

*Chaturthānanam*

(CHAPTER FOUR)

**ABHINAVAGUPTA'S POETICS: ITS  
PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS**

There are the three dimensions of Abhinava's creative personality- philosopher, poet and critic/commentator. His creative vision has been shaped by his philosophy. Śaiva philosophy provides the common substratum to his poet and critic and flows like the under-current of Saraswati. The critic of *Dhvanyālokalocana* and *Abhinavabhāratī* equally contribute to establish the concept of *rasa-dhvani*, originally posited by Ānandavardhana. These two elements constitute soul and body/ content and form of poetry.

*Smṛti*, *jñāna* and *apohana* work together to bring about a greater synthesis. They also qualify each other. These are the powers through which new orders in reality are achieved, examined and comprehended. This synthesis helps formulate our perception of reality. Following are the philosophical assumptions of Abhinavagupta which have been central to his literary theory and aesthetics:

- Issues of creation (*āvirbhāva*), representation (*prtibimbana*) and manifestation (*unmī lana*).
- Theory of image and counter-image (*bimba-pratibimbavāda*).
- Theory of appearance/manifestation (*ābhāsavāda*).
- Theory of re-cognition (*pratyabhijñā*).
- Theory of I-consciousness (*aham* ).

- Theory of intuition (*pratibhā/ śakti*) and role in realization in linguistic meaning and literary experience, [For a detail discussion on *pratibhā* see Gopinatha Kaviraja's "The Doctrine of *Pratibhā* in Indian Philosophy"; Prof. Kapil Kapoor's "The Concept of *Pratibhā* in Philosophy and Literary Theory" and Shri Angirasa's *Pratibhā Siddhānta Vimarsā*], literary skill (*vyutpatti*) and practice (*abhyāsa*).
- Evolutionary process in Sāmkhya as *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* and as *Śva* and *Śakti* in the Śiva-Śakta *tantras*.
- Theory of independent will (*svātantrya*).
- Concepts like *anuttara*, *sādhārṇikaraṇa*, *camatkāra*, *tanmayī bhavana*, *vigalana*, etc.

Manifestation of reality/the world- Śiva concept of creativity, sources and stages of literary /artistic creative process, status of artist and poet in this creative process. Literary creativity as a process to transform abstract into concrete, substance into form, particular into universal; literature as verbal discourse and its status in the discourse of knowledge. We have different concept of the paradigm artist in the Indian and the Western traditions and this largely explains the sources and modes of creativity. Potter in Vedānta, Yogin in the Śiva-Śakta systems and carpenter in the West.<sup>1</sup> The poet or the artist in this system is like a yogin or Maheśwara himself<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> For the metaphor of the Yogins, see *IPV* 1.5.7. *cirātmaiva hi*; see also *PH* p.19 *antarvibhāti*.

This point could also be elaborated with reference to the concept of *vāk* and its four stages already discussed in the third chapter.

In the poetics, emerging from the Advaita systems like that of the Śaiva, there the emphasis is on metaphor rather than on simile. But these two terms should be analyzed with great care. However, both emerge from analogy their nature largely differs. In the Indian philosophy simile is a means of knowledge but metaphor is a form of error because superimposition being a necessary condition in this regard. So how to resolve this impasse? What is the way out? How could superimposition be a valid or real cognition/ experience?

In my opinion this could be resolved in the background of ‘theory of common substratum’, ‘theory of appearance’ and ‘the theory of *Dr̥ṣṭi-śr̥ṭivāda*’. These theories are common and acceptable in both the Vedānta and the Śaiva traditions. Both these systems hold that nothing is false as things emerge from the same common substratum, which is real and whatever appears in/as whatever form is real and identical with its substratum. Rajśekhara holds the same view that for a poet/artist even appearances suffice his/her composition.

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<sup>2</sup> This is also supported by the verse 8 of the *Īś Upaniṣd*. Also see the Śāṅkara Bhāṣya for the meaning of the term *kavi* –seer- *kaviḥ krāntadarśi sarvadr̥k*. “*nānyoto’sti draṣṭā*” (*Br. Upa.* 3.8.11.).

Without literature and art generalization of truth, knowledge and rapture (*ānanda*) is not possible. Logic cannot bring about the pleasure that is the ultimate goal of literature including all the fine arts.

Manifestation of the ontological elements: matter is never different from the mind so far their substratum is concerned. *Aham* appears as *idam* and *this* as *that*. In my opinion it appears as the cognitive process- a case of being aware of something. See the diagram of Śaiva ontology.

From the point of view of creativity this philosophy is known as the *svātantryavāda* and from the manifestation point of view, it is known as the *ābhāsavāda*. *Ābhāsa* is something like the peahen's egg, which is simultaneous and configurational.  $\bar{A}=\bar{i}$  ṣ at=saNkocana+bhāsanam =prakaśanam . This etymological meaning of ābhāsa implies that every manifestation has some constraints (PS 12-13). However, analogy of Maheśwara and mirror has three major exceptions:

## Mirror

## Maheśwara

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1. External object is reflected.	1. His own ideation is reflected.
2. External light is needed for reflection of all lights.	2. This is His own light; it is the light of all lights.
3. The mirror, being insentient, does not know the object reflected.	3. Maheśwara knows them at all the not levels with His <i>Vimarśa śakti</i> ( <i>jñātriva śakti</i> ).  He can reflect, manifest or assimilate all the creation within Himself.  (PS- the verse quoted by Yogirāja; also PH on p.19. <i>antarvibhāti</i> ...)

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\**Ābhāsa* is like the waves but the underlying consciousness is unchanging (cf. the Vijñānavādins' metaphors of the ocean-unstirred in its pristine purity).

One needs to make a comparative estimate of *ābhāsavāda*, *vivartavāda* (in Grammar and in Vedānta), *pariṇāmavāda*, *satkāryavāda* and *ārambhavāda* (Nyāya). Show how the concept of appearance overcomes the difficulties posed by the other theses.

There is a close link between the *pratybhijñā=trika=Ī śvarādvayavāda* and the *advayavāda* of Nāgājuna. Buddha is known as the *advayavādī* (see the *Naiṣ adhī yacaritaṃ* ).

In Vedānta Brahma is of the nature of *śānta* –of the nature of *prakāśa* and *jñāna* only where as in the Śaiva philosophy, He is also of nature of *vimarśa* and *kriyā*<sup>3</sup>.

The Ultimate Self is not defiled or made limited by any designation-See *TS* p.34 *upādhibhiḥ amlānam*.

The Grammarians, the Śaiva and the Buddhists (Sautrāntikas and the Vijñānavādins) believe in the self-validity/manifestation of knowledge of the Ultimate Reality (*svataḥ prāmānyavādī* ).

• **Issues of reception and creative process:**

A. 5 stages in the reception of aesthetic experience:

1. Sense level, 2. Imaginative level,

3. Emotive level (*bhāvātmaka sthāna*), 4. Cathartic level/the level of universalisation, and 5. Transcendental level.<sup>4</sup>

B. 6 stages in the creative process in the Buddhist thought:

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<sup>3</sup> (See also *PH* p.22-26.).

1. The artist begins by ceremonial purification of his/her self; both the mind and body are purified.
2. He then withdraws into solitude to enable himself/herself to focus on the subject of his meditation.
3. Then he/she performs daily acts of worship to cultivate love and reverence.
4. Then he/she consciously inculcates the four 'infinite moods'- of friendliness, compassion, sympathy and impartiality.
5. Then he/she meditates on *śūnyatā*, the great void to destroy his/ her pride.
6. He/she begins to meditate on the essence.
7. He/she meditates on the form of the object. Such is now his/her oneness with the object that the object virtually materializes itself before him/her. All that he/she has to do is now to transcribe it.

("Art as yoga"- See the same work. Chapters on art and aesthetics.

Yoga= *samādhi* (*sabī ja* and *nirbī ja* vide *Yogasūtra*), *avadhāna* (Vāmana's KL 1.3.17) *ekāgratā* (concentration, vide KM Ch.4, p.24. *manas ekāgratā samādhī* ;

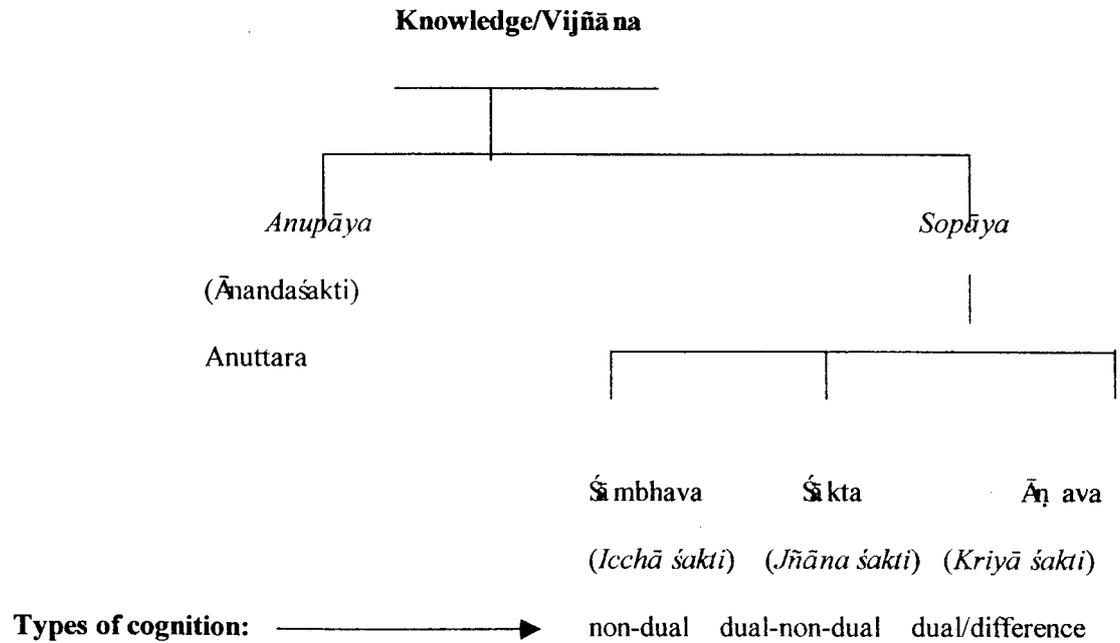
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<sup>4</sup> *Abhinavagupta*, G.T. Deshpande, English edition p.85. *The Dance of Śva*, A.K. Coomaraswamy, p.44).

a verse quoted by Rājaśekhara). This view is also supported by Rājaśekhara's concept of *aupadesika* poets in the classification of literature (KM ch.5, p.42)

If a poet is independent in poetic creation, then in Rājaśekhara's classification of the poets (KM ch.4, pp 28-9) he/she is a *sārasvata* poet.

There are four kinds of knowledge on the basis of means have been discussed:



(Source: TA 1.241-2,245).

*Upāya* (modes or efforts) is certainly an art (*SV*)- the effortlessness is *nirupāya*, i.e. a higher degree of gain- *sānta rasa* or the blissful state is associated with this level of sentience. Buddha's image is a typical example of this. Think of an

image of the Buddha located in the Ajanta caves, which appears placid/calm, meditative and deeply grieved if viewed from three different angles. This is something like the philosophical position one willingly or by compulsion accepts to view this multifold reality.

In what ways the creative process of a painter, potter, carpenter, weaver and a *yogin* differ? Potter, weaver and *yogin* form a class. Where lies the creativity of a poet or an artist?

All these three positions – dual, dual-non-dual and non-dual are comprehend in the context of the *anuttara tattva* (for 16 expositions of this term, see *PTV*). It means that in all the three positions only he/she manifests, partially or fully. The *citta*, the receptive self, is like a mirror.

Theory of image and counter-image expounds that the world is a reflection in the in our receptive self-without any image. That the counter-image can exist without any image is the chief characteristic of this thesis and in this regards it differs significantly from the theory of cause and effect. It is important that Bharata, in the exposition of the *rasa-sutra* has introduced altogether a new terminology- *vibhāva* and *anubhāva* for this kind of relationship. These two terms come closer to the concept of *bimba* and *prtibimba* and the implication is that *rasa* is more a phenomenon of manifestation than creation. Any work of art is a reflection

/projection of the artist's *vimarśa śakti*- will, knowledge and action. So the question of the necessity of a prior image for the counter-image is redundant here. The Ultimate manifests the whole cosmos in this fashion without being dependent on the efficient and the instrumental causes. This *vimarśa śakti* of the Supreme Self is known as HIS/HER independent power. Imagery of dream is quite frequent in his works, which suggests the dual detachment and involvement of the perfect spectator.

Abhnava restores to the poets an important place in the hierarchy of by showing their underlying philosophical seriousness. Artist in India has never been isolated from the social obligations. This evidenced by the acceptance of all the four *dharmas*/goals of life by all major poeticians (Vāmana is an exception in this regard) (Mass. & Pat. p.xii.). The role of poetry lies in the fact that it helps acquire these four goals of life through aesthetic enjoyment. Abhinava's own life exemplifies that an artist in the Indian society is not an alien person<sup>5</sup>

Art and aesthetics is possible in the *āgamika* traditions. This is evidenced by the acceptance of Śva as Naṭ arāja and as the source and abode of music, poetry and language. It is because like art, *tantra* too, allows the modes of *citta* to play its part. It does not suppress or deny them. It expounds that these specific modes of mind or *citta* of an individual finally lead him/her to the ultimate goal. It emphasizes *pravṛtti*, rather than *nivṛtti*. Since everything is shining with the glory of the Auttara, there is

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<sup>5</sup> (Mass.& Pat. p.xiii).

no point to discard anything. One who has experienced this all-pervasive Śva, stays in the state of perfect bliss. So two important assumptions:

*Pravṛtti > Nivṛtti*

Assertion > Negation

The *Vijñanabhairava* clearly states: *yatra yatra manastuṣṭi...*(73).

The *Śaivāgamas* are in the form of dialogue between Śva and Śakti. This unfolds two important dimensions of the *tantric* discourses: 1. It involves only the narrator/teacher and the listener/disciple, which is something like the etymological meaning of Upaniṣ d ‘to sit in aloofness with the teacher, 2. This dialogue between Bhairava and Bahiravī is like the *kāntāsammta* discourse, which means a discourse of knowledge imparted in the form of the dialogue between two intimates. There is no concealment or twisting in such type of discourses.

Pleasure is the ultimate goal here. Narrator if preferred over the author.

(Sources: The opening verses of *PTV*, *MVT*, *VBh.* Etc.)

In a number of verses of the *VBh.*, it is stated that one should concentrate even on the gross physical pleasure, which is bound to result in the aesthetic pleasure of the Anuttara. The pleasure of a literary composition is compared with Brahmānanda and has been stated to originate from the same source. This is the same ānanda śakti

of the Parama Śva that manifests in the form of literary experience; *rasa- raso vai saḥ* (*Tattirī ya Upaniṣd*, II.7; *VBh.* 58-73). This is the manifestation of the *ānanda śakti* of Bhairava in various forms (even in the sexual intercourse) and it is important to note that *ānanda* does fall in the dichotomy of happiness and sorrow. Wordsworth, in the famous **Preface to the Lyrical Ballads**, expounds *pleasure* as the chief goal of the poetic composition.

Rasa: I-Consciousness. *Ahaṃvimarśañcetanam rasarīpo vā ānandaḥ* (*VBh.* 71/2)

See also the commentary on 69/8 *Ghantyanurīpam*...

It is important to note that a philosophical system having such an elaborate ontological structure is almost silent about its epistemology. A close examination seems to unfold the following facts: —

- (a) It may be the influence of early Buddhist skepticism (especially of the Mādhyamikas) regarding epistemology. Nāgārjuna, in his *Pramāṇ avidhvamṣa* and *Vigrahavyāratinī* has substantially refuted the validity of epistemology with regard to the knowledge of transcendental reality. Historically Kashmir Śiva philosophy and Buddhism have enjoyed and shared the same experiences of growth, development and decay. Kashmir remained the seat of learning for both the system of thoughts.

(b) Like Buddhism, Kashmir Śaiva philosophy shows reluctance towards the inference-based epistemology. Being a *tāntrika* or *āgamika* system it emphasizes the role and importance of perception to know the Absolute, Parama Śiva that is closer to its theory of re-cognition (*pratyabhijñā*) and appearance (*ābhāsa*).

However, it is also possible that this philosophy shares epistemology with Vedānta. Śaiva systems, in its fundamental philosophical vision are closer to the Vedantic schools, like- dualism, and non-dualism and dual non-dualism.

However, there is sufficient support to hold that Śaiva philosophers agree on the following valid means of knowledge:-

Perception, Intuition, Verbal testimony and analogy (re-cognition based).

It is equally important to observe that Śaiva thinkers show reluctance towards inference, not only in their philosophy but also in their literary theory. Abhinavagupta refutes the thesis of *hetu* 'theory of cause and effect' (*Tantrasāra* Ch.2) and theory of inference of Śiśankuka (*anumitivāda*) with regard to the *rasa-sūtra* of Bharata (*Abhinavabhāratī* , Ch.6). A *tāntrika* system like the Śaiva believe in the intuitive perception to a great extent and this indifference is understandable in this context. Like the Śaiva, Buddhism does accept the superiority of perception over

inference in order to know the transcendental reality. Inference involves only phenomenal reality.

If we relate this issue to the central thesis of Kashmir Śaivism i.e. *ābhāsavāda* (theory of appearance), we feel that all means bring about certain cognition of the Ultimate Reality which are valid and acceptable. As appearance is also true in this system, literature also emerges as a powerful means of knowledge and not 'thrice removed from reality' (vide Plato's *Republic* ch.10.). Rājśekhara holds that for a poet even appearance suffices and there is no need to delve upon something higher/deeper in poetry.

Śaiva ontology presents a blend of nominalism and realism- subjective realism. There is no division like Brahma and *Maya*. Everything as it appears or as it is in reality- all are true/real with respect to their real substratum.

Like poetics of recollection or imagination, Śaiva system could offer a poetics of **Re- cognition**. What is the nature of experience that manifests in the poems like 'Daffodils' or 'Tintern Abbey'? Are they simply the poems of memory of past experience? Daffodils are in front of poet's 'inward eyes' and 'Tintern Abbey' is physically and mentally present before him at the same time. A blissful state of being is the natural outcome of such identical blending that these poems exhibit at large

**Recognition** could be:

(a) Perceptual- 'Tintern Abbey' over the interval of five years. There is a blending of experience past and present/ now and then and the realization of non-duality of both.

(b) This blending and identity of perceptual and mental impression is brought about by the sheer power of independent Will, the *Vimarśa* aspect of the Universal Being or the individual being.

(c) There could be even a subtler identity/blending of mental and mental constructions. This is a work of divine Will/Vision/ 'Imagination'. Will is has an important role in the creative process and has been identified with Sadāśiva principle in the Śaiva ontology.

*Svātmabhittau viśvacitram unmi layati (PH)*

The awareness of identity that recognition brings about is not merely a blending but this culminates in aesthetic pleasure/rapture (*ānanda*). In the aesthetic and literary theories of India, this pleasure is the chief goal of literature and literary creativity.

Abhinavagupta<sup>6</sup>, talks about three kinds of *visarga*- a potential of Anuttara (same as the *kaulikī śakti*)- *ānava*, which is of the nature of difference; *śākta*, which is of the nature of both difference and non-difference; and *śāmbhava*, which is non-differential. Abhinavagupta, while commenting on the *śānta rasa* posits that it

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<sup>6</sup> in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of the *TS* (p.72)

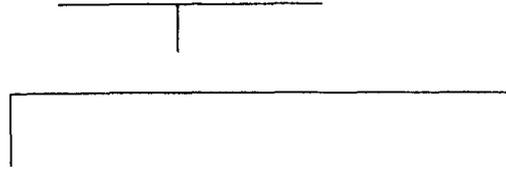
emanates from indifference that originates from the ontological knowledge. In fact, this is the stage of *viśrānti*, associated with these three kinds of *visarga*.

The Ultimate self is not made limited or defiled by any designation (see TS p. 34).

There is a debate over the validity of knowledge – how to prove that this knowledge is valid and acceptable. Like the Grammarian and the Buddhist, Śiva system supports the theory of self-manifestation of validity of knowledge. As a burning lamp does not need another lamp to unfold its identity, similarly knowledge (*sphoṭa*) does not need any other support to establish its validity.

As the Śiva system enumerates two kinds of ignorance (TS ch.1), it also posits a hierarchy of knowledge taking the basis of means. It is important because the means determines the pervasiveness, nature and reliability of knowledge.

## Knowledge/Vijñāna



Type:	Anupāya (with little effort)	Upāya
Content:	(ānanda śakti)	(With effort)
Nature:	Auttara (beyond all constructs)	



	Śambhava	śākta	āṇava
	(icchā śakti)	(jñāna śakti)	(kriyā śakti)
(Difference)	(Non-difference)	(Difference-	non-difference)

**(Source: TA I.241, 42, 45, also TS Ch. 2)**

Dual, non-dual and dual-cum-non-dual are basically the modes of thought and the realization of each of them is possible only through the Parā Samvit, the Anuttara. In all the forms – partially and fully only He /She who manifests. So there is no apparent contradiction between these three modes of thinking. They all are true with regard to their Substratum. However, it is the non-dual mode that has been

preferred because it explains and overcomes many categories and problems. It also helps the recognition of the real self.

The theory of image and counter-image expounds that the world is a reflection in our receptive self. This theory is central to the Śaiva thought and has been preferred over the **cause-effect relationship** of the Nyāya (TS Ch 3. p.52). A counter-image is possible even without the image. These two do not involve any cause-effect relation. The Ultimate is of the nature of light and the presence of counter-image is the evidence of His existence and omni-presence. As a mirror cannot reflect any object in darkness, it requires light. The presence of light is evident in its very being. The whole world is a reflection of the **Parama Śva**. Again, the *vimarśa* aspect distinguishes Him from an insentient mirror. The Parama Tattva is endowed with the faculties like memory, knowledge and differentiation. In this process, the *Viśvottī rṇa* transforms Himself as *Viśwātmaka*. Again, extending the metaphor of the mirror, a mirror cannot reflect anything if its surface is not clean. The impure principles, *māyā* onwards makes the receptive self defiled. Hence there is the need to enter the realm of the pure principles. This purity is a pre-requisite not only in the realization of Parama Tattva but also in the realization of the *rasa* content in the drama and poetry. One who realizes the soul of poetry, in a way also attests the purity and *vimarśa* (*pratibhā*) of his/her receptive self. So the light aspect of Parama Śva makes the manifestation of the world possible and the *vimarśa* makes its cognizable. *Vimarśa/ Śakti/ Pratibhā* is the independent creative instinct of

Parameśwara. It is important to posit here that the Śaiva system great value to the counter-image or appearance (*ābhāsa*). This is not unreal because of its inseparability with its substratum. All the categories or principles emanate from (not separated from, the ablative case does not mark only separation but also origination as in the example 'the Ganges emerges from the Himalayas'. Here the river is not separated from the source. Rejection of the source will result in the extinction of the being.) The same one should understand in the context of the world. The world is within the Parameśwara and through His /Her *vimarśa* it is manifested. So no question of the pre-requisite of an image/cause really comes into our consideration.

Abhinava explains the *rasa sūtra* on the basis of the theory of *bimba pratibimba vāda*. His *abhivyakivāda* can be understood in the background of this theory.

The Śaiva philosophy provides greater space, sanctity and status for literature and art. It is not surprising why all major poeticians and grammarians in one way or the other are sourced by the *āgamic* traditions. The *āgamic* traditions stress the need for the expression and universalisation of the feelings, which is also the process of the literary experiences. Here the emphasis is on *pravṛtti* and not on repression or *nivṛtti*. Assertion is prestiged over negation. The VBh. 73 categorically states that wherever mind gets satisfaction, the *śiva tattva* is implicit because of His imagination in the form of *viśwamaya* and *viśwottī rṇa*. There is nothing beyond Him

/Her. This is also apparent in the central thesis of the śaiva philosophy- “the theory of appearance”. Such a bold statement is also relevant to art and literature.

The whole of the Śaiva canonical discourse is composed in the form of a dialogue either between two lovers/intimates or between wife and husband- *suhṛd* or *kāntā*(vide *VBh.*, *PTV*, *MVT*). This mode of discourse transcends the common discourse of word and meaning in two ways- first it is meaning or mostly the feeling, which is most important and which cannot be analyzed on the basis of causal relationship; secondly it is very intimate; to an extent very private. The language of poetry is highly personal and demands a kind of privacy and intimacy where the poet and the reader get one with each other; in there is space to transcend the literal sense and the world. The words are no more bound to the literal sense but suggest a broader realm of experience and feeling. This is what I mean by saying that words transcend themselves by their own potential. Such a vast and unfathomable world of experience is not meant for the denotation; this can only be suggested and experienced. This is what I also mean by the “*mokṣa* of words”. Words are liberated from their taxing social, stereotyped and conventional roles/ loads. Language of poetry is like a **pidgin** – despite being structured by the normal grammatical functions and rules, it develops its own internal structure and governing rules and categories. Moreover, it is a pidgin in the sense that its rules of structuration, constitution and signification are not yet determinate and has always involved an unfinished debate and multiple interpretations.

No enunciator in the intellectual traditions of India claims for originality and individuality even if he/she initiates a new trend and mode of thinking. As self is given up in creation the same is a prerequisite in the context of realization of the real self. At this level the creation becomes the expression of a liberated and aestheticized self, which is universal and free from all the constraints. The question of authorship does not seem much pertinent in the contexts of art and literature.

In a number of verses of *VBh.* in true conformity with the Śaiva philosophy, it is stated that one should concentrate even on even the gross physical pleasure, like sex, and he/she is bound to feel the pleasure experienced not other the pleasure of the divine. In this context, the literary experience is also the experience of divine; not necessarily that both of them are same. I have noted somewhere that the literary experience and the divine experience are difficult to categorize in the ten types of the worldly experiences; hence Abhinava put them under *lokottara*. So one should be cautious while making such statement. The source of pleasure in poetry and in philosophy is the same. It is the manifestation of the *ānanda śakti* of the Parama Śva. This is what manifested in the form of literary experience –*rasa*. *Raso vai saḥ* (*Tattirī yopaniṣd* II.7 and *VBh.* 58-73). Again we must maintain that *ānanda* does <sup>not</sup> fall in the dichotomy of sorrow and happiness. *Ānanda* is another name of *sthitaprajña*.

Rasa= I-consciousness [VBh. 71-72]

Also see the commentary on the verse 68/69: *ghaṇṭyanuraṇanrupam  
brahmatattvasya sukham Parabrahmānandah.*