CHAPTER SIX
Tantrāgama Theory of Nāda or Śabda

The theory of Nāda found new dimensions in the philosophy of Tantras and Āgamas. The concept of ‘Bindu’ as the source of Nāda is their important contribution.

Some times Āgama is distinguished from Nigama or Vedic tradition. Both are said to be parallel traditions. “Like the Vedas, the Tantras or the Āgamas”, in the words of Manoranjan Basu, “are......brought down to us from time immemorial through spiritual traditions.” ¹ As I have noted in Chapter Two, in all probability Tantrāgama principles have been handed down to us from Harappa-Mohenjo Dāro Culture, as opined by Sir Jhon Marshall and subsequent Indian scholars.

The terms Āgama and Tantra, broadly speaking, are one the same from philosophical point of view. However, if there is predominantly Śiva’element, that ‘śāstra’(science) is called Āgama and if Śakti element is prominent, then it is called Tantra. Thus on the basis of ‘Iṣṭadevatā’ (Deity of ones devotion), there are Śākta-Āgamas, Śaiva- Āgamas, and Vaiṣṇava- Āgamas. Vaiṣṇava-Āgamas are generally known as Pañcarātra Āgamas. I have used the words ‘tantra’ or ‘āgama’ or ‘Tantrāgamas’ to refer to them as a general term.

For ‘Tantrāgamas’ thinkers, spiritual practice (‘sādhanā’) in the form of ‘japa’, or ‘dhyāna of mantra’ or ‘pūja’ (worship) is absolutely necessary in order to put an end to the past ‘sanskāras’ and liberate the soul from births and deaths. It is worth noting that, according to ‘Tantrāgamas’, unlike Vaidika traditions, all classes of people without any distinction of castes, creed and professions are entitled to be initiated in the ‘system’. Women too are allowed to embrace Tantrāgama way of life. For realization of Brahma-jñāna,
according to Tantrāgama philosophers what is required is “the purified heart” : “In the purified heart the knowledge of Brahman grows”.2

All the Tantrāgama systems, believe in two Brahmins: Sakala Brahman (with parts) and Niṣkala Brahman (without parts). The former is ‘para’ (Transcendental) and the latter is ‘apara’ (Empirical). Niṣkala Brahman is ‘the Absolute and Pure Cosmic Consciousness’, but described differently as Śiva, Śaktī, Viṣṇu etc, to suit their respective faith. In Mahānirvāṇa Tantra, Śīva, by way of explaining the nature of Niṣkal Brahman says to Pārvatī that: “....the Lord of the Universe (viśveṣaḥ), .. is one. He is ever. He is the truth. He is the Supreme Unity without second. He is ever full and ‘self —manifest’. (sva-prakāśa). He is Eternal Consciousness (cit) and Bliss (ānanda)....The cause of all the three worlds; He is yet beyond them and beyond the mind of men. ....He, the one Supreme Lord, is the Cause of all beings, the manifestation of whose creative Energy in the three worlds is called Brahmā (or Śaktī)......”3

The above description of Brahman makes it clear that Brahman is Cit or Consciousness. It is generally described as ‘Saṃvid’, ‘Caitanya’ or Cit. This ‘Cit’ is supreme Consciousness latent in all physical and psychic bodies. In the words of Sir John Woodroffe “Cit is one undifferentiated, partless, all-pervading, eternal, spiritual substance”4

At the Niṣkala stage there is mere ‘I-hood’ of Brahman. But later, with His Creative Energy inherent in Him, He desired a more playful mood (Līlā) and accordingly wished ‘May I be many’,5 consequently His Creative Energy or Śakti, evolved Herself into Hiraṇyāṇḍa (Golden Egg) which hatched Ishvara or Śabdabrahman, an intermediate stage of three equipoised Guṇas —Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, with undifferentiated state of “I and this”, designated by pandits as ‘Shabdabrahma’. In the evolutionary system of Kāśmiri
Saivism, this stage is known as ‘śādākhya tattva’. His inner Cetana-Saktī (Consciousness) also the wise people have named differently as Brhmā, Pārvati or Laksānī etc.

Later because of intervention of Māyā and Kañcukas created by the Śakti, the three Guṇas get disturbed. Consequently ‘I’ (ahaṃ) gets separated from ‘this’ (idaṃ), i.e., consciousness gets separated into duality - as Jiva, (a Śiva-element) and Jada (Śakti element). The form of Ahaṅkāra (I-hood) is manifested in the union (mithuna or sāmarasya) of Śiva and Śakti. Tantrāga philosopher explains this idea in a more graphic and mundane manner by stating that Śiva takes the form of ‘white bindu’ (sita bindu) and Śakti takes the form of ‘red bindu’ (sona bindu), and the union of the two (as if in sexual union) results in a new ‘miṣra bindu’. This ‘miṣra bindu’ is that ‘I-hood’ (Ahaṅkāra of the Cosmic Consciousness) which is the cause of the creation of the ‘World’ (on the ontological side) and the cause of the creation of the Word (śabda) on the epistemological side, on the basis of the ‘nāma rūpa’ principle. This ‘miṣra bindu’ is also called ‘Kalā’ or ‘Vimarśa Śakti’ or ‘Vidyā’. Because of these three Bindu phenomenon, Śakti is known as ‘Tribindvatma’ or ‘Tripura Sundari’. By virtue of Her power to manifest three Guṇas (Triguna Svarūpinī) she assumes the ‘form’ of a Triangle, according to ‘Kāmakalāvilāsa.  

It further says that this Triangle form is nothing but the manifestation of Omkāra Nāda. It says: ‘The beautiful Śrīgata (Triangle) which is Her very self (Svatman -Śrīgata) is made up of three Bindus —mixed, white and red. It is ancient (purāna) and is the Pranāva itself (pranavātmakam).’ It can be known by the three lines (rekhātraya) which compose it. It is pure knowledge (Saṃvin-mātra) and is of the nature of Śiva."

The Bindu-tattva, when it gets ready to evolve (Ucchūnna) it transforms and manifests as a trinagle. (Trikoṇa-rūpeṇa pariṇatam). This (Triangle) is the source of the three (Śaktīs), namely —Parā,
Paśyantī, Madhyama and also three ‘Bijas’ 8 In dissolution She assumes the state of Bindu. (see p.75-76).

From the foregoing description and origin of Triangle it is clear that the Form of Triangle (‘Śrṅgāṭa’ Cakra) is, in fact, the manifestation of Praṇava Nāda only. Devi, thus, assumed the form of a Triangle “as a result of the union of the Supreme Bliss, symbolized by the letter ‘A’ with Icchā, Creative Will, symbolized by the letter ‘I’. This is the Cakra of Triangular form (‘Śrṅgāṭa’), which is most secret and called ‘Sarva-siddhi-prdāyaka or that which accomplishes all.” 9 Like wise even “Śrī-cakra composed of nine Triangles (Nava-Yonyātmaka), is the manifestation (vikāsa-rūpa) of the Śaktī’s, Para, Paśyanī and the rest”10 It is a mixture of two triangles by name Śiva triangle and Śakti triangle. The Śrī-cakra thus “consists of a dot (bindu) at the centre surrounded by nine triangles (trikona), of which five have their apexes downwards and the other four, upwards” 11 The nine triangles symbolize the mixture of Śiva and Śakti principles in the evolution of the entire Universe. Thus both ‘trikona’ and Śrī-cakra appears to be basically a sonic phenomenon, arising out of ‘Praṇava’, but expressed in an esoteric language only to camouflage it so as to make it unintelligible to the uninitiated. The sonic aspects of Triangle and Śrīcakra will be explained with the help of the theory of ‘Triangle mode of Voice production’, as propounded by Aumāpatam in Chapter Ten.

In the course of such Cosmic Evolution, according to Lakṣmi Tantra, two, inseparable realities come into existence—“(i) conscious or sentient reality, (material creation) and (ii) non-conscious or insentient reality—(sonic creation) - of the complex of the three Guṇas” 12 Out of these 36 Tattvas, according to all schools of Śaivism, including Kāśmīr-Śaivism, eleven new categories are added to Sānkhyya categories, to explain as to how Sāmkhya’s Puruṣa, and Prakṛtī themselves came into existence viz., Śiva, Śaktī, Sadāśiva,
Isvara, Suddhavidya, Mayā and its five Kañcukas, which would be in addition to Sāṁkhya’s twenty five categories - Puruṣa, Prakṛti, etc., ( in all there would be 11+25=36 categories). Though Śāktas also believe in 36 categories yet there is a slight difference in their enumeration of those eleven newly added categories which are - Bhagavan (omitted from the counting being beyond such categories) Paramavyoman, Puruṣa, Śakti, Niyati, Kāla, the three guṇas (—Sattva, Rajas and Tamas), Mayā, Prasūti, Prakṛti.

According to Tantrāgamas, human body (piṇḍāṇḍa) is nothing but a miniature Cosmos (brahmāṇḍa). Abhinava Gupata in his ‘Para-trīśīkā-Vivaraṇa’ states that the relation between the transcendental and the phenomenal would be like ‘bimba’ and ‘pratibimba’. He says—

“All the categories of existence have two aspects, viz. (i) the original orb (bimba) and (ii) its reflection (patibimba). Their original orb is in ‘paraśakti. No reflection [in mirror] has any existence unless its original orb (bimba) is present in ‘para’. The Supreme original orb is decidedly ‘para’; the ‘bimbas’ of the original orbs, and ‘vāniś’ (speech). viz., paśyantī, madhyamā and ‘vaikhari’, are also present in ‘para’.” According to him, this is so because of the basic principle: “Everything consists of everything else” (sarvaṁ sarvātmakaṁ). Therefore the same principles operate both in Cosmic Body and Human body, but in inverted order just like reflection of an object in mirror. Hence both in cosmos and in human body we find such parallel aspects. In human body we find—( a) Physical body (dominated by Tamas-Guṇa) and (b) Jīva (dominated by Rajas Guṇa) and ‘I consciousness’ of Jīva expresses itself in ‘sound’ or ‘vibration’ or ‘spanda’. What is in Brahmāṇḍa (Comic world) is the same is in piṇḍāṇḍa (Human body). Thus consciousness and the matter, both in Cosmos (brahmāṇḍa) and Human body (piṇḍāṇḍa), are not different existences, nor are they separable, just like Śiva and...
Śakti. What normally is called matter is a substance in which ‘Tāmas Guṇa’ is predominant and the other two Guṇas, namely Rajas and Sattva are also present, but in insignificant proportions. Jīva is the product of body (i.e. Matter), with the predominance of Rajas Guṇa, yet it is of the nature of consciousness, psychic element. Even the the other two elements, viz., Tamas and Sattva Guṇas are in Jīva, but in insignificant proportions. Thus there are ‘concomitant - parallel-creations’ within the cosmic creation, as physical and psychic or sonic creation. Arthur Avalon calls this phenomenon a ‘psycho-physical parallelism’.

According to the Tantrāgama Doctrine, Śiva and His Creative Energy- Śakti, are always latent and inseparable in this world, like fire and fuel. This idea is graphically presented by Śaṅkara in his Soundarya Laharī as under:

śivaḥ śaktyā yukto yadi bhavati śaktaḥ prabhavitum
na cedevam devo na khalu kuśalaḥ spanditumapi

= “If Śiva is associated with Śakti, He can create the universe; if not, He is not capable of even moving His limbs”. Some people high lighted this principle in the form of a symbol, and depicted ‘Śiva without Śakti as śava’ (=dead body).

According to John Woodroffe, the so called ‘phenomenal world’ in terms of the Western traditions, with Five Great Elements, “is nothing but a combination of ‘Śiva and Śakti’ principle. ‘Śiva’ represents the static aspect of the Supreme substance, and ‘Śakti’, its kinetic aspect. The term Śakti is derived from the root “śak” which denotes the capacity of action or power” (ibid., p.,191). Even if one is taken as substance and the other as motion (kriya), they represent two aspects of the phenomenal world, ultmately reduciable to an energy, in view of the development in modern science. As observed by John Woodroffe --“The old duality of force and matter disappears, these being held to be differing forms of the same thing. The matter is
relatively stable form of energy into which, on disturbance of its equilibrium, it disappears; for all forms of matter dissociate. The ultimate basis is that energy, called in Indian philosophy Prakṛti, Māyā or sakti.” (p. 194)²⁰

“In fact, the most general phenomenon of the universe is vibration, to which the human body as all else is subject. Various vibrations affect differently each organ of sensation. When of certain quality and number, they denote to the skin the degree of external temperature; others incite the eye to see different colours; others again enable the ear to hear defined sounds. Moreover “inertia”, which is alleged to be a distinguishing quality of “matter” is said to be the possession of electricity, which is considered to be not material (p. 193)........Moreover, “Herbert Spencer, the Philosopher of Modern Science, carrying the investigation beyond physical matter, holds ...... that the universe, whether physical or psychical, whether as mind or matter, is play of Force; Mind, Life and Matter each varying aspects of the one cosmic process form the First Cause.(p.196)......Both mind and matter derive from what Herbert Spencer calls the Primal Energy (Ādyā Śakti), and Haeckel the fundamental Spirit-Matter Substance.(p.195)”²¹

According to Tantrāgma Philosophers Śakti (Cosmic Energy) manifests herself in the form of vibration (spanda). The Ultimate Reality has three important saktis (powers), viz., Jñāna saktī (power of knowledge), Icchā saktī (will-power) and Kriyā saktī (power of action). Jñāna saktī and Icchā saktī of the Brahman prompt His Kriyā saktī into action. As the result, there is throb or vibration or ‘spanda’ generally described as ‘Nāda’ or ‘Nādabrahman’. This Nādabrahman is nothing but manifestation of Śiva-Śaktī Tattva . Shāradā-Tilaka-Tantram explains the same principle but in different words: “From the Eternal Bliss, Parameśvara who is in the form of ‘Sat’ (ever True) ‘Cit’ (ever living Being) and Ānanda (Eternal
Thus we find that Nāda ultimately is nothing but manifestation of ‘Spanda’ or throb of Cit Śaktī of Cosmic Reality. “Owing to the ripening of Adṛṣṭa (according to me the same as R̄tam principle of Ṛgveda) or Karma, creation takes place by the disturbance of this equality of the Guṇas (Guṇakṣobha), which then commences to oscillate and act upon one another. It is this initial creative motion which is known in the Tantra as Cosmic Sound (Parāśabda). It is through the association of Puruṣa with Mūlaprakṛti in cosmic vibration (Spandana) that creation takes place. The whole universe arises from varied forms of this grand initial motion. So, scientific “matter” is now currently held to be the varied appearance produced in our minds by vibration of, and in the single substance called ether. This new Western scientific doctrine of vibration is in India an ancient inheritance.”

The Śakti of Śiva manifests herself in three forms: Bindu, Nāda and Bīja. It is said by some Āgama Pandits that Bindu is Śiva, Bīja is Śakti and Nāda is the component of these two. But others say that Śiva is Nāda and Bindu is Śakti and Bija is their other manifestation. But this kind of controversy need not hold us up here, in view of the explanation offered by Sri Raghavabatṭa, the commentator of Śārada Tilaka Tantra:

“It is His icchā (or the will) that uniformly extends to the whole of existence in the form of Bindu, which is nothing but solidified massive energy-in-action (= bindubhāvanam -ca -kriyāpradhāna- lakṣaṇam.). In other words Consciousness (Caitanya) intrinsically is Kriyā ie. functional or actional, (or activity of energy (Śakti))”.

It is true that this kind of description relates to esoteric field, which is beyond empirical verifiability. As stated by Śārada Tilaka Tantram (1.7-13) itself that this Nāda arising from Śiva-Śakti
principle is Transcendental Nāda in an unmanifested form. It is Śabdabrahman. But this is not śabdabrahman in the sense of ‘sound’ (ravāḥ) as some Āgama scholars say, nor is it in the sense of ‘the word and meaning’, as others think. This Śabdabrahman is Caitanya-(Consciousness) in the entire creation. The commentator of Śarada Tilaka Tantram, Sri Raghavabhatta explaining the import of these verses says that this Śabdabrahman is ‘ākhaṇḍa’ (whole) not subjected to special parts like ‘varṇa’ or a sound component (varṇādi - viśeṣa-rahitā, akhaṇḍā) etc.²⁵

Now the question that still persists is: What is the nature of the relation among Nāda, Bindu and Bīja?

For Tantrāgama thinkers the Primordial Śakti is an embodiment of action and her activities consist in the form of nāda-bindu series.²⁶ Bhāskararāya, in his commentary called Saubhāgyabhāskara on ‘Lalita Sahasranāma’, offers a beautiful explanation of this Nāda-Bindu relation by quoting Prapañcasāra that the same Cit or Consciousness appears as solidified and concentrated (ghanībhūta), in the form of bindu (a densified drop of energy) ( others call it Parā bindu). The said Bindu is also called Kāraṇa Bindu. (Concentrated Causal Energy) And from the Kāraṇa Bindu arises Kārya Bindu (energy in action.), Nāda (spanda) and Bīja (seed), - the three in that order, which are also known as ‘parama’ (transcendent) , sūkṣma (subtle) and sthūla (gross). So far as it pertains to the individual self (jīvātman), the said Kāraṇabindu is called śaktī, kuṇḍalani, etc., situated in Mulādhāra. From Kāraṇabindu arises Kāryabindu etc the three (ie. Kāryabindu, Kāraṇabindu and Bīja), out of which is born subtle (avyakta) Sound (ravāḥ) called Śabdabrahman of Vedic literature. The said Śabdabrahman, being ‘niśpanda’ (non-vibratory or imperceptible vibratory state) resides in Mulādhāra as kāraṇabindu, but manifestable by air by effort ; and if there is desire and effort, it becomes active and manifests as parāvāk. When it travels up to Nābhi (naval), with the help of ‘manas’ (mind), being
joined with air, it manifests in the form of 'vimarśa and (kāryabindu) as a mild throb or non-particularized (sāmānyā spanda prakāśa rūpa), and in this state it is called Paśyantī Vāk. (Paśyati iti Paśyantī). The same Śabdabrahman joined with air on reaching the heart, joined with the self determining ‘buddhi’ (intellect) becomes special vibrative conscious form (viśeṣaspandaprakāśarūpanādamayam) and assumes the name ‘madhyamā. It has all the characteristics of expressing ‘vāk’ but still avyakta. (“sputataranikhilāvayā vāgrūpā madhyamā )The same śabdabrahman joined with the same air reaching mouth when it manifests through throat etc producing svaras (vowels) like ‘a’, etc., which are of the nature of sound ‘clearly audible to ear, as distinct vibrative seedling (bījātmakam nāda); it is called Vaikharī Vāk. (viśeṣena svarah kaṭhinatasyeyam vaikharī saiva rūpaṁ) In this form, word and its meaning are explicit. These four types of Vāk are also called ‘māṭkās’. (a‘source’ for letters (varṇas). Vaikharī māṭrukā is the source of linguistic Varṇas.27 Varṇa is a letter, or vowel, which goes into formation of word and sentence.

From the above discussion it follows that it is the transcendental-Nāda-saktī or Parabindu which “is thus a compact aspect of Śaktī wherein action or Kriya-saktī predominates. It is compared to a grain or gram (Canaka) which under its outer sheath (Māyā) contains two halves of a seed (Śiva and Śaktī) in close and undivided union.”28 It is this Parābindu when unfolding into creative ideation (śrṣṭikalpanā) into Śabdabrahman (unmenifested Sound) that causes (manifested) vibration or wave or ‘spanda’ (phenomenal-nāda,) generally known as ‘dhvani’ or ‘śabda’ (Sound). The word ‘Spanda’ literally means a sort of movement or “throbbing, or throb, quiver, pulse, tremor, vibration, motion, activity”.29 But it is a technical term in the Tantra system of Kāśmīr Śaivism. Abhinavagupta explains its technical aspect as follows:
“...... it is only because of a slight pulsation [perhaps similar to heart beat] within the essential nature (of the self) consisting of succession less wondrous delight (not because of moving from oneself to another object) that it has been indicated in the Āgamas by words, such as ‘ucchalatta’ (jerking up), ‘ūrmi’ (billow), ‘matsyodari’ (throb in the stomach of a fish). This is, what is said to be ‘spanda’ (because of slight pulsation within the essential nature of the Divine). This ‘spanda’ is of the nature of the union of Śiva-Śakti.”  

Kṣemarāja, in his Spandnirṇaya – a commentary on Spandakārikā, explaining the Kārikā No.(I.1) said - “Thus the essential nature of the Lord is perpetual ‘spanda’ (creative pulsation). He is never without ‘spanda’......Our nature is identical with that of (Śaṅkara) who is full of Spanda Śakti, the essence of which consists in quivering light.” Thus it is clear from Kṣemarāja’s Spandnirṇaya that the ‘Spanda’ is the essential nature of the Ultimate Reality. It is nothing but the creative or thought force (Vimarśaśakti) of Brahman, and accordingly is causal force (Karaṇaśakti) for both Cosmic Nāda and Bhautika Nāda (Phenomenal Sound or Dhvani); it is so because the phenomenal world is a replica (a copy or Pratibimba) of Cosmic World. Thus, Transcendental Nāda causes phenomenal Nāda, which, in turn, manifests in the form of letter-sounds (Mātrkās).. This aspect is further elucidated by Netratantra as under:

“She who is the manifester of sphota, etc., dhvani (or sounds) in eight forms and the one who determines Mātrkās, (the source of letter-sounds) and who is the goddess of energy-in-action, (kriyāśaktiḥ). She who is the cause of motion, is no other than the Cosmic-Energy-in-action (paramā kriyākhyā) and the ocean of all languages (sarva vānmayarūpinī), and is the one called Ādi-Śakati Maheśvarī.” Regarding ‘eight forms of dhvani’, Kṣemarāja, the
commentator of Netratantra, (on Ne.Ta.21.38) points out that Para Vāk-Śakti (Cosmic energy-in-action) causes all the sounds of Paśyantī, etc., which are independently perceivable (bodha svātāntrātmā) both subtle (sūkṣma) and the gross sounds (sthūla) of eight forms (rūpa) as under:

\[ \text{ghośo rāvah svanaḥ sabdaḥ sphonekhyā dhvanireva ca} \]
\[ \text{jhānkaro dhvaṅkritiścaiva hyāsto sabdāḥ prakīrtitāḥ} \]

Ghoṣaḥ, rāvah, svanaḥ, sabdaḥ, sphoneḥ, dhvaniḥ, jhānkaraḥ, dhvaṅkṛ are eight accepted and declared forms of ‘sounds’ (dhvani).

Now another important question that arises, from the point of my thesis is: What is the nature of this dhvani (or Nāda)?

Shiva Chandra Vidyārṇava Bhattacārya Mahodaya, an eminent Tantrāgama scholar opines that ‘Those who are leaned in sound (śabda) have divided it into two classes (Dhvani and Varna) but in reality there is no such difference in sound itself......... What is expressed in the string of letters from A to Kṣa is called Varna, and that which is not expressed by any alphabetical marks is called Dhvani.” Thus “Difference of tone (svara) alone is the cause of this two-fold aspect of śabda” . Thus it is clear that the Sound or Nāda or Dhvani is nothing but a vibrating phenomenon. Dhvani (sound) is that, which dhvanati (sounds). This Sound itself takes the form of Mātrkās (sound as the source from which letters arise) and, accordingly, “fifty letters of the alphabets, from A to Kṣa are only the manifested state of that hissing sound or Dhvani” (of Kūṇḍalani Śaktī in the form of sleeping snake). 34

The letters are called Mātrkās or “Little Mothers” only for the reason that such letters embody the sound produced by Mother Kūṇḍalinī which fact assures eternality to letters. (For Mīmāṃsakas also letters are eternal for different reasons, that we will see soon). But the phenomenal sounds of uttering letters being pronunciations
from the mouth of individuals vary and are different in intonation and, accordingly, are transitory. This kind of esoteric principle is the basis to the Tantric theory of Language. In this aspect, the Tantric theory of Sound is similar to that of Mīmāṃsā. But as to the nature of sound, Tantrics differ from Mīmāṃsā: for Mīmāṃsā, the transcendental Sound or Nāda, which causes phenomenal sound, is ‘substance’, and phenomenal sound itself is not substance but only a quality of ākāśa (ether) and uses Air for its propagation. But for Tantra such Transcendental Sound, which causes phenomenal sound, is Cosmic energy-in-action (Kriyā-śaktī), but not substance in the sense of ‘dravya’. In the same way even the phenomenal sound also would be energy-in-action — (but of physical energy). But this physical energy is nothing but manifestation or reflection of Cosmic Energy. Thus, metaphysically speaking, as explained by Parā-triśikā-Vivarṇa of Abhinava Gupta, as we have seen above, on the basis of the Tantric dictum —“sarvam sarvātmakam’ -everything is related to everything else”, it is clear that the phenomenal sound ultimately is pratibimba (reflection) of transcendental Energy-in-action (Kriyā-śaktī). There cannot be ‘pratibimba’ (in mirror), unless there is ‘bimba’ corresponding to it. Likewise, phenomenal Nāda also should necessarily be present in Cosmic Nāda. The phenomenal Nāda is the tree and its seed is Cosmic Nāda. The tree is present in the seed. Likewise the Cosmic Nāda is present in phenomenal Nāda. Even in the example of sound arising in breaking of wood, or two objects striking against each other, or ringing of bell, etc., as given by Nyāya-Viśeṣika school, are the instances of energy acting on these objects, in creating sound, and, ultimately, sound would be a manifestation of an energy-in-action (kriyā-śaktī) or Spanda. In this sense, the Vāṇas (letters or syllables) are not only sound-units (Mātrkās) but energy-units (śaktī-bija) also. It is because of this intrinsic nature, these Vraṇas are capable being the components of ‘Mantra’, which again is a source of energy called ‘Mantra-śaktī’.
In his commentary on 'Lalitā-sahasranāma' called Soubhāgyabhāskara, Bhāskarārāya says: "Just as the supreme Śiva is two fold as Śakti and Śiva, so this Māṭṛkā Devī herself shines in two. The vowels indicate one form of Śakti, the others (consonants) indicate Śiva." Thus, according to Tantra philosophy, every letter is thus a manifestation of Śiva-Śakti principle. In Mantra yoga of Kāśmīr Shivism, 'a' symbolises Anuttrara or Śiva, and 'ha' symbolizes Śakti. The 'svara' - 'a' is the most natural and primal 'svara or vowel' (sound), out of which all the vowels and consonants emerge. 'Ha', on the other hand, represents expansion which is the symbol of Śakti. The expansion from 'a' to 'ha' is the evolution process and it ultimately results in Aham or I-hood; and 'ṁ' in Ahaṁ symbolizes the union of the two, resulting in Śiva-Śakti principle out of which all the tattvas emerge on the cosmic side; and all the letters, on the linguistic side, concomitantly. Hence the 'word' and its 'referent' have become universal by virtue of this inseparable association. They represent the empirical mixed condition of 'parāpara vidyā'. A mixture of material and divine. The 'parāvāk' has taken the form of Vaikhari representing the gross aspect, but, at the same time, it is not separated from 'parā', 'pasyanti' and 'madhyama'. Highlighting this truth, Abhinava Gupta, in his Parātrīṣiṇī-Vivarpa, further says:

"Therefore, though the condensation of the phoneme becomes distinct only in the 'vaikhari' or gross aspect, yet it abides primarily in the Supreme Verbum (parāvāk) which is all inclusive ('sarvaṃ sarvātmaka'). Even according to Lakṣmītāṇtra, the syllable 'a' uttered in Vaikhari is primary and self-revealed, consciousness and the root of the entire domain of speech. All other letters like 'ā', 'i', 'ī', 'u', 'ū', 'e', 'ai' 'o' 'au' etc, arise out of primary letter 'a'. Thus all these (sounds, which ultimately) relate to objects of knowledge, are derived from the first (vowel —'a')."
In this context, another question may be raised and that is: How does the language as a means of knowledge arise out of this gross letter-sounds, as per Tantrāgamās?

Devi in Lakṣmi Tantra has given the following reply:

"Knowledge (insight, bodha) appears identical with sound, and sound, (as) identical with objects connoted. Considering that knowledge (insight) is one of my aspects, it follows that all the above mentioned sounds (varṇasamāmnāya) (are projections) of myself." 39. In other words, as per Tantrāgama Philosophy, word and objects (nāma and rūpa) and, consequently language, are a manifestation of that Śakti only. "It is universally understood that indication of an object is invariably preceded by use of the sound (śabda) denoting it. The nature of the gross-form of śabda is that the object originates from śabda." 39a Śabda (sound) is the manifest knowledge (bodha), and (artha) is the object of ‘śabda’ (word). 39b In the words of Svacchanda Tantram—"The forms of objects are revealed through the knowledge of words (śabāvabhodarūpena vasturūpasvarūpah 40. In the words of Lakṣmi Tantra, "Words are uttered in ‘Vaikhari Vāk. ‘Vaikhari Vāk is identified with the seat of effort (prayatnasthāna) 40a Thus the object is unmistakably revealed through utterance of the manifest sound. (in the form of syllables). The fifty saktis resting in Vaikhari make-up of (fifty syllables) — (constitute) the garland of letter-sounds. (varṇamālinī). 40b

Even ‘ākāśa’ (ether), which serves as a medium for the sound to travel is not a substance nor sound is its quality. In its transcendental aspect, ‘ākāśa is itself ‘cidākāśa’, a manifestation of Cosmic Consciousness. Hence ‘ākāśa, for Tanrāgama thinkers, is not substance like Sāṅkhya-Yoga or Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, but is vacuity, coextensive with that of Cosmic Consciousness.

Thus the physical Sound, being basically ‘spanda’ (vibration), vibrates (spandati), in ākāśa but as the one caused by external force or
the human effort or action. According to Spandakārika (1.14), the actions caused by external effort are perishable:

avasthāyugalaṃ cātra kāryakarttvāsabdītam
kāryatā kṣayinī tatra karttvam punarakṣayam -14

"Of this Spanda principle, two states are spoken about, viz., of the doer or the subject and the deed or the object. Of these two, the deed or the object is subject to decay but the doer or the subject is imperishable." 41

That means that the deeds or some thing done with human effort perishes, but the 'self', who is a doer, is imperishable. If that is so, the sound or dhvani caused by human or any other external effort (action—Kriyā) is perishable and hence it is non-eternal. Therefore sounds of letters disappear immediately after their utterance. In this respect Tantra theory of Sound is similar to the phenomenal or 'accentual sound' (or dhvani) of Mīmāṃsā and, accordingly is non-eternal and transitory. But letters born out of 'mātrkās', being a manifestation of Śakti, are eternal.

But, how about Mantra and its efficacy since it is also composed in letter sounds?

In fact, a mantra is also a sound (dhvani), which (the adept invariably) associates (with the belief that) - "This protects me or which always protects him from fear" and an adept is a person who (knows) the secret purport (of mantras). 42 ‘Every manifestation of I-hood in the graded sequence peculiar to sound based on absolute I-hood and inducive to the revelation of pure knowledge, is, according to tradition a ‘mantra’'. 43 Śakti also evolves herself by means of mantras through sound combinations. 44 All mantras surge up like waves from her, the ocean, as it were, of consciousness. These forms (mass of sounds, lovely as concentrations of consciousness and bliss, evolve out of her as their substratum and repeatedly flow back into
her” (at the time of dissolution). According to the level of the adept’s mental realization, a mantra is addressed either to Lakṣmī or to some other (deity).

A Sādhaka visualizing himself as one with transcendental entity, ultimately realize that ‘I am He’ (soham); by inhaling as ‘haṁ’, and exhaling as ‘so’, thereby chants ‘soham’ (I am He). This kind of the mental consciousness in breath is called ‘ajapa japa’. There can be chanting of Mantra (japamantra) like ‘Om Namo bhagavate Rudrāya’ or ‘Om Namo Nārāyaṇāya’, etc. There can even be a single syllable Mantra, like ‘Om’, generally known as Praṇava or Praṇava Mantra. What is important in Tantra Vidyā is ‘devotion’ (devatābhāva). It is observed in Rudrayāmalam (Uttaratantram) (Prathamo Bhāgaḥ) — that “It is by devotion to (Devi) one gets her grace and thereby the ultimate happiness. It is again by such devotion one obtains the knowledge of Brahman and from such knowledge consequently Mokṣa”.

It is only such devoted adepts thereby drink the amṛtā (ambrosia) oozing (from brahmarāṇḍra) through palate and, accordingly, would be intoxicated, (but not with the toddy made out of joggary.); at this juncture, they are in the state of bliss, like the one in sexual union; not indulging in sex as such (“The bliss of sexual union by recollection (smarananda). It is only ‘inverted ‘kāma’ or sexual delight” 49 Hence it is rightly said:-

“There is no separate mantra other than nāda, nor there is any other God except one-self. There is no other pūja other than Nāda-meditation (nādānusandhāna); there is no happiness or bliss (or spiritual benefit) other than the contentment, ie., spiritual attainment (paramaphalam or Mokṣa)” 50

nāsti nādāt paro mantro na devaḥ svātmānaḥ paraḥ
nānusandheḥ parā pūjā nahi trupteḥ paraṁ phalam.

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The gist of the theory of Tantrāgamas:-

Nāda is an activity (kriye) - being the manifestation of Cosmic -Energy). (Vibration theory of Sound).

Tantrāgama thinkers also accepted the Cosmic theory of Nāda, but of different nature. Their Niśkalabrahman is mere ‘I-hood’ in the form of Cosmic Consciousness (Saṃvid, Caitanya or Cit) in an indivisible ‘Śiva- Śakti’ principle form, which in its leela (play full mood) starts evolving in the form of Nāma and Rūpa (name and objects). In this process its first manifestation is ‘Nādabrahman’.

Omkāra or Praṇava manifests itself in three ‘bindus — phenomenon’ of ‘triangular form’ (trikona or Śrṅgāta) and evolves into psycho-physical parallel creations, called ‘mind’ (jīva) and ‘matter’ (jaḍa). By virtue of its vibrations, it takes the form of Nāda and ‘Bindu’. Nāda takes the form of ‘word’ and Bindu that of the objects, - (i.e., word and its meaning). The relation between ‘Nādabrahman’ and ordinary ‘Phenomenal Sound’ would be just like ‘a mountain reflecting in a mirror’. Śakti manifests herself as Bindu, Nāda and Bīja.

In human body the Nispanda, situated at Mulādhāra, as ‘kāraṇa bindu’, (cause) manifests by effort with the help of air —as parā, paśyanti, madhyama and Vaikhari. In Vaikhari it becomes audible to ear in the form of varṇa-mātrkās (source of letters).

Thus, it is the ‘Cosmic-Nāda-śaktī’ that causes phenomenal Nāda generally called ‘Sound’. This sound is not a substance but only an action or activity (kriyā) of energy (Shakti). In a bell, the sound lasts till the energy in the bell lasts. Sound is not a substance, as Mīmāṃsakas think. Sound is ‘energy- in- action’ (śakti-kriyā). The phenomenal sound, caused by such activity (kriyā) is non-eternal. But the ‘syllables’ (varṇas) being the manifestation of KuṇḍalinīŚakti as ‘mātrkās’ (little mothers) are eternal. They cause phenomenal
‘sound-syllables’ (varṇas) through the vocal sounds, which are matters of vibrations, and which are transitory and not eternal.

In this respect, the Tāntrika theory of sound appears to be similar to the theory of Mīmāṃsā, except that in Mīmāṃsā the sound is a ‘substance’, but in Tantrāgamas it is Energy-in-action (kriyāsakti).

Notes and References


2. “citte śuddhe.... brahma-jñānāṃ prajāyate” ( Mahānirvāṇa Tantram- 7.94; (2004); Khemārāj Srīkrṣṇadāsa, Mumbai -400004.


4. John Woodroffe, Sir: ‘Śakti and Śākta’; at.p.75; (2006); Oriental Book Centre Delhi-110007.

5. Taittirīya Upaniṣada 2.6.

6. Ramayana Prasad Dwivedi, Prof.. & Sudhakar Malaviya, Dr. (ed. & tr.): ‘Kāmakalāvīśa of Māheśvara Puṇyānanda Nātha; Along with Cīdvalli (Sanskṛt Commentary) of Śrī Naṭanānanda Nātha; (Eng.Tr.); Kā.K.Vil.;25. (2003); Chowkhamba Sanskrit Pratishthan, Delhi-110007)

7. Cīdvalli on (Kā.K.Vil.;25 at p.80-81) - bindutrayātmakāṃ svātmāśṛṅgātaṃ viddhi sundaram, miśrā śuklaṃ ca raktaṃ ca purāṇaṃ pranavātmakāṃ. rekhātrayāvagantavyasaṃvatsāndraśātvātmakāṃ


12. L.T.-V.24

14 Sunjukta Gupta: *Lakṣmi Tantra (A Pāñcarātra Text)*; Introduction at p.xxiii) & Chap. VI .42-44 (2000); Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi-11000
15 L.T. p.125-)
17 *Śakti and Śākta* at page 259.
19 Arthur Avalone (Jhon Woodroffe); *Śakti and Śākta*, p. 268; (2006); Pub: Oriental Book Centre, Delhi -110007].
20 *Śakti and Śākta* p.194
21 *Śakti and Śākta*; see pp.194-196
22 Śā.Ś.ś. T. (17) (Tr. by Board of Scholars: *Śārada Tilaka Tantra*), (1988); Pub:Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi)
23 *Śakti and Śākta* p.245
24 Arthur Avalon (ed) *Śārada Tilka Tantram* (Sankrit text) (1933, Reprint 2001); (on Śā.Ś.ś.T.1.7); p.16-17 and p. 19-20 :Motilal Banarasidas Delhi – 110007) that:

samastatvabhāvena vivartatecchasamanvita
prayāti bindubhāvaṇca kriyapradhanalaksanam

25 *Śārada Tilka Tantram* - Translation by Board of Scholars; (1988); (Verses 1.7-13); p.1&2); Pub.: Sri Satguru Publications, Delhi- 110007.
26 "karmarūpa stithā māyā; nādabindvātmakam kāryam —
Vajravallabha Dwivedi (ed) : *Svaccandratantram with the commentary of Kṣemarāja* (2004) (Vol.2. verse 1263; p.302-303); Parimala Publications Delhi -110007
27 Wasudeva Laxmana Shastri Pansikar (ed) : *Lalitā Sahasranāma* (Of the Second Part of ‘Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa’), (a Sanskrit Text) (with the Commentary - Saubhāgya-Bhāskara’ of Bhāskararāya); See p.99 and 100 (1985); Nāga Publishers, Delhi-
28 *Śakti and Śākta* p. 256;
30 Abhinavagupta Parā-triśikā-Vivarṇa 190-191).
31 Jaidevasingh (tr): *Spanda Kārikās (The Divine Creative*

32 Vajravallabha Dwivedi (ed): Netratantram with the commentary of Kṣemarāja; (1985); Parimala Publications Delhi - 110007

varṇāpāṭabhedena sphoṭādīhvanirūpiṇī
māṭyā kṣa vinirāśṭā kriyāśaktirmahēśvarī
criyākhyā paramā sā tu sarvavāṅmāyayuṣuṃpiṇī
(Ne.Ta.21.38).

33 John Woodroffe (Tr.): The Principles of Tantra—(The Tantratattva of Śrīvācandra Vidyāraṇya Bhattacārya Mahodaya) (2002); at page 505; Shivalik Prakashana, Delhi110007 ).

34 The Principles of Tantra— at page p.511

35 Ananthakrishna Sastry (tr): Lalītā Sahasranāma - p.240;
(Second Ed.-1988,- Reprint); Pub: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, Madras 20010

36 Parā-triśikā-Vivarṇa , p.176

37 L.T.-XVIV.2-3)
38 L.T.-XVIV.5-7
39b L.T.-XVIII.22-23).
40b L.T.-XX.31-33
41 Spandakārika(1.14 )
42 L.T.XVIII.44-45.
43 L.T.-XVIII.44-45).
44 L.T.XXI.8).
45 L.T.XVIII.36-38)
46 L.T.-XVIII.46).
47 bhāvādānugrahaprāptirugrahānāmāhāsukhī (Ru,Y. T 1.118)
bhavena jñānamutpannam jñānānokṣamāvāṃpyāt-
(Ru.Y. T1.221)
48 Rāmakumāra Rāya: Gandharva Tantranti pp.36.49-50)
Kṛṣṇadāsa Academy, Vāraṇāsī -221001
नास्ति नादत परो मांत्रो नादो देवाः स्वतमानो पराः
नानुसंध्येः पराः पूजाः नाहि त्रुप्तेः पराः पहां।