

The Journey of Aesthetic Grace in the *Pancakriyā* Theory of Creation

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Abstract

The eternal consciousness also known as bliss in gross terms can be explicitly reckoned as will which after implementation becomes knowledge or *jñāna*. It is this knowledge that results in the evolution of the grossest form of consciousness which automatically activates the *Pancakriyā* theory and therefore, the process of artistic activity starts and it continues till the completion of the objective or goal. All these activities occur in the mind of the poet before it turns into any actual shape or form. In order to understand this process of poetic composition, the present paper aims at dealing with the concept of the *Pancakriyā* theory of creation of Kashmir Shaivism and the five levels of artistic creation associated with it.

Keywords: *Pancakriyā, Sṛṣṭi, Stithi, Samhar, Tirobhāva, Anugraha.*

The *Pancakriyā* theory of creation can be defined as the five-fold activities, that serves as the constituents for the creation which in turn imparts rasa or aesthetic pleasure. It is an innate process of evolution from gross to refinement, from imperfection to perfection, from idea to activity. It undergoes with observation, co-ordination and finally attains evolution. The term *Pancakriyā* can be splitted into two morphemes, Panch and Kriya, where panch means five and kriya signifies activity. This theory as such is not propounded by any single philosopher, aesthetician, poetician and theorist. This is an outcome of Kashmir Shaivism, a monistic group, the foundation of which is the Lord of the Universe i.e. *Śiva* who performs the cycle of grace with perfect balance which is known as *Ardhanarishwara* (identity of male-female principles) or the balance of Nature. Among the various schools of Shaivism, Kashmir Shaivism retains a distinguished place in terms of philosophical thought. It is a group of non-dualist Tantric Saiva traditions from Kashmir that emerged after 850CE in Northern India. It affirms the creation of the Absolute and His projection of the light of intelligence or Universal Consciousness to be exclusively real and rare. It believes that there is only one supreme power and epitome of the universe i.e. Lord Shiva who is regarded as an indivisible, eternal, transcendental, absolute self, infinite, complete and omnipotent. So, He is all in all for all animate and inanimate beings who pervades in and outside of this world. It refutes the devotional worship of Shiva for self-realisation and the relationship of Shiva and human beings in the form of master and servant as it assumes the scale of both of them to be equal and similar. In simple words, the human beings are the aspects of Him just like the two aspects of a coin where He lies at the top level and at the lower level, human beings stand in terms of position. Thus, Shiva is the only truth and everything else is a mere illusion.

According to Kashmir Shaivism, all the forms of creation that occurs in this universe happen under the designed service of Lord Shiva. He is rendered to be the material and efficient cause of creation. He creates this universe with the help of His strong *Śakti* in the form of five-fold eternal activities that comprise the mind power, the bliss power, the will power, the knowledge power and the active power. By applying these five powers, He develops innumerable forms of objects and beings in different sizes, shapes, colors etc. Moreover, He creates this game of creation for the purpose of extracting pure joy or *ānanda* by rediscovering Himself in deep meditation and undergoes through various frequent creative cycles keeping Himself at the epicenter and the experimental mode in the form of the subject as well as the object, the goal as well as the means for the sake of his own enjoyment. He also does the creative activities by concealing Himself through His limited selves which is found within His peripheral zone in order to maintain the whole universe.

Kashmir Shaivism is recognized for its eminent philosophy known as Trika Philosophy, Trika Sasana, Svantryavad, or simply Trika. We can derive the concept of *Pancakriyā* from Kashmir Shaivite tradition of The *Trika Darśan* of which Pratyabhijna Shastra is a stream, which expresses that there is a knower, that there is a state of knowledge and that there is an experience of knowledge. It is called Trika because it alludes “triple” or “threefold” principle namely, *Siddha*, *Namaka*, and *Malini* out of the ninety-two Agamas recognized by it or the triad consisting of *Śiva*, *Śakti* and *Anu* or *Atom* or again *Śiva*, *Śakti* and *Nara* or lastly the goddesses *Para*, *Apara* and *Parapara*. It also elucidates the concepts of nondual (abheda), dual (bheda) and non-dual cum dual (bhedaabedha). Trika Darshan, the holistic principle which encompasses the triad principle of *Śiva* (energy or light or *parkāśa*), *Śakti* (*Umā* or *vimarśa*) and the identity of both (*samghatta*), endorses to explain this cosmic activity taking place in the Universe as well as

in poetic creation. The whole universe is considered to be managed and controlled by the union of two fundamental and inseparable powers i.e. *Śhiv* and *Śakti*. This tradition has taken these two supreme powers into the form of one image of Lord Shiva where half image represents the male deity and other half portrays the female one. The left side of the image is the Divine mother, Parvati (*Śakti*), the feminine energy and the right side is of Shiva, the masculine energy. Here, Lord Shiva manifests the constitutive elements of the universe whereas, *Śakti* helps in playing the key role of bringing these elements of creation into existence. In this way, this tantric view suggests that the divine couple Shiva and Shakti, together actively contributes in the act of creation. This creation is impossible in the absence of anyone of these two energies. Also, both of these are manifestations of the all-in-one divine consciousness and are considered to be the different sides of the same coin. Energy without consciousness or vice versa is taken to be useless and dormant power as both of these are highly associated with each other. Hence, the creation would be considered blind and disordered until both are united together. For instance, just as, Prakriti without Purusha remains incapable in terms of creative aspects similarly, Purusha without Prakriti cannot creating anything. So, Trika philosophy of Kashmir Saivism manifests the path for human being to rise above from the inferior objective energy to the Supreme energy of Lord Shiva through his cognitive energy.

Thus, we can say that the *Pancakriyā* theory which portrays five eternal activities is imputed to Lord Shiva who always remains in the state of eternal dance which symbolizes cosmic activities that can be entirely delineated as the dance of Nature and His soul's wisdom. The dance of Shiva refers to the dance of activities taking place throughout the Universe along with the fundamental principle or energy. This cosmic activity is the central motif of the dance. Anand Coomarswamy's in his *The Dance of Shiva* categorically says, "Our Lord is the Dancer,

who like the heat latent in firewood diffuses His power in mind and matter, and makes them dance in their turn” (Coomarswamy 3). According to *Trika Darśan*, unlike human, the dance of Shiva results from His own nature- born or His gestures also known as *swabhāvajaha* i.e. He dances without any purpose which is in fact natural, spontaneous and automatic. He stirs in his own *swabhāvajaha*- activity (Sakti) which also represents His *Param Caitanya* or Pure consciousness of which He is eternally aware. This is described as the yoga or union of the dance of nature and wisdom of soul indicating the dance of Shiva.

The universe is the representation of Shiva’s eternal state and activity. He is the universe and being encompassing in His space and there is nothing at the outskirts of Him or His space. He does not require anything else outward of His periphery to create this universe. All the objects and beings forge from within Shiva. He maintains five functions or activities associated with His innate nature: *Sṛṣṭi*(creation), *Stithi*(preservation), *Samhār* (transformation), *Tirobhāva* (diffusion of illusion), and *Anugraha* (grace). The First step is *sṛṣṭi* or creation in which Shiva emits all the universal entities whether living or non-living that reside within Him. In plain words, He does not require any ingredients to create the universe but the universe itself automatically develops from within Shiva. So, all exist within Him and proceed from Him. All the material and bodies that situate in this world are the mere representation of Shiva’s pure and transparent/conscious soul. The second step is *stithi* or preservation in which he maintains whatever is evolved from within Him. Shiva maintains and controls the objects of the world including beings in the form of preserver. He possesses the exclusive power of sustaining the breath and the digestive elements of fire in the body. He is also the epicenter and source of the food and water for gods and beings. The third one is *samhar* or transformation in which He tends to destroy and restore the stuffs/ substances which were produced by Him and then, He goes into

the short-term relaxation mode. Basically, His act of Destruction connotes a kind of withdrawal or restoration and not elimination of the objects. For instance, Shiva displays all his creation in the world just like a shopkeeper who exhibits his products in front of the shop and with the passing of time, Shiva restores His creation into Himself just as the shopkeeper puts back his products at the end of the day and goes into a temporary relaxation. The same cycle reoccurs after this relaxation in both the cases. The fourth step is *tirobhāva* or diffusion of illusion or Concealment in which Shiva conceals the real aspect and identity of the individual soul just like applying the mask in order to hide the real persona or putting the sword in the scabbard. In other words, He hides his real identity and spreads the net of delusion or *maya* upon the whole creation in order to regulate the whole Universe in a proper rhythm. So, it is His invincible power or *maya- shakti* due to which the human beings remain beyond his reach and cannot realize Him and therefore, they always hidden under the veil of impurities. The last or fifth step is *anugraha* or grace conquering stage. Shiva attains this Grace by imparting *moksa* and liberation to the beings from this Samsara. It is also called the stage of Revelation or Liberation as the human beings achieves liberation and grace only with the grace of Lord Shiva. It is impossible to reach the gate of spiritual world without his consent. In this way, the Supreme intelligence always remains engaged in scattering the darkness of illusion of the ones who desire to seek Him, burns the bond of their karma by stamping down evil and consequently showers grace on them by plunging their soul in the ocean of Bliss (ananda). Thus, these are the cosmic activities accomplishing the central motif of His dance in the being's soul for the purification of their soul and maintain the life of the cosmos. In Unmai Vilakkam, verse 36, His activities have been expressed in this manner:

“Creation arises from the drum: protection proceeds from the hand of hope: from fire proceeds destruction: the foot held aloft gives release.” (3)

Further, the following verses from the Tirukuttu Darshana (Vision of the sacred Dance), describe the central motif of Shiva’s dance as:

Everywhere is Shiva’s gracious dance made manifest.

His five-fold dances are temporal and timeless.

His five-fold dances are His five activities.

By His Grace He performs the five acts,

This is the sacred dance of Uma- Sahaya.

He dances with Water, Fire, Wind and Ether.

Thus our Lord dances ever in the court. (4)

This reveals His eternal dance which can be perceived within the heart and the self during the conscious state.

In the similar vein, these five activities are discernible in the poetic and artistic creation also. The poet in his artistic work passes through same stages of creation as in the cosmos. The worldly objects do not galvanize him, instead, he along with his experience of the world which is also known as bliss, is a universe who indulges himself to perform his own activity. In this process, the center of the universe is his own heart wherein he performs his grace dance to compose his poetry as Shiva does and engages himself in the similar process as is perceived in nature. But, the only difference is that as a human being, the poet has to progress through activity

to achieve his grace or *anugraha* in order to enjoy true rasa and beauty of the universe. Therefore, each step of activity is crucial and purposeful for the poet to achieve perfection and refinement as per his abilities whereas this grace activity is naturally infused in Shiva. Thus, the concept of *Pancakriyā* is not only theoretical but also practical- oriented. Further, this activity does not follow a certain direction but it moves freely in any direction. The five activities associated with the poetic creation are as follows:

The first step is *sṛṣṭi* or creation in which there is the will or inspiration to create. This inspiration is evolved only by Shiva's energy or *parkāśa* which enters into the mind of the poet and ultimately idea is developed. This leads him to the state of his self- consciousness and so the Shakti, activity or *vimarśa* gets started. The similar concept of inspiration is visible in Wordsworth poetic composition. He believes that the poet can perform artistic creation only when he fetches super-conscious state. In other words, the poetic creation is possible only through the reflection of god's rays or energy.

The second step is known as *stithi* or preservation or sustenance which means to uphold and follow the course of thought. At the preservation level, both the aspects of ideas i.e. positive and negative cover all over the mind and thus wave with crest and trough resulting in confusion and conflict of thoughts. But the sprouting of thoughts continue for further refinement. In this way the poet entangles between pure and impure ideas during his creative process.

The third step is *saṁhār* or destruction/transformation in which all the negative thoughts set apart from the natural order and set forth a new direction. In simplest terms, in this stage the net of confusion and conflict is cleared off upholding the basic emotion. As a result, the clouds

of perplexity, bewilderment and dilemma that overcast the mind are dispelled and the new thoughts are revitalized.

The fourth step is *tirobhāva* or diffusion of illusion that aheads with the identification and the vision of reality. In this stage, the power of knowledge and consciousness which was concealed becomes lucid and unambiguous and thus steps forward by towering towards the peak of liberation and peace with strong resolution. Hence, the illogical doubts are obliterated and shrugged off maturing with emergence of new belief. The mind is enlightened with new vision and the wind of clarity, certainty and pure belief starts blowing in the mind with new feelings and thoughts just like nectar in a sieve left after passing it through.

The last and the fifth stage is *anugraha* or attaining grace which leads to sublimity and in turn imparts aesthetic pleasure or *rasa*. This can also be averred as the state of gratification, serenity and the complete realization of the idea. In simplest terms, the difference with the subject or *aham* and the object or *idam* is effaced and sublimated thought or truth is revealed. Moreover, the poet achieves and sensates such experience only once in his lifetime and never repeatedly while all the other experiences are only reflections or repetitions of the initial idea. This is so because his mind only once gets connected comprehensibly with God forever in order to envision the reality.

Further, *anugraha*, the stage of grace, ensures the path of universal rhythm. Any literary composition that exhibits this universal rhythm imparts truth and aesthetic pleasure. One can experience the universal rhythm only in the conscious state of *niruddha*. It is considered to be highest state of mind where the person is in meditative state and is not interrupted by any instant thoughts. He is completely immersed and engrossed in thoughts and ideas. The other four states

of mind are: *kṣipta* (sensitive and agitative), *mudha* (insensitive and dull), *vikṣipt* (interruptive and disturbed), *ekagra* (concentrative and pointed). *kṣipta* is claimed to be of lowest level of mind. In this stage, the person is at blank stage of thinking or any process of action. *mudha* is the second level in which the mind seems to be insensitive or dull. Here the mind does not acquire any information and the individual lacks concentration or awareness of his own thoughts. In *vikṣipt* state, the mind starts receiving information but the person bewilders or remains in perplexed condition. *ekagra* is the stage where the person's mind begins to focus or concentrates on the object of thought for some idea and it comes prior to the meditative or *nirrudha* stage. Thus, this journey of realization of universal rhythm takes place with high rapidity. This is the state of *ananda* which in any artistic creation is realized as *rasa* and *rasa* is the result of universal rhythm.

To conclude, the *Pancakriyā* theory of creation is an eminent philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism that focuses on describing the five mental activities that occurs in the mind of the creator or artist when he conceives the idea of literary composition and it is an out and out way of achieving aesthetic pleasure. The poet can feel the experience of the Absolute and enjoy *rasa* or aesthetic pleasure after crossing these five stages and thereby attaining the supra- human power or universal rhythm that makes him capable of looking into the past and the future consequently which is known as *krānta darśināh*. Also, the concept of idea plays a significant role during artistic activity as it is the basis of this mental activity. The five stages that are involved in the process of artistic creation can be precisely expressed as:

1. *Sṛṣṭi*(Creation) which means an aesthetic intuition that charges the poet.
2. *Stithi* (Preservation) denotes the object of inspiration which captivates the mind of the poet.

3. *Samhar* (Transformation) is indication of expression which is the depth of the poet.

4. *Tirobhāva* (Diffusion of illusion) is resulting stimulation which diffuses illusion.

5. *Anugraha* (Grace) is the manifestation of the universal rhythm.

A poetic composition which has this universal rhythm activated by *anugraha* offers truth, meaning and imparts aesthetic pleasure or *rasa*.

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