

## Nothing exists which is not Siva: Siva in Kashmir Saivism

Kashmir Saivism, the Pratyabhijna school, as it is popularly known is, in some sense, the highest attainment in the Indian philosophical tradition. Like Advaita Vedanta, it upholds a kind of non-dualism according to which the entire world is nothing but Siva, the non-dual supreme reality, as it is termed here. Unlike Advaita Vedanta, which has its foundation in the Upanisads, Kashmir Saivism draws its inspiration from the ancient Agama works and another foundational work, the Sivasutra, which is accepted as being mysteriously discovered by Vasugupta in the Mahadeva hills of Kashmir.

The main problem of Kashmir Saivism is to find the reality of the world of phenomena. The ultimate reality is termed as para prakasa, supreme illumination, the unbound consciousness, which not only illuminates the entire universe but also sustains and gives value to all. Siva is not only the ground and the goal of the entire universe, he is all that exists. The supreme consciousness is inseparably associated with his supreme Sakti (Power of Siva), known as vimarsa. Sakti is also known as svatantrya (unbound freedom), sphuratta (manifestation) para vak (supreme word), hrdaya (heart), sara (essence), etc. Sakti is not a separate category; she is the dynamic aspect of Siva. The main manifestations of Sakti are iccha (will), jnana (knowledge), and kriya (action), the triple aspects that make the five cosmic activities possible. Siva is always endowed with the five cosmic activities and the dual aspects of the non-dual supreme reality known as prakasa (illumination) and vimarsa (self-perception) are the main features of Kashmir Saivism, which differentiates it from Advaita Vedanta.

The individual jiva (individual soul) is one with Siva, but it does not know its real nature as it is limited by the five kancukas (coverings), the limiting factors, projected by maya (illusion) that contracts his powers. Thus, consciousness having its power diminished (sakti-daridra) becomes the individual jiva. Again by gaining his Sakti it regains his natural glory, which is known as emancipation. The entire process of regaining its pristine glory is what is known as sadhana (spiritual practice), the spiritual practice for enlightenment, which culminates in grace and consummates in self-recognition.

The idea of Siva is the highest conception of God as approached by the spiritual intuition of man. The conception of Siva-Sakti is the answer to the apparent dualism and ultimate oneness of all existence; it is the flowering and the fulfillment of all relationship through which we enter the heart of reality and transcend them

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