – or the domain of “beings” – and the non-human as the domain of the objective – or the domain of “things”. Now, this division of knowledge into three paradigmatic categories prevents us from having any integral access to the real.

which myths, genealogies, politics, religion, etc. are closely related to each other. In “archaic” or “primitive” cultures, these elements are at the same time real, social and narrated⁸. But precisely because of that, ethnological descriptions of our own culture were not possible until the end of the XX century. In Western modernity, a myth is not a scientific treatise, and scholarly knowledge has nothing to do with liturgy or with initiation rites. Modern *anti-physis* could break into the mythic domain of the archaic *physis*, but nothing coming from that order could possibly contaminate the purity of objective knowledge deployed by

this totalising dispositive of power.

The second paradox is that a second type of ethnology emerged from the first, and this second type of ethnology ended up questioning the foundations of power of *anti-physis*. In a lecture held in Montreuil in 2007, French anthropologist Philippe Descola summarized the ideological character of the universalist project in Western modernity as follows: “Our [modern] world-vision made science possible, but we should understand that it is not the product of scientific activity, but a specific way of classifying and distributing the multiplicity of beings in the world born at a certain point in history and enabling scientific research to develop”⁹. This is a clear example of an ethnologist questioning the ideological character related to the roots of scientific practice without abolishing its local effects. While it is true that the Europeans of former centuries merged the desire of knowledge (ethnology) with the desire of subduing (colonialism), the present challenge would be to work on a progressive divorce – with full awareness that a divorce is a crisis.

Some events – and even dates – are in this sense very telling. 1989, for example, which Burno Latour calls “the miraculous year”, seems to condense the problematic. What are the events? Capitalism triumphed on a global level with the fall of the Berlin wall. This victory implied the globalisation of the liberal-economic project (including the religion of the market and the merchandising of religion: from then on, religion would be fully coupled with *anti-physis*). But 1989 is also the year of the first conferences on the global condition of the planet, the year in which the first ecological reports took place warning against a possible extinction of nature as a “limited resource”, confronted with the unlimitedly predatory will of humans¹⁰. In the same period, French anthropologist Philippe Descola was working

on a book that would revolutionise the field of ethnology: *Les lances du crepuscule. Sur les Jivarons de l'haute Amazonie*. In this work, Descola speaks of the animistic cosmovision of the Achuars (whom the colonisers pejoratively called “Jivaros”, that is, “barbarians”) in a way very different from the anthropology of the XIX century, and this becomes a crucial point in his later work. In fact, the animistic world-view is no unsubstantiated belief to be corrected through science, as postulated by anthropological reductionism. It reveals to us (if we dare perform an exercise in self-critique) the reverse-side of our own modality of relationship with other (human and non-human) beings in the world. The conviction of modern man is that only humans have interiority, spirit, and culture, and that they are faced with a “natural world” devoid of those qualities¹¹. The animistic world-view shows another way of interacting with humans and non-humans, an open-ended field of multiple relationships where no form of intellectual reductionism (from metaphysics to science) has the upper hand. It shows us that the so-called “primitives” are not the children of history, but an alterity demonstrating our own provincialism.

The Challenge of Connexions

Descola’s work opens some central questions concerning other traditions and especially our way of understanding them. Although there is some truth in the sentence “the pretention of universality is always a justification of conquest”¹², it is necessary to rethink “objective knowledge” as well as its exteriority, since the coupling of knowledge and power is inevitable, but mainly because *there are entire worlds outside the domain of objective knowledge*. Modern Western culture has chosen to ignore such worlds, but it has recently become clear that they are part of the same (global) context, that is, that we are in some way or another confronted by them. With regard to religion, it



Banyan tree (Bābā Kīnārām Āśram, Benares), a divine tree in Hindu mythology expressing the ever-lasting power of Nature, known as Kalpavṛkṣa – the world tree emerging from the primal waters.

is widely known that monotheism merged an exclusivist truth criterion with a politics of proselytism, and that the exercise of it (especially in the universalistic variants of monotheistic religion: Christianity and Islam) took many lives (not only on the human level). Now, the fact that the condition of this truth is a radical separation from Nature is not something we should overlook. We also know that certain “alternative” (usually self-proclaimed “esoteric” or “traditionalist”) movements turned the equation upside down and sought in an imaginary East (or an unlocalised Gnosis) the solution to the problem of Western civilisation. Such movements reproduce the universalist illusion reversed: they choose to ignore the complexity of the problem rather than working towards an integration of different types of knowledge and experiences – a very difficult challenge demanding intellectual rigor, openness of mind and a true interdisciplinary bent. Such integration seems to me very difficult but not

impossible, since the globalised world implies, among other things¹³, a drastic reduction of incommensurabilities.

I shall give two examples to illustrate my point. The first one concerns India, a culture that sheds further light on the problem that I have just attempted to expound. In my opinion, we can observe in India a (Neo-)Vedāntic closure with similar characteristics to Platonism in the West. This closure was not so serious within the Indian tradition (even if the philosophical effects of Śaṅkara eclipsed to a certain extent the richness of the Brahmanic tradition¹⁵), but the exporting of Vedānta to the West (which Alain Daniélou never ceased to criticise) took on the dimensions of a reverse colonialism, with regrettable consequences *not only in the West but also in India*. What I call “Vedāntic closure” does not mainly concern the reduction of the pluridimensionality of Brahmanism to the orthodox system of Vedānta as it consolidated itself in the VIII century CE, but rather a later

configuration of *anti-physis* in terms of a religious and cultural influence (stemming from India) in a foreign context (Europe at the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century). In any case, there is a philosophical key to the problem which should be borne in mind: the subtractive re-interpretation of *brahman* (known as Vedāntic acosmism)¹⁶. Many instances of Śaṅkara's transformation of early Upaniṣadic thought can be recalled. I shall limit myself to a decisive one: his commentary on a very well-known passage of the *Bṛhdāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (5.1.1.) dealing with the ontological fullness of Brahman. The passage reads: “*That is full, this is full. From fullness stems fullness. Having taken fullness from the fullness, merely the same fullness remains [pūṇamadaḥ pūrṇam-idaṃ pūrṇāt pūrṇam udacyate / pūrṇasya pūrṇam ādāya pūrṇam evāvaśiṣyate]*”. The contrast of the pronouns *adaḥ* (that) and *idaṃ* (this) indicates the difference between the non-qualified and the qualified Brahman, but the predicate *pūrṇam* connects both terms and makes clear an inclusive conception of transcendence. In fact, the different declensions of the term *pūrṇa* (nominative, ablative, genitive and accusative) express the all-encompassing nature of Brahman, the qualified version of which does not appear severed from the plenitude of the unqualified. In other words, Brahman is the whole of the cosmic order and at the same time the non-manifested core of manifestation. It is interesting to see how Śaṅkara turns the affirmative relationship between ontological surplus and all-encompassing cosmicity into a dis severed core beyond manifestation. A passage of his *Bṛhdāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad-Bhāṣya* (5.1.) is in this respect quite instructive: “It is impossible to ascribe eternity to something having parts and subjected to action [*sāvayavasyā nekāt-makasya kriyāvato nityatvānupapatteḥ*]. Here Śaṅkara takes a decisive step towards acosmism: the ontologically real is (dis-)placed outside Nature, outside the cosmos, outside

the totality and multiplicity of manifested reality – the latter being reduced to the sphere of mere relativity: *nāmarūpa*. If we analyse the soteriological implications of this movement, it becomes clear that it leads humans to a radical separation from the rest of living beings, which was not the case in the thought of the early Upaniṣads – where the ritual dimension of the Vedic past still played a decisive role.

In my view, the effects of this closure became dramatic in the Western reception of Śaṅkara's ideas and their ideological reimporting by India, since the complexity of the Brahmanic dispositive was no longer taken into account as a result of it. Needless to say, this simplification extended itself beyond the scope of Brahmanic tradition, for example, in the hostility of a “universalised” Advaita Vedānta towards the growing interest in Tantric traditions.

The second example concerns the vicissitudes of religious experience. Since the rise of Western modernity, religiosity has left institutions and concentrated itself on individuals and small groups, but in the face of the crisis that I have tried to sketch, it has broken out once again with unthought-of power. I said earlier that religion has become deranged. What I meant by that is that there is no traditional framework to channel this expression. The logical consequence is a proliferation of rootless fragmentary movements. We should not be surprised by the fact that, in such a context, there is – for different reasons – a very strong attraction to Shamanism. First of all Shamanism proposes a revival of the imagination far beyond the modern scientific opposition of the “real” and the “imaginary” with a supplementary expansion of perception. Secondly, the cultural aspect of Shamanism presents, among other things, a collective organisation in which certain techniques to communicate with the (invisible) powers of Nature are socially cohesive and relevant. Thirdly (and most important): in our



The Labyrinth at Zagarolo, the Etruscan enclave where Alain Daniélou tried to rescue the perception of the sacred in Nature.

times Shamans have abandoned their forests (in view of ominous ecological catastrophes) and tried to bring a local message to a global context. Are they adding another piece to the confusing puzzle of modern esoteric trends? Perhaps they are, *nolens volens*, because of the very logic of post-modern appropriation – and transformation – of traditional knowledge. However, there is a difference even between Neo-shamanism and former esoteric movements (like new Gnosticism, Theosophy, Anthroposophy and Rosecrucianism). The latter are fed by the idea of radical transcendence – an idea inevitably fed in turn by the metaphysical closure I have tried to expound throughout this essay. As opposed to them, Shamanism – at its roots – is based on a connexion and interaction with Nature that has become a *desideratum* for the human race in this century. This can be taken quite superficially as abstract romanticism or an alternative gesture remindful of the hippie movement of the 1960s, but it can also be taken seriously in view of the specific challenges awaiting us. The study of a different

world-view and life-attitude, when not merely an intellectual exercise of the academician, shakes the dusty straitjacket of our prejudices and assumptions about reality and the world. One of the most important aspects of Alain Daniélou's work and heritage is his effort to understand the world beyond our own conditioned framework of beliefs and convictions, since they are always related to the culture in which we were born and can be enriched through an integration of "the other". The main challenge today is to de-objectify Nature and give it back its mystery and subjective richness instead of continuing to pursue a double wrong track: the cold (and blind) scientific vivisection and technical manipulation of "resources" on the one hand, and the long-standing metaphysical subjugation of chthonic forces in the name of some being, reality or principle giving us the right to impose ourselves on living non-human agents – as if we were directly and ultimately endowed with the power of a monotheistic god. •

¹ Cf. Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, Band 28: Der deutsche Idealismus [1929], Frankfurt 1997, pp. 23-27.

² Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, §§ 1-8, in: *Werke in sechs Bänden, Band II: Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Darmstadt 1998, pp. 69-96.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, § 43, in: *Werke in sechs Bänden, Band V: Kritik der Urteilskraft und Schriften zur Naturphilosophie*, p. 405.

⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel, *Werke 12: Vorlesung über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, Frankfurt 1986, p. 74

⁵ This dichotomy had terrible consequences also if we consider its reverse side. Aristotle's reaction against Plato, for example, was one of the main sources of repression of the creative role of imagination by means of the opposition between the real and the imaginary, a consideration that has cut across the whole of Western mainstream philosophy – with very few exceptions – up to Jean-Paul Sartre and his theory of imagination as an organ creating unrealities. It is thanks to ethnology and the study of Shamanic cultures that a new consideration of this problem arose. Cf. the exemplary work of Charles Stépanoff, *Voyager dans l'invisible: techniques chamaniques de l'imagination*, Paris 2019.

⁶ Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, Paris 1997, p. 23.

⁷ Bruno Latour, *Ibidem*, pp. 12-13.

⁸ Bruno Latour, *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁹ Philippe Descola, *Diversité des natures, diversité des cultures*, Montrouge 2010, p. 69.

¹⁰ Cf. Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, pp. 17-18.

¹¹ Cf. Philippe Descola, *La compositions des mondes. Entretiens avec Pierre Charbonnier*, Paris 2014, pp. 206-207.

¹² Tobie Nathan, Lucien Hounkpatin, cf. *La parole de la forêt initiale*, Paris 1996, p. 11

¹³ Philippe Descola already pointed to the mistake of homologating globalization with “westernization” (in the worst sense of the term): “If people like the Achuar or other Amazonian Amerindians begin to interact more fluently with national Ecuadorian society, they won't become automatically McDonald consumerists” (Philippe Descola, *Diversité de natures, diversité de cultures*,

p. 72). Even if one cannot deny the potential danger of a neutralization of traditional local knowledge in the hands of the disintegrating tendency of a “global economy”, it is also a fact that the interaction of cultures today has been deeply transformed, and that such transformation also enables further attempts in the opposite direction than that of indiscriminate mixture and disintegration.

¹⁴ A richness consisting in the combination (and tension) between ritual and knowledge, something that extends itself from the Brāhmaṇa literature (especially the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, around 800 BCE) over the principal Upaniṣads up to the Brahmasūtra literature (at the beginning of the common era). Śaṅkarācārya's systematic radicalization of the soteriological core in the *brahma-vidyā* device could be read as a remarkable transformational but also reductionist machinery encompassing the whole field of the problematic, since he wrote commentaries to *Brhdāranyaka*, *Chandogya* and *Taittiriya Upaniṣads* as well as to *Brahmasūtra* (it should not escape us that the *Brhdāranyaka Upaniṣad* is the final section of *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*).

¹⁵ One example of many: “In our days, both in India and in the West, the accent laid on a westernized Vedānta to the detriment of more concrete forms of thought than what is found in modern approaches seems incomprehensible to the traditional pundits of India, who are used to strenuous disciplines related to the different darśanas (Alain Daniélou, *Shivisme et tradition primordiale*, Paris 2006, p. 59, this paragraph is lacking in the English translation, which I quote subsequently).

¹⁶ Alain Daniélou's critique of Vedānta is without any doubt related to this point. He even qualifies Śaṅkara's systematization as a dogmatic trend, “which, in seeking to synthesize, destroyed a complex system of investigations into the nature of the world and the divine” (Alain Daniélou, *Shiva and the Primordial Tradition*, Rochester/Vermont 2007, p. 18).



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A PERSPECTIVIST APPROACH TO THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE AMAZONIAN FOREST

This is a slightly modified version of Amanda Viana’s talk at FIND Forum “Transcultural Encounters 2019” on the subject of Physis and Antiphysis in Religion. It is also representative of FIND’s approach to the problem of “ecology”, not reduced to finding or creating new measures to extend the damage to the environment, but encompassing another attitude to life to be learned from cultures that have been neglected, persecuted and destroyed for centuries.

All photos belonging to this article are taken by the author.

The text is translated from the German by Adrián Navigante
and revised by Kenneth Hurry.

Nukun Mana (Bari, Ushre, Bixe, Niwe, Hane, Shaba, Aiman) I Bubu

I Bubu bu Ta

Eskawa Ta Kayawe eee

Kayawe ke ke

Nukun Xina (Daue, Kana, Dauan, Nixi, Shuru, Deushku, Epakushipa)

I Bubu

I Bubu bu Ta

Eskawa Ta Kayawe eee

Kayawe ke ke¹

This is a healing song of the Huni Kuins, one of the many indigenous peoples of the Amazonian forest. It is a prayer addressed to the forces of Nature, used in sacred ceremonies for participants to be cured and made capable of receiving their teachings. In this song, the Huni Kuins invoke the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the wind, the water, the day, the night and all beings within the cosmic setting. They also invoke the thoughts, the medicines, the signs, the songs, the tea of the forest (Nixi Pae, the living school), the tobacco of the Pajés (spiritual leaders), *rapé* [snuff-tobacco] and the Great Spirit).²

This song is one tiny example of a whole context, but it shows clearly enough the role of Nature in the religious experience of these Amazonian forest people. The purpose of my essay is to open a discussion about some anthropological models that sought to understand and make accessible to us the indigenous peoples' relationship with Nature, including the religious sphere which has lately become so attractive to Europeans. For this purpose I shall focus especially on one model, which is that of the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. This essay is divided into four parts: 1. The value of Nature in the religions of the city and in the religions of nature.

2. The relationship of primitive societies with Nature according to mainstream anthropological theories. 3. The perspectivistic view of the indigenous peoples of the Amazonian forest, and 4. Davi Kopenawa: the voice of the *Xapiris*.

It should be borne in mind that when I speak of "primitive" societies or cultures, the word "primitive" always appears in inverted commas to indicate the point of view of anthropologists who believed in the superiority of Western modern culture (complex and developed) over local forms of tradition (simple and underdeveloped) and my radical distance from that point of view.

The Value of Nature in the Religions of the City and in the Religions of Nature

From a philosophical point of view, we could say that the basis of all religious experience is a human attempt to reconnect with the source of Life. This aspect is evident in polytheistic and monotheistic religions. A very pertinent question is whether, in the context of a religious experience, Nature is considered the source of Life (religion of immanence) or whether Nature appears as the product of the source of Life or God (religion of transcendence). Alain Daniélou expressed an interesting point of view on this subject in his book *Shiva and Dionysus*:³ while

religions of nature define human beings as part of a whole (the whole of Nature), religions of the city place human beings in a position of dominance over Nature.³ The example of the Jewish-Christian tradition is not the only one, but it is quite clear: *homo imago Dei*. Religions of Nature are based on an immediate relationship with Nature and constitute a network of interactions with plants, animals, mountains, rivers, etc. in which Nature is regarded as something that is ultimately a mystery and with which humans have an essential connexion with life itself. Religions of the city established an unbridgeable distance from Nature.⁴ For Alain Daniélou there is a very close connexion between religions of the city and monotheism. For the religions of the city, Nature is excluded from the sphere of the sacred, since the way to God (as a radically transcendent being) must surpass the determinations of time and space (and therefore the fact of imperfection and mortality) that constitute the sphere of nature as such. In religions of Nature, the role of ritual with its manipulation of natural elements and forces is decisive; because of its sacred status, Nature cannot be reduced to a mere instrument and cannot be objectified in any way. In the religions of the city, the sphere of the sacred is transferred to books, institutions and moral prescriptions with metaphysical value. Humans are considered superior to all other natural beings, establishing a clear pattern of dominance over Nature itself. We can see the consequences of this position in the anthropocentric conception that dominates the Western world (and a large part of the globe) today. Daniélou's position towards the religions of

the city is radically negative: they are for him an abstract human projection and therefore a source of alienation.⁶ In *Shiva and Dionysus*, he takes a clear stand for the religions of Nature and makes a plea for their revival in the modern Western world, since (according to him) a concrete relationship with Nature is the basis for all religious experience. In what sense is this relationship plausible?

The relationship of “primitive peoples” with Nature in the light of Anthropology

One of the ways of considering the relationship with Nature in the religious sphere is to look at the testimonies of anthropology and ethnology of religion in the West. In this sense, the work of authors like Edward Burnett Tylor⁷, James George Frazer⁸, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl⁹, David Émile Durkheim¹⁰, Claude Lévi-Strauss¹¹, Philippe Descola¹² and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro¹³ are worthy of attention and consideration. From the perspective of the history of ideas, these authors provide models to explain the relationship between nature and religion in what were long termed “primitive cultures”. I shall summarize their results using the following categories – some of which are well known: animism, totemism and perspectivism.

Early researches on the religions of Nature in indigenous societies were based on an evolutionist model, of which Tylor and Frazer are the main representatives. On the basis of missionary and colonial documents as well as voyage reports, these authors defined indigenous peoples as *primitive people* because they were regarded as the first stage in the develop-

**Indigenous thought is based on a *science of Nature*
and postulates a unity of soul and a diversity of bodies
between humans and non-humans**



Mapu Huni Kuin, a young healer and politically engaged representative of the Huni Kuin tribe in Amazonas.

ment of the human spirit. Their animistic view of Nature was taken as evidence for such an affirmation. Animism, as the word indicates, was, in the eyes of these anthropologists, the belief in Nature as souled or animated, and the related attitude was explained as human perception of a threatening power of Nature that forces human beings to different magical practices to channel and control that power. In this sense, magic was considered an anticipation of science, and the main difference between them was the degree of abstraction. In his book *Primitive Culture* (1871), Tylor considers monotheism (the belief in one god) the highest stage in the development of religion, whereas Frazer, in his monumental treatise *The Golden Bough* (1890), classifies magic among the most underdeveloped social practices – the highest one being science.¹⁴ Science is also presented as the best possible human relationship with Nature, since humans enter

the sphere of “truth” with regard to the environment that they seek to know. For Tylor and Frazer, the concrete relationship of “primitive cultures” with Nature is evidence of their lack of development, among other things because the animistic and magic view is radically opposed to logical thought. In other words: “primitives” are like children, they have not reached the point at which logical thought can be exercised and they are therefore incapable of it.

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl opposed that view¹⁵. In his book *La mentalité primitive* (1922), he affirms that “primitive” peoples are not underdeveloped with regard to logic, since their thought is *pre-logic*¹⁶, which means that it is not made of abstract definitions and concepts, but of a primordial affectiveness elaborating on collective experiences¹⁷ and also of a mystical participation¹⁸. Lévy-Bruhl considers that pre-logic thought is fundamentally synthetic, that is,

oriented towards the unity of a whole. This synthetic thought integrates all kinds of contradictions and oppositions, for which reason “primitive” peoples can participate in natural and supernatural settings (as rites and myths clearly show) without any difficulty, and this is part of their daily life.

In the context of the early anthropology of religion, Émile Durkheim’s book *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912) appears as a valuable contribution to an understanding of the relationship between religion and nature in primitive cultures. Durkheim’s purpose is to reach the ground-level of (social) religious life by isolating its elementary form. For the first time in the history of the anthropology of religion, a systematic categorization is put forward for discussion. The result of his enterprise is twofold: a functionalistic view of religion (religion is not a way of explaining the world, as Frazer thought, but a social function), and the conviction that totemism, that is, the religion of a clan worshipping a *totem*, is the most elementary form of religion. We must not forget that his research was based on ethnographic material about the Aranda, an indigenous clan-system of central Australia.

Durkheim’s starting point is religion as a social structure, that is, religion as an institution mediating the collective representations of a society. That religion has a mediating function means, in Durkheim’s view, that it contributes to an internalization of collective representations in the mind and body of each member of that society. Not only are beliefs and rites relevant for his theory of religion, but also the distinction between the sacred and the profane, since sacred things are the object of religion, that is, things set apart and forbidden.¹⁹

Durkheim affirms, against other theoreticians of religion such as Edward Tylor and Friedrich Max Müller, that neither animism (as the belief in a souled Nature) nor naturism (as the belief

in supernatural powers of Nature) is the most elementary form of religion, since such models do not account for religion as a system of convictions and practices. It is the clan-organization that provides clear elements accounting for a social structure²⁰. The totem (associated with an animal or a plant) is the link between individuals and a social system, and can therefore be said to constitute a social group²¹. As stated above, jumping from concrete observations of clan-organization to a universal structure in dealing with religion cannot be taken for granted in Durkheim’s theory.

One of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s great contributions to the ethnology of religion can be found in his book *La pensée sauvage* (1962). His starting point is that indigenous societies have “savage thought”, meaning a type of thinking oriented towards a whole with the help of complementary dichotomies²². “Savage thought” is therefore a kind of *bricolage* where rationality and irrationality are combined and everything (nature and culture) is considered part of an overall totality²³. For Lévi-Strauss, totemism can work as a model for understanding the relationship between nature and religion in indigenous societies; however, it is neither an autonomous institution nor a relationship between a clan and a totem. It is rather a combination of two units, a natural and a social, which in turn carry differences in themselves²⁴. The most important aspect of totemism is the structuring or bridging over of discontinuities²⁵.

With the ontological turn in French anthropology towards the end of the XX century, research on what had been called “primitive cultures” went through a decisive transformation. Philippe Descola is perhaps the most important representative of this movement. After dealing with former theories of anthropology and carrying out ethnographical work among the indigenous tribe of the Achuar in

Ecuador, he developed a model of four ontologies with a re-interpretation of several classical terms in previous ethnological theories: 1. Animism, 2. Totemism, 3. Analogism and 4. Naturalism. Descola defines each of these ontologies in terms of a central problem: how humans think and experience the continuities and discontinuities between themselves and other beings. In this sense, he defines animism as the ontology of Amazonian tribes, an ontology that postulates a continuity of interiority between human and non-human beings²⁶. Whatever belongs to nature, especially plants and animals, has an interiority of its own, just like human beings. This means that nature in the form we know it does not exist, and that culture (as a complex activity of the spirit) includes the domain of the non-human, thus forming a kind of (spiritual) continuum. Discontinuities are to be found in physicality. If we look closer into Descola's exposition of animism, we realize that it is the exact opposite of the ontology he associates with modern Western thought: naturalism. Or in other words: naturalism is, in Descola's conception, a historical inversion of animism, since it postulates a discontinuity between humans and non-humans as to interiority (neither plants nor animals have soul or spirit) and a continuity as to physicality (human beings are also part of nature, as their bodies show)²⁷. With this characterization, it becomes clear that naturalist ontology is convinced of a superiority of human beings over other species, since no natural species shows the complexity of human interiority (ego-consciousness, cognitive faculties, scientific-technical knowledge and cultural development).²⁸ Totemism, for its part, differs from Durkheim's and Lévi-Strauss' classifications. According to Descola, humans and nature are defined as an organic whole in Australian totemistic systems, but the key issue is the relationship between entity (or individual) and class (or group associated

to a specific totem), which is established by means of common aspects ultimately related to the totem itself. Or even more precisely: The totem is defined by means of the feature and not vice versa, which means that a continuity of features is established joining humans and non-humans according to a specific criterion.²⁹

While animism and naturalism can be regarded as a dichotomic polarity in their dealing with continuities and discontinuities, totemism points to a symmetric scheme constituted by a continuity of physicality and interiority (if a clan is related to a serpent, the serpent won't be seen as alien to the humans associated with it, in either their external or internal aspects!). An oppositional-complementary scheme to totemism should therefore be a world-configuration in which the aspects of radically different entities (from the point of view of both physicality and interiority) can be brought together, which is precisely analogism³⁰. The analogical ontology is an inventory of correspondences (and oppositions) among totally different entities without observable physical or spiritual determination for the establishment of such correspondences (and oppositions).

Descola's proposal of four different ontologies seeks to do justice to natural life and cultural diversity (one could also indistinctly say, if we take his pluralism seriously, "cultural life" and "natural diversity") beyond received opinions and ideas, focusing reflection on how continuities and discontinuities between humans and non-humans in different contexts of life-configuration are dealt with³¹.

The perspectivistic view of the indigenous peoples of the Amazonian forest

At this point I come to an author I would like to focus on: Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. Viveiros de Castro developed a philosophical model of the cosmivision

As opposed to Western theories, which transform things into objects in order to gain knowledge, the operation of forest shamans is a radical process of subjectivation.

of the indigenous peoples of the Amazonian forest, called “perspectivism”. His starting point is the following: indigenous thought is based on a *science of Nature* and postulates a unity of soul and a diversity of bodies between humans and non-humans.³² Here the scholarly voice of ethnology recognizes an instance of knowledge independent of the rational (instrumental or conceptual) elaboration of humans as a challenge to understand forms of interaction alien to what the Western mind deems objective and universal.

Viveiros de Castro is convinced that, for indigenous people, everything belonging to Nature is potentially perspectivistic. Plants, animals, spirits, etc. have the same kind of soul, or in other words: humans and non-humans have the same kind of socio-cultural relationships.³³ But the way in which we (humans) see non-humans is totally different from the way in which non-humans perceive us. Non-humans see humans as *non-humans* and see themselves as fundamentally *human*, that is, capable of producing a culture of their own. A jaguar, for example, sees a human being as an animal, that is, as prey or predator.³⁴ What we (humans) see as Nature is culture for non-humans. Viveiros de Castro operates thus with a double inversion: he transforms nature into culture and at the same time inserts the perspective of non-humans as a specificity of this culture. He does not even hesitate to give examples like: what for us is blood, for jaguars is beer.³⁵ Viveiros de Castro explains that non-humans see themselves as human because humans perceive themselves as human, whereas they regard plants and animals as non-human.³⁶

This should ultimately make it clear that perspectivism de-centralizes the human factor, but the apparent extreme of anthropomorphic inversion is not a mere provocation. It aims at showing the complexity of a view renouncing anthropocentric reductionism.

What is the meaning of “being human”? Being human in the thought of Viveiros de Castro is having intentionality, and intentionality has ontological potential. Intentionality is essentially related to the position of humans as prey or predator –which gives rise to many perspectives.³⁷ Quite unlike the modern Western standpoint, which creates objects out of perspectives, the perspectives of indigenous cultures create subjects that are never fixed or self-evident.³⁸ Perspectives are, for indigenous peoples, related to situations and crystallize themselves as relationships between different subjects.³⁹ Perspective has in this sense nothing to do with representation, nor can it be defined as a mere concept.⁴⁰ It is a *standpoint that belongs to the body*. It is related to the power of the soul (as continuum between humans and non-humans), but it multiplies because of the diversities of bodies (among and between humans and non-humans).⁴¹

That is also why Shamanism plays a decisive role among indigenous peoples. As opposed to Western theories, which transform things into objects in order to gain knowledge, the operation of forest shamans is a radical process of subjectivation. The shaman must adopt the perspective of the other and transform himself into the other in order to gain knowledge.⁴² Only shamans can see non-humans in their intrinsic *human* perspective, which is the condi-

If “Nature” is not heard, the heavens *will fall down*, that is, “Nature” will disappear. If “Nature” disappears, the only source of life (and therefore of religion) will be lost.

tion of possibility of shamanic communication. The shaman can know that an animal is a man that has undergone a specific transformation; but in order to pierce the human-form of the animal, the shaman must be able to transform himself into an animal. Still further: since forest shamans can adopt many perspectives, they can steer relationships between humans and non-humans and extract teachings for their communities from what they have learned through other perspectives.⁴³

To sum up, perspectivism can be defined as follows⁴⁴: 1. What unites humans and non-humans is subjectivity. 2. Non-humans see themselves as human and therefore possess subjective intentionality, the result of which is culture. 3. Non-humans see humans as non-human. 4. The phenomenological body of non-humans is a transformation concealing their true nature (a jaguar strips himself of his jaguar-clothes when he is among his peers)⁴⁵. 5. This transformation is not only a mythic narration, but part of the ordinary life of indigenous peoples (a shaman must adopt different perspectives if he wants to heal people). 6. Although indigenous people are convinced of the unity of souls and the diversity of bodies, there is (within their perspectivistic view) no fundamental dichotomy between them, which means that for them transcendence and immanence are part of the same reality. 7. Body transformation is a synonym of “perspective”⁴⁶.

Davi Kopenawa: the voice of *Xapiri*.

In his book *In welcher Welt leben?* (2019)⁴⁷, Viveiros de Castro quotes a passage⁴⁸ from *La*

chute du ciel, a book based on a long conversation between French ethnologist Albert Bruce and the well-known shaman from the Amazonian tribe of the Yanomami, Davi Kopenawa: “dreams of white men do not reach so far as ours; white men sleep a lot, but they don’t dream of anything but themselves”⁴⁹. From a certain *perspective*, this sentence not only translates the perspectivistic view of the Amazonian people but also formulates a critique of the Western perspective. White men (who for Viveiros de Castro epitomise the alienation of capitalist culture) can only dream of themselves because they are locked up in their own perspective. Either they don’t want to or cannot know other modalities of life. Or perhaps, still worse: they are fully convinced that their perspective is best because *it is true*, and therefore they must persuade or force others to adopt it. For Davi Kopenawa, the Yanomamis can dream of plants, animals and other beings because they are not locked up in themselves, which means that their thinking is not restricted to objectifying Nature.

Davi Kopenawa wanted to participate in a book-project with an ethnologist so that white people can open themselves to the perspective of the forest and hear the *Xapiris*: “I would like them to hear the voice of the *xapiris*, who tirelessly play, dancing on their resplendent mirrors”⁵⁰. In order to hear the *Xapiris*, one must adopt the perspective of “Nature”: one must attend the school of the forest. For the Yanomami-Shamans, *yakoani-hi*, an entheogen powder, is one of the main teachers of the forest, an intelligent plant that can make the

voice of the *Xapiri* perceptible, since it is their food. Through *yakoani-hi*, shamans can enter the world of dreams and open themselves to the perspective of the other.⁵¹ In this way, they can heal and teach their fellow tribe-members how to live. If “Nature” is not heard, the *heavens will fall down*, that is, “Nature” will disappear. If “Nature” disappears, the only source of life (and therefore of religion) will be lost. What I

called at the beginning of this essay the “religious” relationship of indigenous people with “Nature” is nothing other than the perspective of “Nature” itself. The role of religious experience in the lives of these indigenous peoples is essentially linked to the human possibilities of perceiving, adopting and opening themselves to the perspective of “Nature”. •



The sacred fire, a natural element of great importance in Shamanic ceremonies related to purification, visionary insight and passage to other dimensions.

¹ Cf. also the following youtube video:
https://youtu.be/j8ObcKIh_hk

² Cf. the explanation of this healing prayer by Mapu, a young healer of the Huni Kuin people:
<https://youtu.be/1Nt13RMRT2Q>.

³ *Gods of Love and Ecstasy: The Traditions of Shiva and Dionysius*, transl. by K. Hurry, New York 1992.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14: “Since the beginning of urban civilization, religious phenomena among sedentary peoples have been manifested and established in two opposed or contradictory forms. The first is tied to the world of nature, the second to the organization of communal city life. [...] *Dharma* is a word which means ‘natural law’. To conform to what one is by birth, by nature, by one’s natural disposition. Each must play, as best he can, his assigned role in the great theatre of creation. [...] The other form of religion is the religion of the city, the society of mankind, which claims to impose divine sanctions on social conventions. It exalts human laws as sacred enactments. It serves as an excuse for the ambitions of men who seek dominion over the natural world and make use of it, claiming for themselves a unique position to the detriment of other species”.

⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15: “Due to a strange and evil perversion of values [...] man has renounced his role in the universal order embracing all forms of being or life. [...] The danger of monotheism is that it succeeds in reducing the divine to the image of man, an appropriation of God to the service of the ‘chosen’ race. This is contrary to true religion, since it serves as an excuse for subjecting the divine work to man’s ambition”.

⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 16: “[Religion of Nature] does not involve simply a recognition of world harmony, but also an active participation in an experience which surpasses and upsets the order of material life. [...] Communion with Nature and with the gods thus becomes possible, whilst the calculations and frustrations imposed by city religions isolate the world of men from the rest of creation”.

⁷ Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, London 1871.

⁸ George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, New York/London 1890 (first edition in 2 volumes), 1900 (second edition in 6 volumes), 1907–1915 (third edition in 12 volumes).

⁹ Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *La mentalité primitive*, Paris 1922; *L’âme primitive*, Paris 1927; *L’Expérience*

Mystique et les Symboles chez les Primitifs, Paris 1938.

¹⁰ Émile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris 1912.

¹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, Paris 1962; *Le Totémisme aujourd’hui*, Paris 1962 (all works of Lévi-Strauss in this essay are quoted after the Pléiade edition: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Œuvres*, Paris 2008).

¹² Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Paris 2007 (first edition 2005); *La composition des mondes. Entretiens avec Pierre Charbonnier*, Paris 2014. Cf. his introduction to *Les Natures en question*. (Colloque Annuel du Collège de France), ed. by Philippe Descola, Paris 2018, pp. 8-16 as well as his contribution to the same volume entitled “De la Nature universelle aux natures singulières: quelles leçons pour l’analyse des cultures?” (*Ibid.*, pp. 121-136). Cf. also the very didactic summary of ontological pluralism and its ecological potential in: Philippe Descola, *Une écologie des relations*, Paris 2019.

¹³ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Encontros*, Rio de Janeiro 2008; *Cannibal Metaphysics. For a post-structural anthropology*, translated and edited by Peter Skafish, Minneapolis 2014; *The relative native. Essays on indigenous conceptual worlds*, Chicago 2015.

¹⁴ Cf. Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard, *A History of Anthropological Thought*, New York 1981, pp. 136-138 and p. 141. Cf. Jason Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*, Chicago/London 2017, p. 144-145.

¹⁵ Lévy-Bruhl, *La mentalité primitive*, pp. 76 and 80.

¹⁶ Lévy-Bruhl, *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121 and 172.

¹⁷ Lévy-Bruhl, *Ibid.*, p. 121. Cf. the following reflection that summarizes Lévy-Bruhl’s position: “The general notion of experience [in Western culture] is mainly cognitive. It cannot be applied to the experience of primitives, which is mainly affective” (*L’expérience mystique et les symboles chez les primitifs*, p. 5).

¹⁸ Cf. Lévy-Bruhl, *Ibid.*, pp. 84, 86-87 and 88.

¹⁹ Cf. Émile Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, pp. 51 and 55.

²⁰ Cf. Durkheim, *Ibid.*, p. 125.

²¹ Cf. Durkheim, *Ibid.*, p. 142 and 223.

²² Cf. Lévi- Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, in: Claude

- Lévi-Strauss, *Œuvres*, pp. 568-569 and 571,
- ²³ Cf. Lévi-Strauss, *Ibid.*, pp. 576 and 578.
- ²⁴ Cf. Lévi-Strauss, *Ibid.*, pp. 642-643.
- ²⁵ Cf. Lévi-Strauss, *Ibid.*, pp.680-681.
- ²⁶ Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, p.183.
- ²⁷ Cf. Descola, *Ibid.*, p. 241
- ²⁸ Cf. Descola, *Ibid.*, p. 243.
- ²⁹ Cf. Descola, *Ibid.*, p. 222.
- ³⁰ Cf. Descola, *Ibid.*, p. 280.
- ³¹ Descola, *Une écologie des relations*, pp. 46-47.
- ³² Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p. 51 and 52.
- ³³ Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- ³⁴ Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- ³⁵ Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *Ibid.*, p. 57. Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *The relative native*, p. 251.
- ³⁶ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p. 69.
- ³⁷ Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *Ibid.*, p. 58. Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *The relative native*, p. 244.
- ³⁸ Viveiros de Castro, *The relative native*, pp. 244 and 245.
- ³⁹ Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *Ibid.*, p. 204.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *Ibid.*, p. 225
- ⁴¹ Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *Ibid.*, pp. 256 and 268. See also Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p. 52.
- ⁴² Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p. 60.
- ⁴³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 60. Cf. also Viveiros de Castro, *The relative native*, pp. 209 and 291.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. Viveiros de Castro, *Ibid.*, p. 229.
- ⁴⁵ Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, p. 57.
- ⁴⁶ Viveiros de Castro, *The relative native*, p. 268.
- ⁴⁷ Déborah Danowski/ Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. *In welcher Welt leben? (Há um mundo por vir?: Ensaio sobre os medos e os fins)*. Berlin 2019.
- ⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. Davi Kopenawa : “Les Blancs, eux, ne rêvent pas aussi loin que nous. Ils dorment beaucoup mais ne rêvent que d’eux-mêmes” (Davi Kopenawa/ Bruce Albert. *La chute du ciel. Paroles d’un chaman Yanomami*. Paris 2010, p. 518).
- ⁵⁰ Kopenawa/Albert, *Ibid.*, p. 43: “je voudrais leur faire écouter la voix des xapiri qui y jouent sans relâche en dansant sur leur miroirs resplendissants”.
- ⁵¹ Cf. Kopenawa/Albert, *Ibid.*, p. 72.



Valentina Barnabei

Contemporary Hindi independent scholar

YĀTRĀ VRTTĀNT: DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE HIMALAYAN REGIONS IN THE TRAVEL NARRATIVES OF GAGAN GILL AND ANIL YĀDAV

From time immemorial, the Himalayas and their surroundings have been a destination for different kind of pilgrimages. People from urban areas visit this region in a quest for experiences that will reconstitute a sense not to be found in their comfort zone (also the place of routine and alienation). Valentina Barnabei analyses two different expressions of this phenomenon in Hindi literature: *Avāk. Kailāś-Mānsarovar: ek antaryātrā* and *Vah bhī koī deś hai maharāj*.



Mount Kailash seen from the North. Source: Wikipedia

The Timeless Charm of the Himalayas

The Himalayan high plateau, stretching for about 2500 kilometres between India, to the west, and China, to the east, and its surrounding regions exert a timeless charm on those who cross through them or dream about them. Furthermore, this high plateau has a peculiar importance for Buddhists, for Tibetan followers of the Bön religion, for Hindus, because their Trimūrti resides on Brahmālok, Vaikuṅṭh and Kailāś (Consolaro 2013:1), and even for Sikhs. Indeed, Guru Nānak in person made a pilgrimage to the sacred places of the Himalayas (Consolaro 2013:2). Nowadays, an important part of any discourse linked to the Himalayas concerns their contradistinction to the world of the plains, characterised – according to some – by chaos and the absence of simplicity. Indeed, it seems that the Himalayan region emblemises the importance of cultural differences in building the Indian identity (Pozza 2015: 52). Even now, this region continues to be the destination of numerous travellers who reach its summits with the most diverse aims. Such travellers include writers who, thanks

to their *yātrā vṛttānt* (Hindi for “travelogue”), have become part of the long discourse of literature concerning the Himalaya and its cultures, enriching it with their accounts. Such authors, contemporary women and men, for different reasons and at different times, decided to leave temporarily the large towns and metropolises where they live, and choose the Himalayan region. Among those who have made a major contribution to Hindi travel literature in the modern period, we should mention Gagan Gill and Anil Yādav, authors of *Avāk. Kailāś-Mānsarovar: ek antaryātrā* (“Speechless. Kailāś-Mānsarovar: an inner journey”) and of *Vah bhī koī des hai maharāj* (Is that even a country, Sir!) respectively¹. These two writers, who share a journalistic background, have published highly different accounts concerning their experiences in the regions of the Himalayan chain. Their two points of view will be analysed through their own words. The analysis will focus particularly on how the authors describe the places and people that are part of their journeys, observing the relation between their descriptions of these places and of the inhabitants of the Himalayan regions.



Gagan Gill

Avāk – the speechless journey of Gagan Gill

Avāk. Kailās-Mānsarovar: ek antaryātrā is the prose and verse work by Gagan Gill devoted to her pilgrimage to Mount Kailās and Lake Mānsarovar. This account bears witness to the double journey, both inner and outer, which the author took for about two weeks with the aim of circumambulating the area of Mount Kailās and Lake Mānsarovar. What interests Gagan Gill above all is the peak of Dolma-Lā, a site of religious interest in Tibet, where worshippers leave to the Goddess Tara objects that belonged to their deceased loved-ones. Indeed, the reason for which Gill decided to leave New Delhi for a time, where she lives and works, is the loss of her companion Nirmal Verma, also an author of travel narratives and pioneer of the literary movement *Nayī Kahānī* (“new history”).

Besides practical advice to Indian citizens who have to ask the Chinese government for a visa to visit the region, *Avāk* expresses very clearly the political ideas of the author, a fervent partisan

of the Free Tibet movement². Below, we shall deal with the encounters and places that form an integral part of Gill’s journey, a journey not without difficulties. These elements will help us understand Gagan Gill’s view of the Himalayan region and will allow us to analyse how the author – narrator of the work – expresses her impressions and interactions with the Himalayan context.

Gill interacts with various people, only two of whom are locals. At the border between Nepal and Tibet she meets a child of ten-twelve. Their dialogue is emblematic of her exchanges with other characters cited in the work.

“What is your name?”

A light-skinned kid of ten-twelve is pulling my handbag out of my hand, insisting that he is going to take it to the other side. [...]

“First tell me your name!” I ask him again.

The child sees nothing interesting in this superfluous discourse. He simply wants to know whether I am about to give him my bag to carry or not. If not, he will look for another traveller!

“Fine! If I give you my bag, will you tell me your name?”

“Yes, my name is Viṣṇu.”

“You’re lying?” (Gill 2009: 46-47)³.

The whole dialogue, presented in direct speech, is characterised by Gagan Gill’s distrust and the insistence of the child, whose real first name is Ratan.

Suddenly, Gill has a revealing flash and understands clearly the harshness of this child’s life, until that moment perceived only as an annoyance: “His companions, coming and going, are signalling to him. He doesn’t look in their direction. He is totally lost. Such a great problem for such a young life!” (Gill 2009:49)⁴.

From this moment on, Gill becomes more affectionate toward her interlocutor and accepts to call him Viṣṇu. When she states that the

child is a god, he reacts in an unexpected way, affirming with tears in his voice, “If I am a god, why did I fall down here?” (Gill 2009: 50)⁵.

In *Avāk*, most dialogues between the writer and others are developed in the form of direct speech. At the same time, the presence of the author’s personal impressions, interrupting the flow of interactions with her interlocutors, constantly place history’s focus on the narrator’s perspective.

The journey presents numerous difficulties, especially for those who, like the author, live in a polluted environment at low altitude, as in a town, and are not accustomed to living in the mountains. Despite all this, Gill shows great enthusiasm for the Himalayan countryside. Before starting her journey, Gill describes the Lake of Mānsarovar and Mount Kailāś as places on the border of reality, where peace can be attained. In Chapter 20, entitled “One of the purest of waters”, she reaches the foot of Mount Kailāś and her ideas seem to be confirmed: “In the snows of Kailāś there are ladders. It is the southern face of this mountain. Are these the ladders of paradise?” (Gill 2009: 112)⁶.

Not only does the strictly natural aspect charm our author, but also the atmosphere experienced in some of the Himalayan villages, where the simplicity of the buildings harmonises with the beauty of Nature.

Who knows when time began to elapse?

Not only have we left civilisation somewhere behind us, but its importance is no longer felt either. We are heading towards a time that is pure and original. Nowhere is there electricity or running water. No pipes, nor toilets, nor drains. There is a village frozen

in time, its name is Prayang. It stands at an altitude of 4400 metres.

Our last stop on the way to Mansarovar. It’s like going back five hundred years, to encounter our ancestors. And as soon as we arrive: infinite peace. Authenticity.

In a magnificent room, there are six wooden seats. Walls of earth; roof of earth. The walls are painted in the colours of Tibet, on the walls is a border of green, blue and red.

The colours of natural elements. So that no one forgets they are encircled and established.

Tomorrow we reach Mansarovar.

The house. The yard.

In the middle, a well, with a wooden cover, locked with a chain and padlock. When the sherpa draws water from it, I ask him:

“May I take a look?”

“Yes, yes, why not?”

The sky swims at the bottom of the well... Exactly as in a film by Tarkovski...(Gill 2009: 91)⁷.

It is quite clear that Gagan Gill’s view is strongly influenced by those ideas considering the Himalayan regions as places that have retained their purity and authenticity, unlike the towns and villages of the plains. The protagonist’s sensations in this “primitive” place are clear and decided. Her interaction with her surroundings starts with a return to the natural, simple era of the ancestors and concludes with the image of the sky reflected in the crystalline water of the well. The vocabulary and the images chosen reflect a universe made of purity, impossible to find elsewhere. Himalayan nature, which knows no human intervention, constitutes an essential element

Nowadays, an important part of any discourse linked to the Himalayas concerns their contradistinction to the world of the plains, characterised – according to some – by chaos and the absence of simplicity

guiding the deepest thoughts of the author-protagonist. In the following passage, the sight of a solitary swan in a natural setting of astonishing beauty leads Gill to reflect on consciousness, perception and gratitude.

In the sky a swan flies. One. Alone.

Such a lonely swan in such a beautiful nature...

Does he know how beautiful this land is? How lucky he is?

Is he grateful for being himself?

If I were a bird, how I would have said "I am grateful!"

I am grateful for having eyes that can see, for having a body that has brought me here, for having a mind that perceives.

I am grateful for being this. I saw you, god...(Gill 2009: 200-201)⁸.

Although the relationship between the author and the locals is characterised by hesitation and uncertainty, her description of nature and the Himalayan landscape leaves no room for negative emotions.

Vah bhī koī des hai maharāj: India's mysterious North-East seen by Anil Yādav

Vah bhī koī des hai maharāj is the account of the journey of the journalist Anil Yādav and his friend and colleague Anhes Shashwat in the region of India's north-east. The reasons that spur the pair to undertake this adventure are very different from those of Gagan Gill. Indeed, the journalists are in the economic doldrums and hope to improve their situation by writing articles on the highly complex political and social conditions of this region. The author travels through Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Manipur. The result of this experience is consequently a literary work rediscovering a geographical area often forgotten, perceived by other Indians as remote, peopled by bizarre folk; a place of mysterious and frightening events.

The narrative, packed with information about the politics of the situation and groups of the locations visited, pays great attention to the locals' viewpoint. Several times, the inhabitants of the north-east express themselves without the mediation of the narrative voice, even though they are sometimes presented by the author. The following is a passage in which Yādav presents women of the Khasi ethnic group:

In Khasi folk-tales, the sun is female and the moon male. Indeed, Khasi men are only seen in the light of their women. Here, property is transferred to the name of the youngest daughter, called 'kā-kuḍḍū'. When a man has to obtain a bank credit, it is a woman who validates the guarantee. But these girls were lovely so long as they smiled. The moment they laughed, a wave of terror began to rise in me. The teeth of most of the women, open like red-coloured saws embedded in gum, were worn down owing to the custom of chewing kway (the *tāmūl*⁹ of Meghalaya) since childhood. The beautiful faces that supported these teeth recalled the villains of Puranic tales (Yadav 2017:33)¹⁰.

Despite their authority within the community, these women play a passive role in the narrative sequences given above. The absence of any direct communication with the protagonist creates a distance between them, turning them into objects to be described rather than active subjects, and the reader.. The description of these women, both distinguished and dreadful, is only one of the innumerable passages presenting characters of a strongly ambivalent nature. The ambivalence of the people is reflected in the territories of India's north-east: the lands are naturally rich (Yadav 2017:132), but they are characterised by poverty and political instability as well. Indeed, political instability and danger feature throughout the narrative. The areas travelled through by Anil Yādav are, in his opinion, the most disastrous and dangerous in all India. The author often describes situations of violence, danger and open unrest. Furthermore, there is no lack of



Anil Yadav

passages in which the element of danger is manifested through allusions and sibylline phrases.

Even now every Indian must fill in, before entering Nagaland, an Inner Line Permit, which Hariścandra Candolā had already done for us, indicating the duration of their stay and the reason for their journey. “A permit even to get into one’s own country!” To this statement, to which one or the other replies with the simplicity of a child who plays at building a sandcastle, “Your country is behind you. From now on, you are in the homeland of the Nagas”. An amiable face or other also warns every new arrival: “You must absolutely not leave the road after the lights are turned off. Anything can happen!” (Yadav 2017:49)¹¹

The need for a permit to enter Naga territory and the warnings against the region’s inhabitants help create a disturbing atmosphere that implies in readers’ minds an omen of future dangers. Locals’ opinions expressed in the incisive form of direct speech are typical of Yādav’s narration. Indeed, the author, a journalist, often utilises this expedient to make the events narrated even more credible. Furthermore, the use of direct speech and the detailed descriptions of characters and places encourage the

readers’ emotional participation. The following is an example:

Number Four is the code for heroin introduced here covertly, passing through Moreh, from the Golden Triangle – Laos, Thailand and Burma. Groups of boys and girls who dissolve the drug in water and inject it have become a distinctive sign of this district. Their characteristics are red eyes, inexpressive faces and a slight fever. Manipur is ashamed of them, the militants shoot them; they are tied up with ropes in centres, both governmental and not, for detoxification. Despite this, their number continues to grow. [...] Chalambi was proud that neither she nor her child had resulted positive to any test. She has become a single mother at seventeen and has no idea who the child’s father is. Somebody gave her the child in exchange for Number Four a year-and-a-half ago. Her family refused to let her stay with them. [...] She didn’t agree that shared syringes caused the spread of AIDS in the north-east. She says, “First the dealers make the girls addicts, then they turn them into women who will prostitute themselves for a dose. That’s the reason for this spreading of the disease”.

“[...] Everywhere there’s such a disaster that children eat raw potatoes and start stealing as soon as they are a bit older.”

She was saying that children eat raw potatoes before going to school, which is why the teachers don’t identify the smell of alcohol (Yadav 2017: 148-150)¹².

This passage shows the desolation, sickness and violence in which many inhabitants of the State of Manipur live. Yādav describes the young heroin addicts in eloquent detail (their inexpressive faces, in Hindi “patthar caharā”, faces of stone) without using words that might suggest any kind of moral judgement. Indeed, the fact that the journalist merely chronicles the situation without providing personal impressions does not mean that he holds a bad opinion of the persons described. On the contrary, the absence of any personal comments, the wish not to use terms that might mitigate the actual living conditions of these young people, and the space given to Chalambi’s voice and her story, represent Yādav’s strategy to bring his readers closer to these unfortunate characters.

Conclusions

The passages analysed show us how the authors chose to portray two of the most important aspects of their travels in the Himalayan regions: the natural and the human aspects. Gill and Yādav present them to their readers in very different ways. The author of *Avāk* devotes many narrative sequences to describing the beauties of Himalayan nature and the reflections roused by its contemplation, whereas the journey of Anil Yādav features disturbing presages suggested at once by people, nature and events. However, whereas in Gill's work communication with the locals is relatively limited, in Yādav's narrative it plays a fundamental role. Indeed, when the locals express themselves in direct speech, the author tries to

avoid any personal comment that could shift the narrative focus towards his own point of view.

The passages analysed here allow us to note opposite trends in portraying the Himalayan regions in the two works: in *Avāk* we recognise a contrast between enthusiasm for nature and a kind of prudence characterising the author's interactions with the locals, while in *Vah bhī koi des hai maharāj* we observe an organic way of representing society, culture and landscape. Albeit very different, these two literary examples share a major characteristic: showing the Himalayan regions as places on the threshold of ordinary reality, whose nature is opposite to the landscapes of urban areas, where human experience is pushed to the very limit. •

¹ Anurag Basnet translated *Vah bhī koi des hai maharāj* into English as *Is that even a country, Sir!*

² This fascinating subject can be plumbed in the article "Politics and poetics of a sacred route in Gagan Gill's travelogue. *Avāk* : Kailās-Mānsarovar ek antaryātrā" by Alessandra Consolaro.

³ « नाम क्या है तुम्हारा ? » गोरा-चट्टिया दस-ग्यारह साल का एक लड़का मेरे हाथ से मेरा बैग खींच रहा है, जदि कर रहा है कविह उसे उस पार ले चलेगा. [...] « पहले नाम तो बताओ » मैं फरि पूछती हूँ. इन फालतू बातों में बच्चे की कोई दलिचस्पी नहीं. वह केवल यह जानना चाहता है, मैं उसे उठाने के लिए अपना हैडबैग दे रही हूँ कि नहीं. नहीं तो वह कोई और यात्री ढूँढे ! « अच्छा, बैग दे दूंगी तो नाम बताओगे ? » « हां. मेरा नाम वषिणु है » « झाठ बोलते हो ? ».

⁴ उसके आते-जाते साथी उसे इशारे कर रहे हैं. वह उनकी दृशि में तक नहीं। एकदम खोया हुआ है। इतने छोटे-से जीवअन का इतना बड़ा संकट!.

⁵ « भगवान होता तो क्या यहाँ पड़ा होता ! ».

⁶ कैलाश की बर्फ़ में सीढ़ियाँ बनी हैं. दक्षिण मुख है यह पर्वत का. यही है स्वर्ग की सीढ़ियाँ ?.

⁷ वक्त पता नहीं कब झरना शुरू हो गया. सभ्यता न सर्कि कही पीछे छूट गई है,

उसकी ज़रूरत भी अब महसूस नहीं हो रही. एक आदमि पवतिर समय में चले जा रहे हैं हम. न कही बजिली है, न पानी। न नल, न टायलेट, न सीवर. समय में स्थरि एक गांव है, नाम है पर्यांग. ऊंचाई सदे चौदह हजार फीट. मानसरोवार के रास्ते पर हमारा आखरि पड़ाव. पांच सौ साल पीछे चले गए हों जैसे, अपने पुरखों से मलिने. पहुँचते ही अनंत शांति. सात्वकिता. एक सुंदर हाल कमरे में छह तखत लगे हैं। मट्टि की दीवारे, मट्टि की छत। तबिबती रंगो से दीवार रंगी है, दीवार पर बारडर बना है, हरे, नीले, लाल रंग का। प्रकृति के मूल तत्त्वों के रंग। ताकि कोई भूले नहीं, वह इनसे बना है। कल हम मानसरोवर पहुँच जाएंगे! घर। दालान। बीच में एक कुआँ, लकड़ी केढकन वाला, उसी में जंजीर से एक ताला जड़ा है। शेरपा पानी नकालता है, तो पूछती हूँ, « झांक सकती हूँ? » « हां, हाँ, क्यों नहीं? »। कुएं की ज़मीन पर आसमान तैर रहा है... बलिकूल तारकोवस्की की फलिम की तरह... |

⁸ हंस उड़ा है आकाश में। एक. अकेला। इतनी सुंदर प्रकृति में इतना एकाकी एक हंस... क्या उसे मालूम है, कतिनी सुंदर यह पृथ्वी है? वह कतिनी भाग्यशाली है? क्या वह कृतज्ञ है अपने होने में? मैं यदचिडिया होती, तो कैसे कहती कि मैं कृतज्ञ हूँ! कृतज्ञ हूँ कि आँस है, जो देख सकती है. काया है, जो यहाँ तक ले आई। मन है, जो ग्रहणशाली है. मैं कृतज्ञ हूँ इस होने में। मैंने तुम्हें देखा था, ईश्वर... |

⁹ Tāmul: betel nut, utilised in the Meghalaya region as a light narcotic (see Yādav 2017b: 15).

¹⁰ खासी लोक कथाओं में सूर्य स्त्री है और चंद्रमा पुरुष। खासी पुरुष वाकई अपनी

स्त्रियों की रोशनी में ही दिखाई पड़ते हैं। यहाँ संपत्तिका हस्तांतरण सबसे छोटी 'का कुड़ड़ू' के नाम है। पुरुष को बैंक से कर्ज़ लेना हो तो गारंटी औरतो की चलती है। लेकिन ये सुंदर लड़कियाँ मुस्कुराने तक तो ठीक थी, लेकिन उनके हंसते ही मेरे भीतर भय की लहर उठने लगती थी। ज्यादातर के दाँत मसूड़ों में फटि लाल रंग की आरी की तरह खुल जाते थे जो बचपन से क्वाय (मेघालय का तामूल) चबाने की आदत के कारण घसि चुके थे। इन दाँतों को धारण करने वाले सुंदर मुँह पौराणिक कथाओं की खलनायकियों की याद दलाने लगते थे।

¹¹ अब भी यात्रा का कारण, प्रवास की अवधबिताते हुए नागलैंड में प्रवेश से पहले हर भारतीय को इनर लाइन परमिट लेना पड़ता है, जो हमारे लिए हरश्चिंद्र चंदोला बनवा चुके थे। अपने ही देश में जाने के लिए परमिट, जैसा सवाल करने पर कोई न कोई बालू में घर बनाने का खेल खेलते बच्चे की सरलता से बताता है, 'तुम्हारा देश पीछे है। इसके आगे नागा लोगों का घर है।' कोई न कोई सदाशय चेहरा हर नए आने वाले को सावधान भी करता है, बत्तया जलने के बाद सड़क पर मत नकिलिए। कुछ भी हो सकता है।

¹² नंबर चार हेरोइन का कोड है जो लाओस, थाईलैंड, बर्मा के सुनहरे त्रिकोण

से तस्करी कर मोरे के रास्ते यहाँ लायी जाती है। उसे पानी में घोलकर अपने भीतर पचिकारी मारने वाले नशेड़ी लड़के, लड़कियों के झुंड इस कस्बे की पहचान बन चुके हैं। खुद उनकी पहचान लाल आंखें, पत्थर चेहरा और हल्का बुखार है। मणपिर उन पर शर्मदा होता है, उग्रवादी गोली मारते हैं, सरकारी, गैर सरकारी इण्डिक्शन सेटरो में वे जंजीरो में बांध कर रखे जाते हैं - फिर भी उनकी आबादी बढ़ती जा रही है। [...] चालाम्बी को फस्टर था कविह और उसका बच्चा किसी भी टेस्ट में पाजटिवि नहीं पाए गए हैं। वह सत्रह साल में बनि व्वाही मां बन गई थी और बच्चे के बाप के बारे में कोई अंदाजा नहीं था। यह बच्चा डेढ़ साल पहले किसी ने नंबर चार के बदले उसे दिया था। घर वालों ने उसे रखने से मना कर दिया था। [...] वह मानने को राजी नहीं थी कि पूर्वोत्तर में एड्स साझे की सुईयो से फैला है। उसने कहा, नशे के व्यापरी पहले लड़कियों को लत लगाते हैं फिर पुड़िया फीस वाली वेश्या बना देते हैं। बमिारी वहाँ से फैलती है। [...] « चारों ओर इतना मारा मारी है कि बच्चा लोग कच्चा आलू खाता है फिर ज़रा बड़ा होकर उड़ने लगता है। » वह कर रही थी, बच्चे स्कूल जाने से पहले कच्चा आलू खाते हैं तार्का क्लास में अध्यापक शराब की महक न पकड़ सके।

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Translated by Anurag Basnet. Anurag Basnet translated *Vah bhī koī deś hai maharāj* into English as *Is that even a country, Sir!*



Gioia Lussana

FIND Grantee, Indologist and Yoga Teacher

YOGA IS LIFE THE FLOWING COURSE OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN KĀŚMĪRĪ ŚAIVISM

Gioia Lussana approaches the question of the ultimate meaning of non-dual yoga in Kāśmīrī tradition from Abhinavagupta's mediaeval lineage to the current community set up by Lakshman Joo in the 1930s. Yoga appears as a celebration of life and an exaltation of the vital principle (*prāṇa*), regarded as identical to consciousness itself. The ever-vigilant (*svodita*) contemplative yogic attitude nourishes awareness that will unfold into a full awakening – embodied in ordinary life.

This paper is dedicated to the wisdom and fervent enthusiasm of Prān nāthji Koul, whom I was fortunate to meet in Kāśmīrī in the summer of 2019. I am also whole-heartedly grateful to Raffaele Torella, for many years the inspirer of my physical and intellectual adventure in non-dual Tantrism.

All photos belonging to this article are taken by the author.

Śiva, undivided consciousness¹, out of an 'excess of ardour', desired to make himself many. Consciousness, overflowing with happiness, made itself experience, in order to taste the world.

Gioia Lussana

Sacred is simply everything that lives

The non-dual yoga of the Kaśmīri tradition appears as a celebration (*pūjā*) of life in all its aspects, down to the most recondite well-spring of its core. Life with its characteristic of incessant transformation and deployment (*unmilana*), life that knows the secret of renewing itself moment by moment and creatively is what, from the very origins of Hindu Tantrism,² is considered sacred *par excellence*. It is not by accident that, in mediaeval Tantric Schools, use of the senses implies the conscious activation of the *karāṇeśvarī* or *svaśamvid-devī*. These female deities acting as windows on the world allow the perception, enjoyment and knowledge of all that lives.

The primacy of *prāṇa* as exaltation of the vital principle is celebrated in texts of the Śaivite tradition³ as the supremacy of life itself, with its capacity to evolve from one form to another. The Śaivite *tantras* also note the homology between consciousness/knowledge and living movement.

Kaśmīri Śaivism values as divine this knowledge of self-renewal⁴. The freshness that regenerates itself incessantly, like a spring gushing out, is the effervescence of *śakti*, the superabundant energy that, in a sort of 'internal boiling' (*ucchalattā, antarucchālana*⁵) produces all the diversified forms of what exists, all different from each other, but gushing from this single source.

Life's energy movement irradiates in all directions, but *in primis* it is *uccāra*: the energy rising in its original resounding form as a mantra from the lower abdomen up to the throat and beyond, in an overflow expressing life as consciousness. The superabundance (*bāhulya*) of self-generated life, it relates to the quality of consciousness, exuberantly desirous of expressing itself in Creation (*svabhāvajā*)⁶.

In the Kaśmīri view, during the emanation process of Creation, Śiva experiences a phase of shut-down, in which he withdraws into himself (*anāśrita*), fearful of being impoverished by his own creative energy bringing reality into existence. *Ūnatā* is this fear of being in some way diminished. Then the God repents, realising that the world coming into being is nothing other than himself.

The spontaneous motion of life overflowing (*udgāḍha*) like an ever-full vase, being 'sapient' is also never casual, but follows its *raison d'être* and internal coherence. The mere fact of being animated by the omnipervasive vitality of everything that exists means being conscious and manifesting an ordered orientation toward the source of consciousness and revelation in its basic nature (*svarūpa*).⁷ While life is self-generating, it is empowering itself with attention, fed by an intrinsic order, an *ad-tendere* towards full manifestation.

For the *yogin* aspiring to waken his divine nature in toto, attention, an intrinsic quality of life, requires rigorous training through the most specific technical yoga to achieve a relative degree of focus and inner stability. Tantric yoga, particularly in mediaeval Kaśmīr, is generally identified with an ever-vigilant contemplative attitude (*svodīta*). By definition the *yogin* is self-disciplined for such a purpose (*kṛtātman*). Yogic practice increases the innate quality of conscious vitality until the highest degree of Yoga is achieved (*para-*

dhyāna), which is spontaneous (*akṛtaka*) and requires neither effort nor technique. At this level, attention is fully awakened, requires no further training and includes everything. Surprisingly—and even today in the living tradition at Srinagar—, spontaneous Yoga (*para-dhyāna*) is deemed the first level in the hierarchy. If the *yogin* is not immediately capable of intuiting and recognising his own nature, divine and perfect *ab origine*, he practices immersion in the Yoga of psycho-physical techniques, reverting to the lower levels, in order to achieve the same result in all cases: self-recognition as Śiva himself.

The *in-dividuo* (*jīva*) is by definition *not divided*, meaning complete in itself and all-inclusive. *Dis-tracted*, on the other hand, is one who is *drawn out*, *in two*, in dispersion, in duality.

Joy overflows upwards

The non-dual Yoga of Kaśmīr is defined as *dhyāna* in a general sense by Kṣemarāja in his commentary on the *Netra-tantra*, on the basis of a triple gradation of the levels of Yoga⁸. Kāśmīrī Yoga is substantially based on the path of reawakening the vital energy, in the two ways known as *prāṇa-kunḍalinī* or *cit-kunḍalinī* according to the *yogin*'s personal degree of involvement⁹. In both cases, however, the energy awakens spontaneously, at the right moment, and rises along the central channel, sustained by an increasingly intense focus on attention. In this Yoga inner vitality is sustained essentially by consciousness. *Parāśakti*, the supreme energy of life, is the first source that nourishes attention, in a

reciprocal activation that actually constitutes unique, undivided consciousness (*saṁvid*).

'Awakening', the true acme of Yoga, may be defined as an osmotic dynamics between the more properly physiological or respiratory component (*prāṇa*) and the part that is energy/consciousness (*prāṇana*). By means of progressive distillation, the latter becomes prevalent, integrating, without ever losing it, the material or 'tactile' quality of breathing. Attention thus becomes increasingly clear, neither merely focused nor dispersed, but a vivid experience of the present in all its completeness. It is tempered by Yoga practice, triggering the rise of consciousness-energy in a vital vortex that flows upward with irrepressible joy. This overflowing joy (*ānanda*) is, in the words of Lakshman Joo, "the stuff of life"¹⁰, its free expression. It is this very overflowing joy of Śiva¹¹, the *mahā-yogin* rapt in meditation, that generates and coagulates the forms of phenomenal reality.

The increase in awareness that leads to full awakening cannot be deployed without *harṣa*, a state of 'mad falling in love' and desire¹², the authentic fuel of the rite of Yoga (*abhyāsa*). Without this impulse of the heart (*udyoga*), every attempt or effort at attention is lifeless and thus destined to fail, as a mere routine. Actually, attention (*anusandhāna* or *avadhāna*) is not a mechanical adherence to its object, but an immersion in the open centre between two objects, breaths, events. Attention is *samaveśa*: immersion in something that cannot be established as a form, but is the energetic motion of life (which moulds attention itself), before

Kaśmīrī Śaivism values as divine this knowledge of self-renewal.
The freshness that regenerates itself incessantly, like a spring
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Mountains around Dal Lake

the object of attention solidifies, becoming concept¹³.

The awakening of energy or *sūkṣma-upāya*, as it is called in the *Netra-tantra*, is *udaya*, an ascending motion that never occurs through will or effort, but when the *yogin*, engaged in *kula-prakriyā*¹⁴, is ready to let himself be led, without resisting, by the joyous and spontaneous motion of vital energy. The *prāṇa* motion is self-generated within the *yogin* who has stabilised his contemplative attitude (*anusandhāna*), becoming a conscious flow.

Janmādhāra, the *cakra* of 'birth', corresponds to the energy nucleus of sexuality (*svādhiṣṭhāna*) or generative capacity, the mother of all six *cakra*, in union with *mūlādhāra* in the function propelling energy upwards. In the *Netra-tantra* classification, the *ādhāra* are the sixteen energetically sensitive points that in part coincide with the *cakra* and trigger the activity of the physical body. 'Supports of life' (*jīvasya-ādhāra*) as Kṣemarāja defines them:

consciousness that triggers life.

This *sūkṣma-dhyāna*, the yoga that works with the awakening of vital energy interpenetrated by awareness, constitutes the basis of the initiatic procedure in the transmission of Lakshman Joo. In this connexion, he taught two interconnected practices: *cakrodaya*, when contemplation still requires a support or technique, and *ajapā-gāyatrī*, when the attention capacity is now stabilised and flows effortlessly like the quiet subtle flow of breath. Even now, this is the basis of experiential practice in the living Kāśmīrī tradition¹⁵.

Śiva, the *mahayogin* in a meditative attitude, is qualified as *sadodita*, 'always stretched upwards', always awake like the sun on the horizon, which remains thus even when hidden by clouds or after sunset (*astamita*). Thus, Lakshman Joo, commenting on *Span-da-kārikā* II,5¹⁶, notes that consciousness is omnipresent, even when the individual is not aware of his own equivalence to the whole,



Shikara, Dal Lake

because God consciousness is the life of individuality, his reason for being. The life of every individual (*jīvana*) is brought into being and nourished by *saṃvid*. On this basis we may affirm even more specifically that life itself is consciousness, whether we are aware (*ajāḍa*) or not of this reality¹⁷. In this connexion, Prān nāthji, my contact among the present Śaivite community of Srinagar, pointed out to me that it is desire itself - that intense fervour qualifying authentic vitality - that conveys unawareness towards full consciousness.

What is really 'new'?

The movement of life is qualitatively different from the dynamics of thought, which takes place in time, because it occurs always instantaneously and constantly retains the freshness and vividness of the present instant. The invitation is always to remain 'vital' and consequently always generative, 'new'. *Prathama-abhāsa* is the rising of truly new

perception¹⁸. When such a perception occurs, it is the pure movement of life that is manifest, without the support of any object on which to rest. In ordinary life, attention is reawakened by passing from one object to another, but in such a case nothing is truly new.

Non-dual yoga offers yet another possibility: fixing the mind on that open, indefinite and living space, before the object of attention is replaced by another object¹⁹. That gap is the place of encounter (*saṅdhi*, or *saṅdha* in *Kāśmīrī*) where objects are touched, interpenetrate and become knowable. That living space is *spanda*, the conscious vibration of life. In such a way, attention remains nourished and connected with its energy matrix (*prāṇa-śakti*), which moves with the liberty of the limitless, brilliant, since it is still pure impulse, not yet coagulated in things. This fragrant 'newness' is *unmeṣa*, when Śiva opens his eyes²⁰ and from his vision reality comes into being, as from an ever-renewed source.

From this standpoint, the *jīvanmukta* or liberated in life is one who knows how to regenerate himself, without encumbering his existence with objects to be possessed or goals to be reached, but nourishing himself on the potential energy of the instant. Thus, vital energy is not used up or dispersed, but constantly feeds its own quality of presence, keeping it developmental. ‘Liberated in life’ is not living eternally, but wisely learning how to nourish one’s own consciousness-energy, keeping it generative, rather than progressive or possessive.

In non-dual Yoga the central point is feeling, strengthening the vital essence, allowing it to express itself freely in never-exhausted regeneration. For this to happen, space is required, stripping body and heart of whatever obstructs life from flowing freely inside. There is consequently no question of seeking longevity, or in any final analysis immortality, but rather of allowing the *prāṇa* to become *prāṇana*. The vital essence, deployed and free to circulate, must be allowed to receive the nourishment (*āpyāyana*) of a consciousness increasingly strengthened by attention.

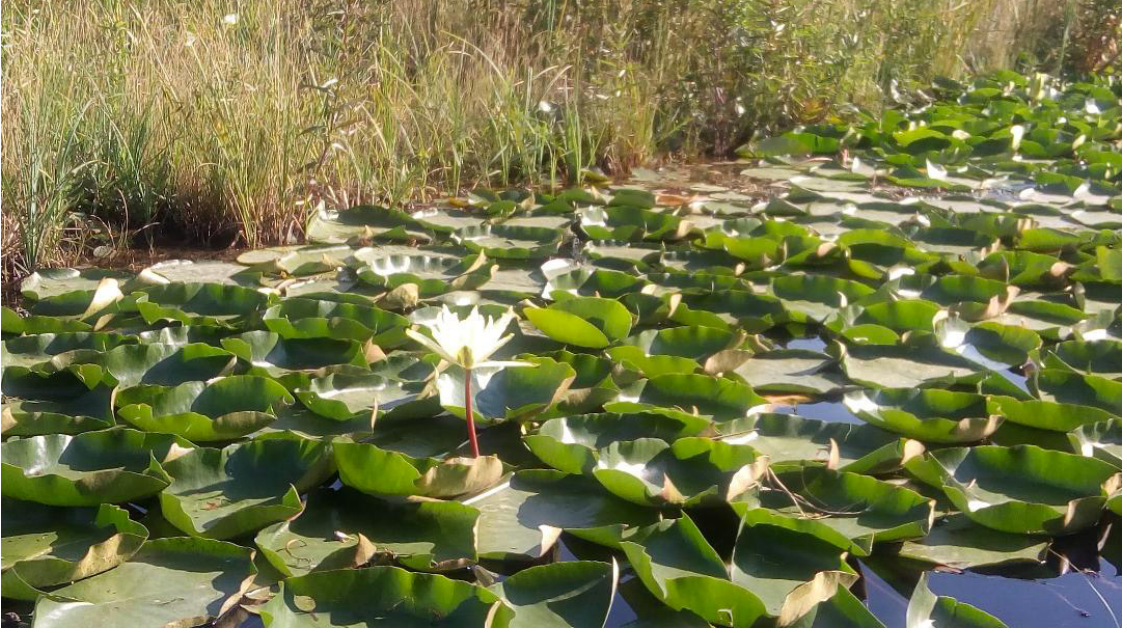
The *yogin* thus preserves his own inner luxuriance. Deep breathing becomes almost imperceptible²¹, so subtle that it completely imbues every cell, allowing life to circulate throughout the body. In this ‘vital crucible’ the *yogin* enters a ‘vegetative sensitivity’, albeit conscious, ignoring itself and removing the cruder and more cumbersome psycho-physical components.

‘Subtle yoga’, *sūkṣma-dhyāna*, is thus outlined as a process of decantation, dissolving and refinement of the mind-body. Muscular tensions, as also - and much more so - the nodes of heart and mind, act as a rule as dikes that block the free flow of energy-consciousness. Opening the inner obstructions allows vitality to move into the space discovered (*khe-carī*) without obstacles such as *spandana*, the conscious vibration that animates that vastness, rendering the confines between inside and outside open and permeable. It is this animation, vital, conscious and ever new that makes the *yogin* a *jīvanmukta*. Such a *yogin* does not operate using various techniques, but is moved and affected by his own essence-consciousness without interfering with or forcing the course of life, but vigilantly cooperating with it. The *jīvanmukta* and the *yogin* need no techniques and particularly the appropriative attitude to techniques typical of *sthūla-yoga*. Body and mind become an incessant creation, luminous and intelligent²², running without set-backs, fed by what Lakshman Joo calls *amṛtikaraṇa*, being pervaded by the nutrient nectar of life. The *yogin* of a higher level (the *para-dhyāna*) embodies Mṛtyujit, he who has defeated death, since he has intuited²³ the secret of self-renewing life.

Yoga is ‘non-yoga’

The loosening of psycho-physical tension in a receptive, stable and quiet approach is the basis for triggering the rise of energy-consciousness. The result is a state of tranquil-

Life’s energy movement irradiates in all directions, but in primis it is *uccāra*: the energy rising in its original resounding form as a mantra from the lower abdomen up to the throat and beyond, in an overflow expressing life as consciousness.



Dal Lake, Srinagar

lity and vigilant harmony (*samatā/samādhi*), simultaneously the base and arrival point of the *yogin's* contemplative attitude. A pacified mind 'without thoughts' (*nirvikalpa*), tranquil clarity, act as trigger for the increase and then, as we shall see, a profound calming of the energy.

In this Yoga, which is *akṛtrima*, *akṛtaka*, *akalpita*, not artificial and not constructed, emphasis always lies on what occurs by itself, naturally, not intentionally. Starting from a body and mind liberated as far as possible from unnecessary encumbrances, vital energy and consciousness are achieved. This is the experience of *para-dhyāna* or supreme yoga²⁴, in which the contemplative attitude (*dhyāna*) is life itself, omnipervasive, with no further distinction between the meditator and the object of meditation. Śiva (the *para-yogin*) becomes all things and is 'non-meditable' (*nirdheya*), the pure experience of being.

Lakshman Joo taught a practice (*spanda*

labhate yathā), still alive today amongst his followers at Srinagar, consisting of moving breath between the space in front of the heart (external *dvadaśānta*) and the centre behind the forehead (*ājñācakra*/internal *dvadaśānta*). In its conscious and silent passage, the breath becomes increasingly subtle and short, until it is perceived only as a small flame shining inside the head. The natural outcome of *spanda*, the manifestation of conscious energy, is *nispanda*, a profound calm in which movement is extremely concentrated, so subtle as to be almost imperceptible, 'invisible'.

In this Yoga, the non-manifest condition (*nirābhāsa*), empty, open and also limitless, is the highest, without any superior (*anuttara*). It is this very opening that allows the new to break in. In it, everything is potentially there to be manifest in a new form. Everything is vividly tranquil (*sānta*) and the *yogin* dwells at ease in the 'formless'.

"I am not, nor is there any other. Thus he attains

*the state beyond manifestation”*²⁵

What the great Abhinavagupta defines as *anupāya* is this very Yoga, as it were ‘immaterial’, but firmly and spontaneously focused on an aware presence.

Contemplating Life

In this connexion, Lakshman Joo taught an *āntarikāsana*, a non-corporeal, internal posture. The yogin is simply seated at ease (*sukhaṃ*) to make space for the naked presence which, in this system, is conceived as ‘pure subjectivity’. Observation (contemplation) always occurs ‘from the universal point of view’ i.e. that of the subject, considered as Śiva himself.

Āsana is accomplished by dwelling, as it were, in the conscious space that generates things, rather than the things themselves. Hence, this is not a ‘performative’ yoga, but felt, lived, experienced at first hand, co-penetrated in the open question ‘Who am I?’ (*so’haṃ*), the true basis of this embodied consciousness.

An example of the eminently inner attitude of the *āsana* in Kaśmīri Yoga is found in Kṣemarāja’s commentary on the *Śiva-sūtra* III,16²⁶, in which the only support for the yogin is none of the many means traditionally used by Yoga to cultivate physical and mental focus, but simply an all-inclusive state of participating presence, which in practical experience ‘has no support’ (*nirādhāra*). None of the more or less numerous *āsanas* foreseen by Haṭha-Yoga is deemed authentic by the Yoga of Kaśmīr. Every experience of consciousness represents the sole *āsana*, the inner one (*āntarika*); all others are only imitations.

I was personally able to verify, from my conversations with Prān nāthji, the central role of ‘contemplation in action’ in the living tradition of Kaśmīri yoga. Once consciousness has become spontaneous and is firmly

stable and internal vitality is simultaneously flowing through all the veins, Yoga becomes a participating presence in ordinary daily activities. *Samvit-rūpa-aveśa* exists, without distinction, in every experience. Every experience, whether pleasant or unpleasant, is imbued with that unique consciousness, which delights in taking different forms. From such a point of view therefore, there is no border between what is ‘spiritual’ and what is ‘ordinary’: the radiant consciousness of Śiva shines in everything. We have only to remove the obstacles that veil this living and conscious light, from which everything is made.

On such a basis, for applied Yoga great importance is attributed to the so-called *krama-mudrā*, an inner disposition, firmly anchored in a corporeal centre while fully addressing outside activities. This is an integrated and extremely elevated psycho-physical condition of non-dual Yoga. Having eliminated this fictitious barrier separating the so-called inner world from the so-called outer world, only the vital link between the two ‘worlds’ remains: a diffused and omnipervasive consciousness.

Lakshman Joo, quoting the *Kramasūtra*²⁷, describes the *krama-mudrā* as a ‘non-*mudrā*’, a state of absorption (*samāveśa*) achieved effortlessly by the *yogin*, who merely observes and performs all ordinary activity with the same quality of focus that he has achieved within. This non-dual condition, in which *cit-kunḍalini* is permanently stabilised, is the absolute goal of the *para-yogin*, since Yoga is Life. •

¹ *Ekohambahusyām*, as already stated in one of the oldest Upaniṣads (*Chāndogya* 6.2.3). Śiva is called *Bahūrupa* (of the many forms) in the *Svacchanda-tantra*.

² See, in this connexion, G. Lussana 2017.

³ Cf. for example *Svacchanda-tantra* 4.374ab or *Mataṅga-pārameśvara-tantra* YP 2.10c-IIb.

⁴ An ancient teaching handed down from generation to generation by Kāśmīri women says, “Let me have the power of action where there is nothing to be done. Let me have the power of contemplation where there is nothing to contemplate”. The meaning is that ‘there is always something that can come into being’, since life ‘has nothing that exceeds it’: it is the generative power par excellence. This recalls in Western mystical tradition the value of life exalted in the Gospel of John, in which Father and Son ‘make alive’ (*zoopoiéin*), give authentic life, that is not born and does not die. See, in this connexion, F. Jullien 2019: 52.

⁵ Cf. R. Gnoli, 1956: 279 - 90. The *tantra* considered by R. Gnoli is especially *Svacchanda-tantra* (KSTS, 1921, cap. VII) on which Abhinavagupta bases his discourse in cap. VI of the *Tantrāloka*.

⁶ *Netra-tantra*, 1, 25d. In this paper we refer in particular to the *Netra-tantra* and its systematisation of Yoga (especially chapters. VI, VII and VIII.). Cf. B. Bäumer 2019.

⁷ See the well-known quotation, occurring often in Kāśmīri works: *prāk samvit prāṇe pariṇatā*, attributed to Bhaṭṭa Kallaṭa (*Tattvārtha-cintāmaṇi*, lost commentary on the Śiva-sūtra, about IX century).

⁸ *Netra-tantra*, cap. VII. Abhinavagupta considers three distinct paths of Yoga (*upāya*), which he takes from the *Mālinīvijayottara-tantra*. *Āṇava* is minimal yoga ‘of psycho-physical techniques’, *śākta* is the yoga of awareness, which constitutes the training essential to increasing and stabilising mental presence, and *śāmbhava* is the ‘divine’ level, requiring no kind of effort or technique. This third path, immediate and fruit of an instantaneous intuition of the deep essence of each individual, coincides with a fully-aware savouring of the liberated condition, in practice with a ‘non-yoga’ or ‘non-means’ (*anupāya*). *Netra-tantra*, our main point of reference in this work, adopts a slightly different classification

and calls these three different *upāyas*: *sthūla-dhyāna*, ‘corporeal’ yoga, *sūkṣma-dhyāna*, the yoga that trains the vital breath, *para-dhyāna*, supreme and spontaneous yoga.

⁹ See S. LakshmanJoo, *Kashmir Shaivism, The Secret Supreme*. 2016: 117 et seq. In this paper I refer more especially to exegesis on the source texts of mediaeval Tantrism by Swami LakshmanJoo (died 1991), a spiritual master considered a saint in the still-living tradition of Kāśmīri Śaivism. During my recent stay at Srinagar I was able to verify for myself the mark – particularly experiential and practical – that LakshmanJoo’s teaching has left on the community around the ashram founded by him. His contribution was consequently fundamental, not only for knowledge of philosophical and religious speculation on the Trika, but particularly for the conservation and diffusion of applied Yoga.

¹⁰ Ivi: 121.

¹¹ Raffaele Torella most effectively translates Utpaladeva’s *vikāsa* as “joy”. Cf. N. Rastogi, in R. Torella, B. Bäumer (Eds) 2016: 171. Rastogi refers to a celebrated article by Gopinath Kaviraj, “The Doctrine of Pratibhā in Indian Philosophy” (1923-24 ABORI, Poona). See also *śl.* 26 of the *Vijñānabhairava-tantra* in which this joy is described as expansion and light.

¹² In our talks, Prān nāthji noted the characteristics of this ‘falling in love’ which, in Kāśmīri tradition, is ‘rise in love’ rather than ‘fall in love’.

¹³ Kāśmīri Yoga does not consider only the 6 *cakra*, recognised by Tantrism as a whole, but the same number of *vyoman* or *śūnya* (spaces): the living spaces (*aśūnya / śūnya*) in which energy can move.

¹⁴ According to the view of the *Netra-tantra*, the *kula-prakriyā* corresponds to the path of *cit-kuṇḍalinī*, which does not require techniques or a gradual process through the *cakra*, but is an instantaneous and effortless path, guided only by an increase in attention. The slow progress (*prāṇa-kuṇḍalinī*), utilising the various tools of Yoga practice corresponds to *tantra-prakriyā*.

¹⁵ S. Lakshman Joo 1982: cap.2.

¹⁶ Vasugupta’s Spanda Karika & Kshemaraja’s Spandasandoha, *The Mystery of Vibrationless-Vibration in Kashmir Shaivism*, revealed by S. Lakshman Joo, 2016: 49

¹⁷ The fact that a life, a consciousness greater than we are, brings us to fruition, unknown by us as it were, recalls a passage by R. M. Rilke which says: “Even if we don’t desire it: God ripens” (Rainer Maria Rilke, 2016: *Letters to a Young Poet*, 60)

¹⁸ See *VijñānaBhairava, The Manual for Self Realization*, revealed by Lakshman Joo, 2016: Comment śl.68.

¹⁹ Ivi: śl. 62.

²⁰ R. Torella 2013: 114 “Lo ‘schiudersi’ è quella realtà che sottende a ogni pensiero, e che dunque abbraccia in questo caso i due pensieri indipendenti, essendone in ultima analisi la fonte unica.” [The ‘opening’ is that reality which underlies every thought and which therefore encompasses in this case the two independent thoughts, being in the ultimate analysis their unique source.]

²¹ *Kumbhaka* as early as in *Patañjala-yoga* is not the absence of breath, but vital breath become so

subtle as to seem absent.

²² Kṣemarāja, in commenting the *Netra-tantra* 7.39, describes the supreme condition as *bhāva*, an intense, self-illuminating emotional state (*sva-prakāśa*).

²³ Non-dual yoga is *dhyāna*, contemplative attitude. In the *Netra-tantra dhyāna* it is traced to *dhih/pratibhā*, the capacity to intuit, to know the divine nature of all things.

²⁴ *Netra-tantra* cap. VIII.

²⁵ “*nāhamasminacānyo’stinirābhāsastatobhavet*”. *Netra-tantra* VIII 39 ab.

²⁶ Vasugupta, *Śiva Sūtras, The Supreme Awakening*, with the Commentary of Kshemaraja, revealed by S. Lakshman Joo 2007: 169 - 171. The Italian edition by R. Torella, *Gli aforismi di Śiva con la vimarsinī di Kṣemarāja*, has for me been a further tool due to its profundity and exegetical richness.

²⁷ *VijñānaBhairava, The Manual for Self Realization*, revealed by Lakshman Joo, 2016: 276.

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Alain Daniélou

MANTRA: THE PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE AND MUSIC ACCORDING TO HINDU COSMOLOGY SECOND PART

This essay appeared in the *Cahiers d'Ethnomusicologie* N°4, 1991. Alain Daniélou deals with the question of mantra from an integral point of view, bearing in mind metaphysics, cosmology, language, music and psychology. The first part was published in the Summer Solstice issue of *Transcultural Dialogues* (May 2019). This is the second part of the rather long essay, originally published in French.

Translation by Adrián Navigante
Revision by Kenneth Hurry



Alain Daniélou at the Labyrinth in 1985 (photo by Jacques Cloarec)

In the Kali-Yuga (the age in which we live), the path of music, the path of *rāga*, is regarded as more accessible than *mantra-yoga*, since it is not intellectual and active but rather intuitive and passive. These characteristics are in consonance with the present age, in which the feminine aspect is emphasized as the best means of self-realisation and access to spiritual values.

If we examine the organs used to manifest spoken language, we notice that, like all the organs of our body, the organ of speech presents symbolic characteristics. It is not by

chance that our hand has five fingers, that each one of the fingers has three phalanges, that our body has certain proportions, that our eye is solar and our ear labyrinthine. The organ of speech has the form of a *yantra*. The arch of the palate is shaped like a demisphere, similar to the celestial one. There, we find five special points of articulation which enable us to pronounce five main vowels, two secondary and two resulting ones, all of which are symbolically related to the nine planets, two of which are normally invisible.

The fifty-four sounds forming the stuff of

speech are classified in a mysterious formula called the *maheśvara sūtra*, which, by means of a hierarchy of articulate sounds, mirrors the emergence of the Universe from the Divine Verb. Nandikeśvara's commentary on the *maheśvara sūtra* (which pre-dates Pāṇini's grammar in the V century BCE) explains this particular classification of sounds and its fundamental meaning from a very abstract point of view, but we can find applications of it in all aspects of manifested reality, for example at the basis of every science. Nandikeśvara also points to the correspondences between vowels in language and sounds in music. The nine (seven main and two secondary) vowels are seen as parallels to the musical notes, the planets and the colours. The parallels between the notes of the musical scale and the vowel sounds of articulated language are self-evident – and incidentally they have the same name: *svara*.

In his *Rudra Ḍamaru*, Nandikeśvara establishes correspondences between vowels and musical notes in an unexpected way, since he does it on the basis of the tetrachord instead of the octave. *Sa*, the tonic devoid of fixed value, which we call for the sake of convenience “do” (c), corresponds to the vowel a, which is the basis for all other vowels. In fact, the tonic forms the basis on which all other notes depend and to which they owe their existence. “Re” (d), called *ṛṣabha* (the bull), corresponds to i, that is, to energy (*śakti*). *Ga*, e-flat, corresponds to u, which in turn stands for the materialised principle – source of life, sensation and emotion. These three basic notes are surrounded by e natural, which corre-

sponds to the vowel ë (as in the French “je”) standing for the personified god, whereas in the other tetrachord, b natural corresponds to ü (as in the French “tu”), which stands for *māyā*, the illusion of matter. “Fa” corresponds to the vowel e, the principle endowed with its power, its *śakti*, represented by the moon, the female symbol. *Sol* corresponds to o, the principle indwelling its own creation, the symbol of which is the sun, the male principle. It is therefore the note “sol” that corresponds to the syllable AUM. Subsequently we have the note corresponding to the open vowel e, which stands for the mirror of the universe upon its principle. This is the path of reintegration or *yoga*. Open o corresponds to b flat major and evokes the universal law (*dharma*), determining the development of the world like a fetus in the divine womb.

We can see that the essential basis of musical expression is focused on the first trichord: c, d, e flat. C is the neuter base from which all the intervals can be constructed. D (9/8), arising from the number 3, stands for the *śakti* and expresses movement, strength, aggression. It is with e flat that the element of life, sensitivity and emotion appears.

Consonants are shaped at the same five points of articulation as vowels by efforts directed either inwards or outwards, either by projection or by attraction, for example k outwards and g inwards, or t outwards and d inwards. Consonants can be de-aspirated (t) or aspirated (th).

Every language consists of monosyllabic entities forming autonomous elements added to

Primordial language, according to Sanskrit grammarians, was essentially monosyllabic. This is the language of *mantras*, from which all other languages have emerged.



Śrī Yantra, a sacred diagram with multiple meanings, among which that of a simultaneously luminous and sonic vibration channeling the universal manifestation of the ultimate principle, whose first determination is symbolised by the central point.

each other to compose complex words. The meaning of a word is the sum of the meanings of the different syllables. Primordial language, according to Sanskrit grammarians, was essentially monosyllabic. This is the language of *mantras*, from which all other languages have emerged. In this language, sounds – due already to their point of articulation and the nature of the effort to produce them – help represent fundamental principles. The language of *mantras* can therefore be seen as the true language in which sound is the exact representation of a principle. In this sense, *haṃ*, the guttural sound stemming from a, is the mantra of ether, the latter being the principle of space and time as well as the sphere of the sense of hearing. *Yaṃ*, stemming from palatal i, is the mantra of air or gaseous state corresponding to the sense of touching. *Raṃ*, stemming from cerebral ě (ṛ), is the mantra of the igneous state or fire, which corresponds to the sense of sight. *Vaṃ*, stemming from labial u, is the *mantra* of the liquid state or water, sphere of taste. The last demi-vowel, dental l, stemming from ü (lṛ), constitutes a separate group. The syllable *laṃ* symbolises the solid state or earth, corresponding to the sense of smell, which is also perceptible by all other

senses. In the organ of speech, the syllable *aum* contains guttural a, labial u and cerebral resonance m. This constitutes a triangle circumscribing all possibilities of sound articulation, that is, the totality of language, and thus everything that can be expressed through language. Its multiple meanings are explained in the Tantras and in certain Upaniṣads, especially in the *Chāndogya*. The *Maheśvara Sūtra* explains the basic sense of all possibilities of articulation and shows how – upon this basis – roots can be built that will represent the most complex ideas through their multiple combinations. The different possibilities of pronunciation concerning vowels, for example long or short, high or low, natural or nasal, make a total of 162 different vowel sounds that can be modelled with the aid of five consonant groups with airflow or occlusion, with or without aspiration, making a total of 33 consonants. This group constitutes the totality of the material susceptible of being used in spoken language. This shows that by using Nandikeśvara's method we can explain the formation of words in each language.

Musical language seems in a certain way more abstract and more primordial than

spoken language. It consists purely of frequency relationships and vibrations that can be traced back to purely numerical relations. This is a direct image of the process of manifestation out of the Verb (corresponding to the origin of the world), that is, of energy-codes and pure vibrations of which all elements are constituted. The mathematical principles on which musical language rests can be compared to the geometric symbolism of *yantras*. The latter are diagrams evoking the fundamental energy principles or deities on which all sacred art is based. The fact that we are unable to recognize accurately and reproduce the fifty-four different sounds within an octave is not accidental, but rather due to the fact that we can grasp only certain simple numeric relationships corresponding to different combinations of factors 2, 3 and 5. In Indian music, we use only twenty-two of these sounds, or twenty-four if we count the tonic and the octave, but only in relation to one single basic sound. As soon as the basic sound is altered, other intervals appear.

The sounds of musical language relate to affective elements and have a direct impact on our psyche. They create different emotional states called *rasa*, such as love, tenderness, fear, heroism, horror and peace. There are correspondences between our different forms of perception and the structures of matter and life, since both realms are interdependent. We can therefore establish parallels between colours and sounds, or planets and musical notes. This is no arbitrary comparison, but an observation of identical characteristics evoking cosmological principles related to the very nature of the world. Whether we represent the origin of the world as a cry, or a word in the theory of the Verb, or as an explosion of energy (like the *big bang*), the question remains the same. The world develops within the limits of its own possibilities according to a plan, a kind of genetic code. All its aspects

have parallel structures that can be traced back to a common origin, and it is through these parallelisms that we can have an idea of the nature of the world, since they are the object of all research and all veritable science. Perception and its object are strictly coordinated and stem from the same principles. They are made for each other within a pattern of intense interdependency, which is why we have a distinct sense to perceive each one of the states of matter or the elements.

Geometric figures forming *yantras* present a system of symbolic relations parallel to that of musical and articulated sounds (*mantras*). The parallels that can be established between colours and musical notes are complex, since their difference consists of *śruti* or micro-intervals. They depend on the relationships between sounds and not on their absolute pitch. In modal music, we must first consider the invariable notes forming the framework of *rāgas*. If we consider “do” as tonic, like “sa”, it appears as multicolour and corresponds to the point in the *yantras*, to the nasal resonance or *anusvāra* in the *mantras*.

The triangle with the tip at the top is the symbol of fire, in this case considered as a male principle. It corresponds to the colour red, to “re” in the range of music and to the vowel i of the *mantras*. The triangle with the tip at the bottom is the symbol of water, here considered as a female principle. It corresponds to the colour of pearl, the moon, the note “fa” and the vowel ü (lr) of the *mantras*. The circle, a solar symbol, corresponds to the note “sol”, to the colours black or golden and to the vowel ë (r) of the *mantras*. The square, symbol of the earth, has a yellow colour, evokes the sense of smell and corresponds to the note “la”.

All the other notes of the scale are mobile and, depending on their *śruti*, their exact relationship with the tonic corresponds to a colour of

the *śruti* category, the *śruti-jāti*, to which they belong and which determines their expressive value, the feeling or evoked *rasa*.

The *śrutis* are divided into five categories corresponding to different *rasas* or genres of emotion evoked by them. They can therefore evoke a feeling of quiet joy (blue), aggression (red), eroticism (orange), vanity (green), confidence (yellow), melancholy (grey), fear or repulsion (purple). Thus the “mi” or third harmonic is blue, whereas the “mi +”, obtained by fifths, is orange. The superimposed triangles that we call the seal of Salomon represent the union of opposites, the union of sexes, also like the cross, whose vertical line is the symbol of fire (male principle) and the horizontal line that of water (female principle). This symbol corresponds to the relationship

To achieve a strong and lasting psychological effect, the modal system (found in Indian or Iranian music) is by far the most efficient. The reason is simple: the basic sound, or tonic, is fixed during a musical performance, therefore each interval, for example a third or a fifth, will always correspond to the same sound, to the same frequency. This sound repeats itself, returns and is permanently charged with the same meaning. Such repetitive action has profound effects. If it happens to be a soothing blue third, listeners will little by little feel relaxed. If, on the contrary, it is an aggressive third perpetually stimulating their ear, the listeners will step out of their apathy and feel more energetic and vigorous. Sound categories work in this sense like drugs, and precisely for this reason the modal

The language of *mantras* can be seen as the true language in which sound is the exact representation of a principle.

of “sol” (3/2) and of “fa”, a female symbol (with a relationship of 2/3). The starlit pentagon is the symbol of life and the sign of Shiva. It corresponds in music to e flat major and to the series of expressive intervals in which the factor 5 is represented and of which the harmonic minor third is the clearest expression.

It is the subtle differences in its sounds that enables music to have a profound psychological effect. Following the *śrutis* for a given scale, every melodic form built upon this scale will have either a soothing and pacifying effect or a stimulating one. It is no coincidence that military music styles use instruments like trumpets, which can only emit sounds of the red series: aggressive and stimulating.

system enables real therapeutic action to be applied in music-therapy with great success – of course on condition that the sounds be emitted with great precision. For this very reason, the sounds of contemporary music are sometimes very scary.

The question that arises is the following: are we confronted with arbitrary approximations based on coincidence or rather with constants revealing essential aspects of the nature of manifestation? We know in any case that we are dealing with the limits that shape our perception of the world, but what for us seems an unresolvable question does not pose any problem for Hindu theoreticians. Such correspondences enable them to explain the power of *mantras* as well as the psychological effect

of musical intervals. It is easy to regard these theories and the correspondences put forward by them as arbitrary – as has occurred many times. It is also true that such principles are sometimes misunderstood and applied in a way that oscillates between the whimsical and the absurd. We can very well bring to mind the example of the Chinese philosopher who, knowing that there were five elements, defined them as earth, water, fire, silk and bamboo. By means of the yogic experience, we can verify the reality of certain fundamental factors, and in the practice of music we can experience the psychological effect of sounds and the connexion between our perceptions and numeric factors independently of any theoretical approach.

Indian cosmology as a method does not begin with sense experience in order to ascend to the principles, but, on the contrary, takes research on universal principles as a starting

point, and subsequently finds their application to the different aspects of the visible and invisible world. This approach is called Sāṃkhya, “study of the measurable”. This definition has something in common with the idea of science according to contemporary scholars and philosophers. If applied to articulated or musical language, it establishes existing connexions between sounds, ideas and emotional states, which no other method can achieve. The study of parallels between different aspects of the world can also open a channel of communication (through the magical power of sound, gestures and symbols) between the different states of being, not only among humans but also between humans and non-humans (spirits and gods). Ultimately it can lead the practitioner beyond the limits of the senses and attain, in the innermost part of ourselves, transcendent reality, the deepest and most essential aim of *yoga*. •

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