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Grace in Degrees: Śaktipāṭa, Devotion, and Religious Authority in the Śaivism of Abhinavagupta

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Grace in Degrees: Śaktipāta, Devotion, and Religious Authority in the Śaivism of Abhinavagupta

Abstract
This dissertation analyzes conceptions of grace (śaktipāta) and devotion in the doctrine of the Kashmiri polymath Abhinavagupta (c. 960–1020 CE), within the broader context of his tradition, Tantric Śaivism. Śaktipāta, “the descent of power,” refers to the descent of Śiva’s divine grace upon the individual soul at a single moment in time, conferring on the person who shows its signs the eligibility to receive initiation from a guru. Questions examined include the relation between Śiva’s grace and devotion; the soteriological efficacy of individual actions (karman) with respect to grace; who is a fit recipient for grace; and how officiants, or gurus, qualify as agents of grace, through which divine power is transmitted, or at least confirmed. The first part of the dissertation explores the relationship between devotion and grace in Tantric Śaivism, and, more broadly, the roles of bhakti in the Tantric traditions. Through analysis of the Gitārthasaṅgraha, Abhinavagupta’s commentary on the Bhagavadgītā, I show how in the author’s non-dualistic philosophical view conceptions of devotion merge with those of grace, knowledge, and liberation. The second part of the dissertation analyzes Abhinavagupta’s discussion of śaktipāta in his magnum opus, the Tantrāloka. Chapter 3, for instance, analyzes the author’s critique of the views on the causes of śaktipāta held by his main opponents, followers of the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta. Finally, chapter 4 examines how Abhinavagupta uses his doctrine of “grace in degrees” to establish the superiority of his tradition, the Trika, and its gurus. I argue that the hierarchy of teachers he establishes is part of a strategy to legitimize the power of the gnostics (jñānins)—gurus who had not necessarily been consecrated as officiants (ācāryas) through the traditional rituals—within the larger community of Tantric Śaivas.

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GRACE IN DEGREES: 
ŚAKTIPĀTA, DEVOTION, AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY 
IN THE ŚAIVISM OF ABHINAVAGUPTA

Alberta Ferrario

A DISSERTATION
in
Religious Studies
Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania 
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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2015

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ABSTRACT

Grace in Degrees: Śaktipāta, Devotion, and Religious Authority in the Śaivism of Abhinavagupta

Alberta Ferrario
Justin McDaniel
Shaman Hatley

This dissertation analyzes conceptions of grace (śaktipāta) and devotion in the doctrine of the Kashmiri polymath Abhinavagupta (c. 960–1020 CE), within the broader context of his tradition, Tantric Śaivism. Śaktipāta, “the descent of power,” refers to the descent of Śiva’s divine grace upon the individual soul at a single moment in time, conferring on the person who shows its signs the eligibility to receive initiation from a guru. Questions examined include the relation between Śiva’s grace and devotion; the soteriological efficacy of individual actions (karman) with respect to grace; who is a fit recipient for grace; and how officiants, or gurus, qualify as agents of grace, through which divine power is transmitted, or at least confirmed. The first part of the dissertation explores the relationship between devotion and grace in Tantric Śaivism, and, more broadly, the roles of bhakti in the Tantric traditions. Through analysis of the Gitārthasaṅgṛaha, Abhinavagupta’s commentary on the Bhagavadgītā, I show how in the author’s non-dualistic philosophical view conceptions of devotion merge with those of grace, knowledge, and liberation. The second part of the dissertation analyzes Abhinavagupta’s discussion of śaktipāta in his magnum opus, the Tantrāloka. Chapter 3, for instance, analyzes the author’s critique of the views on the causes of śaktipāta held by his main opponents, followers of the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta. Finally, chapter 4 examines how Abhinavagupta uses his doctrine of “grace in degrees” to establish the superiority of his tradition, the Trika, and its gurus. I argue that the hierarchy of teachers he establishes is part of a strategy to legitimize the power of the gnostics (jñānins)—gurus who had not necessarily been consecrated as officiants (ācāryas) through the traditional rituals—within the larger community of Tantric Śaivas.
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# Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BhG</td>
<td>Bhagavadgītā</td>
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<tr>
<td>conj.</td>
<td>conjecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>em.</td>
<td>emendation</td>
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<tr>
<td>GAS</td>
<td>Gītārthasaṅgraha of Abhinavagupta</td>
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<tr>
<td>ÍPK</td>
<td>Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā of Utpaladeva</td>
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<td>ÍPVV</td>
<td>Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivimṛśīnī of Abhinavagupta</td>
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<td>KP</td>
<td>kriyāpāda</td>
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<td>KSTS</td>
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<td>KVf</td>
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TTN\textsuperscript{DV}  \textit{Tattvayatrimśayā}, Dvivedī ed.
TTN\textsuperscript{FI}  \textit{Tattvayatrimśayā}, Filliozat ed.
TTN\textsuperscript{GA}  \textit{Tattvayatrimśayā}, ed. Goodall et al.
TTNV  \textit{Tattvayatrimśayayavīrtī} of Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha
VP  \textit{vidoḍḍāpāḍā}
†...†  text passage deemed corrupt, for which no conjecture is offered
Introduction

At the turn of the first millennium of the Common Era, the Kashmiri teacher and philosopher Abhinavagupta declared:

1

It is only pure, self-luminous Śiva who is the cause of this [grace]. And He is the one who, on account of his autonomous will alone, causes the manifestation of its various degrees. For those who do not desire fruits, [but liberation alone,] the descent of [Śiva’s grace-giving] power (śaktipāta), which is devotion to Śiva, is not dependent upon family lineage, birth, body, action, age, or behavior.2

In these two stanzas, the author summarizes his radical view that God’s grace manifests out of his supreme free will alone, utterly independent of any conditions, including a person’s good or bad deeds or specific religious practices. His stance, therefore, severs any causal connection between ethical and normative behavior and the presence of divine grace in an individual’s life. Moreover, according to the Kashmiri philosopher, even inner inclinations such as devotion towards God and the desire to find a true spiritual teacher are already consequences—that is, signs—of grace rather than causal factors that trigger the manifestation of grace. However, not all schools, exegetes, and anonymous scriptural sources (tantras or āgamas) within the Tantric Śaiva fold shared this perspective.

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1 Tantrāloka XIII.116cd-118ab. For Sanskrit text see fn. 74.
2 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of Sanskrit passages in the dissertation are mine.
GRACE IN TRANSLATION: PRASĀDA, ANUGRAHA AND ŚAKTIPĀTA

The Sanskrit language includes a variety of terms to denote what in English we commonly refer to as “grace.” The most widely used in the religious literature across various Hindu traditions are anugraha and prasāda. The first term is formed from the verbal root ṛgrah, “to take possession.” When preceded by the prefix anu, the term becomes anu-ṛgrah, meaning, “to show favor, to treat with kindness, to foster, to support.” In Śaivism anugraha also refers to one of the five cosmic acts of Lord Śiva, together with creation, maintenance, resorption, and obscuration. Anugraha is the function that leads a soul to liberation, the attainment of the state of Śiva,³ and the end of the cycle of rebirth in this world. The term anugraha, therefore, is perhaps the closest semantically to the English word “grace”: both terms denote the ideas of favor, assistance, or help, and, most importantly, the divine salvific act.

The second term, prasāda, has a broader semantic field. It is derived from the root pra-ṛsad, “to be pleased, satisfied, or appeased; to be gracious, or propitious; to be pure, or clear.” When prasāda is used in its causative form, the meaning becomes “to please, propitiate; to secure the favor of; to purify, to make clear.”⁴ The noun prasāda may denote the meanings of both verbal forms—the state of being, which can arise spontaneously or may be induced by someone else, and the act of causing that state in someone else. Thus the term prasāda can mean “favor, gracious disposition, calmness, purity”; and also “propitiatory offering, gift.” As Andrea Pinkney observes, the first set of

³ As I will explain later, the dualist and non-dualist branches of Tantric Śaivism conceive of the state of Śiva, or śivatā, in different ways: according to the former it means to become equal to Śiva, though remaining separate from him; for the latter it is ontological identification with Śiva, the all-encompassing Consciousness.
⁴ Apte 1957: 1115.
meanings, which describe an affective emotion, refer to a “non-material prasāda,” while the second refers to a “material prasāda,” or the offering that brings about the auspicious disposition in the deity. The divine being who accepts the gift, in turn, becomes satisfied and favorable (prasanna) to the propitiator and bestows his grace on him or her, as a gift in return.⁵ It is perhaps because the term prasāda is semantically connected to these ideas of “satisfaction” and “favor” that Abhinavagupta, when referring to Śiva’s grace, privileges the term anugraha (besides saktipāta, which has a more specific meaning).⁶ As the opening quote of this introduction illustrates, one of the fundamental points of Abhinavagupta’s doctrine of grace is that in its bestowal Śiva does not depend on any cause other than his autonomous will or volition (icchā). Thus in Tantrāloka XIII, when he explains the meaning of the term prasāda, he does not refer to a transaction between the Lord and the devotee, for this would be incompatible with his non-dualistic view. Rather, by referring to the other meaning of the term, “purity,” he glosses it as the state of divine plenitude.⁷

Grace (prasāda) is the state of becoming pure, hence a state of plenitude, for Śiva himself shines forth as full [even] as that [limited] individual soul.

Śiva’s grace, independent of external factors, is nothing but the expansion of Śiva back to his original nature as full, all-encompassing Consciousness, after he earlier took on the contracted state of a limited individual.⁸ Both acts of expansion and contraction are the

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⁵ Pinkney 2013: 752.
⁶ See also Baumer 2003: 154-156.
⁷ TĀ XIII.286cd-287ab:

\[
\text{prasādo nirmātibhāvas tena sarpūṣnārāpanaḥ} \parallel 286 \parallel \\
\text{ātmanā tena hiti śivaḥ svayam pūrṇaḥ prakāśate} \parallel
\]

See also fn. 70 in chapter 1, subsection 1.2.3 (“Abhinavagupta: Devotion as the Power of the Lord”), where I quote the extended passage.

⁸ Jayaratha’s commentary ad 286-287ab.
expression of his absolute freedom.

The term śaktipāta has a narrower semantic field and is specific to the Śaiva Tantric tradition. Translated literally as “descent of power,” śaktipāta refers to the descent of Śiva’s divine grace upon the individual soul (ātman), which occurs at a single moment in time in an individual’s life. Śaktipāta occupies a central place in the doctrine of all branches of Tantric Śaivism, because it marks the beginning of a new religious life for the follower of these esoteric traditions. From a strictly doctrinal point of view, only a religious aspirant deemed to show the signs of śaktipāta is eligible to receive initiation from the guru. Therefore any investigation into grace in this system necessitates discussion of dīkṣā, initiation, and the ācārya, spiritual teacher, which link doctrines of grace to religious and social practice and identity formation. Through the ritual ceremony performed by the guru a pupil becomes part of the particular religious community centered on the officiant and his spiritual lineage; and, through a higher consecration ritual (abhiṣeka), an initiate can become an ācārya himself, with full empowerment to act as teacher and officiant within that system or cult. There are thus critical social implications to śaktipāta.

Previous Literature

Since Abhinavagupta’s sectarian affiliation is with cults within the Tantric Śaiva fold, a discussion of grace in his doctrine is essentially a discussion of śaktipāta. To date no monographs have addressed this topic specifically. While focusing mainly on other issues,

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9 In the Pāñcarātra tradition the term is found only in one text, the Ahirbudhnyasamhitā (XIV.29 ff.), and it is likely a case of assimilation from Śaiva doctrine. See my brief discussion on the relation between Pāñcarātra and Śaivism in chapter 4, subsection 4.5.2 (“Unqualified Gurus: Obscuration of Teachers and Disciples”).
several scholars, such as Paul Muller Ortega, Debabrata Sen Sharma, Jun Takashima and John Dupuche, have nonetheless briefly treated the topic of \( \text{\textit{saktipāta}} \).\(^{10}\) The only exception is Chris Wallis’s fairly recent article on \( \text{\textit{saktipāta}} \), based on his translation of chapter XI of the Tantrasāra—a work Abhinavagupta composed after the Tantrāloka as a more accessible and condensed version of it.\(^{11}\) Translations of other relevant Sanskrit sources exist, but the majority of these concern the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta tradition, owing, in part, to the prolific work of the French Institute of Pondicherry.\(^{12}\) The most significant among these works is the critical edition and translation of Rāmakaṇṭha’s Kiranavṛtti by Dominic Goodall, the foremost scholar of the pre–twelfth century Śaiva Siddhānta.\(^{13}\) Goodall’s introduction and extensive annotation to this work include important insights into the doctrine of \( \text{\textit{saktipāta}} \) taught in the canonical scriptures and elaborated in later exegetical works of this tradition. The primary textual sources of the non-dual traditions concerned with \( \text{\textit{saktipāta}} \), conversely, remain largely untranslated in English. In particular, Abhinavagupta’s voluminous work in the field of Tantra, the Tantrāloka, still needs much scholarly attention. In his survey of Hindu Tantric literature Teun Goudriaan emphasizes the importance of the Tantrāloka, remarking on “its inestimable value as a source of Tantric thought, ritual and literary history . . .” and describing it as a work “in which this versatile and most learned writer tries to present a

\(^{10}\) Examples of these include Muller-Ortega (1989), who focuses on the symbol of the Heart in Abhinavagupta, although he bases most of his analysis on a short commentary (\textit{laghu vṛtti}) to the \textit{Parārtiśikā} that he erroneously attributes to Abhinavagupta; Sen Sharma (1990), who presents an overview of Tantric sādhanā based on the non-Saiddhāntika exegetical tradition; Takashima (1992), who examines the topic of initiation in the Tantrāloka; and Dupuche (2003), who looks at the Kaula ritual in Abhinavagupta’s doctrine, based on his translation of \textit{Tantrāloka} XXIX.

\(^{11}\) Wallis 2008.


\(^{13}\) Goodall 1998. I draw extensively from Goodall’s work in chapter 3 of the dissertation, section 3.2, “The Views on Grace of the Śaiva Siddhānta Tradition.”
general survey of the esoteric Śaiva doctrine and practices as they prevailed in the Kashmir of his age.”

This text constitutes the principal source for my analysis of Abhinavagupta’s views on śaktipāta, which he expounds in chapter XIII of his work.

At present, only one of the thirty-seven chapters of the Tantrāloka has been translated into English, by John Dupuche, and five chapters into French, by Lilian Silburn and André Padoux. The only Western language into which the text has been translated in its entirety is Italian, by Raniero Gnoli. Gnoli deserves special acknowledgment for his pioneering work on Abhinavagupta: not only did he publish a first translation of this voluminous and complex work in its entirety as early as 1972, when knowledge of the field was still in its inception, but he has also made available translations of several of Abhinavagupta’s other major works in the field of Tantra. While Luce dei Tantra—his 1999 revised edition of the Tantrāloka—may not be easily accessible to specialists who do not read Italian, it has been of invaluable help to me while navigating this material in the original Sanskrit. Nonetheless, Gnoli’s translation contains minimal annotation and tends to gloss over ambiguities and other textual problems. Furthermore, Gnoli does not include Jayaratha’s extensive commentary (thirteenth century), nor any explanation based on it, without which this cryptic text remains at times unintelligible.

THE PRESENT STUDY IN ITS LARGER CONTEXT: TANTRIC ŚAIVISM AND DOCTRINAL QUESTIONS ACROSS TRADITIONS

Within Śaivism, an inclusive term denoting systems of worship centered on the Hindu

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16 Gnoli 1999.
17 Gnoli’s 1972 translation of Tantrāloka was published with the title Luce delle Sacre Scritture.
18 Such as the Tantrasāra, the Paramārthasāra, the Parārtṣikāvivaraṇa, and the Gītārthasaṅgraha.
god Śiva or his consort goddess, Pārvatī or Mahādevī, a major distinction can be made between the community of lay, or non-initiated, devotees and Śaiva initiates. Within the latter, we can distinguish two streams: the Atimārga, or Outer Path, and the Mantramārga, or the Path of Mantras. While the ascetic followers of the Atimārga sects, such as the Pāśupatas and Lākulas, may be considered “proto-Tantric,” the followers of the Mantramārga, grouped into distinct esoteric Śaiva cults, are collectively referred to as Tantric Śaivas.¹⁹

The earlier body of Tantric Śaiva texts consists primarily of scriptural sources known as tantras (or āgamas), which the tradition regards as revealed, directly or indirectly, by Lord Śiva. Little is known about their geographic origins and chronology, but the majority were likely composed between the fifth and the ninth centuries CE.²⁰ This scriptural corpus is divided into two main groups: the Siddhānta tantras, which taught the cult of Śiva, and the Bhairava tantras, dedicated to the cult of Bhairava and the Goddess.²¹ A later body of texts consists of exegetical works on these scriptures. While these learned authors flourished particularly in Kashmir in the tenth and eleventh centuries, other exegetes from South India also wrote prolifically, and still other works have come down to us from authors whose geographical origin is uncertain.²² Based on the group of tantras that these authors regarded as the highest Śaiva revelation, two

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²⁰ Sanderson 1988: 663. For the sake of clarity, I remind the reader that Tantras/āgamas continued to be composed until the modern period, in significant numbers. Here, however, I am referring to the corpus of scriptural texts of the pre-twelfth century Tantric Śaiva tradition, or Mantramārga. The earliest of these texts, the Niśvāsa, was likely composed between 450 and 550 CE (Goodall and Isaacson 2007:6). This literature formed the basis of the learned “Mantramārgic” exegesis which I refer to in the following paragraph. For a survey of the literature of the Mantramārga see Sanderson 1988, 2007a, and 2012.
²¹ Sanderson 1988: 668-669. We know for sure that Tantric Śaivism was not only present but well established by beginning of the seventh century (Sanderson 2001: 10-11).
²² Sanderson 2012: 14-26, 44-56, 68-76.
distinct branches emerged in the post-scriptural tradition: the Śaiva Siddhānta, which was based upon the Siddhānta tantras, and the non-Saiddhāntika schools, based upon the Bhairava tantras. Following the doctrinal orientation of those canonical scriptures they considered most authoritative, the Kashmirian Śaiva Saiddhāntikas were dualists, in the sense that they posited ontological distinctions among God, souls, and matter. The non-Saiddhāntikas, conversely, were non-dualists: they recognized the same ontological categories, but denied any ultimate distinction between them.

Abhinavagupta, a Brahmin who lived in late tenth to early eleventh century Kashmir, was and still is regarded as the most authoritative exegete, philosopher, and teacher of the non-dualist traditions. Several scholars have documented the life and works of this polymath, who, in addition to his religious writings, composed treatises in philosophy, poetics, and drama/aesthetics. In his magnum opus, the Tantrāloka, Abhinavagupta presents a synthesis of various non-dualist cults. Although he declares his treatise to be an exposition of the teachings of the Trika—specifically of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra, a text dedicated to this particular cult—he draws from scriptures of other Mantramārga traditions, such as the Kālikula, Kaula, Yāmala, and Dakṣina divisions.

While focusing on Tantric Śaivism, and Abhinavagupta in particular, this study addresses fundamental, and problematic, concepts common to many religions. The questions I address include the relation between Śiva’s grace and devotion; the

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23 Sanderson 2007a: 231.
24 As Sanderson (1992) noted, however, not all the non-Saiddhāntika tantras, such as the Mālinīvijayottaratrantra, have a clear doctrinal orientation.
soteriological efficacy of individual actions (*karman*) with respect to grace; who is a fit recipient for grace; and who are the agents of grace through which divine power is transmitted, or at least confirmed. The doctrinal debate between Abhinavagupta and the exegetes of the Śaiva Siddhānta on the causes of grace—the relative role of individual agency or other factors versus divine free will—echoes the writings of theologians and philosophers of various traditions throughout the ages. Western Christianity alone is marked by numerous controversies on the topic, often centered upon the relative potentiality of human choice and good works versus the exercise of God’s power and the notion of a divine plan for the elect. Within the Hindu fold, the idea of grace is already found in the late *Upaniṣads* and is developed further in the *Bhagavadgītā*, in the devotional (*bhakti*) and the Tantric traditions, as well as in contemporary Hindu sects. In the majority of Hindu traditions, philosophical views on grace inform those on devotion. These two concepts are often seen as linked by a relation of cause and effect, but the doctrines of the various traditions diverge with regard to the direction of such relation: Does devotion draw the Lord’s grace? Or is it itself the product of divine intervention? The same question could be posed in slightly different terms: Does devotion, both as an emotional state and as religious practice, have any soteriological efficacy? Or is liberation based on grace alone?

**AN OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

The first part of the dissertation—chapters 1 and 2—concerns the relationship between devotion and grace in the context of Tantric Śaivism, while paying particular attention to Abhinavagupta. I contextualize the discussion of this relationship in the case of Tantric Śaivism within the larger scholarly discourse on another relationship, that between the
bhakti and the Tantric traditions. This subject is historically complex, and the very categories problematic, calling into question the legitimacy of the dichotomy itself. Scholars who have reflected on these issues have reached divergent conclusions, and much work remains to be done on the subject.

Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of the different scholarly approaches that have been adopted in elucidating the relationship between “Tantrism” and “bhakti,” and the problems involved. Then follows my analysis of the place of devotion in Tantric Śaivism, a question that I approach historically. After briefly showing some major differences between the early (pre-twelfeth century) and the later traditions, I concentrate on the former, in both its dualistic and non-dualistic branches. In the last part of the chapter I focus on the two exegetes who gained the greatest prominence in these two respective streams: Rāmakaṇṭha for the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta, and Abhinavagupta for the non-dualist non-Saiddhāntika traditions. In addition to exploring commonalities in their doctrines—such as devotion being a consequence of and sign for śaktipāta, and the latter being a prerequisite for initiation—I highlight divergences on doctrinal points directly related to their views on the nature of devotion in both the pre-initiatory and post-initiatory phases.

Chapter 2 is entirely concerned with Abhinavagupta’s philosophical formulation of devotion, as well as with the roles of grace and practice in his soteriology. In the Tantrāloka, he makes only cursory references to bhakti, and does not expound on the full range of meanings of the term. In order to understand how he defines bhakti and the way in which he relates it to grace, I resort to his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā, the Gītārthasaṅgraha. Through an analysis of key passages in this text, I show how in his
non-dualistic philosophical view the conceptualization of devotion merges with those of grace, knowledge, and liberation—the last being the complete immersion (*samāveśa*), in the sense of ontological identity, with the supreme Lord, Śiva.

In Abhinavagupta’s non-dualistic understanding, *bhakti*, which I argue is, unexpectedly, synonymous with knowledge, is both a means and a goal. As a gnostic practice *bhakti* is the cultivation of self-awareness (*vimarśa*), or self-identification with Śiva; and as a goal it is the actual experience of this identity, or immersion in Śiva (*samāveśa*), marked by the feeling of intoxicating devotion. The difference between *bhakti* as the first spark of devotion—a sign of *śaktipāta* manifesting as the desire to seek a guru—and *bhakti* as the powerful experience of love and bliss, a sign of *samāveśa*, is only a question of degree. This chapter shows how in Abhinavagupta’s view the process leading from *śaktipāta*—the starting point of a disciple’s journey—to *samāveśa*, the final attainment of Śivahood, is characterized by the gradual increase of devotion, which is nothing but the expression of the person’s unfolding knowledge, or awareness, of identity with Śiva. The various ways in which this process may occur—slowly or quickly, with the support of more or less external means, or no means at all—depend on the different degrees of grace a person receives, which is the focus of chapter 4.

The second part of my dissertation—chapters 3 and 4—explores Abhinavagupta’s discussion of *śaktipāta* in *Tantrāloka* XIII. This text cannot be understood through an internal analysis alone, in isolation from its larger context. By adopting an intertextual approach, I interpret Abhinavagupta’s *magnum opus* in its relation to other sources of the tradition relevant to my topic. The author himself makes references to various texts and exegetes, either refuting their positions or using their
statements to support his own arguments. Among Abhinavagupta’s main opponents are the Śaiva Saiddhāntikas, whose positions he carefully reviews and refutes.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to this doctrinal debate, which centers mainly around the causes of grace: What determines, if anything, the descent of divine power on a certain individual at a given moment in time? I highlight here how the doctrinal differences between Abhinavagupta and the Śaiva Siddhānta on śaktipāta stem from the contrast between two ontological views: the monistic theism (Īśvarādvaita) of the first and the dualistic theism (Īśvaradvaita) of the latter. According to the Śaiva Siddhānta, the moment in which the descent of grace occurs is determined by particular factors such as the “ripening of a soul’s impurity” (mal aparipāka), which thus becomes ready to be removed, or the state of balance between the consequences of a person’s actions (karmasāmya). Abhinavagupta’s non-dualism, conversely, forces him to take a radical doctrinal position, namely that the supreme Lord (Parameśvara/Śiva), in his omniscience and omnipotence, cannot depend on any cause external to himself, and hence bestows grace almost randomly, out of his supreme free will.

Beyond the strictly philosophical plane, however, there is a sectarian agenda behind Abhinavagupta’s radical refutation of the Śaiva Siddhānta, which often takes on sarcastic tones, and to which he devotes a third of this chapter on śaktipāta. During the time of Abhinavagupta the Śaiva Siddhānta represented the mainstream Śaiva tradition of Kashmir, while the non-dualistic Śaiva tradition of the left was confined to small esoteric circles. Gradually, however, the non-dualistic tradition succeeded in becoming well established within the larger community of Śaiva devotees. The relevance of the doctrinal debate with the Śaiva Saiddhāntikas can perhaps be better understood by considering the
overall religious competition between these two branches of Tantric Śaivism. As Sanderson observes, “it is hardly surprising . . . that the non-dualistic tradition of the left should have tried to oust the Śaiva Siddhānta from this position of power once it had itself attained a degree of respectability during the course of the tenth century.”27 As this tradition became progressively more established by expanding its following from limited esoteric circles to a larger community of Śaiva devotees, it also re-interpreted certain elements of its doctrine, in particular those relating to the criteria of “eligibility” (adhikāra) for discipleship and access to the religious community through śaktipāta and initiation.28

Finally, in chapter 4, I show how Abhinavagupta uses his doctrine of grace to construct a rationale for a hierarchical classification of gurus and disciples based on specific criteria. Where applicable, I include an analysis of his forced interpretation of the source text he claims as the basis of his exegesis, the Mālinīvijayottaratantra. In Abhinavagupta’s formulation, śaktipāta manifests in varying degrees (tāratamya). While the notion of a descent of grace ranging from “mild” to “intense” is not new in the tradition, he seems to assign these differing intensities a novel degree of relevance. He describes nine distinct types of śaktipāta, according to intensity (mild, moderate, intense, each threefold) and then maps these onto different kinds of gurus and types of initiated disciples.

One is faced with the question of what Abhinavagupta’s agenda is in creating such a complex and layered system, an issue I address by examining the way the author links the degree of grace with the degree of religious authority. My analysis suggests that,

by providing doctrinal justification for the empowerment of selected individuals who are not ritually initiated or consecrated to act as gurus with full functions, Abhinavagupta challenges the structure of religious authority established by the Śaiva Siddhānta. It was the ācāryas of the dualist tradition—the spiritual preceptors who also acted as officiants in the cult and as royal gurus—who maintained control over which individuals gained access to the religious community through initiation, as well as over which individuals could become publicly recognized teachers of the tradition through the ceremony of consecration to the office of ācārya. Abhinavagupta’s formulation would allow devotees of his own tradition greater access to these structures of institutional religious authority. I also suggest that the hierarchical typology Abhinavagupta created is perfectly coherent with his strategy of validating the religious doctrine and praxis of other Śaiva systems and non-Śaiva sects, yet assigning them a lower, provisional value, owing to their failure to understand the ultimate nature of reality.

The substantial portion of Tantrāloka XIII addressing the issues I discuss in the second part of the dissertation, including the multiple categories of Śaiva practitioners, is discursive, complex, and often convoluted. The discussion presupposes the reader’s acquaintance with several other topics covered in different parts of Abhinavagupta’s voluminous work, such as the typology of gurus, the notion of impurity or mala, initiation, the kaula ritual, and the theory of Śaiva revelation (in chapters IV, IX, XV, XXIX, and XXXV-XXXVII, respectively). My task in this chapter is to draw from all this material to offer the reader a clear understanding of Abhinavagupta’s formulation of śaktipāta. In the course of my exposition I have included my translation of several sections of the Tantrāloka—mostly, but not exclusively, from chapter XIII.
Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, the root text (*mūla*) by itself is not easily intelligible even for specialists in the field. The *Tantrāloka*, like the majority of the Tantric exegetical literature, presents difficulties at both the textual and the paratextual level, such as use of polyvalent technical terms; elliptical or condensed exposition; the predominance of a śāstric style of debate in which switches to exposition of the opponent’s view are not always clearly marked; a considerable level of doctrinal complexity and philosophical sophistication; esoteric components of the material; and last but not least, the fact that this material is deeply embedded within a remote cultural context and presupposes a highly educated reader. For all these reasons I often expound on the *Tantrāloka* passages I quote throughout the dissertation, also providing references to Jayaratha’s commentary in support of my understanding of the text.
CHAPTER 1

The Place of Devotion and its Relationship with Grace and Initiation in Tantric Śaivism

1.1 Devotion in Tantric Soteriology

The relationship between the “tantric traditions” and bhakti is historically complex, and the very categories are problematic. Scholars who have reflected on this issue have reached different conclusions, and much work remains to be done. I will begin by discussing different approaches that have been adopted in understanding the relationship between “Tantra” and bhakti, pointing out some of the problems involved. Following this, I will present my analysis of the place of devotion in Tantric Śaivism, a question that I approach historically. After showing some major differences between the early and the late traditions, I will concentrate on the former, in both the dualistic and non-dualistic branches.

1.1.1 “Tantra” and “Bhakti”: Reflections on the Scholarship

Attempts to characterize the relationship between “Tantra” and bhakti in general terms often end up in sweeping, essentialist generalizations. These fail to provide an understanding of the complexity of the situation, neglecting three major factors. The first
is the diversity among tantric traditions and among branches within the same tradition: do we refer to the Śaiva Tantric tradition, or to the Vaiṣṇava one (Pāñcarātra)? And within the first, also known as the Mantramārga, to the Śaiva Siddhānta or the non-Saiddhāntika systems? And indeed, to exegetical understandings or to scripture, which is by no means univocal? A second factor that is often neglected by scholars discussing devotion in the tantric traditions is historical change: do we refer to early Śaiva Siddhānta, a dualist pan-Indian tradition, whose exegesis developed particularly in Kashmir, or to post-twelfth century Śaiva Siddhānta, a tradition flourishing in the Tamil region that came to embrace non-dualism? Do we have in mind early Pāñcarātra texts or later Pāñcarātra texts, influenced by Rāmānuja’s theistic Vedānta? As we will see in the following pages, the significance of bhakti in these various traditions, and within the same tradition, changes considerably over time. The third factor that general statements do not take into account is the multiplicity of areas of inquiry potentially involved in evaluating the interplay between Tantra and bhakti: philosophical concepts, ritual and performance practices, cultural values, and religious literature.

A few examples from the scholarship on Tantra and bhakti will provide a better idea of these sweeping generalizations. It is also worth noting that, depending on which tradition, historical period, or methodological approach scholars have used to gather their evidence, they have reached opposite conclusions, emphasizing either points of convergence or divergence between the two religious phenomena. David White, for instance, argues that Tantra and bhakti are antithetical. He characterizes bhakti as the “religious production” of the urban élite, mainly the Brahmins, the aristocracy and the

29 On the label “Śaiva Siddhānta” applied to these two schools see fn. 248 at the beginning of section 3.2 (“Grace and Bondage in the Doctrine of the Śaiva Siddhānta”).
merchants; and Tantra, on the other hand, as being “the antitype of bhakti,” a non-elite “cultural phenomenon” belonging to the rural majority of the Indian subcontinent.\(^\text{30}\) The adoption of these local cults by the élites during the early medieval period, White argues, would be the result of the “ruralization of the ruling class” eager to strengthen their connection with agrarian society.\(^\text{31}\)

Unlike White, the majority of scholars trying to understand the relationship between Tantra and bhakti have focused on points of convergence. In his essay entitled “What Do We Mean by Tantrism?” André Padoux, after specifying that according to the Saiddhāntika Āgamas the person who has attained liberation becomes similar to Śiva, and not merged in him as one, states: “This permits the liberated soul to go on loving God. It is evidently even more so in the Pāñcarātra, where devotion \(\text{(bhakti)}\) is essential.”\(^\text{32}\) To begin with, when he mentions the “Saiddhāntika Āgamas,” Padoux does not specify whether he means the early pan-Indian or the later South Indian sources. While his reference to ontological dualism, where souls are separate from the Lord, points to the early tradition, his allusion to bhakti and the love for God instead calls to mind the later southern tradition. We will see how, in fact, in the Śaiva Siddhānta of the early Kashmiri exegetes, devotion has minimal salvific value. It is important to point out that many scholars seem to be unaware of the major shifts that occurred in the Śaiva Siddhānta over time. The same observation can be made regarding Padoux’s statement that devotion is an “essential” part of Pāñcarātra, without taking into account differences between the earlier and the later sources. Gavin Flood, in *The Tantric Body*, reiterates Padoux’s view

\(^{30}\) White 2003: 3.  
\(^{31}\) White 2003: 126.  
\(^{32}\) Padoux 2002: 20.
of Vaiṣṇava Tantra. While he acknowledges that the Pāñcarātra sources are focused primarily on ritual, he argues that “they are also pervaded with devotionalism (bhakti)” and that “bhakti could be said to be an important dimension in the Pāñcarātra textual corpus.” As I show below, this statement is not always valid for the Pāñcarātra tradition, from which devotionalism appears absent in the early stage.

In the same essay Padoux makes another problematic assertion regarding Tantra and bhakti that is particularly relevant for my topic. He argues that “the love of God and the essential role of God’s grace to gain liberation are insisted upon in such Tantric works as those of Abhinavagupta.” While it is true that Śiva’s grace, or śaktipāta, is indispensable in order for an aspirant to attain final emancipation, the same cannot be said for “the love of God.” In chapter two, devoted to Abhinavagupta’s conceptualization of bhakti, I will show that the feeling of love and emotional attachment to Śiva does not have much of a salvific value for the Kashmiri polymath, and that bhakti as a “means” to liberation acquires a very distinct connotation in his philosophical view. Padoux ends his argument by raising the question: “Where does bhakti end and Tantra begin? There is a problematic relationship between Tantrism and bhakti.” The relationship is problematic only if one forgets that the term “Tantrism” includes a number of traditions characterized by basic “tantric” elements, common to all, but also by significant differences, one of these being precisely the relevance and nature of devotion within a specific tradition.

Avoiding essentialism, other scholars have taken the opposite approach, taking a particular “case study” to be exemplary: they base their understanding on the relationship between Tantra and bhakti on a specific historical locus of convergence between the two.

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such as a place of worship or a text. Madeleine Biardeau, for instance, while acknowledging the differences between Tantra and bhakti in values, practices and literature, argues that “the gap” between the two is actually small. In support of her statement she points out how elements and themes from tantric sources are found in the devotional literature of the Purāṇas, and vice versa; or how, in a single temple, recitation of the Purāṇas may coexist with tantric ritual.\textsuperscript{35} Similarly, Douglas Brooks observes how in South India the same goddess Śrīvidyā could be worshipped in her anthropomorphic form by ordinary bhaktas, and in her mantra and yantra forms by tantric initiates.\textsuperscript{36} Thomas Coburn, instead, take as exemplary the encounter between Tantra and bhakti in the eighteenth-century Tantric commentary by Bhāskararāya on a purānic devotional text, the Devīmāhātmya.\textsuperscript{37} While this approach has much value in elucidating pieces of the puzzle, it leaves us without the possibility of arriving at a more articulate, historical, and wide-ranging understanding of the relation between Tantra and bhakti.

### 1.1.2 A Case for the Historical Approach: The Pāñcarātra Tradition

In addition to the essentialist and the “case study” approaches, a third, and I think more effective, way of studying the issue is to examine the bhakti element within a single tantric tradition diachronically, starting with the early sources and comparing them with later ones. Through this kind of approach, which we could call “text-historical” it is easier to avoid both extremes of over-generalization and over-specificity. Sanjukta

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\textsuperscript{35} Biardeau 1989: 156. Thomas Coburn (2002: 78) also refers to the same passage by Biardeau.

\textsuperscript{36} Brooks 2002: 61.

\textsuperscript{37} Coburn 2002: 77-89.
Gupta, for example, analyzes five texts of the Pāñcarātra tradition belonging to the early, the intermediate, and the later period. Based on this evidence, she shows how the emotional kind of loving devotion for God (bhakti-rasa or prema-bhakti), accompanied by complete surrender (prapatti), is found only in the later texts and is therefore not a trait present in the initial stages of the tradition. She points out that, in the earliest sources, the emphasis is rather upon meditating on mantras (mantropāsanā) and worship of the śaktis, the powers of Viṣṇu—all practices that must be preceded by initiation. Gupta also notes that the texts belonging to the intermediate period, conversely, feature the coexistence of both kinds of paths, thus marking the transitional stage in the development of Pāñcarātra from a purely “tantric” tradition to a form of religiosity in which the bhakti dimension becomes significant. She suggests that this transformation may be due to the influence of the Tamil devotional poetry of the Ālvārs, the Vaiṣṇava poet–saints who flourished in South India between the seventh and the ninth centuries.

Gerhard Oberhammer and Marzena Czerniak-Drozdowicz, conversely, take a historical approach in their study of a single Pāñcarātra text, the Paramasamhitā. From an examination of doctrinal, narrative and structural elements, they find evidence of a later re-working of the text and argue that the bhakti feature belongs to a later stratum of this samhitā. Oberhammer focuses on the frame story, which comprises the first and last chapters of the text, and narrates the history of the revelation of the teachings (śāstrāvataraṇa). The “teachings” themselves consist in the corpus of ritual, which

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39 As examples of early āgamas Gupta (1986) takes the Sātvata Samhitā and the Jayākhyā Samhitā; as texts belonging to an intermediate, or transitional phase, she quotes the Ahirodbhānya Samhitā and the Lakṣmī Tantra; and, as a later source she cites the Bhāradvāja Samhitā.
expresses mainly a “tantric” doctrinal view, shaped by the belief that the performance of the rituals revealed by Lord Viṣṇu will bring about the desired results, including salvation. Oberhammer points out that the frame story, on the other hand, has a more traditional brahmanical character, with elements from the Sāṅkhya philosophy and the Nārāyanīyam section of the Mahābhārata epic, thus reflecting a change in religious paradigm effected by a redactor of the text, who added these sections to the older material. In addition to this, he observes that the kind of bhakti-oriented doctrine present in the frame story—and even in the last two chapters of the text, which also seem to have been redacted by the same author—is completely at odds with the “tantric” view of the chapters on ritual. In these sections of the text, ritual takes on a secondary role, while what ultimately brings salvation are renunciation of worldly desires, a wholehearted devotion to Viṣṇu, and resorting to the Lord’s mercy by taking refuge in him with complete faith and surrender (śaraṇāgati). Most importantly, this divine grace can be obtained only through devotion, which in this view becomes the key to emancipation, substituting for the function of ritual. In a more recent essay, Oberhammer shows additional evidence that links the doctrine of śaraṇāgati expounded in the later stratum of the Paramasamhitā to the influence of the bhakti piety of the orthodox (South Indian) Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition.

Oberhammer 1998: 23, 40. In an essay from the same volume edited by Oberhammer, Czerniak-Drozdzowicz (1998: 43-54) agrees with Oberhammer’s conclusions and adds another argument in favor of a later reworking of the original Tantric stream of the text. She points out the non-Tantric character of the first two versions of the creation story, which follow respectively the Manusmṛti and the Sāṅkhya model. She argues that it is the third version that is likely original, whereby the Lord does not participate in the creation of the world directly, but only through his five powers, or śaktis, which are fundamental in the ritual taught in the text.


Oberhammer 2007: 37-54. Referring to the two specific passages expounding the doctrine on śaraṇāgati (ParS XXX.37-67 and XXIX.21-33), Oberhammer writes: “both texts … lack any hint of ritual śaraṇāgati. In both, the idea of taking refuge fits well into an orthodox Vaiṣṇava tradition moulded by bhakti spirituality, in which taking refuge is the expression of confident bhakti and in which reflection on the
Czerniak-Drozdzowicz, who devotes an entire monograph to the structure of the \textit{Paramasaṃhitā},\textsuperscript{44} reaches the same conclusions as Oberhammer regarding the \textit{bhakti} doctrine in the framing chapters of the text.\textsuperscript{45} She also argues that even the passages on devotion that are found within the core text itself, otherwise centered on ritual, are later interpolations by the same author.\textsuperscript{46} She writes:

Interpolations that give voice to the attitude of \textit{bhakti} are found throughout the ParS, most noticeably in the framing chapters, thus redefining the context of the whole text. What was purely ritualistic and tantric has assumed a strongly theistic flavour with devotion as the primary characteristic of religious life. We see that the text connects two streams, one tantric and the other emphasizing emotion and more closely connected with non-Pāńcarātric orthodox Vaiśṇava theism, in an attempt to produce a coherent whole in which the older ritualistic topics are represented in the light of the later mentality. … The text therefore seems to be less an objective transmission of the rules of [this] tradition than the work of a distinct individual, who undertook to re-define the basic principles and ideas of that tradition to bring them in line with the more Veda-congruent Vaiśṇava trends exemplified by South-Indian Śrīvaiśṇavism.\textsuperscript{47}

Thus, the subordination of ritual to devotion that resulted from the re-working of the \textit{Paramasaṃhitā} must be understood as part of the larger process of adaptation of the Pāńcarātra tantric tradition to the religious environment of South India, influenced by the theistic \textit{bhakti} of the Ālvārs poets, the philosophical school of Rāmānuja, and Śrīvaiśṇavism in general. By means of a historical approach to textual analysis applied in the study of the sources of the Pāńcarātra, it has been possible for these three authors to

\textsuperscript{44} Czerniak-Drozdzowicz 2003. The author uses, as a basis for her arguments, the evidence provided by Oberhammer’s work (1998) on the same text.

\textsuperscript{45} That is, the frame story in chapters I and XXXI, as well as chapter XXX and parts of chapters II and XXIX.

\textsuperscript{46} Such as ParS IV.71-75. See Czerniak-Drozdzowicz 2003: 172-174.

\textsuperscript{47} Czerniak-Drozdzowicz 2003: 182-183.
isolate a bhakti stream from the “tantric” one and find evidence that the emotional kind of devotion was absent in the early stage of the tradition. This historical development in the Pāñcarātra tradition presents significant analogies with the Śaiva Siddhānta stream of Tantric Śaivism. As we will see in the next section, this tradition also became less ritualistic and more devotionally oriented in the bhakti-permeated environment of medieval South India.

1.1.3 Devotion in Tantric Śaivism: A Historical Perspective

Similarly to what Sanjukta Gupta, Oberhammer and Czerniak-Drozdzowicz observe for the Pāñcarātra tradition, a textual-historical analysis reveals that in the Śaiva tantric tradition too the shift of emphasis towards bhakti is only a later, post-twelfth century development: textual evidence from early (i.e., pre-twelfth century) Śaiva Tantra sources show how, although a bhakti component is present, the way devotion is conceptualized in meaning and function is radically different from its counterpart in more bhakti-oriented traditions, as well as in later Tantric Śaiva texts influenced by these bhakti traditions.

Firstly, devotion is not a central element of the soteriological discourse, which is characterized instead by emphasis on either ritual or knowledge: dīkṣā, the initiation ritual, which presupposes God’s grace, and not bhakti, is the means to liberation. This constitutes a remarkable difference with respect to what we may call “bhakti tradition(s),” which portray devotion as the fundamental pathway to the ultimate goal.

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48 I am not using the expression “bhakti tradition” as theorized first by European Indologists and, later, by modern Western and Indian scholars. They constructed a definition of “bhakti” based on what they thought was the common doctrine of the “bhakti religion,” which they erroneously conceived of as a homogeneous phenomenon. This characterization of bhakti presupposed the worship of a personal God; the antithesis and mutual exclusion between monotheism and monism, or saguṇa and nirguṇa bhakti; and the contraposition...
Similarly, in later South Indian Tantric Śaiva sources, the relevance of initiation diminishes, while more emphasis is placed on devotion and knowledge as primary soteriological means. Some examples may serve to illustrate this point. The first passage is from the Śvāyambhuvasūtrasamgraha, an early scripture of the Śaiva Siddhānta:

Therefore initiation alone frees [the soul] from this long-standing bond obstructing the supreme state, and leads upwards to the abode of Śiva. [Emphasis mine.]

Commenting on this stanza, Sadyojyotis explains that the characterization of initiation as the only means, through the word “alone” (eva), is meant to exclude knowledge and the other post-initiatory observances, which are just ancillary means to initiation. The same idea—that the initiation ritual is indispensable to destroying the ignorance of the soul—is expressed by other early Śaiva Siddhānta sources, such as the Kirāṇa Tantra, as well as

of the path of devotion with the path of knowledge, the latter being typically represented by Advaita Vedānta. (For a thorough discussion on the old theorizations and the new perspectives about bhakti, see K. Sharma 1987: ix-xvii, 1-73.) Rather, I am using the expression “bhakti tradition” here to refer to the soteriological view shared by several Hindu sects, according to which a feeling of loving devotion towards a personal or impersonal god is an essential means, if not the fundamental one, to attain liberation, without necessarily excluding, however, knowledge or even ritual.

49 Goodall 2004: 397, fn. 890.
50 SSS.II.24, ed. Filliozat 1994 (my translation):
			tasmaḥ pravitattād bandhāt parāśamśthānīrodhakāt \
		dīkṣāiva mocayaty ārdhvaṃ śaivaṃ dhāma nayaty api ||
51 Sadyojyotis’s commentary ad Śvāyambhuvasūtrasamgraha II.24, ed. Filliozat 1994: 60 (my translation):
			śīṣṭaivetyavahāranam avabodhādinivṛttyartham \ ... ye ’py atroktās te śīṣṭāṅgatvaprasiddhyā pratipādyanta ity avadhārtadīkṣāivetī |
	
“The restrictive connotation [of the particle eva] in the expression ‘initiation alone’ has the purpose of excluding knowledge and the other [means, such as ritual actions, post-initiatory observances and yoga] … These [other means] which are taught in this system are explained because they are known as subsidiary to initiation. Hence the expression ‘initiation alone’ with a restrictive connotation.”

52 Kirāṇa VI.9a too states that initiation is the prerequisite for all the other means. Text and translation by Goodall 1998: 144, 369:
			fāṇāntīnam upāyāṇāṁ dīkṣā kāraṇaṁ iṣyate |
	
“Initiation is held to be a prerequisite for the [further] means [to liberation], which are knowledge [ritual actions, observances] and [yoga].”
by early exegetes of the tradition, such as Sadyojyotis (ca. seventh century) and Rāmakaṇṭha (tenth century).  

Similarly, Bhairava Tantras, such as the Svachchandatantra, state the importance of initiation in order to become free from the bonds of māyā and attain liberation. The following passage from the Svachchandatantra is particularly significant because it mentions devotion as well, and because it was later paraphrased by Abhinavagupta in the Tantrāloka:  

She (i.e. the goddess Māyā) quickly leads astray those wretched ones who have abandoned the right path and who are not devoted to guru, God and Scripture. Māyā deceives those who know through judgment based on erroneous arguments and who depend on dry reasoning, by [making them] desire liberation where [true] liberation is absent. When severed by the sword of Śiva’s initiation, she does not sprout again. [Emphasis mine.]

I will return later to the meaning of the term bhakti in these early Śaiva texts and its relationship to dīkṣā. For now I want to emphasize how the early sources, both Siddhānta and Bhairava tantras, emphasize initiation as the indispensable means to liberation. Notice how Abhinavagupta in the Tantrāloka paraphrases the Svachchandatantra passage (Table 1.1). The last few lines of his version read: “When severed by the sword of Śiva’s

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53 For Sadyojyotis, see for example his commentary on Svāyambhūvasūtrasamgraha II.24 just quoted in fn. 51. See also Rāmakaṇṭha’s Kiranavṛtti ad 20-22ab (text and translation by Goodall 1998: 28, 221).

54 See the two parallel passages from Svachchandatantra and Tantrāloka in Table 1.1.
**initiation** and the *sword of Śiva’s knowledge*, she does not sprout again.” He adds “knowledge” (*jñāna*), in addition to “initiation,” as another essential means, consistent with the increased emphasis on gnosis and decreased emphasis on ritual in his doctrine—although initiation, he believes, is still essential for the majority of disciples.

**Table 1.1: Parallel Passages in SvT X.1138b-1142a and TĀ VIII.332cd-337ab**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Svacchanda Tantra X.1138b-1142a:</th>
<th>Tantrāloka VIII.332cd-337ab:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>ataḥ param bhaven māyā sarvajantuvimohiniḥ</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>nirvairaparipanthīyā tāyā bhramitabuddhayeḥ</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>idaṃ tattvam idāṃ neti vivadantaha vādinaḥ</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>satpatham tu parityāja nayati drutam upathām</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>gurudevāṇāśtrasyāya ye na bhaktā narādhamaḥ</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>bhramayaty eva tāṁ māyā hy amokṣe mokṣalipsyāḥ</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>śivadīkṣāṣīnā cchinnā na prarohet tu sā punāḥ</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After this [māyā as a cosmic level] there is Māyā, who bewilders [all] living beings.

Philosophers, with their intellects subdued (*bhramita*) by her who obstructs without enmity, in this world debate “This is real; this is not [real].”

She quickly leads astray those wretched who have abandoned the right path and who are not devoted to the guru, God, the fire, and the Scriptures.

Māyā deceives those who know through judgment based on erroneous arguments and who depend on dry reasoning, by [making them] desire liberation where [true] liberation is absent.

When severed by the *sword of Śiva’s initiation*, she does not sprout again.

After this [māyā as a cosmic level] there is Māyā, the goddess, who bewilders living beings.

She is the power of the Lord of lords, his power of accomplishing very difficult tasks.

Philosophers, with their intellects subdued (*śramita*) by her who obstructs without enmity, in this world debate “This is real; this is not [real].”

She causes the wretched, who are not devoted to the guru, God, the fire, and the Scriptures, to abandon the right path and inevitably leads them astray.

Māyā deceives those who know through judgment based on erroneous arguments and who depend on dry reasoning, by [making them] desire liberation where liberation is absent.

When severed by the *sword of Śiva’s initiation* and the *sword of Śiva’s knowledge*, she does not sprout again.

There is no other means to sever it.

The *Ajitāgama*, on the other hand, which is a later Śaiva Siddhānta source from South India, provides a good example of the further loss of soteriological relevance of the initiation ritual. This lengthy text, devoted primarily to temple ritual, for attaining

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55 My translation.
salvation emphasizes the importance of reliance on devotion, in addition to knowledge, while it does not mention initiation:56

In the Śaiva tradition Śiva should be known as omniscient, complete, not limited by space and time, one whose scope is beyond speech and mind, one without parts and with parts too, always omnipresent and all-seeing. Liberation, O Janārdana, may occur by mere knowledge of him [Śiva]; and for his devotees worship of him also bestows the fruit of the state of [becoming] Indra and other [fruits]. When the Lord of lords is worshiped, He grants devotion [and] knowledge. Without knowledge and devotion [emphasis mine] one can never attain liberation, [even] by millions of rituals. Therefore the worship of the liṅga is supreme. 57

For the purpose of liberation, we can see here a shift of emphasis from initiation to devotion and knowledge. However, this devotional character in post-twelfth century Śaiva Siddhānta in South India is the result of the influence of the Tamil devotional tradition, rather than a feature of Tantric Śaivism in its early stages.58 In addition to acquiring a central role in the pathway to salvation, devotion in the later Śaiva Siddhānta, especially in the Tamil sources, takes on more of an emotional tone. The term bhakti

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56 Ajītāgama XVIII.2-5, ed. Bhatt 1964 (my translation):

| sarvajñaḥ pariṇāṇaḥ ca śivo jñeyah śivāgame |
| dikkālādanavacchino vāṁmano ‘ittagocaraḥ |
| niṣkalo ‘niṣkalaḥ caiva sarvagah sarvadroṣa dhā |
| tajjñānād eva muktih syād bhaktānām ca janārdana |
| tatpurāṇāt dadaty eva phalam indrapadiṭṭikam |
| pūjito devadeveśa bhaktim jñānaṁ prayacchati |
| jñānena bhaktiyogenā vināyañaiḥ karmakoṣṭhibhiḥ |
| prāpyate na kvacin muktis tasāṁ liṅgārcanāṁ param |

See also the more recent critical edition and translation of the Ajītāgama by N. R. Bhatt, J. Filliozat and P. S. Filliozat (2005). Dominic Goodall first noticed this passage from the Ajītāgama, which he quotes in Sanskrit, as an example of the importance of devotion and knowledge, as opposed to initiation, in South Indian texts. See Goodall 2004: 397, fn. 890; and Goodall 2006: 108, fn. 21.

57 The shift of emphasis from the initiation ritual to knowledge and devotion, however, does not imply the loss of importance in temple ritual. On the contrary, the text extols worship of the liṅga, or phallic icon of Lord Śiva. This might actually be symptomatic of the coexistence, in later Śaiva Siddhānta tradition, of the ritualistic dimension of a temple-centered religiosity with its increasing devotional character. Liṅgārcana is the means to both jñāna and bhakti.

58 For an understanding of the historical development of the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition, and its scriptural sources, from its early pan-Indian Sanskrit school to the post-twelfth century developments in the Tamil-speaking South, see Goodall 2004: xiii-xxxiv.
refers here to an intense kind of devotion and passionate love for the Lord that is the mark of the bhakti tradition: for our purposes, the Tamil Śaivite poetry collected in the Tirumūṟai, which expresses the idea that liberation can be attained only through devotion to Śiva. In early Tantric Śaivism, on the other hand, devotion is perceived not as the means to emancipation, but rather as the sign of grace, the consequence of a divine favor that has already occurred, as I will show below with examples from the early Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. In Utpaladeva, devotion becomes actually the ultimate consequence of Śiva’s grace, described as a blissful state characteristic of the highest goal, liberation. Abhinavagupta’s conception of devotion, as we will see, encompasses both these perspectives, and more.

1.2 Early Śaiva Siddhānta and Non-Dualist Views

1.2.1 Devotion as a Sign of Grace in the Early Siddhānta Tantras

In the early scriptural sources of the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition, devotion is considered the main sign of ṣaktipāta, the descent of Siva’s salvific power which, in turn, is the prerequisite for dīkṣā, initiation. Thus the ācārya looks for devotion in a disciple as the sign that proves his eligibility for initiation. The Mrgendrāgama, for example, lists among the signs of a descent of power “devotion to the devotees of Śiva, and faith (śraddhā) in his Scriptures.” Similarly, the Kiraṇa Tantra states that devotion to Śiva is a sign by which one can recognize the occurrence of ṣaktipāta.

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59 The Tirumūṟai was collected in the tenth century and includes earlier works, such as Campartar’s Tēvārī, Appar’s Tēvārī, Cuntarar’s Tēvārī, Māṇikkavācakar’s Tiruvācakam, Tirumūlar’s Tirumantiram, and Čekkilār’s Periya Purāṇam. See Dhavamony 1971: 4-5.

60 Mrgendrāgama, VP, V.4-5ab (as translated by Sanderson 1992: 286, fn. 24):

yeṣāṁ śaṅkriṇaṁ śaktiḥ pataty api niyattaye
I need to point out here that even the mere fact of approaching a guru and requesting to be initiated in the Śaiva teachings is considered an expression of devotion to Śiva. This leads us to the next important point: that in the pre–twelfth century Śaiva tantras and exegetical works, expressions such as *deve bhaktiḥ* and *Śive bhaktiḥ* (devotion to god and devotion to Śiva respectively) do not necessarily refer to an overwhelmingly emotional, passionate feeling for the Lord. The term *bhakti* refers generally to a devout attitude that manifests as the desire to receive instruction from a Śaiva teacher; faith in the Śaiva scripture; good disposition towards the Śaiva community; and the choice of Śiva as one’s deity.

This is evident simply by looking at the context in which the expression *deve bhaktiḥ* generally occurs: in most cases, it is found together with *bhakti* for the guru and for the Śaiva scriptures (*āgama* or *śāstra*); or we find it in the compound “devotion to god, guru and fire”—fire (*agni*) referring here to the sacred fire kindled during the
initiation ceremony;\textsuperscript{63} or we may find the expression “devotion” towards the other śaiva devotees (bhaktas). When used in this context, the meaning of the term bhakti is closer to the semantic field of terms including paricaraṇa (attendance, service), śraddhā (faith), and viśvāsa (belief, faith), rather than love and affection. Occasionally these other terms are used instead of bhakti to express precisely the same ideas—faith in the guru and attendance upon/service to God, guru, and devotees.\textsuperscript{64}

1.2.2 Utpaladeva: Devotion as the Goal

The few major exceptions I have found to this absence of emotional connotation with regard to bhakti in pre-twelfth century Śaiva Tantra are found in the Stotra literature, such as Utpaladeva’s Śivastotravalī, a collection of hymns to Śiva from the early tenth century. In hymn XV (bhaktistotra)\textsuperscript{65} of the Śivastotrāvalī, Utpaladeva writes:\textsuperscript{66}

\begin{quote}
\textit{What regular duties do they have? Such things as attendance (paricaraṇa) on God, the guru and His devotees either in a worldly* manner or in a manner enjoined by [the corpus of] Śivadharma [texts] ... 
... It is right that they should [instead at least] always perform only such things as [reciting] hymns of praise (stuti) about the Lord, obeisances (namaskāra), and attendance (saparyā) [upon images of the Lord and upon the guru] just as lay followers do, who have not received initiation. ...”
\end{quote}

* The term “worldly” here refers to the puranic/smārta tradition.

The parenthesis for the Sanskrit words terms paricaraṇa, namaskāra and saparyā are my additions to the original translation.

\textsuperscript{63} See the Svacchandatantra and Tantrāloka passages quoted earlier in TABLE 1.1: \textit{gurudevāgniśāstrasya ye na baktā narādhamāḥ} in SvT X.1140cd; and \textit{gurudevāgniśāstreṣu ye na baktā narādhamāḥ} in TĀ VIII.334cd.

\textsuperscript{64} See, for example, Mrigendra VP V.4-5ab, quoted in fn. 60 above, and Rāmakaṇṭha’s Kiraṇavṛtti ad VI.11d-12ab I quote an extended version of this passage in section 1.3.2, “Is Devotion a Post-Initiatory Practice (samaya)?”. (Translation in Goodall 1998: 375-78):

\begin{quote}
tarhi kiṃ tair nityam anuṣṭheyam \| laukikena rūpeṇa śivadharmoditena vā yathāsakti devaguru-tadbhaktaparicaraṇādikām eva ...
... aprāptadikṣānām ivopāsakānāṁ bhagavadvīṣayastutinamaskārasaparyādy eva nityam anuṣṭheyam yuktam ity avirodhaḥ || ...
“… What regular duties do they have? Such things as attendance (paricaraṇa) on God, the guru and His devotees either in a worldly* manner or in a manner enjoined by [the corpus of] Śivadharma [texts] ...
... It is right that they should [instead at least] always perform only such things as [reciting] hymns of praise (stuti) about the Lord, obeisances (namaskāra), and attendance (saparyā) [upon images of the Lord and upon the guru] just as lay followers do, who have not received initiation. ...”
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{65} bhaktistotranāma pañcadaśa stotram.

\textsuperscript{66} Śivastotrāvalī XV.4, my translation.

\begin{quote}
na virakto na cāptō mokṣākāṅkṣi tvadarcakaḥ ||
bhaveyam api tūdrikabhaktyāsavarasonmadāḥ ||
\end{quote}
May I be not your worshipper desirous of liberation, detached [from this world], or a lord [of the universe]: rather, let me be drunk with the abundant liquor of devotion.

Although it is evident that this Kashmiri philosopher places a high value on devotion, which he views in intensely emotional terms, here devotion is the goal to aspire to, rather than a means to a goal.

If we leave aside Utpaladeva’s devotional writing, and move to his more systematic philosophical work, the Īśvarapratyabhijnākārikā, it is evident from the very first half-stanza that devotion is the ultimate goal, described as dāsyā, a state of slavery, or being servant to the Lord.67

Having in some way (kathamcid) attained the state of servant (dāsyā) of Maheśvara...

In his own auto-commentary, the Vṛtti, Utpaladeva glosses “in some way” (kathamcid) with the expression “through the grace (or benevolence) of the Supreme Lord” (parameśvaraprasādāt).68

I who have obtained, thanks to the benevolence of the Supreme Lord the benefits that derive from being his servant (dāsyā)—a state it is very difficult to achieve...

67 Īśvarapratyabhijnākārikā I 1.1, as translated by Torella 2002: 85.

kathamcid āśādya maheśvarasya dāsyam janasyāpy upakāram icchan 1
samastasampatsamavāptihetum tatpratyabhijnām upapādayāmi ||

“Having in some way attained the state of servant of Maheśvara and wishing to offer assistance also to the whole of mankind, I shall—by giving logical justification—make possible the awakening of the recognition of the Lord, which brings about the achievement of all success.”

68 Īśvarapratyabhijnākārikāvṛtti ad I 1.1, as translated by Torella 2002: 85:

parameśvaraprasādāt eva labdhā invitadurlabhatadāsyalakṣmīnām akhilaṁ aptvam akhilāṁ svasvāminām vaksyāṇopāyena pratyabhijnāpayāmi yena tasyāpi paramārthalābhena paritūṣyeyam 1

“I who have obtained, thanks to the benevolence of the Supreme Lord (parameśvaraprasādāt eva) the benefits that derive from being his servant a state it is very difficult to achieve—being ashamed of my solitary success, shall, by the method that will here be described, enable the whole of mankind to recognize their Lord, in order to gain my complete fulfillment through the attainment also by them of the Supreme Reality.”
Thus Utpaladeva makes clear that devotion, the state of being servant to the Lord, is the highest state; that this state is very difficult to achieve; and that it is attained through the Lord’s grace. Ultimately we also know that for Utpaladeva this dāsyā means the state of recognition of the Lord, hence liberation itself.

1.2.3 Abhinavagupta: Devotion as the Power of the Lord

While Abhinavagupta does not depart from Utpaladeva’s conceptualization of devotion as the goal itself, his use and definition of the term bhakti throughout his work is more complex and deserves a more thorough analysis, to which I devote the next chapter. First, it is worth noticing how Abhinavagupta, who wrote his own commentary, the Vimarśinī, on Utpaladeva’s IPK, glosses the word servant (dāsyā) in the passage just quoted. He seeks to take away any connotation of duality, and of dependence, from the supreme goal. He uses etymology for this purpose:

The word “servant” (dāsa) means that the master gives him (dīyate asmai) everything as desired. With the expression “the state (bhāva) of [being a servant]” the property of being suitable for autonomy (svātantra), which is the nature of Parameśvara, is stated.

Hence Abhinavagupta does not miss the opportunity to state one of the main tenets of his doctrine, that the Lord is absolutely independent (svātantra, anapeksya), even as he glosses a word like dāsyā, “being a servant,” which would seem to imply a relation of duality (Lord/servant) and dependence.

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Abhinavagupta’s Iśvarapratyabhijnāvimarsinī ad I.1.1, my translation.

\[ \text{tasya dāsyam ity anena tatpratyaḥbhijnopādasanasya mahāpahālatvam āśātryaṇāḥ | dīyate 'śmai svāminā sarvam yathābhūṣitaṁ iti dāsas tasya bhāva ity anena parameśvaraśārūpaśvātantra-} \]
\[ \text{prātaḥ uktā |} \]
This notion of the utter independence of Śiva, and of his grace, underlies also Abhinavagupta’s conceptualization of devotion, which is caused by Śiva alone, independent of any external factors. To support his arguments, Abhinavagupta quotes a verse of the Mahābhārata (which he refers to as Purāṇa), but he twists its meaning to make his case:70

And in the Purāṇa too it is held that devotion derives from the grace of him alone.71 Through this [devotion] those whose minds have developed feeling for him reach the supreme perfection. With the word “alone” (eva) the dependence from karman etc. is denied. Grace (prasāda) is the state of becoming pure, hence a state of plenitude, for Śiva himself shines forth as full [even] as that [limited] individual soul. For in the case of the Vaiṣṇavas and so forth, who are completely deprived of contact with [i.e. achieving] the great perfection of becoming Śiva, that devotion is not [caused] by Śiva alone. This Śiva is the cause of that [kind of devotion too], but not [Śiva] alone and pure; rather [Śiva] who has taken on [some] limitations, dependent on karma and other [factors]. This is the true meaning (jīvita) of this [sentence], “Through this [devotion] they reach the supreme perfection.”

70 Tantrāloka XIII.285-289, my translation:
       purāṇe ’pi ca tasyaiva prasāداد bhaktiḥ isyate l
       yayā yānti parāṃ siddhiḥ tadbhāvagatāmānasāḥ || 285 ||
       evākārena karmādīśāpeksatvam niśidhyate l
       prasāda nirmaltībhāvas tena sampūrṇarūpaṭā l || 286 ||
       ātmanā tena hi śivāh svayam pūrṇāḥ prakāṣate l
       śīvābhāvaṁahāsidhīśparśavandhye tu kutracit l || 287 ||
       vaiśnāvādau hi yā bhaktiḥ nāsau kevalataḥ śivāḥ l
       śīvo bhavati tatraśaś kāraṇam na tu kevalaḥ l || 288 ||
       nirmalaś cāpi tu prāptavacchītikarmādyapekṣakaḥ l
       yayā yānti parāṃ siddhiḥ ity asyedām tu jīvitaṁ l || 289 ||

71 Jayaratha in his commentary provides us with the complete half-verse quoted by Abhinavagupta, which is taken from the Mahābhārata:
       tasyaiva tu prasādena bhaktiḥ utpadyate nṛṇāṁ ity asya prathamam ardham ||

“The first half of this [verse] is: ‘devotion arises for men through the grace of him alone.’” The quote is from the Mahābhārata, Anuśāasanaparvan (book 13), section XVII.160cdef. The second half of the verse, yayā yānti parāṃ siddhiḥ tadbhāvagatācetasaḥ, “through this [devotion] those whose minds have developed feeling for him reach the supreme perfection” is also quoted by Abhinavagupta in stanza 285cd, with the slight variation of mānasāḥ instead of cetasaḥ; and the first pāda of this second half-verse (yayā yānti parāṃ siddhiḥ) is also repeated at the end of this same passage, in stanza in 289cd.
Abhinava proposes that the passage means that devotion occurs “through the grace of Śiva alone” in the sense that Śiva is not dependent on any other factors, such as the amount of karma a soul has, the extent to which one’s impurity has been purified and so forth, because Śiva is full, pure, and unlimited, unlike Viṣṇu, who is ultimately a limited, lower form of Śiva. While acknowledging that in the case of the Vaiṣṇavas too devotion is caused by the Lord, he says that Viṣṇu needs the help of other factors, such as karma. It is only the Śaiva bhakti, not the Vaiṣṇava bhakti, that leads to perfection.

If we look, however, at the Mahābhārata section from which this quote is taken from, we see that the epic says something different. The passage, which is part of a hymn to Śiva in the Anuśāsanaparvan (book XIII), states that devotion occurs “through the grace of him alone,” meaning of Śiva Mahādeva alone, as opposed to the grace of other gods, which does not bestow liberation. Two verses after the verse quoted, the MBh text reads:72

Thus, except for Mahādeva, other gods, do not bring about liberation from samsāra for mortals, even through austerities.

The MBh does not intend to say “Śiva alone, not dependent on other factors, such as karma.” Although the MBh passage too states that devotion arises because of the Lord’s grace, karma, on the contrary, seems to play a part too, in the sense that for devotion to arise one’s karma needs to have been purified in the course of multiple incarnations.73

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72 Mahābhārata XIII.17.162ad:

\[
\text{evam anye na kurvanti devāh samsāramocanam} \\
\text{manuṣyānām mahādevād anyatrāpi tapobalāt} \\n\]

73 Mahābhārata XIII.17.157ef-158ab, my translation:

\[
\text{janmakotisahasreṣu nānāsamsārayoniṣu} \\
\text{jantor viśuddhapāpasya bhave bhaktih prajāyate} \\n\]
Devotion arises in the heart of a creature whose sins have been purified in the course of millions [thousands of crores] of births, characterized by various worldly existences and family origins.

For Abhinavagupta, on the other hand, the devotion granted by God through grace is completely unconditional, free. According to him, devotion is actually the same as grace, and grace cannot depend upon conditions, because God is wholly autonomous. In his *Tantrāloka* Abhinavagupta draws the connection between grace and devotion even more closely, by establishing a relation of identity between the two—between the descent of Śiva’s salvific power (*śaktipāta*) and devotion to Śiva:74

It is only pure, self-luminous Śiva who is the cause of this [grace].75 And He is the one who, on account of His autonomous will alone, causes the manifestation of its various degrees. For those who do not desire fruits [but liberation alone,] the descent of [Śiva’s grace-giving] power, which is devotion to Śiva, is not dependent upon family lineage, birth, body, action, age, or behavior.

The commentator Jayaratha, however, explains that devotion is indeed a sign of grace: they are not the same thing. The reason Abhinavagupta’s statement seems to imply their identity is that in logic there is a metaphorical non-distinction between a sign and that which possesses a sign, such as fire and smoke. I highlight this particular stanza because it goes the furthest in implying the identity of grace with devotion. Jayaratha comments, however, by quoting from the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra*, the tantra on which Abhinava claims to base the *Tantrāloka*, which says that devotion is a sign of *śaktipāta*:76

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74 *Tantrāloka* XIII.116cd-118ab, my translation:

\[
\begin{align*}
tena śuddhaḥ svaprakāśah śiva evātra kāraṇam \parallel \\
sha ca svācchhandyamātrenā śrāvatamya-prakāśikah \parallel \\
kulājñātivapuskarmavayuḥśāṇasampadah \parallel \\
anapekṣya śive bhaktih śaktipāto 'phalārthinām \parallel
\end{align*}
\]

75 According to the commentator Jayaratha, Abhinavagupta here is referring to *anugraha*, grace, the liberating function of Śiva.

76 Jayaratha ad TĀ XIII.118ab, my translation:
Abhinavagupta himself elsewhere quotes the same stanza of the *Mālinīvijayottaratantra*, and in several other passages states that devotion is a sign of grace. Nonetheless, the two appear so intimately intertwined that their relationship may be treated as one of virtual synonymity.

In the final chapter of the *Tantrāloka*, where he provides some autobiographical details, Abhinavagupta invokes his own personal experience in support of his views on devotion and grace. Here Abhinavagupta describes the arising of his own devotion to Śiva as something spontaneous, not brought about by other causes. After describing how his father introduced him to grammar, how the study of logic purified his mind, and how he chose to devote himself to enjoying the *rasa* of poetry, he mentions “being seized (*grhīta*) by a spontaneous (*svayamgrahaṇa*) and intoxicating devotion” to Śiva. Even the verbal root *grh*, to seize, which he uses twice in a fourth of a stanza, alludes to being captured by the power of a force, which is obviously Śiva’s power (*śakti*).

We find a similar conceptualization of devotion as a power of the Lord in Abhinavagupta’s commentary on *Bhagavadgītā* 14.26. The BhG verse itself portrays...
“unwavering devotion” as a means to an end, specifically the means for a disciple to attain the state of Brahman. Abhinavagupta, conversely, overtly shifts the source of devotion from the devotee to the Lord, hence making it the end itself, the result of a purification process enacted by the Lord, rather than a means in the hands of the disciple to attain the Lord: he states that this kind of unwavering devotion, wherein the aspirant does not crave for fruits, is the supreme śakti of the great Lord, Maheśvara, alluding to his power of grace.

However, the person who does not desire any fruit, even when asked “Why do you keep practicing this false [observance]?,“ gives an answer by silence alone, with his bodily hair [erect] (romavān), his body shaking, a flow of tears rolling from his wide open eyes, [all this] because of having his mind and heart (antahkaraṇa) dissolved by the piercing (vedha) of uninterrupted devotion to the Lord. It should be understood that this person alone, not anyone else, is purified by unwavering devotion, the supreme power of the Lord, i.e. of Maheśvara.

This vivid description of the physical manifestations of unwavering devotion is particularly striking because the bodily signs mentioned, such as trembling or shaking, having one’s bodily hair erect, as well as the image of being pierced (vedha) by a power,

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80 Bhagavadgītā XIV.26, my translation:

mām ca yo 'vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevate
dha gunān samāttāyaṁ brahmabhūtīya kalpate

“And the one who serves me with an unwavering yoga of devotion, transcending the guṇas, is fit to become Brahman.”

81 Gītārthaśaṅkraha ad BhG XIV.26, my translation:

yas tu phalaṁ kimedg āpy anibhilaśyam “kīm etad alīkam anutīṭasi” iti paryanuvijamāno ‘pi,
nirantarabhaṅgavdbhaktivedhavīdṛtuṁtaḥkaraṇatayā kāntakītāromavān vepamānatanur vis-
phāriitānayaṇayugaṁaparivartamānasalīlasaṁpātayā tāṣṭāmbhāvenaivottaram prayacchati sa
evāvyabhicāryā bhagavato maheśvarasyāygraśaṅkṛtyā bhaktyā pāvīrtpīṁto nānya iti jīyeyam

82 The compound bhagavad-bhakti is a genitive compound, which in this particular context is intentionally ambiguous: it can be read in its most obvious meaning as an objective genitive: devotion to, or for, the Lord; but also as a subjective genitive, as devotion of the Lord, meaning belonging to the Lord. It is in fact this second, less natural, reading that Abhinavagupta chooses a few lines below, when he glosses bhagavataḥ bhaktā as maheśvarasya śaktyā. I translated here the compound as “devotion to the Lord” because this reading is the most natural and, in any case, it is not ruled out by Abhinavagupta’s gloss: the author would not deny that the feeling of devotion is directed towards the Lord; however, in accordance with his non-dualistic view, he emphasizes that the ultimate source of devotion is the Lord.
allude to the signs of śaktipāta. These very signs have parallels in the early scriptural sources of the Kaula and Trika traditions. In these scriptures these signs are listed among those manifesting in a disciple after an appropriate guru causes the entrance (āveśa or samāveśa) of Śiva’s sakti into the body of the adept. It is precisely śaktipāta that Abhinava refers to when he glosses “devotion of the Lord” as the supreme power of Maheśvara. Here too, as in the Tantrāloka passages XIII.18 and XXXVII.50 quoted above, Abhinavagupta tends to conflate conceptually the notions of śaktipāta and intense devotion, both referring to the manifestation of Śiva’s power in the disciple. Relevant to this point also is the fact that Abhinavagupta in the Gītāsaṅgraha glosses devotion as samāveśa, immersion in Śiva. Wallis points out how in some early tantras, such as the

83 See for example Timirodghāṭanā IV.9 (my translation):
   ekaika bhramayed [evam] āṅgaprātyāṅgasandhisu
   ghāṛmmito sarvvaideho ‘yam kaulavidyāprabhavatāḥ || 9 ||
9.e ghāṛmmito conj.; ghāṛmmitat GRETIL e-text.
   “[This sakti] causes whirling in the joints, limb by limb; due to the power of Kaula knowledge,
   he, his entire body, is made to shake.”

This text, whose name translates as “Dispelling the Darkness,” is an early Kaula Tantra, currently unpublished. An e-text of the manuscript (NGMPP A35/3, National Archives, Kathmandu) has been input by Somadeva Vasudeva into the Gottingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages (GRETIL).

See also Ûrmikaulūrṇava II.236 (my translation):
   romāṅcaṣṭobhāvikṣobhāḥvisṇuḥbhaktyamartgatiḥ [-bhaktomartgati] ||
   pāṇcalakṣaṇam āvesāṁ śāmbhavabhavam paripākritām || 236 ||
   “Having one’s hair erect, paralysis, shaking, devotion … and movement like a divine being:
   these are known as the five signs of the Śaiva type of āveśa.”

and Ûrmikaulūrṇava II.144cd-245ab (my translation):
   itvrasaktiniṁpātena samyagguṛvāvalokanāḥ || 244 ||
   vedhayen nātra samdehaḥ … |
   “Through an intense saktipāta, due to the gaze of a true guru, [Rudra’s sakti] penetrates [in the
disciple], there is no doubt on this.”

This last passage is also quoted by Wallis 2008: 266. This Kaula text, whose name translates as “The Kaula Ocean of Waves,” is also unpublished. An e-text of the manuscript has been input by Mark S.G. Dyczkowski into the Muktabodha Digital Library. NAK MS. no: 5-5207.
Ūrmikaulārṇava, the terms śaktipāta and āveśa (and even the notion of vedha, piercing) are essentially interchangeable.84

1.3 Devotion Before and After Initiation: The Views of Rāmakaṇṭha and Abhinavagupta

1.3.1 The “Locus” (adhikaraṇa) of Devotion as a Sign of Śaktipāta

An important issue concerning the relationship between devotion, grace and initiation, around which we find a divergence of opinions, indeed a polemic, among exegetes of the tradition, concerns the “locus” of devotion as a sign of śaktipāta. I mentioned earlier in this chapter how the simple act of approaching a Śaiva teacher, and requesting from him initiation in the tradition, was considered a sufficient expression of devotion to Śiva—sufficient at least to prove that Śiva’s salvific power had actually descended upon the adept, thus rendering him fit for initiation. The question debated is, in order for the guru to ascertain that śaktipāta has occurred for someone, must the request for initiation come directly from the initiand, or could it also be presented by a relative on his or her behalf, even without the initiand’s awareness of it? A practical ramification of one’s view on the matter is whether a person who cannot express devotion directly by requesting to be initiated—because he or she is too stupid, too sick, or already dead—may be fit for initiation or not.

Rāmakaṇṭha answers negatively to this question. His argument against the possibility of inferring that Śiva’s power has descended upon an individual from the devotion of a relative requesting initiation for the individual is based on the fact that, since “their locus is different (vyadhikaranatvat)” there is no necessary concomitance

84 Wallis 2008: 266.
between them. He uses the classical Nyāya image of logical inference of the existence of fire from smoke, its sign, pointing out that if the cause and the effect are in different locations—such as smoke in one tree and fire in another tree—they cannot be related. Rāmakaṇṭha also points out that someone could be influenced to introduce a relative to the religion by mere affection and not necessarily by a descent of Śiva’s grace.⁸⁵

Abhinavagupta, conversely, completely endorses the practice of initiating an “absent” (parokṣa) person, living or dead, upon someone else’s request, devoting an entire chapter of his Tantrāloka to this kind of initiation. Directly contradicting Rāmakaṇṭha, he argues that the fervent requests for initiation on behalf of relatives or friends are indeed evidence of a descent of Śiva’s power on the initiand. With regard to initiation of a dead person (Mṛtodhāradīkṣa), he writes:⁸⁶

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⁸⁵ Rāmakaṇṭha’s Kiranavṛtti ad VI.11-12ab; text and translation by Goodall 1998: 147-148, 376:

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yathāḥ bhaktiyogata iti | na ca putrādes tatāṃśkārārthitaya tēsaṃ śaktipātānumānam yuktam vyadhikaraṇatvāt | na hi dhāmaḥ khadire svakāraṇam āgnim anumāpayatī | kāraṇam ca śaktipāto bhaktyādīnāṃ ity aktaṃ | na tv arhitādeḥ | viśeṣato bhinnādhikaraṇasya snehasamśkrāpārvakatvenaiva tasya ādhibhū | yad ahaḥ
iṣṭam dharme niyojayed iti
na tataḥ śaktipātānumānam yuktam pratibandhāhāvād iti 1
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“For He teaches [that they receive initiation] “because they have devotion.”… And it is wrong to infer the descent of Śiva’s power on them from their sons or others asking that they be initiated, because the locus [of devotion] is different. For smoke in a Dhava tree does not cause one to infer fire in a Khadira tree as its cause. And the descent of power has been taught to be the cause of devotion and such, but not of becoming a suppliant [begging for initiation], especially not [when this becoming a suppliant is] in a different locus, since this can be proved to be dependent on the influences of affection alone. As they say,

One should urge someone one loves to the religion.

It is not right to infer from this [that] a descent of Śiva’s power [has taken place], because there is no necessary concomitance.”

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⁸⁶ Tantrāloka XXI.9cd-11ab

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bandhubhāryāsuhṛtputragādībhṛhyarthanayogataḥ 9 9
svayam iadvāyotpannakarunābala 1 pi vā 1
vijñātanmukhyātasaśaktipātāṃśadharmanāḥ 10 10
gurur dīksāṁ mṛtodhārīṁ kurvīta śivadāyintī 1
```

A Guru may perform the Śiva-bestowing initiation that rescues the dead [from the hells] for any [deceased person] whom he knows to possess one of the degrees of saktipāta through either of the following means: because of fervent requests from the person’s kin, wife, friends or son or because of the intensity of the pity that he himself feels for that person.

Jayaratha’s commentary on these stanzas is additional evidence of the direct polemic between Kashmirian dualist and non-dualist exegetes on the validity of requesting initiation on behalf of another. It specifically refutes both arguments that Rāmakanṭha used in the Kiraṇavṛtti passage discussed above: that the cause of the relative’s intense requests could also be mere affection, and that the cause and the effects must necessarily be in the same place.87

As Sanderson points out, however, in spite of these subtle philosophical arguments leading to an “inferred” descent of grace, Abhinavagupta’s position defending the practice of initiating the dead serves as a clever strategy to combine the functions of the Śaiva guru with those of a priest performing funerary rituals.88 What might have induced the non-dualists to take such a stance was their desire to provide legitimacy to a practice that stood outside the theoretical framework of mainstream Śaivism but that was

87 Jayaratha’s commentary ad TĀ XXI.9cd-11ab:

.ev.

“So for such as these a Guru should perform mrtoddhāradikṣā, once he has determined that saktipāta has come to them, reasoning that such [phenomena] as the fervent requests he has received from their kin and others would not occur if it had not. Moreover, when the requests and the like of kin and others arise through intense desire to save [the dead] they must originate in a descent of the power of Paramēśvara, not in mere affection, for we do not see such [affection] in all instances. Nor does the fact that they [the requests and the inferred descent of power] have different loci constitute a defect [in this position]. For there are effects which are seen to come about from their causes even though the effects are in a different location, as in the case with such phenomena as the motion of a ball of iron and a magnet.”


88 Sanderson 1995: 33-34.
nonetheless prevalent at the time. Contemporary literary evidence in fact shows that initiation of the dead was practiced in tenth and eleventh century Kashmir, while the satirical tone used by local authors such as Kṣemendra towards widows requesting the ritual for their deceased husbands shows the dubious social acceptance of the practice. 

1.3.2 Is Devotion a Post-Initiatory Practice (samaya)?

After having looked at the relation between devotion and grace in the process leading to initiation, I will now shift focus to the place of devotion in the post-initiatory phase, the process leading an initiate to liberation. The first question is whether devotion must be considered a samaya (post-initiatory observance) or not, an issue I discuss by comparing the contrasting views of Abhinavagupta and Rāmakaṇṭha. A fundamental question, closely related to the first, is the salvific function of devotion: to what extent is bhakti considered a cause (kāraṇa), in the sense of means (upāya), for liberation in early Tantric Śaivism? The following section is devoted primarily to the first question and will also provide an answer to the second question in the case of the early Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. As for Abhinavagupta, the question of “devotion as a means” requires a separate discussion, which will occupy a section of the next chapter, devoted entirely to him.

According to Abhinavagupta, because devotion is an expression of divine grace, it is not considered a post-initiatory pledge (samaya), something that needs to be practiced

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or cultivated by the initiated disciple; it is simply present as the natural consequence of
grace. In the Tantrāloka he writes:\(^90\)

One [i.e. the disciple who has received initiation without seeds] is to engage in
devotion for the guru, for God and for the scriptures. And this [devotion] is not a
post-initiatory pledge, but rather a natural expression of the descent of [Śiva’s]
power, not separate [from it].

Commenting on this stanza, Jayaratha simply paraphrases Abhinavagupta’s text:\(^91\)

For one who has received initiation without seeds, devotion to the guru etc. arises
as a necessary result, but this [devotion] is not a post-initiatory pledge, as stated
in the [passage] beginning with “devotion arises for men through the grace of
him alone.”\(^92\) This [devotion] is a natural expression of the descent of [Śiva’s]
power alone. The meaning is that it is not something different from that [descent
of power].

Jayaratha here merely follows Abhinava’s statement that devotion must not be considered
a post-initiatory pledge. However, opinion diverges on this point among the exegetes of
the tradition. Two chapters before this, in TĀ XV on initiation, Abhinava mentions the
case of nirbījādīkṣā, where liberation occurs only “through initiation” (because the post-
initiatory pledges are burned) “on account of devotion.”\(^93\)

But in the case of [initiation] without seeds,\(^94\) [the guru] should remove the fetter
consisting in the observation of the post-initiatory pledges. [In this case]

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90 Tantrāloka XVII.73, my translation:

gurau deve tathā śāstre bhaktiḥ kāryāsya na hy asau
samayāḥ śaktipātasya svabhāvo hy eṣa no prthak

91 Jayaratha ad TĀ XVII.73, my translation:

asya nirbījadīkṣādīkṣātasya gurvādau bhaktiḥ kāryatvena saṃbhavati, na punar asau samayāḥ,
yat “tasyaiva tu prasādena bhaktir utpadyate nr̥ṇām” ityādintyā śaktipātasyaiva eṣa svabhāvo
na prthak tato ‘tiriktam etat na kīmeit ity arthah \(\|\) 73

92 The verse Jayaratha quotes is the one from the Mahābhārata, which Abhinava himself quotes in TĀ XIII.285. See above, in section 1.2.3 (“Abhinavagupta: Devotion as the Power of the Lord”).

93 Tantrāloka XV.31, my translation:

samayācāraitapāsam tu nirbījāyām viśodhayet

dīkṣāmātreṇa muktiḥ syād bhaktyā deve gurau sadā

94 Those who are exempt from observing the post-initiatory practices: children, stupid people, old people, women, kings, sick people etc. (See TĀ XV.25ab: bālabāliśavṛddhastṛbhogabhugvyādhīdikah).
liberation occurs merely through initiation, always on account of devotion to God [and] guru.

Jayaratha understands the passage to mean that devotion remains as the only post-initiatory observance, contradicting Abhinavagupta, as well as his own commentary in the other passage occurring two chapters later.⁹⁵

In this case [i.e. in the case of initiation without seeds] the necessary post-initiatory observance is merely supreme devotion to God and guru.

The most plausible explanation for why Jayaratha here states that devotion is a samaya is that Tantrāloka XV.31 is a close paraphrase of Svacchandatāntra IV.147; Jayaratha here ad TĀ XV.31 simply paraphrases Kṣemarāja’s commentary ad SvT IV.147, where Kṣemarāja explains that devotion is a samaya.⁹⁶ The statements of the TĀ and SvT, which both translate as “liberation occurs merely through initiation, on account of devotion” are no doubt ambiguous: there are two instrumentals in TĀ (dikṣāmātērṇa muktiḥ syād bhaktyā) and an instrumental and an ablative in SvT (dikṣāmātērṇa muktiḥ syād bhaktimātrād), all of which could express causality. What is the causal relation here among initiation, devotion and liberation? Does liberation occur through initiation, and,

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⁹⁵ Jayaratha’s commentary ad TĀ XV.31, my translation:

asyāṁ parama-devagurubhaktimātram eva āvaśyakasamaya iti uktam bhaktyā deve gurāv iti |

⁹⁶ See the parallel passages in TĀ and SvT, with their respective commentaries; my translation:

Svacchandatāntra IV.147cd-148ab:

samayācārapāsaṁ tu nirbijáyām viśodhayet ||
dikṣāmātērṇa muktiḥ syād bhaktimātrād gūroḥ sadā ||

“But in the case of [initiation] without seeds, [the guru] should remove the fetter consisting in the observation of post-initiatory pledges. [In this case] liberation occurs merely through initiation, always on account of devotion to the guru.

Kṣemarāja’s commentary:
gurubhaktimātram evāsaṁ samaya ity arthāḥ

“The meaning is that his post-initiatory observance is only mere devotion to the guru.”

Tantrāloka XV.31:

samayācārapāsaṁ tu nirbijáyām viśodhayet ||
dikṣāmātērṇa muktiḥ syād bhaktyā deve gurau sadā ||

“But in the case of [initiation] without seeds, [the guru] should remove the fetter consisting in the observation of the post-initiatory pledges. [In this case] liberation occurs merely through initiation, always on account of devotion to God [and] guru.”

Jayaratha’s commentary:

asyāṁ paraṁ devagurubhaktimātram eva āvaśyakasamaya iti uktam bhaktyā deve gurāv iti |

“In this case [i.e. in the case of initiation without seeds] the necessary post-initiatory observance is merely supreme devotion to God and guru.”
after that, through devotion, making devotion a post-initiatory observance? This is the line of reasoning followed by both Kṣemarāja and Jayaratha. Or, instead, does liberation occur through initiation, which, in turn, takes place because of devotion? In this second case devotion would not need to be considered a post-initiatory practice, because it would be assumed to be present in any initiated disciple (as the natural consequence, or sign, of śaktipāta, precondition of initiation). This second line of reasoning seems to be what Abhinava follows in TĀ XVII.73 (quoted above), when he states that bhakti is not a samaya because it is “a natural expression of śaktipāta, not separate from it.”

Interestingly, the Śaiva Siddhānta commentator Rāmakṛṣṇa takes an intermediate position between Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja while commenting on a very similar passage in the Kiraṇatantra that has remarkable parallels with the two stanzas from Svacchandatantra and Tantrāloka previously discussed. For the sake of clarity, I will first quote the passage from the Kiraṇa itself, followed by relevant sections of Rāmakṛṣṇa’s commentary:97

[The initiating teacher] should cleanse away the obligations [to perform what is enjoined for ordinary initiates]98 (samayān) from women and other such, because they are incapable [of fulfilling those obligations]. That is no fault, because they are ignorant. If they had understanding (jñatvāt) it would be a great sin. Therefore these [ignorant ones] attain liberation through initiation, because they have devotion [to the Lord].

Like the other two passages previously discussed, the Kiraṇa too here is discussing the case of initiates who received initiation “without seeds,” and, like the Svacchandatantra

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97 Kiraṇatantra VI.11-12ab, as translated by Goodall 1998: 373-375:

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Samayāṁ cāsāṅganādānāṁ aśaktačārd viśodhayet
Ajitavān na ca doṣo ’sti jñatvād doṣo mahān bhavet
Tena teṣām vimuktih syāt dīkṣayā bhaktiyogataḥ
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98 In this dissertation I generally translate the Sanskrit term samaya as “post-initiatory pledge/observances,” and samayin (the adept who has obtained the samaya initiation) as “pledge-holder.”
and the *Tantrāloka*, also states that they attain “liberation through initiation, on account of devotion” (*vimuktih syād dikṣayā bhaktiyogataḥ*). Let us now look at the relevant sections of Rāmakanṭha’s long commentary on these few lines, where he provides his interpretation of this statement.\(^9^9\)

... What regular duties do they have? Such things as attendance (*paricaraṇa*) on God, the guru and his devotees, either in a worldly manner or in a manner enjoined by [the corpus of] Śivadharma [texts], as much as they are able, either themselves or by sending sons, servants and so forth. ... For He teaches [that they receive initiation] “because they have devotion” (*bhaktiyogataḥ*). Otherwise, because one would not be able to discern in them devotion and such, which is an effect of the descent of Śiva’s power, because of their utter stupidity, as with animals, they would not be entitled to receive initiation. ... And the descent of power has been taught to be the cause of devotion and such, but not of becoming a suppliant [begging for initiation] ... Because they are proved to have [a certain level of] understanding, in contradistinction to animals, because of their having devotion [toward God], and because, they cannot perform what is enjoined by the śāstra, since they are utterly incapable,\(^1^0^1\) it is right that they should [instead at least] always perform only such things as [reciting] hymns of praise (*stuti*) about the Lord, obeisances (*namaskāra*), and attendance (*saparyā*) [upon images of the Lord and upon the guru] just as lay followers do, who have not received initiation. We can see that Rāmakanṭha is interpreting the ablative “because they have devotion” as providing the reason they received initiation in the first place, rather than providing a second cause for liberation; in contrast to Abhinavagupta, however, for Rāmakanṭha this

\(^9^9\) Rāmakanṭha’s *Kirauavrty* ad VI.11-12ab, as translated by Goodall 1998: 375.

... tarhi kim tair nityam anusṭheyam | laukikena rāpena śivadharmoditena vā yathāsakti devagurutadbhakta-paricaraṇādikam eva svatah putrabhṛtyādi-pṛṣṭaṣena vā | ... yathāha bhaktiyogata iti | anyathā teśām ayantamudāhavatena tirāscām iva śaktipatakāryasya bhaktiyāder anīścayād dikṣayām anādhikāra eva... kāraṇam ca śaktipāto bhaktivyadāṃ nam ity uktam | na tv arthitādeḥ | ... bhaktiyogata eva teśām tiryagvairakṣanyena jñānāsiddhay atyantāsaktatvena ca śāstracitānuṣṭhānasambhavād aprāptadikṣānām ivopāsakānāṃ bhagavadvīṣayastuti-namaskārasya-saparyādy eva nityam anusṭheyam uktam ity avirodhaḥ |

\(^1^0^0\) The term “worldly” (*laukikena*) here refers to the the conventional, Veda-based religion, i.e., the puranic/smārta tradition.

\(^1^0^1\) I chose here the translation that Goodall proposed as a second possibility in the footnote, as opposed to the one he placed in the body of the text: “and because, if they were utterly incapable, they could not perform anything enjoined by Śāstra [not even devotion], it is right that they should ...”
devotion, which is assumed to already exist in order for initiation to occur, translates in practical terms into some kind of post-initiatory observance. However, what Rāmakaṇṭha means by “devotion” as something to be practiced is clear from his commentary: towards the beginning of the passage he mentions “attendance (paricaraṇa) on God, the guru and his devotees”; and, in the last few lines, he specifies “[reciting] hymns of praise (stuti) about the Lord, obeisances (namaskāra), and attendance (saparyā) [upon images of the Lord and upon the guru].” All this refers to the performance of particular actions,102 which does not come close to the cultivation of intense feeling of love for god that we find as a means to liberation in the bhakti traditions and in the later Śaiva Siddhānta. For Rāmakaṇṭha too, as in general for the tantras of the early Śaiva tradition, initiation is the central element of the soteriological scheme.

1.3.3 Devotion, Initiation, and Śaktipāta in Rāmakaṇṭha’s Exegesis

Ramakantha’s understanding of devotion as something that translates into the actions of worshiping Śiva and the guru is perfectly congruent with the Śaiva Siddhānta soteriological model. Because the impurity of the soul is a material substance, covering it like a cataract covers an eye, it can be removed only by ritual action: first initiation, and then post-initiatory worship, which completes the process by progressively eliminating the remaining imperfection.103 As we will see later in this section, Rāmakaṇṭha does not deny the experience of devotion as a feeling, in the sense of emotional attachment to Śiva,

102 Although Abhinavagupta may have a similar view when he speaks of bhakti as something “to be performed” or “engaged in” (kāryā), he declares such actions not to be a samaya. See TĀ XVII.73 quoted above (Sanskrit text in fn. 90).
103 See Rāmakaṇṭha’s Kiraṇavṛtti ad 20-22ab. See also Sanderson 1995: 40-41.
but he values it only as the outer sign of śaktipāta. In itself bhakti has no soteriological efficacy. It is rather Śiva’s grace that sets in motion the process by which a soul attains liberation, and not the feeling of devotion, which is just grace’s outer manifestation. However, Rāmakanṭha states that śaktipāta alone is insufficient to free a soul from bondage, unless it is followed by initiation. Therefore, I could not agree more with the observation of Dominic Goodall, the foremost scholar of the early Śaiva Siddhānta:

It is undoubtedly not exaggerated to say that, for a classical theologian such as Rāmakanṭha, devotion in itself did not have any salvific value: bhakti was one of the signs through which the initiating master could discern if a candidate was ripe for initiation or not. Moreover, he considered that the manifestation of this bhakti after initiation was appropriate and sufficient for women as well as for those who did not have the capacity to perform rituals or to study themselves the tantras. But only initiation rituals were salvific.

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104 See my translation of Rāmakanṭha’s commentary on MaP I.14 at the end of this section (fn. 122).
105 See for example Rāmakanṭha’s vṛtti ad MaP XIII.22-24, my translation:

na ca tasya pariṣṭapalasya viṣṇuṣvārovalina iva śaktipātaṁatrād eva mokṣo bhavisyatī vācaya ∥ yatāḥ tatkṣanāṁ mucyate na ca iti ∥ ayaṁ arthaḥ: śaktipātena saṁsāravirāga-yavinihātalingasiddhena saha sakalasya darśanāt na śaktipātaṁ eva mokṣaḥ siddhyati ārya tu dīkṣāder evopāyāntarāt paraṃesvarānugrahātmakaṁ iti ∥

dīkṣāder evopāyāntarāt paraṃesvarānugrahātmakaṁ iti ∥ em. Goodall (personal communication, 6/12/2015); dīkṣāder evopāyāntarāpaparāt paraṃesvarānugrahātmakaṁ iti ∥ ed. Bhatt 1977.

“And it should not be said that liberation will come about for him [scil. the ordinary sakala soul] through a descent of grace alone, as it would for a viṣṇuṣvārāvalin whose mala has ripened, since [the text tells us that] ‘and he is not liberated from that instant [of descent of grace].’ This is the meaning: liberation is not established to take place after a descent of grace alone, since one sees sakala souls endowed with (saha) a descent of grace that is proven to have taken place by necessarily concomitant signs such as dispassion for worldly existence. It is rather [the case that liberation takes place] only after some further instrument, such as dīkṣā, that is [nonetheless also] of the nature of the Lord’s grace.”

The viṣṇuṣvārāvalins are special souls bound only by mala, while sakalas are regular souls bound by all the three fetters. I am grateful to Dominic Goodall for his corrections to my translation of this passage, as well as for the emendations he has proposed to the Sanskrit text.

106 Goodall 2006: 98. My translation from the French:

“Il n’est sans doute pas exagéré de dire que, pour un théologien classique tel que Rāmakanṭha, la dévotion en soi n’avait aucune valeur salvatrice: la bhakti était l’un des signes au moyen desquels le maître initiateur pouvait discerner si un candidat était mûr pour l’initiation ou non. En outre, il considérait que la manifestation de sa bhakti après l’initiation était appropriée et suffisante pour les femmes et ceux qui n’avaient pas l’habilitation pour célébrer des rites ou étudier eux-mêmes les tantras. Mais seuls les rites d’initiation étaient salvateurs.”
As Goodall also observes, if this theoretical justification concerning the absolute necessity of initiation belongs mainly to the exegetical tradition, the idea of the soteriological efficacy of ritual initiation alone is nonetheless present everywhere, even in the early scriptural sources of the dualist school, and not just in the commentarial tradition. Thus, the marginal relevance of bhakti, coupled with a strong emphasis on ritual, in the Śaiva Siddhānta exegesis appears as a natural consequence of ideas concerning soteriology found early in the tradition.

In light of this, Jason Schwartz’s suggestion that the adoption by Śaiva exegetes of the interpretative practices of the Mīmāṃsā is mainly responsible for the emphasis on ritual may need to be revised. Nonetheless, the world of scholarship is indebted to him for raising these important questions. In a recent publication that focuses mainly on pre-twelfth century Śaiva Siddhānta, Schwartz argues that the diminishing relevance of devotion in the course of the development of Śaiva literature is necessarily the result of its encounter with the interpretative practices of the Mīmāṃsā, with its emphasis on the correct performance of ritual. While Schwartz’s argument appears problematic even in reference to the Śaiva Siddhānta, it is particularly inapplicable to Abhinavagupta, contemporary of Rāmakāṇṭha, as well as to other exegetes from the non-dualist traditions, who do not emphasize ritual in their exegesis. I mentioned earlier how for Abhinavagupta the salvific function of ritual decreases in favor of knowledge. Similarly, devotion for

107 Goodall 2006: 94. I quoted and translated relevant passages from these scriptural sources earlier in this chapter, in section 1.1.3 (“Devotion in Tantric Śaivism: A Historical Perspective”). See, for example, Svayambhuvasātrasaṃgraha II.24; Kīrāṇa VI.9a (footnote 52); and Svachchandatantra X.1138b-1142a (TABLE 1.1).
109 This is because for Abhinavagupta bondage is not caused by a material substance, but rather by ignorance alone. When ritual worship is performed, it can function salvifically only inasmuch as it brings about in the performer the awareness of his identity with consciousness. See Sanderson 1995: 44-47.
him does not have specific soteriological value, except to the extent that it is taken to be synonymous with knowledge. I will discuss these ideas in greater depth when examining Abhinavagupta’s conceptions of devotion and ritual worship in chapter 2. My intention here is merely to point out how, for both Rāmakaṇṭha and Abhinavagupta, the lack of salvific function of bhakti is a direct consequence of the doctrinal views of the traditions they represent regarding the appropriate means for liberation: ritual for the Śaiva Siddhānta, and knowledge for the non-dualists.

Schwartz bases his argument mainly on Rāmakaṇṭha’s commentary on an early Śaiva Siddhānta tantra, the Mataṅgapārameśvara, a work that contains devotional elements, particularly in its frame story. Schwartz cogently observes that these bhakti elements might be present owing to the influence on the Mataṅga of earlier Śaiva traditions that were more devotionally oriented, such as the (non-tantric) Śivadharma and the (pre-tantric) Atimārga.110 Indeed, as Schwartz observes, Rāmakaṇṭha does distort his interpretation of the root text in order to emphasize the importance of ritual initiation.111 I suggest, however, that the primary motivation behind the Kashmiri author’s forced readings may not necessarily be the desire to conform to a Mīmāṃsaka “interpretative programme,”112 even though Schwartz is correct in pointing out that the writings of the

110 It is also possible, however, that the frame story, to which the passage that Schwartz discusses belongs, could be a later addition to the Mataṅga—although no later than Rāmakaṇṭha who comments upon it. We saw earlier how Oberhammer sees the same possibility for the Paramasamhitā: he argues that its frame story, where devotional elements are strongly present, is a later addition to this Pāṭicarātra text, which is otherwise mainly concerned with ritual. In any event, the version of the text that Rāmakaṇṭha is commenting upon does include the frame story.

111 Schwartz (2012: 220-222) notes that if Rāmakaṇṭha interpreted literally compounded expressions in the Matanga such as śivadhyānaikacāritātmā (“one whose mind is solely intent on meditating on Śiva”), he would convey the impression that initiation is not necessary for Śaiva sādhanā. By glossing it as parinatamalā, “one whose impurity has become ripe” he is showing that the sage Mataṅga has received saktipāta and is now qualified to receive initiation.

112 Schwartz 2012: 224.
Mīmāṃsā philosophical school strongly influenced Rāmakaṇṭha’s exegetical approach. Rather, I propose that the commentator’s agenda here must be considered in both its doctrinal and sectarian dimensions—the latter here referring to the social relation of the religion with the larger community, as well as with the centers of power and financial resources. On the doctrinal level Rāmakaṇṭha is simply reiterating a well-established belief in the soteriological efficacy of the initiation ritual alone, an idea that is already found in several early sources, as shown previously in this chapter. It is thus unnecessary to postulate Mīmāṃsaka influence. Moreover, emphasis on initiation is also key to the institutionalization of the Śaiva Siddhānta, consolidating ties between lineages of officiants, their mathās, their patrons, and the general laity. This emphasis is also a way for Śaiva Siddhānta to secure its financial resources, through initiation fees as well as contributions from initiated patrons, including kings. My view is that congruence with the Mīmāṃsā concern for ritual need not be understood as influence, in the absence of other demonstrations of this influence.

Schwartz also sees a Mīmāṃsā influence on Rāmakaṇṭha in what he understands to be Rāmakaṇṭha’s doctrinal position: that the prerequisite for śaktipāta, and hence initiation and access to the Śaiva community, is an “abstract ontological qualification,” the ripening of an individual’s impurity (malaparipāka) and the balance of opposite karmas (karmasāmya), rather than “the affective emotional state of the practitioner.”

113 With regard to this, Sanderson (1985b: 566) writes: “Rāmakaṇṭha’s theoretical works, while they oppose Kaumārila and Prabhāka doctrines, certainly assert views of the nature and mutual relation of subject and object which might be interpreted as the product of a desire to formulate a theistic compromise with the Mīmāṃsakas’ ultra-realist, atheistic autonomism.”

114 On the relationship between Tantric Śaivism and the political institutions, see Sanderson 2005b and his forthcoming essay “Religion and the State: Initiating the Monarch in Śaivism and the Buddhist Way of Mantras.”

115 Schwartz 2012: 221.
However, the idea of this mechanized and impersonal occurrence of a “balance of opposite karmas” as the precondition for the descent of Śiva’s grace is already found in early Śaiva Siddhānta sources. Examples of this can be found in the Kiraṇa\textsuperscript{116} and even the Mataṅga\textsuperscript{117} itself, the latter being the source that Schwartz takes as an example of a more devotionally oriented text. As for Rāmakaṇṭha, his exegesis distorts the Kiraṇa’s doctrine on karmasāmya by making it less impersonal and mechanical: he maintains that the descent of grace occurring when two opposing karmas are in equilibrium is not liberating unless there is also a second condition: that the soul’s impurity has become ripe (malaparipāka).\textsuperscript{118} All these references suggest that this “mechanization” of the process through which Śiva is supposed to bestow grace is not a later development of the tradition resulting from Mīmāṃsā influence, but is found even in early sources such as the Mataṅga and the Kiraṇa.

As for Rāmakaṇṭha’s conception of devotion, it is certainly true that he does not emphasize its emotional dimension, such as an intense feeling of love and attachment to Śiva. However, devotion, for him, can mean more than the mere performance of ritual worship, which he emphasizes in the post-initiatory phase, as we saw in the section of this chapter devoted to samaya. After śaktipāta, and more precisely as a manifestation of it, devotion also involves a particular mental disposition towards Śiva. Rāmakaṇṭha, for instance, explains that the devotion to the Lord that arises in someone after Śiva’s Descent of Power brings about an attitude of indifference towards the world (saṃsāra-vaitṛṣṇya); and that, upon seeing this kind of mental disposition in a disciple, a guru can

\textsuperscript{116} Kiraṇa I:20c-22b. See Goodall 1998: xxxiii and fn. 73 on the same page; see also 339, fn. 525.
\textsuperscript{117} Mataṅga, VP XIII.15-20. I quote and translate this passage in two parts, in section 3.2.2 (“The Balance Between Opposite Karmas (karmasāmya) and the Role of Merit”). For Sanskrit text see fn. 284 and 288.
\textsuperscript{118} Goodall 1998: xxxvi; and 215, fn. 171. See also Kiraṇavṛtti ad V.13cd-14ab.
infer the occurrence of śaktipāta and thus consider the disciple fit to receive initiation. Thus I would not necessarily attribute to Rāmakaṇṭha the view that the emotional state of the practitioner is irrelevant as a prerequisite for initiation. On the contrary—as I explained earlier—this is precisely the place that devotion has both in the more doctrinally oriented early sources and in the exegetical traditions: it is the main sign that Śiva’s descent of grace has taken place, and hence an essential prerequisite for initiation and entrance in the Śaiva community. This is precisely why Rāmakaṇṭha, glossing the word bhakti in the passage where the sage Mataṅga is expressing his devotion to the Lord Śrīkaṇṭha, explains that “devotion is the state of being intent upon Him, precisely the state of being qualified [for initiation] arising from śaktipāta.” It is also worth noting that, a few lines later, Rāmakaṇṭha does not feel a need to explain away the root text’s vivid description of the emotional state sage Mataṅga experiences upon seeing the Lord: the devotee is overpowered by his own devotional fervor, which stirs his mind and causes him to shed tears of bliss, tears with which he then washes the Lord’s

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119 MaV, VP, ad IV.44, my translation:

yasya hi sā patati, tasyāvaśyam samsāravaitṛṣayavyabhicārīṁ bhaṅgavati bhaktir upajāyate | ata eva tataḥ śaktipātānumanam avyabhicārīṁ kāryam ācāryādibhir ity arthah ||

“For the one upon whom this [Power of Śiva] descends, devotion towards the Lord, which causes with no exception indifference towards worldly existence, inevitably arises. Precisely for this reason, from this [devotion], gurus and others should invariably infer [the occurrence of] śaktipāta. This is the meaning.”

120 See, for example, Mrgendrāgama, VP, V.4-5ab and Kiraṇa V.13-14ab, quoted and translated in section 1.2.1 (“Devotion as a Sign of Grace in the Early Śiddhānta Tantras”), fn. 60 and 61.

121 MaV ad VP, I.11: bhaktiḥ śaktipātayogatāyaiva tannoṣṭhatvam śaktipātā. This is the meaning.”
feet. Words as the ones Rāmakaṇṭha uses here are more than the exception here are more than the rule from this commentator, because it is certainly true that, on the whole, he does not emphasize the intense emotional dimension of devotion, such as a strong feeling of love and attachment to Śiva. In this respect, Schwartz is correct when he observes that in Rāmakaṇṭha’s commentary “bhakti becomes a rather bloodless thing, divested of the visceral and embodied quality” of the root text (2012: 224).

122 MaP VP, I.14, and Rāmakaṇṭha’s commentary ad loc; my translation:

\[
\text{tadbhāktimanyor āveśā nayanāmalavārīnāḥ}
\]

\[
pādau prakāśāya tam atāḥ stotum āraṇḍhavān munīḥ \]

The sage washed [Lord Śrīkaṇṭha’s] feet with the pure tears from his eyes, [crying] because he was overcome by the fervor of his devotion for him, and then began to praise him.

Devotion for him, i.e. for the Lord; [his] fervor is due to this [devotion]. [He also has] inner dispassion, thinking: “Even though I have been a devotee for such a long time, the Lord is not pleased.” Due to his fervor, he is overwhelmed, i.e., his mind is shaken. Because of this, he has pure tears in [his] eyes, i.e. tears of bliss. Having washed his feet with these [tears], then, i.e. right after that, the sage began to praise him, i.e. [Lord] Umāpati.

My understanding of this passage diverges from Schwartz’s, who interprets Rāmakaṇṭha as saying that Matanga’s “mental confusion” is caused by the sage’s “self-doubt” when the Lord does not seem pleased with him. I suggest, instead, that Rāmakaṇṭha is faithful to the root text in explaining that the state of āveśā, the sense of being overpowered, is actually caused by the devotional fervor (mānyu, caused by bhakti). When the Kashmiri exegete uses the expression “mental agitation” (cītakṣoṭhāḥ), he is glossing the term āveśā in this context: the feeling of being overpowered by devotion is explained as a “shaking” of the reasoning faculty, the cītā, which naturally occurs in the presence of a strong emotion that leads to crying. If Rāmakaṇṭha intended it in a negative way, it would not make sense that he would follow the root text in the description of Matanga shedding pure tears, which he actually glosses as “tears of bliss.” What Schwartz understands as an expression of “self-doubt”—when Matanga thinks the Lord is not pleased with him in spite of his constant devotion—could rather be interpreted as the feeling of sorrowful longing of the devotee when the Lord does not make himself manifest, an emotional state described very often in bhakti literature. Even within the Śaiva Tantra exegetical tradition, we have an example in Utpaladeva’s Śivastotrāvali XIII.11, a stanza that refers to Śiva bestowing saktipāta without an apparent logic. The devotee expresses his dismay and longing by crying out to the Lord: “What has occurred for me today, for which you are delaying in the process of manifesting yourself?” (saktipātasaṅaya vicāraṇam prāptam tṣa na karoṣi karhicit | adya maṁ prati kim āgatoṁ yataḥ svapraṅkāṣānavibhau vilambase ||). The reason Rāmakaṇṭha added this expression of unfulfilled longing by sage Matanga, which is absent in the root text, might be that it provides him with a way to include among the manifestations of devotion the state of virāga (dispassion, detachment). We saw earlier how in his commentary on MaP IV.44, Rāmakaṇṭha uses a synonym of vairāgya, i.e. vaiṁśṛṣya, to refer to the attitude of indifference to the world, considered a clear sign of saktipāta. The Matanga text itself (XIII.19b), referring to the Descent of Power at the time of balance of two opposite karmas of equal strength, states that this power renders the soul “dispassionate towards worldly experience” (bhogaparāṁmukha).
Finally, we must not forget what I mentioned at the beginning of this section, that for Rāmaṇṭha and the Śaiva Siddhānta in general, devotion in itself has no soteriological value because it is ultimately just the outer manifestation of the Lord’s grace. Its real function is to kindle the desire for knowledge in the aspirant, leading him to seek initiation in a Śaiva lineage. Rāmaṇṭha’s view that external expressions of devotion, such as the act of flute playing by Mataṅga, are not soteriologically efficacious, is consistent with early Śaiva Siddhānta sources, which regarded ritual alone as the primary means to liberation.\(^\text{123}\) If we examine the section of the Mataṅga itself devoted to doctrine (vidyāpada), we find that the text states that even if one has received śaktipāta, and therefore has devotion for Śiva (śivarāga), without the initiation ritual one cannot attain him.\(^\text{124}\)

[The soul who has received śaktipāta] does not require further experiences and is always free from desire. He remains imbued with love for Śiva up until the expiry of his body. For the [store of karma that produced the] body of an embodied soul is something that ripened prior [to his experience of śaktipāta]. However, without the distinguishing marks consisting in the initiations, [the state of Śiva] is never known. Therefore, for all those living beings saved by Śiva’s [Descent of Power, the whole [sequence of] purificatory rituals taught by Śiva, which ends in death (niṣṭhānta), takes place.\(^\text{125}\)

\(^{123}\) Schwartz, on the other hand, seems to suggest that it is Rāmaṇṭha who is denying the soteriological efficacy of mere flute playing, while the Mataṅga would instead acknowledge its value. See Schwartz 2012: 222-223.

\(^{124}\) Mataṅga VP XIII.30bc-32, my translation:

\begin{verbatim}
naipekaete parin bhogan nirakanka saidaiva hi |
rañijita śivaragaṇa yavadya dehasya paryayah || 30 II
prāg eva paripakvaṁ yāc chartraṁ hi satrīnḥaḥ |
kim tu dtkṣṭmakair līṅgair na vinā jñāyate kvacir || 31 II
tataḥ pravartate sarvo niṣṭhānto yah śivoditaḥ |
samskāraḥ sarvajñatānām śivaśaktyuddhṛitiṁ nam || 32 II
\end{verbatim}

\(^{125}\) This passage is part of the explanation that Lord Paramēśvara gives to sage Mataṅga in response to his doubt. Mataṅga seems to erroneously believe that after śaktipāta a person does not have any karma left, due to the impass created by karmasāmya, the balance of opposite karmas of equal strength. Therefore he would lack the condition to remain in the world, such as a physical body. If this were the case, the person would not be able to receive initiation, nor use any of the other means to attain knowledge, such as yoga and post-initiatory practices. And—Mataṅga reasons—since according to the doctrine of the tradition
Rāmakaṇṭha, however, does distort the meaning of this stanza: according to his reading, the expression “Śiva’s sakti” does not refer to śaktipāta, but instead to dīkṣā; and therefore, the ritual following that would refer not to the initiation, but rather to the series of post-initiatory rituals such as daily and occasional rituals, ending with anteṣṭī. However, that the expression “Śiva’s sakti” in Mataṅga XIII.32 refers to śaktipāta, and not initiation, is even more obvious if we consider the mention of devotion to Śiva (śivarāga) two stanzas earlier in the passage. According to what the text states elsewhere, it is in fact śaktipāta that arouses in its recipient the feeling of devotion to Śiva, as well as the desire for knowledge; and it is śaktipāta which, consisting in eternal grace, begins the process of ending the ignorance that bounds all beings.\textsuperscript{126} This is why the Mataṅga speaks about the souls who have received śaktipāta as “saved” (uddhṛtā), even while regarding initiation and post-initiatory rituals as necessary steps to bring the process to its final conclusion—liberation.\textsuperscript{127} Once Śiva’s grace strikes, the process unfolds almost by itself: the devotion, discrimination, and desire for knowledge that arise after that automatically

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\textsuperscript{126} Mataṅga VP IV.43-46ab, my translation:

\begin{quote}
patiśaktītāvāśīśaṃ jagat sthāvarajaṅgamaṃ l
bhramaty ajñānamohena dukkhādiparītāpita l 43 l
yāvat somśiltānt saktī śivarāgaṇa saṃyuṭā l
na pataty atitejāsvinīyaṅugrahaśālīnt l 44 l
\end{quote}

“The [whole] world of inanimate and animate beings, permeated by the three powers of the Lord, wanders about due to the delusion of ignorance, tormented by sorrow etc., until the expanding power [of Śiva], possessed with a very mighty and eternal grace, [and] endowed with feeling for Śiva, does not descend [upon someone].”

For a translation of the subsequent stanzas, Mat IV.45-50, see chapter 3, fn. 354 and 355.

\textsuperscript{127} Mataṅga VP XIII.30bc-32, quoted above.
lead the practitioner to seek initiation from a Śaiva guru, and to follow the post-initiatory observances.

Rāmakāṇṭha, on the other hand, does not interpret the text as saying that souls are saved by the power of Śiva, (śaktipāta) and he specifies instead that they are saved by dīkṣā.¹²⁸ His intention here is not to leave even a trace of ambiguity with regard to the fact that only initiation is salvific. Even though the Mataṅga itself states that without initiation one does not attain knowledge (and hence liberation), the text, as we have seen, still refers to the souls who have received Śiva’s śakti as “saved.” For the Mataṅga, like later Śaiva Siddhānta sources, it is Śiva’s power of grace that brings about the feeling of devotion in its beneficiary, and not vice versa; that is, it is not the aspirant’s devotion that draws the Lord’s grace.¹²⁹ This is why what carries soteriological efficacy, the ability to “save,” is Śiva’s grace, followed by initiation, while devotion is treated as a natural manifestation of grace. On the whole, Rāmakāṇṭha’s exegetical agenda does not seem to be to deemphasize devotion per se, but rather to convey unambiguously the message that unless one receives Śaiva initiation, there is no possibility for any sort of salvation.

1.4 Conclusion

In trying to understand the relation between tantra and bhakti, specifically the development of a bhakti dimension within the tantric traditions, I suggest that a historical-philological approach is essential: starting with the early sources allows us to better evaluate which features characterize the initial stages of a tradition, versus which

¹²⁸ Rāmakāṇṭha adds that the purpose of these post-initiatory rituals would be to eliminate the remaining bonds not already severed by initiation, so that the soul could attain the ultimate goal, the manifestation of the state of equality with Śiva (śivatva).
¹²⁹ See the expression śaktiḥ śivarāgeṇa samyutā (MaP, VP, IV.44ab) in the passage quoted, and translated, in fn. 126.
elements develop later from the influence of other modes of religiosity. Based on a textual-historical analysis, and in line with what other scholars have observed for the Pāñcarātra tradition, I argue that in the Tantric Śaiva tradition too the emphasis on bhakti is not an original feature, but rather is a later (post–twelfth century) development, and it is the result of the influence of the Śaiva bhakti traditions. More specifically, with regard to pre–twelfth century Śaiva Tantra:

1. Devotion was not conceived of as having much salvific value: the main means of liberation is dīkṣā, the initiation ritual, with more or less emphasis on knowledge according to various branches of the tradition. In post–twelfth century Śaiva Siddhānta, conversely, we find more emphasis on devotion and less on initiation as a means to liberation. This is likely the result of the influence of the Tamil Śaiva bhakti traditions.

2. Devotion is viewed as the sign of grace rather than the means to mokṣa. It is a sign of śaktipāta, the descent of Siva’s salvific power which, in turn, is the prerequisite for dīkṣā, initiation.

3. The term bhakti does not necessarily refer to an emotional, passionate feeling of love for the Lord. In general, it refers to a reverent attitude towards guru, scripture, the Śaiva community, and sacred fire, as well as the choice of Śiva as one’s deity. Bhakti is in general closer in meaning to words such as paricarana, saparyā or “attendance” and “service” or śraddhā, faith, and namaskāra, obeisance.

4. In the exegetical literature, occasional references to a state of intense and ecstatic devotion, as in Utpaladeva’s Śivastotrāvalī, refer to the experience of liberation itself,
the supreme goal, the awareness of one’s identity with Śiva, and not to bhakti as a means to liberation.

5. Abhinavagupta in his non-dualist formulation brings closer this connection between grace and devotion and in some passages affirms the identity of the two; the corollary of this position is that devotion, like Śiva’s grace and, ultimately, Śiva himself, is completely independent of factors such as past karma and behavior. Hence devotion is “assumed” to be already present in an initiated disciple, as part of Śiva’s grace, and thus Abhinavagupta does not consider devotion a post-initiatory observance. This is another reason bhakti is not a means in the “path.”
CHAPTER 2

Devotion, Grace and “Immersion in Śiva” (samāveśa) in Abhinavagupta’s Soteriology

2.1 Devotion in Abhinavagupta’s Commentary on the Bhagavadgītā

2.1.1 Devotion in a Non-Theistic Context: The Gītārthasaṅgraha

In the Tantrāloka references to devotion are infrequent. In order to understand more thoroughly the way Abhinavagupta conceptualizes bhakti, it is necessary to turn to his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā, the Gītārthasaṅgraha, which was composed subsequently to the Tantrāloka. As the title, “Compendium on the Meaning of the Gītā,” suggests, this work is not a traditional commentary, with a gloss of the text verse by verse. Rather, Abhinavagupta comments on a relatively small number of stanzas that he deems need further explanation. Aware of the great number of commentaries on the Gītā that preceded his, he justifies his effort as appropriate because “it sheds light on the hidden meaning of this [text].” While Abhinava’s interpretation of the Gītā is in some passages influenced by the Krama tradition, his overall intent seems to be to reframe any reference to dualistic notions of reality in non-dualistic terms. This can be observed, for example, in his reinterpretation of the Sāṅkhya ontological dualism that is present, among

130 I discuss most of these in various sections of this chapter.
131 Gītārthasaṅgraha, introductory stanzas, verse 5cd:
nyāyas tathāpy udyamo me tadgūḍhārthaprakāśakah ||
132 Sanderson 2007a: 357.
other philosophical strands, in the Gītā: the two primordial categories of Soul (puruṣa) and Matter (prakṛti) are skillfully subsumed under the undivided principle of Brahman.¹³³

... primordial matter, its evolutes, the fourteen kinds of creation¹³⁴ and the soul: all this is beginningless and eternal because, being enveloped by Brahman (brahmatattva), it is non-different from it. Thus the yogin who, through this non-dual perception of Brahman, knows primordial matter (prakṛti), the soul (puruṣa), the three constituents of nature (gunas) and their evolutes, in whatever way he proceeds, is surely liberated—this is the meaning.

Thus for Abhinavagupta Soul and Matter are not separate ontological categories, but rather different levels of manifestation of the ultimate principle, Brahman or Parama śiva.

This philosophical view naturally informs his conceptualization of both grace and devotion, two concepts that are closely linked and often mirror each other in religious doctrine. Since they both require a subject and an object, on first consideration they would seem more relevant to religious traditions based on ontological dualism, or at least qualified non-dualism, where the “otherness” of God justifies the idea of grace flowing from the Lord to the devotee and, in turn, of devotion flowing from the individual to the Lord. We have previously seen, however, how Abhinavagupta manages to reformulate grace within his non-dualistic framework, by resorting to the notion of the Lord choosing to liberate himself. As for devotion, the Hindu traditions offer various examples of its coexistence with non-theistic monism, where worship is for the non-dual, impersonal or

¹³³ Gītārthaśaṅkraha ad XIII.23-24:

prakṛṭiḥ tadvikāraś caturdaśavidhaḥ sargaḥ tathā puruṣaḥ, etat sarvam anādi nityaṃ ca, brahmatatvācchurītāte sati tadananyatvāt ||23|| evam anena sarvābhadarūpena brahma-
darśanena yo yoḥ prakṛṭiḥ puruṣaṃ gunāṁ ca tadvikārān jānāti, sarveṇa prakāreṇa vartamāno ’pi, sa mukta evety arthah

¹³⁴ On the fourteen kinds of creation, see Sāmkhyakārikā 53 (as translated by Goodall 1998: 173):

aṣṭavikalpo daivas tairāgyoniś ca pañcadhā bhavati
mānuṣyas tv evaśvadhaḥ samāśato bhautikāḥ sargaḥ

“Celestial [creation] is of eight kinds, that of animal is of five and that of humans is of one kind. This is material creation in a nutshell.”
“unqualified” (nirguṇa) Brahman. This kind of devotion for a god without attributes (nirguṇa bhakti), however, is expressed more as a desire of the individual soul to “participate” in the divine nature of the Brahman than in terms of the emotional love and surrender typical of theistic, or ‘qualified’ devotion for a personal god (saguna bhakti). The Bhagavadgītā, being a synthesis of different religious and philosophical traditions, dualistic and non-dualistic, contains expressions of both kinds of devotion, depending on whether the focus is on Kṛṣṇa as a personal god in a human form, or on Kṛṣṇa as omnipresent Brahman. In Abhinavagupta’s non-dualistic view, conversely, there is no place for a typically theistic, saguna, kind of devotion. His conceptualization of devotion, however, goes beyond even what scholarship on Hinduism typically considers a nirguṇa type of devotion, because he strips the term bhakti of its emotional connotation by glossing it with a series of terms that fall outside its semantic field, such as jñāna or knowledge, āveśa or immersion in the Lord, and vimarśa or self-awareness.

One might expect that this shift of emphasis in bhakti away from the emotive is required by a non-theistic tradition, but this is not necessarily the case. In the nirguṇa type of devotion expressed by the medieval saints Kabīr or Nānak, for example, an emotional connotation is still very much present. Krishna Sharma correctly points out

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136 In the texts we find elements of the Upaniṣads, the Sāṅkhya and Yoga philosophical schools as well as ideas drawn from the Vaiṣṇava tradition and the Kṛṣṇa cult. The saguna type of devotion is typically exemplified by the worship centered on Lord Viṣṇu and his incarnations Rāma and Kṛṣṇa. It is perhaps for this reason that modern scholarship on the Bhagavadgītā has focused on the theistic type of devotion in the text, while neglecting the impersonal view of God also present in the Gītā when Kṛṣṇa is identified with the unmanifest Brahman. See Sharma 1987: 116-119.
137 I do not mean to imply here that theism is inherently dualistic. Equating “theism” and “dualism” would exclude non-dual Saiva doctrine from “theism.” A more appropriate term for Abhinavagupta’s type of theism is “panentheism,” as Loriliai Biernacki correctly observes in a recent essay (2014b: 161-166). In the Gītārthasaṅgraha, however, Abhinavagupta expounds his doctrine outside of a Śaiva context: his emphasis on Kṛṣṇa as the absolute brahman makes his view appear closer to non-theism than he may have intended.
that although bhakti, as a feeling, necessarily presupposes a subject and an object, it need not necessarily entail duality between man and God. Taking as an example the monistic context of Advaita Vedānta, she writes,

The required duality, taken in this context, exists within man himself. It exists in the polarity of his higher and lower self. It is the love and devotion on the part of one for the other, which makes bhakti possible for the Brahman.\footnote{Sharma 1987: 44.}

Abhinavagupta, however, does not emphasize this emotional relationship between a “lower” self and a “higher self,” be it Brahman or Śiva. In his view, love and emotional feelings are not efficacious means for liberation. Rather, what is necessary to attain the goal is a particular kind of awareness obtained by directing one’s mind towards Brahman, the non-dual principle underlying all reality.

Abhinavagupta also makes these points clearly and succinctly in the Parātrīśikāvivaraṇa, where he provides an understanding of devotion based on three meanings of the term bhakti. In its meaning as “reverence” or “submission” (prahvatā), bhakti refers not to the act of bowing to an external deity, but rather to the notion of “immersion” (anupraveśa) in the Lord, which ultimately results in identification with him (tādātmya), and hence in liberation. In its meaning as “division” (vibhāga), bhakti also refers to the distinction between worshipper and object of worship. He notes, however, that this division is self-created by the absolute Consciousness as an act of supreme freedom. According to Abhinavagupta, to reach the goal of identification with the Lord/Consciousness what is necessary is not a feeling of love and attachment between subject and object, but rather the awareness by the subject of worship that the ultimate object of worship can only be Consciousness, or supreme reality. This is precisely what
the author writes in the Parātrīśikāvivaraṇa regarding the third meaning of bhakti, namely its “figurative sense.” Abhinavagupta says that “through the act of worship the supreme reality is alluded to.” With these words he teaches that even though the practitioner is performing worship of the icon of a deity, he or she must maintain awareness that ultimately it is Śiva who worships Śiva, or Brahman who worships Brahman, since it is unified Consciousness alone that created out of itself the distinction between subject and object of worship.139

By its simultaneous focus both on Kṛṣṇa as a personal god and on Brahman as the absolute, the Bhagavadgītā blurs the lines between theistic and non-theistic worship. This text often presents devotion as a means to an end, a cause for emancipation. When this is

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139 Parātrīśikāvivaraṇa ad PT 32.ab, (KSTS ed., p. 262, and p. 266), my translation:

Pūjāyat paravā bhaktavā ātmānām ca nivedayet \| parayaiva hṛdayarūpayā pūjaya katham? (1) bhaktavyā tādātmyānuprāveṣaprāhvatātmanā, (2) bhaktavyā svayaṁ kūptena pūjapājakavibhāgena pūjyohi svayaṁ sṛjyate sa param svatantra-cinmayātāparamārtha eva anuttarasarvāntrtyabalāt na ghaṭādir iva jaḍa iti viśeṣo ’tra tad uktam śrīpratyabhijñāyām

svāntrtyānuktaṁ ātmānāṁ svāntrtyād advaṭātmanah \| prabhiḥ tādīśaṃkalpair nīrmaṇā ya vibeśhārayet ||

iti \| (3) bhaktavyā ca lakṣaṇaṁ pājanena param tattvaṁ lakṣayate sarvākriyaśv evamprāpatā-pratyabhijñānām upāyatvā līpyakṣaraśasyeva mātyavārṇavyutpaṭtai ivaṣyāpi ca varṇaṇaṇū-praveṣā iva ... ||

“He should worship [the goddess] with the supreme devotion and he should offer her his own self.

He should worship [the goddess] with the Supreme (paravyā), whose form is the heart. How? (1) By bhakti [in its meaning of ‘reverence’], consisting in an attitude of submission with respect to merging in identity [with the Lord]. (2) By bhakti [in its meaning of ‘division’], i.e. by the self-contrived distinction between worshipper and object of worship. For the object of worship is self-created, but (param), due to the freedom of the Absolute (anuttara), it is nothing but autonomous consciousness and supreme reality, not insentient like a pot. This is the distinctive feature in this system. This has been taught in the revered Stanzas on Recognition of the Lord [ĪP 1.5.16]:

The Lord, out of its independence, which is non-duality, creates, in the forms of Iṣa etc., his own self, [which still remains] not devoid of freedom, and causes it to engage in action (vyavahārayet).

(3) And by bhakti [in its ‘figurative sense’], i.e., metaphorical indication: through the act of worship the supreme reality is alluded to. There is a recognition of such reality in all actions, because [they function as] means, like written characters, [are a means] for learning the letters at the gross level, and these, in turn, for penetrating into the power of the phonemes.”
the case, Abhinava uses the commentary to dissolve any hint of theism and to shift the emphasis from a “devotional” kind of practice to “awareness.” His commentary on verse XVIII.65, for example, illustrates well this shift: 140

Fix your mind on me, be devoted to me, perform sacrifice to me, pay homage to me: [thus] you shall come to me, truly; I promise you, for you are dear to me.

[Commentary:] In the passage beginning with “fix your mind on me” it is established that in the scriptures the most important element is always focusing upon the Brahman (brahmārpana). 141 [Only] for the one who focuses upon Brahman does this scriptures become meaningful.

This stanza from the Bhagavadgītā shows that the text regards maintaining a devotional attitude and performing actions, such as sacrifice and paying homage, as valid means for attaining the Lord, in addition to one’s mental focus on God. Abhinavagupta, on the other hand, chooses contemplation as the principal element, where the focus is not a personified deity, but the non-dual, omnipresent Brahman. By declaring “you will come to me” the Gītā here describes the end result as the attainment of one’s object of devotion. Abhinavagupta, conversely, rephrases the ultimate goal as a shift in awareness, in which one understands, inasmuch as one experiences, the meaning of the text: “[only] for the one who focuses upon Brahman does this scripture become meaningful.” As we will see

140 BhG XVIII.65 and Abhinavagupta’s commentary ad loc. My translation:

manmanā bhava maddhakto madyājī māṃ namaskuru
māṃ evaisyasi satyam te pratijāne priyo ‘si me || 65 ||

manmanā bhava—ityāśrī śāstrē brahmārpana eva sarvathā prādhānyam—iti niścītam ||
brahmārpanaśāstrēḥ śāstrēm idam arthavad ity uktam ||

141 Although the primary meaning of arpanam is “offering,” I think Abhinavagupta here is using this term in its secondary meaning, as “placing upon,” or “setting upon.” Cfr. also Apte, Sanskrit-English dictionary, for the meaning of the causative form arpayati of the verbal root vṛ: to fix upon, direct towards. This meaning is perfectly congruent with Abhinavagupta’s idea of vimarśa in his commentary on the Bhagavadgītā: self-reflecting awareness, in the sense of directing one’s awareness toward oneself as identical with Brahman.
in the remaining part of this chapter, in the author’s view—and in accordance with non-dual Śaiva doctrine—this ultimate awareness is the knowledge of one’s identity with the Lord, with the Absolute, Śiva or Brahman. It is a complete “immersion” in him (samāveśa), where the internal duality between “lower” and “higher” self, between subject and object of worship, is permanently dissolved.

2.1.2 Devotion as Internal Worship and Self-Reflective Awareness (vimarśa)

Abhinavagupta elaborates his concept of devotional worship further by explaining that the seat of Brahman is the I-consciousness, the I (aham), whose nature is self-reflective awareness (vimarśa). Therefore, in his philosophical view, the object of devotion becomes the ahaṁvimarśa, the I-awareness, and the practice of devotional worship becomes a form of meditation on the Self. Abhinava’s commentary on Gītā XIV.27 provides a good example of this:

For I am the foundation of Brahman, the immortal and changeless, the eternal dharma, and absolute bliss.

[Commentary] “Of Brahman”: for it is the I (aham) alone which is the foundation of Brahman. If a person worships the I [consciousness] he becomes Brahman. Otherwise, if a person worships Brahman as having an unconscious form, though

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142 BhG XIV.27 and Abhinavagupta’s commentary ad loc (my translation):

brahmaṇo hi pratiṣṭhāham anmrtyasyāvyayasya ca
śāśvatasya ca dharmasya sukhasyaikāntikasya ca || 27 ||
brahmāna iti | aham eva hi brahmaṇah pratiṣṭhā | mayi sevyamāne brahma bhavati; anyathā
jaḍarūpatayā brahma upātēmāṁ mokṣam api saṣṭhād eva prāpayed iti śivam ||

143 I am understanding mayi, the locative form of aham, as ahaṁvimarśe based on the ĪPVV parallel that I quote in the next paragraph, where Abhinavagupta comments on the same verse of the Bhagavadgītā. When Lord Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavadgītā speaks in the first person, using the pronoun aham (I), and its accusative form mām (me), Abhinavagupta takes the opportunity to gloss it as the “I” in the sense of subjective Self, or self-reflecting awareness (vimarśa), the seat of Brahman, the all-encompassing I-Consciousness. See also Abhinavagupta’s commentary ad BhG VI.49 quoted in the next paragraph (Sanskrit text in fn. 145).
he may attain liberation, [it would be a liberation] indistinct from deep sleep. Blessings (iti śivam).

In this passage the author clarifies that the object of worship, the Kṛṣṇa-Brahman, is nothing but the I-Consciousness. Abhinava comments on the same verse also in his Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivimarśinī (ĪPVV), where he further specifies that the “I” is essentially Self-reflective awareness:144

This verse teaches that the aham, which consists in Self-reflective Awareness (vimarśa), is the resting place of Brahman, who is existence [and] supreme bliss.

In this way the Kashmiri author is able to use the authority of the Gītā to promote certain key concepts of his Trika-Pratyabhijñā philosophy, and to make devotion synonymous with meditation on one’s innermost Self: worshiping Kṛṣṇa for him translates into the practice of ahamvimarśa, or I-awareness.

Abhinavagupta’s commentary on Bhagavadgītā VI.49 provides us with further insights into the meaning he ascribes to devotional worship:145

Of all the yogins,
I consider the most accomplished
the one who reveres me with faith (śraddhāvān bhajate),
with his inner self directed towards Me (madgatena).

Among all yogins, the one who, having entered the I (mām niveśya),146 meaning the inner sense faculty (antahkarane), with single-minded faith and devotion, i.e

144 ĪPVV, Vol II, p. 206. My translation:

anena sadṛṣṭasya brahmaṇaḥ paramānandasya viśrāntishānam aham iti vimarśātmakaṃ darśītam

In his translation of the Gītārthaśaṅgraha S. Sankaranarayanan also noticed this comment made by Abhinavagupta on BhG XIV.27 in his ĪPVV, which he quotes. See Sankaranarayanan 1985, II: 265, fn. 12.

145 Bhagavadgītā VI.49 and Abhinavagupta’s commentary ad loc:

yoginīm api sarveṣāṃ madgatenāntarātmanāḥ
śraddhāvān bhajate yo mām sa me yuktatamaḥ mataḥ
sarva-yogimagadyaḥ ya eva mām antahkaraṇe niveśya bhaktiśraddhāvat-puruṣopapadåyakrameṇa mām eva nāyat bhajate vimrṣate sa yuktatamaḥ prameṣvaram-

146 See fn. 143 on Abhinavagupta’s gloss of the pronoun aham in the Gītārthaśaṅgraha.
following the method of the tradition received by serving the guru’s feet, worships (bhajate), i.e. places his awareness (vimśate) on the I alone—i.e. on nothing else—is the most accomplished, meaning that he is immersed (samāviṣṭa) in the Supreme Lord. Therefore [this text] teaches the superiority of knowledge of one’s identity with the Lord (seśvarasya) over all other [means].

It is significant for this point that in his commentary Abhinavagupta glosses the verbal root bhaj, “worship”—the same root from which the term bhakti derives—with the root vimṛṣ, “reflect” or “meditate,” from which the term vimarśa is formed. In his non-dual doctrinal view, the worshiper transcends the external form of the deity, which is instead equated with “his own liberated identity.”\textsuperscript{147} Because the distinction between subject and object of devotion dissolves, the real act of worship can only take place internally, by turning one’s awareness towards one’s self, the “I,” which is identical with Śiva or Parameśvara, the supreme Lord, and has the nature of Consciousness. In this way, as Sanderson observes in another context, “Abhinavagupta directs the awareness of the worshipper to a point beyond both ritual and devotion.”\textsuperscript{148}

The idea of translating devotional worship into a process of mental offerings and abstract contemplation has precedents in earlier Śaiva sources, in particular the Vijñānabhairavatantra, a Trika text whose doctrine aims at internalizing the rituals of its

\textsuperscript{147} Sanderson 1990: 74.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibidem, 73. Sanderson is discussing the following passage from Abhinavagupta’s Tantrāloka (TĀ XXVI.41-42ab, trans. by Sanderson):

\begin{verbatim}
tatas tat sthaṇḍilam viḍhravyomasphatikanirmalam ||
boḍhātmakam samālokaṁ tatra svam devatāganam || 41 ||
pratibimbatayā paśyed bimbatvena ca bodhataḥ ||
\end{verbatim}

“He should meditate on the cult-platform (sthaṇḍilam), imagining that it is transparent, like a crystal or a pure radiant sky. [Concentrating on these qualities] he should identify it with consciousness. In this [mirror-like] consciousness he should contemplate the images of the deities as reflections and himself as the reflected.’’
One verse, for instance, describes worship not as the traditional offering of flowers, but rather as the process of firming one’s awareness and dissolving one’s individuality in non-conceptual consciousness, the “final void.” In addition to this, we already find in the Vijñānabhairava the idea of samāveśa, “immersion” in the Lord, which, as we will see, becomes central in Abhinavagupta, who uses the term to gloss the word bhakti. This text celebrates immersion in the power of Rudra (rudraśaktisamāveśa) as the highest form of contemplation and the true sacrificial ground, where there are no distinctions among the one who worships, the object of worship and the act of worship.

Abhinavagupta, however, does not dispense with the performance of “external” worship, as long as it is performed along with the practice of non-dual awareness, the persistent thought of the identity between oneself and the deity (tadrūpavikalpābhyaśa). Rituals, actually, have as their purpose precisely this contemplative practice, which

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149 Sanderson 1990: 74. As John Nemec points out, the VBh also influenced Somānanda, the founder of the Pratyabhijñā school and teacher of Utpaladeva. His Śivadṛṣṭī has several references to the VBh, including the verses redefining external worship as a mental practice. See Nemec 2011: 45-47, where he also quotes VBh 147 and 150-151, fn. 27.

150 VBh 147, as translated by Sanderson 1990: 76:

\[
pūjā naṁ na puspādyair yā matih kriyate drdhā n nirvikalpe mahāvyommi sā pūjā hī ādarāl layah \]

\[147 \text{ll:} \]

“Worship (pūjā) likewise is not what is accomplished by [offering] flowers and the rest. It is awareness made firm, dissolution into the final void [within consciousness] which is free from all thoughts, through intense conviction [that this is the goal] (ādarāt).”

151 VBh 150-151. Adapted with minor variations from the translation by Jaydeva Singh (1979a: 138).

\[
yāgo ‘tra parameśānī tuṣṭir ānandakeśanā \]
\[ksapaṁat sarvapāpānāṁ trānāt sarvasya pārvatī \]
\[rudrasaktisamāveśas tat kṣetram bhāvanā parā \]
\[anyathā tasya tatvāśa kā pūjā kaś ca tṛpyati \]

\[151 \text{ll:} \]

“O supreme goddess, sacrifice in this system means contentment characterized by bliss. O Pārvatī, immersion in the power of Rudra is the real sacrificial ground (kṣetra), because it destroys* (kṣapaṁat) all sins and it protects (trānāt) all. This constitutes the highest contemplation. Otherwise in the case of the (non-dual) reality, how can there be any worship and who is it that is to be gratified?”

* Singh translates this sentence as “the absorption into the śakti of Rudras is alone real kṣetra (place of pilgrimage) inasmuch as this absorption destroys …“
eventually leads to the “state of Śiva”: if one continually thinks that one is Śiva, one actually becomes Śiva.¹⁵² According to Abhinavagupta, the repetition of right conceptual thoughts (such as “I am Śiva”) eventually leads to a state of non-conceptual thought, or non-differentiated knowledge.¹⁵³ Most practitioners, however, require ritual action to support this process. In Abhinavagupta’s view, ritual and knowledge do not constitute two separate means for liberation: for him the only path is knowledge, and ritual action is itself a form of knowledge, albeit a lower, less subtle kind of knowing, serving as a means for developing the right kind of awareness.¹⁵⁴ Having his philosophical view in mind, we can then understand why Abhinavagupta would gloss the term “worship” (bhajate) in BhG VI.49 with “placing the awareness on the I” (vimṛṣate); and why he would then interpret the same stanza of the Gītā as teaching that knowledge of one’s identity with the Lord is superior to all other means.

¹⁵² Tantrāloka XV.268cd-270ab, my translation:


māyāpramatā tadrāpayikalpābhāṣaṣṭāvatā || 268 ||
śiva eva tadabhāṣaphalam nyāsādi kṛiti ||
yathā huṣṭakarmāsmy evam bhāvayatas tathā || 269 ||
tathā Śivo ’ham nānyo ’smīty evam bhāvayatas tathā ||

“The knower of māya, by mastering the practice of conceptually thinking that he is identical [with Śiva], actually does become Śiva. The rituals such as installation of mantra (nyāsa) etc. are known as having as their purpose the practice of this [contemplation of this identity]. For, just like in the case of one who thinks ‘I am a sinner’ he becomes that way, in the same manner one who thinks ‘I am Śiva and nothing else’ becomes such [i.e. Śiva].”

See also Sanderson 1995: 46.

¹⁵³ TĀ XV.270cd-271ab.

¹⁵⁴ TĀ I.231-232, my translation:

ante jñāne ‘tra sopāye samastāḥ karmavistarāḥ ||
prapṛṣṭhenaiva rāpena bhāvī so ‘ntarbhaviṣyati || 231 ||
kriyā hi nāma vijñānān nānyad vastu kramāmatām ||
upāyavāśatāḥ prāptaṁ tat kriyeti puroditam || 232 ||

“The whole series of ritual actions which will be exposed [later] in a clear manner are included in this last [kind of] knowledge [i.e. conceptual way of knowing, or vikālpa-pramāṇam] together with its means (i.e. āṭavopāda). For action in fact is not a different thing from knowledge, which, having taken on a sequential nature in order to serve as a means, is called ‘action,’ as it has been said before.”

See also Sanderson 1995: 47.
If we now consider the way Abhinavagupta describes devotion to the guru for initiated disciples, we can see that its function is in some ways similar to the one he ascribes to worship of the deity: the emphasis is not on the “action” of devotional worship, nor on the emotional feeling towards the external form of the guru, but rather on awakening the knowledge of one’s identity with Śiva, as the following passage from the *Tantrāloka* shows:

And the disciple, for his part, seeing the teacher, who has been favored by the grace of gradually [attaining] Śiva-nature of this kind, by perceiving his own identity with him, and through devotion, reaches the state of identity with Śiva.

Devotion here is not about pleasing the guru to obtain his favor in return, nor is it about ritual worship. Rather, devotion is the act of identification with the guru, who has himself attained identity with Śiva, so that the disciple can reach the same state.

According to Abhinavagupta, while the guru bestows initiation and teaches the scriptures, he cannot ultimately grant liberating knowledge to a disciple, an act that is a prerogative of the Lord. The way Abhinava glosses BhG IV.34 is very revealing of his view on this issue. This stanza of the *Gītā* prescribes a traditional model of guru–disciple relation based on the exchange of devotion and knowledge, whereby the student is able to obtain the highest knowledge from the teacher by behaving in a prescribed, reverential manner. Abhinavagupta, however, twists the meaning of every term in order to show that ultimate knowledge is not bestowed by another human being, not even by a guru, in

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155 *Tantrāloka* XVI.198cd-199ab, my translation:

*kramikatathāvidhaśivatānugrahasabhagaṃ ca daiśikam paśyan ||198 || ṣiśur api tadabhedaḥdrśā bhaktibalāc cābhhyapaiti śivabhāvam |
response to devotional worship; rather, it arises within one’s own Consciousness through reinforcement of the right kind of awareness.\footnote{156 Bhagavadgītā IV.34 with Abhinavagupta’s commentary, my translation: 
\begin{quote}
tad viddhi pranipātena paripraśnena sevayā \| 
upadeksyanti te jñānāṁ jñāninas tatvadarsināṁ \||
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
tac ca jñānāṁ, pranipātena bhaktyā, paripraśnena tāhāpohatarkavitarakādibhiḥ, sevayā abhyāsena jānithi | yata evambhātasya tava jñānino nījā eva sanvittiviśeṣanuṛghītā indriyaviśeṣāḥ, tattvam upa satīpe deksyanti prāpayasyanti | tathāhi te tattvam eva darśayantīt tattvadarśinaḥ \| \ldots ane jñānīnāṁ purusāḥ iti vyākhyaṁane, bhagavān svayam upaśtiṣavāṁs tad asatyam iti uktam syat \|}
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
157 As I explain a few lines below, the primary meaning of sevā is “service,” which is the meaning intended in the Gītā verse. Abhinavagupta, however, chooses here a secondary meaning of the term, i.e. practice, exercise (cfr. Apte dictionary, under -4), which then he glosses with abhyāsa, or repeated practice. He does this in order to avoid the dualistic relationship between the one who serves (disciple) and the one who is served (guru).
\end{quote}
\begin{quote}
158 By glossing the term pranipāta (“bowing down,” “reverence”) with bhakti, Abhinavagupta here is not referring to an emotional feeling of love and attachment, but rather to the gradual dissolution of the sense of individuality in the process of merging with consciousness. He is referring here to the first of the three meanings of bhakti he provides in the Parārtāṣikāvivarana, which I discussed in a previous section: bhakti ṭādāmyānāupraveśaprahaṇvatāmanā: “By devotion, consisting in an attitude of submission with respect to merging in identity [with the Lord],” See Parārtāṣikāvivarana, KSTS ed., p. 266\footnote{178-18}, and my translation of the same passage in fn. 139.}

Learn this [knowledge] by reverence (pranipātena), by questioning (paripraśnena), and by service (sevayā) [to the wise men]. The men of knowledge (jñānāṁ) who see the true nature [of reality] will teach you knowledge.

Learn this knowledge by reverence, i.e. devotion (bhaktyā); by inquiry, i.e. positive and negative arguments and logical reasoning (āhāpohatarkavitarkādibhiḥ); by exercise,\footnote{157} i.e. repeated practice (abhyāsena). If you [proceed] in this way, those who have knowledge, i.e. your special sense organs (indriyaviśeṣāḥ), the internal ones, favored by a special kind of knowledge, will show you the close by truth, i.e. will lead you to it. ... If one were to interpret “those who have knowledge” as referring to “men,” it would amount to saying that it is not true that it is the Lord himself who taught.

In his commentary Abhinavagupta reinterprets as internal practices all the terms referring to external actions, normally implying a dualistic relationship: in this way, bowing in reverence (pranipāta) becomes devotion, which as we have seen for our author can refer to the practice of self-reflective awareness, not requiring an external object of devotion;\footnote{158} asking questions (paripraśna) is understood as a process of self-inquiry through logic;
and the term *sevā* is not understood in its more common meaning of service, but as exercise, here glossed with *abhyāsa*, or repeated practice. As I mentioned above, Abhinavagupta use this term to refer to the practice of identifying oneself with the deity. Finally, he interprets the expression “those who have knowledge” (*jñānīḥ*) to refer not to wise men, or spiritual teachers, but rather to the internal organs of perception, which have been transformed and refined in this process.

In this way Abhinavagupta adapts the *Bhagavadgītā* to his doctrinal view, according to which true knowledge cannot be transferred by an entity separate from oneself: it is only the Self who becomes aware of itself, or, in other words, the Lord who reveals his full nature to himself. If an external entity is involved, such as the guru or an icon of the deity, devotion is intended only to support the identification of the initiate with his perfected self. Only in this sense can we speak of devotional worship as a “means” in Abhinavagupta’s doctrine, the ultimate means being knowledge. As Sanderson notes in discussing a passage of the *Tantrāloka* and, more generally, the doctrine concerning the visualization of the deities in the Trika, “the forms of the deities in ritual and devotion are merely provisional, to be abandoned at higher levels of practice.”

### 2.1.3 Devotion as the Goal: Bhakti as “Knowledge” and “Immersion” in the Lord

The practice of focusing one’s awareness on the “I” culminates in complete immersion (*āveśa* or *samāveśa*) in the Lord, which, as Abhinava explains in the TĀ, consists in identification with the Supreme through “immersing” (*nimājjanāt*) one’s own limited,...

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159 The practice is referred to as *tadrāpavikālpābhyāsa*. See TĀ XV.268cd, quoted in fn. 152, and my explanation on p. 70.

160 Sanderson 1990: 74.
individual nature. This is why Abhinavagupta in his commentary on Bhagavadgītā VI.49, quoted earlier in this section, after mentioning the practice of reflective awareness also specifies that the most accomplished yogin is one who is “immersed” (samāviṣṭa) in Parameśvara. This state of identity with the Lord, resulting from merging in Him, is what Abhinavagupta regards as ultimate knowledge. These two terms, āveṣa and jñāna, function practically as synonyms in the writings of the Kashmiri exegete, who at times glosses one with the other, as in the following passage:

Therefore knowledge, consisting in āveṣa, is the most important because it lies at the root of all [the other means].

He refers here to the highest kind of knowledge (param jñānam), the one that he defines as “the shining forth of one’s own nature (svarūpaprathana) as non-different from the single being underlying all things.” That being is the supreme Lord, Śiva or Parameśvara, consisting in all-pervading consciousness.

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161 TĀ I.73cd-74ab, my translation:

āveṣaś cāsvatantrasya svadṛāpanimajjanāt || 173 ||
paratadrūpaṭat śambhor adyāchaktyavibhāginaḥ |

“Immersion [in Śiva] consists in the identification with the Supreme by merging one’s own [individual] nature of dependent beings. [This process occurs] through Śambhu, the primordial [principle], undivided from his powers.”

162 See subsection 2.2.1 (“Samāveṣa: The Role of Grace and Practice”). Sanskrit text in fn. 145.

163 This practice of reflective awareness (vimarśa) is technically part of the śākta-upāya, or “method of divine power” taught by Abhinavagupta in chapter IV of the Tantrāloka. See, for example, TĀ IV.7 (my translation):

ataś ca bhairavīyaṃ yat tejāḥ saṃvītisvabhāvakaṃ |
nāyo bhūyo vimṛṣatām jāyate tat sphuṭatmataḥ || 7 ||

“Therefore the splendor of Lord Śiva, whose nature is consciousness, appears in its manifest nature for those who repeatedly place their awareness on it (vimṛṣatām: lit. ‘when it is repeatedly reflected upon’).”

For a discussion of the “means” (upāya) in Abhinavagupta see subsection 2.2.2 (“Practice’ and ‘Means’ in Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy”), in particular fn. 192.

164 GAS ad XII.12, my translation:

ataḥ sarvamūlātvaḥ āveṣātmaṃ jñānam eva pradhānam.

165 TĀ I. 141, my translation:
Ultimately, Abhinavagupta employs both terms, “knowledge” and “immersion,” to refer to the same idea, final emancipation (mokṣa), so that the three words become synonymous. That liberation consists in the arising of knowledge, and in freedom from the bond of ignorance, is indeed a basic tenet of Abhinavagupta’s philosophical view, one that he states at the beginning of his Tantrāloka.\textsuperscript{166} In some passages the author provides the same definition we just saw for this highest knowledge, paraṃ jñānam, for the term liberation, or mokṣa: “the shining forth of one’s own nature (svarūpaprathana), the nature of the self, which is nothing other than consciousness.”\textsuperscript{167} To “know” one’s self as that being means to have become him, to be immersed in him. That liberation for Abhinavagupta is the same as immersion in Śiva is clear even from the preliminary stanzas of his commentary on the Gītā, where he explains that what is called emancipation is “dissolution in the supreme Lord, who is ever manifest.”\textsuperscript{168} Therefore, in Abhinavagupta’s philosophical view, the notions of liberation, supreme knowledge, and

\begin{verbatim}
viśvabhāvakabhāvātmavartapratihatam hi yat 
anīnāṃ tat param jñānam tadanyad aparāṃ bahu || 141 ||
“Supreme knowledge for individual souls is the shining forth of one’s own nature, which consists of the single being underlying all things. [Knowledge] different from this, of which there are many kinds, is inferior.”
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{166} TĀ I.22, my translation:

\begin{verbatim}
tha tāvat samasteṣu sāstreṣu pariṣṭate 
aṇāṇam saṃśṛte hetur jñānaṃ mokṣaikaṅkaraṇam || 22 ||
“To begin with, in this system all the scriptures proclaim that ignorance is the cause of transmigration, [and] knowledge is the only cause of liberation.”
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{167} TĀ I.156, my translation:

\begin{verbatim}
mokṣo hi nāma naivānyah svarūpaprathanam hi saḥ 
svārūpaṃ cātmānaḥ saṃvīn nānyat tatra tu yāḥ punaḥ || 156 ||
“For, what is called liberation is really nothing other than the shining forth of one’s own nature (svarūpaprathanam); and one’s own nature is nothing other than the consciousness of one’s own self…”
\end{verbatim}

This definition of “liberation” is very similar to the definition of “supreme knowledge” in TĀ I. 141, quoted in fn. 165 above: viśvabhāvakabhāvātma-svarūpaprathanam.

\textsuperscript{168} GAS, Introductory Stanzas, verse 3, my translation:

\begin{verbatim}
mokāśca nāma … bhagavyat adhiṣe nityodite laya, iyān prathitah samāsāt ||
\end{verbatim}
complete immersion in Śiva are essentially equivalent. I will now clarify how for him devotion relates to these ideas.

In non-dual Śaiva doctrine, the state of final emancipation, also referred to as “the state of Śiva” (Śivatā), is one in which any sense of duality has dissolved. It is in this state of oneness with the Lord that, according to Abhinavagupta, one can experience true bhakti. More precisely, wholehearted devotion is that state itself. This is why for Abhinavagupta wholehearted devotion, accompanied by a feeling of supreme bliss, is not a means but rather an expression of the goal itself. There are in fact several instances in which Abhinavagupta characterizes devotion as either āveśa or jñāna. In his commentary on BhG XV.20, for instance, he describes the ultimate attainment as a state of “wholehearted devotion” to the supreme Lord, Parameśvara, and specifies that this devotion consists in the complete “immersion in him.”

Thus, O Blameless One, I have taught you this very secret scripture. By understanding it one gains [true] knowledge and accomplishes all that is to be done.

… The word “iti” indicates the conclusion of [this] scriptural text. For what needed to be revealed has been completely concluded. To explain: the sixteenth chapter only expounds on the disciple Arjuna’s eligibility [to receive this knowledge]. … Thus, while it is the nature of the disciple which is mainly being discussed, other matters as well are incidentally mentioned. Therefore there will be two more chapters. However, the instruction [part] is completed right here. For what needs to be attained is the state of wholehearted devotion (sarvabhāvena… bhajanam) to the supreme Lord, consisting in the immersion [in

\[\text{169 GAS ad BhG XV.20, my translation:}\]
\[
\text{iti guhyatamāṃ śāstram idam uktam mayānaghaḥ} \mid
\text{etat buddhāv buddhīmāṁ syāt kṛtakṛtyaś ca bhārataḥ} \parallel 20 \parallel
\]
\[
\text{… itiśabdena śāstrasya samāptih sācītā, vaktavyasya paripūrṇatayā samāptavāḥ} \mid \text{tathāḥ} \mid \text{śodāśādhvyena śīsyasyājūnasya kevalam yogyatā pratīpādyate} \mid \text{… evaṃ ca śīsyasvacitāpe prādānyena nirūpyamāne, prasaṅgato 'nyad apy uktam} \mid \text{ity adyāyadvyāyaṁ bhavisyati} \mid \text{upadeśas tv ita eva parīsamāptaḥ} \mid \text{sarvabhāvena hi paramesvarabhajanam āveśarūpanā prāpyam} \mid \text{tadartham cānyatāsvam ity uktam prāk} \mid \text{sarvamāheśvarasvarūpāveśa eva hi paramaṁ śivam iti śivam} \parallel \]
him] (āveśarūpa). Everything else is [only] for this purpose—this has been explained earlier. For supreme beatitude (paramānāṁ śivam) is nothing but the complete immersion in the nature of the great Lord (sarvamāheśvaras-vārūpāveśa).

In the quote above Abhinavagupta explains that this state of wholehearted devotion and “supreme beatitude” is the state of complete immersion in the Lord. Everything else that is taught in the Gītā, he argues, is only aimed at this purpose.

We saw earlier that this final emancipation, where intense devotion and bliss arise, is also described as a state of complete knowledge, the knowledge of one’s Self as identical with Śiva: this is why for Abhinavagupta, at this stage of consciousness, the terms bhakti and jñāna mean the same thing. He unambiguously expounds this view in his commentary on BhG VII.16. This is a well-known stanza of the Gītā wherein Lord Kṛṣṇa lists four kinds of devotee: those who are suffering, those who want to acquire knowledge, those who seek particular goals, and those who already have knowledge (jñānī).

In his Gītārthaśaṅgraha Abhinavagupta explains that the last kind of devotee, the man of knowledge, is superior to the other three, who are still trapped in the notion of duality by thoughts such as “I desire this from the Lord.” The man of knowledge, instead,

170 Instead of using the more common term ānanda, Abhinavagupta here uses śiva, which also means “bliss” or “final beatitude” (as well as “auspiciousness,” “prosperity,” or “well-being”). While saying that this complete immersion in the nature of the great Lord (Maheśvara) is “supreme bliss,” he is also saying that it is Paramaśiva, the supreme Lord and highest principle of reality, in which no trace of duality remains.

171 To stress the significance and ultimate nature of this goal, Abhinava also uses his commentatorial skills to portray this stanza, which concludes chapter 15, as the culmination of the whole text, or at least of the “instructional” part. As is well known, however, the Bhagavadgītā is comprised of eighteen chapters. Therefore, there are three more chapters to follow, which deal with more than subsidiary, or “incidentally mentioned” (prasangato uktam) topics.

172 Bhagavadgītā VII.16, my translation:

caturvidhā bhajante mām janāḥ sukṛtināḥ sadā ||
ārto jijāśās arthārthāḥ172 jñānī ca bharaṭarśabha ||16 ||

“Four kinds of good people, O Bull of the Bharatas, always worship me:
those who are suffering, those who desire knowledge,
those who seek [specific] goals, and those who have knowledge.”
is aware of his identity with the Lord, and for him any sense of duality has dissolved. Expounding on the same verse in another of his work, the ĪPVV, Abhinavagupta explains that by being immersed in the Lord, experiencing devotion, this devotee remains in a permanent state of union:

... Therefore there are four kinds of devotees. Among these, the last [kind] is constantly united, i.e. constantly united through immersion (samāveśayogena yuktaḥ), as in the expression

those who, having immersed their mind in me [constantly united, worship me] (BhG 12.2),

and constantly united through devotion (bhaktyā yuktaḥ), unlike the other three [kinds of devotees], whose devotion revolves around obtaining fruits. In this way, the one whose devotion is in a single place, the supreme Lord alone, and not predominantly on the fruit/result, is superior. Having thus defined excellence, he describes the state that brings about all accomplishments as the state of immersion in the supreme Lord.

But the one who has knowledge of the I is nothing but the Self. (BhG VII.18)

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173 Gītārthaśaṅgraha ad BhG VII.16, my translation:

sarve caite udārāḥ | ... jñānyaapekṣāya tu nyūnasattvāḥ | yatas teṣaṁ tāvayi api bheda ‘sti “bhagavata idam aham abhilāsa-yāni” iti bhedasya sputa-pratibhāsāt | jñānt tu mām evābhedatayvalambate iti tato ‘ham abhinna eva | tasya cāham eva priyo, natu phalam |

“All these [four kinds] are noble. ... however, compared to the man of knowledge [the other three] have an inferior nature. For even with regard to them (teṣaṁ tāvayi api) there is a notion of duality, because [when they think] ’I desire this from the Lord’ the notion of duality is clearly manifest. The man of knowledge instead resorts to me alone without there being differentiation [between us]. Hence I am completely identical with him. I alone am dear to him, and not the fruit [of their worship].”

174 ĪPVV I.1, 28-29 ed KSTS, my translation:

... tena bhaktāś caturvidhāḥ | teṣaṁ madhye ‘ntyo nityayukto nityaṁ 
masy āveṣa ya mano ye mām [nityayu knowledgeable] upāsate ] (BhG XII.2)

ītī uktena samāveśyagoyena yuktaḥ, nityaṁ ca bhaktyā yuktaḥ, natu ādyatritayavat phalapratāpavatā āvānabhāvam kathā ekatra parameśvara eva bhakti yasya, natu prādhānya phale, sa viśiṣṭā iti prakṛṣṭatāṁ nirāpya paramesvarāvēśarāpatayā samastasaṃpannimitābhāvam samvādavayati

... jñānt tv ātmaiva me... | (BhG VII.18b)

ītī | mama pratyabhijñātaparamesvarātmamo jñānt ātmā svabhāvah 
parameśvara ity ayaṁ artho bhāvyā uktaḥ, natu jñāṇino ’hamāśite | etad eva sputatayati jñānt
hi bhaktāh iti | jñāṇītavam eva nāma bhaktir iti vai ṣvāt

175 I translated BhG VII.18b following Abhinavagupta’s interpretation. The more natural reading of this quarter stanza would be “But the one who has knowledge is my very self.”
The knower “of the I,” whose [true] nature as the supreme Lord has been recognized, is the Self, i.e. his essential nature, the supreme Lord. This meaning has been expressed with a periphrasis, not [in the straightforward way]: “for the one who has knowledge, the I is the Self.” He shows precisely this: one who has knowledge is called a devotee, to the extent that what we call “devotion” is indeed only the state of possessing knowledge.

This kind of devotion does not involve the request of any fruit from the Lord, and it is therefore exclusively directed toward one locus, the supreme Lord (ekatra parameśvara eva bhaktir). This “non-dualistic” devotion, whereby the subject and the object become one, can occur only in this state of total immersion in the Lord, and presupposes the knowledge of one’s identity with him. It is in this sense that Abhinavagupta at the end of the passage identifies the “man of knowledge” (jñāṇī) with the “devotee” (bhakta), because devotion, or bhakti, is ultimately “the state of possessing knowledge” (jñāṇitvā).

As is clear from the passage just quoted—the interpretation of BhG VII.18 that Abhinavagupta provides in the ĪPVV—the kind of knowledge he is referring to is not “dry” intellectual knowledge, but rather the “recognition” of one’s true nature as the supreme Lord, Parameśvara, hence the direct experience of Śiva as one’s own form. Thus when in BhG XI.41 Arjuna expresses his devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa by emphatically repeating several times the traditional expression namo namas te, or “homage to you,” Abhinavagupta takes the opportunity to interpret the passage according to his non-

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176 Bhagavadgītā XI.41 (39cd-40ab in vulgata ed.), my translation:

\[\text{namo namas te 'stu sahasrakṛtvah pūnaśca bhāyo 'pi namo namas te}
\text{namāh purastād atha prṣṭhatas te namo 'stu te sarvata eva sarvā||}

“Homage, homage to you a thousand times, and again more homage to you! Homage to you in front and behind, homage to you al all sides, O you who are everything!”
dualistic view, in which devotion is not an emotional longing for the Lord expressed through words of praise, but rather the ultimate, direct experience of him:\footnote{\text{177}}

The frequent repetition of the expression “Homage to you!” manifests a very great devotion; through hymns of praise Arjuna proclaims to have directly experienced\footnote{\text{178}} [the Lord’s] own true nature, that very [nature] about which the Lord spoke in the previous chapters.

This passage makes evident that, according to Abhinavagupta, Arjuna expresses his devotion as a \textit{result} of his experience of the Lord’s nature, the ultimate goal, and not as the \textit{means} to it. Only in this state of complete immersion in the Lord does devotion become an intense, blissful experience, often described as an intoxicating power. This is the state Utpaladeva wishes to attain when he prays to Śiva that he may become “drunk with the abundant liquor of devotion”\footnote{\text{179}} and it is also the state Abhinavagupta describes in an autobiographical stanza of the TĀ when he mentions “being seized by a spontaneous (\textit{svayamgrahana}) and intoxicating devotion.”\footnote{\text{180}}

\section*{2.2 Devotion, Practice, and Grace: The Question of Means in Abhinavagupta}

Having considered all of the different meanings that Abhinavagupta associates with the term \textit{bhakti}, a number of questions arise. If the Kashmiri author claims that intense devotion is experienced only as a result of the state of identity with the Lord—complete immersion in him, or \textit{samāveśa}, which in his view is the same as liberation—it would

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{\text{177}} GAS ad BhG XI.41, my translation:
\begin{quote}
\textit{namo nama ity anena paunaḥpuryaṁ bhaktyaratiśayāviśkāram | yad eva bhagavatāt-krāntādhyāyair abhyadhāyī svasvarūpam, tad evārjunāḥ pratyakṣopalambhaviṣayāpannyaṁ stotradvāreṇa prakaṭayati | ... ||}
\end{quote}
\footnote{\text{178}} Lit.: “obtained as an object of perception through direct experience.”
\footnote{\text{179}} Śivastotrāvalī XV.4. \textit{tādṛktabhaktyāsavaraṇadāh}. The full passage is quoted in chapter 1, subsection 1.2.2 (“Utpaladeva: Devotion as the Goal”), in fn. 66.
\footnote{\text{180}} TĀ XXXVII.58: \textit{maheśabhyātyā svayaṁgraḥanadurmanadāy ērhiṭāh}. The full stanza is quoted in chapter 1, subsection 1.2.3 (“Abhinavagupta: Devotion as the Power of the Lord”), in fn. 78.
\end{footnotesize}
seem that he conceives of this as the goal itself, and not as a means to the goal. If this is the case, he would depart from the Bhagavadgītā, which teaches bhaktiyoga as the ultimate path to liberation. In a few passages throughout his work, however, Abhinavagupta also seems to include devotion among the means to liberation. To what extent, then, is devotion just a goal, and in which way, if any, can it also function as a means in his soteriological view? Can we say that Abhinavagupta teaches the path of bhaktiyoga, as some scholars have claimed? Furthermore, when he does refer to bhakti as the goal or ultimate state, does he teach specific means to attain this goal? I will start to address this last question.

2.2.1 Samāveṣa: The Role of Grace and Practice

In the autobiographical stanza from the Tantrāloka quoted at the end of the last section, Abhinavagupta qualifies the intoxicating devotion that seized him as “spontaneous” (svayamgrahaṇa). Should we conclude that this desirable state is something that always occurs entirely by itself, through divine grace, without requiring any kind of practice? Several passages that we examined would seem to suggest the answer is yes. In a previous section, for instance, we examined a passage from the Tantrāloka where Abhinavagupta established the identity between the descent of grace (śaktipāta) and devotion. Furthermore, we know that he adheres to the Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine according to which bhakti is in fact a clear sign of śaktipāta. The issue, however, is more

181 I discuss this question, as well as the claims made by other scholars, in section 2.2.3 (“A Case of Bhaktiyoga? Abhinavagupta in Translation”).
182 See TĀ XIII.116cd-118ab. The passage is quoted above in chapter 1, subsection 1.2.3 “Abhinavagupta: Devotion as the Power of the Lord”); Sanskrit text in fn. 74.
complex, as is often the case with Abhinavagupta’s thought, characterized at times by seemingly irreconcilable statements. Therefore the topic deserves further discussion.

I showed earlier that for Abhinavagupta the experience of intense bhakti is synonymous with “immersion” in Śiva (āvēṣa or samāveṣa), inasmuch as these experiences occur in conjunction with each other. A clearer understanding of the latter also sheds light on devotion and its relation to grace. In his commentary on BhG XII.2, Abhinavagupta defines immersion in the supreme Lord as “a spontaneous state of being identified with him.” The word he uses for “spontaneous” here is akṛtrima, which also means “not created,” “not man-made.” Again, this echoes Abhinava’s autobiographical description of being overtaken by a spontaneous (svayamgrahana) devotion. However, in addition to acknowledging the importance of grace in achieving the state of immersion in the Lord, Abhinavagupta also points out the importance of persistent practice (abhyāśa). The wording of Bhagavadgītā XII.2 provides him the perfect opportunity to make his point:

But if you are not able
to firmly fix your mind (āvēṣayitum) on me,

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183 Gitārthasaṅgraha ad BhG XII.2, my translation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mayy āvēṣya mano ye mām nityayuktā upāsate} & \\
\text{śraddhayā parayopetāḥ te me yuktatamā mātāḥ} & \parallel 2 \parallel \\
\text{māheśvarya visayo yeśāṁ samāveṣah, akṛtrimaś tanmaytbhāvaḥ, te yuktatamā mama matā ity} & \\
\text{anena pratijñā kriyate} & \parallel \\
\end{align*}
\]

I consider the most skilled [in yoga] those who, fixing their mind on me,
serve me constantly intent [on me], filled with supreme faith.

I consider the most skilled [in yoga] those who are immersed in supreme lordship, a spontaneous state of being identified with him. This is the assertion made [by the Lord] in the verse.

184 Bhagavadgītā XII.9 and Abhinavagupta’s commentary on it, my translation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{athāvēṣayitum cītām na śakṣoṣi} & \parallel \text{mayi sthirat} & \\
\text{abhyāsayogena tato mām icchāptum dhanaṃjaya} & \parallel 9 \parallel \\
\text{ītvrataraḥhagavacchaktrapatām ciratarapasādaitāgurucaranānugrahaṁ ca vīna durlabha āvēṣa} & \\
\text{ity abhyāsaḥ} & \parallel \\
\end{align*}
\]

*Here the Kashmiri recension differs from the vulgata one, which reads atha cītām samādhātum na śakṣoṣi.
then seek to attain me by persistent practice (abhyāsa),
Dhanamjayā.

Immersion [in the Lord] (āveśa) is difficult to attain without a very intense
descent of salvific power (śaktipāta) from the Lord and the grace (anugraha) of
the feet of the guru who has been propitiated for a very long time. Therefore [the
Bhagavadgītā prescribes] “persistent practice” (abhyāsa).

To the reader who is not familiar with Abhinavagupta’s doctrinal view, the passage may
raise more questions than it answers. What are then, for Abhinava, the respective roles of
divine grace and individual practice in attaining this ultimate state of immersion in the
Lord, whereby one experiences intense devotion? Can samāveśa be “practiced” and thus
also function as a means? Furthermore, what is the meaning of “practice” for a gnostic
such as Abhinavagupta, who claims the superiority of knowledge over other means?185

With regard to the first question, the answer is to some extent contained in the
adjective “very intense” (tīvratara) qualifying the Lord’s grace or salvific power
(śaktipāta). The stronger this power, the more spontaneous and rapid the process of
identification with the Lord will be (i.e. without requiring practice). In the most extreme
cases, it could occur instantaneously after śaktipāta. It the majority of cases, however, it
is a gradual process occurring through the continuous practice of immersing one’s heart
in Śiva.186 An example of this can be found in Abhinavagupta’s commentary at the end of
chapter XII.187

185 BhG XII.9, just quoted, recommends “persistent practice” (abhyāsaḥ) to those individuals who are not
able to firmly fix their mind (āveṣayitum) on Krṣṇa. It is clear that the Gītā here is offering a more practical
or “action-based” alternative to the mental exercise of āveśa, focusing constantly on the Lord. For the Gītā
these practices may consist of yogic exercise, ritual worship, or performing action without attachment.
Abhinava, on the other hand, does not want to allow for means that are not gnostic, since knowledge is the
only means to the goal, which itself is knowledge of onself as identical with the Lord, the immersion in
him—precisely āveśa.

186 I will come back to this important issue in the last section of this chapter, devoted to the idea of
“gradation” in Abhinavagupta’s soteriology.

187 Bhagavadgītā XII.19 and Abhinavagupta’s commentary ad loc, my translation:
One who regards praise and blame as equal, who observes silence, content with whatever occurs, having no fixed abode, of steady mind, filled with devotion (*bhaktimāṅ*)—that man is dear to Me.

… The person who enjoys pleasure, pain etc. with an [equally] ardent desire as they occur, whose heart is immersed (*samāveśita*) in Parameśvara, easily attains the supreme emancipation (*paramakaivalya*). Blessings.

Abhinavagupta here chooses again the notion of *samāveśa* to gloss the term *bhakti*; in this case, however, he is referring not to the final experience of complete identity with the Lord, but rather to the yogic practice of non-dual awareness. In this sense, then, we may say that Abhinavagupta conceives of *samāveśa* also as a “means” or a “practice”:\footnote{I explain the relation between *samāveśa* and the theory of four “means” (*upāyas*) in fn. 192.} a partial, or progressive immersion in the Lord that will eventually result in the continual experiencing of non-duality, *kaivalya*, final emancipation, or complete and lasting immersion.\footnote{This would be consistent with conceptions of *samādhi* as practice in classical yoga.}

The next section will address the second question: the meaning of “practice” (*abhyāsa*) and the related notion of “means” (*upāya*) in Abhinavagupta’s philosophy. Without understanding these terms it is difficult to solve the apparent contradictions in his statements regarding the issues we are discussing: grace, devotion, knowledge, and liberation.

### 2.2.2 “Practice” and “Means” in Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy

For the most part, in Abhinavagupta’s writings the term “practice,” or *abhyāsa*, refers not to specific ritual actions or religious activities but to the repeated cultivation of...
knowledge—more precisely, of conceptual knowledge, proper to the intellect (buddhi). He explains this unambiguously in the beginning of the Tantrasāra, an abbreviated version (sāra) of the much longer Tantrāloka. After summarizing in one sentence the essence of his soteriological view—that knowledge is the cause of liberation and ignorance is the cause of bondage—he makes a distinction between two kinds of ignorance (and consequently, of knowledge). The first is “intellectual” ignorance, or bauddhaka ajñāna, in the sense of ignorance related to the discriminating mental organ, or buddhi. This is essentially the erroneous conceptual formulation of reality in dualist terms—that is, as multiplicity. The second kind is ignorance “proper to the soul,” or pauruṣa ajñāna, which manifests as contracted consciousness, or the actual experience of reality as multiplicity.190 While the latter can be partially destroyed by initiation, intellectual ignorance needs to be removed by the repeated practice (abhyāsa) of intellectual knowledge, or the gradual purification of conceptual awareness (vikalpaśaṃskāra). This process, ultimately, will also complete the destruction of the ignorance proper to the soul, resulting in the full expansion of consciousness, the experience of reality as non-dual, and therefore the identity between oneself and Śiva.191

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190 Tantrasāra, pp. 2-3; and Sanderson 1995: 44.
191 Tantrasāra, p. 3, my translation:

tatra adhyavasāyātmakam buddhiniṣṭham eva jñānaṃ pradhānām tad eva ca abhyasyamānām
pauruṣam api ajñānaṃ niḥanti vikalpasamvidabhyāsasya avikalpāntatāparyavasānāt ।

“Between these two, intellectual knowledge, whose nature is determination, is the most important; and this alone, when practiced (abhyasyamānām), destroys also the ignorance related to the soul, because the practice of conceptual knowledge (vikalpa-saṃvid-abhyāsa) ends in the final state (antatā) of non-conceptual knowledge.”

See also Tantrāloka IV.2, my translation:

anantarāññikakte ’śmin svabhāve pārāmeśvare ।
pravivikṣur vikalpasya kuryāt saṃskāram aṭṭajasā ॥ 2 ॥

“The one who desires to enter into the essential nature of the Supreme Lord, which was taught in the previous chapter, should properly purify his conceptual awareness [of such a nature].”
This process of purification of conceptual awareness occurs through specific “methods” (upāyas), based either on thought alone or also on external practices. The first paradox is that while Abhinavagupta teaches that this process of gradual refinement of knowledge is accomplished through various means or “methods,” he also asserts that knowledge of supreme reality, the ultimate goal, cannot be attained by any means. I will take as an example a stanza from his Tantrāloka XIII, the chapter on śaktipāta.

See also Sanderson 2007a: 313-314.

192 Abhinavagupta draws from the MVT the idea that “immersion in Śiva” (samāveśa), or liberation, can be attained through three different methods. The process of gradual refinement of knowledge is accomplished through the two “lower” methods. The aṇava upāya, or “method of the limited individual soul,” is the least subtle of all methods, in that it is based on “actions,” such as meditation (dhyāna), the repetition of mantras and the use of phonemes (varṇa), the rising of the vital breaths (uccāra), and rituals (karma) (TĀ I.170, I.231, and TĀ V). The second method for purifying conceptual knowledge is more subtle than the first: it is called the method “of divine power,” or śākta upāya, whereby the divine power of knowledge (jñānaśakti), as opposed to action, is the dominant element. This method does not rely on any of the external practices proper to the lower aṇava upāya, but rather on thought alone. Conceptual thinking (vikalpa) is purified by conceptual thinking itself. With the help of a true guru and the scriptures he teaches, the student’s conceptual thought generates progressively purer forms of conceptual thought, such as, “That which has limited nature, up to Śiva, is made merely of unlimited consciousness (aparichinna-saṃvin-mātra-rūpa), and that alone is the highest truth (paramārthaḥ); . . . and I am nothing other than that” (TS IV, p.21). From this kind of awareness arises what Abhinavagupta calls “correct reasoning in support of truth” (sattarka), an uninterrupted series of proper thoughts (samucita-vikalpa), free from doubts with regard to the nature of supreme reality. (I borrowed the translation of the term sattarka in Abhinavagupta from Sanderson 2005a: 135). This correct reasoning forms the basis of the practice of “meditative realization” (bhāvanā), through which the disciple is able to gradually bring into manifestation his essential nature as identical with Śiva. Although this supreme reality already existed, it is as if non-existent until one can actually perceive it through a refined awareness (TS IV, p. 23, TĀ IV.6-7, and TĀ IV.13-14). The term bhāvanā is at times translated as “meditation” or “creative meditation,” but it must not be confused with dhyāna, a form of concentration belonging to the lower method and performed through the buddhi, or intellect (TĀ V.19-42). This reasoning in support of the highest truth, or sattarka, is not a kind of logical thinking (tarka) but is closer to the notion of insight or intuition. Abhinavagupta in the Tantrasāra specifies that sattarka has the nature of the “light of pure knowledge,” (śuddhavidyāprakāśa) (TĀ IV.2-7 and TS IV pp 21-23). The third method (in ascending order) is called śambhava, or the method “of Śiva,” whereby one is able to immediately achieve the object of knowledge (jñātīti jñeyasamāpattir), without using any conceptual form of thinking (vikalpānupayogita) (TĀ I.171). In other words, one can attain identity with Śiva through non-conceptual awareness alone (avikalpā samvītir), without resorting to meditative realization (bhāvanā) or other means (TĀ I.178cd-179ab). Abhinavagupta also adds a fourth, still higher method that transcends the other three based on the MVT. Called the method “without means;” or anupāya, it is suitable only for the very few recipients of an extremely intense descent of grace. These disciples need to hear the word of the guru only once in order to attain an everlasting state of immersion in Śiva (TĀ II.2 and TS II, p. 8).

193 Tantrāloka XIII.157, my translation:
upāya-yogakramato nirupāyaṁ athākramam |
yad rūpaṁ tat paramaṁ tatvaṁ tatvaṁ suniścitam || 157 ||
That nature\textsuperscript{94}, which is not accessible through any means and [therefore is] non-sequential, [which comes about] as a result of the process of practicing the methods (\textit{upāyas}), is the supreme reality. This point is well established in various scriptures.

For Abhinavagupta, supreme reality transcends the categories of means and ends; these methods, or \textit{upāyas}, cannot lead “directly” to it, as in a cause–effect relation.\textsuperscript{95} It is a self-revealing process in which the last step can occur only through intuitive knowledge (\textit{prātibhajñāna}). The means can only act as a stimulus for this self-revelation to occur.\textsuperscript{96} In Abhinavagupta’s non-dualistic view, only Śiva’s grace, the descent of his divine power upon an individual (\textit{śaktipāta}), can bring about this intuitive knowledge: depending on the intensity of this grace, this intuition may arise spontaneously or with the assistance of means.\textsuperscript{97}

The notion of “means”\textsuperscript{98} in Abhinavagupta presents a second peculiarity, aside from the fact that it cannot be understood literally as “direct cause.” It also cannot be understood as something involving human agency independent of Śiva’s will, or as...
having an influence on his grace. I mentioned earlier how, in Abhinavagupta’s nondualistic doctrinal view, Śiva’s grace is an expression of his will, completely independent from external factors. I provide as an example the following passage from the fourth chapter of *Ṭantrāloka:*³⁹⁹

Since he acts out of His own will, [the Lord] resorts to infinite means [of liberation], at times devotion,²⁰⁰ or ritual, gnosis, teaching of [Śaiva] knowledge and [Śaiva] religious life (*jñānadharma-padaśena*),²⁰¹ mantra, or initiation. And Parameśvara, the Lord of the entire universe, bestows grace on the transmigrating beings in multiple ways such as these.

One might infer on first reading of this passage that Abhinavagupta considers devotion as a means to liberation for a seeker, even if it is one means among many. This whole one and a half stanza, however, is not his original composition, but a passage from an early tantra²⁰² he is explicitly quoting to provide scriptural authority for his view on a point made in a previous stanza: a very high level of teacher, who does not require ritual consecration (*abhiśeka*) to become a Śaiva guru with full authority, may still need external means of consecration, such as “meditative realization” (*bhāvanā*), meditation (*dhyāna*),²⁰³ mantra repetition (*japa*), dream (*svapna*), vow (*vrata*), or oblation (*huti*).”²⁰⁴

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³⁹⁹ *Ṭantrāloka* IV. 55-57ab, my translation:

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tasya svacchāpravṛttavāt kāraṇānantaṁtyate
dadācid bhaktiyogena karmanā vidyayāpi vā
jñānadharma-padaśena mantrair vā dīkṣāyāpi vā
evamādyair anekaiś ca prakārāii paramesvare
dvii jñāna-dharma-padaśena vā bhūtāḥ patiḥ
```

²⁰⁰ I am inclined to take yogena simply as an instrumental marker, translating *bhaktiyogena* as “through yoga,” rather than following Jayaratha’s reading of it as a dvandva compound: *kadācīt bhaktayā kadācid yogena*,”at times through devotion, other times through yoga.”
²⁰¹ I took the compound as *jñānopadeśena dharmopadeśena vā,* though it may also be read as *jñānena dharmopadeśena vā.*
²⁰² According to Jayaratha, the quote is from the *Sarvavīra* tantra. However, this may not be a quote from the *Sarvavīra.* The next verse in the *ṬĀ* is in fact from the *Brahmayāmala* (*evamādyair anekaiś ca . . .*). See Shaman Hatley’s thesis (2007: 212), for the demonstration of this.
²⁰³ For an explanation of the Sanskrit terms *bhāvanā* and *dhyānam* see fn. 192.
²⁰⁴ *Ṭantrāloka* IV. 53, my translation:
Aside from the fact that Abhinavagupta’s purpose here is not to present a list of “means” to liberation, here he does not even include devotion among the means. The commentator on the *Tantrāloka*, Jayaratha, is aware of the possible doubt that this quote from the Tantra might raise for the reader, regarding the erroneous idea that certain external “means” used by individuals might be the cause of liberation, or might influence the kind of grace the Lord bestows on them. This idea would undermine Śiva’s full and only agency, his independent will, in granting grace and, through it, liberation. On the contrary, these means are themselves the expression of divine grace, chosen by the Lord. Jayaratha explains why this scriptural source lists several of them:

Although the [Lord’s] will alone is the cause for bestowing grace etc. [the text] mentions innumerable causes because, since there are different types of recipients of grace, he too resorts to various means [i.e. according to their respective mental disposition]. But in reality there is nothing else he depends upon other than His own will.

Jayaratha then also explains what Abhinava means by saying that the Lord “bestows grace” (*anugṛhṇāti*) on bound souls: “he makes them shine in their true nature, which is

\[
\text{bhāvanāto 'tha vā dhyānāj japāt svapnād vratād dhuteḥ} \\
\text{prāpnoty akalpitodāram abhiṣekam mahāmaith} \parallel 53 \parallel
\]

“Such a high-minded [teacher] obtains the elevated, ‘non-forged’ consecration through [means such as] meditative realization, meditation, mantra repetition, dream, vow, or oblation.”

The subject in question is not the initiated disciple, and not even the ordinary teacher: it is the “spontaneously perfected” (*saṃsiddhika*) or “not made” (*akalpita*) guru, the highest level of Śaiva guru: owing to a very intense descent of divine power, knowledge has arisen in him on its own without ritual initiation or consecration (*abhiṣeka*) by another teacher. In this instance, Abhinavagupta is discussing the “second best” kind of spontaneous guru, the “unformed-formed” (*akalpita-kalpaka*): although not ritually consecrated by another Śaiva ācārya he still needs some external means to obtain the consecration conferring on him the status of guru. For a discussion of the “spontaneously perfected” guru, see chapter 4, subsection 4.2.3 (“Medium-Intense Śāktipāta: Intuitive Knowledge and the Spontaneously Perfected Guru”).

205 Jayaratha ad TĀ IV.53:

\[
\text{svecchāyā evaṅugrahādipravṛttau kāraṇatve 'pi anugṛhyabhedāt tasyā api vaicitṛyāt } \\
\text{kāraṇāntām ānātaman ucyaate, vastutas tu tadatirekyanyat asyāpeksaṇātyam nāsti} \parallel
\]

206 As Jayaratha explains a few lines below: *tadādāsāyāṇusāreṇa.*
full knowledge, by removing the contraction in them.” Grace, and the liberation ensuing from it, is that process of Śiva choosing, out of his supreme will alone, to remove the contraction of the souls so that full knowledge can shine forth in them. There is no other cause on which the Lord depends. As I mentioned before, however, we also know that Śiva is not separate from the bound souls. In the Śaiva non-dualist worldview, grace is ultimately the act of Śiva liberating himself by returning to his state of original purity and fullness. Therefore, even when Abhinava talks about “means”—whether ritual, knowledge, or devotion—we must be aware that grace alone, and the Lord’s will to bestow it, is the only, and ultimate, means to liberation.

2.2.3 A Case of “Bhaktiyoga”? Abhinavagupta in Translation

So far we have seen that for Abhinavagupta bhakti as the feeling of devotion is something that arises as a consequence of divine grace, and in its most intense expression is also the goal; bhakti as a “practice” or “means” to the goal refers instead to the cultivation of knowledge, for Abhinavagupta the only viable “means” for liberation. This is why Abhinavagupta at the end of his commentary on the same passage claims that the Bhagavadgītā teaches the superiority of knowledge of one’s identity with the Lord with respect to all other means. This is also why Abhinavagupta often glosses the term

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207 sankocāpahastanena pūrṇajñānarūpatayā prathayati l.
208 TĀ XIII.286cd-287ab. I quote this passage in chapter 1, subsection 1.2.3 (“Abhinavagupta: Devotion as the Power of the Lord.” For the Sanskrit text see fn. 70).
209 The Gītā, however, does not always award to knowledge the highest place among the various means available to yogins: BhG XII.12, for instance, lists from best to worst: renouncing fruits of actions, meditation, knowledge and practice. My translation:

    śreyo hi jñānam abhyāṣatā jñānād dhyāṇam viśiṣyate l
    dhyānāt karmaphalatīyagas tyāgac chāntir anantarā 12 ll

    “For knowledge is better than practice,
    meditation is better than knowledge,
“devotion,” or *bhakti*, with “knowledge,” as we saw in a previous section. In this aspect, Abhinavagupta’s conceptualization of *bhakti* is quite similar to that of Śaṅkara. In her excellent monograph on the *bhakti* traditions, Krishna Sharma aptly characterizes the Advaita Vedānta philosopher’s view on devotion:

Śaṅkara regards *bhakti* as a means as well as an end itself. The highest form of *bhakti* according to him, is *jñānaniṣṭhā* or the state of abiding in the knowledge of the Self. Thus *bhakti* which acts as a means in the initial stage of spiritual endeavour, finally becomes an end in itself when it culminates in the experience of the Self, for it exists both in the search for the Self as well as in the state of abiding in it. It may be noted that in the highest form of *bhakti*, described by Śaṅkara as *jñānaniṣṭhā*, there is no contradiction between *bhakti* and *jñāna*, and the two are identified with each other.210

Similarly, in Abhinavagupta’s view, devotion (*bhakti*), immersion in Śiva (*āveśa*), and knowledge (*jñāna*) are all synonymous: just as knowledge functions as the means, but is also the goal, *bhakti*, understood as the gnostic practice of *samāveśa*, is the means as well as the goal. If there is no “qualitative” difference between the means and the goal, the

and letting go of the fruits of actions is better than meditation; from [this] renunciation peace follows right after.”

12d. anantarā | anantarām ed. vulgata

Abhinavagupta, however, in order to put knowledge in the first place, skillfully twists the meaning of the sentence “meditation is better than knowledge” (*jñānād dhyānam viśiṣyate*) to “because of knowledge alone meditation becomes excellent”:

*jñānam āveśatma abhyāsāc chreyāḥ abhyāsasya tatphalatvāt | tasmād evāveśād dhyānam bhagavannayaatraṁ viśiṣyate viśeṣatvām yāti, abhimataprātyā | sati dhyane bhagavannayaatve karmaphalānī samnyasitum yujyante | anyathājñātārūpe kva samnyāsaḥ karmaphalātaye ca dtyāntik śāntih | atah sarvamālavrād āveśatmakām jñānam eva pradhānam |

“Knowledge, whose nature is immersion [in the Lord], is better than practice, for practice has this [knowledge] as its result. It is for this immersion [in the Lord] alone that meditation, i.e. the state of identity with the Lord, excels, i.e. becomes excellent, because of the achievement of the desired object. When meditation—this state of identity with the Lord—is realized, it is possible to renounce the fruits of actions. Otherwise, how can there be renunciation for something whose true nature is not known? But when there is renunciation of the fruits of actions, an endless peace arises. Therefore knowledge alone, consisting in immersion [in the Lord], is the most important, because it lies at the root of all [the other means].”

By reinterpreting the stanza of the *Gītā* Abhinavagupta manages to rearrange the hierarchy of means: not only does he assign the first place to knowledge, but he also makes it the indispensable foundation of the other practices.

210 Sharma 1987: 149.
distinctive mark must be found in a more “quantitative” aspect, more precisely in the
notion of “degree”: the degree of knowledge and the degree of devotion, which are
determined, in turn, by the degree of grace. The last section of this chapter, as well as
chapter 4, are devoted to these concepts.

Based on the above discussion on the relative role of bhakti as a means in
Abhinavagupta, we can safely conclude that Abhinavagupta does not advocate a path of
bhaktiyoga in the sense in which this expression is generally understood in the
historiography of Hindu traditions: a path that emphasizes the feeling of love, emotional
attachment, and surrender to the Lord, as opposed to other paths privileging either
knowledge (jñāna-yoga) or ritual and action (karma-yoga). While a text such as the
Bhagavadgītā, philosophically eclectic, manages to include all three, it does not strip the
term bhakti from its emotional connotation: the Vaiṣṇava-type of devotionalism based on
the love and longing for Lord Kṛṣṇa as effective means to attain Him is a recognizable
stream in the text. On the other hand, we saw how for Abhinavagupta, just as for Śaṅkara,
bhakti can be a means only inasmuch as it is synonymous with knowledge, referring to
the gnostic practice of self-identification with the all-inclusive principle, Śiva, Brahman,
or Consciousness.

Abhinavagupta’s stance is particularly clear in his commentary on the
Bhagavadgītā, where he is forced to twist the ostensible meaning of the text when it
presents a doctrinal view different from his own. I have extensively shown throughout
this chapter that by glossing the term “devotion” with words such as self-awareness
(vimarśa), immersion in Śiva (samāveśa), and knowledge (jñāna), he identifies the path
of bhaktiyoga with that of jñānayoga; and he manages to make a highly authoritative and
widely known text in the Hindu traditions claim one of the main tenets of his soteriology: that knowledge is superior to all other means.

Other scholars who have translated the *Gītārthaśaṅgraha*, however, seem to have missed the important shift of emphasis from devotion to knowledge that Abhinavagupta makes in his interpretation of the text. I have particularly in mind here Arvind Sharma, whose translation and interpretation of certain passages of the *Gītārthaśaṅgraha* have erroneously led him to state that “the pen picture which Abhinavagupta draws of the aspirant is that of bhakta par excellence,”211 and that his position can be “referred to as one represented by bhaktiyoga.”212 A good example may be *Gītārthaśaṅgraha ad* BhG XII.2. For the purpose of clarity, I will first provide my own translation of both the *Gītā* stanza and Abhinavagupta’s commentary on it:213

I consider the most skilled [in yoga] those who, fixing their mind on me (*mayy āveśya mano*), serve me constantly intent [on me], filled with supreme faith.

This is the assertion made [by the Lord] in the verse.

Sharma’s translation of the same passage reads:214

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211 Sharma 1983: 32.
212 Sharma 1983: 33.
213 BhG XII.2 and Abhinavagupta’s commentary ad loc:

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mayy āveśya mano ye māṃ nityayuktā upāsate |
śraddhāyā parayopetāḥ te me yuktatamā maṭāḥ || 2 ||
maheśvaryavaiśayo yeśāṃ samāveṣah, akṛtrimas tanmayībhāvah, te yuktatamā mama maṭā ity anena pratiṣṭhā kriyate ||
```

Those who abide in devotion to the great God (Śiva) (māheśvaryaviśayo yeśāṁ samāveśah), and whose existence is naturally pervaded by (love for) him (akṛtrimas tanmayībhāvah)—they in my opinion are yogins par excellence.\(^{215}\)

Sharma here translates samāveśa (immersion in the Lord) with “devotion” probably because Abhinavagupta, as we saw earlier, often glosses the term bhakti in the Gītā with samāveśa. The Kashmiri author, however, never glosses the two terms in the opposite direction, using the term bhakti when the word samāveśa appears in the root text. This is because his purpose is precisely to move away from the idea that bhakti, understood as a feeling of emotional love, is a means to liberation. Abhinavagupta instead presents the Bhagavadgītā as a text that teaches a path of knowledge rather than a path of devotion. In the passage just quoted, he uses the term samāveśa to gloss a similar expression in the Gītā, mayy āveśya mano, which means “[one whose] mind is fixed on me” (on the Lord).

The idea of service to, and faith in, the deity, expressed in the remaining part of the Gītā verse, suggests a theistic type of worship with a devotional tone, whereby the devotee places his mind on Lord Kṛṣṇa as something other than himself. Abhinavagupta, conversely, seeks to avoid any dualistic/theistic implication, as well as an emotional connotation, to the expression “one whose mind is fixed on me.” By glossing it with the expression “immersed in Maheśvara” (māheśvaryaviśayo yeśāṁ samāveśah) and further clarifying its meaning as “a spontaneous state of being identified with Him” (akṛtrimas tanmayībhāvah), he leaves no doubt about his non-dualistic interpretation of the verse.

Furthermore, the practice of self-identification with the Lord, which leads the yogin to the state of Śiva (śivatā), is the essence of the path of knowledge proposed by Abhinavagupta, and the foundation of all other practices. Sharma’s translation, on the

\(^{215}\) Both brackets, (Śiva) and (love for), are in Sharma’s translation.
other hand, does not understand *akṛtrimas tanmayībhāvaḥ* as the gloss of *samāveśa*, but rather as a separate, additional expression meaning “and whose existence is naturally pervaded by (love for) Him.” By this interpretation, and by adding in parentheses the word “love,” completely absent not only in Abhinavagupta’s commentary but in the *Gītā* text itself, he bends the meaning of Abhinavagupta’s passage in the direction of devotion/emotional love rather than knowledge.

An interpretation such as this, as well as others in his translation of the *Gītārthaśaṅgraha*, have led Aravind Sharma to the problematic understanding of Abhinavagupta as a *bhakta*, that is, as someone proposing a path to salvation through devotion. Instead, although the *Gītā* recognizes the validity of multiple paths, depending on the inclination of the yogin, Abhinavagupta regards only knowledge as a valid means. Therefore, while commenting on the stanzas in which the *Gītā* expounds the way of knowledge, Abhinavagupta would never (and does never) shift the emphasis to devotion. Other passages that Sharma uses in support of his argument that “it is the path of devotion that Abhinavagupta sees as leading to salvation”\(^\text{216}\) are those in which Abhinavagupta is describing the state of one who has already attained liberation, and therefore experiences devotion arising naturally, such as the summary verse of chapter 14:\(^\text{217}\)

> Immersed in the feeling of arising devotion (*lasadbhaktirasāveśa*) and free from the erroneous sense of limited individuality, the yogin, although standing in close contact [lit. in friction] with the *guṇas*, remains unaffected, transcending them.

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\(^{216}\) Sharma 1983: 32.

\(^{217}\) *Gītārthaśaṅgraha*, ad XIV, summary verse (my translation):

> lasadbhaktirasāveśaḥ nāhamkārāvibhramaḥ
>  
> sthitopī guṇasammarde guṇāttāḥ samyo yatiḥ
Abhinavagupta here describes the state of the yogin who has achieved his goal: he has transcended the gunas and overcome the notion of reality as differentiated. While previously the practitioner saw himself as a separate, limited self, now he is aware of the unity of reality (Śiva/Consciousness/Brahman) and of his identity with it. This state is samāveśa, or immersion in Śiva, which I discussed earlier, where the yogin experiences supreme devotion as a natural state. Not by coincidence Abhinavagupta chooses the term āveśa here to describe the state of the yogin “immersed in the nectar of devotion.” Furthermore, he characterizes devotion as a feeling that is just “arising” (lasat), because it is the result of this newly expanded consciousness rather than what has brought it about.

In other words, in this summary verse of chapter XIV of the Bhagavadgītā, Abhinavagupta rephrases verse XIV.26 but skillfully avoids the path of bhaktiyoga the text teaches in that passage. The Gītā verse in fact teaches that one transcends the gunas and becomes Brahman through the path of bhaktiyoga, making devotion the means to the end:218

And the one who serves me with an unwavering yoga of devotion, transcending the gunas, is fit to become Brahman.

Sharma, however, does not seem to notice this significant shift away from bhaktiyoga that Abhinavagupta consciously effects. Disregarding the meaning that the term āveśa has in Abhinavagupta’s philosophy, Sharma translates the compounded expression lasadbhaktirasāveśa-hīnāhāṃkāravibhramaḥ as “one who is devoid of the delusion of egoism under the influence of the nectar of scintillating devotion,” thereby making

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218 Bhagavadgītā XIV.26, my translation:

mām ca yo 'vyabhicāreṇa bhaktiyogena sevat
sa guṇān samattiyaitān brahmabhūyāya kalpate || 26 ||
devotion the cause, rather than the consequence, of the newly acquired state of freedom from the sense of individuality of the contracted self. In this way Sharma interprets Abhinava as following the soteriological view of the Gītā verse on which the Kashmiri author is commenting (XIV.26), which teaches the path of devotion as the means to become Brahman (bhaktiyogena ... brahmabhūyāya kalpate). Furthermore, Sharma uses as an example this same passage of the commentary, in the introduction to his translation, in order to support his argument that Abhinavagupta teaches the path of bhaktiyoga.219

Other scholars who have translated this passage of the Gītārthasāṅgraha have also erroneously attributed a causal meaning to the first part of the compound lasadhaktirasāveśa. Boris Marjanovic, for example, translates “a yogin, who has become free from error caused by ahaṁkara (the sense of egoity or limited individuality), as a result of the nectar of blooming devotion,” a rendering that does not account for the technical term āveśa that Abhinavagupta uses.220 Similarly, S. Sankaranarayanan’s translation, which reads “the ascetic, in whom the confusion due to egotism has disappeared because of the frenzy of his taste in the glowing devotion,” also posits a causal relation between devotion and freedom from contracted individuality.221 In addition, Sankaranarayanan’s rendering of āveśa as “frenzy” is closer to the meaning of “possession” (i.e., by the power of the deity) that the term connotes in early Śaiva scriptures, rather than to Abhinavagupta’s idea of immersion in, and identification with, Lord Śiva. To my knowledge, the only scholar who correctly translates the compounded expression lasadhaktirasāveśa-hināhaṁkārabhrāmaḥ is Raniero Gnoli, whose Italian

221 Sankaranarayanan 1985, II: 262.
translation reads something like, “The sage who, immersed in the shining juice of devotion, has shed the mistakes of the I…” This came to me as no surprise, since Gnoli has devoted his academic research primarily to non-dual Kashmiri Śaiva exegesis, and in particular to Abhinavagupta, its main exponent. By avoiding taking the expression as a “syntactic” compound, Gnoli does not make devotion the causal factor for freedom from ego. Although grammatically possible, the other interpretations are completely at odds with Abhinavagupta’s conceptualization of devotion as the goal.

In case the reader is still in doubt, I quote here again a passage of the Kashmiri author’s commentary at the end of the following chapter, just before the summary verse:

For what needs to be attained is the state of wholehearted devotion to the supreme Lord, consisting in the immersion [in him]. Everything else is [only] for this purpose—this has been explained earlier.

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222 Gnoli 1976: 222.
223 Although Gnoli, in his translation, does not place the conjunctive particle “and” to connect the two members of the compound, its meaning is understood. He takes it as a “copulative,” or dvandva, compound, and not as a “syntactic” or tatpurusa compound, like the other three scholars mentioned, who in this case interpret the first member to function as instrumental.
224 Another passage from the commentary that Arvind Sharma uses to argue that Abhinavagupta is a bhakta par excellence is the one immediately preceding the summary verse in chapter XIV: the last part of his commentary on BhG XIV.26, where Abhinavagupta is explaining the meaning of “unwavering devotion.” I already discussed this passage earlier and noted that, while the Gītā describes this kind of one-pointed devotion as a means to attain Brahman, Abhinavagupta describes the outer manifestation of the experience of devotion as having the same signs of an intense form of śaktipāta and explicitly characterizes this devotion as being “the power of the Lord.” See chapter 1, subsection 1.2.3 (“Abhinavagupta: Devotion as the Power of the Lord”). See Sanskrit text in fn. 81. For the reader’s convenience, I am providing again below the English translation of this passage (GAS ad XIV.26):

“However, the person who does not desire any fruit, even when asked ‘Why do you keep practicing this false [observance]?’ , gives an answer by silence alone, with his bodily hair [erect] (romavaṁ), his body shaking, a flow of tears rolling from his wide open eyes, [all this] because of having his mind and heart (antahkarana) dissolved by the piercing (vedha) of uninterrupted devotion to the Lord. It should be understood that this person alone, not anyone else, is purified by unwavering devotion, the supreme power of the Lord, i.e. of Mahēśvara.”

225 GAS ad Bhagavadgītā XV.20:

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sarvabhāvena hi parameśvarabhajanam āveśarāpaṁ prāpyām \ tadartham cānātarsvam ity uktam prāk
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We see from this passage that for Abhinavagupta this feeling of wholehearted devotion is not the means, but rather the end result of all the other practices, which are based in knowledge and made possible through divine grace.

2.3 Degrees of Devotion and Degrees of “Immersion” in Śiva

After clarifying the concepts of practice and means in Abhinavagupta’s soteriology, some of the questions raised at the beginning of this section concerning grace, devotion, and liberation remain unanswered: How can devotion be at the same time the characteristic sign of both śaktipāta and samāveṣa, when the first marks the beginning of the path of the Śaiva adept, while the latter is the end goal? How can knowledge, which we saw is for Abhinavagupta what devotion ultimately consists of, function both as a means and as a goal? And, coming back to Abhinavagupta’s commentary on BhG XII.9,226 why can some people attain samāveṣa, immersion in Śiva characterized by blissful devotion, through divine grace alone, while others need practice, even if we saw that the practices themselves are ultimately Śiva’s instrument of grace?

The answers to these questions all emerge through scrutiny of another idea central to Abhinavagupta’s soteriology: the idea of a gradation (tāratamya), or difference in degree, which applies most fundamentally to the intensity of the grace, or śaktipāta, an individual receives. The degree of grace received determines the quality and strength of one’s knowledge—more or less intuitive and more or less stable—as well as the level of one’s devotion, which is closely related to this knowledge. In the Tantrāloka Abhinavagupta explains how an individual’s initial level of stability or instability of

226 I quoted this passage at the beginning of this section (2.2), “Devotion, Practice, and Grace: The Question of Means in Abhinavagupta.”
intuitive knowledge is determined by the degree of śaktipāta: the stronger the śaktipāta, the more spontaneously and quickly the person’s intuitive knowledge will become stable. Most people, however, will require means, such as study of scriptures, reasoning, or study with a teacher, to strengthen their intuitive knowledge and increase the firmness of their conviction in the non-dual nature of reality. Once one’s knowledge is completely stable and one is firmly concentrated on and identified with the highest reality, one attains liberation (mokṣa) while living, the state of samāveśa, complete immersion in Śiva. We can look at the process leading from śaktipāta—the initial descent of Śiva’s

227 TĀ XIII.247cd-250, and XIII.130cd-143ab. I quote and translate stanzas 135cd-138 in chapter 4, subsection 4.2.3 (“Medium-Intense Śaktipāta: Intuitive knowledge and the Spontaneously Perfected Guru”; Sanskrit text in fn. 590). For the reader’s convenience I quote here śl. 136-137:

tatāpi tāratanyotha āṇantyaṁ dārḍhyakamprate I
yuktiḥ śastraṁ purur vādo ‘bhāyāśa ityādy apekṣyate II 136 II
kampamānaṁ hi viśīnaṁ svaya eva punar vraser I
kasyāpi dārḍhya anayasya yuktiyādhi kevātāraṁ II 137 II

136d. apekṣyate ] em. Harunaga Isaacson (personal communication, April 2005); apekṣate ed. KSTS.

“Nonetheless there is an infinity [of intuitive knowledge] that arises from [its] degree (tāratamoyotham āṇantyaṁ), namely stability or unsteadiness. Reasoning, scripture, teacher, philosophical debate, repeated practice etc. are required.* For an [intuitive] knowledge that is unsteady, can spontaneously become firm for some rare people. For others, [however] [it can become firm] through reasoning etc., alone or not alone.”

See also TĀ XIII.250:

tena prāptavivekotthajñānasampūrṇamāṇasaḥ I
dārḍhyasamvādārdhiyāder yiśyās ur bhavati sphaṭam II 250 II

“Therefore he whose mind is filled with the knowledge arisen from the attainment of discrimination clearly becomes desirous to go to the guru in order to develop a firm conviction (dārḍhya-samvāda-rūdhī).”

228 See, for example, TĀ XIII.180cd-184, where Abhinavagupta quotes a passage from the Nandiśīkhā-tantra:

sarvabhāvavivekātu tu sarvabhāvaparānukhaṁ II 180 II
kṛttātu suviraktatāṁ śivabhāvākabāвитah I
māhāṁyam etat suśrūṇi prātibhasya vidhiyate II 181 II
svacchāyādārśavat paśyed bahūr antargataṁ śivam I

parabhāvanadārḍhyāt tu jīvanmukto nagyadāte I
etat te prātibhe bhede laksanam samudāhṛtaṁ II 184 II

“But once one has achieved this discrimination (lit. from discrimination) of [the nature of] all things, one turns away from all things, completely uninterested in the play of supernatural powers, being focused on Śivahood alone. This indeed, O deity with fine hips, is taught to be the
salvific power—to samāveśa, as the progressive unfolding of knowledge, accompanied by the progressive unfolding of devotion. The different degrees of grace determine only how gradual and how mediated by means is this process of acquiring this supreme knowledge and devotion.

2.3.1 Devotion in its Highest Degree: Liberation/Samāveśa

Only a few, rare individuals receive a very intense kind of grace that enables them to attain samāveśa, or complete immersion in the Lord, without needing further practice (abhyāsa). The key word in the passage from Abhinavagupta’s commentary on BhG XII.9229 is the adjective “very intense” (tīvratara) qualifying śaktipāta, the descent of Śiva’s salvific power. In its highest degree, śaktipāta leads to liberation without means, whereby the recipient does not even require initiation by a teacher or the study of the scriptures. This strong divine power immediately yields a very intense and blissful devotion as well as the highest kind of knowledge, called intuition (pratibhā), which spontaneously brings about a “correct understanding of ultimate reality” (sattarka).230

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229 I am still referring to Abhinavagupta’s commentary on BhG XII.9, which I quoted at the beginning of section 2.2.1, “Samāveśa: The Role of Grace and Practice.” For the reader’s convenience I quote again below this same passage. For the Sanskrit text, please refer to fn. 184.

230 Tantrasāra IV, ed. KSTS p. 23, my translation:
According to Abhinavagupta, devotion, just like grace, manifests in different degrees. Commenting on an important passage of Tantrāloka XIII where Abhinavagupta discusses the signs of śaktipata based on the MVT, Jayaratha explains that devotion is the most important sign and is characteristic of an individual, in this case a guru, whose only goal is liberation (mukti) and not rewards or enjoyments (bhakti). To illustrate this concept he then quotes the following half-stanza:

In fn. 192 I followed Sanderson’s translation of the term sattarka as “correct reasoning in support of truth.” I also specified that Abhinavagupta defines this “reasoning” as an uninterrupted series of correct thoughts (samucita-vikalpa), free from doubts, on the nature of reality. The term vikalpa typically refers to a discursive, or conceptual, kind of thinking. In due process, however, as these thoughts become gradually purer, they bring about a type of knowledge that is non-discursive, or nirvikalpa. Therefore, although tarka commonly means “reasoning” or “logic,” the term in this context rather refers to a way of understanding, or knowing, that is ultimately non-discursive and that penetrates the ultimate, non-dual nature of reality. In Tantrāloka IV.13 Abhinavagupta describes sattarka as that which cuts at its roots the tree of duality. A few stanzas below, in IV.34, he defines the same term as “pure knowledge” and “the will of the supreme Lord.” As for the term “goddesses,” here it refers to the internal sense faculties: in TĀ IV.43ab, while discussing the same idea of sattarka arising spontaneously in some rare individuals, Abhinavagupta writes that “he is one initiated by the goddesses of his own consciousness” (svasāmvitti-devvibhir dadsyata ca sa). Jayaratha in his commentary on the same stanza further explains that these goddesses are the sense faculties causing a person to perceive his identity with Śiva, the Knower (yāh samvittaya indriyavrttayaḥ tā eva ... pramātraikātyayam abhidvatayantyo devyah). See also TĀ XIII.140-142ab, which I quote and discuss also in chapter 4, section 4.2.5 (“The Question of Qualification of the Non-Initiated Officiant”).
Liberation is just devotion taken to the highest degree.\textsuperscript{231}

This, after all, is perfectly coherent with the view that bhakti is a consequence, and a manifestation of, śaktipāta. The individual under discussion in the TĀ passage on which Jayaratha is commenting is a guru who has received an intense type of śaktipāta,\textsuperscript{232} hence is fully liberated and manifests supreme devotion as a sign. I have shown in a previous section\textsuperscript{233} how for Abhinavagupta this intense, blissful devotion can occur only in the state of total immersion in the Lord and that the Kashmiri author himself glosses devotion with samāvesa. This is devotion in its highest degree, which, as Jayaratha observes, is the goal itself, liberation.

2.3.2 Devotion in its Initial Stage: The Desire for Samāvesa

Progressively less intense kinds of śaktipāta eventually also lead to liberation, which for Abhinava is the firm knowledge of one’s identity with Śiva accompanied by the highest degree of devotion. The process, however, takes place gradually, over a longer or shorter period, and, in most cases, after formal initiation by a Śaiva guru, followed by scriptural study and spiritual practice. In these cases of less intense kinds of śaktipāta, devotion does not manifest initially in its highest degree, as the blissful experience of immersion in Lord Śiva; rather, it is expressed as a desire for this experience and the consequent act of seeking a Śaiva guru. This is equivalent to saying that knowledge of ultimate reality does not arise immediately; what arises instead is the desire for knowledge. In non-dual Śaivism, however, even this lower degree of devotion, manifesting in the act of seeking a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Jayaratha ad TĀ XIII.214-216, p. 137:

\begin{verse}
\textit{bhaktir eva parām kāṣṭhām prāptā mokṣo ‘bhidhyate}
\end{verse}
\end{enumerate}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Specifically, a “Medium-Intense” (madhyatīrtha) śaktipāta. See TĀ XIII.214-216.
\item See subsection 2.1.3 (“Devotion as the Goal: Bhakti as ‘Knowledge’ and ‘Immersion’ in the Lord”).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
guru, is not based on individual will, but rather on Śiva’s will and on his power of grace reaching the individual through saktipāta. Even the mere desire for immersion in Śiva, or samāveṣa, can only arise in an individual as the product of the descent of Śiva’s salvific power.\footnote{On this point, see the introduction to the Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya by Kṣemarāja, one of Abhinavagupta’s disciples. Translation by Sanderson 2007a: 401, fn. 567:}

I will return to these concepts in chapter 4, which addresses the different degrees of saktipāta in more detail. My purpose here is to show in general terms the relations among degrees of grace, degrees of devotion, and degrees of stability of a person’s knowledge. When Abhinavagupta says that saktipāta is devotion, or at least that the latter is the characteristic sign of the former, his statement remains valid regardless of the degree: a very intense saktipāta immediately leads to the highest degree of devotion, the blissful state that accompanies the awareness of one’s identity with Śiva, complete samāveṣa; less intense kinds of saktipāta lead to a lower kind of devotion, manifesting in the desire for Śiva knowledge and in the request of initiation from a Śaiva teacher.\footnote{I already discussed how the Tantric Śaiva tradition considers such a request to a guru a sufficient manifestation of devotion, and thus an adequate sign of saktipāta, the prerequisite for initiation.} This understanding provides a coherence to Abhinavagupta’s scattered remarks on bhakti that is not otherwise readily apparent.
2.3.3 Devotion in Progress: From Faith to Conviction

In Abhinavagupta’s doctrinal view, a person’s degree of devotion increases in tandem with the degree of knowledge, that is, with the level of firmness of his or her conviction (niścaya) that the whole reality is Śiva. This is because for this person devotion is a direct consequence of that knowledge and conviction, rather than a means to it. In a previous section I noted how the Kashmiri author treats the terms “devotion” and “knowledge” as synonymous. For Abhinavagupta this implies that a progressive increase in bhakti can only be the consequence of a progressive increase in one’s conviction of identity with Parameśvara, the supreme Lord. Abhinavagupta states in his commentary on BhG XIII.11, “Through this conviction [i.e., that nothing exists other than the great Lord] devotion to me arises.”236

Another term that Abhinavagupta equates with devotion is faith, or śraddhā. For him, however, “faith” is not the wholehearted belief in an unknown divinity based on surrender and devotional feeling, but rather the willingness to follow the Śaiva path. Even when the Gītā refers to “faith” in the Lord as the ideal attitude for devotional worship, and understands faith as a means, Abhinavagupta glosses the term as “following the

236 In BhG XIII.11ab (or XIII.10ab I the vulgata edition), Lord Krishna lists among the qualities of the wise person (the “knower of the field”) a firm devotion: mayī cānanyayogena bhaktir avyabhicārint, “unwavering devotion to me with single-minded yoga.” While the text here emphasizes bhaktiyoga, the path that recognizes devotion as the principal means to liberation, Abhinavagupta manages again to twist its meaning and to assign the primary role to knowledge, devotion being just its natural consequence:

ananyayogeneti “paramātmama maheśvarād anyad api kārṇaḥ asīt” ity ananyarūpo yo niścayah sa eva yogah; tena niścayena mayī bhaktih

“The expression ‘with single-minded yoga’ refers to that very yoga which is the single-minded conviction that ‘there is nothing which exists other than the great Lord, the supreme Self’; ‘devotion to me’ [arises] through this conviction.”
traditional method” taught by the guru. In fact, the Kashmiri exegete considers the desire to listen to the scriptural teachings as itself an expression of this faith; and he further specifies that this faith is nothing but devotion, as he explains in his commentary on BhG XVIII.67:

This [scriptural knowledge] should never be revealed to one who does not perform austerities, who does not have devotion, who has no desire to listen, one who scorns me.

If this knowledge is kept secret, it grants perfection, because it is not within the reach of all people. To begin with, when the knot of sin is dissolved through austerities, [one’s] virtues become ready to bear fruits. Therefore, austerity [comes] first, [and] from austerity faith is born; in this context, devotion is precisely this faith. Even when [this] faith is born, sometimes it does not develop, because it appears for a moment [and then] it vanishes, like lightning. Then, when the faith has grown, the desire to listen [to the scriptures] arises.

In Abhinavagupta’s doctrinal view of the path to liberation as a path of unfolding knowledge, “faith” precedes “conviction.” As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, according to the Tantric Śaiva tradition (in both the Śaiva Siddhānta and the non-dualistic

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237 Bhagavadgītā VI.49 and Abhinavagupta’s commentary ad loc (for Sanskrit text, see fn. 145 where the same passage is quoted):

Of all the yogins,
I consider the most accomplished
the one who reveres me with faith,
with his inner self directed towards Me.

Among all yogins, the one who, having entered the I, meaning his inner sense faculty, with single-minded faith and devotion, i.e following the method of the tradition received by serving the guru’s feet [emphasis mine], worships, i.e. places his awareness on the I alone—i.e. on nothing else—is the most accomplished, meaning that he is immersed in the Supreme Lord. Therefore [this text] teaches the superiority of knowledge of one’s identity with the Lord over all other [means].

238 Bhagavadgītā XVIII.67 and Abhinava’s commentary ad loc:

idam te nātapakūyā nābhaktūyā kadācana 
na cāsūśrūṣave vācyam na ca mān yo ‘bhyasāyati || 67 ||

asya jñānasya gopāmāṇāvatam śiddhiḍam sarvajñadviṣayatvat || tapasā tāvat pāpapragnathau
viśīrtre kuśalaparipakṣaṇa>bhavat i iti pūrvaḥ tapah, tapasaḥ śraddhā jāyate, saivātra bhaktih || śraddhāpy upajātā kadācin na prarohati, saūdāmiṃñva kaṣānādṣaṭānapratvāt || tatas tatprarohe śrotum icious bhavati ||
doctrines), this initial devotion/faith, manifesting as the desire for knowledge and the request for Śaiva initiation, is the consequence of Śiva’s grace in the form of śaktipāta. It is hence likely that, in Abhinavagupta’s view, the descent of Śiva’s salvific power is what causes devotion or faith to grow beyond the stage of momentary experience, like a bolt of lightning, and to express itself in the desire for scriptural knowledge.239

In Abhinavagupta’s doctrinal view, the only śaktipāta that grants liberation is the one bestowed by Śiva;240 and the scriptural knowledge that the author has in mind is that of the Śaiva tradition, even though in this particular passage he states this only in a veiled manner.241 In the second part of his commentary on BhG XVIII.67, the Kashmiri exegete does remind the audience to carefully choose the appropriate system of knowledge, because the study of certain traditions would amount to disrespecting the Lord. He provides as examples the Sāṅkhya tradition, which is atheistic and thus does not even admit the existence of the Lord; and the Mīmāṃsā, which is theistic but focuses primarily on achieving the fruits of its rituals rather than on the Lord himself. Abhinavagupta concludes that this attitude amounts to degrading the Lord, who is reduced to the role of an auxiliary instrument in attaining the desired results.242 While in this passage the author

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239 In this passage Abhinavagupta is explaining his view within the limits of the context provided by the Bhagavadgītā, which he is commenting upon. Although the text itself does not indicate devotion as the fruit of austerity, Abhinavagupta establishes a “causal” relation between the two. I mentioned earlier, however, how in his non-dualistic philosophy, Śiva’s grace is completely independent and the only cause for both devotion and liberation. For Abhinavagupta even the practices, including austerity, are an instrument of Śiva’s grace.

240 See for example TĀ XIII.268-70ab, where Abhinavagupta explains that other gods such as Viśṇu are lower forms of Śiva, located inside of māyā; and that the śaktipāta bestowed by these gods does not lead to liberation, the state of identity with Śiva. I will discuss this issue in more depth in the last chapter of the dissertation.

241 I will come back to these issues in more detail in chapter 4, drawing from passages from Tantrāloka XIII.

242 The second part of Abhinavagupta’s commentary on BhG XVIII.67 reads (my translation):

    iyad api ca kasyacid anīśvare vastuni śuṣkasāṁkhyaśādijñāne bhavati । sevāre ‘pi vā kasyacit phalārhitayā phalam eva pradhānākṛtya bhagavantaṁ ca svātmānāṁ tadupakaraṇapārtr-
does not include the Vaiṣṇava tradition among the ones disrespecting the Lord, in the
Tantrāloka he states that the śaktipāta of Viṣṇu cannot grant liberation. If the desire to
study the Śaiva scripture is an expression of the faith or devotion that arises from Śiva’s
śaktipāta, it is the study of Śaiva scripture that, in turn, strengthens this initial faith and
turns it into conviction. I showed earlier how for Abhinavagupta this firmer conviction
that nothing exists outside of Śiva is also the precondition for a stronger devotion,243 and
how, when this conviction becomes absolutely firm and permanent, it leads to the
experience of samāveśa, complete immersion in, and identity with, the Lord,
accompanied by the highest degree of devotion.

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karaṇena nyakkṛtya bhavet । yad uktam “puruṣaś ca karmārhatvāt,” “karmāṇy api
phalārhatvāt” iti evam ubhayathāpi bhagavaty astyaivānādara ity arthaḥ ।

“For some, however, even this [desire to listen to the teachings] arises with regard to an atheistic
system, whose doctrine is dry, like the Sāṅkhya; or for another person, although it arises with
regard to a theistic system, since he desires the fruits [of his actions], he accords more
importance to the fruits alone and degrades the Lord, i.e. his own Self, by making him the
instrument to achieve these [fruits] [lit. by making him the vessel in service of that]. This has
been said [in Jaimini’s Mīmāṃsāsūtra]: ‘the agent too [is an auxiliary element] because he is
intended to perform rituals’ and ‘actions are also [auxiliary elements] because they are intended
to produce the results’ [MSū III.1.6 and III.1.4]. Thus the meaning [of the Gītā verse] is that in
both ways there is just scorn, i.e. disrespect, towards the Lord.”

243 See his commentary on BhG XIII.11ab. quoted in fn. 236 above.
CHAPTER 3

Causes of Grace according to the Śaiva Siddhānta and Abhinavagupta

3.1 Introduction

Why are some individuals touched by the descent of Śiva’s salvific power while others are not? Do certain criteria make one eligible to receive it? What factors account for its timing? The exegetes within the Śaiva Tantra fold are not unanimous in answering these questions. Like the theologians and philosophers of other religious traditions, they have expressed different views on divine grace. In Western Christianity, the doctrinal debate on salvation has centered on the relationship of human free will to divine predestination, or the soteriological efficacy of “good works” versus the power of grace. Toward the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth, with the Christian thinkers Augustine and Pelagius these issues became the subject of a controversy that continued for centuries.244

While Tantric Śaiva scriptures and exegetes also made an attempt to define the scope of divine agency and the role of individual actions, these two traditions, Christianity and Śaivism, frame these questions about grace in fundamentally different ways. In Christianity, the debate centers on divine free will, or predestination, relative to

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244 Duffy 2007: 67, 84-88.
the human ability to choose good over evil. In Śaivism, on the other hand, the main concern is not ethics and human freedom, but rather the scope of divine autonomy. The question that stirs the debate about grace is whether Śiva bestows his favor based on his will alone or whether his bestowal depends on particular factors.

The surviving literature of the Śaiva Siddhānta teaches that the Lord bestows his salvific power on an individual soul according to specific conditions occurring for that soul. These factors, in turn, which vary according to the particular view, do not necessarily entail an intentional human agency, such as the performance of “good works.” Karman, the Sanskrit term that denotes action as well as the consequence of an action, may be an obstacle to both grace and liberation even if it is “good.” Abhinavagupta’s non-dualism, on the other hand, leads him to declare that Śiva, in his absolute autonomy and omnipotence, cannot depend on any cause external to himself, because nothing ultimately exists outside of the supreme Lord, conceived as having the nature of all-encompassing Consciousness. While for the Saiddhāntikas this seemingly random way of bestowing grace incurs in the problem of God’s partiality, Abhinavagupta accuses his opponents of positing a Lord who lacks omnipotence. Thus, in both branches of Tantric Śaivism, virtuous conduct and merit-acquiring practices do not play a role in drawing grace—at least up until the time of śaktipāta and initiation, which are what concern us here.

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245 We know from indirect quotations, however, that some Saiddhāntika exegetes held that Śiva, like Abhinavagupta, bestows śaktipāta out of his own will. I discuss this in more detail later in this chapter, in section 3.2.3 (“From Scriptures to Exegesis: A Shift in Doctrine or Coexisting Views?”).

246 As I explain later in the chapter, in Śaiva doctrine Karma (karman) is one of the three fetters that bind the soul, together with Impurity (mala) and Primal Matter (māyā).
In addition to gaining an understanding of the role of karman (individual actions and their consequences) in the soteriology of both branches of Tantric Śaivism, this part of my investigation looks for possible sectarian concerns behind the doctrines expounded by the most prominent exegetes of these two traditions, Rāmakanṭha, and Abhinavagupta respectively. The chapter first examines the theory of śaktipāta in the Śaiva Siddhānta, as elaborated in the early sources of the tradition as well as in exegetical works of some of its main exponents: Sadyojyotis, Nārāyaṇakanṭha and Rāmakanṭha. This overview is essential not only to place Abhinavagupta’s doctrine in historical context, but also to understand the arguments he propounds against his dualist counterparts. To this animated critique is devoted the rest of the chapter, which concludes with an exposition of the author of the Tantrāloka’s own view.

3.2 The Views on Grace in the Śaiva Siddhānta Tradition

3.2.1 Grace and Bondage in the Doctrine of the Śaiva Siddhānta

An understanding of certain principles of the Śaiva Siddhānta, mainly its ontology and soteriology, is essential to comprehend this tradition’s ideas about how grace operates—as a divine function (anugraha) active universally and at all times, and, in its individual and momentary manifestation as śaktipāta.247 By “Śaiva Siddhānta” I refer to the “classical” pan-Indian school rather than the better-known, living South Indian tradition.248

247 For an overview of the doctrine of the Śaiva Siddhānta, which is beyond the scope of this work, see Goodall 1996: xxxi-xxxviii; Goodall 1998: ix-xxxvi; Brunner 1977: i-lii; Sanderson 1992; Filliozat 2001; and Goodall 2006.

248 As Goodall explains, “the Śaiva Siddhānta is a label that is commonly applied both to a pan-Indian dualist Śaiva school, whose scriptures and exegetical treatises are exclusively in Sanskrit, and to a later South Indian school, much of whose authoritative literature is in Tamil. The South Indian school developed
Śaiva Saiddhāntika doctrine, as systematized by the exegetes of this tradition, is dualistic, in that it posits ontological distinctions among its main entities: God, souls, and Primal Matter (māyā). Thus there is dualism between “Spirit,” which is conscious, and “Matter,” which is unconscious—much like in the Sāṅkhya philosophical school. The dualism, however, is also posited within Spirit, in the sense that Lord Śiva is separated from souls, and souls are distinct from one another. Śiva, who is eternal, omniscient, and omnipotent, does not create souls, which are also eternal. While Primal Matter is the material cause (upadānakāraṇa) of the universe, Śiva is its efficient cause (nimittakāraṇa). With his power, acting through his vice-regent Lord Ananta, Śiva stimulates insentient matter to transform itself into the various constitutive principles (tattvas) that make up all physical and mental reality—namely worlds, bodies and the internal faculties of individuals.

from the pan-Indian one and differs from it in that it compromised the tenets of early scriptures of the Śaiva Siddhānta by succumbing increasingly to conformity with Vedism (in particular to the influence of the orthodox school of Advaita Vedānta), and by laying increasing stress on the importance of devotion to God” (1996: xxxii).

249 As Alexis Sanderson (1992) has demonstrated, while most of the Siddāntatantras—the scriptural sources of the tradition regarded as revealed by Lord Śiva—are dualistic, there are some exceptions.

250 Kirāṇa 1.15. I am following the numbering of stanzas of the Kirāṇa in Goodall’s critical edition of Kirāṇavṛtti (1998), which at times varies slightly from his 1996 translation of the root text.


252 Sanderson 1992: 283; Goodall 1996: xxiv-xxxv. See also Kirāṇa IV.13cd-14, and 17:

\[
\begin{align*}
yathā bheṣajasāmartyāyād aṣaṅktānāṃ balaṃ param & \parallel 13 \parallel 
yāti tacchaktisāmartyāyād anantasya pare balam & \parallel 14 \parallel 
tenā sāmartyayogena yonîm prerayate kṣanāt & \parallel 17 \parallel 
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
yatetanatvāt preryāt sa puruṣārthena hetuna & \parallel 14 \parallel 
svato na viṅkṣitis tasmād ananto 'syāh pracodakah & \parallel 17 \parallel 
\end{align*}
\]

“Just as great strength [can be attained] by weak people through the power of medicine, so too Ananta has great strength through the might of Śiva’s power (tacchakti-), and, because he has this might, he immediately stimulates the matrix [of primal matter to generate from herself all that is material] (13cd-14) … She is insentient and that is why she needs to be stimulated [to transform herself] for the sake of the good of souls. Of herself she does not transform and therefore there must be an Ananta who impels her to act” (17). (Sanskrit text and numbering of stanzas in Goodall 1998; translation in Goodall 1996: 355).
Souls are beginninglessly bound by an innate Impurity (*mala*), which acts like a covering, limiting a person’s faculties of knowledge and action.\(^{253}\) The non-dualists regard the soul’s primary Impurity (*āṇavamala*) as a state of ignorance—the root of one’s self-perception as individual self. The Śaiva Siddhānta, on the other hand, holds this *mala* to be a real entity with specific physical characteristics: it is large and dense and is a single entity for all beings. This *mala* is also beginningless and without a cause.\(^{254}\) Impurity is what causes for the soul the state of being an experiencer (*bhoktṛtva*). However, to have experience a soul needs a body, which is the product of the second bond, Primal Matter (*māyā*).\(^{255}\) As the *Kiraṇatantra* states, “the soul is bound for the sake of liberation,” because unless it has a body it cannot experience—and therefore consume—its accumulated *karman*, which is the third bond.\(^{256}\) For this purpose, and out of his grace, Śiva creates bodies and worlds, which thus function as means for both bondage and liberation.\(^{257}\) By means of these bonds Śiva, omnipotent and acting out of his free will,

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\(^{253}\) *Kираna* II.3-5.

\(^{254}\) *Mrgendra* VII.8-10:

\begin{verbatim}
tad ekaṁ sarvabhātānāṁ anādi nibidāṁ mahat |
pratyātmasthasvakālāntāpāyīṣaktisamāhavat \| 8 \|
tadanādīṣṭham arvāg vā taddhetus tad ato ‘nyatha |
rūṇaddhi muktān evam cen mokṣe yatnas tato mṛṣā \| 9 \|
tad ekaṁ bahusāmkhyam tu tādṛg utpattimad yataḥ |
kintu tacchaktayo ‘nekā yugapan muktyadarśanāt \| 10 \|
\end{verbatim}

“It is one for all beings, beginningless, dense, big. It has a multitude of powers which are [specific] for each soul, and which cease [to be active] when their time is over. It exists [in the souls] without beginning. Or, [if it existed] from a certain point onward (*arvāk*) [one would have to indicate] a cause for it. Then, if existing in this other way [i.e. depending on a cause] it would thus [also] block the liberated souls, then the effort towards liberation would be in vain. This Impurity is one, even if it has multiple [nature], because if it were such [multiple], it would have a beginning. However its powers are multiple, because we do not see liberation at the same time [for all souls].” (My translation.)

\(^{255}\) *Kiraṇa* III.4cd-5.

\(^{256}\) Therefore the three bonds are Impurity (*mala*), Primal Matter (*māyā*) and Karma (*karman*).

\(^{257}\) *Kiraṇa* II.7-8:

\begin{verbatim}
muktyartham sa paśur baddho nānyathā sāsya jāyate |
yāvac charārasamsleṣo na sañjāto na bhogabhuk \| 7 \|
\end{verbatim}
bestows grace on everything (sarvānugrāhaka). Therefore, Śiva’s power (śakti), too, which keeps the soul connected to these three bonds, has this double nature of being both binding and liberating.

The Mṛgendratantra lists the Lord’s power (iśabala) as a fourth bond, in addition to the other three. This same text later explains that Śiva’s power of bondage is also part of his power of grace: both are aspects of the same benevolent force working for the ultimate benefit of the soul and its final liberation. This occurs because Śiva’s power of

\[
māyeyam tadvapus tasya tadbhāvān na nirvṛtih |
\begin{align*}
& tēna tendāsvatantaravān malino malintkṛtaḥ ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā |
\end{align*}
\]

“The soul is bound for the sake of liberation; this [liberation] does not come about for him otherwise. Until he is linked to a body he cannot experience [the fruits of his past actions]. His body is derived from primal matter; if he has no body (tasya tadbhāvāt) then he cannot be liberated. Therefore (tēna), [though already] dirty through his impotence, he is made [yet more] dirty by [being bound by] that [body] (tēna).” (Trans. in Goodall 1996: 346.)

\[
\begin{align*}
evam etad anantena sṛṣṭaṃ dehanibandhanam ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā |
& na dehena vinā mukti na bhogaś citkriyā gurūḥ ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā |
etac ca kurute śambhūḥ svatantaravāt prabhutvataḥ ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā |
sarvānugrāhakāḥ sāntas tadvasād akhilam phalam ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā |
\end{align*}
\]

“Thus Ananta created this means of bondage to a [gross] body (dehanibandhanam). Without a [gross] body there can be no liberation, [because there can be no] consumption [of the fruits of past actions], [no powers of] knowledge and action, and no teacher (gurūḥ). This Śiva also (ca) does, because He acts entirely as He wishes, since He is omnipotent. He is at peace, [and] bestows grace on all. Through His power [the suppliant may attain] all desires.”

(Sanskrit text and numbering of stanzas in Goodall 1998; trans. in Goodall 1996: 357.)

258 Kīraṇa IV. 28cd-29ef:

259 Sanderson 1992: 285. Mṛgendra II.7 says:

prāvyṛtśābale karma māyākāryaṃ caturvidham ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā |
pāsajālam samāśena dharmā nāmnaiva kīrtitaḥ ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā ṇā |

“The four bonds are the covering [i.e. Impurity], the power of the Lord, karman, and the products of Primal Matter. Through these names alone their properties are mentioned.” (My translation).

260 This āgama is an upabedhā, i.e. one of the pre–twelfth century Siddhāntatantras that are not included in the original canon of 28 “principal” Saiddhāntika scriptures, and which present themselves as redactions of those (Goodall 2004: xxv). According to the relative chronology of the early Saiddhāntika scriptures established by Goodall (1998: xlvi–lxvi), the Mṛgendra is later than Śvāyambhūvasūtrasaṅgara. The Śvāyambhūvasūtrasaṅgara is mentioned in the Rauravasūtrasaṅgara II.14ab (p. lxviii) and therefore pre-dates it. According to Goodall, based on the list of tattvas, the Rauravasūtrasaṅgara, in turn, is earlier than the Mātāṅga (lxiii).
bondage gradually neutralizes the power that the Impurity has over a soul. This Tantra says:

Among these [powers] there is [also] the power of the great Lord, which is auspicious and bestows grace on everything (sarvānugraḥikā). It is metaphorically called “bond” (pāśa) only because it has similar properties [to the powers of Impurity, i.e. the power of blocking the faculty of knowledge and action of souls]. And this [power of the Lord called “bond”] causes these [powers of Impurity] to transform until their obstruction ends. When [the power of the Lord] brings about the unfolding [of the souls] through the light of consciousness of the Isāna [face of Śiva] (kārka) it is called “grace-bestowing” (anugrāhikā).

When the Mrgendra refers to Śiva’s twofold power as “bestowing grace on everything,” (sarvānugrāhikā) it refers to the fact that the Lord’s grace is directed at the same time towards conscious entities (souls) and unconscious ones (the bonds that bound them).

This is precisely why the grace of Śiva that descends upon a soul is the same grace that transforms Impurity. Note that the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha uses the same term to qualify Śiva’s power as “bestowing grace on everything” (sarvānugrāhikā);

261 It is important to look closely as the doctrine of grace taught in the MRgendratantra because this idea of the transformation of the powers of Impurity (mala-śakti-pariṇāma)—in the sense of their progressive waning up to their cessation—has relevant parallels to Sadyojyotis’s theory of the “transformation of Impurity” (mala-pariṇāma), which, in turn, is the basis for Rāmakṣaṇṭha’s doctrine that śaktipāta is caused by this transformation (section 3.2.4 of this chapter, “The ‘Ripening’ of Impurity: From Sadyojyotis to Rāmakṣaṇṭha”). However, we do not have any evidence that Sadyojyotis knew the Mrgendratantra, nor even that this scripture precedes Sadyojyotis. According to Goodall (2004: iiv-ivii) “it is conceivable that both the Parākhyā and the Mrgendra post-date him.” However, because of the remarkable parallels between the teachings of chapter VII of the Mrgendra (vidyāpāda) and the Tattvātreyānīṃṇaya, we may assume either that one text drew from the other, or that they both drew from a third source, or at least from the same ideas circulating in a stratum of the tradition.

262 Mrgendra VII.11-12:

| tāsam māheśvarī śaktih sarvānugrāhikā śiva | dharmānuvarthanād eva pāśa ity upacaryate || 11 ||
| parināmayatvā etāḥ ca rodhāntam kārkacittviṣā | yadonāśam adhatte tadānugrāhikocayate || 12 ||

263 Nārāyanaṇakaṇṭha ad loc.

264 According to Nārāyanaṇakaṇṭha the word “ka” in the compound kārka is used in the meaning of “head” (mārdhā), the compound therefore translating as “head-sun,” and referring to Isāna, one of the five faces of Śiva, the one “always engaged in the cosmic function of grace” (sadānugrahaikavyāpāra) (vyṛti p. 171 16-18)

265 My translation.
Sadyojyotis’s commentary on that passage is also completely in line with the Mrgendra, when he explains that Śiva’s power gives strength to conscious and unconscious entities.266

The Mrgendra also specifies that the two powers of the Lord do not contradict each other, as one might mistakenly think.267 The Lord—the text explains—does not give grace to the bonds, including the soul’s Impurity, to cause suffering to human beings, but rather to help them, much like a doctor who causes pain to sick patients in order to ultimately heal them.268 Śiva’s grace when bestowed on the Impurity causes a transformation of its powers, which results in a weakening of the Impurity’s function (adhikāra) to block the faculties of knowledge and actions of souls—faculties that are potentially as full as those of the Lord. As long as this function of Impurity is active a soul cannot achieve liberation and reach the state of equality with Śiva, who is omniscient and omnipotent.269

266 See also Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha III.1 and Sadyojyotis’s commentary ad loc:

atha devādidevasya śivasyāmitatejasah ā
sarvanugrāhikā saktir amoghā balaśālinī II.1 II

Now, Śiva, the first God of gods, of immeasurable might, has a power that bestows grace on everything, which is unfailing and strong.

Sadyojyotis glosses sarvanugrāhikā as sarveṣām cetanānām acetasnānām anugrāhikā upodbalīkā, “which gives strength to all, i.e. to conscious and unconscious entities.” See Filliozat 1994: 64-65; and Filliozat 2001: 44.

267 The text (Mrgendra VII.13-14) expresses this possible misunderstanding with the following objection:

śambhoś cidādy anugrāhyam tadvirodhitayā mithāḥ ā
yugapan na kṣamaṁ saktih sarvānugrāhikā katham II.13 II
katham bhatopakārārtham pravṛttasya jagatprabhoḥ ā
apakārakam āviśya yujyate tunnatadānām II.14 II

“It is not possible that what is conscious and the rest [which is not conscious] are the object of Śiva’s grace at the same time, because they are in opposition to each other. How can the power [of the Lord] bestow grace on everything? How would it be possible for the Lord of the universe, who acts for the purpose of helping [all] beings, to cause harm and [thus] bring suffering to them, who are [already] afflicted (tunna)?”

268 Mrgendra VP, VII.15 and 18. For text and translation see fn. 424.

269 Mrgendra VII.16-17:
The Mrgendra also clarifies that this process of transformation of Impurity cannot occur by itself, without the Lord’s intervention, because the bonds, which are inert, need to be set in motion by what is conscious. Just as Primal Matter (māyā) must be stimulated by Śiva’s power in order to transform and generate the universe, so too the other two bonds—the accumulated Karma (karman) and the soul’s Impurity (mala)—must be activated by the Lord’s divine power, which is grace. The grace bestowed on Primal Matter is what brings about the existence of worlds and bodies, allowing souls to transmigrate and experience their karma; the grace bestowed on Karma is what makes it ready to produce its fruits, and therefore to be experienced by souls until its complete consumption; and the grace bestowed on Impurity is what causes its transformation, thereby weakening its power to limit the faculty of knowledge of souls. Thus,

na sādhikāre tamasi muktir bhavati kasyacit
adhikāro ’pi tacchakteh parināmāṇi nivartate || 16 ||
so ’pi na svata eva syād api yogasya vastunāḥ ||
sarvathā sarvadā yasmāc citprayojyām acetanam || 17 ||

“Until Impurity (tamas) exercises its function (sādhikāra) liberation cannot occur for anyone. And its function, in turn, ceases through the transformation of its power. And this [transformation], in turn, cannot occur by itself, even for things suitable [to transform], because in all cases and at all times, that which is inert must be set in motion by what is conscious.” (My translation.)

See Mrgendra VII.17 in the previous footnote.

Mrgendra VII.23:

ity evam yaugapadyena kramāsthagata eva hi
māyāyāḥ sādhikārāyāḥ karmaṇaś cokta eva saḥ || 23 ||

Thus, [the activity of grace], occurring simultaneously [for conscious and inert entities], as well as in succession, has been explained. The [grace] directed towards Primal Matter (māyā) and its evolutes (sādhikāra), as well as the one towards Karman—have been also [implicitly] explained.

See also Nārāyanakaṇṭha ad loc: yaugapadyena cidacitor anugraho an viruddhaḥ. The commentator clarifies that the idea of grace operating “simultaneously” (yaugapadyena) refers to the fact that Śiva bestows it on conscious and unconscious entities (cid-acitor anugraho) at the same time, and that these two types of grace are not in opposition to each other (na viruddhaḥ). He also adds:

malavac ca māyāyāś ca kalādikṣiyantasaivaahikārasahasatāyāḥ kalādīavirbhāvalakṣanās tad-upasamāhātmakaś ca karmanas tu phalaadanaunmukhyāñātāntanātakāḥ so ’yam anugraho mā-yakarmaṇo anukto ’py ukta eva jñeyah || sarvathā sarvadā yasmāc citprayojyām acetanam” iti sāmānyena sarvasyaivoktatvād iti ||
ultimately, Śiva’s act of transformation of the bonds, or “grace of the bonds,” is Śiva’s grace for the souls (ātmano ‘nugraḥ), which results in their acquiring their full faculty of knowledge and becoming omniscient like Śiva.\textsuperscript{272}

With regard to śaktipāta—as I briefly mentioned in the introduction to this chapter—the general view found in the surviving texts\textsuperscript{273} of the Śaiva Siddhānta is that Śiva bestows his grace depending on particular factors. What these factors are, and how they operate in the process leading to śaktipāta, vary among different Saiddhāntika scriptures and exegetical works. The earliest theory that developed in the tradition is that śaktipāta is caused by karmasāmya—the state of “balance” between two opposite karmas, a moment of time in which karma is not supposed to be effective. The second theory, found only in the Saiddhāntika exegetical sources, is that śaktipāta is determined by the ripening of the soul’s innate Impurity, malaparipāka. The following sections provide an overview of these two theories, both of which Abhinavagupta thoroughly refutes.

\textsuperscript{272} Nārāyaṇaṇaṭha’s commentary ad Mrgendra VII.22:

\begin{quote}
\begin{verbatim}
  boddhṛtvadhmānūrvartanam ātmano ‘nugrahaḥ pariṇāmīvadharmānūrvartanaṃ pāśānām iti
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

“The favorable influence on the property which is the faculty of knowing is the grace to the soul, [while] the favorable influence on the property which is the faculty of transformation is [the grace] to the bonds.”

\textsuperscript{273} I said “in the surviving texts” because the view that Śiva bestows śaktipāta out of his will is also attested, although we know about it only through quotations. I will discuss this idea later in the chapter.
3.2.2 The Balance between Opposite Karmas (karmāsāmya) and the Role of Merit

As Dominic Goodall, one of the foremost scholars of the early Śaiva Siddhānta, explains, not all scriptural sources of this tradition mention specific prerequisites for šaktipāta. Those tantras that do so, such as the Kiraṇa and the Mataṅga, declare that its occurrence is determined by karmāsāmya, a compounded word that literally means the “equality (sāmya) of karmas.” The expression refers to a situation deemed to occur when two karmas of equal power become ripe—that is, ready to bear fruit—at the same time, thereby blocking each other from producing fruit. It is at that time that Śiva is held to bestow his salvific power on the soul, as the Kiraṇatantra explains:

Sanskrit text in Goodall 1998: 26-27. The translation is from Goodall’s earlier translation of the Kiraṇa (1996: 344), which he also reports in a footnote in his later translation (1998: 216, fn. 171). I used his earlier (1996) translation, because it offers an interpretation of the root text based on what was likely its intended meaning. Goodall’s later translation and critical edition of the same text (1998), which also includes Rāmakṛṣṇa’s commentary (śṛttih), intentionally follows the interpretation of the Kiraṇa provided by Rāmakṛṣṇa, who often distorts the text in order to superimpose his own doctrine. See for example Goodall’s translation of this same passage done according to Rāmakṛṣṇa (1998: 215, 1:20cd-21ab):

“When [good and bad] karmas have become equal because of an intense descent of power [which in turn comes about] through the power of the maturation of mala, the soul is initiated by the guru…”

Rāmakṛṣṇa distorts the meaning of the Kiraṇa because he wants to make the Tantra teach that it is the “ripening of Impurity” or mala, which causes šaktipāta, and not karmāsāmya. For this purpose, he interprets the expression same karmah sañjāte, which in the Kiraṇa refers to kramasāmya, to refer to equanimity towards good and bad karma, a state of mind regarded as a consequence, i.e. a sign, of šaktipāta (Goodall 1998: 215, fn. 171).
When karmas\textsuperscript{276} become equal [i.e. when two actions block each other by being simultaneously ready to produce fruit and equally urgent] due to the power [of the passing] of intervals of time, [and] when [thereupon] because of an intense descent of grace the soul is initiated by his guru, he then becomes omniscient like Śiva and devoid of his state of partial knowledge, filled with the unfolding of his [innate] nature of [identicalness to] Śiva and he does not [after death] continue to be involved in the cycle of rebirth.

The descent of Śiva’s power upon the soul—the Kirāṇa explains in a later chapter—removes this blockage by either destroying the two karmas, or by making them unequal.\textsuperscript{277}

Understanding the doctrine of karmasāmya presents challenges, owing in part to the technical aspects involved and in part to the divergent ways in which the literature refers to it. The first question is whether this theory has ethical implications—that is, whether it establishes any connection between the performance of “good works” and

\textsuperscript{276} I chose to leave the Sanskrit word karman in its original, rather than translating it in English as “action,” as Goodall does, because the term in this context refers to the traces of an action bound to bear fruit (“karma”), rather than to the action itself.

\textsuperscript{277} Kirāṇa V.8cd-10ab (Sanskrit text in Goodall 1998: 116-119). As translated by Goodall (1996: 358-359) with the corrections the same author proposed to stanza 10ab in his later edition (Goodall 1998: 337, fn. 516—see below).

\textit{tannipātasya sah kālah karmanām tulyataiva ca} 8 8
\textit{tulyatvāṁ karmanāb kālah kṣīnām vā yadi vāsaman} 1
\textit{[samatvatvam talkatham gamyaṁ nyānādhikatuṁ katham] 1}
\textit{evam sūkṣmam samāvatvam yasminkāle tadaiva sā} 9 11
\textit{svartapaṁ dyotayatā āśū bodhaciḥnabalena vai} 1

And the time of the descent of this [power] is [that of] the equal balance of [two simultaneously maturing] karmas.\textsuperscript{*} The equal balance of [simultaneously mature] karmas is the time [of the descent of power]. It is either destroyed or [made] unequal [by the descent of power] (8cd-9ab). … (9cd) At that very time this equal balance [of karmas] that is beyond our senses (sūkṣmam) occurs, this [power of Śiva] straight away reveals [her own] essential nature, [discernible] through the sign that is [the soul’s] enlightenment (9ef-10ab).

\textsuperscript{*} I left the term karman as “karma,” instead of translating it as “action,” as in Goodall 1996.

For stanza 10ab, I included the corrections Goodall proposed in his later edition (1998: 337, fn. 516) for his 1996 translation. The original 1996 translation reads: “this [power of Śiva] straight away illuminates the [soul’s] own nature, [and this is discernible] by means of the marks characteristic of enlightenment (bodhaciḥnabalena vai).” Śiva’s power of grace, which reveals the true nature of the souls, manifests itself at the individual level through its characteristic signs, such as devotion and faith in Śaiva scriptures. On the signs of sāktipāta, see Kirāṇatāntra V.13-14ab and Mṛgendrāgama, VP, V.4-5ab. I have quoted both of these passages in chapter 1, in subsection 1.2.1 (“Devotion as a Sign of Grace in the Early Siddhānta Tantras”).
grace. The ethical question seems particularly pertinent in this case, because we are considering a tradition—the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta—that postulates a Lord who is ontologically separate from souls and who bestows śaktipāta only under certain conditions. Also, some of the textual sources explicitly indicate that the two kinds of mutually opposing karmans, or actions, involved in creating karmasāmya are “good” and “bad.”

We must always keep in mind that the Sanskrit term karma may refer to all three phases of an action: the “act performed” by the individual, in the sense of behavior; its period of storage in a soul as a “trace of that action” (karmasamskāra); and the “fruit of the action” (karmaphala), meaning its consequence for the individual, such as favorable or unfavorable circumstances in the person’s life. Consequently, Sanskrit sources may refer to the concept of “good” and “bad” actions with terms that may emphasize any of these three phases: dharma and adharma, referring to normative behavior/meritorious actions, and their opposites; śubha and aśubha karma, the auspicious or inauspicious karma stored in a soul that will bear fruit accordingly; and sukha and duḥkha, happiness and unhappiness, deemed to be the karmic consequence of dharma and adharma. The Kiranatantra, for example, explaining the theory of karmasāmya, alludes to “good” and “bad” karmas by referring to one’s experience of happiness and unhappiness:

278 With the exception of Rāmakaṇṭha, who in any case distorts the whole theory of karmasāmya. As I will show in section 3.2.3 (“From Scriptures to Exegesis: A Shift in Doctrine or Coexisting Views?”), while discussing the Kiranayyti, Rāmakaṇṭha holds that the śaktipāta determined by the balance of karmas does not lead to liberation, unless the Impurity is also ripe. Furthermore, in his view, the blockage need not necessarily be created by a good karma (dharma) and a bad karma (adharma), like in the Mataṅga and Kirana. A good example is his gloss of the expression dharmadharma-vipāke ad Mataṅga VP, XIII.15. See fn. 287.


karmāṁśo yo ‘dhikah purvam bhogadas tv itarāh punāh || 10 ||
samatve sati yo bhogah kathāṁ tasya prajāyate ||
[Ordinarily] a more powerful karma\textsuperscript{280} [gives its fruits] first; another one will give its fruits later. When there is equal balance, how can the soul’s (tasya) experience arise? It is “mixed” karma\textsuperscript{281} that generate [experience], for if it is equal, then there can be no experience. And it should be explained that one karma has to be more powerful [than the others], otherwise there can be no happiness or unhappiness.

The Kīraṇa here is explaining how the mechanism of karmasāmya, the “balance of karmas,” creates an impasse: when two opposing types of karmas (such as the karma generating happiness and the karma generating unhappiness) have the same strength, they cannot produce experience for the soul, because one neutralizes the other’s activity. Only the karma “of mixed strength” (miśra)\textsuperscript{282}—this Tantra says—can generate experience: happiness if the good karma is prevalent, and unhappiness if it is the bad karma that instead predominates.

A doctrine formulated in such terms does not appear to determine any positive concomitance between the performance of good actions, or good karma, and divine grace: meritorious deeds may be conducive to favorable life circumstances in this life or the next, but not to final emancipation. On the contrary, if we apply the mechanism described to two hypothetical individuals—one who has a prevalence of good karma ready to yield fruit and the other who has good karma and bad karma in equal measure—it is the latter who would be the recipient of saktipāta. In addition to this, the balance

\textit{miśram vārambhakaṁ karma same bhogas tadā na hi} \text{II 11 II}
\textit{vaktavyaś cādhikāḥ kaścid anyathā na sukhetaṁ}

\textsuperscript{280} Literally, “the more powerful portion of karma.” I left the term karman as “karma” instead of translating it as “action” or “past action(s)” as in Goodall 1996.

\textsuperscript{281} See fn. 282.

\textsuperscript{282} Goodall interprets the adjective \textit{miśram} to mean “of mixed strength,” referring to karmas unequal in power. Goodall’s interpretation makes perfect sense, considering the rest of the sense. Rāmakaṇṭha, however, and later Abhinavagupta and Jayaratha, understand different things respectively. See section 3.2.4 on \textit{malaparipūka} for Rāmakaṇṭha (“The ‘Ripening’ of Impurity: From Sadyojyotis to Rāmakaṇṭha”), and section 3.3.2 for Abhinavagupta (“Refutation of the Doctrine of Karmasāmya”), fn. 487 and 488.
spoken of is not between the cumulative good karma and the cumulative bad karma stored in a soul, but rather only between the two karmas that happen to be ripe at a certain moment in time. This factor makes the occurrence of this state of equilibrium, and therefore of śaktipāta, even more accidental.283

The Mataṅgapārēśvaratantra, another scriptural source of the Śaiva Siddhānta, offers an explanation of the “balance of karmas” that is conceptually very similar to that of the Kiranā, but with a few additional details and slightly different terminology. The text refers to the two opposite karmas with the terms dharma and adharma, the good and bad deeds that produce them; and it expresses the idea of equality or balance between them (normally sāmya or samatva) with the image of a scale in equilibrium.284

When good and bad actions (dharma) mature [simultaneously] and are seen to be [as though balanced] on the fulcrum of a pair of scales, [and] when [thereupon] Fate (niyati),285 because it draws [the soul] out from that [bondage

283 In the other case, whereby the balance would need to be between the cumulative good karma and the cumulative bad karma, we might assume that, since all humans have unlimited bad karma accumulated over many lives, only the performance of many good deeds could bring about this balance. However, this is not the case, since the texts explicitly mention that the two karmas blocking each other are the ones that are “ripe,” i.e. ready to bear fruit.
284 Mataṅga VP XIII.15-17 (trans. in Goodall 1998: 339, fn. 525. Minor modifications are indicated in footnotes):

dharmādharmavipāke ‘smīms tulākotyupalakṣite 
niyatis tatsamuddhārād yadā paśyati karmaṇaḥ 15 ||
same bhoktus tadā tasya yugapac cāpy asaṃbhavāt āśā 
śānyavat samsthitā yasmān nirapeksaiva laksyate 16 ||
samānadharmaṇvāpāraḥ kaśto ‘yaṃ syāt suduskarāḥ 
yugapat sukhaduḥkhaḥbhāhyāṃ yoktuṃ puṃ śākyate katham 17 ||

As the text explains in stanzas 18-19, which I quote in a footnote below, Lord Śiva, by removing niyati, removes the ties of the soul to the consequences of its past actions, both good and bad (dharma and adharma). This idea of karmasāmya is probably what Vidyādhipati (quoted by Abhinavagupta) alludes to when he refers to śaktipāta being regarded by the dualists as the moment of the cessation of the pervasion of dharma and adharma (TĀ XIII.128: dharmādharmavātivināśāntarakāle śakteḥ pāto gāhanikair yah pratipannahāḥ ||). See also Jayaratha ad loc.
285 Niyati, or binding Fate, is the principle that binds the soul to past karmas, as Goodall clarifies in his own translation, which reads: “when [thereupon] the principle responsible for binding the soul to the accumulated fruits of his past actions (niyatiḥ), because…”
of past action], sees the two [opposite] karmas of an experiencer to be equal, and, because they cannot then both arise [to give experience] simultaneously, niyati is seen to stand [inactive], as if non-existent, since she has no [karma] to depend upon [to bind the soul] (nirapekṣā).

This extremely difficult impasse, in which the activities [of the two opposing past actions] are the same (samānadharma-) must results, for how can the soul simultaneously be linked to happiness and unhappiness?

Just like the Kirāṇa, the Mataṅga here points to the impossibility of the soul’s experiencing at the same time happiness and unhappiness—the respective consequences of good and bad actions (dharma and adharma). This is because—the text explains—Fate (niyati), which is the principle that binds the soul to past karmas, remains inactive, or neutralized. At this precise moment—the text declares in the stanzas following this passage—Śiva removes this binding Fate from a soul and infuses it with his power, that is, he bestows saktipāta:

At this time that power of the creator whose nature it is to ‘draw out’ (uddhāraśīlinī) pushes niyati aside by force with her great strength and leaves her traces with the soul, after first rendering him dispassionate towards [all worldly] experience, towards this terrible ocean of worldly existence with its manifold troubles.

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286 In trying to be literal, I modified this sentence from Goodall’s translation, which, expanding on the meaning of the sentence, reads: “… as if non-existent, since she has nothing [which could cause her to bind the soul to the fruit of one action rather than the other] (nirapekṣā).”

287 Rāmakanṭha, however, gives a different interpretation of the expression dharmādharma ad Mataṅga VP, XIII.15. He explains that the two opposing fruits of the two ripe karmas can be not only a good and a bad one—such as going to heaven (svarga) and hell (narakā); they could also be both good, but incompatible—like going to heaven and going to the desirable realm of brahmaloka; or both bad, like going to two different hells, the Raurava and Āvīci netherworlds.

288 Mataṅga VP XIII.18-19:

\[
\begin{align*}
etasminn antare kartur yāsāv uddhāraśīlinī \mid 
protsārya niyatīn vegaṁ svavtryenātibhūrīnā \mid 18 \parallel 
ksetraṁ vāsayet pascāt krtvā bhogapārahūrāmukham \mid 
nānavāsan mahāghorād asmāt samśārasagarā \mid 19 \parallel
\end{align*}
\]

Just like the *Kiraṇa*, the *Mataṅga* describes this state of equilibrium between the two opposite ripe karmas in purely mechanistic terms. The performance of good actions has no role in creating this condition, which is the prerequisite for *śaktipāta*.

The image of *dharma* and *adharma* balanced on a scale—which the *Mataṅga* passage quoted above uses to describe the state of equilibrium and mutual blockage between two opposing karmas—has a precedent in an earlier Siddhānta tantra, the *Śvāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha*. However, whether this text is actually referring to *karmasāmya* is far from certain. The relevant passage reads:

The karma that the bound soul has to experience is of two kinds, consisting in *dharma* and *adharma*. It should be known as existing until it is experienced and as obstructed by the two fruits (17)… The rise and dissolution of each previous and subsequent of these two [types of] karmas [viz. *dharma* and

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290 For the relative chronology of the early Saiddhāntika scriptures see Goodall 1998: xlvii-lxxvi. The *Śvāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha* is mentioned in the *Rauravasūtrasaṅgraha* II.14ab (1988: xlviii) and, based on the list of *tattvas*, Goodall places the latter text earlier than the *Mataṅga* (1998: lxxiii).

291 *Śvāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha* II.17-21:

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karma tad dvividham bhogyam dharmaḥdharmaṁmakam paśoh ||
abhogasthayi tad vidyāt phaladvayavirodhi ca || 17 ||

... unmatyavanat yadvat tulākhotyor vyavasthite ||
karmaṇor vilayotpattī tadvad uttarapūrvavoh || 20 ||
asamsthā muktiparyantā dvikarmaṇaṇaṇaṇadhatāh ||
procyaṭe 'sāv añor bandhah sukāvalaṇvirodhikā || 21 ||
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taddvividham (17a): Filliozat’s French edition (1991) reads “vividham” (translated in French as “divers,” i.e. “of many kinds”), with variant readings as “dvividham”. His 1994 English edition, however, reads “dvividham” (twofold), even though the translation has remained as the earlier “of many kinds.” The second reading seems the correct one, considering that the text is talking about *dharma* and *adharma* and that the genitive *karmaṇoḥ* ad II.20c is a dual. Furthermore, this half stanza has a parallel in the *Parākhyatantra* IV.41ab: *karmāpi dvividham bhogyam dharmaḥdharmātmakam paśoh ||

292 According to Sadyojyotis the fact that *karma* is “obstructed by two fruits” (*phala-dvaya-virodhi*) would refer to the idea that a good karma is obstructed, but not destroyed, by a more powerful bad karma, and vice versa. If I understand Sadyojyotis correctly, this refers to the idea that a more powerful karma, good or bad, would predominate and bear fruit first. See Sadyojyotis ad SSS II.17:

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phaladvayavirodhīti virodho ‘tra prati bandho na vināsah, dharmāḥdharmaḥmakam tāvadh
adharmaḥbhalaṇe dharmabhalaṇe ca baliyaśādhiṣeṇa virudhyata iti ||
```

‘obstructing the two fruits’: here *virodh* means obstruction, not destruction; [the karma] consisting in *dharma* and *adharma* is obstructed by a stronger, greater fruit of *adharma* and fruit of *dharma* [respectively].” (Translation adapted, with minor variations, from Filliozat 1994: 55.)
adharma] is established [by the tradition] to be like the upwards and downwards movements of the two ends of the beam of a scale. (20) [This chain of karman] is uninterrupted, it ends in liberation due to the blocking of the two [types] of karman (dharma and adharma). It is taught to be a bond of the soul [and] it obstructs the ultimate liberation. (21)

Quoting the last of these three verses, Goodall observes “it is conceivable that it is a doctrine of the indispensability of some sort of karmasāmya that is referred to in II.21.” However, he also remarks, “there is nothing in the immediate context to confirm such an interpretation.” Indeed the text makes no reference to śaktipāta in this particular context, which is instead mentioned in the preceding chapter and taught as occurring out of Śiva’s will. The context here is instead the general idea—stated two stanzas later—that the three bonds (māyā, mala, and karman) obstruct the highest liberation, and that only initiation can free the soul from these bonds. If this is the case, Sadyojyotis perhaps is right when he interprets the expression “due to the blocking of the two karmas” (dvikarma-pratirodhatāḥ) as referring to the idea that the soul can achieve liberation only when these two types of karma, good and bad, are no longer active.

293 I followed Sadyojyotis here, who, in introducing stanza 21, refers to this rise and dissolution of successive karmas described in stanza 20 (unnaty-avanatī) as “chain of karmas” (karmāvalī). I suspect Sadyojyotis may also have been puzzled by the lack of concordance in gender and number between unnaty-avanatī (pāda 20a), feminine dual, and asaṃsthā and muktiparyantā (pāda 21a) and nirodikā (pāda 21d), all feminine singular.

294 It is “uninterrupted” in the sense that it does not have a beginning, an “antecedent limit,” as Sadyojyotis clarifies.

295 My translation.


297 SSS I.16. I will discuss the view on śaktipāta in this text at the end of the next section (3.2.3 “From Scriptures to Exegesis: A Shift in Doctrine or Coexisting Views?”).

298 SSS II.23-24.

299 Sadyojyotis’s commentary ad SSS II.21:

kim artham avadhāryate—yāvad iyaṁ dvirāpyadhikārayata tava sukāvaliyam na bhavaty eveti |

dvikarmapratirodhatāḥ | yato 'vāṣyaṁ dvirāpāniradhikārāntarām eva sukāvaliyam bhavatti |

“Why is it concluded that as long as there is activity in the two forms [of karman] there is no liberation? That is ‘because of the obstruction done by the two karmas’ (dvikarma-
created by the two opposing karmas of equal strength—the impasse that causes śaktipāta according to the theory of karmasāmya—would have no particular function in the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha, which teaches that Śiva bestows his grace-giving power out of his will. In either case, however, dharma, or “good karma,” has no positive correlation to grace even in this tantra.

The Parākhyatantra, another early scripture of the Śaiva Siddhānta, is even more explicit in ruling out any role of meritorious deeds in drawing Śiva’s grace. Furthermore, it also provides a hint as to why the tradition would hold such a doctrine. The core section where this Tantra deals with grace begins with the accusation of partiality made by a potential objector: Śiva’s grace (anugraha) comes to a soul randomly, depending on his affection or aversion towards an individual. The reply, which represents the view this tantra teaches, is that liberation, or the state of Śiva (tadbhāva), comes about only through the descent of his power (śaktipāta), and cannot be caused by these feelings.300 The Lord—the text explains a few stanzas later—is the locus of knowledge (jñānadhāra), and as such, by his own nature, is devoid of passions such as attachment and hatred.301 This reply, however, does not solve the partiality issue raised, because it merely removes the problem of causality one step further: if the Lord is truly impartial—an opponent may object—then there must be some cause for his śaktipāta, such as “good birth” (śubhā jātir), good actions (dharma) or extraordinary rites

pratirodhataḥ); because, necessarily, only after two forms of karmas are without activity, liberation occurs’ (as translated by Filliozat 1994: 59).

In the context of karmasāmya the same expression dvikarmapratirodhataḥ would be understood as “due to the [reciprocal] blocking of the two [opposing] karmas.”

300 Parākhyā II.101-102. My understanding of this text is based on the critical edition and translation by Goodall (2004: 34-34, 197-199).

301 Parākhyā II.107-108ab.
(samutkrśṭā kriyā).” The next two and a half stanzas, which are worth quoting, explicitly deny that such factors can be the cause of śaktipāta:

[We reply that] birth or excellence of good actions cannot be the cause, nor auspicious rites, because with these [there are cases of] deviation [i.e. cases where the result does not follow upon the supposed cause]; and so they are not causes. And the soul’s fitness [for salvific grace] is in the seed, and that [fitness] is [therefore] in accordance with [that] unequal [seed] (viśamānugā). The conditions [of souls are] various because of the [various degrees of] ripening (vipāka) of that [seed]; like a doctor, the Lord (saḥ) accordingly links each particular soul with that means (enam upāyam).

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302 Parākhya II.110-111ab The text here, instead of using the usual terms, śaktipāta or śaktinipāta, uses bodhanipātana, “descent of knowledge,“ which alludes to the consequence of grace (II.110cd).


304 Goodall interprets the term bīja, literally “seed,” as karman, thus translating: “…in the seed [i.e. in karman]. However, he also notes that the expression is ambiguous (2004: 199, fn. 201), as I explain below. The only variation I made from his translation was to keep the literal translation of bīja as “seed” (and not “karman”) throughout the passage when the text refers to it with the pronoun tat (tat-vipāka).

305 The addition of this term in parenthesis is mine.

306 Goodall specifies in his translation “the means [that is a descent of His grace],” understanding the “means” (upāya) to refer to śaktipāta. I would instead be inclined to understand it, more broadly, as referring to the various means—such as bodies and worlds—the Lord provides to souls in order to transform the powers of mala and of the other bonds as well (once the bonds have achieved a certain degree of ripening, then the Lord bestows a higher means, śaktipāta). See, for instance, the similar ideas expressed in the Mrgendrāgama, VP VII.15 and VII.18:

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302 Parākhya II.110-111ab
303 Parākhya II.111cd-113.
304 Goodall...
305 The addition of this term in parenthesis is mine.
306 Goodall...
What renders the soul fit to receive śaktipāta—according to the Parākhya—is the “ripening of the seed” (bīja-vipāka). As Goodall observes, the expression bīja is ambiguous, and could refer either to karman (as he prefers to interpret) or to the soul’s Impurity (mala). In the first case the expression could be alluding to the “balance of karmas,” and in the second to the “ripening of Impurity” (mala-paripāka)—the other factor some of the Śaiva Siddhānta’s texts consider a prerequisite for śaktipāta, as I explain below.

The idea that virtuous deeds do not have a particular role in drawing grace is also congruent with Śaiva soteriology, because all karma, good and bad, constitutes a bond for the soul and therefore cannot bring about emancipation. The Mrgendra, another of the early Siddhānta Tantras, states this plainly, and the commentator Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha, Rāmakaṇṭha’s father, expounds on it further:

Therefore karma, operating/being active [in the levels of reality] beginning with māyā and ending in kālägni, is without beginning. Even the [karma] that manifests [from merit] is an obstacle, for, while it exists, it does not lead to liberation.

Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha’s Commentary ad 18:
“The supreme Lord is not considered the cause of suffering even if He [appears] unfavorable (vāma) towards the souls—whose faculty of knowledge and action are covered by the bonds—by causing them suffering through [means] such as births, putting to flight etc. (janma-drāvaṇādi) in accordance with the powers of their respective bonds. However, He is not considered the cause of suffering [for these souls], because of the fact that He is solely engaged in their upliftment.”

If we understand bīja as karman, the reference to the “ripening of karma” (karma-vipāka) would echo the compound dharmādharma-vipaka found in the MaP VP XIII.15a (quoted in fn. 284) to refer to karma-sāmya.

Mrgendratantra (VP) VIII.6:

\[
\text{iti māyādikālāntapravartakam anādimati} \\
\text{karma vyāñjakam apy etad rodhi sad yan na muktaye} \\
\| 6 \|
\]
All karma—even the type that manifests as the fruit of meritorious actions (punyavyañjaka)—is a cause for transmigration, and as such it obstructs liberation—as Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha explains commenting on the passage above.\textsuperscript{309}

Moreover, this karma—even if it manifests [the fruit] of merit, on account of its being of the good kind—is an obstacle, that is, an obstruction, in other words it is (ity arthah) a cause of transmigration. Why? [one may ask]. Therefore [the Lord] says “because it (yad), while it exists, does not lead to liberation,” [i.e.] because karma, even if it is meritorious, while it is there, i.e. while it exists, it does not lead to liberation, to emancipation. Rather, it only creates an obstacle to it, because liberation occurs only for those who—on account of the destruction of their karma, or because [their karmas] balance—have received grace (anugraha) [i.e. dikṣā] following upon [Śiva’s] Descent of Power (śaktipāta)\textsuperscript{310}

Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha’s position here is that śaktipāta occurs when the bond of karman is absent or inoperative and thus cannot produce its effects. In other words, karman must be either exhausted through experience, or suddenly rendered inoperative on account of the impasse created by the balance of two opposing karmas (karmasāmya).\textsuperscript{311}

Interestingly, even though the Mrgendra does not mention karmasāmya, the commentator himself refers to this doctrine in order to show that the view taught in the Mrgendra—that karma, as long as it exists, cannot lead to liberation—does not contradict the teaching

\textsuperscript{309} Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha’s Mrgendravṛtti ad VIII.6 (pp. 184\textsuperscript{16},185\textsuperscript{4}):  

kim ca etat karma subhasvarāpatvāt punyavyañjakām api sat rodhi rodhakaṁ samsārakāranam ity arthāḥ kutā ity āha “sad yan na muktaye” yasyāt punyātmakām api karma sat vidyamānaṃ na muktaye nāpavargāya, api tu tatpratibindhāyaiva kalpate yat karmakṣayā tatsāmyād vā śaktipātānusārasaṁsādītānugrahāṣaṁ eva kaivalyam ।

\textsuperscript{310} I am grateful to Dominic Goodall for his corrections to my translation of this passage (personal communication, April 2015).

\textsuperscript{311} Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha’s position appears to be different from that of early scriptures such as the Śvāyambhuvasūtraśaṅgraha. According to this text the neutralization of karma due to its exhaustion through experience or its blockage by two opposite fruits (a possible allusion to karmasāmya) leads to liberation, not just to śaktipāta. See Śvāyambhuvasūtraśaṅgraha II.17 and 21 (Sanskrit text in fn. 291).

“The karma that the bound soul has to experience is of two kinds, consisting in dharma and adharma. It should be known as existing until it is experienced and as obstructed by the two fruits (17) … [This chain of karman] is uninterrupted, it ends in liberation due to the blocking of the two [types] of karmans (dharma and adharma). It is taught to be a bond of the soul [and] it obstructs the ultimate liberation (21).” (My translation)
of another authoritative Tantra, the Kīraṇa: in the situation of karmasāmya, the author explains, karmas are as if non-existent, because they do not produce fruits, like actions performed after initiation.\(^\text{312}\) Compared to the early sources, however, Nārāyaṇaśekha’s theory of what must precede śaktipāta is more complex, in that it also includes the second view found in the post-scriptural tradition—that Śiva’s grace-giving Descent of Power is determined by the degree of ripeness of the soul’s Impurity (malapāraṇā)—which Abhinavagupta also refutes.\(^\text{313}\)

### 3.2.3 From Scriptures to Exegesis: A Shift in Doctrine or Coexisting Views?

Among the exegetes of the Śaiva Siddhānta whose works survive, it appears that only Śṛiṅkaṇṭha—who was probably, but not beyond doubt, a predecessor of Nārāyaṇa-

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\(^{312}\) *Mṛgendravṛtti* ad VIII.6 (p. 185+11):

> nanu sad yan na muktaye ity auyktam uktam saty api karmapi tatsāmyān mkter āmnāttavāt \(\|\) yad uktam śrīmatkriyān

> same karmapi sañjīte kālāntaravaśāt tatah \(\|\) 20 \(\|\)

> itvrasaktīnipātena guruṇā dīKSito yadda l

> sarvajñāḥ sa śīvo yudvat …………… || 21 \(\|\)

> iti \(\|\) naiṣa doṣas tathāvidhāsya karmāṇaḥ sato ‘py asattvam parasparapratibaddha-śaktitvenāphalatvād dīKSottarākarmavat

> “Someone may object that [what is expressed with the words] ‘for while it [viz. karman] is there, it is not [conducive] to liberation’ is wrong, because it has been handed down by tradition that liberation comes about even when karma still exists through the balance [and thus blockage] of that [karma]. This [the objector would argue] is taught in the venerable Kīraṇa:

> When karmas become equal [i.e. balance and so block each other by being equally powerful and simultaneously ripe] due to the power [of the passing] of intervals of time, [and] when [thereupon] because of an intense Descent of Power (śaktipāta) the soul is initiated by his guru, he then becomes omniscient like Śiva [I.20-21c]

> [To this objection, we would reply] that there is no fault [in our position], because such karmas, even though they are there, are [in a certain sense] not [really] there, because, like actions performed in the period after initiation, they do not yield fruit, since they block each other’s power [to produce fruit].” (trans. Goodall 1998: 216, fn. 171).

\(^{313}\) As I will point out in the next section, according to Nārāyaṇaśekha karmasāmya is not a condition *sine qua non* for śaktipāta.
kaṇṭha\textsuperscript{314}—closely adheres to the doctrine of the \textit{Kīraṇa} and the \textit{Mataṅga}, by stating that the descent of Śiva’s grace-bestowing power occurs as a consequence of \textit{karmasāmya}, while making no reference to the ripening of a soul’s Impurity.\textsuperscript{315} Other Saiddhāntika exegetes whose works survive—such as Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha, Rāmakaṇṭha, and Aghoraśiva—considered instead the ripening of Impurity to be a necessary condition for a salvific \textit{saktipāta}.\textsuperscript{316} According to this theory, the soul’s Impurity (\textit{mala}) goes through a transformation (\textit{parināti} or \textit{parināma}), also defined as “ripening” (\textit{paripāka} or \textit{vipāka}),\textsuperscript{317} and only when it has attained a certain degree of maturation can Śiva bestow \textit{saktipāta}. This doctrine however, as Goodall has remarked, is not found in any of the surviving early Saiddhāntika scriptural sources.\textsuperscript{318} As a result, the commentators must resort to their exegetical skills to read these ideas into the canonical texts.

\textsuperscript{314} Some scholars (Bhatt 1977: viii; Goodall 1998: ix) have asserted that Śrīkaṇṭha was a disciple of Rāmakaṇṭha I, who, in turn, was Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha’s grandfather, and great-grandfather of Rāmakaṇṭha II, the prolific author of works such as \textit{Kīraṇavṛtti} and \textit{Mataṅga-vṛtti}. At the end of the \textit{Ratnatrayaparīkṣā} (verse 321) Śrīkaṇṭha does indeed indicate a work (\textit{-āloka}) of a certain Rāmakaṇṭha to be his source of inspiration. Sanderson (2006b: 42), however, observes that Śrīkaṇṭha does not identify this author as his guru, and, furthermore, that there is nothing to prove that the two Rāmakaṇṭhas are the same. Sanderson also notes that there is no conclusive evidence that Śrīkaṇṭha even belongs to the same teaching lineage as Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha and Rāmakaṇṭha II (2006b: 42; 2012: 16).

\textsuperscript{315} In \textit{Ratnatrayaparīkṣā} 315 Śrīkaṇṭha writes:

\begin{quote}
parasparavirodhena nivāritavipākayoh \\
karmaṇoḥ sannipātena śaivī saktih patatya anau \parallel 315 \parallel
\end{quote}

“Because of the two actions coming together that prevent [each other from bearing] fruit by blocking each other, the power [called] Śaivī descends upon the soul.” (As translated by Goodall 1998: 219, fn. 182.)

\textsuperscript{316} I intentionally left Sadyojyotis out because, as I will discuss later, his position with regard to the prerequisites for \textit{saktipāta} is ambiguous.

\textsuperscript{317} In this process, the power that this Impurity has over the soul somehow weakens, until it stops affecting the person.

\textsuperscript{318} Goodall 1998: xxxv and 338, fn. 524. The only exception would be \textit{Parākhyatantra}, if the reference to the “ripening of the seed” (\textit{bīja-vipāka}) found in ParT II.112cd-113ab is interpreted as referring to the “ripening of Impurity” (\textit{mala-paripāka}). I discussed this passage in the previous subsection (3.2.2; “The Balance Between Opposite Karmas and the Role of Merit;” see fn. 303 for Sanskrit text). Goodall also points to the remote possibility that the term \textit{yogyatā} (suitability) in MVT I.42 may refer to \textit{malaparipāka} (1998: xxxv, fn. 80).
Nārāyaṇaṇaṭha’s commentary on a passage of the *Mṛgendratantra* provides an example of this kind of interpretation, since this tantra does not indicate any prerequisite for śaktipāta—not even karmasāmya as I showed earlier. Nārāyaṇaṇaṭha writes:319

Either because his various karmas320 have been destroyed, consumed by experience in bodies throughout different births, or because those [karmas] balance [and thus block each other], the soul receives grace (anugraha),321 his impurity is removed by a descent of power (śaktipāta) that comes to action due to the exceptional force of the maturation of his impurity;322 and because all his bonds are cast off, his power to do and to know all things is revealed, and because the released soul is not in a state of bondage (paśutvasya), which is the cause of rebirth,322 he becomes a Lord whose nature is [that of] Śiva.

Based on this passage, according to Nārāyaṇaṇaṭha śaktipāta occurs when two conditions are present: the absence of karmic fruits and the ripening of the soul’s innate Impurity. He does not appear, however, to consider karmasāmya a condition sine qua non, but rather as only one of the two possible ways in which the bond of karman can be neutralized, the second being its exhaustion through life experience, as I explained


320 Because the term *karman* here refers to the “consequences of past actions,” I chose to render it as “karma,” a word that has entered common usage in English. Goodall translates the term in English as “past actions.”

321 *avāptānugrahasya*: I choose to translate *anugraha* literally, as “grace.” Goodall (1998) translates the expression as “the soul attains power,” which is also correct, since Śiva’s *anugraha* is his *sakti* or “power.” Nārāyaṇaṇaṭha here may be also referring to initiation (*dṛkṣā*). I am proposing this based on a similar passage in *Mṛgendravṛtti* ad VIII.6 translated above (pp. 130-31, Sanskrit text in fn. 309), where Goodall suggested that we might understand the term *anugraha* as *dīkṣā* (personal communication, April 2015).

322 Minor modification in punctuation: I used a semi-colon instead of the comma after “impurity” to clarify for the reader that the sentence “because all his bonds are cast off” belongs to what follows.

323 Slightly modified from Goodall’s translation, which reads “and because the released soul has no impurity (paśutvasya), which is the cause of being subject to the cycle of rebirth.”
earlier. Curiously, the *Mrgendratantra*—which teaches that Impurity transforms through time—makes an allusion to its complete “ripening” as being a prerequisite not for *śaktipāta* but rather for the highest initiation, the one that grants immediate liberation (*sadyonirvāṇadikṣā*).\(^{326}\)

Of this [category of initiations without post-initiatory requirements (*nirapekṣā dīkṣā*)] the highest is the one that grants emancipation immediately, called “[immediately] liberating,” which is obtained when the ripening (*pāka*) of impurity (*tamas*)\(^{327}\) has reached its culmination (*pare*).\(^{328}\)

Nārāyaṇaṇaṭha’s commentary is faithful to the root text. He explains that when the ripening of a soul’s impurity has reached its culmination, the disciple obtains this highest initiation.\(^{329}\) In this passage, however, he makes no allusion to *śaktipāta*\(^{330}\).

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\(^{324}\) See my translation and discussion of *Mrgendravṛtti* ad VIII.6 (pp. 184\(^{16}\)-185\(^{4}\)) toward the end of the previous section (3.2.2).

\(^{325}\) See section 3.2.1 in this chapter.

\(^{326}\) *Mrgendra*, *Kriyāpāda* VIII.5:

\[\text{sāsyaḥ paratamā sadyo yāḥ vidhatte nirānayam} \]
\[\text{nāmā nirvāṇikāt pāke tamaso yāpyate pare} \]

See also chapter 4, subsection 4.2.6, “Lower-Intense *Śaktipāta*: The ‘Living Liberated’ (*jīvanmukta*) and the Initiation Bestowing Immediate Liberation (*Sadyonirvāṇa*),” where I explain that according to the *Mrgendra* this initiation is not the one given to individuals who are about to die (text in fn. 659).

\(^{327}\) As Brunner notes, the term *tamas*, literally “darkness,” is not included in the list of various synonyms for *mala* that the *Mrgendra* provides in *vidyāpāda* VII.7 (see translation below). That list, however, is not meant to be comprehensive, ending with the word *ādi* “et cetera” (Brunner 1985: 202, fn. 6). Furthermore, other lists of synonyms of *malam* in the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition do include *tamas*. See, for example, *pāda* 19cd in *Kīrṣṇa*, VP, II.19ab-20cd (trans. Goodall 1998: 247):

\[\text{malo ’jīnānaṁ paśutvaṁ ca tirakṣārakaras tamaṁ} \]
\[\text{avidyā ha āvṛtir mārča paryāyās tasya coiditaḥ} \]
\[\text{sa cāvidyādiparyāyabhedaḥ Siddho mate mate} \]

And these are said to be synonyms: impurity, nescience, bound-soul-ness, that which obscures, darkness, ignorance, envelopment, delusion. It is well known from scripture to scripture (*mate mate*) with these different synonyms, such as ignorance.

\(^{328}\) Nārāyaṇaṇaṭha glosses *pāke pare* with *prakṛṣṭe malaparipāke*.

\(^{329}\) See also *Somasambhabpadhāti*, Introduction, xxvi: a disciple needs to be “ripe” in order to receive *sadyonirvāṇa* initiation.

\(^{330}\) *Mrgendravṛtti* ad *Kriyāpāda* VIII.5 (I am extremely grateful to Dominic Goodall for his corrections to my translation of this passage, as well as for the emendation he has proposed to the Sanskrit text.}

\[\text{nirapekṣā tāvad dīkṣā paratvena shitāḥ} \]
\[\text{anyāsāṁ sāpekaśatvenāvāparavāt} \]
\[\text{tato ’pi paratarā nirvāṇadikṣā} \]
\[\text{asyā api sakāsāt sa prakṛṣṭatamā jīneyāya} \]
\[\text{ṣaṣṭrāṇambhakakarmadāhāt sadya eva} \]
To begin with, the initiation “without requirement” (nirapekṣā) is higher [than initiations “with requirement” (sāpekṣā)], because these, due to the fact that they depend on something, are inferior. The liberation-bestowing (nirvāṇa-[dā]) initiation is even higher than the [one without requirements]. Beyond [even that one], the very highest should be understood to be that which instantaneously liberates a man from the torments of endless rebirth by burning the karma which produces the body.332 This [initiation], called “immediately liberating” (sadyo-nirvāna), is attained [by a disciple] when the ripening of his impurity (malaparipāka) has reached its culmination.

Although Nārāyaṇakanṭha does not appear to be as intent as his son Rāmakanṭha on the theory of malaparipāka, it is possible that the latter took from the former the idea that increasing degrees of ripening of the Impurity would determine more intense degrees of śaktipāta and higher kinds of initiations.333

The most illustrative example of a distortive interpretation of a text, in order to use it as scriptural evidence for the doctrine of malaparipāka, is Rāmakanṭha’s commentary (vṛtti) to the Kriṇatatantra. As Goodall (1998) has expertly documented in his critical edition and translation of this text, the Kashmiri author is forced to make various exegetical leaps to claim that it is the “ripening of Impurity” and not the “balance of karmas” (karmasāmya) that causes Śiva’s liberating grace to descend upon a soul. To construct this argument, Rāmakanṭha twists the meaning of words in ways that often make his interpretation quite unnatural. In stanza I.20, for example (Table 3.1), Rāmakanṭha interprets the expression “when karmas are equal” (same karmani sañjāte),

\[
saṁsāravyathāmuktaṁ naraṁ karoti \ sā hi sadyonirvānasamjñikā yā prakṛṣṭe malaparipāke saṁi prāpyate \]  

331 The term sakāṣṭa here functions as an emphatic ablative.  
332 The compound sartrārāmbha-karma literally means “which is the starting point of the body,” and could be an acceptable reading. I am following, however, Dominic Goodall’s suggestion (personal communication) of a possible haplographic corruption of sartrārāmbhaka-karma, “which produces the body.”  
333 Rāmakanṭha hints at this connection at ripening of impurity and śaktipāta in his commentary ad Kiraṇa V.30ab and ad Tattvatrayanirnaya 12. See footnotes 421 and 425 on these passages. I discuss his interpretation of Sadyojyotis’s Tattvatrayanirnaya in section 3.2.4.  
which in the *Kiraṇa* refers to *karmasāmya*, as referring to a soul’s equanimity towards good and bad karma, a state of mind regarded as a consequence or sign of Śiva’s grace.

**TABLE 3.1: Rāmakaṭṭha’s Interpretation of *Kiraṇatantra* I.20cd-21**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATURAL READING OF THE PASSAGE</th>
<th>RĀMĀKAṬṭHA’S INTERPRETATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>same karmāṇi saṇījāte</strong></td>
<td><strong>same karmāṇi saṇījāte</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When karmas become equal</td>
<td>When [good and bad] karmas have become equal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[i.e. when two karmas block each other by being simultaneously ready to produce fruits and equally urgent]</td>
<td>[i.e. when a soul has equanimity towards the consequences of good and bad actions, a state which is achieved]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>kāla-antaravaśāt</strong></td>
<td><strong>tīvra-śaktinipātena</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>due to the power of [the passing] of intervals of time, [and] when [thereupon]</td>
<td>because of an intense descent of power, [which in turn comes about]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>tīvra-śaktinipātena</strong></td>
<td><strong>kāla-antaravaśāt (= mala-parināma-vaśāt)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because of an intense descent of grace (<em>śaktipāta</em>)</td>
<td>through the power of the maturation of <em>mala</em> ,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>guruṇā dīkṣito...</strong></td>
<td><strong>guruṇā dīkṣito...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the soul is initiated by his guru,</td>
<td>the soul is initiated by the guru,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he then becomes omniscient like Śiva and devoid of his state of partial knowledge.</td>
<td>and becomes omniscient like Śiva and devoid of parviscence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the *Kiraṇa* makes no reference to the ripeness of Impurity, Rāmakaṭṭha adds an even more creative twist by reading the idea that *śaktipāta* is caused by *malaparipāka* into an expression that literally means “through the power of an interval of time” (*kalantaravaśāt*).\(^{337}\)

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\(^{335}\) Sanskrit text in Goodall 1998: 26-27. Translations in Goodall 1996: 344 (left column), and Goodall 1998: 215-216 (right column). I left the term *karma* as “karma” instead of translating it as “action.”

\(^{336}\) This square bracket is my addition.

\(^{337}\) Rāmakaṭṭha’s commentary ad I.20cd:

“Kāla refers here [not to time, as in verse 19, but ] to Impurity (*mala*) since it blackens (*kṛṣṇatām nayati = kālayati*), that is to say makes dirty (*malinīkaroti*), since words like *kāla* and *ntla* denote particular colors. … The phrase *kalantaravaśāt* [is to be interpreted to mean]:
In a later chapter, since the Kiraṇa reiterates the idea that śaktipāta occurs only at the time in which karmas are in balance, Rāmakaṇṭha uses a common exegetical device playing on the dual meaning of the connective particle ca as “and” as well as “also.” He argues that the text alludes to the fact that the time in which Śiva’s Descent of Power occurs is also when the soul’s Impurity is ripe (Table 3.2):338

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.2: Rāmakaṇṭha’s Interpretation of Kiraṇatandra V.8cd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NATURAL READING OF THE PASSAGE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And (ca) the time of the descent of this [power] is <strong>precisely</strong>340 (eva) [that of] the equal balance of [two simultaneously maturing] karmas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RĀMAKAṆṬHA’S INTERPRETATION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[In addition to being the time of the ripeness of Impurity] the time of the descent of this [power] is <strong>also (ca)</strong> [that of] the equal balance of [simultaneously maturing] karmas,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[these two <strong>alone (eva)</strong>].341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

through that power (sāmarthyaṃ = vaśah) of the transformation (parināma = antaram) of that [mala ( = kāla)] comes the intense descent of [Śiva’s] power, and not through this power of interval (antara) of kāla [in the sense of] time [as characterized by differentiations] such as past and future. This is expressed by the word ‘from that’ (tatah). For it is the maturation of mala alone (eva) that is the cause of the descent of [Śiva’s] power.” (As translated by Goodall 1998: 216-217)


338 Kiraṇavṛtti ad V.8cd:

“With the word ‘and’ … is included also [the time of] the ripening of impurity. And with the particle ‘only’ (eva) is expressed that there is no third time according to the Śaiva Siddhānta (attra). [It does] not [express that] the time stated above [—i.e. that of the ripeness of impurity— does not exist], because [the word ‘alone’] serves to emphasize (-avadhāraṇātvat) [two times] that are being [enumerated and] added [by the particle ‘and’].” (As translated in Goodall 1998: 333)

339 Kiraṇa V.8cd. The translation is adapted with minor variations from Goodall 1996: 359 (left column) and Goodall 1998: 333 (right column).

340 The term “precisely” is my addition to Goodall’s translation.

341 The first and the last square brackets are my addition to Goodall’s translation (based on Goodall’s translation of Rāmakaṇṭha’s commentary)
The two conditions, however, are not interchangeable in his view, because they produce different effects. The śaktipāta caused by a balance of actions does not lead to liberation, he says, and its only purpose is to remove the blockage created by the two opposing karmas so that the soul can continue to experience its fruit. On the other hand, he claims that it is only the śaktipāta that depends on the ripening of Impurity that—by making a soul fit for initiation—causes liberation.  

Thus the Descent of Power which has been taught in other scriptures to have been caused by maturation of impurity is here too taught to be the cause of liberation by means of the sequence of [processes that follow culminating in] initiation. But the Descent of Power that this scripture teaches which is caused by a balance of karmas ends either in the removal of that balance of those [karmas] or in their destruction in the manner taught above. Thus there is no contradiction with other scriptures, since they do not teach this in particular [viz. the theory of the balance of karmas is liberating].

Rāmakaṇṭha, however, is making two inaccurate statements with regard to the doctrine of the Saiddhāntika scriptures. The first is that the scriptures teach that the śaktipāta leading to liberation is caused by the ripening of impurity, while such teaching is not found in any of the surviving early scriptural sources. The second is that no other scriptures besides the Kiraṇa teach the theory of karmasāmya—an assertion contradicted by the relevant passage on the balance of karmas in the Mataṅga, which I discussed earlier. With regard to his first statement, it is unlikely that Rāmakaṇṭha has in mind a tantra that has not reached us, since a few lines earlier he uses verses from the Mataṅga and the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha to make the same point. Both quotes refer to the fact that

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342 Kiranavyrtti ad V.9ef-10ab in Goodall 1998: 337-340. See also Goodall 1996: 358, fn. 51.
343 Section from Kiranavyrtti ad V.9ef-10ab, as translated in Goodall 1998: 338.
344 See also Goodall 1998: 338, fn. 524, and 339, fn. 525.
345 Mataṅga vidyāpāda X.25cd and Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha I.17cd.
when Impurity is worn away a person becomes dispassionate towards this world and longs for liberation.

Distortive interpretations in favor of the theory of malaparipāka continued long after Rāmacanṭha, such as those found in the works of Aghoraśiva, a twelfth century Saiddhāntika exegete from South India. Since this doctrine that śaktipāta depends on malaparipāka, however, is absent from any demonstrably early Siddhānta tantras, some questions naturally come to mind. How did this idea come about? Should we simply assume that somehow, over time—between the redaction of the canonical texts and their exegesis—a shift in the doctrine of grace occurred within the tradition?

The doctrinal development indeed is not so linear, with the early Siddhānta tantras teaching the theory of karmasāmya and the majority of the exegetical literature teaching the theory of karmasāmya.

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346 Goodall has shown how Aghoraśiva in his commentary (Ullekhī) to Śrīkanṭha’s Ratnārayaparīkṣā intentionally distorts verse 315 (text and translation in footnote 315) in order to propound his theory that śaktipāta is caused by malaparipāka and not by karmasāmya. By reading sannipātena (the term in the instrumental case which translates as “by coming together”) as sannipātē na (the locative form followed by the negation na), Aghoraśiva skillfully has Śrīkanṭha say the exact opposite. Thus, Aghoraśiva reads Ratnārayaparīkṣā 315 as:

“When the two actions come together, by preventing [each other from bearing] fruit by blocking each other, the power [called] Śaivī does not descend upon the soul.”

And in Ullekhī, commenting on the same verse, he says:

“When two actions—good, such as the performance of an aśvamedha sacrifice, or bad, such as the killing of a Brahmin—whose fruits, such as heaven (svarga) and Brahmā’s world, if they are two good actions, or the hell called Raurava and the hell called Avtci, if they are bad, occur together, blocking each other’s fruits, then the power [called] Śaivī that is compassionate and bestows Śivahood does not descend upon the soul, because it is taught that that [power] descends only when mala is ripe. It is rather the power of restraint (rodhaśaktih) that falls, through necessity in order to destroy the opposing actions. This is taught in the venerable Mataṅga with the section starting ‘When the soul has [two actions] whose fruits are those of good and bad [action]…’ By destroying actions initiation alone, which cannot occur without the maturation of mala, is the cause of liberation. This is taught in the venerable Kīrāna: ‘The action of many existences has its seeds burnt, so to speak (iva), by mantras [in initiation]. Future [action] too is blocked; [but] that by which this [body is sustained can be destroyed only] by experience.’ [Only] when impurity is ripe does the power that bestows grace descend.” (Trans. Goodall 1998: 219-220, fn.182).

Aghoraśiva also displays his exegetical skills in his sub-commentary (dīpikā) to Nārāyaṇakanṭha’s Matangavṛtti. See, for example, his dīpikā ad Mrgendra VP, VIII.6, where he denies any role of karmasāmya in determining śaktipāta. See Hulin 1980: 195-196.
that of malaparipāka. Only two surviving scriptural sources—the Kīrāṇa and the Mataṅga—teach that saktipāta occurs as a consequence of the balance of karmas. Furthermore, if the idea that saktipāta causes malaparipāka is absent in the early scriptures, some of the elements that make up this theory can nonetheless be traced to some of the Siddhāntatantras—such as the notion of a “ripening” (of the “seed”) preceding saktipāta, in the Parākhyatantra, and the idea that the soul’s Impurity transforms over time, in the Mṛgendratantra—both of which I discussed earlier. As for the exegetical tradition, if it is true that, based on the commentaries that have reached us, the idea that Śiva’s liberating power depends on malaparipāka became the normative view, we also know, indirectly, that—in addition to karmasāmya, followed by Śrīkanṭha—some exegetes in the Śaiva Siddhānta held a third position, interestingly the one later championed by Abhinavagupta: that Śiva’s grace does not depend on any cause other than his own will. The question that we need to ask then is rather the following: why do we know about the authors who followed this theory only indirectly?

As Alexis Sanderson has noted, between Sadyojyotis, the earliest exegete of the Śaiva Siddhānta whose work has survived, and the rest of the literature of this tradition that has reached us stretches a gap of almost two hundred years. Sanderson writes,

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347 Parākhyāya II.111cd-113, which I discussed earlier. See footnote 303.
348 I do not include Nārāyaṇakanṭha because, as I showed earlier, he does not consider karmasāmya a condition sine qua non for saktipāta.
349 This view, on the other hand, was not a later development in the Śaiva Siddhānta, since it is attested in one of the earliest surviving scriptural sources of this tradition, the Śvāyambhuvasātrasaṅgraha (vidyāpāda I.16), which I discuss later in this section. I quote the extended passage in fn. 374.

śivecchayā prāṇanām śāivā śaivāśāvādātīkā
sā saktir āpatah ādāyā pumśo janmany apāśčime || 16 ||
“In the first place, out of Śiva’s will, the infinite, primal Power of Śiva, which bestows the goal of the Śaiva [path], descends on the soul during its last birth.”
The reason for this lacuna is not that no such literature was produced in the interim but rather that the Kashmirian exegesis of the tenth to the eleventh centuries was a dogmatic return to the strictly ritualistic soteriology of Sadyojyotis after a period during which alternative, more flexible readings of the scriptural corpus had been current. The success of this fundamentalist reformation appears to have ousted alternative readings to the extent that no manuscripts of the commentaries that taught them have come down to us. Indeed we would know nothing of these readings were it not that some non-Saiddhāntika authors have referred to them.350

Among these authors is Abhinavagupta, who, in *Tantrāloka* XIII, quotes a short passage on śaktipāta, purportedly belonging to a commentary on the *Mataṅga* composed by a certain Aniruddha.351 Abhinava quotes Aniruddha in support of his theory on the complete autonomy (*nirapekṣatā*) of Śiva’s grace, not dependent on any cause other than himself:352

The venerable Aniruddha too has taught that [Śiva’s liberating power] is autonomous when commenting on the Lord’s “power that awakens” in the Tantra of *Mataṅga*, explaining at great length that when the power of the Lord descends it is beholden to nothing, being an unfolding of the nature of the self that can take place even in the extreme case of immobile life-forms.353

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351 Sanderson points out this passage in an earlier essay (2006b: 79-82), where he provides some textual evidence of the existence of these lost commentaries that deviated from the views of Sadyojyotis and Rāmakanta.
352 *Tantrāloka* 13.293cd-295ab:

> śrtmatāpy aniruddhena śaktim unmitināṃ vibhoḥ || 293 ||
> vyācakṣāṇena mātoṁge varṇitā nirapekṣatā ||
> sthāvarānte ‘pi devasya svarūpamātanātmikā || 294 ||
> śaktih patantī sāpekṣā na kvāptii svistarāt ||

353 As translated by Sanderson 2006b: 81, fn. 54. The passage of the *Mataṅgapārameśvara* the commentary is referring to is *Vidyāpāda* IV.43-44:

> patiśaktitrayāviṣṭam jagat sthāvarajāngamam ||
> bhramaty ajñānamohena duḥkhdiparāpītaṁ || 43 ||
> yāvat sūmmtānt śaktih śivarāgena saṃnyutā ||
> na pataty atitejasvinīyānugrahaśālinī || 44 ||

“This [whole] world of inanimate and animate beings, permeated by the three powers of the Lord, is in error owing to the delusion of ignorance, tormented by sorrow etc., until the expanding power [of Śiva], possessed with a very mighty and eternal grace, [and] endowed with feeling for Śiva, does not descend [upon someone].” (My translation.)
We can see from this quote that Aniruddha’s theory on Śiva’s redeeming power, which descends on souls “dependent on nothing” (sāpekṣā na kvāpi), was closer to the position of Abhinavagupta than that of Rāmakaṇṭha.

Even though, as I discussed earlier, the Mataṅga in a separate chapter teaches that śaktipāta occurs when the fruits of opposing karmas mature and block each other (dharmādharmanivipāke…), the section of the text that follows the two stanzas Aniruddha comments upon describes a process whereby the Lord is the agent, the instigator for both the guru and the disciple and for their connection. Śiva is also in complete control of whether a soul attains liberation, and he needs to be pleased. For this reason, the passage concludes that the Lord is “the cause.”

If the Lord is not pleased, the soul does not attain the gateway to liberation, the clear and very pure path called guru. For, having attained him, the perfected souls reach the state of [equality with] the Lord. Because of this [yasmāt], this

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354 Mataṅga IV 45-48:

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tannipātāc ca tasyeytham ajñasyāpy abhilāśināḥ
buddhir utpadyate ‘kasmād vivekenāṃvatāṁ || 45 ||
vivekino viraktasya jīvāśā copajāyaḥ
jīvāśaopetacaitanyam paśūṁ sāmśārasaṅgarāt || 46 ||
jīvāśaopetacaitanyam paśūṁ sāmśārasaṅgarāt
prerate prerakah śrīmān dvayar api sa mantrarat || 47 ||
anugrāhyasya vinaye tathānugrāhakasya ca
kārunyey tv anayor yasmāt tayor yogah sudurlabhah || 48 ||
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“And in this way, because of śaktipāta, for him who, though [still] ignorant, has longing, suddenly understanding arises, through the discrimination present in [his] soul. [And], for the one who has discrimination and is free from passions, the desire for knowledge arises. [Then] the Lord links [this] bound soul, whose consciousness is endowed with the desire to know, with the desire to extract himself from the ocean of worldly existence; [the Lord] is the one who inspires this [soul], [now] linked [to the desire for liberation]. In this process of moving forward (prerāne) the revered [Lord], who is the king of mantras, is the [power] who pushes forth both of them: [the disciple], who is the recipient of grace, in his humble submission (vinaye), [and the guru], who is the bestower of grace, in his compassion. This is because [otherwise] the connection between the two would be very rare for both [guru and disciple].” (My translation.)

355 Mataṅga IV 49-50:

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nāprasaṇane prabhau yasmād dvāram āpnoti pudgalaḥ
muktaye guruṇāmānaṁ vyakaṁ vartama sunirmalam || 49 ||
yam prāpya paśavah siddhāḥ patitvam upayānti hi
tasya devādīdevasya kāraṇatvam aninditam || 50 ||
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[process] does not contradict the fact that the first Lord of lords is the cause 
\( (devādidevasya kāraṇatvam aninditam) \).\textsuperscript{356}

Thus, by declaring that the Lord is independent, Aniruddha does not really distort the root text.\textsuperscript{357} Rather, it is Rāmakaṇṭha who twists the meaning of this stanza of the Mataṅga, by introducing the idea of the “ripening of impurity,” which is not mentioned at all in the tantra.\textsuperscript{358} Rāmakaṇṭha’s intention to correct what he regarded as misleading interpretations of the Mataṅga is not a veiled one; in the introduction to his commentary he overtly declares that his main purpose is to drive back the “elephant” (mataṅga) on the main road established by the Siddhānta scriptures and taught by the “foremost Gurus.”\textsuperscript{359} As Sanderson convincingly argues, these earlier authorities were likely Sadyojyotis and his contemporary Brhaspati, both of whom Rāmakaṇṭha is claiming to follow in his own understanding of the doctrine.\textsuperscript{360}

\textsuperscript{356} My translation.
\textsuperscript{357} These three views—that śaktipāta is caused by karmasāmya, or malaparipāka, or the Lord’s will—are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and aspects of them may coexist in the same tantra or, in the case of Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha, in the same exegetical work. While it may seem logical that one theory would rule out the other—since the Lord may be postulated as either autonomous, as the only cause of śaktipāta, or dependent on other causes—the doctrine of the early sources is not always philosophically consistent even within a single text. The Mataṅga, for example, teaches both that śaktipāta depends on karmasāmya, as I explained earlier, but also that Śiva’s grace-bestowing power descends on all things (IV.43–44), and the Lord is the cause of liberation (IV.49-50).
\textsuperscript{358} Rāmakaṇṭha’s Mataṅgavṛtti ad VP IV.50. Rāmakaṇṭha states that, while Śiva’s grace is “autonomous” (svatantra) it is not “independent” (anapekṣa): it is autonomous because no human can act against the Lord’s will, but it still depends on the soul being fit for it, i.e. on its innate Impurity being ripe. I will quote the entire passage in the following section, while discussing Rāmakaṇṭha’s view on śaktipāta. The Sanskrit text is in fn. 443, and the translation is in the body of the text.
\textsuperscript{359} Rāmakaṇṭha is playing on the fact that the word mataṅga also means “elephant.” The title of the text, Mataṅgopāramesvara, refers instead to the teaching of the supreme Lord (parameśvara) to the sage Mataṅga. See opening verses (4-5) of Rāmakaṇṭha’s Mataṅgavṛtti as translated by Sanderson 2006b: 79.
\textsuperscript{360} Sanderson 2006b: 82.
The theory that śaktipāta depends on Śiva’s will alone is attested in another (likely) Saiddhāntika author, Vidyādhipati,361 whose doctrinal view, like Aniruddha’s, has reached us only indirectly. It is again Abhinavagupta who transmits to us a fragment of his work:362

And the glorious teacher Vidyā [i.e. Vidyādhipati] said in the Pramāṇastotra363 teachings (darśana): “The descent of power was regarded by those whose view focuses obsessively on māyā (gāhanikas)364 as being in the moment of the cessation of the manifestation of dharma and adh arma.365 But the composer of hymns366 and other [authors], stating367 that this [descent of power occurs] out of your will, declare that freedom to be independent in you.”368

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361 Although there is no clear basis for assuming Vidyādhipati was a Saiddhāntika, Rāmakanṭha in the Mokṣakārikāvṛtti quotes him in a manner that may suggest this to be the case. See Goodall 1998: xxxiii. The relevant passage of the Mokṣakārikāvṛtti is quoted below (Sanskrit text in footnote 370).

362 Tantraloka XIII.128-129a:

śrīmān vidyā guruś cāha pramāṇastutidarśane |
dharmadharmavyāptivināśāntarākāle sakteḥ pāto gāhanikair yah pratipannah ll 128 ll
tam svecchātāha samgiramānāh stavakādyāh svātantryām tat tvāy anapeksaṃ kathayeyuh |

363 pramāṇastutī-darśane: this work is lost. The word stuti or stotra means hymn. The fact that Abhinavagupta uses the word darśanam—which means “teaching” but also “doctrine,” or “philosophy”—may indicate that it was a doctrinal work.

364 I am grateful to Dominic Goodall for suggesting this translation for the term gāhanika. In his commentary on this passage, Jayaratha explains that the gāhanikas are those who believe that gāhana—a term that literally means “thick forest” and that here refers to māyā, “primordial matter”—is the material cause of the universe. This is the view typically held by dualists such as Rāmakanṭha. If indeed, as I mentioned in footnote 361, we can assume Vidyādhipati was likely a Saiddhāntika, he was less fundamentalist than Rāmakanṭha, who after quoting him in the Mokṣakārikāvṛtti refutes his view of an autonomous śaktipāta. See footnote 436.

365 In his commentary on this passage Jayaratha explains that Vidyādhipati is referring to the Saiddhāntika doctrine of karmaṣānya. See also footnote 369 below.

366 The “composer of hymns” (stavaka) is probably a reference to Utpaladeva. Abhinavagupta quotes Śivastotrāvali XIII.11 as evidence that Utpaladeva too maintained that śaktipāta occurred depending on Śiva’s will alone, and not on the qualities of a disciple. See TĀ XIII.290-292ab:

śrīmānupaladevaś cāpy asmākaṃ paramo guruḥ |
śaktipātasamaye vicāraṇaṃ prāptaṃ tāṣa na karosi karhicīt | 290 ll
adya māṃ prati kim āgataṃ yataḥ svaprakāśanavidhau vilambase |
karhicītprāptasabdābyāṃ anapeksitaṃ ivīcivān || 291 ll
durlabhavām arāgītvam śaktipātavidhau vibhoh |

“And also our guru’s guru, the revered Utpaladeva, said: ‘Oh Lord, at the time of śaktipāta you never do the normal (prāpta) examination. Today what has occurred for me [i.e. what is wrong with me], for which you are [still] delaying in the process of manifesting yourself?’ With the words ‘ever’ and ‘normal’ [Utpaladeva] expressed the independence, the difficulty in obtaining it, and the lack of favoritism of the Lord in the process of śaktipāta.”

I quote this passage in chapter 4, introducing Abhinavagupta’s notion of śaktipāta having nine degrees (section 4.1 “Introduction: Abhinavagupta’s Doctrine of the Nine Śaktipāta”). Based on the same verse of
In common with the author of the *Tantrāloka*, Vidyādhhipati not only promotes the view that Śiva’s *śaktipāta* is independent of any cause, but also explicitly rejects the theory of *karmasāmya*, which in this passage is denoted by terms (*dharma* and *adharma*) that echo the wording of the *Mataṅga*.\(^{369}\) Vidyādhhipati reasons, in agreement with the non-dualists, that a Lord who depends on something external is not omnipotent, as another of his statements shows, this time quoted by Rāmakaṇṭha:\(^{370}\)

This is what Vidyādhhipati said: “The Descent of Power from Śiva that releases bound souls is autonomous, for if it were dependent [on something else], then the supreme Lord would not be [omnipotent].”\(^{371}\)

Rāmakaṇṭha places this quote in the mouth of an objector who is arguing in favor of the Lord being autonomous, only cause for liberation.\(^{372}\)

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\(^{367}\) The expression *saṃgiramāṇḥ* literally means “speaking together” or “agreeing.” Jayaratha glosses it with *pratiyānāṇas* (“promising,” “stating,” “declaring”).

\(^{368}\) Jayaratha takes the locative case *tvayy* as a “locative of scope” (*viṣay-saptamī*), which would translate as “with regard to you.” I am instead taking it as a “locative of place” (*adhikāra-saptamī*) i.e. “in you,” following Harunaga Isaacson’s suggestion (personal communication, spring 2005).

\(^{369}\) See *Mataṅga* XIII.15-17 (quoted in the section on *karmasāmya*), which also refers to *dharma* and *adharma* while describing *karmasāmya*. It is possible that Aniruddha, like Vidyādhhipati, while claiming Śiva’s autonomy in bestowing grace, rejected the theory of *karmasāmya* taught in the *Mataṅga*, but unfortunately his commentary on that passage of the text has not reached us even indirectly.

\(^{370}\) *Mokṣakārikāvṛtti* (Rāmakaṇṭha’s commentary on Sadyojyotis’s *Mokṣakārika*) ad 67cd-69ab.

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yad āha vidyādhhipatiḥ—
svatantarāḥ śaktipāto ’saú śaivaḥ paśuvimokṣaṅkṛt l
sāpeksatve hi tasya syād aśaktatḥ parameśvarah āḥ ||
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\(^{371}\) As translated by Goodall 1998: xxxiii, fn. 74.

\(^{372}\) *Mokṣakārikāvṛtti* ad 67cd-69ab. In the two lines preceding Vidyādhhipati’s quote, the objector says:

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astu tarhi svatantarā eva paramēśvaro mokṣaḥetuḥ l tato naiṣa doṣa, nāpy atiprasaṅgaḥ,
sveccayā niyamitaśtvār āḥ yad āha vidyādhhipatiḥ—
```

“Let then there be a supreme Lord who is completely autonomous. There would not be a logical problem nor a very undesirable corollary as a consequence of this, because of the fact that He limits Himself out of His own will. This is what Vidyādhhipati [also] said . . .”
The view that Śiva causes his grace-bestowing power to descend out of his will was not a later development in the Śaiva Siddhānta, since it is attested in one of the earliest surviving scriptural sources of this tradition, the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha. Chapter 1 of this text describes the sequence starting from saktipāta and leading to liberation:

In the first place, out of Śiva’s will (śivecchayā), the infinite, primal Power of Śiva, which bestows the goal of the Śaiva [path], descends on the soul during its last birth. Due to the descent of this [Power], the Impurity of that [soul], cause of transmigration, wears away (kṣarati). When [this Impurity] is worn away, [the soul] has a desire to reach the supreme, highest state. Having attained a teacher, its bonds cut by initiation, [the soul] obtains the state of union with Śiva (śivasāyuṣya), free from impurity (nirmala) and free from [the tendency of] going after [sense-objects] (nirṇamalā). [The soul] which has attained the highest liberation through this process (kramayogena), does not obtain another existence, because it is free from the beginningless Impurity.

In the passage above at least three elements diverge from the later, “orthodox” Śaiva Siddhānta soteriology as represented by Rāmakaṇṭha and, to a certain degree, by Rāmakaṇṭha’s reply to this view provides a clear summary of his argument against the idea of a Lord who acts in complete autonomy from other factors. I quote this passage in the next section, while discussing Rāmakaṇṭha. See footnote 436.

Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha also appears to have elements of both views, even if the two causes are inverted—so to speak—with respect to the Mataṅga: saktipāta is taught to be determined by Śiva’s will, while liberation occurs as a consequence of karmasāmaya, or what seems a reference to it. As in the case of the Mataṅga, the two views are expressed in two separate sections.

Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha 1:16-19:
śivecchayā puṇāntā śaivī śaivārthadāyikā
sā śaktir āpatatā ṣaivyā puṁso janmanī apiṣeṣime || 16||
tannipātāt kṣarataḥ asya malaṁ saṁsārakāraṇam ||
ketu tasmin yiṣaḥ syāt paraṁ niḥṣreyasam prati || 17||
sa deśikaṁ anuprāpya dīkṣāvivechinchinnabandhanah ||
prayāti śivasāyuṣyaṁ nirvāla nirṇamalā nirṇamalāvah || 18||
anena kramayogena parām kevalatām gataḥ ||
anādaśadvādhiśāntayatvāt prāpanāṁ na bhavāntaram || 19||

Sadyojyotis glosses: anu samātānaṁ plavaṁ vishayasāṭaṭayogamanam anuplavaḥ: “anuplava means plavana, ‘going,’ anu ‘in the trail of’ i.e. going in the trail of external objects” (trans. Filliozat 1994: 29). Kṣemarāja also glosses the term nirṇamalāvah in his commentary ad Netratantra XXII.51b, and basically understands it in the sense of “free of mala” (anu plavate āṇavamalānantaram prasaratīt anuplavaḥ…).

My translation.
Sadyojyotis. The first is that Śiva’s liberating power descends out of his will, and not as a consequence of the ripening of the soul’s Impurity. The second is that śaktipāta (instead of initiation) removes the soul’s innate Impurity. The third is that liberation ends in “unity with Śiva,” an expression that may suggest the idea of philosophical non-dualism typically found in non-Saiddhāntika Śaiva scriptures.

Commenting on this āgama, Sadyojyotis promptly reinterprets some of these points: śaktipāta, he maintains, reduces the part of Impurity that causes transmigration but does not destroy it completely; otherwise initiation would be purposeless. He also reinterprets the expression śivasāyujya as “equality” with Śiva, in line with the dualistic orientation of post-āgamic Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine. However, Sadyojyotis does not appear to distort the teaching of this āgama that śaktipāta occurs out of Śiva’s will.

377 According to Saiddhāntika doctrine, this ritual’s main function was precisely to remove a soul’s Impurity, conceived of as the fundamental bond of the soul. I mentioned earlier that the Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine regarded Impurity to be the main bond, conceived of as a material substance, similar to a cataract covering the eye. Because of its nature, this bond could be removed only by a physical action, such as the initiation rite. I purposefully wrote “typically” because not all the non-Saiddhāntika Tantras are non-dualistic. For a more detailed exposition of the dualistic and non-dualistic doctrine of the Śaiva Tantras—Saiddhāntika and non-Saiddhāntika—see Sanderson 1992.

379 The expression śivasāyujya, “unity with Śiva,” however, need not necessarily be understood as a statement of philosophical non-dualism. The expression, which also occurs in Pāṇḍava sources, may have a less technical sense, for instance, “union” as in “communion.” In order to avoid ambiguity, however, Sadyojyotis prefers to gloss it as “equality with Śiva,” as I mention below.

380 The expression śivasāyujya, “unity with Śiva,” however, need not necessarily be understood as a statement of philosophical non-dualism. The expression, which also occurs in Pāṇḍava sources, may have a less technical sense, for instance, “union” as in “communion.” In order to avoid ambiguity, however, Sadyojyotis prefers to gloss it as “equality with Śiva,” as I mention below.

381 Sadyojyotis’s commentary ad Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha I.17. I will discuss his interpretation in detail in section 3.2.4.

382 Sadyojyotis’s ad Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha I.18: prāpnoti śivasāyujyaṃ śivena sahayughbhāvan tulyatvam: “it reaches śivasāyujyaṃ the state of being united with, i.e. equality with Śiva” (trans. Filliozat 1994: 29). According to Filliozat (2001:46), however, this dualistic view of Sadyojyotis with respect to Śiva and the soul “does not seem to go to the extreme position of considering that the similarity of nature at the time of supreme release still implies some difference.” He makes this observation based on Sadyojyotis’s commentary ad SSS III.6, a stanza that describes Mantra souls acting “in the vast past ending in Śiva” (śivānte vitate ‘dhvani). Sadyojyotis’s commentary reads: “Where do they [viz. Mantra souls] act? Śivānte vitate ‘dhvani. Some say, ‘They act in the vicinity of Śiva; they, indeed, do not reach Śiva.’ But we say, ‘Even in Śiva they act to give the soul unity with Śiva.’”
Commenting on the first stanza (I.16) of the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha passage just quoted above, Sadyojyotis writes: 383

Impelled by Śiva’s will, His Power [śakti] descends. Now śakti is Śiva’s will itself. Therefore how is that told? Even if there is no difference between these two, there is no defect, because the author says “by Śiva’s will śakti descends” having in mind that firstly there is the action of Śiva’s śakti called will: “I give grace to this soul; subsequently śakti comes [to that soul].” … To whom does this Power descend? “Pūmsaḥ” i.e. it comes to the soul; it amounts to say[ing]: it is related to the soul. When [does it come]? “In the last birth of the soul.” Mala’s power has its function obscured by Śiva’s śakti and goes to its end. That is the last birth. 384

Sadyojyotis in his commentary appears to be faithful to the root text regarding the idea that Śiva’s power descends depending on the Lord’s divine will. This fact would not be noteworthy had Rāmakaṇṭha and later authors of the tradition, including non-dualists, not attributed to Sadyojyotis the idea that Śiva’s liberating power descends on a soul depending on the degree of ripeness of its Impurity. 385 Was this exegete really the founding father of this particular theory? A closer look into the works of Sadyojyotis and Rāmakaṇṭha can provide further insights into this question.

3.2.4 The “Ripening” of Impurity: From Sadyojyotis to Rāmakaṇṭha

Sadyojyotis refers to the idea of transformation of Impurity as malaparinatī. This theory, in turn, renamed “ripening of impurity” (malaparipāka) became predominant among later

383 Sadyojyotis’s commentary ad Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha I.16:
śivasyečchayā prayuktā śaktir āpatati | śivečchā[ya śaktir iti] tat katham etad iti | nāvyatireke
‘pi doṣāya, yataḥ pārvaṃ śivasyečchāhyāsakter vyāpāraḥ—“asya puṃso ’nugraham karomīti,”
anantarāṃ ca śaktir āpataty etam artham abhipreyoktam—śivasyečchayā śaktir āpatatīti | …
kam asāv āpatatīti | puṃsaḥ puṃsāṃsam āpatati yāvat | puṃsā saha saṃbadhyata iti yāvat | kadaḥ | puṃso jannany apaścime āvasāni[ke] jannani | malaśaktīṣvaraśaktitirasḵrādhiḥkāra
samāpyate | tad apaścimaṃ janneti |

384 As translated by Filliozat (1994: 27), with minor variations.

385 Goodall 1998: xxxiv-xxv and fn. 77-79. See for instance Rāmakaṇṭha’s commentary ad Tattvatraṇa-
nirṇaya 13 and 19; and Kṣemarāja’s Svacchandatantrodhyota V, vol. 3, p. 84.10-11.
exegetes of the traditions, such as Rāmakaṇṭha and Aghoraśiva, who regarded this development in the mala as a necessary precondition for śaktipāta. My purpose here is to evaluate the claim made by these authors that it was Sadyojyotis who first regarded this ripeness of the soul’s Impurity as a prerequisite of śaktipāta. While focusing mainly on the Tattvatrayanirṇaya—the treatise he devotes to the examination of the soul’s Impurity—and on which Rāmakaṇṭha wrote a commentary (vivṛti)—I will use as a point of departure Sadyojyotis’s commentary on the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha.

Commenting on the stanza that concludes the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha passage I quoted above (I.19), Sadyojyotis summarizes the sequence leading to liberation as follows:

Kramayoga means a union with a succession [of events]: firstly there is union with Śiva’s šakti, then union with the wearing away of Impurity, then with the desire to approach [a preceptor], then with the preceptor, then with initiation, then with the state in which the bonds are severed [i.e. liberation].

Based on this evidence, it would appear that Sadyojyotis does not consider any change of Impurity as a prerequisite for śaktipāta, but rather as a consequence of it. The sequence would be as follows: first the descent of Śiva’s grace-bestowing power, then a decrease in the Impurity, then initiation by a guru, and finally liberation. Sadyojyotis makes the

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386 The title Tattvatrayanirṇaya, which translates roughly as “A Treatise on the Three Entities,” refers to the three main ontological entities of Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine: Lord Śiva, souls, and Primal Matter (māyā). As Goodall et al. (2008: 311) correctly observe, however, the main focus of the work is on a “fourth entity,” mala, the soul’s innate Impurity, which “determines the relations between the three entities of the title.”

387 “[The soul] which has attained the highest liberation through this process (kramayogena)...” See footnote 374 for Sanskrit text of Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha I.19.

388 Sadyojyotis’s commentary ad Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha I.19:

kramenā yogah kramayogah pūrvam śaktyā saha yogah, tato malakṣaramena yogah, tato yiyāśayā, tato deśikena, tato dikṣayā, tato vichinnabandhanatvena |


390 As I will show below, however, in a later work, the Tattvatrayanirṇaya, Sadyojyotis is less clear regarding the whole sequence leading to liberation.
sequence appear consistent not only with his earlier statement—that Śiva’s power descend out of his will (ad I.16)—but also with the “process” (kramayoga) taught by the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha in the aforementioned four stanzas (I.16-19). It is Rāmakaṇṭha instead who, in the Kiraṇavṛtti, indicates a different sequence—inverting the two terms śaktipāta and malaparipāka—stating that “first there is a maturation of impurity, then a descent of power, then initiation.”

Table 3.3: Sequence Leading to Liberation (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha</th>
<th>Sadyojyotis (Svāyambhuvasāravṛtti)</th>
<th>Rāmakaṇṭha (Kiraṇavṛtti)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Śiva’s will</td>
<td>Śiva’s will</td>
<td>Ripening of Impurity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descent of Śiva’s power</td>
<td>“Union” with Śiva’s power</td>
<td>Descent of Śiva’s power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing away of Impurity</td>
<td>Decrease of Impurity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Initiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberation</td>
<td>Liberation</td>
<td>Liberation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, in the entire Tattvārāyanināṇaya (the treatise he devotes to the examination of the mala), Sadyojyotis does not explicitly mention the term śaktipāta. This omission on Sadyojyotis’s part is precisely what allows Rāmakaṇṭha, in his commentary (vivṛtti) to the TTN, to interpret Sadyojyotis’s doctrine as teaching that this transformation, which Rāmakaṇṭha calls “ripening” (paripāka), occurs before śaktipāta, and is in fact its pre-condition. As Goodall has observed, however, in none of the passages where Sadyojyotis refers to the transformation of Impurity “does he clearly state that he regards that and that alone as an essential prerequisite for the fall of salvific

Goodall 1998: xxxiv, fn. 76, and 353. The quote is from Kiraṇavṛttih ad V.29: pūrvarn malaparipākas tataḥ śaktipātas tato dīkṣety anena kramayogena yo dīkṣitah… The context in which the quote occurs is that of occultation. Rāmakaṇṭha is saying that whoever is initiated by this sequence eventually attains liberation, even if there is a period of occultation.
power”—the position that will become characteristic later with Rāmakaṇṭha. Goodall also remarks that indeed Sadyojyotis “fails to make this clear even when there seem to be opportunities that invite an exposition of his position on the sequence of events leading to liberation.”

I suggest that Sadyojyotis’s avoidance of the term “śaktipāta” in the Tattvatrayanirṇaya is entirely intentional, in that it allows him to systematize the ideas of an emerging ritualistic Saiddhāntika doctrine without overtly contradicting the teachings of the āgamas. After examining Sadyojyotis’s independent treatises and their relation to the scriptural sources, Filliozat remarks that this author is “a philosopher who has constructed a system on the basis of Agamic material. However”—he notes—“Sadyojyotis’s philosophy remains very close to the rites. It is the thought of a ritualist, more than a philosopher, about rites.” He adds that the “rite par excellence” is that of initiation, which removes the Impurity; and that the Lord’s grace “is the efficient cause of the rite of purification.” If there is no doubt on the fact that the Svāyambhuvasūtra-saṅgraha informs Sadyojyotis’s doctrine in Tattvatrayanirṇaya, this treatise must also be


393 To explain: if Sadyojyotis in the TTN had stated that śaktipāta occurred after this transformation of mala—as Rāmakaṇṭha maintains—he would have contradicted the sequence taught in the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha and his own commentary thereupon. If, conversely, Sadyojyotis had explicitly stated that the transformation of mala was determined by śaktipāta—as Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha I.16-19 teaches—he would have postulated a sequence implying a lag of time (i.e. that of transformation of mala, specific for each individual) between śaktipāta and initiation. A theory conceived as such would be inconsistent with ritualistic Saiddhāntika doctrine, where the latter is the visible manifestation of the former: Śiva’s śaktipāta is “actualized,” so to speak, in the initiation ritual performed by the guru, which alone can remove the mala.

394 Filliozat 2001: 49. On the last point—that śaktipāta is the “efficient cause” of initiation, see, for example, Aghoraśiva’s commentary ad Tattvatrayanirṇaya 27: “en effet l’élimination du mala est comprise quand on a vu son effet mentionné dans le présent [enseignement], à savoir l’exécution de la dikṣā qui est inséparable de la chute de la puissance [de grâce du Seigneur]” (as translated by Filliozat 1991a:155).
understood as an independent work. Furthermore his commentary on the former can already be seen as a transition towards the latter: by reinterpreting certain elements of this āgama, Sadyojyotis prepares the ground for the doctrine he expounds the Tattvatrayanirṇaya.

Sadyojyotis’s intention, I would argue, is to progressively move away from the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha’s idea that śaktipāta has any significant impact in removing the soul’s innate Impurity. The point where he appears to distort the intended meaning of the āgama in a significant way is related to the degree to which Śiva’s śakti affects the soul’s innate Impurity. The term used in the root text, kṣarati, means “flows away” or “wears away.” It appears then that the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha, by stating that, after Śiva’s power descends, the mala “flows away,” teaches that śaktipāta removes this fundamental bond, a function that the exegetical literature, including Sadyojyotis, strictly reserves for initiation. Sadyojyotis, instead, interprets the texts as saying that mala merely “decreases.”

395 In the last verse of the Tattvatrayanirṇaya Sadyojyotis refers to himself as the commentator of the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha. Similarly, in the last verse of another of his treatises, the Tattvasaṅgraha (TSaṅ), he refers to himself as the commentator of the Rauravāga. According to the twelfth century exegete Aghoraśiva, these two works by Sadyojyotis (TSaṅ and TTN) are elaborations, respectively, of the Rauravāga and the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha (Aghoraśiva’s commentary ad TTN 2). Filliozat (2001: 48), however, remarks that the Tattvatrayanirṇaya “is not a mere summary of the content of the Svāyambhūvāga, but a rethought and systematized exposition”; and Goodall et al. (2008: 315) observe that in spite of Sadyojyotis’s self-reference at the end of the TTN “we cannot be certain that he means to express thereby that the Tattvatrayanirṇaya is an exposition of the doctrines of the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha.”

396 Filliozat (1991a: 34) remarks that one may not find apparent divergences between the Tattvatrayanirṇaya and the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha. With regard to śaktipāta, however, this seems to be more the result of Sadyojyotis’s exegetical skills than a real convergence in doctrine.

397 Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha 1.17ab: tannipātāt kṣaraty asya malaṃ samśātrakārānam | The natural interpretation of the verse, as I indicated earlier quoting the entire passage, is: “Due to the descent of this [Power], the Impurity of that [soul], cause of transmigration, wears away (kṣarati).”

398 See footnote 378. Discussing the teachings of the Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha Filliozat (2001: 47) says: “It is to be remarked that [in this āgama] the rite of ātksā acts mainly on one bond, i.e. karman. It acts also on māyā because the karman can be consumed only by the fulfillment of its
Therefore by the descent of Śiva’s śakti the mala “asya” [of it] i.e. of the soul, “kṣarati” [wears away] i.e. goes down… The wearing away bears only upon mala’s action to lead [the soul] downwards, because it is qualified by [the expression] “cause of transmigration” (samsārākāraṇa): mala wears away as a cause of transmigration. This is what has been told: “the property of mala to be a cause of transmigration, i.e. its action to lead the soul downwards, comes to an end.” Thus initiation is purposeful. If we accepted a flowing away of the mala in its entire nature, there would follow the unwanted consequence that initiation is useless.  

Thus Śiva’s grace-bestowing power, Sadyojyotis maintains, removes only the part of Impurity that causes transmigration, but it does not destroy it completely: otherwise initiation would be purposeless. If we look even closer at Sadyojyotis’s interpretation of Svāyambhuvasthrasaṅgraha I.17ab, we see that he pushes the text even further. He also reinterprets the expression that in the root text refers to śaktipāta—the specific event occurring at a certain moment in time and preceding initiation—in terms of anugraha, or anugrahi kṣakti, Śiva’s cosmic function of grace, which acts continuously on all things, animate and inanimate. According to Sadyojyotis’s interpretation, verse I.17 would then teach that Śiva’s grace-giving power (anugraha) causes Impurity to diminish (to

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399 Sadyojyotis’s commentary ad Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha I.17 : kṣaraty asya malam | … atas tannipātāt kṣaraty adho y[a]tī asya puṃso malam iti | … asmāt kṣarāṇaṃ malasyādhniyāmakatvaṃātraṃ eva yato viśeṣayati—samsārākāraṇam iti | yataḥ samsārākāraṇam, malam kṣarānti | etat uktām bhavati—malasya samsārākāraṇatvam adho-niyāmakatvam nivartata iti dīkṣāyāḥ sārthakatvam | yadi cātā malasya sarvātmanā kṣarāṇam iṣyate, tato dīkṣāyā anarthaḥ kyam prasajyetetī |

400 As translated, with minor variations, by Filliozat 1994: 29. The Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgraha, however, is not doing away with initiation. Not only does it list this ritual as a step in the sequence leading to the highest liberation, it is also teaches that this ritual is the only means that removes “the protracted [threefold] bond” (pravītataḥ bandhāḥ) of the soul—māyā, mala and karman—obstructing the highest liberation. See SSS II.23-24.

401 Sadyojyotis achieves this result by glossing “The descent of that [power]” as the “contact between the object of grace (anugrāhya) and the bestower of grace (anugrahaka).” See Svāyambhuvasūtrasaṅgrahavṛtti ad I.17ab: [tannipātā]: tasyaḥ śaṭker nipātād anugrāhyānugrāhakalakṣaṇasaṃśleṣāt /
“transform”). Once this divine power has caused a transformation of the Impurity to the point that it is ready to be removed, then the Lord bestows initiation, as Sadyojyotis states in the *Tattvatrayanirṇaya:*402

Once [H]e has seen that [mala is] ready to be removed, [H]e uses his instrument [i.e. initiation] for releasing the soul. Just as māyā ripens403 in a period of resorption of the universe, so too we require that mala ripens, [and this is possible] because it is devoid of sentience.404

Thus, by distancing himself from the idea that śaktipāta neutralizes the soul’s Impurity, Sadyojyotis has taken the meaning of this tantra further in the direction of ritualism. In his view—as in the view of later Saiddhāntika ritualists such as Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha and Rāmakaṇṭha—the Lord removes the Impurity through initiation alone, which in the *Tattvatrayanirṇaya* he defines as “the instrument for releasing the soul” (nṛmuktaye karaṇam).405 The idea Sadyojyotis reads in SSS I.17—that Śiva’s grace causes Impurity to decrease—forms the essence of the doctrine of the “transformation of Impurity” (mala-pariṇāma) that Sadyojyotis expounds in the *Tattvatrayanirṇaya.*406 This theory is

402 *Tattvatrayanirṇaya* 21, text and translation as in Goodall 1998: xxxiv, fn. 75:

*dṛṣṭvā ca taṁ nivṛttyai yogyaṃ yuṅkte nṛmuktaye karaṇam |
brahmaṇe svāpe pariṇatī istā malasya citihāneḥ || 21 ||
taṁ nivṛttyai ] em. Goodall (1998); *tan nivṛtyai* TTN<sup>DV</sup> TTN<sup>PI</sup> TTV<sup>GA</sup>. *citihāneḥ* is Aghoraśiva’s reading. TTN<sup>DV</sup> TTN<sup>PI</sup>. Rāmakaṇṭha reads *citihānaḥ* (TTV<sup>GA</sup>) “with the result that there is no sentience.”

403 Primal Matter (māyā) “ripens” (pariṇāti) in the sense that it undergoes transformation.

404 This is a reference to a principle found in Śaiva doctrine, according to which only something insentient can go through transformation. See Goodall 1998: xxxiv, as well as his translation of *Kīrāṇa* II.26ab: “Transformation [is possible] of the insentient (pariṇāmo ‘cetanasya). It is not possible for what is sentient” (p. 254). If Impurity were sentient, since it is eternal, it could not undergo transformation.

405 See TTN 21 quoted earlier. Sadyojyotis’s reaction to the *Śvāyambhubhuvātrasāstrasangraha* I.17 is somewhat analogous to Rāmakaṇṭha’s reaction to *Matanga, Vidyāpāda* XIII. 32. The tantra speaks about the souls who have received śaktipāta as “saved” (uddhṛtaḥ). Rāmakaṇṭha, however, distorts the meaning of this stanza by claiming that the expression “Śiva’s sakti” does not refer to śaktipāta, but instead to dīkṣā. Thus, according to his reading, the *Matanga* would teach that souls are saved by dīkṣā. I discuss this passage and Rāmakaṇṭha’s commentary in more detail in chapter 1, section 1.3.3 on Rāmakaṇṭha.

406 According to Goodall et al. (2008: 315) verse I.17 of the *Śvāyambhubhuvātrasāstrasangraha* can be taken as no more than an “oblique allusion” to the doctrine that mala ripen through time. See how Rāmakaṇṭha interprets SSS I.17 ad TTN 12 and 27, and ad *Kīrāṇa* II.27cd-29ab.
remarkably similar to the *Mṛgendratantra*, which—as I showed while introducing the doctrine of the Śaiva Siddhānta⁴⁰⁷—also teaches that it is Śiva’s grace-bestowing power (*anugrahikā śakti*) that transforms the powers of Impurity until they stop obstructing the soul.⁴⁰⁸ Rāmakāṇṭha too uses SSS I.17, not only to support the theory that Impurity ripens, but also to suggest that its ripeness precedes śaktipāṭa.⁴⁰⁹

**TABLE 3.4: Sequence Leading to Liberation (2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ŞADYOJYOTIS (Svāyambhuvaṃvaraṇī after glosses of I.17)</th>
<th>ŞADYOJYOTIS (Tattvaturanirṇaṇaya)</th>
<th>RĀMAKĀNTHA (Tattvaturanirṇaṇayavivekī)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Şiva’s will = Śiva’s grace (anugraha instead of śaktipāṭa)  ↓</td>
<td>Śiva’s will = Śiva’s grace (causes Impurity to transform) ↓</td>
<td>Śiva’s will = Śiva’s grace (causes Impurity to transform) ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impurity decreases (instead of wearing away) ↓</td>
<td>Impurity transforms (in the course of time) ↓</td>
<td>Impurity ripens (in the course of time) ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation ↓</td>
<td>Initiation ↓</td>
<td>Descent of Śiva’s power ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberation</td>
<td>Liberation</td>
<td>Initiation ↓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Liberation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What does this transformation of the soul’s innate Impurity entail, how does it occur, and who causes it? Sadyojyotis explains that when *mala* ripens, it ceases to obstruct the powers of soul, that is, the powers of knowledge and agency. This transformation occurs over time, but the amount of time and the means through which it ripens differ among various individuals.⁴¹⁰

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⁴⁰⁷ See section 3.2.1 of this chapter.
⁴⁰⁸ See *Mṛgendratantra*, VP, VII.11-12, which I quoted and discussed in section 3.2.1 “Grace and Bondage in the Doctrine of the Śaiva Siddhānta”. For Sanskrit text see fn. 262.
⁴⁰⁹ Rāmakāṇṭha quotes the second half of the verse, SSS 17ab, in several places (for example in his commentary ad TTN 12 and 27; and ad *Kīrana* V.9ef-10ab): “When [this Impurity] has diminished, [the soul] has a desire to reach the supreme, highest state.” Disregarding the fact that the SSS is teaching that Impurity wears out after the descent of Śiva’s power, Rāmakāṇṭha interprets pāda c as referring to the ripening of Impurity preceding śaktipāṭa, and pāda d as referring to the signs of śaktipāṭa, i.e. equanimity and the desire for liberation. See Goodall et al. 2008: 374, fn. 112.
⁴¹⁰ *Tattvaturanirṇaṇaya* 11cd-13:
The powers of mala are different and, in each soul, cover its qualities [accordingly] (11cd). As it transforms over time, Impurity stops (vinivartate) its blocking (virodhā) [the manifestation] of the soul’s powers. Because it may have different particular degrees of ripening,411 this [impurity stops] at a certain particular moment for a certain particular soul and in a certain particular way (kathaṅcid) 412 (12). Precisely for this reason we see different degrees of awakening for souls—i.e. because of the [various] means (sādhanād), [and] because of the [different] time [of transformation] and quality [of the Impurity]. This [awakening] takes place in this way—never otherwise (13).413

The text makes an important point here. It provides an explanation of the fact that, even if Śaiva Siddhānta’s doctrine holds that Impurity is a single entity, since its powers are different for each soul, individuals attain liberation at different times, and not all at once.414 In their introduction to the critical edition of this text, Goodall et al. (2008) suggest that the primary focus of the Tattvatrayanirnaya is in fact “a justification of the tenet that the ripening of impurity is required to account for the attainment of liberation

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411 Owing to the fact that the process of transformation is different (pariṇātivīśayogā) for each soul.
412 The parenthesis here is my addition.
413 The translation of stanza 12 is by Goodall et al. (2008: 359, fn. 72), which follows Aghoraśīva’s interpretation. The translation that the authors provide in the body text, on the same page, follows Rāmakaṇṭha’s interpretation and, as footnote 72 clarifies, it was unlikely the meaning Sadyojyotis intended. There are no variations, however, in the Sanskrit text of this stanza between the reading by Aghoraśīva (TTN) and that by Rāmakaṇṭha (TTN45a). The translation of stanza 13 is mine. For pāda 13d (nānyathā jātū), I followed the reading by Rāmakaṇṭha and not Aghoraśīva, where the expression tīṣṭaḥ “from the Lord” follows nānyathā, “not otherwise.” The TTN does not deny the role of the Lord, who is the agent for the transformation of mala. It states, instead, that the Lord depends on these factors. Following Rāmakaṇṭha’s commentary, Goodall et al. (2008: 360-361) translate stanza 13 as follows:

“It is for this very reason that various degrees of ‘success’ (udayabedha) that have been explained above (pariṇāṛṣṭaḥ) come about for souls through the means [known as initiation], in the same way (tathā), [i.e.] because of ‘time’ and because of the quality [of each individual’s impurity] and not ever otherwise.”

414 As I will show in section 3.3.1, one of the arguments Abhinavagupta uses to refute the views of the Śaiva Siddhānta is that, if certain presuppositions were accepted, they would lead to the simultaneous liberation of all souls.
by different souls at different moments.” The Mrgendranatra teaches the same view in very similar terms. The stanza that precedes the exposition of the doctrine of the transformation of a soul’s Impurity reads:

This Impurity is one, even if it has a multiple [nature], because if it were such [multiple], it would have a beginning. However its powers are multiple, because we do not see liberation at the same time [for all souls].

It appears that Sadyojyotis’s theory of transformation of the soul’s innate Impurity (malaparinaṭi) is closer to that of the Mrgendra than to Rāmakaṇṭha’s reformulation of the doctrine as a “ripening of Impurity” (malaparipāka) that must precede śaktipāta. Sadyojyotis teaches explicitly that Śiva depends on the time of transformation of a soul’s Impurity for liberation. He does not say, however, that the Lord depends on this transformation for śaktipāta, as Rāmakaṇṭha maintains.

415 Goodall et al., 2008: 313.
416 Mrgendra VII.10:

\[\text{tad ekam bahusaṃkhyaṃ tu tādṛg utpattimad yataḥ} \]
\[\text{kintu tachaktyayo 'nekā yugapan muktyadarśanāt} ⊥ 10 \]


417 Nareśvaraparīkṣā (“An Inquiry into Human Beings and the Lord”) III.152cd-154ab:

\[\text{anuvanugrahāsāmartyaṃ sarvathā cāsti śaṃkare} ⊥ 152 \]
\[\text{tathāpi yugapan muktir nāṭīnām tena dhṛyate} \]
\[\text{sṛṣṭau yoner yathā kālam mahēśāno vyapekṣate} ⊥ 153 \]
\[\text{protārane tathā kālam malasyāsāv apeksate} \]

“Śiva is always capable of giving grace (anugraha) to the souls. Nonetheless we do not see that He [grants] liberation to [all] souls at the same time. Just as Mahēśāna (i.e. Śiva) depends upon Time in creating from Primal Matter, so also He depends upon Time in the removal of Impurity.” (My translation.)

Note that here too Sadyojyotis refers to grace as anugraha, while making no mention of śaktipāta. The “time,” as Sadyojyotis explains in Tattvatrayanirnaya 11-13 quoted earlier, is that of transformation of a soul’s Impurity, which Rāmakaṇṭha—who writes a commentary (prakāśa) on this other work of Sadyojyotis as well—glosses here as “ripening of Impurity.” His commentary Nareśvaraparīkṣā 152cd-154ab reads:

\[\text{yathā hi māyātaḥ sarganimittam karmaparipākakālāpekṣitvena bhagavato na yugapat sarva-}
\[\text{bhogapradatvam ity uktaṃ prāk \ evam mokṣanimittam malaparipākāpekṣitvāt na yugapat}
\[\text{sarveṣāṃ mokṣaprasāṅgo nirapekṣitvasyaivāśiddhē} \]

“Just as the Lord, for the sake of creation from māyā, does not give experiences to all [souls] simultaneously, due to the fact that He depends on the time of ripening of karma—this was said
In his commentary (vivṛti) on the Tattvatrayanirṇaya, Rāmakanṭha distorts Sadyojyotis’ intended meaning in order to claim that this author also teaches that śaktipāta is caused by the degree of ripening of the Impurity—just as he did in his exegesis (vṛtti) of the Kiraṇatantra. In stanza 12 of the passage quoted above, Sadyojyotis teaches that Impurity stops blocking each soul at a particular moment and “in a certain particular way” (kathaṅcit), and that souls attain liberation through different “means” (sādhana). Sadyojyotis here is referring to the idea—which he explains concisely a few stanzas later—that it is the Lord who causes the souls’ Impurity to ripen, and he does so with means that are specific for each soul: he considers the different karmas of people, and gives them the corresponding experiences, as well the means earlier; in the same way, for the sake of liberation, He does not bring about the undesirable consequence of liberation of all [souls] simultaneously, due to the fact that He depends on the ripening of mala, because His independence is not established.” (My translation).

Curiously, in this passage (previous footnote) Rāmakanṭha does not distort Sadyojyotis’s text to say that the Lord depends on the ripening of Impurity to bestow śaktipāta. Rather, he follows the author in saying that Śiva depends on malaparipāka for liberation. Elsewhere, however, like in his commentary on Sadyojyotis’s Tattvatrayanirṇaya, as well in the Kiraṇavṛtti, he is explicit about the fact that saktipāta too depends on the ripening of Impurity.

The idea expressed in stanzas 12-13 of the TTV that Impurity stops blocking the soul “in a particular way” (kathaṅcit) and through a “particular means” (sādhana) has a parallel in the Kiraṇatantra, which also uses the expression kathaṅcit; for “means,” however, it uses upāya instead of sādhana. The Kiraṇa appears to use this expression to refer to initiation, which is indeed the means that blocks the power of Impurity. Kiraṇa 27cd-29ab reads:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{vibhūr āpi malaśyāṣya taccakteḥ kriyate vadah} & \parallel 27 \parallel \\
\text{upāyāc chaktisamrodhah kathaṅcit kriyate male} & \parallel \\
\text{yathāgner dāhikā śaktir manṛtenāśu niruddhyate} & \parallel 28 \parallel \\
\text{tadvat taccaktisamrodhād viśiṣṭa iti kathyate} & \parallel
\end{align*}\]

“Though this Impurity is all-pervasive, its power is destroyed. By a [certain] means (upāyā) the power in Impurity is blocked in a particular way (kathaṅcit): just as the burning power of fire is blocked, and thereby [the soul] is separated [from impurity]. That is what is taught.” (As translated in Goodall 1998: 255-256; and Goodall 1996: 349)

Rāmakanṭha in his commentary on this passage also interprets “the means” to refer to initiation, and uses the expression “in a particular way” (kathaṅcit) to make a distinction between the initiations that give immediate liberation (sadyonirvāṇa-dīkṣā) and the initiation that gives gradual liberation (asadyonirvāṇa-dīkṣā). As I will show below, his view is that different degrees of ripeness of Impurity determine various degrees of śaktipāta and initiations (Kiraṇavṛtti ad V.30ab). See Goodall 1998: 256 and 354 for the relevant passages of Rāmakanṭha’s commentary. Rāmakanṭha gives the same interpretation to Sadyojyotis’s Tattvatrayanirṇaya 12-13. See my discussion below as well as footnote 425.
(sādhana)\textsuperscript{422} to experience them, that is, bodies and worlds.\textsuperscript{423} This basic idea of Siddhānta soteriology is expressed in very similar terms in the Parākhyā as well as in other scriptures of this tradition, such as the Mrgendratantra, which also refer to the “means” (upāya) the Lord uses to cause the transformation of the bonds (Impurity and karman). This text compares the Lord to a doctor who cures patients with specific medicines, such as unpleasant experiences—the means—which may be sour but are aimed at the highest good.\textsuperscript{424}

\textsuperscript{422} Sadyojyotis uses the word sādhana, “means” also in TTN 14 and 16 to refer to the various means of liberation. It is not clear to me whether in these two stanzas he is referring to initiation, as Rāmakantha interprets (explicitly ad 14, and possibly ad 16), or if instead he is alluding to the “means” the Lord provides in order for souls to experience their karma and to cause Impurity to ripen—i.e. the means he describe in stanzas 17-19. I am inclined to think that Sadyojyotis is referring to the latter for two reasons. First, in both stanzas 14 and 16 he uses the term sādhanam (as in stanzas 17), whereas in stanza 21, when he refers to initiation—the “means,” or instrument, “for the liberation of the soul” (nr̥muktaye)—he uses a different term, karaṇam. Second, in stanzas 14 and 16 Sadyojyotis is still talking about the process of transformation of Impurity, and not about the moment in which it is ready for cessation (nivṛtta), after which it is removed through initiation, the subject of stanza 21 (21ab: drṣtye ca taṁ niṣṛtyai yogyaṁ yunte nr̥muktaye karaṇam). See footnote 402 for the Sanskrit text of the full stanza and the translation in the body of the text.

\textsuperscript{423} Tattvārāyanirnaya 17-19.

\textsuperscript{424} Mrgendra VII.15 and 18:

\begin{verbatim}
na todanāya kurute malasyānāv anugraham |
kintu yat kriyate kiñcit tad upāyena nānyathā 15 15
... yathā kṣatrādinā vaidyās taddālam api na roginam 1
koṭāv iṣṭārdāyitīvād duṣkhahetuh prattayate 18 18

“It is not to bring sorrow [to human beings] that He bestows grace to the soul’s Impurity. However, whatever is accomplished [is done] through a means (upāyena), not otherwise... [The Lord is] like a doctor [who]—although procuring pain to a sick person through acid substances—is not regarded as the cause of suffering, because in the end He provides the desired thing. (My translation.)

See also Nārāyanakaṇṭha’s Commentary (Vṛttī) ad 18:

pāśāvṛtaddṛkkriyāṛttīṣv aṇuṣu tattapāśaśaktayanuvartanadvāreṇa jannadrāvaṇāniduṣkhahā-
dāyitīvād vāmo ’pi paramesvaras tadabhūdayāyaiva pravṛttatvān na duṣkhahetur avagamyate 1
"abhūdayāyaiva 1 1 em.; "abhūdayāyaiva ed. KSTS.

“The supreme Lord is not considered the cause of suffering even if He [appears] unfavorable (vāma) towards the souls—whose faculty of knowledge and action are covered by the bonds—by causing them suffering through [means] such as birth, putting to flight etc. (jannadrāvaṇādi), in accordance with the powers of their respective bonds. However, He is not considered the cause of suffering [for these souls], because of the fact that He is solely engaged in their upliftment.” (My translation)
Rāmakaṇṭha, conversely, interprets Sadyojyotis’ expression “in a certain particular way” (kathañcid) to refer to the varying degrees of ripening of Impurity—“intense, mild etc.” (tīvramānādā dibedhena). He then uses the scriptural authority of the Kirana to claim that these variations in the degree of ripening result in different degrees of śaktipāta and initiation.\(^{425}\) In other words, Rāmakaṇṭha uses the same argument that Sadyojyotis and the Mṛgendra tantra employ to justify the fact that liberation does not occur simultaneously for all souls—that for each individual it depends on the time of ripening of the Impurity—to also claim that śaktipāta depends on this ripening.

Rāmakaṇṭha overtly criticizes the svatantra śaktipātādīns, “those who maintain that the [grace-giving] descent of [the Lord’s] power must depend on nothing else [than the Lord’s will].”\(^{426}\) One of his arguments against this view is that it presupposes a Lord who is partial: as God is by nature free from bias, he does not have feelings of attachment or aversion towards particular souls. Rāmakaṇṭha also defends himself from the potential accusation that such a Lord would lack omnipotence, which Śaivism defines as of “universal agency” (sarvakartṛṭva). This, in turn, is closely related to the idea of divine autonomy—both regarded in the Śaiva tradition as defining characteristics of lordship. Rāmakaṇṭha solves this philosophical question by introducing a distinction between

See also Parākhyā: II.113. I quoted an extended version of this passage in section 3.2.2, indicating the minor modifications I made to the translation by Goodall (2004: 200). For Sanskrit text see fn. 303. For the modifications see fn. 304 and 306.

“The conditions [of souls are] various because of the [various degrees of] ripening (vipāka) of that [seed]; like a doctor, the Lord (saḥ) accordingly links each particular soul with a means (upāyam).”

\(^{425}\) Tattvatrayanirṇayavivṛti ad 12. As Goodall et al. (2008) suggest, Rāmakaṇṭha is probably referring to Kirana V.30ab, mandā mandatārā śaktiḥ karmanāvavavakṣayā, which occurs in the context of Śiva’s power of concealment. The idea in the Kirana is that Śiva’s power is slow or very slow depending on the speed of attainment of the balance of karmas. Rāmakaṇṭha, however, distorts the Kirana on that occasion too, linking a weak or very weak, or intense or very intense, śaktipāta to corresponding degrees of ripening of Impurity (359-360, fn. 74). See also Goodall 1998: 354.

\(^{426}\) Tattvatrayanirṇayavivṛti, introduction to stanza 13, as translated in Goodall et al. 2008: 360.
“autonomy” (svātantra) and “independence” (anapekṣitāvya). He maintains that the fact that God is “dependent” (sāpekṣa or āpekṣa) on certain factors, such as the ripening of a soul’s Impurity or karma, does not entail his lack of autonomy (asvātantra). An agent is autonomous, Rāmakaṇṭha argues, as long as he does not depend on the will of another Lord, a condition that is not applicable to Śiva, because he is the “Lord over all” (sarveśvara). Following this reasoning, Rāmakaṇṭha then can claim that “it is really the Lord (īśvara eva) who is the agent of liberation (mokṣakartā).” Consequently, he maintains that Śiva is also the agent of grace, so there is no reason even to prove that śaktipāta depends on nothing other than Śiva’s will. Note that Rāmakaṇṭha employs a line of reasoning similar to one found in the Kiranatāntra, which, as we saw earlier, holds that śaktipāta is determined by karmasāmya. This scripture teaches that Śiva is the active agent, or “governing power” (prabhu), of the descent of grace, even if he must wait for the time of the balance of karmas in a soul.

427 Tattvatrayanirnayaavivriti ad 13. See Goodall et al. 2008: 360-362. In his commentary ad Matanga, Vidyāpāda V.50, Rāmakaṇṭha expresses a similar idea when he glosses Śiva’s epithet as “first Lords of lords (devadīveva): śaktipāta is autonomous (svatantra)—he maintains—because without his permission “a human being would not be able even to bend a blade of grass.” However, he adds, it still depends on the suitability of the soul. I quote and discuss this passage below. For Sanskrit text see footnote n. 433.

428 Tattvatrayanirnayaavivriti ad 19. The quote is translated by Goodall et al. 2008: 366. By making this distinction between “agency” and “autonomy” on one side, and “being dependent” on certain factors on the other, Rāmakaṇṭha here (ad 19) is able to make this statement (īśvara eva mokṣakartā) that would otherwise appear in complete contradiction to what he has said earlier (ad 13): that liberation does not come about “through the Lord alone” (mokṣah... ghaṭate na... īśvarād eva). Glossing Sadyojyotis ad 13 he explains that liberation, which souls attain by means of initiation, comes about through “time,” which Rāmakaṇṭha interprets as impurity’s “self-transformatory nature” (parinatisvabhāvātmaka), and through “quality,” the degree of ripeness of the Impurity of a particular individual. See Goodall et al. 2008: 361. Rāmakaṇṭha, however, follows the root text (TTN 17-19, quoted above), where Sadyojyotis teaches that it is the Lord who causes Impurity to transform, i.e. makes it ready to cease, and makes karma ready to be experienced. See Tattvatrayanirnayaavivriti ad 17-19 in Goodall et al. 2008: 365-366. There are differences, however, in the readings of the root text transmitted by Rāmakaṇṭha and the one transmitted by Aghoraśiva. See TABLE 3.5.

429 Tattvatrayanirnayaavivriti ad 19:

“… it is reasonable to maintain that it is really the Lord who is the agent of liberation also in [this] view of ours that impurity transforms. So on what ground [should we go to the extreme of claiming that there is] proof of the view that the [grace-giving] descent of [the Lord’s] power must be independent [of all other factors]?” (Trans. Goodall et al. 2008: 366).
Table 3.5: *Tattvātmanirṇaya* 17-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aghoraśiva’s reading, TTN(^{FI}) 17-19</th>
<th>Rāmakantha’s reading, TTV(^{GA}) 17-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>parinamayati malam kah</strong>(^{431})</td>
<td><strong>parinamayati hi malam kah</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>yah karmāveksya citrakam anusbhyah</strong></td>
<td><strong>yah karmāveksya citrakam anusbhyah</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>bijad dadati citram</strong></td>
<td><strong>bijad dadati citram</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>niśkṛṣya sasādhanam bhogam</strong> (|) 17 (|)</td>
<td><strong>niśkṛṣya sasādhanam bhogam</strong> (|) 17 (|)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>yaś ca svāpe bijam</strong></td>
<td><strong>yaś ca svāpe bijam</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>kurvan nāste prasātaye yogyam</strong></td>
<td><strong>kurvan nāste prasātaye yogyam</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>viśvam ca tatra nihitam</strong></td>
<td><strong>viśvam ca tatra nihitam</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pralaye tēnaiva viśrāntyai</strong> (|) 18 (|)</td>
<td><strong>pralaye yenaiva viśrāntyai</strong> (|) 18 (|)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>karma ca bhuktyai pumśām</strong></td>
<td><strong>karma ca bhuktyai pumśām</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>jāgrati viśve ‘pi kincid tisānāḥ</strong></td>
<td><strong>jāgrati viśve karoti cesānāḥ</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>sa malam mahābaladoḥ</strong></td>
<td><strong>sa malam mahābaladoḥ</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>kāruṇyāt sarvadaiva vinivṛtyai</strong> (|) 19 (|)</td>
<td><strong>kāruṇyāt sarvadaiva vinivṛtyai</strong> (|) 19 (|)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who is it that causes Impurity to transform?
He who discerns the varying karmas and, drawing upon the seed [that is primal matter], gives to the souls the various [corresponding] experience together with its means [of experiencing it]; and He who, in [the universe’s phases of] sleep, keeps ensuring (*kurvann āste*) that the seed should be ready (*yogyam*) for producing [evolutes], and the karma of the souls [ready] to be consumed, by Him (*tēnaiva*) the universe is placed in that [seed] at a time of resorption, in order that there should be rest.

When the universe is awake, this Lord, who bestows the great power [of grace] (*mahābaladoḥ*), out of compassion at all times [makes karma] along with impurity (*samalam*) somewhat (*kimcit*) [ready] to be removed.

Who is it that causes Impurity to transform?
He who discerns the varying karmas and, drawing upon the seed [that is primal matter], gives to the souls the various [corresponding] experience together with its means [of experiencing it]; and He who, in [the universe’s phases of] sleep, keeps ensuring (*kurvann āste*) that the seed should be ready (*yogyam*) for producing [evolutes];

and He by whom (*yenaiva*) the universe is placed in that [seed] at a time of resorption, in order that there should be rest;
and [who] makes (*karoti*) karma [ready] for being consumed, at a time when the universe is awake; that (*sah*) Lord, the destroyer of impurity (*mahāḥ*), the giver of [souls’] power, out of compassion at all times [makes] impurity [ready] for ceasing to act.

\(^{430}\) *Tattvātmanirṇaya* 17-19. As translated by Goodall et al. 2008: 365. The interpretation of stanzas 18-19 according to Aghoraśiva’s reading is provided by Goodall et al. in a footnote (2008: 365, fn. 88). For the reader’s convenience, I highlighted in bold the differences between the two readings.

\(^{431}\) Aghoraśiva’s reading in 17a is hypometrical (missing a light syllable) and thus unlikely.
“Time,” this tantra says, cannot be the active agent because it is insentient, while the Lord is omniscient. The simile the text provides is that of the sun, which is commonly referred to as the active agent in awakening lotuses, even if it depends on time, that is, the appropriate season for their blossoming.\(^{432}\) One may wonder why Rāmakṛṣṇa claims so adamantly that an autonomous Lord must still depend on the soul’s Impurity being ripe to bestow śaktipāta. A passage from his commentary on the Mataṅga, as he glosses Śiva’s epithet as “first Lord of lords,” provides some explanation on this point: \(^{433}\)

[The meaning of this expression is the following]: He is the Lord of everything. If not permitted by him, a human being would not be able even to bend a blade of grass. For this reason śaktipāta is autonomous. It is not independent, however, from the suitability (yogyatā) \(^{434}\) of a soul. Since there would follow the undesirable corollary that it would be the same case with regard to experience, it would be a completely materialistic view, due to the fact that there would be no purpose in performing [normative] actions. Therefore in this system we teach that the Lord is not [completely] autonomous, because He depends on karma. \(^{435}\)

Rāmakṛṣṇa’s logic here is the following: a Lord who bestows śaktipāta without waiting for the impurity to be ripe is a Lord who acts completely independently, without taking into consideration any factor. Such a Lord would also enable souls to have experiences unrelated to their individual karma, the retributive force of their past actions. If this were

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\(^{433}\) Rāmakṛṣṇa’s *Mataṅgavṛtta* ad *VP IV.50:*

\[
tasya devadīdevasyet\] sa hi sarveśvarah \| tatananaujāto narah trasya kubātkarane ‘pi aśaktah \| ata evāsau svatantraḥ śaktipāta \| na tu puruṣayogatānapekṣah \| bhoge ‘pi tathātvaprasaṅgataḥ karmānuṣṭhānāvaiyarthyāl lokāyatikapakṣa eva \| tatra bhagavataḥ karmāpekṣitvena nāsvatantraṁ ity uktam asmabhīḥ \|
\]

For the text of *Mataṅga* *VP IV.50*, see fn. 355.

\(^{434}\) See the lines preceding the passage quoted:

\[
tataś ca ananugṛḥtaḥ api pariṇatamalatvād upāsakaṁ anugrahasādhanaprāptinimittām mataṅgamuninīeva pūrvaṁ śrutau vihitena, śivadharmodītena vā vidhītaṁ…\]

If the soul is suitable, if its Impurity is ripe, even worshippers who have not received grace attain the means for that grace…

\(^{435}\) My translation.
the case, no one would have any reason to engage in purposeful behavior. Rāmakaṇṭha, however, is not alluding to a causal relation between specific actions and divine grace.

What then is his concern?

In the Mokṣārikāvṛtti, his commentary on Sadyojyotis’s “Stanzas on Liberation,” Rāmakaṇṭha further explains his view, while arguing against an opponent who holds that Śiva acts out of his will alone. Such a Lord, Rāmakaṇṭha observes, would be unpredictable and would create a chaotic world without logic:436

No [we would reply], because this [view of an independent Lord] would be impossible. For, if [the Lord] were independent,437 since He would not depend on such things as karma, He would constantly create and destroy the world, give experience to those who do not have [accumulated] karma, bestow liberation even on the evil-doers, draw into cosmic resorption even the liberated souls—[all this] without there being any ground for it. Therefore this world would be unreasonable, like the behavior of a drunken person. And, because of this, no one would make an effort to gain otherworldly pleasures and supernatural powers, [or] to achieve liberation, [or] to give up performing bad actions. Therefore (iti), let then (tad) the object of one’s worship (upāsyā) be completely worldly-oriented (lokāyata),438 because of the fact that all the teachings and scriptures would be meaningless.439

436 Mokṣārikāvṛtti ad 69cd-70ab:

na, tasyāsaṁbhavat 1 svātantrye hi karmādyanapekoṣṭaḥ akasmāt sadaiva jagataḥ srṣṭi-

437 In this passage Rāmakaṇṭha is using the term svātantra in the sense of anapekṣaṇa, “non-
samhārau, karmaṁtānayāpi bhogam, duṣkṛtair api mokṣam, muktasayaṁ samhāraṁ tśvarah

dependence”—which he consider an undesirable quality of the Lord. I showed earlier that he used this term
kuryād ity unmuttaceṣṭvad asamaṁjasam jagad bhavet 1 tataś ca na kaścid bhogāya mokṣāya
instead to indicate the Lord’s “autonomy” and “agency” as opposed to its dependence. The author uses
duṣkṛtamārthaṁ pravarṇetai tad upadeśāśāstraṁ sarveṣāṁ ānarthakāyāl lokāyata evopāsyo
this term here to refute the position of an opponent who used the term svatantra to refer to his view that Śiva
bhavatāṁ 1

does not depend on conditions, such as karmāsāmya, to bestow saktipāta. This is the same opponent who
438 The term lokayata could also mean “materialistic.” I preferred, however, to translate it more literally as
quotes the passage by Vidyādhipati that I discussed earlier. Vidyādhipati also uses svatantra in the meaning
“worldly oriented” because, from the point of view of a person who desires liberation alone, goals such as
of “not dependent.” See fn. 370 and 372 in the former section (3.2.3) and the translation of the quote by
supernatural powers and otherworldly pleasure may seem rather materialistic.

439 My translation.
Rāmakaṇṭha here is not concerned primarily with the deeds aimed at acquiring merit prescribed by the “worldly religion” (lokadharma)—the orthodox tradition of the Vedas and Veda-based literature (smṛti)—as opposed to a behavior that is sinful, hedonistic, or contrary to what is considered “normative” in that orthodox, non-tantric tradition. Rather, postulating an independent Lord would undermine the logic behind the ritually inclined doctrine of the Śaiva Siddhānta, which holds that certain rituals and practices have specific consequences: the Lord removes the Impurity through initiation, and, after this fundamental ritual, the adept must actively engage in the performance of post-initiatory observances in order to achieve the goals promised by the religion—liberation, supernatural powers and enjoyments in different levels of reality.

It is important to clarify that, just like the doctrine of karmasāmya, the theory of malaparipāka does not postulate any link between “good deeds” and the descent of Śiva’s grace-bestowing power. In this view, the ripeness of Impurity, and therefore śaktipāta, is not caused by the performance of good actions. As I explained in the discussion on karmasāmya, meritorious deeds only create further karma—even if pleasant—to be experienced. At most, Rāmakaṇṭha (but not Sadyojyotis) seems to imply a certain correlation between the ripening (the experiencing) of karma and the ripening of Impurity.\(^{440}\) However, both Rāmakaṇṭha and Sadyojyotis state plainly that even if karma has been completely consumed, Impurity is not destroyed.\(^{441}\) Rāmakaṇṭha explains that the Lord enables both the bonds of karma and impurity to ripen based on their “readiness”

\(^{440}\) Sadyojyotis does not make such a correlation, which Rāmakaṇṭha seems to make ad TTN 15, distorting the verse. According to Goodall et al. (2008: 363, fn. 83), verse 15 of this treatise “appears to mean, for Rāmakaṇṭha, that when certain particular past actions ripen, then impurity, which bounds the soul together with those particular bonds of karman, gives up, together with those bonds, which have been destroyed, its binding functions.”

\(^{441}\) Tattvātṛayānirnāyavivṛtti ad 11ab. See Goodall et al. 2008: 358-359 and fn. 67.
(yogyatā), and that he bestows śaktipāta based on the soul’s “suitability” (yogyatā), or the ripeness of its Impurity. However, he never clarifies what elements make the Impurity of a particular soul ripen faster than another’s, and, consequently, why that soul receives śaktipāta earlier than the other.

If we base our understanding on Sadyojyotis’s Tattvatrayanirnāya or the Mrgendratantra, we can presume that it is a question of the number and type of fetters with which Impurity binds a particular soul. However, since Śiva is eternal, and since souls are eternal and Impurity is eternal and without a cause, who or what determines the specific way in which Impurity binds a soul? To my knowledge none—among those whose doctrine entails the idea of different degrees of ripening of a soul—address this question.

In conclusion, Rāmakaṇṭha’s doctrine of malaparipāka does not entail any role for the individual in drawing down the grace-bestowing power of the Lord. In this respect, it is no different from the theory of karmasāmya or that of Śiva’s will (svatantra-

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442 Tattvatrayanirnāyavivṛtti ad 27:

“Just as the Lord is the [instigating] cause for the ripening of karmas for experience, in due order in accordance with their readiness (yogyatākramena)* [for being experienced], in exactly the same way [in due order in accordance with its readiness] it is He who is the instigating cause of the ripening of Impurity too.” (Trans. Goodall et al. 2008: 374).

* Parenthesis mine.

In this passage Rāmakaṇṭha appears to keep the ripening of Impurity as a separate process from the ripening of karma.

443 See Rāmakaṇṭha’s Mataṅgavṛtti ad VP IV.50 quoted above, in footnotes 433 and 434.

444 Tattvatrayanirnāya 15 (Sanskrit text as in TTNGA):

yasya yadā yavadbhīḥ sacchreṇo bodhaḥkṛn mālaḥ pāśaiḥ |
tasya tadā tāvadbhīḥ vihatair vijahāti bandhatvam || 15 ||

TTN9 reads: 15a. yasya yathā; 15b. sa śreyorodhaḥken; 15c. tasya tathā; 15d. nihitair vijahāti.

“Impurity blocks liberation of a certain soul at a certain time, with a certain number of fetters. When all those [fetters] are destroyed, at that time and for that particular soul, [impurity] gives up its function of binding.” (Translation as in Goodall et al. 2008: 363, fn. 81.)

445 See for example Parākhyanatana II.111cd-113. I quoted this passage earlier in this chapter, towards the end of section 3.2.2. For the Sanskrit text see fn. 303. See also Mrgendra, vidyāpāda, VII.10. Sanskrit text in footnote n. 416 and translation in the body of the text.
śaktipātavāda). Prescribed actions for the attainment of liberation become relevant only after śaktipāta—namely the initiation ritual and post-initiatory observances.⁴⁴⁶

3.3 Abhinavagupta’s Critique of the Views of the Śaiva Siddhānta

In the Tantrāloka, when arguing against the views of his opponents, Abhinavagupta adopts a rigorous “śāstric” style, the language of philosophical reasoning used by orthodox Indian philosophical schools. His critique of the Śaiva Siddhānta’s doctrine of śaktipāta is no exception. According to Sanderson, this attempt of non-Saiddhāntika exegetes to present their esoteric tradition in the discourse of brahmanical culture is part of their overarching ambition to penetrate a larger public, especially the higher social circles.⁴⁴⁷ He suggests that even the shift of emphasis in the writings of these non-dualist commentators from the most esoteric practices—the visionary meditations and ascetic observances aimed at attaining supernatural powers—to the non-visionary gnostic practices, is part of this same process.⁴⁴⁸ He writes,

This shift of focus arises from the nature of the commentators’ social milieu, which is one of Śaiva brahmins eager to consolidate their religion on the level of high culture. It is this, I propose, that also predisposed them to devote much more attention that can be seen in their scriptures⁴⁴⁹ to formulating their metaphysical doctrines and to defending them against those of their opponents in the shared language of Indian philosophical argument.⁴⁵⁰

Abhinavagupta’s refutation of the two main Saiddhāntika views on the causes of śaktipāta—the “ripening of the soul’s innate Impurity” (malaparipāka) and the balance

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⁴⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that Kīrāṇa V:21cd-29 explains the lapsing from post-initiatory observances with reference to Śiva’s “occlusion,” rather than to the negligence of a disciple. (Goodall 1996: 360-61)
⁴⁴⁷ Sanderson 1985: 203.
⁴⁴⁹ With the term “scriptures” Sanderson here refers to the early scriptural sources—tantras and āgamas—upon which these commentators are basing their exegesis.
between two opposite karmas (karmaśāmya)—is exemplary in this respect and deserves a close reading. It is not easy, however, for the non-specialist to follow Abhinavagupta’s line of reasoning, even in translation. The text is condensed and it presupposes the reader’s acquaintance with the doctrine of the Śaiva Siddhānta, as well as some familiarity with “śāstric” philosophical argumentation. Abhinavagupta refutes even hypothetical replies that a Saiddhāntika would never give in reality, because they would not be in line with their doctrine. This rhetorical device is used in śāstric literature in order to demonstrate the logical impossibility of an opponent’s view, without leaving any avenue for escape. Therefore, while providing a translation of Abhinavagupta’s main arguments, I try here to provide as much information and context as is necessary to make these passages intelligible.451

3.3.1 Refutation of the Doctrine of Malaparipāka

In line with non-dualist doctrine, Abhinavagupta conceives of the soul’s innate Impurity (mala) as a state of contraction resulting from ignorance, and not as a material substance, as the Śaiva Saiddhāntikas maintain. After briefly summarizing the opponents’ view on Impurity,452 the author of the Tantrāloka focuses on refuting their conception of a

451 My understanding of Abhinavagupta’s critique of the Śaiva Siddhānta has benefited immensely from my close reading of the text, and commentary, with Dominic Goodall and Harunaga Isaacson.

452 Since Abhinavagupta already devotes a large part of chapter IX to expounding and refuting the view of mala held by the Śaiva Siddhānta, in chapter XIII he simply provides a brief summary of his opponents’ view (TĀ XIII.41cd-52) and then refers the reader to his previous chapter for the refutation of the same (TĀ XIII.53):

atrocyate malastāvadithamēṣa na yujyate

iti pūrvānike proktam punaruktau tu kīṁ phalam || 53 ||

“To this we reply: ‘first this mala can not be consistently conceived in this way.’ This has been mentioned in a previous chapter. And what would be the fruit in repeating it again?”
“ripening of Impurity” (*malaparipāka*), which some Saiddhāntika exegetes saw as the main cause of *śaktipāta*.

Abhinavagupta’s refutation begins by posing the most basic question regarding the opponents’ view: What is this “ripening of Impurity?” He then deconstructs one by one every conceivable reply of the opponent, with each possible ramification, until no line of defense is left. The following table outlines the successive questions and arguments the author uses to challenge his Saiddhāntika interlocutors, on which I expound below.

**TABLE 3.6: Outline of Abhinavagupta’s arguments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is “ripening of Impurity” (<em>malaparipāka</em>)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I) Is it its destruction?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) If this destruction has a cause:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) If the cause is God…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) If the cause is karma…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) If this destruction does not have a cause…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II) Is it the obstruction of its power?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) If it occurs for one soul, it would occur for all souls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) What kind of power? A power of blocking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) How would this power of blocking block?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By its mere presence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By “doing” something to the souls?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) What would it block?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The faculty of knowledge and action of a soul? …</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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453 Mainly Sadyojyotis and Rāmakāṇṭha, as I showed in the previous section. Abhinavagupta’s critique of *malaparipāka* occurs in stanzas 54-66 of *Tantrāloka* XIII.
He asks,\textsuperscript{454} What should this “ripening of mala” be? If you say it is destruction there would follow\textsuperscript{455} that other souls [too] would become free of mala, since you said that this mala is one.

Abhinavagupta reasons that “ripening of Impurity” can mean only two things: either the complete destruction of this Impurity, or just the obstruction of its power. If it means destruction,\textsuperscript{456} since the Śaiva Saiddhāntika doctrine holds that this mala is singular, without parts and common to all souls,\textsuperscript{457} then if this destruction occurs for one soul, it would occur for all other souls too at the same time. Therefore, if this were the case, there would follow the undesirable corollary that all souls would receive śaktipāta at the same time. Abhinavagupta could theoretically conclude here the refutation of this first hypothesis—that “ripening of innate Impurity” entails its complete destruction—and begin the refutation of the second (that it is the obstruction of its power). However, as a rhetorical strategy, he begins a refutation of the same hypothesis even in the case in which the Saiddhāntika doctrine, contradicting its tenets, accepted the idea that the innate Impurity was not one and common to all souls, but different in each soul. He writes,\textsuperscript{458}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{454} TĀ XIII.54:
 \begin{verbatim}
 malasya pākah ko ‘yam syān nāśaś ced itarātmanāṁ \\
 sa eko mala ity ukter nairmalyam anuṣajyate || 54 ||
\end{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{455} Here anuṣajyate means “prasajyate.”
\textsuperscript{456} This is one of the cases in which Abhinavagupta refutes a view that a real Saiddhāntika would not hold, because Saiddhāntika teaches that mala is not destroyed (see TĀ XIII.47).
\textsuperscript{457} TĀ XIII.49.
\textsuperscript{458} TĀ XIII.55-57ab:
 \begin{verbatim}
 atha pratātmaniyato ‘nādiś ca prāgabhāvavat \\
 malo naśyet tathāpi eṣa naśo yādī sahetukah || 55 ||
 hetuḥ karmeśvarecchā vā karma tāvan na tādṛśam \\
 tīvarecchā svatantrā ca kvacīd eva tathaiva kim || 56 ||
 ahetuko ‘syā nāśaś cet pragevaiṣa vinaśyatu ||
\end{verbatim}
\end{footnotesize}
Or if a *mala*, which is assigned to each soul and is beginningless, is destroyed, like “previous non-existence,” nevertheless, if this destruction has a cause, [this] cause is either karma or God’s will. To begin with, karma is not of that kind. And why should God’s will, independent, be like that only in some cases? If the destruction of this [mala] does not have a cause, let it be destroyed at the very beginning.  

Continuing with the hypothesis that this ripening of the innate Impurity is equivalent to its destruction, Abhinavagupta now refutes both ways in which this destruction could occur: owing to some cause or without a cause. In the first case, he argues, the only possible causes could be either karma or God’s will. However, he continues, “karma is not of that kind”; as Jayaratha clarifies, it could not destroy the innate Impurity, because the nature of *karma* is only to produce experience.  

And, if instead of *karma* one postulates God as the cause for the destruction of innate Impurity, one would incur again the problem of partiality: why would God choose to purify only some souls and not others? Abhinavagupta here is accusing his Saiddhāntika opponents of the same flaw they attribute to his own position, because God’s free will may imply partiality. Finally, the author addresses, and refutes, the last hypothesis—that this destruction of a soul’s innate Impurity occurs without a cause. If this were the case, he argues, then it should be “destroyed at the very beginning,” at the time of creation of the universe. As Jayaratha clarifies, there would be no period of “maintenance”: dissolution would immediately follow creation.

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459 Abhinavagupta makes this comparison because non-existence, like *mala*, is also beginningless, but it can come to the end with creation—just as the state of non-existence of a specific pot ends when that pot is made. Abhinavagupta, however, will also explain that a permanent thing, if it is also a positive entity, in the sense of an existing thing, like *mala*, cannot by rule be destroyed (see XIII.58).

460 prāg eva: literally “before.”

461 Jayaratha ad XIII.56ab.

462 Jayaratha ad XIII.57ab.
After refuting the first possible meaning of the expression “ripening of Impurity” (*malaparipāka*)—that it entails the complete destruction of a soul’s innate Impurity—Abhinavagupta tackles the second possible reply of his opponents: that *malaparipāka* is just an obstruction (*pratibaddhatā* or *pratibandha*) of the power of this Impurity. This idea corresponds to the real doctrinal position of the Śaiva Siddhānta, as expounded by Rāmakanṭha.  

Abhinavagupta writes,

> Or if you say that the so-called ripening of this [*mala*] is [not destruction, but rather] the state of obstruction of its power, [I would then reply] that [*mala*] would be equally [obstructed] for everybody, just like poison or fire that have had their power blocked. And when its power is again manifest, its effect would [again] arise, as in the case of poison or fire. Then even those who have been liberated would not be liberated [any more]. And further we do not understand what this power is.

Abhinavagupta here uses the same argument he used earlier for the hypothesis that “ripening” of Impurity (*malaparipāka*) means complete destruction of Impurity: since the Saiddhāntikas claim that *mala* is a single entity, if its destruction occurs for one soul, it should occur for all souls at the same time. With a similar line of reasoning, if this “ripening” is the obstruction of the power of a soul’s innate Impurity, that too should be something universal and not applicable to selected souls. Consequently, everybody would

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463 See Rāmakanṭha’s TTNV ad 12.
464 TĀ XIII.59-60:

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{athāśya pāko nāmaśa svāśaktipratiśuddhatā} & | \\
\text{sarvān prati tatāśa śyād ruddhaśaktivishāgnivar} & \| 59 \| \\
\text{puṇar udbhūtaśaktatva ca svakāryam śyād viśāgniva} & | \\
\text{mukta api na muktāḥ syuh śaktim cāsy na mānmahe} & \| 60 \| \\
\text{ruddhaśakti} & \text{ms GA in fn. 1 ed KSTS; ruddhaśakti} & \text{ed. KSTS.}
\end{align*} \]

465 This translation is for the reading in compound: *ruddhaśakti-viśāgnivar* (instead of *ruddhaśakti*), like in manuscript *GA* reported in footnote 1 of this KSTS edition. If we take the reading as in the printed KSTS edition (*ruddhaśakti viśāgnivar*), then it would translate “it (viz. this ripening) would be something whose power is blocked with respect to all, like poison or fire.”

466 Technically this is a *bahuvrhi* compound that would translate as: “and when [*mala*] becomes something whose power is again manifest.”
receive śaktipāta and become liberated at the same time, which is an undesirable corollary, since it contradicts the doctrine of any religious tradition positing liberation as the ultimate goal. To illustrate his point more effectively, Abhinavagupta uses a simile drawn from physical elements: if the power of poison or of fire were neutralized by something, such as a mantra, nobody without exception could be poisoned or burnt. If, however, that power were activated again, it would affect everybody equally. This fact serves as a further argument for Abhinavagupta in his overall refutation of his opponents’ idea that the power of Impurity can be “obstructed”: in case this power became manifest again, even those souls who had already attained liberation would become bound again. Jayaratha then asks humorously, but cogently, if this were the case, if liberation were not a permanent achievement, which person “who ponders before acting” would even strive for such a purpose?467

Since this second view—that malaparipāka is the obstruction of the power of Impurity—is a real position held by Saiddhāntika opponents, Abhinavagupta now strikes an additional blow. After refuting the concept of “obstruction,” this time he challenges the idea that this innate Impurity has a “power” (śakti). Addressing the dualists, the

467 Jayaratha ad XIII.60 (Vol. VIII: 4117–426):

\[\text{iti māvatāyāsena muktā apy akasmād eva baddhā bhaveyus tān prati pratiprasavanyāyena nirodhakatvasya sambhāvyamānatvāt, ataśca bandhamokṣau prati na kasyacidapi dārdhyam bhavet, iti ko nāma perkṣāpārvakārti bandham hātuṃ mokṣaṃ copādātumudayacchet} \]

“Therefore, even those liberated by a great effort, would suddenly become bound [again], because [mala’s] blocking power towards them is made possible by the rule of counter-exception (pratiprasavanyāyena). Hence there would not be stability for anybody with regard to bondage and liberation. Therefore which person who ponders before acting would strive to relinquish bondage and obtain liberation?”

In other words, the general rule is that mala’s blocking power is active, thus creating bondage for souls. The exception takes place when this blocking power is obstructed, and souls are liberated. The counter-exception occurs if the obstruction of the blocking power ceases and the blocking power becomes active again, causing a liberated soul to become bound again.
author asks what would be the nature of such power. He then systematically refutes possible replies:

If you reply that it has a blocking power, [I would ask you: blocking] of what? If [you say that it is the blocking] of the faculties of knowledge and actions of souls, if it obstructs by its mere presence (sadbhāva), there would not be a Śiva or liberated souls. And mala does not do anything beyond its presence, because [otherwise] it would necessarily follow that souls, due to the fact that they would be subject to transformation, would not be eternal.

The hypothetical reply that Abhinavagupta gives for the Saiddhāntika—that the kind of power mala has over souls is a “blocking power” (roddhrśakti) of their “knowership and doership” (jñātvakarṭṛva), their ability to know and act—corresponds to the opponents’ real position, which he immediately refutes. First he argues against the possible ways in which this blocking power would affect souls (i.e. the “how”). As Jayaratha clarifies, commenting on the author’s condensed exposition, Abhinavagupta is using again his universality argument against his opponent: if innate Impurity had this faculty of obstructing (rodakatva) a soul by its mere presence, without actively doing something to the soul, then it should obstruct all souls without exception, and there would not be a single liberated soul. The commentator adds again a humorous rhetorical flourish, observing that, if this were the case, the entire world would be not only bound, but also

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468 This is the question he asks in pāda 60d, at the end of the last passage I quoted.
469 TĀ XIII.61-62:

roddhrṭi cet kasya nṛṇāṃ jñātvakarṭṛtvayor yadi l
sadbhāvamātrād roddhrṭvṛte śivamuktāvanvasambhāvalī l 61 ll
sam nidhāntiriktaṃ ca na kīcīt kurute malalī l
ātmanāṃ pariṇāmitvād anityatvaprasaṅgataḥ l 62 ll

470 The idea seems again to be sarvān prati, i.e. it should be with respect to all, as I explain below.
471 Meaning that mala does not do anything for souls; it does not change souls. Effectively all it does is sit there, being present.
472 I explained earlier how the doctrine of the Śaiva Siddhānta describes the innate Impurity as a material substance that covers the soul, and that its removal through initiation is essential for the soul to attain the state of Śiva (śivatā), becoming like Śiva, with his attributes of full powers of knowledge and action (omniscience and omnipotence).
“more or less blind and dumb.” If, on the other hand—Abhinavagupta continues—the Saiddhāntika opponent argued that this Impurity implements a transformation on the souls it obstructs, then souls would not be eternal, which is contrary to the doctrine of the Śaiva Siddhānta, according to which souls are beginningless. Abhinavagupta here refers to the Sāṅkhya postulate accepted by the Saiddhāntikas, that if something is eternal and sentient, it does not undergo transformation. Consequently, if something is sentient and subject to transformation, it cannot be eternal.

Abhinavagupta next demonstrates the impossibility for Impurity to block the faculties of knowledge and of action of a soul (i.e. the “what”).

And souls consist of nothing but the powers of knowledge and action—they are not the substrata of those properties. If these two [powers] were covered, alas! the destruction of their nature would be entailed.

Abhinavagupta first argues that the powers of knowledge and action cannot be taken away as if they were qualities separate from the soul, because Śaiva doctrine does not teach the separation between the property (dharma) and the possessor of the property (dharmin), as does the Vaiśeṣika philosophical school. According to both dualist and non-dualist Śaivas, souls consist in consciousness, and as such, since their nature is knowership and agency, taking away these powers would imply the destruction of their nature. Abhinavagupta also argues that, even if we were to accept the idea of an

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473 andhambhākaprāyam. See Jayaratha ad TĀ.XIII.61cd.
474 See Kīraṇatātra II.26ab quoted in fn. 404.
475 TĀ XIII.63:

\[\text{jñātvakarśtramātram ca pudgalā na tadāśrayāḥ} \]
\[\text{tac ced avāritam hanta rūpanāsah prasajyate} \]

476 Jayaratha ad XIII.63. The commentator also refers to a passage in a previous chapter, TĀ IX.75, where Abhinavagupta explained these ideas in his refutation of the Śaiva Siddhānta’s view of mala of the. The passage (TĀ IX 73cd-75ab) reads:

\[\text{vibhor jñānakriyāmātrasyāśrayaḥ pṛthuganasya ca} \]

477 Jayaratha ad XIII.63.
Impurity capable of changing the nature of knowledge into non-knowledge, we would incur some additional problems, owing to the Saiddhāntika notion that the soul’s innate Impurity serves as a “covering” (āvaraṇa) for the soul:

Furthermore this covering causes [only] the invisibility of an object and does not make it something different; and knowledge cannot be covered in the way that a pot can. How is it possible that the covering itself is not known by knowledge, which is [supposed to be] the thing to be covered? And in this way the covering would be [a covering] in name alone.

Thus, Abhinavagupta points first to a weakness in the Saiddhāntika notion that Impurity covers knowledge, namely that a cover only makes something invisible, like a cloth over a pot, but it cannot really change its nature. Second, knowledge is not something material, which has a physical form that can be covered, as can a pot. More important, even if we were to accept that knowledge is the “thing to be covered” (āvaraṇtyam) by Impurity, since—as Jayaratha explains—“knowledge cannot be obscured,” it would still be able to cognize this Impurity and “it should know everything as having Impurity. Therefore

\[\text{tadabhāvo malo rūpadhvamsāyaiva prakalpate |} \]
\[\text{dharmād dharmini yo bhedah samavāyena caikataḥ |} \]
\[\text{na tadbhavadhīr uditaṃ kaṇabajojanāśisyavat |} \]
\[\text{“A mala [as you, Saiddhāntika, conceive it], consisting in the absence [of knowledge and action], would be capable of bringing about the destruction of the nature of the Lord, whose essence is merely knowledge and action, and of the souls. You do not teach the distinction of a quality (dharma) from its possessor, and their union through inherence (samavāya), in the way that the followers of Kaṇāda [i.e. the Vaiśeṣikas] do.”} \]

477 TĀ XIII.64-65:
\[\text{āvaraṇam cādṛṣyaatvaṃ na ca tadvastuno ‘nyatām |} \]
\[\text{karoti ghaṭavaj jñānaṃ nāvaṛttaṃ ca śakyate |} \]
\[\text{jñānenāvaraṇtyena tad evāvaraṇam katham |} \]
\[\text{na jñāyate tathā ca syād āvṛtir nāmamātrataḥ |} \]
everybody should be omniscient." Therefore the covering would be devoid of reality and would no longer be a covering, but just a word.

Abhinavagupta concludes his refutation of the Saiddhāntika position on malaparipāka by resorting again to the partiality problem. Even if we accepted that this “ripening of Impurity” is an obstruction (prabandha) of its power to cover the faculty of knowledge of the soul, the following question would arise: who is the agent of this obstruction (prabandhaka), who can ultimately neutralize the power of innate Impurity, so that it ceases to bind a soul? The question is rhetorical, because Saiddhāntika exegetes such as Sadyojyotis and Rāmakaṇṭha state explicitly that the Lord is the agent of the gradual maturation of Impurity. By asking this question, Abhinavagupta aims simply to show that his opponents’ view is flawed regardless of Śiva’s role in this process—whether Śiva acts out of his independent will or depends upon certain factors such as karma. Abhinavagupta says,

What is the blocking agent of the obstructing power of [this] mala? If it is God without depending [on anything else, external to him], to that we give the same answer that we have previously given: (“and why should God’s will, independent, be like that only in some cases?”) If [on the other hand], you say that His will operates depending on the equality of karmas, you must tell me the nature of this [equality]: for what is the equality of karma?

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478 Jayaratha ad XIII.65, ll. 12-14: atau ca iti mantra tva iti sarvah sarvajño bhavet

479 My explanation of this additional argument is based on Jayaratha’s commentary ad XIII.64-65.

480 Sadyojyotis’s Tattvārāṇāntāvāya 17-19 with Rāmakaṇṭha’s commentary (vivṛti) on it. Text edited and translated by Goodall et al. 2008: 365.

481 TĀ XIII.66-67:

482 In his commentary on this stanza, Jayaratha provides the quote from TĀ XIII.56cd (īśvarecchā svatantrā ca kvacid eva tathaiva kim) in which Abhinavagupta uses the partiality argument in order to reply to a similar question.
In whatever direction Abhinavagupta takes his arguments against the Śaiva Siddhānta’s doctrine on grace, he shows his opponents that their views always lead to the same logical problems. If the Lords acts based on his will alone, he is partial. If he acts depending on causes, he lacks independence; thus he would not be an omnipotent Lord.

The stanza just quoted provides a transition to his refutation of the other main Saidhāntika view, that śaktipāta is determined by the balance of two opposite karmas (karmāsāmya).

3.3.2 Refutation of the Doctrine of Karmāsāmya

Just as he did for his critique of the doctrine of malaparipāka, Abhinavagupta begins his refutation of the idea of karmāsāmya by asking the most general question: “What is equality of karmas?” He then briefly summarizes the Siddhānta’s view, in the form of a reply that an exponent of that doctrine might give:

Due to the power of the process of experience, at a certain time two karmas stand blocked, due to the [reciprocal] opposition with respect to their fruit. It is this kind of equality [that I mean]. And God, who is omniscient, having seen this instant, blocks the innate Impurity (mala). And this time is to be known (lakṣya) by the absence of pain, pleasures etc.

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483 See pāda 67d quoted above (samatā karmanāṃ hi kā).
484 Tantrāloka XIII.68-69:

bhogaparyayamāhāmyāt kāle kvāpi phalaṃ prati
virodhāt karnantu ruddhe tiṣṭhataḥ sāmyam tṛśaṁ || 68 ||
taṃ ca kālāṃśakaṃ devaḥ sarvajño vīksya taṃ malaṁ ||
rundhe lakṣyāḥ sa kālaś ca sukhādukkhādīvarjanaḥ || 69 ||

485 Commenting on this passage, Jayaratha clarifies that, by implication, we must understand that the other karmas that are supposed to bear fruit after these two are not yet ripe, and therefore are unable to produce experience. (J. ad XIII.68: tadanantarabhabhītā karmāni cāparipakvatvād arthaḥ bhogaṇa nonmakāḥ bhavanti…). As I show below, Abhinavagupa uses the presence of other karmas, aside from these two, as one of the arguments to refute the Śaiva Siddhānta position.
This passage expresses the idea that the series of experiences in life is the product of the fruits of karmas stored in our soul and ready to bear fruit (“ripened”). However, if in the course of this process two karmas of equal strength become ripe at the same time, and the fruits that they are about to bear are mutually opposed, they block each other’s activity, so that neither is able to generate any experience, positive or negative. This is why Śaiva Saiddhāntika doctrine maintains that this moment is characterized by the absence of pain and pleasure.\footnote{Abhinavagupta objects to this characterization of karmasāmya as the absence of pain and pleasure. If this were the case, Abhinavagupta argues, then the numerous people who experience such states would also experience devotion, the main sign for śaktipāta—while this is contrary to what we observe in reality. See TĀ XIII.73:}

\begin{quote}
śataśa ‘pi klādatapaśāṇyāṁ saṃcīnva daśām ||
nā ca bhaktirasāvesam iti bhūmnā vilokitaṁ || 73 ||
\end{quote}

[And] we observe very frequently that (īti) people experience a state free of pleasure and pain hundreds of times, but they do not experience being pervaded by the feeling of devotion.

While Abhinavagupta’s refutation is based mostly on reasoning, targeting the inherent logical weakness of the mechanism of karmasāmya, this particular argument is based on empirical evidence and addresses instead the external sign supposed to indicate the occurrence of this moment.\footnote{TĀ XIII.70:}

\begin{quote}
naitat kramikasamśuddhavyāmiśrākāraśīrakarmabhīḥ ||
tathāiva deye svaphale keyaṁ anyonyaśīrakarmabhīḥ || 70 ||
\end{quote}
As Jayaratha clarifies, “pure” karma—the term *karma* here referring to both actions and their consequences—is either all good (*śubha*) or all bad (*aśubha*), as opposed to “mixed” karma, which is made up by a combination of good and bad actions. According to Abhinavagupta, all types of action occur in sequence, and therefore can only give fruit in sequence. The commentator, conversely, places particular emphasis on the consequentiality of mixed actions: since their nature is mutually opposed—Jayaratha notes—they cannot be performed at the same time, nor can they produce consequences simultaneously. Therefore, the mutual obstruction of their fruits, claimed by the Saiddhāntika as the mechanism of *karmasāmya*, cannot occur. The reason Jayaratha focuses on mixed (good and bad) actions is likely a fact that I explained earlier: according to the Śaiva Siddhānta’s doctrine, when dharma and adharma oppose each other, they can create *karmasāmya*.489

The idea of consequentiality by itself would be a sufficient and solid argument against the possibility of the fruits of two actions blocking each other. Abhinavagupta, 488

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488 Jayaratha ad XIII.70:

*Earth* is divided into three kinds: good, bad, and mixed. Among these, good and bad actions are of a pure kind, because their nature is fixed for each [case]. Mixed [actions] however, are of a hybrid kind, because their nature is not determined. These [actions] can reasonably exist only in sequence, because, in as much as their nature is mutually opposed, they cannot exist simultaneously. And that is why [each action] also gives its own fruit in succession only. What mutual obstruction with regard to their fruit could there possibly be for them, at any moment at all, since their activity cannot take place at the same time? For their sole mode of existing (*jīvitatva*) is sequential: in their being performed (*anuṣṭhāne*), in their remaining (*avasthāne*), and in giving fruit (*phaladāne*), and thus stored as karma in the soul, and in giving fruit (*phaladāne*). This has been said many times.”

489 According to the Śaiva Siddhānta, however, the term “mixed” actions refers to the fact that the opposing karmas have unequal power, and thus bring about experience, not *karmasāmya*. See KT, VP, V.10cd-12ab quoted in fn. 279.
however, takes his critique further using a rhetorical device common in the śāstraic style of argumentation aimed at defeating the opposite side in a more radical way: a theory or idea, whose presuppositions have already been refuted through logical reasoning, is provisionally accepted as possible, and then refuted again by showing further inconsistencies. In this instance, Abhinavagupta analyzes the case (already shown as an impossible event) in which this impasse created by two mutually opposing karmas would occur. Introducing this new section, Jayaratha writes,

Or let it be as you say, that at a certain time two karmas opposed in their fruits remain blocked; but then, in that case (tatra), can another karma in the meantime bear some fruit or not? If it can bear fruit, [then] enough with their [tat] obstruction, because karmas could continue to produce fruits in succession, just like before. If it cannot bear fruit, then also the karma that gives caste and life span would not produce its fruits. Therefore the body would drop at that same time for everybody. Then enough with talking about the obstruction of the power of Impurity (mala)! This is what [Abhinavagupta] now says.

Although these few lines are technically part of the avataranikā, or introduction, to the two stanzas that follow (śl. 71-72), they provide a clear summary of the arguments Abhinavagupta makes throughout the rest of his refutation of the theory of karmasāmya, a critique that stretches over several stanzas and is interrupted by a substantial digression.

490 Jayaratha’s introduction ad TĀ XIII.71-72:

bhavatu nāma vai tat kvāpi kāle phalam prati viruddhe karmanī ruddhe tiṣṭhata iti, tatra punar antarā tato ‘nyat karma kiścit kim phalen na vā | yadi phalet kṛtaṁ tannirodhena prāgyad eva karmanām anupāryya phaladānāvasthiteḥ, atha na phalet taj jātyāyuspradām api karma na phaled iti tadaiva sarvasya dehapātaḥ, tat kṛtaṁ malaśaktipratibandhena—ityāha—

491 Abhinavagupta’s critique of the doctrine of karmasāmya ends in stanza 95ab. In stanzas 71-72 he discusses the hypothesis of all karmas remaining blocked, which would lead to death. I will quote and explain these stanzas in a later footnote, because the author somehow interrupts this discussion with a digression fourteen stanzas long, and he takes it up again later (89cd-92ab), after analyzing the other case, that of other karmas continuing to bear fruit. Stanzas 74-87 constitute somewhat of a digression from the theory of karmasāmya. They address, in a more general way, the overarching critique that Abhinavagupta advances against the exponents of the Śaiva Siddhānta: that the Lord depends on any external factor to
Abhinavagupta’s reasoning is the following: even if one rejected the argument he made earlier—the fact that actions and their consequences occur only in succession—and accepted as a possibility that two karmas could block each other from bearing fruit, then one would have to account for the other existing karmas. Would they continue to produce consequences (i.e. life experiences), or would they also be blocked by the two opposing karmas? Considering the first possibility, the Kashmiri author writes,

And [even] if these two karmas at some time, there being an opposition with respect to their fruit, remain inactive, then let another karma become active. Merely by this [mutual blockage of two karmas], however, what chance is there for Śiva’s šaktipāta [to occur]?

bestow grace. Time, for instance, cannot be a differentiating factor among souls. The Saiddhāntika doctrine itself postulates that souls, karma, and experience are all beginningless, and that souls are beginninglessly covered by Impurity (74-77ab). Therefore souls necessarily have equal sequences of karma, and karma too cannot be a differentiating factor. Whence would this difference in karma come from? From the different desire of experience? And where would the latter come from? From past traces of karmas (77cd-81)? If one were to accept that these beginningless karmic impressions were the cause for the karma that exists at the level of māyā (the karma which instead, in your doctrine, is the effect of māyā, which, in turn, presupposes mala), then your postulation of mala is useless (82-84 and Jayaratha ad loc). Abhinavagupta concludes his digression with an outright rejection of Saiddhāntika soteriology, reasserting his essential view that liberation is attained through gnosis (TĀ XIII.87):

\[
\text{ḥtēm učchīnna evāyaṁ bandhaṁspādikāḥ kramaḥ l}
\text{ājñānād bandhanaṁ mokṣo jñānād iiti partkṣītām l l 87 l l}
\]

“Thus this process of bondage, liberation and so forth [as you conceive it] has been completely uprooted. [As] I have examined [before] ‘bondage is caused by ignorance, liberation is caused by knowledge’.”

492 TĀ XIII.88-89ab:

\[
\text{virodhē svaphale caite karmanṛ samaye kvacīt l}
\text{udāsate yadi tataḥ karmāṇyaḥ pratibudhyatām l l 88 l l}
\text{śivaśaktinipātasya ko 'vatakasas tu tāvatā l}
\]


The expression karmaitat, “this karma” would not make much sense here. Jayaratha’s gloss, karmāntaram eva kime, also supports this reading.

493 I read svaphale, “with respect to their fruit” as dependent on virodhe [satiḥ], “there being an opposition.” Syntactically it could also be dependent on udāsate, “are inactive;” (lit. “indifferent”), thus reading “they remain inactive with respect to their fruit.” My choice is due to the parallel expression in stanza 68 (phalam prati virodhāt karmāṇi ruddhe tiṣṭhataḥ), which I quoted and translated earlier (see fn. 484).

494 Literally “awaken.”
The flaw Abhinavagupta is highlighting in this position is that, since karmas are infinite, if merely two karmas happen to temporarily block each other, other karmas could bear fruit in the meantime. Therefore the Lord would not have an opportunity to bestow his salvific power. Making more explicit the subtle satirical tone in Abhinavagupta’s rhetorical question (“What chance is there for Śiva’s saktipāta to occur?”)—which envisions Śiva having to bestow saktipāta in the fraction of time between the moment in which two karmas block each other and the moment in which a third karma produces fruits—Jayaratha uses the metaphor of grace resembling, in that case, a goblin suddenly appearing out of nowhere.⁴⁹⁵

As for the second hypothesis, whereby one postulates instead that all other karmas would also be obstructed by the two that are blocked, Abhinavagupta shows an even more serious flaw:⁴⁹⁶

If (yadā) these two karmas are inactive at some point, then they should be like that also at another time, because their [reciprocal] obstruction does not cease. And therefore these two [karmas] would never bear fruit, [while] other karmas would also be obstructed by those two, which are the ones ready to be experienced because their time has come. Thus, since [this blockage] would remain permanent, and death (“the falling off of the body”) would likewise result, liberation would occur. Therefore let us leave aside the postulation of saktipāta.

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⁴⁹⁵ Jayaratha ad 89ab: akāndakāśmāndanyāyena śivaśaktinipātasya ko ‘vasarah? “What chance is there for the descent of Śiva’s power, in the manner of the sudden [descent of] a goblin?” Jayaratha uses the same metaphor in his commentary on TĀ XI.31. This expression is also found in Nyāya. See for example Udayana’s Nyāyavārttikatātparyaparīsuddhiḥ I.1: “akāndakāśmādapatamavṛttiṁ anuharati.”

⁴⁹⁶ TĀ XIII.89cd-92ab:

kvāpi kāle tayor etad audāstrīyaṃ yadā tataḥ || 89 ||
kālantare tayos tadavad vīrodhasthānyāvrittiḥ ||
atāt ca na phaletān te tābhīyāṁ karmāntaṁ ca || 90 ||
ruddhāṁ prāptakālaśvad gatābhīyāṁ upabhogatāṁ ||
evaṁ sadaiva vārtāyāṁ dehapāte tathāiva ca || 91 ||
jāte vimokṣa ity āstāṁ saktipātādikalpanā ||
The idea is that the two karmas that are blocked are the ones that are ripe and that need to be experienced first. Therefore, in the meantime, no other karmas could bear fruit. As Jayaratha clarifies, since such a blockage would be permanent, the karma determining a person’s life span would gradually be destroyed, resulting in the person’s death. Also, since in this case no karma could ever bear fruit, one would attain liberation effortlessly, without needing śaktipāta. Needless to say, such a mechanical universe would render useless not only God and grace but also the religion itself, with its initiation and post-initiatory practices. No system therefore would be likely to teach such a doctrine.

In order not to leave even the smallest avenue of escape to his Saiddhāntika opponent, Abhinavagupta addresses two more hypotheticals that could constitute a last line of defense against the accusation that the impasse created by the two opposing karmas would lead to death and liberation without śaktipāta:

497 Jayaratha ad XIII.92ab. Abhinavagupta had already discussed this idea of a complete blockage of all other karmas towards the beginning of his refutation of karmasāmya, before making his digression ad śl. 74-87. On that occasion, however, he only refers to the death of the body as consequence of karmasāmya, and not liberation. See TĀ XIII.71-72:

rodhe tayoṣ ca jātyāyur api na syād atah atah patet ||
deho bhogadāyor eva nirodha iti cen nanu || 71  ||
jātyāyuspradakarmāṃśasamnīdham yadi śaṅkaraḥ ||
malam rundhe bhogadātūḥ karmanāḥ kim bibheti saḥ || 72  ||

“And if there were the obstruction of these two [karmas], also the [karma that gives] birth in a [particular] caste and the life span wouldn’t be [producing its fruits]. Therefore the body would fall off. If you say that the obstruction is only of two experience-producing [karmas], surely—[ I would reply]—if Śaṅkara obstructs Impurity when the portions of karmas producing caste and life span are present, why would He fear the experience-producing karma?”

In stanza 72 Abhinavagupta anticipates a line of defense of the Saiddhāntika opponent against the argument that karmasāmya would lead to death—i.e. that only the karmas producing new experiences would be blocked, while the karmas that have generated the body and the life span would remain active. The author’s objection in this case would be that if Lord Śiva can bestow grace (by blocking the Impurity) in the presence of the part of karma that gives rise to the body, why would he instead have to wait for the disappearance of the other kind of karma—the one that produces experience during one’s life—in order to save a soul?

498 I am extremely grateful to Harunaga Isaacson for his help in understanding these stanzas (personal communication, spring 2005).

499 TĀ XIII. 92cd-94ab.
The first idea the Saiddhāntika could resort to in the case in which the two karmas that are blocked also obstruct the other karmas, is that this obstruction is not permanent: at a later time these other karmas could continue to bear fruits, thus keeping the body alive and generating new experiences for the individual. As the commentator clarifies, Abhinavagupta’s argument—concisely expressed with the question “Why does it not do that also in that moment?”—is that there is no reason that the opponent has indicated which could justify the fact that the other karma cannot bear fruit at the moment of blockage between the two opposing karmas, while it can bear fruit at a later time.

The second possible avenue of escape for the opponent, in order to avoid a scenario where all karmas would be permanently inactive—with the consequence of death and a liberation without śaktipāta—would be to say that it would not be the other karmas to produce fruit at a later time, but rather the same two opposite karmas that originally block each other. Abhinavagupta also refutes this possibility by asking the opponent to explain what would remove the initial blockage. Although it may not be immediately evident upon a cursory reading of the passage, Abhinavagupta here uses the same argument as in the first case, but emphasizes a different aspect. In other words, regardless of whether the karmas that

186

Or if [you say that] another karma produces fruit in a different moment from the [moment of] union of these two inactive karmas, why does it not do that also in that moment [of union]? Or if [instead you say that] it is these two same karmas, [being] free of blockage, which produce fruit in another [future] moment, what—pray—causes the disappearance of their state of blockage?²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Literally, “How is the disappearance of their blockage done?”
²⁰¹ Jayaratha’s introduction ad 92cd-93ab.
start again to bear fruits are the original two or all the others, if at one point there is a
blockage (or a situation of any kind), which later disappears, one must determine what
causes the change, otherwise nothing prevents the change from occurring earlier.\(^\text{502}\)

The last objection Abhinavagupta presents in refutation of the doctrine of
\textit{karmasāmya} is less technical, in that it is not concerned directly with the mechanisms of
the karmic blockage. Rather, the author points to an inconsistency in the overall theory of
\textit{karmasāmya}: that one cannot account for the different degrees of \textit{śaktipāta} (mild,
moderate, intense, and their subdivisions). He writes,\(^\text{503}\)

\[
\text{And this balance of karmas does not have a gradation by its own nature, nor does śiva’s}
\text{will. Therefore there should not be this [gradation] in śaktipāta [either], which is the effect of}
\text{these two [balance of karmas and Śiva’s will also].}
\]

The premise of this argument is the logical principle governing the relation of cause and
effect, namely that the effect should be consistent with the cause. The Saiddhāntika
document that Śiva bestows \textit{śaktipāta} depending on the balance of karmas, however,
contradicts this basic principle, because \textit{śaktipāta} has a gradation, while the two factors
causing it, Śiva and \textit{karmasāmya}, do not have such a nature. As Jayaratha observes, Śiva
is eternal and the nature of \textit{karmasāmya} is equality (sāmya).\(^\text{504}\)

\(^{502}\) Jayaratha ad 94ab:
\[\text{tad api tayoḥ kim svataḥ parato vā] svataḥ cet ādāv eva astu, parataḥ cet kuta ity anavadhāranād āstām etat}]\]
\[\text{“As for the [disappearance] of their [blockage], would it take place by itself or [be caused] by}
\text{something else? If by itself, then it should happen in the very beginning; if due to something else,
\text{what would cause it? Therefore, since you have not determined it, let’s leave this aside.”}\]

\(^{503}\) TĀ XIII.94cd-95ab:
\[\text{karmasāmyaṃ svarāpeṇa na ca tat tāratmyabhāk] 94 ]]\]
\[\text{na śiveccheti tatkārye śaktipāte na tad bhavet]}

\(^{504}\) In the \textit{Gītārthasaṅgraha} Abhinava appears instead to support \textit{karmasāmya}. See \textit{Gītārthasaṅgraha} ad
VII.13:
\[\text{satvādmi manmayaṁ natvāhām tanmayaḥ āta eva ca bhagavanmayah sarvam bhagavadbhāvāna samvedayate] 94 ]\]
\[\text{nu nānāvidhaparātṛhaviśājanaṣṭho bhagavattattvam pratipadyate, iti sakalamānasāvarjaka eṣa kramaḥ ā tenaiva cāśayena vākṣyate “vāsudevah}
3.4 Abhinavagupta’s View: Śiva’s Grace as Autonomous

3.4.1 Independence of Śaktipāta from Any Cause

After concluding his refutation of the two main Śaiva Saiddhāntika views on grace, both of which regard divine grace as relying on specific factors, Abhinavagupta extends his critique to include any doctrinal view that would make the Lord dependent on certain conditions to bestow his favor. The list he provides is intended as a sample for any conceivable cause, such as mental and emotional states, life experiences or normative behavior:

Detachment, the loss of taste for experience, some meritorious [prescribed] action, having discriminating knowledge, association with the good, constant practice such as worship of Parameśvara, the coming of a calamity its examination, some characteristic mark in the body, devoted study of scriptures, being replete with the multitude of experiences [one has enjoyed], knowledge of

At present I do not have a convincing explanation for Abhinavagupta’s apparent support of the theory of karmasāmya in the GAS. Gnoli (1976: 48) solves the discrepancy by adding in parenthesis the words “as some say” (in Italian: “come vogliono alcuni”), producing a translation that reads “by a descent of power, which [as some say] occurs…”.

505 TĀ XIII 98-100ab

vairāgyam bhogavairasyam dharmaḥ ko’pi vivekātā
satsaṅgaḥ parameśānapujyādyabhyaśaṃityataḥ || 98
āpatprātipī tannirikṣā dehe kiśic ca laṅkṣaṇam ||
śāstrasevā bhogasāngapūrṇataḥ jñānamsaṃvaram || 99
ityapekṣyam yadṛśasya dīṣyaṃetacca pūrvavai ||

506 An alternative interpretation of the term nirikṣā in this context could be “prognostication.”
God. What [other] things, such as the ones listed above (jit) are for God things to be dependent upon, these too are to be refuted along the same line.507

The previous line of reasoning Abhinavagupta is alluding to here is the one underlying his entire critique of the doctrines of karmasāmya and malaparipāka. It is the logical problem he has referred to in the previous stanza as the fault (dāṣaṇa) of “permanent and non-permanent cause or lack of cause” (nitya-anya-hetu-ahetu).508 In other words, as Jayaratha clarifies in his commentary, if something—whatever one postulates as a necessary condition for saktipāta— does not have a cause, it either exists permanently or it never exists: in the first case saktipāta should have taken place from the very beginning, while in the second case it should never arise. Similarly, if something has a cause, and this cause is permanent, it should always exist. If, on the contrary, something has a non-permanent cause, that cause too must be dependent on another cause, and the process would continue ad infinitum.509 In addition to the fact that the postulation of a cause for divine grace leads to faulty results, Abhinavagupta also notes the “huge logical impossibility” (anupapattir ca bhuyasti) that the Lord would depend on something else,

507 pūrvavat: literally “like before.”
508 See TĀ XIII.97:

`etenānye’pi ye’peksyā tsecchāyāḥ prakalpitāḥ |
dhvaṁs te’pi hi nityānyahetvahetvādiśaṇaḥ || 97 ||
``
“Also whatever other [causes] might be conjectured as [things] for God to be dependent upon, those too would be refuted [lit. ‘destroyed’] in this manner, because of the fault of permanent and non-permanent cause or lack of cause.”

`tsecchāyāḥ` em. KSTS tsecchāyāṃ. I followed Sanderson’s suggestion to emend the locative case into a genitive.

509 Jayaratha ad XIII.97:

`tatra ahetutve nityam sattvam asattvam vetti dosah | nityahetutve nityam sattvam eva | anitya-\hetutve ca ko nāmāyam anityo ‘nyo hetur iti tadanavadhāraṇān na kiñcit siddhyed iti ||
In the case [something] lacks a cause, its existence or non-existence would have to be eternal. This is the logical fault. If it has a permanent cause, its existence is permanent. And, if there is a non-permanent cause, which is this other non-permanent cause [of this cause]? Therefore, since that cannot be determined, nothing can be established.
because this would undermine his autonomy and, ultimately, his lordship. 510 Abhinavagupta’s statement is the result of his non-dualistic conceptualization of the universe, where nothing exists outside the all-encompassing Consciousness, Lord Śiva, as I explain in the next section.

3.4.2 The Nature of Śiva: Bondage, Liberation, and the Problem of Partiality

Quoting the Trikāsāra,511 a non-dualist scriptural source, Abhinavagupta writes:512

[Śiva] by himself covers his own self—there is no doubt—through multiple realities (bhāvas)513 having the nature of dharma, adharma [etc.] [in the whole cosmos] beginning with [the reality-level] of Avīci514 up to Śiva. And, in exactly the same way, He himself uncovers himself through the multitude of his powers. The Lord of the gods binds and He himself liberates. He himself is the experiencer, He himself is the knower, He perceives things as himself.515 He himself is enjoyment and liberation, He is the goddess, He is the Lord, He is the [female mantra-deity of a] single syllable,516 like the heat for the fire.

In line with scriptural sources with a non-dualist doctrinal orientation, Abhinavagupta’s ontological view is that in this universe nothing exists outside of Śiva: he is “an

510 TĀ XIII.100cd-101ab. See also Jayaratha ad loc: tad dhīg idam aśvaryaṃ yat svecchayaiva na kiñcid api kartuṃ pāryata iti “What fie is this lordship where he is not able to do anything by His own will?” (Vol. VIII, 6813-14).

511 This text has not survived.

512 TĀ XIII.122-125ab:

dharmādharmātmakair bhāvāir anekair veṣṭayet svayam
asandehaṃ svam ātmānam avṛcyādīśivāntake || 122 ||
tadvac chaktsamādhena sa eva tu viveṣṭayet |
svayam badhnāti deveśāḥ svayaṃ caiva vimuñcati || 123 ||
svayam bhoktā svayaṃ jñātā svayaṃ caivopalakṣayet |
svayaṃ bhuktī ca nuktī ca svayaṃ devī svayaṃ prabhuh || 124 ||
svayaṃ ekākṣarā caiva yathoṣmā kṛṣṇavartmanāḥ l

513 The text is referring to the Sāṅkhya list of eight bhāvas, four positives (dharma, jñāna, vairagya, and aśvarya) and four negatives, which are their opposites (adharma, ajñāna, avairagya or rāga and anaiśvarya).

514 Avīci is in the lowest level of reality, that of the earth element (prthvī-tattva).

515 Literally “he observes himself.” I followed Jayaratha’s interpretation, who writes: ata eva sarvam idam viśvam svā́ma māyaya-tayaiva paśyed ityāha svayaṃ eva upa samāpate laksyed iti l “For this very reason he can see this entire universe as consisting of himself. He expresses this in the following phrase: ‘he himself sees things upa = samāpe i.e. close to him [i.e. as identical to himself]’.”

516 According to Jayaratha the text is referring to the goddess Parā.
autonomous entity, consisting in Consciousness and light." Out of this supreme freedom he manifests in the form of individual souls. This process of transformation into multiplicity, by which he hides his true nature, is his cosmic function of concealment, or tirobhāva, the opposite of grace, or anugraha. Therefore, according to non-dualist Śaiva doctrine, individual souls are not ontologically separate from the Lord, because they are the result of Śiva’s own act of self-binding. Out of the same supreme freedom and autonomy, he liberates himself, by attaining again his original, real, pure form.

In a monistic world-view, we see that divine grace is ultimately the act of the Lord gracing himself. This is the argument Abhinavagupta uses to eliminate the problem of partiality his dualist opponents raise. By assuming that there are separate souls, the Saiddhāntikas’s line of questioning is the following: if you maintain that the Lord bestows grace and liberates souls out of his will, without depending on any cause, then why would he do so only for certain individuals and not others? Does he love only certain people and hate others? In order not to be impartial he should either redeem all souls or no soul at all. However, Abhinavagupta argues, this objection cannot be raised because there are no souls separate from Śiva.

Expounding on the author’s line of defense, Jayaratha writes,

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517 TĀ XIII.103ab: svatantraḥ cidrūpah prakāśātmā.
518 TĀ XIII.103 and 264.
519 TĀ XIII.104.
520 TĀ XIII.105 and 265.
521 TĀ XIII.106, with Jayaratha’s introduction:

na vācyam tu kathaṁ nāma kasmiṁścit puṁsy asau tathā || 106 ||

“If that is so, why is it that He manifests in this way only in some particular souls? Does He hate other people?

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For in our system, no soul whatsoever exists which is separate from him, as is the case for systems such as the dualist, for which there could be the objection “either He should liberate all [souls] or He should not liberate any [soul].” For, to begin with (yāvatā hi) it is God himself who, out of His own freedom, manifests as having a pure or impure nature, since His nature is precisely of such a kind.

The “impure nature” the commentator refers to is the one Śiva takes on when he wishes to conceal himself and contracts into multiple reality.

While for the dualists the bond of Impurity is a material substance that covers the soul, for the non-dualists it is simply Śiva’s state of contracted consciousness in the form of an individual soul (aṇutva), a condition of ignorance characterized by the belief in one’s own imperfection. Abhinavagupta notes that even in this limited sphere as an individual soul, Śiva is still the agent, and therefore the cause, of another bond too, that of karman, as well as the one who experiences its fruits. Even though these bonds are caused by Śiva they are still beginningless, Abhinavagupta argues, because Śiva is eternal.

One should not object: ‘how on earth is it that He [does] so [only] in certain souls?’ For there is not any soul with respect to which this could be objected.”

522 Jayaratha ad TĀ XIII.106:

na hi asmaddarśane bhedavādivat tadatiriktaḥ kaścit pumān nāma saṁbhavet yatrāyaṁ paryanuyogah syāt sarvān eva mocayatu mā vā kañcid iī | yāvatā hi deva evāsau svātantryāṁ śuddhāśuddhātmatayā prathate yad asya tādrśaṁ eva svam rūpaṁ iī ||

523 TĀ IX.65-66ab. See also Sanderson 1992: 288-289.
524 TĀ XIII.109cd-110ab and Jayaratha ad loc.
525 TĀ XIII.110cd-111ab and Jayaratha’s introduction ad loc. This theory—that Śiva contracts and causes the bonds of mala and karman—seems to imply that, since these two bonds have a cause, they are not beginningless. As Jayaratha observes, this would contradict a main tenet agreed upon by all Śaivas, i.e. that mala and karman (and saṃsāra, or transmigration) are beginningless (Jayaratha’s introduction ad śl. 110cd). Abhinavagupta responds to this possible objection by saying that, although mala and karman have a cause—Śiva’s desire to conceal himself—since this cause is beginningless, these bonds are also beginningless (TĀ XIII.110cd-111ab and Jayaratha ad loc). If this is the case, however, an opponent could raise the following objection: if both Śiva and these bonds are without beginning, should they not be all equally so? Then why should we say that Śiva is the cause of these bonds? (Jayaratha’s introduction ad 112cd-113ab). In response to this potential objection Abhinavagupta states that Śiva is the ultimate ground of everything, and nothing could exist without this “Śiva nature.” TĀ XIII.112cd-113ab:

viśuddhasvaprakāśātmaśivarāpataya vinā || 112 ||
3.4.3 Śaktipāta and the Role of Karma

In Abhinavagupta’s view, because the bonds of Impurity (mala) and karman are part of the contracted nature of the individual soul, then they cannot also become the cause for the “loss of that nature” (svarūpatāhāni), that is, the cause for the removal of that state of contraction of the soul—a process that culminates in the individual’s identification with Śiva. In other words, the fetters that bind a soul, Impurity and Karma, cannot bring about also its liberation. The Kashmiri author makes this statement alluding to the doctrine of the Śaiva Siddhānta, whose view that śaktipāta depends on either the “ripening of mala” or the “balance of karmas” involves these bonds in the process leading to grace and liberation. In overt polemic with the Śaiva Saiddhāntikas, Abhinavagupta states that Śiva alone brings about the liberation-bestowing type of śaktipāta:

It is only pure, self-luminous Śiva who is the cause of this [grace]. And He is the one who, on account of His autonomous will alone, causes the manifestation of its various degrees. For those who do not desire fruits, [but liberation alone.]

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526 TĀ XIII.115cd-116ab:

na kiñcid yujyate tena hetur atra maheśvarah |
Without the state of being [something whose nature is] Śiva, whose essence is pure self-luminosity, nothing is possible. Therefore with regard to this [mala] Śiva is the cause.

527 TĀ XIII.116cd-120ab:

tena suddhiḥ svaprakāśah śiva evātra kāraṇam || 116 ||
sa ca svācchhandyamātreṇa tāratamyaprakāśakah ||
kulajātivapuskarmavayo 'nuṣṭhānasampadāh || 117 ||
anapeksya śive bhaktiḥ śaktipāto 'phalāṛthinām ||
yā phalāṛthināyā bhaktiḥ sā karmādyaṃ apekṣate || 118 ||
tato 'tra syat phale bheda nāpavarge tv asau tathā ||
bhogāpavaragadvitayābhisandhātur api sphaṭām || 119 ||
prāgābhāge 'pekṣate karma citratvān nottāre punaḥ ||

Since stanzas 116cd-118ab summarize Abhinavagupta’s view on śaktipāta and devotion, I used them in the Introduction, in the opening paragraph of this dissertation, as well as in chapter 1, subsection 1.2.3 (“Abhinavagupta: Devotion as the Power of the Lord”).

528 According to the commentator Jayaratha, Abhinavagupta here is referring to anugraha, grace—the cosmic function of Śiva that brings about liberation.
śaktipāta, which is devotion to Śiva, is not dependent upon family lineage, birth, body, action, age, or behavior.

This first part of the passage, however, refers only to what Abhinavagupta considers a higher level of śaktipāta—the case of the person who desires liberation alone (mumukṣu).

The next part of the passage refers instead to the person who desires both enjoyment, or “fruits,” and liberation (bubhuṣu), who is the recipient of a lower degree of śaktipāta, which is partly dependent on karma:

But the devotion one has when desiring some fruit,529 that [is a sign of a śaktipāta which] depends on karma etc. For this reason, there should be a variety [of actions] with regard to the fruit, but not with regard to liberation.530 As for the one who aims at both enjoyment and liberation, clearly [śaktipāta] depends on karma for the former because of the variety [of enjoyments],531 but not for the latter.

The author here is referring to the law of cause and effect according to which an action (karman)—both in its general meaning as behavior, and in its specific meaning as ritual—produces a corresponding result. Since liberation, the state of Śiva, is not characterized by distinctions, it cannot be produced by a variety of causes, including a person’s given life circumstances, such as caste, physical appearance, or age, and conduct in daily life. In the case of “experience” (bhoga), however, there are various fruits (phala) one can attain—such as different kinds of supernatural powers or pleasures in various paradises—which are produced by different kinds of karma.532 This is why Abhinavagupta says that the śaktipāta received by the enjoyment-seeker (bubhuṣu) is

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529 Literally, “that devotion as somebody who desires the fruits depends on karma etc. …”
530 Literally, “but there should not be this [variety] in the same way with regard to liberation.”
531 This sentence means that there is a variety of enjoyments depending on the variety of karmas.
532 As Jayaratha points out in his commentary by quoting relevant passages from Tantrāloka XXVI—the chapter where Abhinavagupta outlines the various post-initiatory observances (śesavṛttiḥ)—the same principle applies to the observances to be performed after dīkṣā: the bubhuṣuḥ needs to perform specific ritual actions, while such restrictions do not apply to the mumukṣuḥ. See TĀ XXVI.55cd-60ab.
both “dependent and independent”: for the enjoyment part it is dependent on karma, but for the liberation part it is independent of karma or any other cause.\footnote{533 See parallel passage in Tantrasāra XI (119\textsuperscript{3}-5) bhogamokṣobhayotsukasya bhoge karmāpeko mokṣe tu tannirapekṣah iti sāpekṣanirapekṣah || 534 TĀ XIII.360cd-361ab. See text and translation of the full passage in the footnote below.}

Since the Sanskrit term \textit{karma} includes in its semantic field also what in English we commonly refer to as “religious practices,” such as worship, recitation of mantras, and meditation, Abhinavagupta makes an important distinction that allows him to preserve the role of religious practice in attaining liberation without invalidating his doctrine of Śiva’s absolute autonomy. He differentiates between \textit{karman}, or “ordinary action,” and \textit{kriyā śakti}, Śiva’s Power of Action, originating in his Will (\textit{icchā}). While Śiva’s Power of Action (\textit{kriyā śakti}) is what leads to the awareness of one’s true nature, \textit{karman} is the activity that bestows a lower kind of experience (\textit{avaram bhogam}), which actually conceals the true nature of the experiencer.

Thus, in Abhinavagupta’s view, the pleasurable experiences of the enjoyment-seeker (\textit{bubhukṣu})—including those that may be experienced in paradisiacal worlds—are comprised of this lower category of experience, produced by ordinary action (\textit{karman}). Śaiva religious practices, conversely, such as worship, mantra recitation, and meditation, ultimately are not just mere actions, based on individual will, but are expressions of Śiva’s own Power of Action, originating in divine Will (\textit{īśvarecchā}). “Let us examine”—Abhinavagupta challenges his opponents—“why in the first place they become engaged in [practices] such as meditation on Śiva …, mantra repetition etc.”\footnote{534 TĀ XIII.360cd-361ab. See text and translation of the full passage in the footnote below.} Abhinavagupta
then reasserts his basic argument that people engage in Śaiva practices as a result of Śiva’s grace, which amounts to say that Śiva’s Will is the only cause.535

In this clever way Abhinavagupta can affirm the soteriological value of post-initiatory observances, and initiation itself, without invalidating his main tenet: that Śiva’s grace is the only cause for liberation, the immersion (samāveśa) of the individual soul in Śiva. In chapter 2 I have shown that in Abhinavagupta’s non-dualistic view, Śiva’s grace is also the cause of devotion (bhakti) and of knowledge (jñāna), and that these three terms—jñāna, bhakti, and samāveśa—can function as synonyms. They all refer to the gnostic practice of progressive identification with Śiva, which begins with śaktipāta and culminates in liberation. I explained how Abhinavagupta regards this

535 This distinction between karman and kriyā śakti occurs in the course of an argument Abhinavagupta makes to demonstrate that śaktipāta is independent of both bonds karma and māyā. He uses the example of higher soul-deities, such as Mantras, who are not under the influence of māyā or karman and who receive śaktipāta and attain the state of Śiva at the end of their office (TĀ XIII.257cd-259ab). In the following stanzas Abhinavagupta anticipates a possible objection (TĀ XIII.259cd-263):

\[
\begin{align*}
nau pāṭjāpadhyānaśaṅkarāśevasanādibhiḥ & || 259 \parallel \\
te mantrādīvatvam āpamāḥ kathāṃ karmānapekṣiṇaḥ & ||
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
maivām tathāvidhottātraśvadhānājaṃpādisu & || 260 \parallel \\
pravṛttit eva prathamam eṣāṃ kasmād vivicyatām & ||
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
karmatāntāmyavairāgyamapākādi dāśītam & || 261 \parallel \\
tīvarecchā nimittam cec chaktipātaikahetuta & ||
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
jāpādikā kriyāśakti evetthāṃ na tu karma tatr & || 262 \parallel \\
karma tallokrādhaṃ hi yad bhogam avaraṃ dadaī & ||
\end{align*}
\]

“But—one may object—they have attained the state of Mantras etc. through worship, recitation [of mantras], meditation, devotion to Śaṅkara and so forth. How [could you say that] they are independent from karma? It is not so. Let’s examine why in the first place they become engaged in [practices] such as meditation on Śiva who is beyond such kinds of things (karma), repetition etc. Karma, the equality of karma, detachment, the ripening of mala etc. have been refuted [as possible causes]. If, [on the other hand], you say that the cause is the will of Śiva, [then that is doing no more than saying that] śaktipāta is the only cause. Thus, such [activities] as recitation of mantras etc. are nothing but [Śiva’s] power of action, they are not, however, [mere] karma. For what is known in the world as karma, is that which, bestowing lower enjoyment, conceals the true nature of the experiencer. But we don’t give weight to a term [i.e. the word karman].”

As Abhinavagupta clarifies a couple of stanzas later (266-267ab), karman is a manifestation of Śiva’s power of concealment, while kriyāśakti is his power of grace, which brings about liberation. He bases his explanation on Spandakārīka III.16. I quote both passages in chapter 4, section 4.5 (“Grace Obscured: Šaktipāta in Non-Śaiva Traditions and Unqualified Gurus”), fn. 720.
knowledge as being the means as well as the goal, and that the difference between the two is only a question of “degree.” This unfolding of knowledge can occur more or less gradually and more or less mediated by other means, depending on the degree of śaktipāta, which is the focus of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4

Degrees of Grace and Degrees of Authority: Śaiva Gurus and Classes of Initiates in Abhinavagupta’s Doctrine

4.1 Introduction: Abhinavagupta’s Doctrine of the Nine Śaktipāta

Central to Abhinavagupta’s formulation of śaktipāta is the idea that it manifests in different degrees (tāratamya). He describes nine distinct types of śaktipāta, which vary according to intensity: Intense (tīvra), Moderate (madhya), and Mild (manda), each with three further subdivisions based on the same criterion. Accordingly, his classification of Śiva’s Descent of Power into nine categories is as follows: Higher-Intense, Medium-Intense and Lower-Intense; Higher-Moderate, Medium-Moderate, and Lower-Moderate; Higher-Mild, Medium-Mild and Lower-Mild. Theoretically, each of these nine categories is further divided threefold, bringing the number to twenty-seven, and further threefold, ad infinitum. In his exposition, however, Abhinavagupta outlines the characteristics of the main nine types, and only alludes to further subdivisions. He also maps out a system according to which the various degrees of śaktipāta give rise, in descending order, to different types of gurus and disciples distinguished by the types of initiation they receive. All Śaiva initiates—from the most powerful guru to the lowest

536 TĀ XIII.129cd-130ab and Jayaratha ad loc.
537 The discussion on the nine degrees of śaktipāta stretches over 124 stanzas (TĀ XIII.129cd-254ab), about one third of the whole chapter.
538 Jayaratha ad TĀ XIII.132, p. 872-5.
kind of practitioner who only seeks mundane enjoyments—are thereby accounted for as vessels of Śiva’s varying degrees of grace.

One must raise the question of Abhinavagupta’s ultimate purpose in propounding such a complex hierarchy. In this chapter I attempt to untangle what Abhinavagupta probably aimed at in the Tantrāloka, explore the typology he constructs, and evaluate his likely interlocutors in the social and religious landscape of the time. My analysis includes the author’s interpretation of the scriptural sources he uses in support of his arguments—in particular his exegesis of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra. While my task would have been impossible without Jayaratha’s commentary, I also point to the rare occasions where my interpretation of Abhinavagupta’s categories departs from that of the thirteenth century commentator.

The idea that śaktipāta may occur in different degrees of strength, such as “mild” or “intense,” occurs in some earlier scriptural sources of the tradition, as well as in exegetical works preceding Abhinavagupta His doctrine, however, has no precedents with regard to many aspects: the number of categories involved, the detailed typology of gurus and disciples he connects with it, and the overall relevance it takes on in soteriology. At the end of his long exposition on the nine degrees of śaktipāta, Abhinavagupta himself, by declaring that the classification was revealed to him by his guru Śambhunātha, implicitly acknowledges that it has no explicit scriptural foundation.539 What we do find in some early scriptural sources, however, is a classification in three categories—Intense, Moderate and Mild—without however a necessary correspondence to types of gurus or types of initiation.

539 TĀ XIII.254ab: navadhā śaktipāto’yaṃ śambhunāthena varṇītaḥ: “These nine kinds of śaktipāta have been explained by Śambhunātha.” See also Sanderson 2007a: 314, fn. 269.
The Mālinīvijayottaratantra, for example, the text on which Abhinavagupta claims to base the Tantrāloka,\textsuperscript{540} refers to the three main degrees of śaktipāta in the course of its exposition of a high-level, rare kind of initiation, which bestows immediate results in terms of both liberation and supernatural powers.\textsuperscript{541} The context is that of a procedure within the initiation ritual called “the method of Śiva’s hand,” whereby the guru gazes at the disciple’s arms and empowers them with Śiva’s divine energy (rudraśakti). The teacher then leads the pupil through a series of rituals involving the movements of his hands, now infused by and presumably guided by Śiva’s power.\textsuperscript{542} Based on these movements, the guru evaluates the degree of śaktipāta the disciple has received. The Mālinī says:\textsuperscript{543}

On the basis of these movements [of the hands] the wise master (budhaḥ mantrī) should examine [the intensity of] the Descent of Power—mild, intense etc.—on account of [these movements] being mild, intense etc. Therefore, the [disciple] who has gone through the method described\textsuperscript{544} is called a “pledge-holder” (samayin).\textsuperscript{545}

\textsuperscript{540} TĀ I.17 (trans. in Sanderson 1992: 292, fn. 44)
\textsuperscript{541} MVT XI.1:
\begin{verbatim}
na tad astha yan na śrtmālinīvijayottare
devadevena nirдиstam svaśabenātha lingataḥ || 17 ||
“There is nothing in this [Tantrāloka] which has not been taught by the God of gods in the Mālinīvijayottaratantra, either explicitly or by implication.”
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{542} MVT XI.17-26ab. In one of these rituals, for example, the guru through this power drives the disciple’s hands until they reach his head (22ab: taddhastau prerayec chaktyā yāvan mārdhānta āgatau).

\textsuperscript{543} MVT XI.26cd-27:
\begin{verbatim}
eteyāṃ cálanān mantrī śaktipātam partkṣayet || 26 ||
mandatvādhibhedena mandatvādikān budhah ||
ity āyaṃ samayiḥ proktaḥ sanṣṭhitoktena vartmanā || 27 ||
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{544} The expression sanṣṭhitoktena vartmanā is not syntactically clear to me.

\textsuperscript{545} Wallis’s problematic interpretation of this passage (2008: 264) is what leads him to state that Abhinavagupta’s classification of śaktipāta in nine categories is drawn from the MVT (2008: 274). He translates the above one and a half stanza as:

“Because of the loosening of these (bonds), the Mantra-master (i.e. the guru) may verify the Descent of Power (that the disciple has received). He is awakened due to (a Descent of Power...
Thus the *Mālinīvijayottaratāntra* only refers to *śaktipāta* as being “mild, intense etc.,” where the word “etcetera” (*ādi*) presumably stands for the intermediate (*madhya*) range between these two degrees, which I translate as “moderate.” It makes no reference whatsoever to a classification in nine types.\(^{546}\) References to different degrees of *śaktipāta* are also found in other early scriptural sources, but they are made almost in passing, and without a systematic explanation of their relevance, or even of a division of three kinds, not to mention a division in nine kinds.\(^{547}\)

In addition to Śambunātha, Abhinavagupta attempts to ascribe the theory of *śaktipāta* in degrees to another guru of his lineage, Utpaladeva. Although the latter never refers to specific distinctions in the Descent of Power as “mild” and “intense,” Abhinavagupta uses his exegetical skills to read an allusion to different levels of intensity in a hymn of Utpaladeva’s *Śivastotrāvalī*, a collection of devotional songs.\(^{548}\)

And also our guru’s guru, the revered Utpaladeva, said: “Oh Lord, at the time of *śaktipāta* you never do the appropriate (*prāpta*) examination. Today what has occurred for me [i.e. what is wrong with me], for which you [still] delay in the process of manifesting yourself?” With the words “ever” and “appropriate” [Utpaladeva] expressed the independence, the difficulty in obtaining it, and the

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\(^{546}\) I will show in the next section how Abhinavagupta forces his interpretation of another passage of this text to suggest that it teaches the three degrees of Intense *śaktipāta*.

\(^{547}\) *Kīraṇa* I.21, for example only mentions “intense” *śaktipāta* in a context where the text appears to refer to *aktipāta* in general. To my knowledge there are no references to degrees of *śaktipāta* in the *Mṛgendra* (Only Nārāyanakanṭha’s *Mṛgendravṛtti* refers to “intense” *śaktipāta* ad MrT, KP, VIII.144cd-145ab quoted in fn. 660. *Somaśambhupaddhati* I.1.6 (*samayadikśāvidhiḥ*) also mentions *tṝvraśaktipāta*.

\(^{548}\) TĀ XIII.290-293ab:

 śrītān utpaladevaś cāpy asmākam paramo guruḥ l
*sākṭipātasamaye vicāraṇam prāptaṁ tīṣa na karōśi karhīcita* II 290 l
adya māṁ prati kim āgataṁ yatāḥ svaprakāśanavidhau vilambase l
*karhīcitrāṇapṛtaśadābhyaṁ anapekṣitvam ucīvān* II 291 l
durlabhatvaṁ arāgītvaṁ sākṭipātavidhau vibhōḥ l
*aparārdhena tasyaiva sākṭipātasya citratāṁ* II 292 l
vyavadhānaśaśprabhedādyair upavarnitaḥ l
lack of favoritism of the Lord in the process of śaktipāta. In the latter half of the same [verse] [Utpaladeva has expressed] śaktipāta’s variety with distinctions such as a long or short interval, alluded to [in the verse].

The hymn (Śivastotrāvalī XIII.11) portrays the pangs a devotee feels on account of the absence, or lack of manifestation, of the Lord. Abhinavagupta may be correct in interpreting the reference to the fact that the Lord does not examine the worthiness of a person before granting grace as a statement by Utpaladeva on the “randomness” of śaktipāta—that is, that it is not dependent on the merits of the recipients. However, to infer that the author alludes to a variety of degrees of śaktipāta when he mentions that the Lord delays in manifesting himself seems an exegetical leap.

The fact that the doctrine of śaktipāta manifesting in nine degrees of intensity lacks scriptural foundation raises the question of what agenda its author sought to serve in propounding it. With this in mind I examine Abhinavagupta’s description of the various levels of śaktipāta in Tantrāloka XIII.

We can gain insight into Abhinavagupta’s doctrinal concerns in this chapter merely by considering the unequal space he devotes to the different types of śaktipāta: he devotes 110 stanzas to the three levels of Intense śaktipāta; five stanzas to the three levels of Moderate śaktipāta; and one stanza to Mild śaktipāta, summarizing in one sentence the criterion that determines its further subdivisions. Given that the Intense Descent of Power in its variations is received mainly by those who become gurus, I suggest that one of Abhinavagupta’s main purposes for propounding his doctrine of “grace in degrees” is to provide a theoretical foundation for his hierarchical classification of Śaiva teachers or “officiants” (ācārya). In fact, after the initial discussion on the causes of grace and the
philosophical dispute with the Śaiva Siddhānta, which I discussed earlier, Tantrāloka XIII becomes as much a chapter on the Śaiva guru as on śaktipāta.

“Moderate” and “Mild” śaktipāta in different degrees, conversely, result in various kinds of ordinary initiates who do not become spiritual teachers. They constitute the vast majority of Śaiva practitioners, who attain liberation only after death, with or without also attaining supernatural powers and enjoyments in paradisiacal realms. To these two categories and their subdivisions, however—six of the nine types in his classification—the author reserves only a few stanzas.\(^{549}\) This should not be surprising since Abhinavagupta regards these lower degrees of grace as “inferior” (apara) kinds of śaktipāta. At the end of his exposition in fact he reduces the nine categories to two essential ones, a “superior” and an “inferior.” He writes,\(^{550}\)

These nine kinds of śaktipāta have been explained by Śambhunātha. Here the following should be understood as the essence. The superior śaktipāta is the shining forth of the Self which is full consciousness, without distinction, [and] the inferior śaktipāta, although it is of that kind, is characterized by the distinction of [there being some] portion of experience (bhogāṃśa). This [too], at the end, grants identity with Śiva.

The superior (parama) śaktipāta bestows immediately liberating knowledge, which Abhinavagupta describes as the “shining forth of the Self” as full, undifferentiated Consciousness. This grace is the kind received by those bound to become liberated while still alive (jīvanmukta, which includes gurus), that is, the majority of cases within Intense śaktipāta. On the other hand, Abhinavagupta describes the inferior (apara) type of

\(^{549}\) Five for the Moderate and one for the Mild, as I mentioned earlier.

\(^{550}\) Tantrāloka XIII.254-256ab:

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\begin{align*}
\text{navadhā śaktipāto 'yam śambhunāthaṁ varaṇitaḥ} & \| 254 \\
\text{idam śāram iha jñeyaṁ paripūrṇacidātmanāḥ} & \| 254 \\
\text{prakāśah paramaḥ śaktipāto 'vacchedadavargitaḥ} & \| 254 \\
\text{tathāvihdo 'pi bhogāṃśā vacchadenopalaksitaḥ} & \| 255 \\
\text{aparaḥ śaktipāto 'sau paryante śivatāpradaḥ} & \|
\end{align*}
\]
śaktipāta as the type that grants liberation only after some experience, whether in this world or other, supernatural realms. The latter category includes the majority of disciples, recipients of Moderate and Mild forms of śaktipāta, who attain liberation only after death.

In the Parātrśikāvivarana Abhinavagupta describes “supreme” (para) śaktipāta as the kind that grants liberation in this life, precisely the experience of the Self as full, undifferentiated consciousness mentioned in the previous passage from the Tantrāloka.551 He also describes it as the śaktipāta that grants knowledge without requiring further yogic practice or even ritual initiation—that is, intuitive knowledge.552 As I will explain later, this particular degree of śaktipāta is Medium-Intense, the category to which he devotes most of his attention. Essentially, the superior śaktipāta corresponds to the various degrees in the Intense range, and the inferior to all the others.

552 Parātrśikāvivarana, KSTS, Vol XVIII, 2516. 2524 (my translation):

adṛṣṭamaṇḍalo 'py evam yah kaścid vetti tattvatah
sa siddhiṁbhaḥ bhavaḥ nityaṁsa yogī sa ca dīkṣitāḥ || 18 ||

mandalam devatācakram apaśyam apy aprāptam elako ‘pi caryāniśaṁtanahaṭhādīnā, mandalāni sarvanācakrānucakrarāpāni yogābhyaśenaśaksat kurvam api, trisālabhājimandalam adṛṣṭvāpi l naṁra mandalādīdṛksopayogah evam eva kaścit paraśaktipātaṁugrīto vetti yaḥ “etaj jñānam eva hi dīkṣā kāṇyātra dīkṣā,” ata eva evaṁ jānan vibhūnā bhairavabhaṭṭārakeṇa dīkṣitāḥ...1

“Anyone who understands this truly, even though he has not seen the mandala [i.e. has not received initiation], always attains supernatural powers, he is perfected in yoga and he is [a true] initiate.”

[There are three meanings of the word mandala, or sacred diagram]: 1) mandala as the circle of goddesses: even if one has not seen it, i.e. has not attained a meeting [with them] through observations, night wanderings, violent [unions] etc. 2) mandalas as the main and secondary cakras of the subtle body channels: even if one has not had direct experience of these through the practice of yoga; 3) mandala as the diagram of trident, lotuses etc.: even if one has not seen this. Here there is no use for ritual initiation with sacred diagrams etc. The one who, favored by a supreme saktipāta, knows precisely this, ‘initiation is nothing but this very knowledge; what other initiation is [required] in this case?’ For this very reason, knowing in this way, he is initiated by the all-pervading venerable Bhairava.”

Abhinavagupta quotes this same stanza (Parātrśika 18) ad TĀ XIII.152ab-153cd to support his argument that ritual initiation is not necessary for those who have a firm intuitive knowledge due to intense śaktipāta.
4.2 Intense Śaktipāta: A Typology of Śaiva Gurus

4.2.1 Abhinavagupta’s Interpretation of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra

Abhinavagupta claims that his exposition of the three degrees of Intense Śaktipāta is based on a passage of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra where Lord Śiva presumably conveyed these teachings in a veiled manner. The passage in question is the following:

Thus at some moment, as a result of his suitability [to receive this knowledge], this power of Śiva, which is quiescent and bestows the fruit of liberation, comes into contact with that soul. As a result of the connection with that [power of Śiva], some rare individuals then achieve liberation at that very moment. For another person the unity with ignorance ceases. Infused by the power of Rudra, feeling the desire to go to a true guru under the influence of the will of Śiva, he is led [to him] in order to attain enjoyment and liberation. Having propitiated him,

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553 TĀ XIII 199ab.
554 MVT I.42-45, quoted ad TĀ XIII.199cd-203:

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555 I discuss MVT I.42, and Abhinavagupta’s interpretation of it, in the next subsection (4.2.2, “Higher-Intense Śaktipāta”). See also fn. 573.
he receives the Śaiva initiation from him, when [the guru is] satisfied. And then he will attain Śivahood either immediately or after further experience at death.

The natural reading of this passage is relatively straightforward. It describes two cases of śaktipāta: the first (rare) case is the individual who achieves instant liberation without needing a guru; and the second case is the person in whom this infusion of Śiva’s power arouses the desire to seek initiation from a guru, as a result of which he may achieve liberation either immediately, while still living, or after death. Abhinavagupta, instead, wants to read three different cases into the passage, and to associate them with the three degrees of Intense śaktipāta he has in mind. In order to do this, however, he breaks the syntax in the middle of a pāda, a verse quarter (44b), in a very unnatural way.\textsuperscript{556}

Thus, in Abhinavagupta’s interpretation, the person who comes in contact with the quiescent power of Śiva is “infused with the great power, i.e. the Higher-Intense,”\textsuperscript{557} and becomes liberated right away (by dying); the one who is “infused by the power of Rudra” is the case of Medium-Intense śaktipāta, that of the “spontaneously perfected” guru, for whom ignorance ceases as a result of intuitive knowledge; and the person who, impelled by Śiva’s will, seeks the help of a guru is a recipient of Lower-Intense śaktipāta. For the most part, they too eventually attain realization in this life. Since Abhinavagupta classifies those ordinary disciples who become liberated at death as recipients of degrees of grace below Intense (i.e., Moderate and Mild in their variations), he skillfully interprets the sentence of the Mālinī “he attains liberation at death” as a special case of Lower-Intense śaktipāta, that of a dying person who receives an instantly liberating

\textsuperscript{556} See TABLE 4.2 at the end of this section.
\textsuperscript{557} See TĀ XIII. 211cd: tṝvrai\vramahāśaktsāmaviṣṭaḥ sa sidhyati ||
initiation. I will analyze in detail below these three levels of Intense śaktipāta and show how Abhinavagupta uses the words of this authoritative tantra to validate his view.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4.2: Abhinavagupta’s Interpretation of Intense Śaktipāta in MVT I.42-45</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MVT I.42-45 quoted by Abhinavagupta in TĀ XIII.199cd-203 and interpreted in TĀ XIII.204-218558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Higher-intense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evam asyātmanaḥ kāle kasmimścid yogatāvasāt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Medium-intense</td>
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<tr>
<td>ajñānena sahaikutvaṃ kasyacid vinivartate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Lower-intense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yiyāsuḥ śivecchayā</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

558 I analyze the interpretation of MVT I.42-45 Abhinavagupta proposes in TĀ XIII.204-218 in the sections below devoted to Higher-Intense (4.2.2), Medium-Intense (4.2.3) and Lower-Intense śaktipāta (4.2.6).

559 TĀ XIII.217: sa ityantato grantha eṣa dvītyaśiṣvayaḥ sphaṭam || anyas tu mandattvākhyāsaṅkṣiptāvidhīṃ prati || 217 || sphaṭam | em. Sanderson (personal communication, 11/29/2007); sphaṭaḥ ed. KSTS. “The section of this text ending with [the word] ‘sa’ is clearly referring to the second topic [i.e. Medium-Intense śaktipāta], but the rest [of the text refers] to the process of the śaktipāta called Lower-Intense.”

560 Abhinavagupta interprets the locative dehapāte as an ablative (dehapātaḥ). Thus, he paraphrases the last pāda of the Malinī he quotes ad XIII.203d as dehapātaḥ chivaṃ vrajet.
4.2.2 Higher-Intense Śaktipāta

“Thus at some moment, as a result of his suitability [to receive this knowledge], this power of Śiva, which is quiescent and bestows the fruit of liberation, comes into contact with that soul. As a result of the connection with that [quiescent power of Śiva], some rare individuals then achieve liberation at that very moment.”

(Mālinīvijayottaratantra I.42-43ab)\(^{561}\)

Of the one hundred and ten stanzas devoted to Intense śaktipāta, Abhinavagupta reserves only a few stanzas for this Higher-Intense kind—a single stanza in the course of his independent exposition,\(^{562}\) and a few others during his commentary on the section of the Mālinīvijayottara passage that he connects with this particular degree.\(^{563}\) In the single stanza, which begins his nine-fold classification, he writes,\(^{564}\)

The Higher-Intense Descent of Power bestows liberation automatically (svayam) through death, at that same moment [in which śaktipāta occurs] or at another time, depending on its degree of intensity.

Thus, this śaktipāta is so intense that it causes death in the rare person who receives it, and, through this death, it grants liberation. Even this kind of śaktipāta has a range of intensity within it, which determines the span of time a person remains alive after receiving it: death occurs immediately after the Descent of Power in the highest level of Higher-Intense (tīvra-tīvra-tīvra) śaktipāta; after a little time, in the medium range of Higher-Intense (madhya-tīvra-tīvra); or after a longer time, in the milder case of Higher-

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561 This passage is quoted ad TĀ XIII.199cd-200.
562 Two half-stanzas, TĀ XIII.130cd-131ab.
563 TĀ XIII.204-211. This means that the major part of the discussion on the nine degrees of śaktipāta focuses on only two of them: Medium-Intense and Lower-Intense, precisely the kind of grace that leads to the state of liberation in this body, thus making its recipient fit to become an authoritative Śaiva guru.
564 TĀ XIII.130cd-131ab:

\[ \text{tīvratvraḥ śaktipāto dehapātavaśāt svayam} \parallel \\
\text{mokṣapradas tadaivānvāyakāle vā tāratamyatāḥ} \parallel \]
Intense (manda-tīvra-tīvra). As Jayaratha notes in his commentary, this suggests that each of the nine categories is further divided threefold, bringing the total number to twenty-seven.\(^{565}\)

The term svayam “by itself” (or “automatically”) refers to the fact that after receiving this degree of śaktipāta the practitioner does not need to go to a guru or to perform any practice in order to achieve liberation. Abhinavagupta uses the expression in a similar way to introduce the next lower degree of śaktipāta (Medium-Intense), as a result of which the recipient attains knowledge “by himself alone” (svayam eva), without relying on a guru.\(^{566}\) In his commentary, however, Jayaratha curiously specifies that the term svayam refers to the fact that this degree of śaktipāta can liberate “without the well-known cause which is death.”\(^{567}\) This interpretation seems rather odd, since Abhinavagupta says explicitly that Higher-Intense śaktipāta liberates “through death” (dehapātavaśāt).\(^{568}\) One possible explanation for Jayaratha’s statement is that, although Higher-Intense śaktipāta causes one to achieve liberation only after leaving the body, it is śaktipāta itself that causes this death, rather than a “natural” death causing liberation or providing the condition for it. According to mainstream Śaiva doctrine—propounded by the Śaiva Siddhānta—liberation can be attained only at death, even if the practitioner performs all the prescribed post-initiatory practices. This is also the general understanding among followers of non-dual Śaivism. Texts that admit the possibility of

\(^{565}\) TĀ XIII.131ab and Jayaratha ad loc.

\(^{566}\) See TĀ XIII.131cd-132ab quoted at the beginning of the next subsection, 4.2.3 (“Medium-Intense Śaktipāta: Intuitive Knowledge and the Spontaneously Perfected Guru”). Sanskrit text in fn. 581.

\(^{567}\) Jayaratha ad 130d (Vol. VIII, 187’). He glosses the word svayam, which means “automatically,” “by itself”: svayam iti prasiddhadehapātanimittam antareṇety arthah “The meaning of the term svayam is ‘without the well-known cause which is death’.” “Well known” because, as I explain above, most Śaiva texts maintain that the initiate attains liberation at death, and not before.

\(^{568}\) Similarly, in the Tantrasāra he uses the expression “at death” (dehapāte).
liberation in this life, or jīvanmukti, consider it to be rare.\footnote{This is precisely what MVT I.43ab states.} In Abhinavagupta’s classification, only those who receive Medium- and Lower-Intense saktipāta have the privilege, as I will discuss below, to become jīvanmukta, or “living liberated.”

Another possible explanation for Jayaratha’s statement that this degree of saktipāta can liberate “without the well-known cause which is death” might be that Abhinavagupta’s treatment of the topic later in the chapter—in the section where he claims to be expounding the veiled teachings of the Mālinī on saktipāta—is not completely consistent with the description above in terms of liberation occurring through death. This inconsistency may reflect the fact that in explicating the tantra, Abhinavagupta needs to conform at least to the words, if not to the meaning, of the text on which he is commenting.

The first stanza of the Mālinī passage that Abhinavagupta quotes, which he associates with the Higher-Intense degree, describes the occurrence of saktipāta in terms that are more reminiscent of Saiddhāntika exegesis than of Abhinavagupta’s own view.

Thus at some moment (kāle kasmiṃ ścid), as a result of his suitability (yogyatā) [to receive this knowledge], this power of Śiva, which is quiescent and bestows the fruit of liberation, comes into contact with that soul.\footnote{MVT I.42 quoted at the beginning of this section on Higher-Intense saktipāta.}

The references to a specific moment in time, as well as to the “suitability” (yogyatā) of the soul, may allude to the existence of certain prerequisites for grace, as opposed to grace occurring from Śiva’s autonomous will.\footnote{Goodall (1998: xxxv, fn. 80) even suggests that there is a remote possibility that yogyatā in MVT 1:42 alludes to the “ripening of the Impurity,” or malaparipāka, based on the fact that Rāmakaṇṭha uses this term in the Kiraṇavrattih ad 4:5.} Abhinavagupta dispels any possible
ambiguity by glossing the Sanskrit word for “time” (kāla) as the arising of self-reflection (kalanā),\(^{572}\) within a non-dualistic framework:\(^{573}\)

The meaning of this [passage] is the following: a “certain time” (kāla) referred to here is nothing but a certain activity (kalanā) of the soul, consisting in being aware with respect to one’s own nature. The “competence” (yogyatā) here means being worthy of that union, which is identity with Śiva.

Also, since he is claiming that the Mālīnī in this stanza teaches Higher-Intense ṣaktipāta, he does not describe it as the ordinary event whereby a person is touched by Śiva’s grace and then experiences the arising of devotion and seeks initiation by a guru. Rather, he is alluding to the complete experience of samāveśa, immersion in, and identity with, Śiva. This full manifestation of Consciousness is free and not subject to any limitation, including time. Thus Abhinavagupta continues:\(^{574}\)

The objection “Why was it not also that way formerly? [i.e. why should this not have occurred earlier?] Why just at that very moment?” is not appropriate. For there is no time [for Consciousness] apart from [its autonomous] manifestation in this way or that. Let [us accept that] the power of time unfolds in this kind of form [i.e. in past, present and future], out of its own independence, but that [power of time] cannot be [used] for refutation (paryanuyuktyai). This is taught as the glory of Śiva himself. But surely [one may object that] this power of Śiva

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\(^{572}\) Abhinavagupta derives the term kalanā from the root kal, and then interprets it as referring to jñānam (knowledge), one of the meanings listed under the root kal in the dhātupātha (a traditional compilation of Sanskrit roots attributed to Pāṇini). I am grateful to Alexis Sanderson for pointing this out to me.

\(^{573}\) TĀ XIII 204-205ab:

asyārtha ātmanaḥ kācit kalanāmarśanātmikā \\
svam rūpaṃ prati yā saiva ko’pi kāla iḥoditaḥ ॥ 204 ॥
yogyatā śivatādātmyayogārhatvam ihocyate ॥

\(^{574}\) TĀ XIII 205cd-208:

pūrvaṃ kim na tathā kasmāt tadaīveti na saṅgatam ॥ 205 ॥
tathābhāsānam ujjhitvā na hi kālo ’sti kaścana ॥
svatāntrītā tu tathābhāse kālasakti vijṛmbhatam ॥ 206 ॥
na tu paryanuyuktyai sā śive tannahimoditā ॥
nanu śaīv śaśāśaktiḥ saṃbaddhāvātmabhiḥ shtītaḥ ॥ 207 ॥
satyaṃ sācchādānātmā tu śāntā tv eṣa svarāpadr̥k ॥
ksobho hi bheda evaikyam prāsāmas tannuyat tataḥ ॥ 208 ॥

207c. sadaśākṣitiḥ | em. Alexis Sanderson (personal communication 11/26/2007); mahāsaktiḥ ed. KSTS. This reading is also strongly suggested by Jayaratha’s expression sadaivaisām in the introduction (avatāranīka) to this passage.
[i.e. the power of temporality] is always connected with souls. True, [I would reply], but that [aspect of Śiva’s power] has the nature of self-concealment, while this quiescent [power] [i.e. the power which brings about liberation] is direct perception of one’s own nature. For excitation is nothing but plurality, [and] quiescence is oneness. Therefore [this power] consists of both of those.

In other words, Consciousness is not subject to time. However, through its own power of temporality it can manifest itself in a temporally differentiated manner. The fact that we experience phenomena as past, present and future cannot be taken as grounds to deny this truth and impart plurality to this all-encompassing Consciousness. This is actually its greatness—or, as Abhinavagupta explains it—“the glory of Śiva,” and not his limitation. Śiva’s ability to project himself as a plurality of phenomena qualified by time, space, and form is part of his power of concealment. Conversely, his manifestation as undifferentiated reality is his “quiescent” (śāntā) power. When souls are connected with this other power, they experience their identity with Śiva.

Abhinavagupta concludes his exposition of Higher-Intense śaktipāta by commenting on the other half-stanza of the Mālinī he associates with this degree of grace, which reads:576

As a result of the connection with that [quiescent power of Śiva], some rare individuals then achieve liberation at that very moment.

575 See Jayaratha ad XIII.206-207ab:

māyāpade punas tattvāntanryād attāvartamānādyābhāsanimitām vijṛmbhatāṁ nāma kālaśaktiḥ,
parasmin prakāśe punas tadbhedam* ādhātum na samarthā yatās tatsphāramātrām evāsāv ity uktam prāg bahuśah ।

* "bhedam" em. Alexis Sanderson (personal communication, 11/26/2007); "abhedam ed. KSTS.

“Let us accept that on the level of differentiated experience (māyāpade) there is manifest a power of temporalization which is the cause of phenomena appearing as past, present and so forth, by its own autonomy. But that [power] is not able to impart plurality into all-encompassing light itself, because it is nothing but the expansion of that [consciousness]. He has said this many times before.”

576 MVT I.43ab. For Sanskrit text see TABLE 4.2.
While it is true that the Mālinī admits the case of an instantly liberating śaktipāta that does not require initiation, it does not mention death as a consequence of this śaktipāta, nor as something occurring prior to liberation. Abhinavagupta, conversely, makes this idea—that the intensity of this Power is so strong that it causes death—the defining characteristic of Higher-Intense śaktipāta, and therefore he inserts this idea into his commentary on the Mālinī. However, the commentary is inconsistent with another idea: that with this degree of śaktipāta, liberation occurs at death, and through this death. The exegesis of the above half-stanza reads:

When [the self] is connected with this quiescent [aspect], it dwells in the śakti state. Having abandoned his state of contracted being, as a result of the intensity of that power, he becomes Śiva. Even in this case [i.e. Higher-Intense śaktipāta], due to the gradation of intensity and so forth, the dropping of the body can occur soon or later on in time, or he can become like a log of wood. One who is penetrated by this highest power, which [we call] Higher-Intense (tiṅva-tiṅva), having his awareness introverted [even] in the midst of all worldly activities, achieves self-realization.

Not only does Abhinavagupta not mention death here as a precondition for liberation, he even suggests that this divine power is so strong that the person can attain the state of Śiva even while performing ordinary activities, as opposed to yoga practices. I am inclined, however, to conclude that this is simply the result of a circumstantial adaptation to his “source text.” In fact in the Tantrasāra, a work that Abhinavagupta composed after

577 See my reference to Jayaratha’s commentary ad TĀ XIII.131 at the beginning of the net subsection (4.2.3) devoted to Medium-Intense śaktipāta.
578 TĀ XIII.209-211:

tayā śāntyā tu saṁbaddhaḥ sthitāḥ saktisvarūpabhāk ā
tyaktaṇubhāvo bhavati śivas taccakṣitārdhyataḥ ā II 209 ā
tratāpi tārataṃyādīvaśāc chīghracirārditaḥ ā
dehaṇaḥ bhaved atya yadvā kāṣṭhādītulyaḥ ā II 210 ā
samastavyavahāreṣu parācintiacetanāḥ ā
tiṅvatvramahāśaktisamāviṣṭaḥ sa sidhyati ā II 211 ā

579 Literally “soon, after a long time, etc. [i.e., everywhere in between].”
he wrote the *Tantrāloka* as a more accessible compendium of it, he reiterates the view that Higher-Intense *śaktipāta* causes liberation “at death.”\(^{580}\)

### 4.2.3 Medium-Intense *Śaktipāta*: Intuitive Knowledge and the “Spontaneously Perfected” Guru

“For another person the unity with ignorance ceases. He is one who is infused by the power of Rudra.”

(*Mālinīvijayottaratantra* I.43cd-44a)

The Medium-Intense degree of *śaktipāta* is the kind to which Abhinavagupta devotes most of his attention. In the very first stanza of this long section he outlines its essence, echoing the words of the *Mālinī*:\(^{581}\)

> With the medium-intense [śaktipāta], however, [the body does not cease, but] all ignorance ceases,\(^{582}\) since he knows, by relying on himself alone, that he is [both] bondage and liberation. That is the great knowledge, born of intuition, which does not require either scriptures or teacher.

The commentator Jayaratha explains that the word “however” (*punar*), which indicates a contrast, alludes to the fact that instead of a cessation of the body (i.e. death), as in the case of the Higher-Intense degree, Medium-Intense *śaktipāta* determines the cessation of ignorance, which is the cause of bondage.\(^{583}\) The fundamental characteristic of this degree of grace is that its recipient attains this knowledge “by himself alone” (*svayam eva*), without being taught by a guru or relying on the scriptures. Abhinavagupta implies here

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580 *Tantrasāra* XI, 1201-2 ed. KSTS. … *tatra utkṛṣṭattvāt tadaiva dehapāte parameṣatā*.
581 TĀ XIII. 131cd-132:

> madhyatvātpunah sarvam ajñānam vinivartate || 131 ||
> svayam eva yato vetti bandhamokṣatayāmatām |
> tat prātibham mahājñānam śāstrasāryānapekṣi yat || 132 ||

582 The expression “all ignorance ceases” (*sarvam ajñānam vinivartate*) in this passage is a clear reference to *Mālinīvijayottaratantra* I.43cd: *ajñānena sahaikatvam…vinivartate* “all unity with ignorance ceases,” which is part of the four stanzas from this text that Abhinavagupta quotes ad TĀ XIII199cd-203.
583 Jayaratha ad XIII.131 (TĀV, Vol. VIII: 875-6).
that Medium-Intense śaktipāta brings about the spontaneous arising of intuitive knowledge (pratibhajñāna or pratibhā), without the help of external means. In his view this is the highest kind of knowledge, superior both to the knowledge acquired from the scriptures and to that learned from a teacher.

According to Abhinavagupta this transcendent intuition is also the characteristic feature of the highest type of Śaiva teacher, the “intuitive” guru (pratibhaguru), one who becomes realized through liberating insight alone, without initiation ritual.\textsuperscript{584} The author of the Tantrāloka also defines such a teacher as “spontaneously perfected” (sāṃsiddhika or saṃsiddha), precisely because he has received complete, liberating knowledge through Śiva’s grace alone, without the aid of external means.\textsuperscript{585}

So, evidently [we can conclude that] (tāvat), for some exceptional person this insight arises completely by itself. This person is called in the scriptures one who is spontaneously-perfected (sāṃsiddhika), one who relies upon his own knowledge. As for what is stated in the Kīraṇatātra,\textsuperscript{586} that [knowledge] comes from the guru, the scriptures and by itself, [one should know that] each

\textsuperscript{584} See Tantrasāra XI:
madhyatvāt śāstra-cāryānapekṣāḥ svapratyayasya pratibhajñānodāyah yadudaye bāhyasamskārāṃ vinaiva bhogāpavargapradāḥ pratibho guru ity ucyate

“Through Medium-Intense [śaktipāta], for someone who has spontaneous knowledge, without relying on scriptures and teacher, intuitive insight arises. When it arises, such a person, who is able to grant enjoyment and liberation without the external initiation ritual, is said to be an ‘intuitive guru.’”

\textsuperscript{585} TĀ IV.40cd-43ab:

sa tāvat kasyacit tarkaḥ svata eva pravartate || 40 ||
sa ca sāṃsiddhiḥ śāstre proktah svapratyayātmaḥ

kirāṇyāṁ yad apy uktam gurutah śāstraḥ svataḥ svataḥ || 41 ||
tatottattarstam mukhyam pūrvapūrva upāyakah

yasya svataḥ yam sattar karah sarvairāvādhikāravān || 42 ||
abhīṣiktaḥ svasamvitdevētthihādhikāravān
dāksitaḥ ca saḥ

\textsuperscript{586} The reference to the Kīraṇatātra is found ad Kīraṇatātra VP IX.14ab (ed. by Vivanti 1975: 42) and it is the conclusion of the Lord’s reply to Garuḍa’s question, “How can the reality level of Śiva be empty?” (śivatattvam kathaṃ śūnyam) ad IX.1a.

śūnyam evamvidham jñeyaḥ gurutah śāstraḥ svataḥ

“Based on the [knowledge acquired] from the guru, from the scriptures and by one’s self, the [reality level of Śiva] should be understood as empty in such a way.”
subsequent [kind of knowledge] is superior [to the previous], and each previous is the means [for the subsequent kind of knowledge]. He in whom this direct intuition arises spontaneously has authority on everything, he is consecrated, he is initiated by the goddesses of his own consciousness.

Such a guru does not need the actual initiation ritual, because he is initiated by the “goddesses of his own consciousness,” his internal sense faculties through which he becomes aware of his Śiva-identity. For this reason, Abhinavagupta also refers to this type of guru as “not created” or “natural” (akalpita). His intuitive knowledge extends beyond what is commonly referred to as “spiritual” knowledge, the awareness of one’s identity with Śiva. Rather, intuitive knowledge includes all domains of traditional knowledge, such as grammar, astrology, codes of law and conduct, and Tantric texts, because it bestows the ability to intuitively know the meaning of the scriptures. Abhinavagupta acknowledges that such an individual in whom this insightful intuition arises completely by itself is quite rare. He is the recipient of the highest level of Medium-Intense  śaktipāta, which is the strongest kind one can receive without dying shortly afterwards.

In his commentary on this passage, Jayaratha explains that the goddesses of consciousness are the sense faculties causing a person to perceive his identity with Śiva, the Knower (yāḥ samvittaya indriyavṛttayah tā eva… pramāṭraikātyam abhidhotayantyā devayah). Abhinavagupta repeats this concept that the spontaneous guru is initiated by the goddesses in chapter XIII.140-142ab. See also Tantrasāra IV, p. 23, (quoted in fn. 230 in chapter 2, subsection 2.3.1 (“Devotion in its Highest Degree: Liberation/Samāveśa”).

tatra atidṛḍhaśaktipātāviddhasya svayam eva sāṃśiddhikatyā sattarka udeit yo ‘sau devtbhiḥ dtkṣita iti ucenate anyasya āgamanakramaṇa ityādi savistaram śaktipātaprakāśane vaksyāmah |
“‘For one who has been pierced by a very intense descent of [divine] power, correct knowledge of ultimate reality (sattarka) arises completely by itself, as a state of complete realization; he is called ‘one initiated by the goddesses.’ For the others [it arises] through scriptural study and other methods. We will speak of this in detail in our illustration on śaktipāta.’”

See also TĀ IV.51ab:

akalpito gurur jīyeyah sāṃśiddhika iti smrtah |

See also TĀ IV.40cd-41ab:

sa tāvat kasyacit tarkah svata eva pravartate || 40 ||
sa ca sāṃśiddhikah śāstre praktaḥ svapratyayātmakah |

TĀ XIII.134cd-135ab.
As in the case of Higher-Intense šaktipāta, the Medium-Intense range is also divided by degrees, which give rise to different levels of intuitive gurus, depending on how firm or unsteady their intuitive knowledge is. The major part of Abhinavagupta’s discussion on Medium-Intense šaktipāta is indeed focused on the nature of intuitive knowledge and on the characteristics of intuitive gurus, to which I devote a separate section below. Abhinavagupta writes,\(^{590}\)

Not any creature at all is devoid of that [intuitive ground] which is the root of scripture. Even if this is the case, nonetheless there is an infinity [of intuitive knowledge], which arises from [its] degree, namely stability or unsteadiness. Reasoning, scripture, teacher, philosophical debate, repeated practice etc. are required. For an [intuitive] knowledge that is unsteady can spontaneously become firm for some rare people. For others, [however, it can become firm] through reasoning etc., alone or not alone. In an intuitive [teacher], the less is his dependence upon other means, the better is that guru, one who has completely mastered knowledge.

Thus, according to Abhinavagupta, all living beings have some kind of intuitive knowledge. The commentator Jayaratha explains that, at the lower level, this includes even animals, whose intuition—in their case their natural instincts—guides their daily behavior. In human beings this knowledge manifests in different degrees, ranging from

\(^{590}\) TĀ XIII.135cd-138:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{yamālañā śāsanañ tena na rikṣaḥ ko 'pi jāntukaḥ} & \parallel 135 \parallel \\
\text{tārāpi tātāramyotham ānancyāṇ dārdhyakamprate} & \\
\text{yuktiḥ śāstraṃ gurur vādo 'bhyaśa ityady apeksyaite} & \parallel 136 \parallel \\
\text{kampamānañ hi viññānam svayam eva punar vrajet} & \\
\text{kasyāpi dārdhyām anyasya yuktīdyaiḥ kevaletairaiḥ} & \parallel 137 \parallel \\
\text{yathā yathā parāpekṣātānavaṃ prātiibhe bhavet} & \\
\text{tathā tathā gurur asau śreṣṭho viññānāpāraṣṭaḥ} & \parallel 138 \parallel \\
\end{align*}
\]

136d. *apeksyaite* ] em. Harunaga Isaacson (personal communication, April 2005); *apeksate* ed. KSTS.
very firm to very unsteady. Those whose intuitive knowledge wavers need to increase its steadiness through external means, such as scriptural study and religious practices.

### 4.2.4 Degrees of Intuitive Knowledge: The Typology of Gurus

Since the degree of intuition is determined by the degree of śaktipāta, the firmer and least dependent on external means a guru’s knowledge is, the higher is his level. On this basis, Abhinavagupta classifies gurus into four main types. The highest teacher is one in whom a firm intuitive knowledge has arisen by itself, right after śaktipāta, and without the support of any means, that is, the completely “not created” (akalpita) guru. This is the somewhat exceptional person the author refers to in one of the passages I quote earlier.

The next best kind of guru is the one who has relied on himself alone, but who still needs the help of external means to make this knowledge firm:

> Therefore, [an intuitive guru] who has this devotion to the teachings of Śiva is one initiated by the goddesses. This one too, according to the degrees of stability and instability [of his intuitive knowledge], should then perform his rituals of initiation and consecration by himself—through intense (gurutaḥ) ascetic vows, ascetic practices, mantra recitation etc.

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591 See TĀ XIII.136cd, a half stanza in the passage above, and 142cd-143ab, which I quote at the beginning of the next subsection (4.2.1). For the Sanskrit text see fn. 595.

592 See TĀ XIII.138cd, which is the last sentence of the passage quoted above. Therefore, Medium-Intense śaktipāta is further divided into higher Medium-Intense, medium Medium-Intense, and lower Medium-Intense. See Jayaratha’s first few lines of commentary ad 142cd-143ab.

593 Abhinavagupta states that the cases of self-accomplished gurus whose intuitive knowledge is unsteady in the beginning and becomes firm spontaneously are extremely rare. Such cases would still fall within the first category of a completely “not created” guru.

594 See TĀ IV.40cd, “So, evidently [we can conclude that] (tāvat), for some exceptional person this insight arises completely by itself.” I quoted the complete passage in the previous subsection (4.2.3) when I introduced the spontaneously perfected guru. For Sanskrit text see fn. 585.

595 TĀ XIII.142-143ab:

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devtbhir dūṣītas tena sabhaktih śivaśāsane |
dṛḍhatākampratābhedaṁ so ’pi svayam atha vratāt || 142 ||
tapojapāder gurutauḥ svasaṃskāraṃ prakalpayet ||
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596 Following Alexis Sanderson’s suggestion (personal communication, 10/18/2007), I chose the meaning “intense” for the Sanskrit term guru (143a: gurutaḥ), as opposed to its other meaning as “teacher.” Abhinavagupta is talking here about the person who is initiated by himself, that is, by the “goddesses” of
Abhinavagupta refers to this guru as *akalpita-kalpaka*, or “not created [by another, but] who has created [himself]”: like the former—the purely *akalpita*—he has not been “made” teacher by someone else, that is, another guru; however, he has “made himself into” a teacher with the help of certain practices, such as meditation, mantra repetition, or ascetic vows: 597

And that teacher who, although possessing that [intuitive] nature has become knowledgeable in the scriptures through meditative realization on the self (*ātmabhāvanā*), without relying on another [teacher], is called by the scriptures an *akalpita-kalpaka*. Of this one too there are many kinds, depending on whether his descent of power [lit. “means”] was intense, medium, mild etc. This wise one obtains the “not created” (*akalpita*), sublime consecration through meditative realization (*bhāvanā*) or meditation, mantra repetition, dream, vow, sacrifice.

Thus, even within the *akalpita-kalpaka* type exist various levels of gurus, depending on the intensity of the *śaktipāta* they received. As I mentioned earlier, the distinguishing characteristic of the Medium-Intense degree of *śaktipāta* is that its recipients attain knowledge without relying on another teacher. Thus, both the *akalpita* and *akalpita-kalpaka* types of guru are cases of Medium-Intense *śaktipāta*: in the latter, however, some individual agency is also required for the attainment of complete and lasting knowledge. We must always keep in mind, however, that in Abhinavagupta’s view these

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597 TĀ IV.51cd-53, also quoted by Jayaratha ad TĀ XIII.142cd-143ab:

*yas tu tadṛṣṭapabhaṃ ātmabhāvanātaḥ paraṃ vinā || 51 ||
śastravit sa guruḥ śāstre prakto ‘kalpitakalpakaḥ || 52 ||
tasyāpi bhedā utkṛṣṭamadhyamāndādyupāyataḥ || 52 ||
*bhāvanāto ’tha va dhyānāj japāt svapnād vratād dhuteḥ || 53 ||
prāṇnoti akalpitodāram abhiśekoṃ mahāmatiḥ || 53 ||

means too—all forms of Śaiva religious practices—are an expression of the grace of the
supreme Lord, who is the ultimate agent.\footnote{598}

Gurus who have acquired their knowledge with the help of other gurus, conversely, fall in the category of Lower-Intense śaktipāta, which I will discuss in the
next section.\footnote{599} Abhinavagupta writes,\footnote{600}

Not everyone achieves self-realization (bhāsate)\footnote{601} in this way [i.e. through pure
intuition], because they have a sense that they are dependent on others.\footnote{602} They do
not understand without the words of someone else, due to the weakness of their
śaktipāta.

What in this stanza he qualifies as “weak” śaktipāta in reality includes all degrees of
intensity below Medium-Intense. Abhinavagupta refers to such gurus as “made,” “created”
(kalpita), or “ritually consecrated” (saṃskṛta),\footnote{603} alluding to the fact that they are initiated,

\footnote{598} TĀ IV.55-57ab and Jayaratha \textit{ad loc}:

“Since He acts out of his own will, [the Lord] resorts to infinite means [of liberation], at times
devotion, or ritual, gnosis, teaching of [Śaiva] knowledge and [Śaiva] religious life, mantra, or
initiation. And Parameśvara, the Lord of the entire universe, bestows grace on the transmigrating
beings in multiple ways such as these.”

\textit{Jayaratha’s commentary ad loc (section)}

“Although the [Lord’s] will alone is the cause for bestowing grace etc. [the text] mentions
innumerable causes because, since there are different types of recipients of grace, he too resorts
to various means [i.e. according to their respective mental disposition]. But in reality there is
nothing else he depends upon other than his own will.”

For the Sanskrit text and grammatical notes see the chapter 2, subsection 2.2.2 (“Practice and Means in
Abhinavagupta’s Philosophy”) where I also quoted this passages. For the Sanskrit text see fn. 199.

\footnote{599} See TĀ XIII.218-22ab, which I quote at the beginning of the section on Lower-Intense śaktipāta; see
also the section of this chapter I devote to Abhinavagupta’s interpretation on the MVT, whereby whether
one seeks a guru or not to attain full knowledge, is the distinguishing factor between Medium-Intense and
Lower-Intense śaktipāta.

\footnote{600} TĀ XIII.161:

\begin{quote}
paropajīvitābuddhyā sarva ittham na bhāsate l
taduktyā na vinā vetti śaktipātasya māṇḍyataḥ || 161 ||
\end{quote}

Jayaratha glosses bhāsate as prakāsate, which literally means “becomes manifest, shines forth [as the
self].”

\footnote{601} Literally, “because of their awareness of their dependency (upajīvitā: the state of upajīvin) on others.”

\footnote{602} The term \textit{saṃskṛta}, past participle of the root \textit{saṃskṛ}, could also simply mean “made,” and thus could be
used as synonymous with \textit{kalpita}. It could also mean “perfected” and “trained,” both of which are
appropriate in this case, since the \textit{saṃskṛta} guru is instructed and made perfect (\textit{siddha}) by another teacher,
instructed, and consecrated as gurus by another teacher. As he does for the akalpita guru, Abhinavagupta establishes a hierarchy also in the case of the kalpita guru. Even though, by definition, all kalpita gurus have relied on another teacher, some of them may have acquired a portion of knowledge through their own intuition. He defines such teachers as “created-cum-not created” kalpita-akalpita, a higher level guru than the purely kalpita guru.604

Such a one [who has no intuitive knowledge], having propitiated with devotion the teacher by whatever means, then knows the teachings of the scriptures from the guru through the procedures of initiation. And after obtaining consecration, he becomes a “created” (kalpita) [teacher]. Although being [“created”] he is able to [bring about] the cessation of the stream of all fetters. One who, connected with the due procedures [of initiation, etc.] (yathākramayogena),605 [nonetheless] attains spontaneous (ākasmikam) knowledge in some scriptural matters, is “created-cum-non created” (kalpītakalpīta).” The part of him which is “not created” (akalpita) is known as the most excellent, because excellence is determined by the degree of intensity of the portion of pure knowledge.

Abhinavagupta considers the portion of intuitive knowledge as higher than the portion of knowledge acquired from a guru.606 Thus, as in the case of the akalpita-kalpaka, within

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604 See TĀ IV 70cd-73ab, which Jayaratha also quotes in his commentary ad XIII.139, the stanza translated in the next footnote:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{yena kenāpy upāyena guruum ārādhya bhaktitaḥ} & \parallel 70 \parallel \\
\text{taddāksākramayogenaśāstrārtham vetty asau tataḥ} & \parallel \\
\text{abhīsekaṃ samāsādyā yo bhavet sa tu kalpitaḥ} & \parallel 71 \parallel \\
\text{sann āpy aśeṣapāśañgahavinivartanakovidāḥ} & \parallel \\
\text{yo yathākramayogena kasmimśic chāstravastumi} & \parallel 72 \parallel \\
\text{ākasmikam vrajed bodham kalpitākalpito hi saḥ} & \parallel \\
\text{tasya yo ‘kalpito bhāgah sa tu śreṣṭhatamah smṛtaḥ} & \parallel 73 \parallel \\
\text{utkaraśaḥ śuddhavidyāṃśatārtratamyakṛto yataḥ} & \parallel \\
\end{align*}
\]

605 Jayarata glosses yathākramayogena with yathāvastu (“as things are,” or “accurately,” “truly”) is not very convincing: it seems more likely that yathākramayogena should mean more or less the same thing as taddāksākramayogena above.

606 See TĀ XIII.139:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{anyataḥ śīksītānantajñāno ‘pi pratibhābalāt} & \parallel \\
\text{yad vetti tatra tatrāṣya śivatā fyāyasī ca sā} & \parallel 139 \parallel \\
\end{align*}
\]
the category of kalpita-akalpita too there are different levels of teachers, based on the amount of knowledge that has arisen in them spontaneously (Table 4.3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF GURU</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AKALPITA (not created) or SAMSIDDHA/ SĀMSIDDHIKA (spontaneously perfected) or PRATIBHA (intuitive)</td>
<td>Received Medium-Intense śaktipāta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does not require a guru for initiation, because intuitive knowledge arises spontaneously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. AKALPITA</td>
<td>Has a firm intuitive knowledge and does not need any external means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Highest level of Medium-Intense śakipāta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. AKALPITA-KALPKA</td>
<td>His intuitive knowledge wavers; needs external means/practices to make intuitive knowledge firm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium-to-lower level of Medium-Intense śakipāta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KALPITA (created) or SAMSKRITA (initiated)</td>
<td>Received Lower-Intense śakipāta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Requires a guru for initiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. KALPITA-AKALPITA</td>
<td>Requires guru for some knowledge, but has some knowledge that is intuitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher to medium level of Lower-Intense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. KALPITA</td>
<td>Receives all knowledge from another guru and from the scriptures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower level of Lower-Intense</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Establishing a hierarchy of gurus for Abhinavagupta is not just a theoretical exercise but also has practical implications for the gurus’ authority to perform their functions. In his view, for instance, if a guru who has been ritually initiated finds himself in the proximity of a spontaneously perfected guru, the first would lose his authority (adhikāra), that is,

“Even one in whom infinite knowledge has been learnt from someone else, has the state of Śiva with regard to whatever he knows through the power of intuition. And that [state of Śiva] is superior.”
his qualification to act in his role as a teacher.\footnote{TĀ IV.43cd-44ab.}
I will return to the subject in a later section devoted to Abhinavagupta’s view on the hierarchy among Śaiva gurus.

\subsection*{4.2.5 The Question of Qualification of the Non-Initiated Officiant}

Abhinavagupta held that one may attain liberation through direct intuition alone, without ritual initiation, and even become a guru without receiving the formal consecration by a teacher to qualify for such a role. This teaching places him in radical opposition to mainstream Śaivism, the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta school. That tradition considered as legitimately empowered ācāryas, or teachers, only those who had gone through the institutional initiation and consecration rituals performed by a qualified officiant, one who in turn was himself publicly recognized by having gone through the same procedure.

As Sanderson observes,

\[\ldots\text{ according to major Śaiva scriptures and the school of Saiddhāntika Śaiva exegesis that flourished in Kashmir in the tenth century alongside the traditions of the Svācchanda, Netra, the Trika, and the Krama there can be no valid Śaivism without ritual, since it was held that no person has the authority to adopt Śaiva observances and study the scriptures unless he has gone through that ceremony [i.e. initiation], and that no person may be a Guru of the system with the right and duty to initiate others, teach the scriptures, and consecrate images unless he has been first initiated and then ritually consecrated to that office by his predecessor. Moreover, the ritual of initiation was considered not merely an}\]

\footnote{sa eva survācārāyāṃ madhye mūkhyah prakṛtītah ī 43 ī
tatsaṃnīdānāṁ niṃyesu kalpītasya adhikāritā ī
“He [i.e. the akalpita or samsiddika guru] is known to be preeminent among all other teachers. In his presence, the other ‘made’ gurus (kalpita) do not have authority (adhikārā) [to perform the functions of their office, such as initiation].”
Abhinavagupta reiterates that the spontaneously perfected guru has authority (adhikāra) over other gurus ad TĀ IV.74cd-76ab, which I will quote later.}

\[\ldots\]
unavoidable rite of passage into the practice in the religion but also as essential to the attainment of the liberation that is the religion’s goal.608

I discussed in an earlier chapter how, according to Śaiva Siddhānta doctrine, initiation is a necessary means for liberation, since the impurity of the soul is conceived of as a material substance, removable only by ritual action. In Abhinavagupta’s view, on the contrary, correct knowledge by itself can be a direct means to liberation,609 while initiation, ascetic observances and yogic practices are mainly for those incapable of achieving liberation by knowledge alone.610

Abhinavagupta was well aware that the spontaneously accomplished guru, completely self-made, might have raised issues of authority in the Śaiva community. His dualist opponents, or indeed anyone within the Śaiva tradition, might have questioned the qualification of such a person to perform the functions of an officiant, owing to the lack

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608 Sanderson 2007b: 114.
609 See TĀ XV.9cd:

\[ \text{samayajñānasvabhāvā hi vidyā sāksād vimocikā ā v} \]

610 See TĀ XV.11ab:

\[ \text{tatrāśaktās tu ye teṣām dīkṣācaryāsāmādhyayah} \]

In direct polemic with the exponents of the Śaiva Siddhānta, Abhinavagupta quotes a source from their own tradition, the Mataṅga KP, I.2 (quoted again by Rāmakaṇṭha ad Vidyāpāda XXVI.63), which supports his doctrine of initiation as one of the means to liberation, and not the only and necessary one. See TĀ XV.8:

\[ \text{yeṣām adhyavasāyo ‘sti na vidyāṃ praty aśaktītāḥ l}
\text{sukhopāyam idāṃ teṣām vidhānam uditām guroḥ ā v} \]

“This [initiation] ritual by the guru is taught to be an easy means for those who, due to their incapability, lack determination towards knowledge.”

A statement such as this, however, represents an exception within the Śaiva Siddhānta literature, even in its early scriptural sources. In his own commentary on the Mataṅga, Rāmakaṇṭha, one of the foremost commentators on the dualist tradition, and a radical advocate for the indispensability of initiation, resorts to his exegetical skills to reverse the meaning of the stanza. With regard to this Godall (1998: 367, fn. 596) writes:

“Rāmakaṇṭha (Mataṅgavyrttiḥ ad vidyāpāda 26.63, p. 569) explains that what is actually meant is that for Śaivas, those who realize that knowledge alone cannot remove mala and thus bring about liberation, as thinkers of other persuasions who do not know of the physical obstruction that is mala maintain, the Lord has taught this easy means called dīkṣā: yeṣām mokṣahetutayā (em.; mokṣatuhetutayā Bhatt) jñānam prati buddhir eva nāsti, darśanāntarāparidṛṣṭa-
dravyātmanamalākhyabandhanīvṛttav uktanayena śāktvabhāvād iti yuktītāh teṣāṃ saivanām mokṣāya sukhopāyam etad dīkṣākhyāṃ sādhanam uditām iti vakṣyāmāḥ.”
of objective criteria, namely the institutionalized ritual procedures that would normally empower a guru to hold office. For this reason, he devotes a sizeable number of stanzas in the section on Intense śaktipāta to validating the authority of these gurus. The doctrine of grace in degrees, which reserves for such intuitive gurus the highest level of śaktipāta, provides a convenient way to legitimize them. Abhinavagupta states explicitly that these teachers are directly empowered by Śiva himself.\textsuperscript{611}

A [teacher] whose path is intuitive (prātibha) does not require the series of initiatory stages—being [first] a “pledge-holder” (samayin) etc.—nor the consecration, nor the initiatory lineage and so on, nor the vow of the vidyā mantras, because he is empowered by him, the first wise one, the great god [Śiva]. The rituals of qualification are [performed] for the sake of attaining empowerment by him. But he has that [empowerment] spontaneously.\textsuperscript{612}

As I mentioned earlier, the state of “pledge-holder” was the result of the preliminary initiation (samayadīkṣā), the basic rite of entrance into the esoteric Śaiva community that qualified one for scriptural study and required observance of post-initiatory rules (samaya). This rite was a necessary pre-requisite for the initiation leading to liberation (nīrvāṇadīkṣā), also referred to as “initiation of the sons” (putrakadīkṣā), because the ritual would bring a “pledge-holder” to the stage of “son.” In mainstream Śaivism, both these initiatory stages were necessary steps for anyone who wished to be consecrated as a teacher-officiant, an ācārya. Abhinavagupta’s statement that one could become a teacher

\textsuperscript{611} Tantrāloka XIII.140-141:

\begin{quote}
na cāṣya samayitvādikramo nāpy abhiṣecanam \\
na santānādi no vidyāvratam prātibhavartmanah \textsuperscript{140} \textsuperscript{114} \\
adīvīvan mahādevās tenaśu ʻdhiśūhito yataḥ \\
samskārāḥ tadadhiśṭhānasiddhayai tat tasya tu svataḥ \textsuperscript{141} \textsuperscript{114}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{612} The expression “initiatory lineages” refers to things such as initiatory names (such as names ending in “gupta”); the vow of the vidyā mantras (vidyāvrata) is the practice of mastering the vidyā mantras that one must undertake after having been initiated or consecrated.
bypassing all three of these successive rites of empowerment must have seemed radical, and likely raised some skepticism.

Some early scriptural sources of the non-dual tradition, however, do allow for both “self-performed” initiation and “self-performed” consecration.\(^{613}\) Abhinavagupta uses these texts—tantras and āgamas regarded by the tradition as revealed by Lord Śiva—to provide scriptural authority for his argument.\(^{614}\) He quotes, for instance, the Vājasanīyasamhīta, a lost Kaula text that describes a ceremony of consecration that occurs through a mental process alone, without the aid of external ingredients, such as

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\(^{613}\) I deliberately used the term “self-performed” instead of “spontaneous” because the initiation and consecration described here still require some practice, even though a mental one. One could perhaps also use the expression “self-caused.”

\(^{614}\) As Jayaratha notes in his introduction to TĀ XIII.143cd, Abhinavagupta provides scriptural evidence in response to a possible objection: “But what is the authority on this?” (nanu kim atra pramāṇam…). The Mālinīvijayottaratantra does state the possibility for rare persons to become liberated as a result of saktipāta, without the need to receive initiation from a teacher. According to the text, all the others, however, would still experience the Descent of Śiva’s Power as a longing to approach a guru and obtain ritual initiation. For the reader’s convenience I quote again the full passage of MVT I.42-45 (For the Sanskrit text, refer to fn. 554 in subsection 4.2.1 on Abhinavagupta’s interpretation of the Mālinī).

“Thus at some moment, as a result of his suitability [to receive this knowledge], this power of Śiva, which is tranquil/transcends activity and bestows the fruit of liberation, comes into contact with that soul. As a result of the connection with that [power of Śiva], some rare individuals then achieve liberation at that very moment. For another person the unity with ignorance ceases. He is one who is infused by the power of Rudra. Feeling the desire to go [to a true guru] under the influence of the will of Śiva, he is led to a true guru in order to accomplish bhakti and muktī. Having propitiated him, he receives the Śaiva initiation from him, when satisfied. And then he will attain Śivahood either immediately or at death after further experience.”

Even though Abhinavagupta claims this text as the basis of his exposition of the Trika in the Tantraloka, he does not quote the first part of this passage to provide scriptural evidence for the full qualification of the spontaneously accomplished guru. The most plausible reason for this is that, in interpreting this text as a source for the three degrees of Intense saktipāta, he claims that this passage is an exposition of Higher-Intense saktipāta (the strongest degree in his classification), which causes immediate death, and liberation thereafter. I explained earlier that the sāṃsiddhika guru, conversely, is a case of Medium-Intense saktipāta. Regardless of Abhinavagupta’s interpretation of the passage, it is remarkable that this particular text contains such an indisputable statement on the possibility of liberation without initiation. Although the Mālinī does not belong to the Śaiva Siddhānta canon, it does not unambiguously position itself as a non-dualist tantra: while enjoining a non-dualistic worship, it still posits Śiva and souls as ontologically separate entities (Sanderson 1992: 297-301.). Its syncretistic nature made it possible for this text to become authoritative among the officiants of the Kashmiri Śaiva Siddhānta (Sanderson 1990: 203).
water for sprinkling, and without the presence of an officiant: one can visualize a jar of nectar on his head and become consecrated by imagining that nectar flowing upon him.\textsuperscript{615}

An even stronger statement for his argument is made in the verses Abhinavagupta quotes from the *Parātrīśikā*, a Trika āgama on which he wrote a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item Tā XIII.143cd-144ab:
\item yato vājasantyākhyatuktaṃ siṃcet svayaṃ tanaṃ | 143 ll
\item ityādyupakramam yāvad ante tatpariniṣṭhitam |
\item abhiṣikto bhaved evaṃ na bāhya kalasāmbubhiḥ | 144 ll
\item “Since in the [work] called *Vājasanțyasamhita*—in the passage beginning with ‘he should sprinkle his body by himself’ up until ‘established in it [mind]’—it is said: ‘He becomes consecrated in this way, not by the waters of an external jar.’”
\item 143c. vājasanțya° ] em. Alexis Sanderson (personal communication, 10/18/2007); vājasaney° ed. KSTS
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}

Abhinavagupta quotes only the first and last lines of the passage. Jayaratha, quoted below, provides an extended version of the initial and concluding portions of the section Abhinavagupta is referring to:

\begin{itemize}
\item yad uktāṃ tattva—
\item vratādau ca japādau ca tayor ante tathaiva ca |
\item yāgam kṛtvāha vidhiyata vṛṣeṇa svam abhiṣecayet ll
\item yadi sampattyabhāvah syān manasaivaṃ prakalpayet |
\item yasmād idam jagat sarvaṃ manasy antah pratiṣṭhitam ll
\item ityādi
\item tataḥ pṛyāṣakalaśam kalākamalamandaṇītām |
\item dhyātvā śīrṣi tenaiva plāvitaṃ bhāvayat budhah ll
\item abhiṣikto bhaved evaṃ na bāhyakalasāmbubhiḥ |
\item ya evam abhiṣiktaḥ san so ‘dhiḥkārt javādike ll
\item ityāntam ll
\item “As it is said there [i.e. in the *Vājasanțyasamhita*] in the passage beginning with:
\item ‘Having performed the sacrifice in conformity to the prescribed rules, at the beginning of the vow and at the beginning of the recitation, and likewise in between these two, then he should sprinkle himself by himself. If the ritual ingredients are lacking, he should perform it in this way with the mind, since this whole world is established within the mind.’
\item and ending with:
\item ‘Therefore the wise one, having visualized on his head a jar of nectar adorned with the lotus which is the constituent part of consciousness, should be flooded by that [nectar]. He becomes consecrated in this way, not by the waters of an external vase. And he, being one consecrated in this way, is qualified for mantra recitation etc.’”
\end{itemize}

Abhinavagupta also mentions, without quoting, the *Brahmayāmala* (Hatley 2007: 211–12) and the *Sarvavīra* as two other tantras supporting his view of self-caused consecration.
commentary. This text unambiguously supports the viability of a purely gnostic means to liberation, without the need for ritual initiation.\footnote{616}

In this way one who truly has this knowledge has an undoubted liberation-bestowing initiation, free from oblations of sesame seeds and clarified butter. The special person who understands this truly, even though he has not seen the mandala [i.e. has not received initiation], always attains supernatural powers; he is perfected in yoga and he is [a true] initiate. Though not knowing the ritual procedure he becomes one who understands that procedure with respect to the sacrificial rites.

The sesame seeds and clarified butter allude to the haurtrī dikṣā, the initiation ritual performed through the fire ceremony (homa), whereby these ingredients are continuously offered to the fire as part of the process of purification of the karma of the initiand. Similarly, the mandala refers to the complex ritual diagram used in the initiation ceremony.

This passage also serves very well Abhinavagupta’s view regarding the full authority of the spontaneously perfected guru, because it extends his qualification beyond the domain of liberating knowledge. The references to “sacrificial rites”—understood here as desiderative rites (kāmya)\footnote{617}—as well as to supernatural powers (siddhis) and “yoga”\footnote{618} imply the authority of such a person in the desiderative domain of Śaiva

\footnote{616} TĀ XIII.151cd-153:

\vspace{5mm}

\begin{quote} evaṁ yo veda tattvena tasya nirvāṇagāminī || 151 ||

dikṣā bhavaty asandigdhā tilājaḥutivarjita l

adṛṣṭaṁandalo ’py evaṁ yaḥ kaścid vetti tattvataḥ || 152 ||

sa siddhiḥbhaṅgh bhaven nityan sa yogi sa ca dikṣitaḥ l

avidhiṣṇo vidhānajīṁ jāyate yajanam prati || 153 ||
\end{quote}

The first stanza is from Parārtṣikā 25. The text reads vetti instead of veda. The second stanza is from Parārtṣikā 18. The last half-stanza is from Parārtṣikā 20ab.

\footnote{617} See Jayaratha ad XIII.154: yajanam prati jayate: kāmyadiviṣayāyāṁ yajikriyāyāṁ kartā bhavet l

\footnote{618} The term yoga in this context refers to the visionary practices performed by enjoyment-seekers (sādhakas) to attain their goals. In this sense it is part of the “desiderative” domain of practice, rather than the one connected to the attainment of liberating knowledge. I will discuss in a later section Abhinavagupta’s view on the qualification of the gnostic guru (jñānīn) to serve the needs for sādhakas, and on this guru’s overall superiority over the yogin.
practice. Abhinavagupta uses these verses to argue that the self-accomplished guru is able to serve not only those who seek liberation but also those who seek results from desiderative rites. This idea clashed with the interests of the ācāryas, whose main function and source of income was to perform desiderative rites for their patrons, including kings. Abhinavagupta alludes in a passage to the arguments of these officiants: they maintained that intuitive (prātibha) gurus were only gnostics (jñānins) fit for the needs of a few personal disciples seeking liberation alone, but that they were not qualified to act as Tantric officiants and to perform desiderative rites. The author refers to them as “other authorities” and summarizes their argument in the following way:

619 TĀ XIII.147-148:

anye tv āhur akāmasya prātibho gurur tdrṣāh ||
sāmagṛjāyata kāmye tenāsmīn sāṃskṛto guruh || 147 ||
niyater mahimā naiva phale sādhya nivartate ||
abhiṣiktaś cṛṭravidyāvratas tena phalapradaḥ || 148 ||

620 Jayaratha glosses akāmasya with mumukṣoḥ, i.e., “for the one who desires liberation only (mumukṣu). Literally akāmasya means “for the one who does not engage in the performance of any desiderative ritual (kāmya) for himself or for the benefit of others.

621 Literally “the power of causal law definitely does not cease in the case of a benefit which is aimed at.”
arguments on the same principle maintained in the case of śrauta rituals—ceremonies performed according to the orthodox, brahmanical tradition. These rituals were considered successful only if all the rules were meticulously observed, such as the ingredients offered into the fire, the mantras repeated, and the qualifications of the priest.622

Few of the scriptural sources claimed by the non-dualist traditions, however, state unambiguously that one can attain liberation via intuitive knowledge alone, without first receiving initiation. One of the texts that Abhinava quotes extensively in support of his position, the Nandiśikhātantra,623 shows tension on the matter. The text is written in the traditional form of a dialogue between Śiva and the goddess Parvatī. In response to her inquiry on the means to attain liberation, Śiva replies:624

When one has intuitive knowledge, then he is liberated and he can liberate others.
He is a man for whom the bonds of samsāra625 have been eliminated by a supreme śaktipāta.

Parvatī is puzzled by this statement, which seems to imply that liberation can be attained by intuitive knowledge alone. No mention is made of initiation, whose function in the tradition is to release the soul from its bonds. In Śiva’s words this release from fetters is

622 I am grateful to Alexis Sanderson for clarifying these concepts to me.
623 This non-dualist tantra is now lost. Abhinavagupta’s quote, or more precisely paraphrase, of the text takes up thirty-one and a half stanzas (TĀ XIII.164cd-195). We know it is a paraphrase because Jayaratha quotes verbatim some of the same passages (for instance ad 166-167).
624 TĀ XIII. 166cd-167ab:
\[
yadā pratibhayā yuktaś tadb muktaś ca mocayet || 166 ||
\]
       parasaktinpātaṇa dhvastamāyāmalaḥ pumān ||
625 I understood māyā in this context in its wider meaning, as referring to the impure universe of tattvas from māyā downwards. The compound māyāmala, however, may also be taken in the technical sense (i.e. māyāyamala as one of the three bonds, in addition to āṇavamala and kārmamala).
instead the result of šaktipāta. Since the goddess previously learned from Śiva that the means for liberation is initiation, she presses Śiva for clarification:626

Surely, [you have already said] before that liberation is brought about by initiation. And how is it now from intuitive knowledge?

Śiva replies by explaining that both means are necessary:627

A creature is liberated by initiation and by intuitive [knowledge], O dear one. Initiation, which brings about the freedom from bonds for the bound person, depends on the guru. But one’s very nature is intuitive [knowledge], which bestows perfection, the state of becoming liberated.

Here the text takes the traditional stance that it is initiation by a teacher, and not šaktipāta, that severs the bonds of the soul. Intuitive knowledge, on the contrary, is an inherent property of the soul, and it is necessary for the final step towards liberating Śiva-awareness, which can arise only through insight.628 However, this awareness can only “shine forth” in a second stage, after the bonds that obscure it have been purified by initiation, followed by scriptural study and ascetic practices.629

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626 TĀ XIII. 167cd:

nanu prāgdṛksayā mokṣo ‘dhunā tu prātibhāḥ katham || 167 ll

627 TĀ XIII.168cd-169:

dṛksayā mucyate jantuḥ prātibhena tathā priye || 168 ll
gurvāyatā tu sā dṛksā badhyahandhanamoksane |
prātibho ‘syā svabhāvas tu kevaltbhāvasiddhidhūḥ || 169 ll

628 See the stanza of Nandiśikhā quoted ad TĀ XIII.181cd-182ab:
māḥatmyam etat suśroṇi prātibhasya vidhyate || 181 ll
svacchāyādarśavat paśyed bahir antargatam śivam |

“This indeed, O deity with fine hips, is taught to be the greatness of intuitive knowledge. One can see Śiva outside and inside, like one’s own image/reflection in the mirror.”

629 TĀ XIII.174cd-176:

dṛksāsicchinnapātasya bhāvanābhāvīsya hi || 174 ll
vikāsam tattvam āyāti prātibham tad udāḥram |
bhasmacchannāṅnivat sphautyaṃ prātibhe gauravāgamār || 175 ll
btiṃ kāloptasamsktam yathā vardheta tat tathā |
yogayāgajapair uktair gurunā prātibham sphuṭet || 176 ll

174c. “pāsasya ] em. Alexis Sanderson (personal communication, October 2007); paśavād ed. KSTS. (”pāsavād is the reading in Jayaratha’s quotate from the Nandiśikhā).
What is called intuitive knowledge is that reality which expands [i.e. becomes vividly apparent] for one whose bonds have been [first] severed by the sword of initiation, and who has [then] been purified by meditative realization (bhāvanā). [This] intuitive knowledge becomes intensified as a result of the oral teachings of the guru and the study of the scriptures, just like the [domestic] fire covered by ashes. As the seed planted at the right time and then tended with water will grow, in the same way intuitive knowledge becomes [more and more] vivid by the practices of meditation, worship and mantra recitation taught [to a person] by his teacher.

The rest of the Nandiśikhātantra section that Abhinavagupta quotes describes the state of a person in whom such discriminating insight has arisen,630 as well as the nature of mind (manas) and intellect (buddhi), and their relation with intuitive knowledge.631 The last two and a half stanzas of this long quotation, however, are the most ambiguous of the entire passage and could potentially be interpreted in favor of Abhinavagupta’s argument. The goddess suddenly asks:632

But if liberation can be achieved through intuitive knowledge, what is the use of initiation in the Śaiva system?

The question is somewhat puzzling: nowhere has the text quoted so far stated that intuitive knowledge alone is sufficient to attain liberation. Śiva’s reply is equally surprising:633

In initiation those who lack knowledge—children, imbeciles and women—are liberated through the severing of the bonds and they are awakened in the ritual of

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630 TĀ XIII.177-187ab.
631 TĀ XIII.187cd-193ab.
632 TĀ XIII.193cd:

\[ nanu prātibhato muktau dṛṣṭayā kim śivādhvare \| 193 \|

633 TĀ XIII.194-195:

\[ tace jānā hi dṛṣṭayām bālāvāśayōṣitaḥ \|
pāśacchedād vimucyante prabuddhyante śivādhvare \| 194 \|
tasmād dṛṣṭā bhavaty eṣu kāraṇatvena sundari \|
dṛṣṭayā pāśamokṣe tu śuddhabhāvād vivekajam \| 195 \|
Śiva. Therefore, O beautiful one, initiation for them is the cause [for liberation]. And when there is release from the fetters through the state of purity brought about by initiation, [this intuitive knowledge] born from discrimination [may arise].

It is not plausible that the text here intended that only “children, imbeciles and women” need initiation, while the rest do not. This would conflict not only with the previous lengthy exposition, but also with the doctrines of both dualist and non-dualist Śaiva traditions. Therefore, despite Abhinavagupta’s claim that the *Nandiśikhātana*tra also teaches a path based on intuitive knowledge alone, the tantra seems unclear on this issue. Its ambiguity and somewhat contradictory statements may indeed reflect the tension within the non-dualist tradition itself regarding the role of initiation. This ambiguity, however, is also what allows Abhinavagupta to read his own view into this text. In support of his position on the soteriological efficacy of a path of knowledge without ritual, he does not even hesitate to distort the meaning of a Saiddhāntika tantra such as the *Kīrana*, which explicitly declares initiation as an indispensable cause of liberation and a prerequisite for the post-initiatory practices.

634 First, across Śaiva traditions these are the categories of persons (in addition to sick persons and kings) deemed incompetent to perform religious practices, and who therefore receive a special type of initiation called *nirbījā*, “without seeds,” which provides them with the benefits of a liberating initiation without the duties of post-initiatory practice. The majority of practitioners, however, receive the *sabījā* type of initiation, “with seeds,” which obligates them to follow specific observances. Secondly, even in the non-dualist tradition, texts that allow for a gnostic path to liberation without initiation, including Abhinavagupta’s works, always treat this option as an exception reserved for the rare person. Thirdly, in the *Nandiśikhā* passage, when the goddess earlier asks whether liberation is attained through initiation or intuitive knowledge, Śiva does not give this reply (i.e., that liberation occurs through initiation for the few incompetent, and through intuition for everyone else). Professor Sanderson, with whom I discussed this passage, also thought it is quite unlikely that the text is advocating initiation only for these few people. He suggested rather that the *Nandiśikhā* here is making a rhetorical statement on the efficacy of initiation, which causes the arising of intuitive knowledge even in incompetent people. He pointed out to me that, in the Śaiva Saiddhāntika scriptures, the fact that initiation brings about liberation even for incompetent people is used to demonstrate the efficacy of initiation, but never to state that these are the only kind of people who need it.

635 See TĀ XV.18 (Abhinavagupta quotes again the first half-stanza ad TĀ XIII.163ab):

\[ jñānayogyās tathā kecic caryāyogyās tathāpāre \]
4.2.6 Lower-Intense Šaktipāta: The “Living Liberated” (jīvanmukta) and the Initiation Bestowing “Immediate Liberation” (sadyonirvāna)

“Feeling the desire to go [to a true guru] under the influence of the will of Śiva, he is led to a true guru in order to attain enjoyment and liberation. Having propitiated him, he receives the Śaiva initiation from him, when satisfied. And then he will attain Śivahood either immediately or at death after further experience.”

(Mālinīvijayottaratantra I.44bcd-45)

According to Abhinavagupta’s classification, everyone in the Lower-Intense (manda-tīvra) and all lower categories of śaktipāta requires instruction from a teacher in order to achieve liberation. He makes this explicit in the course of his discussion on the Mālinīvijayottaratantra:

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As Goodall (1998: 366, fn. 596) observes, Abhinavagupta here (ad TĀ XV.18) distorts the meaning in two ways: first he substitutes the word for “ritual” (kriyā) in the Kiraṇatantra with “initiation” (dīkṣā); second, he omits to quote the rest of the passage, where it becomes clear that these means are just post-initiatory practices, and initiation is the prerequisite for them. See Kiraṇa VI.8cd-9ab (trans. in Goodall 1996: 362-363):

evam yeśāṁ yatāḥ prokto mokṣas teneśayojanāt || 8 || jñānādṛtāṁ upāyānāṁ dīkṣā kāraṇaṁ iśyate || 218 ||

“Thus for each of these the Lord (tenā) has taught a [means of] liberation, [and they are to follow it] accordingly, after they have been joined [through initiation] to the Lord (iśayojanāt). Initiation is held to be a prerequisite for the [further] means [to liberation], which are knowledge [ritual, observances] and [yoga] (jñānādṛtāṁ).”

The sense of the whole passage is that, after initiation, different disciples use various means in accordance with their inclination. Rāmakaṇṭha “the ritualist,” however, distorts the meaning of these lines in the opposite way from Abhinavagupta. According to him, after initiation one must use all four post-initiatory means, not just one or more of them. See Goodall 1998: 366-369.

See TĀ XIII. 218-222ab:

mandattvrač chaktaḥ balā ṣivāśayopajāyaṁ ||
śivecchāvaśayogena sadguruṁ prati so ‘pi ca || 218 ||
Due to the force of the lower-intense šaktipāta, by Śiva’s will, for him arises the desire to go to a true guru. And this one [i.e. the guru], in turn, has been defined in this same scripture [i.e. the Mālinīvijayottaratantra]. As the Lord himself has said: “As for the guru who knows all the levels of reality (tattvas) correctly, he is said to be equal to me [i.e. Śiva], one who illuminates the power of the mantras. Those persons who are seen, addressed [with words], and touched by this [guru] when he is benevolent are freed from sins, even those committed in the [previous] seven births. As for those living beings who, impelled by Śiva, have been initiated by him, having achieved their reward as desired, they reach the state free from imperfection [i.e. they attain liberation].”

By using this description of the guru given in the Mālinīvijayottaratantra, Abhinavagupta points out that recipients of the Lower-Intense type of šaktipāta are drawn to the feet of a true guru, one who knows all the levels of reality (tattvas), who is equal to Lord Śiva, and who is thereby fit to grant a liberating kind of initiation. In Abhinavagupta’s theory, the degree of saktipāta also determines, to a certain extent, the kind of guru, among the

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atraiva lakṣitaḥ śāstre yad uktam parameṣṭhinā ||

yaḥ punah sarvatattvāni vetty etāni yathārthatah 219 ll

sa guruḥ matsamaḥ prokti mantravīryaprakāśakaḥ 1

dṛṣṭāḥ sambhāvītās tena sprīṭaḥ ca prītacetasaḥ 220 ll

narāḥ pāpāh pramucyante saptajananmaṇḍaḥ api 1

ye punar dṛṅkaśtaḥ tena prāṇinaḥ śivacoditaḥ 221 ll

tev yathāṣṭāḥ phalaṃ prāpya padaṃ gacchanty anāmayam 1

The passage is part of the section (TĀ XIII 212-222) where Abhinavagupta interprets MVT I.42-45 quoted verbatim in XIII.199cd-203.

637 MVT reads sambhāṣītās (addressed), and not sambhāvītās (thought of).

638 The quote is from MVT II.10-12.

639 If this level of šaktipāta does not cause directly the arising of intuitive knowledge of the nature of reality and of oneself, it provokes at least a feeling of dissatisfaction with one’s current understanding of it, and the need to find the answers in a guru. A certain level of intuition, on the other hand, is what might actually lead him to the right guru, or, in the absence of that, the help of a spiritual friend may serve the same purpose. See TĀ XIII.222cd-223ab:

kim tatvaṃ tattvavedeti ka ityāmarśanayogataḥ 222 ll

pratibhaṇṇāt suhṛtaṅgad gurau jīgamisur bhavet 1

“As a result of this reflection ‘What is ultimate reality? Who might know it?,’ by his own intuition or through his association with good friends he becomes desirous to go to a guru.”

I am interpreting this passage following a suggestion by Alexis Sanderson (personal communication), which departs from Jayaratha’s commentary. The Kashmiri commentator understands the expression “by his own intuition or through his association with good friends” as referring to the way the questions arise in the seeker. I understand it, instead, as referring to the way he approaches the right guru. The inquiry into the nature of reality, conversely, is a direct consequence of šaktipāta.
various Śaiva gurus, to whom one is drawn. This is because, as I show in the course of this chapter, different degrees of śaktipāta lead to distinct kinds of initiations, and only certain teachers are fit to grant certain types of initiation. Thus, only recipients of Lower-Intense śaktipāta are qualified to receive an initiation leading immediately to the state of liberation while still alive (jīvanmukta), and only these individuals would be drawn to a teacher capable of granting such an initiation, that is, the “spontaneously perfected” (sāṃsiddha or sāṃsiddhika) guru. However, not all recipients of Lower-Intense saktipāta approach a sāṃsiddha guru and become liberated immediately. Others receive initiation from the more ordinary Śaiva guru, who, in turn, has been first initiated and then consecrated into the office. Abhinavagupta explains this in the course of his exposition on Lower-Intense śaktipāta:

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640 See, for example, Jayaratha’s introduction ad TĀ XIII.342cd:

> śāstrastragate sattve ‘sattve cātra vibhedakam |
> śaktipātasya vaicitryam purastāt pravivincyate || 37 ||

“In this system, the variety [in the degrees] of śaktipāta is the differentiating criterion determining whether one goes to a guru and scriptures which are true or untrue. This [variety in degrees] will be discussed later [in chapter XIII].”

In this context “true” gurus and “true” paths should be understood as the Śaiva ones, and “untrue” gurus and paths are those from other traditions, such as the Vaiṣṇava one (see Jayaratha ad IV.36: śāstrāntare iti—arthad asatpathe vaisnāvādye, satpatham vaiṣṇaguruśāstralakṣaṇam).

641 In other words, if a disciple receives an initiation that bestows the state of jīvanmukta, we know for sure that he received a Lower-Intense degree of śaktipāta. We know this with certainty from the fact that the recipients of the form of śaktipāta immediately higher (Medium-Intense) do not need initiation from a guru; and those who receive the degree immediately lower (Higher-Moderate), or any of the degrees below that, can achieve liberation only at death, as I will show in the next section.

642 TĀ XIII.223cd-227ab:
And in this way, as a result of this desire to go to a teacher, he reaches him. And he [the teacher], in turn, will be “spontaneously perfected” (samsiddha) or “initiated” (samskṛta) [by another teacher], according to the degree of intensity [of the saktipāta he received] and so forth. The attainment of the guru which pertains to the former kind (i.e. samsiddha) has been taught here as being divided by such types, [depending on whether it has occurred] at once, gradually, entirely or in part. From him [i.e. the self-accomplished guru], he attains a gnostic (jñānarūpām) initiation, which bestows Śivahood immediately, in such a way that he knows everything correctly. He, having become Śiva (śivibhūta) at that very moment, is called “liberated while alive” (jīvanmukta). For even his manifest state of connection with the body serves to bring about his Śivahood.

Abhinavagupta’s exposition focuses predominantly on the first kind of disciple, the one who is led to the spontaneously perfected guru and receives a “gnostic” initiation, an

643 The expression tāratamāyādiyogena (ad 224a), which I translated as “according to the degree of intensity [of the saktipāta he received],” is slightly ambiguous, in that it could refer to the saktipāta received by the guru, or to the saktipāta received by the disciple. I am interpreting it as referring to the saktipāta received by the guru, following Jayaratha’s commentary (vol. VIII, 240ª). In favor of this interpretation is also the fact that the stanza immediately following (to be precise, two half-stanzas, 224cd-225ab), translated in the passage quoted, refers to the various ways the self-accomplished guru has attained his state (“at once, gradually, entirely or in part”). These variations also depend on saktipāta, as not only Jayaratha clarifies in his commentary (vol. VIII, 241ª), but also as Abhinavagupta himself explains in the course of his exposition on the intuitive or self-accomplished guru (see sub-sections 4.2.3–4.25). Gnoli (1999: 311) also follows this interpretation in his translation of the Tantrāloka. Takushima (1992: 71), however, interprets the expression as referring to the saktipāta received by the disciple. In a paragraph devoted to Medium-Intense saktipāta, referring to the quarter stanza in question (XIII.224a), he writes: “If the degree of saktipāta is high, the disciple will obtain an ‘akalpita’ teacher, if low, a teacher with ordinary dikṣā (samskṛta).” To his credit, I think his interpretation is still consistent with Abhinavagupta’s theory. It is in fact likely that those who approach a spontaneously perfected (sāmsiddhi) or “not created” (akalpita) guru, and who become immediately liberated through one of the gnostic kinds of initiations, have supposedly received a higher degree of saktipāta (within the Medium-Intense range) than those who approach a samskṛta guru and receive a ritual initiation. Various elements support this hypothesis. First, as I mentioned earlier, Abhinavagupta explicitly states that the kind of guru a disciple approaches depends on the degree of saktipāta (see TĀ IV.37, quoted in fn. 640), and he regards the sāmsiddhi guru as the highest of all teachers. Second, throughout his exposition, the author hints that, within each category of saktipāta, the timing for attaining results (whether liberation or worldly enjoyments) depends on the degree of intensity of saktipāta. It would therefore be consistent with Abhinavagupta’s logic that the disciple of the sāmsiddhi guru, who becomes liberated immediately, has received a higher level of Lower-Intense saktipāta than the disciple who approaches the samskṛta guru, who attains liberation later.
initiation not involving external ritual. In the stanzas immediately following this passage, Abhinavagupta lists various methods, mostly from the Kaula and Krama traditions, through which this non-ritual initiation may occur: by listening to the exposition of the scriptures from the guru, or through the power of mantras and hand gestures; or even without words, by merely coming in contact with the teacher (saṅgamana), or through his gaze (avālokana), or by silent, direct transmission (samkramana); or by means of oral teaching (kathana); or through antinomian Kaula practices, such as reflecting upon as well as performing non-dual observances (sāmyacaryā); or offering a mixture of impure substances (caru).

This type of gnostic dikṣā grants immediate liberation, which is the same as the state of identification with Śiva, while the disciple is still alive. This idea of the

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644 See TĀ 227cd-229ab.
645 Alexis Sanderson translates some of these terms in one of his essays (1995: 46), where he refers to this same passage of TĀ XIII. I am extremely grateful to Professor Sanderson for his further clarification of their meaning (personal communication, December 2007), which I attempt to offer here. These are technical terms from the Krama system, which teaches three levels of practice: saṃkramana, kathana and pūjana. Samkramana is direct transmission without thought, or vikalpa, and it takes place silently. Kathana, on the other hand, is not silent: a pithy oral instruction, which thus involves some vikalpa. The third is pūjana, which is not mentioned here, and refers to the Krama ritual worship performed after initiation (the term must not be confused pūja, which is the worship of the guru). This third level of practice is the one that involves the most vikalpa, although its ultimate purpose is to diminish the vikalpa, until avikalpa, or the absence of conceptual thought, predominates.

646 I am following Alexis Sanderson’s suggestion (personal communication, December 2007) to understand the compound sāmyacaryā as “that kind of practice (caryā) which involves equanimity (sāmya).” It is the same as advaitācāra, the non-dual Kaula observances, as Jayaratha suggests in his commentary by glossing the term as “the obliteration of such distinctions as caste etc.” For an exposition on the non-dual Kaula observances see Sanderson 1985: 200-205.

647 See TĀ 227cd-229ab:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{asyāṁ ṃhdho hi kathanāt saṅgamāḥ avalokanāḥ} & \parallel 227 \parallel \\
\text{sāstrāt saṃkramanāt sāmyacaryāsāṃdarsanāc caroh} & \parallel \\
\text{mantramudrādīnāhāmyāt sanastavyastubhēdātāḥ} & \parallel 228 \parallel \\
\text{kirṣayā vántarākārārāpaprānaprānaprāvesah} & \parallel 
\end{align*}
\]

The term caru here does not refer to the traditional offering made of boiled rice, but rather a mixture of impure substances such as mingled sexual fluids. Jayaratha glosses the term as “kundagolaka etc.,” a term he also uses in his commentary ad TĀ XXIX.14-15ab to refer to the sexual fluid produced from the “union with the śakti” offered in the Kaula ritual. See also Dupuche 2003: 192 and Brunner, Oberhammer and Padoux 2004: 109)
jīvanmukta constitutes an exception in the Śaiva tradition, both dualist and non-dualist: according to the dualist Śaiva Saiddhāntikas, liberation can occur only after death. Non-Saiddhāntika scriptures and exegetes, conversely, admitted the possibility of liberation in life, although they too did not regard it as the norm. In Abhinavagupta’s classification of the nine types of śaktipāta, only two, Higher-Intense and Lower-Intense, lead its recipient to such a state. The recipients of the other seven types of śaktipāta, who constitute the majority of practitioners, attain liberation only at death. In mainstream Śaivism, the understanding is that the fact of being in the body prevents a person from experiencing the state of identity with Śiva. For this reason, Abhinavagupta concludes the passage I quoted earlier by pointing out that for the jīvanmukta, being in his body is not an obstacle, but rather a cause for his Śivahood. This idea is congruent with the author’s non-dualistic world view, which conceives of external reality as an expansion of one’s own Self, or consciousness, as if reflected in a mirror. In support of this view that liberation can occur while a person is still in the body, Abhinavagupta quotes two scriptural sources, now lost, namely the Kularatnamālā and the Śrīgamaśāstra.

648 The MVT, the source Abhinavagupta claims to be his reference for his exposition of the Trika in the Tantrāloka, also allows for such a possibility (see MVT I.42-45).
649 TĀ XIII 227ab.
650 The position of the mainstream Śaiva, most likely a Śaiva Saiddhāntika, is represented by the hypothetical objector in Jayaratha’s introduction to the half-stanza (227ab) that concludes the passage just quoted. Jayaratha writes:

\[
\begin{align*}
nanu \textit{dehasaṁ} \textit{bandhe} & \textit{ṛpy asya katham eva} \textit{ṁrūpātvaṁ syāt—ity āśaṅkyāha—} \\
dehasaṁ \textit{bandhitāpy} \textit{asya śiva} & \textit{tāyai yataḥ spha}\textit{ṣa} \\
\end{align*}
\]

“But how could he have such a nature [i.e., having become Śiva, and therefore liberated] while there is still connection with this body [i.e., while the body is still in place]? He addresses this question in the following:

For even his manifest state of connection with the body serves to bring about his Śivahood. (227ab).”

I am grateful to Alexis Sanderson who pointed out to me the significance of this half-stanza in Abhinavagupta’s discussion on the jīvanmukta.
651 TĀ 230cd-231ab.
And then, even though he is still in the body, he is called liberated. And this has been said in the two scriptures called *Ratnamālā* and *Gamaśāstra*. “At the time in which the thoughtless state is revealed by the guru, at that very moment” it is taught, (*kila*), “he is liberated. Only the machine [i.e. body] remains.”

Once the individual soul has completely identified with Śiva, the body remains in place as a mere covering, made of gross elements, without any sense of agency or subjectivity attached to it, like a mere machine.

As for the second kind of disciple, who received Medium-Intense *śaktipāta*, but is ritually initiated by the *saṃskṛta* guru, he too eventually becomes *jīvanmukta*, attaining liberation while still alive. Although Abhinavagupta does not say this explicitly, as

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yasminkāle tu gurupā nirvikalpam prakāśitam || 230 ||
tadaiva kīla mukto 'sau yantram tiṣṭhati kevalam ||
```

This quote is also found in Kṣemarāja’s commentary, the *Vimarsīnt*, on the *Śivasūtra*, ad III:42, with slightly different wordings. Since Abhinavagupta tends to paraphrase his sources rather than citing them verbatim, the original Tantra (*Kularatnamālā*) was more likely as Kṣemarāja quotes it:

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yadā guruvarah samyak kathayet tan na saṃśayaḥ ||
muktas tenaiva kālēna yantraṁ tiṣṭhati kevalam ||
yantraṁ tiṣṭhati || em.; yantratiṣṭhati ed. KSTS.
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“When the best of guru tells this correctly, no doubt, he is liberated at that very time, [and] only the machine remains.”

Kṣemarāja quotes this stanza in his commentary on *Śivasūtra* III.42, a *sūtra* describing the body of the liberated person as a mere covering. The commentator introduces the *sūtra* with a question from a hypothetical objector whose line of thinking about the idea of someone who is liberated while still in the body is similar to the objector in Jayaratha’s introduction to TĀ XIII.227ab, quoted in the previous footnote. Kṣemarāja writes (trans. adapted from Singh 1979b: 222-223, with minor modifications in the language style):

“A doubt arises here. The ending of the state of the empirical individual connotes the dissolution of the body. But this dissolution of the body is not noticed immediately even in the case of the perfectly awakened (enlightened) yogī. Then how can he be said to be rooted in the awareness of the transcendental state? In order to remove this doubt, the next *sūtra* says:

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bhūtakaṇčukī tadāvimukto bhāyaḥ paitisamah parah || 42 ||
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Then [i.e on the ending of desire], he uses the body of gross elements as covering and being liberated is pre-eminently like Śiva, the perfect reality.

… Thus *bhūtakaṇčukī* means ‘one whose gross elements that go to the formation of the body are like kaṇčukas,’ like separate coverings, and do not even touch the state of ‘I.’ Such a person is liberated, an enjoyer of *Nirvāṇa*. Since he is preeminently (*bhāyaḥ*) like Śiva (*paitisamah*), possessed of the compact consciousness of the highest Lord, therefore he is perfect (*pūrṇah*). In accordance with the *sūtra* ‘Remaining in the body is all his observance of a pious act’ (*sārtravrtyttratam*, III.26), though he still exists in the body which is to him like a mere sheath, he is not touched even by a trace of the feeling of the body being the subject …”

It is at this point that Kṣemarāja introduces the quote from *Kularatnamalā Tantra*.
Takashima\textsuperscript{652} correctly observes we can infer that it is his view in two ways. First, attaining liberation at death is the main characteristic of the degree of śaktipāta immediately below (Higher-Moderate).\textsuperscript{653} Second, within the degree of Lower-Intense śaktipāta, Abhinavagupta explains that the person who attains liberation at death (dehapātāt), referred to in the Mālinī, is the recipient of a special “life-removing” initiation called sadyonirvāṇa.\textsuperscript{654}

This kind of initiation, as the name suggests, does grant immediate liberation (sadyonirvāṇadā), but—unlike the gnostic dīkṣā discussed above, whereby the initiand continues to live in this liberated awareness—it also instantly separates the person from his vital breath (sadyahprāṇavīyogikā), thus causing instant death.\textsuperscript{655} However, as Abhinavagupta explains, the teacher cannot perform this initiation unless he is sure that the moment of death is very close, because even a person who has been separated from his vital breath must experience his remaining ārabdhṛ karma—the kind of karma already

\textsuperscript{652} Takashima 1992: 72.
\textsuperscript{653} See my comments on TĀ XIII 240-241ab, at the beginning of subsection 4.3.1 on Moderate śaktipāta (Sanskrit text is fn. 670).
\textsuperscript{654} MVT I.45cd (tatkṣaṇāc copabhogādvā dehapāte śivāṁ vrajet) quoted ad TĀ XIII.203cd. At the beginning of chapter XIX, devoted to sadyonirvāṇadīkṣā, Abhinavagupta explains that this last half-stanza of the MVT passage, which in chapter XIII he connects with Medium-Intense śaktipāta, refers to sadyonirvāṇa dīkṣā:

\begin{verbatim}
atha sadyahsamuṭrāntipradā dīkṣā nirūpyate
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
tatkṣaṇāc copabhogādvā dehapāte śivāṁ vrajet
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
ityuktyā mālīntāstre sūcitāsau maheśānā || İ 1 ||
\end{verbatim}

“Now I [will] discuss the initiation that bestows immediate liberation. In the Mālinīvijayottaratantra, this [initiation] has been indicated/referred to by the great Lord with the words ‘he attains Śivahood at death, either in that moment [of death] or after further experience’.”

If we take Abhinavagupta’s words literally, he is saying that the whole half-stanza refers to sadyonirvāṇa dīkṣā, and not just the expression “at death” (dehapāte). If this is the case, since sadyonirvāṇa initiation inevitably causes the disciple to immediately leave the body, we must interpret the expression “after further experience” as referring to further experience occurring after death, that is, in another world or in another lifetime. Theoretically this is possible, and could refer to the case of a disciple whose ārabdhṛ-karma is not purified yet, and needs to be experienced (see fn. 656 below). According to Jayaratha, however, Abhinavagupta intends to refer to sadyonirvāṇa initiation only with the words “he attains Śivahood at death” (see Jayaratha’s introduction ad XIII.234cd: idānāṁ tu dehapātae chivāṁ vrajediti vivṛṇoti).

\textsuperscript{655} See TĀ XIII.234cd-235.
bearing fruits, responsible for things like one’s physical body, life span and caste. On the other hand, as Jayaratha explains, this initiation purifies the other kind of karma, called bhaviṣya, or “future,” which refers to the karma a person has already generated, but which is bound to bear fruit at a later time. In case of a mistake in judging the timing of death, the negative consequences would fall on the teacher, for supposedly “transgressing the command of the supreme Lord” (paramesājñālaṅganāt). As for the disciple, he would have to experience his remaining ārabdhṛ karman, and then he would be liberated.⁶⁵⁶

The recipient of sadyonirvāṇa initiation seems to be the exception within the category of Lower-Intense śaktipāta, in that he is the only one who does not attain liberation while still alive. We might wonder why Abhinavagupta would choose to classify this type of initiation under Lower-Intense and not, for instance, under the degree

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⁶⁵⁶ See TĀ XIII 236-239:

tatra tv eṣo ‘sti niyama āsanne maraṇaṅkaṣane ||
tāṁ kuryāṁ nānyathārabdhṛ karma yasmān na śuddhyati || 236 ||
uktaṁ ca pūrvam evaitān mantrasāmarthyaśayogataḥ ||
prāṇair viyojito ‘py esa bhūnte śesaphalam yataḥ || 237 ||
tajjanmaśeṣam vividham atīvāhyā tataḥ sruṣṭam ||
karmaṁtaranirvṛddhena śṛgṛham evāpavrjyate || 238 ||
tasmāt prānahartīm dīksāṁ nājñātvā maraṇaṅkaṣanam ||
vidaḍhyāt paramesājñālaṅghanaikaphalāḥ hi sā || 239 ||

“With regard to this [initiation] there is the following restriction: [the teacher] can perform it [only] when the moment of death is near, not otherwise, since the karma already bearing fruits (ārabdhṛ karma) cannot be cleansed. This has been explained before [in TĀ IX.131]. The reason for this is that even the person who has been separated from his vital breaths through the power of mantras experiences the remaining fruit [of his karma]. Having gone through [i.e. hence completed] the various remaining [karma] of this [present] birth, then, clearly, through the cessation of the remaining karma, he is quickly liberated. Therefore the teacher should not perform the life-removing initiation without knowing [the disciple’s] moment of death, for this [initiation], [for the teacher,] has as its only fruit the transgression of the command of the supreme Lord.”

The stanza from the Tantrāloka (IX.131) Abhinavagupta refers to in the passage reads “As for that karma that has already produced its effects in this body, how can that be cut off? For, when it is in its final stage it cannot be removed.” Although Abhinavagupta does not state it explicitly, since sadyonirvāṇa initiation causes immediate death, the disciple would supposedly experience the rest of his ārabdhṛ-karman in another lifetime. Jayaratha seems to allude to this when he refers to this karma as the one “remaining from that former birth” (tasmāt prāktanāj janmaṅgaḥ śeṣam), that is, the lifetime in which the person received the sadyonirvāṇa initiation (see Jayaratha ad XIII.237-238, Vol. VIII, p. 148).
immediately below, Higher-Moderate, whereby the disciple, who receives ordinary nirvāṇa initiation (i.e. “liberating,” but not “immediately liberating”), also attains liberation at death.⁶⁵⁷ One reason might be historical: the early sources of the Śaiva Siddhānta regarded sadyonirvāṇa as a very high form of dīkṣā. They did not, however, teach it as an initiation reserved for a dying person. The Kiraṇatantra, for example, refers to it as an exception to the general rule that liberation can be attained only at death: it is a special kind of initiation that bestows liberation immediately, and which is given not by a human guru, but by perfected mantra-souls.⁶⁵⁸ According to the Mṛgendratantra, on the other hand, this high-level initiation is granted by a teacher to those whose innate impurity is ripe, and it is the teacher’s responsibility to evaluate the suitability of a disciple.⁶⁵⁹ Commenting on this tantra, Nārāyaṇakaṭha interprets this required

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⁶⁵⁷ Takashima (1992: 72) suggests that perhaps Abhinavagupta classifies nirvāṇadīkṣā in Lower-Intense (manda-tīva) śaktipāta because the span of time between this initiation and liberation is very brief.

⁶⁵⁸ See Kiraṇatantra VI. 21 (trans. Goodall 1998):

  dehapāte vimokṣaḥ syāt sadyonirvāṇadāpi vā ।
  kāryānubhīḥ sadā siddhais tena te śivayojakāḥ ॥ 21॥

  “[Only] when the body collapses, [does the soul attain] liberation. Otherwise [initiation] which gives immediate liberation (sadyonirvāṇadā) may also be effected by mantra-souls that are eternally established, and therefore they link [souls] to Śiva.”

⁶⁵⁹ See Mṛgendratantra, KP VIII.5 and VIII.144cd-145ab:

  sāsyāḥ paratamā sado yā vidhatte nirāmayaṃ ।
  nāmnā nairvāṇikī pāke tamaso yāpyate pare ॥ 5 ॥

  “Of this [category of initiations without post-initiatory requirements (nirapekṣā dīkṣā)] the highest is the one that grants emancipation immediately, called “[immediately] liberating,” which is obtained when the ripening (pāka) of impurity (tamas) has reached its culmination (pare).”

  ... sado nirvāṇadā tu yā ॥ 144 ॥
  tāṃ kuryād desīkahād śiddhaś cetasa viśya yogyatām ।

  “As for the initiation which bestows immediate liberation, the perfected teacher should give it after having examined mentally the suitability [of the disciple]”

Nārāyaṇakaṭha glosses MṬ KP VIII.5d, “pāke tamaso ... pare,” with “prakṛṣṭe malapariṃpāke.” See fn. 661 below.
qualification as being determined by Intense saktipāta. Unlike Abhinavagupta, however, he does not make any reference to sadyonirvānadikṣā as being for the dying person. Instead, the Saiddhāntika exegete explains that this superior form of initiation also burns the karma that has already started to bear fruits in terms of this body and life span, the ārabhrdr-karman.

This represents an absolute exception in Śaiva doctrine, according to which the initiation ritual removes the soul’s innate impurity as well as a portion of karman; it cannot, however destroy the karman that sustains the body, which would otherwise result

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660 See Nārayaṇaṇakaṇṭha ad Mṛgendra VIII.144cd-145ab Wallis also notes this passage in his essay on Tantrasāra XI (2008: 284).

661 Nārayaṇaṇakaṇṭha ad Mṛgendra VIII.5:

nirapekṣā tāvad dīkṣā paratvena shtiī | anyāsām sāpekaṇṭaśeṣa aparatvāh tat tato 'pi paratarā nirvāṇadikṣā | asyā api sakāśāt sā prakṛṣṭataṁ jīve yā sarvātmañcāt karmañcāt sadya eva saṃsāra-vyathāmaṭyā naraṁ karoti | sā hi sadyonirvāṇaśeṣa yā prakṛṣṭe malaparipāke sati prāpyate ||

“‘To begin with, the initiation ‘without requirement’ (nirapekṣā) is higher [than initiations ‘with requirement’ (sāpekaṇṭā), because these, due to the fact that they depend on something, are inferior. The liberation-bestowing (nirvāṇa-ḍā) initiation is even higher than the [one without requirements]. Beyond [even that one], the very highest should be understood to be that which instantaneously liberates a man from the torments of endless rebirth by burning the karma which produces the body. This [initiation], called ‘immediately liberating’ (sadyonirvāṇa), is attained [by a disciple] when the ripening of his impurity has reached its culmination (prakṛṣṭe malaparipāke)”

I am extremely grateful to Dominic Goodall for his corrections to my translation of this passage, as well as for the emendation he has proposed to the Sanskrit text (see fn. 330). I quoted and discussed this passage also in chapter 3, subsection 3.2.3 (“From Scriptures to Exegesis: A Shift in Doctrine or Coexisting Views?”).
This karma can be eliminated only through experience. As I mentioned earlier, this is why Abhinavagupta and Jayaratha stress that *sadyonirvāṇa* initiation cannot be bestowed on anyone who is not about to die. Nārāyanakaṇṭha neither posits such a restriction nor offers any explanation as to how these rare individuals who receive *sadyonirvāṇa* initiation could continue to live in their bodies without any remaining ārabhṛ-dharma. Nor does he hint at imminent death as a consequence of this initiation. It is only his son Rāmakaṇṭha—who became the most prominent Saiddhāntika exegete of his time, and whose doctrinal views often clash with those of Abhinavagupta—who clarifies the issue: like his father, and in contrast with the author of the *Tantrāloka*, he maintains that *sadyonirvāṇa* initiation destroys all karmas, including the one by which the body is sustained. However, the body remains in place, like a potter’s wheel that continues to spin even after the completion of the pot. Thus—Rāmakaṇṭha concludes—“the fault that the body should die absolutely immediately after initiation does not apply.”

Another reason Abhinavagupta classifies *sadyonirvāṇa* initiation as a case of Lower-Intense śaktipāta could be that his view here—*sadyonirvāṇa* can be granted only to those close to dying, and provokes immediate death—departs from mainstream Śaivism, as I just showed. The expression “he attains liberation at death (*dehapāte*)” in

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662 See Brunner 1977: 192, fn. 68.
663 See TĀ XIII.236-239 and my note on Jayaratha’s commentary *ad loc*, in fn. 656 above.
665 It is worth noticing that Abhinavagupta changes the reading in the *Mālinī* from *dehapāte* (locative case, meaning “at death) to *dehapatāti* (ablative case, literally meaning “through death”). Even though Abhinavagupta often changes the wording of the texts he quotes, in this case he quotes the four stanzas of the *Mālinī* verbatim, with the only exception of *dehapāte*. This may be due to the fact that the ablative *dehapatāti* better fits the case of *sadyonirvāṇa* initiation. This may be because the ablative *dehapatāti* better fits the case of *sadyonirvāṇa* initiation. This case, whereby it is initiation itself that causes death by taking
Mālinīvijayottaratraṇa I.45cd—a convenient quote to provide as evidence that this tantra teaches “immediately liberating” initiation in the way he conceives it—occurs in the passage of the text that he associates with the Lower-Intense degree. However, the claim that the Mālinī teaches *sadyonirvāṇa* in that passage is not convincing; it is the product of Abhinava’s exegetical leap. The tantra is referring in a straightforward manner to the two possibilities for disciples initiated by a guru: attaining liberation at the moment of initiation (*tatkṣanāt*), or attaining liberation at death (*dehapāte*). The Mālinī does not mention *sadyonirvāṇa* initiation anywhere. When Abhinavagupta wants to provide further scriptural authority for the practice of initiating a person who is about to die, he quotes the Gahvaratantra, a text that has not survived:

> When [the teacher] sees the student seized by old age and beset by sicknesses causing him to leave the body he should link him to the supreme level of reality (*tattva*). away one’s vital force, and through this death (*dehapāte*) liberation, is in some way analogous to the case of the recipient of Higher-Intense *saktipāta*, whereby it is the *saktipāta* itself causing death, and through this death (*dehapātavaśāt* ad XIII.130cd) liberation. It is also true, however, that in the *Tantrasāra* Abhinavagupta uses the expression *dehapāte* for Higher-Intense *saktipāta*. I suspect, however, that in that case he does so in order to gloss the expression *tadaiva*, “at that very moment” which is originally in Mālinī I.42, and which he uses in the *Tantrasāra*, in the only sentence he devotes there to the Higher-Intense degree: *tatra utkṛṣṭatvṛt tadaiva dehapāte paramesatā* “among these [nine degrees of *saktipāta*], with the Higher-Intense [one attains] the state of Śiva”. In the TS Abhinavagupta does not describe the further variations within Higher-Intense *saktipāta*, whereby death may occur at a later time, as he does in the corresponding sentence ad TĀ XIII.130cd-131ab, which I quoted earlier (p. 208, and fn. 564): *ītvṛttvrah saktipāto dehapātavaśāt svayam ī mokṣapradas tadaivānukāle vā tāratamyaḥ “The Higher-Intense Descent of Power bestows liberation automatically (svayam) through death, at that same moment [in which *saktipāta* occurs] or at another time, depending on its degree of intensity.”*

See TĀ XIX.8, in the course of Abhinavagupta’s discussion on the appropriate moment for *sadyonirvāṇa*:

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dṛṣṭvā śiśyaṃ jāraṅgrasmā vyādhibhiḥ pariṣṭhitam śvapāt
uktāṃśyāya tatas tv evaṃ paratattve niṇyojayet
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He provides the same quote also ad TĀ XVI.182, while expounding the different types of initiation. Jayaratha also quotes this same stanza in his commentary ad XIII.237-238.
Just as Abhinavagupta does in the case of the initiation of someone who is already dead, he argues here too that when relatives and friends request initiation on behalf of a sick person, that in itself is a sufficient sign of śaktipāṭa. In other words, the Descent of Power in a person can be inferred by the devotion of the petitioners close to him. I explained in an earlier chapter how Rāmakaṇṭha strongly opposes this view, based on the argument that a cause (devotion) and an effect (śaktipāṭa) cannot be related if their locations are different (vyadhikaraṇa). This might explain why Rāmakaṇṭha makes no reference to initiating someone on his death bed. On the contrary, he follows the tradition of allowing sick persons who are able to request initiation for themselves to obtain the so-called initiation “without seeds” (nirbījā), which guarantees liberation at death without the requirement of post-initiatory observances.

4.3 Moderate and Mild Śaktipāṭa: Classes of Initiated Disciples

4.3.1 Moderate Śaktipāṭa: Liberation-Seekers (putrakas) and Enjoyment-Seekers (sādhakas)

After concluding his lengthy exposition of the three degrees of Intense śaktipāṭa, Abhinavagupta introduces Moderate śaktipāṭa, in its threefold subdivision:

This first set of three [Intense] śaktipāṭa has been explained. Now [we will examine] another [set of three] [i.e. the three degrees of Moderate śaktipāṭa]. But in the case of Higher-Moderate [śaktipāṭa], [the disciple] even though initiation

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667 See TĀ XXI.6-11ab.
668 See TĀ XIX.4-6.
669 See chapter 1, subsection 1.3.1, “The ‘Locus’ (adhikaraṇa) of Devotion as a Prerequisite of Initiation.”
670 See TĀ XIII.240-241ab:

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ekas triko 'yaṁ nirnāṭaḥ śaktipāṭe 'py athāparaḥ l
tīrṇamadhye tu dīkṣāyām kṛtayām na rathā dṛḍhām || 240 ||
svātmano vetti śivalaṁ dehānte tu śīvo bhavet l
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has been granted [to him], does not know so firmly\textsuperscript{671} his own identity with Śiva.
At death, however, he becomes Śiva.

In this category, Abhinavagupta includes various levels of ordinary Śaiva practitioners, that is, disciples who will not become gurus and who will achieve liberation only after death. This characteristic is indeed what sets them apart from the recipients of Intense śaktipāta,\textsuperscript{672} who become jīvanmuktas, unless they fall into the two exceptions of those who die shortly after and as a consequence of either śaktipāta or initiation.\textsuperscript{673}

Relying on the support of earlier scriptural sources, such as the Niśisamcāra tantra, the author explains that conceptual thinking, or vikalpa, is what prevents individuals who have been initiated from being liberated while alive.\textsuperscript{674} Even after

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\textsuperscript{671} Technically \textit{dṛdhām} is not an adverb, since it is feminine, in agreement with \textit{śivatām}, literally “he does not know his identity with Śiva as firm.”

\textsuperscript{672} The use of the adversative particle “but” (\textit{tu}) in this stanza introducing Higher-Moderate śaktipāta strongly suggests that the fact of achieving liberation at death, and not earlier, is what distinguishes the Higher-Moderate degree from the two levels above it (Medium-Intense and Lower-Intense). In addition to this philological clue, from a more theoretical perspective it is unclear what criterion would otherwise differentiate between recipients of Lower-Intense śaktipāta who approached a \textit{samskṛta} guru, and recipients of Higher-Moderate śaktipāta. They would both aim at liberation without any desire of worldly enjoyments along the way (the type of disciple defined as \textit{putraka}, or “Son”); they would both approach a \textit{samskṛta} guru and receive a ritual type of liberating initiation from him (\textit{nirvāṇadīkṣā}); and they would both attain liberation only at death. Abhinavagupta, conversely, is very particular in assigning specific characteristics to recipients of each type of śaktipāta: in other words, the socio-spiritual identity within the community of Śaiva practitioners is a function of the degree of grace Śiva has supposedly bestowed on the individual.

\textsuperscript{673} The two exceptions to this general rule are the recipients of Higher-Intense śaktipāta, who die, and attain liberation, shortly after receiving it; and the particular case within the Lower-Intense degree who receives \textit{sadyonyonivāna} initiation and also dies shortly after and attains liberation immediately. What for Abhinavagupta ultimately distinguishes higher forms of śaktipāta from lower forms is their ability to bestow liberating knowledge immediately, whether a person continues to live or dies right away as a consequence of śaktipāta. See my discussion in section 4.1 (p. 203), regarding Abhinavagupta’s division of śaktipāta into two essential categories, a “superior” śaktipāta and an “inferior” śaktipāta (TĀ XIII.254-256ab, text in fn. 550).

\textsuperscript{674} See TĀ XIII.241cd-242ab:

\begin{quote}
\textit{uktam ca niśisāñcārayogasañcāraśastraśayoh} \text{ll} 241 \text{ll} \\
\textit{vikalpāt tu tanau sthivā dehānte śivatām vrajat} \text{ll}
\end{quote}

“And in the Niśisamcāratantra and in the Yogasañcāratantra it is said: ‘Remaining in the body on account of differentiated thought (vikalpa), at death he becomes Śiva.’”
initiation, they do not have a firm conviction about their identity with Śiva.\textsuperscript{675} Since these practitioners do not attain liberation while living, they cannot become liberation-bestowing gurus.\textsuperscript{676} The highest types among these initiates are the recipients of Higher-Moderate śaktipāta, whose goal is liberation alone, which they attain at death.\textsuperscript{677} This category of initiates, as Jayaratha points out, correspond to the putrakas, or “sons,” those who have received nirvāṇadikśā, “liberation-bestowing initiation.”\textsuperscript{678}

Jayaratha provides us with the literal quote from the Niśisāncāratantra: “One whose mind is joined to differentiated thought attain Śiva at death” (vikalpayuktacittas tu pīṇḍapātāc chivam vrajet). Abhinavagupta also quotes the extended passage ad TĀ XIV.43cd-45:

\textit{uktam śrīnīscāre ca bhairavīyena tejasā || 43 ||
vyāptam viśvaṃ prapasyanti vikalpojjhitacetasah ||
vikalpayuktacittas tu pīṇḍapātāc chivam vrajet || 44 ||
bāhyadikśādiyogena caryāsamayakalpanaḥ ||
avikalpa tathādyāiva ṣivamukto na saṃśayāḥ || 45 ||}

“In the revered Niśisāncāra is said that those whose mind is free from conceptual thought see the universe pervaded by Bhairava’s splendor. One whose mind is joined to differentiated thought attains Śiva at death, due to such [means] as external initiation [and] the practice of post-initiatory observances. Thus, the one free from conceptual thought becomes liberated while living at this very moment, without doubt.”

Even the above, longer quote by Abhinavagupta is a paraphrase of this tantra, which is quoted by Jayaratha ad loc:

\textit{tejasāya śivasyaiwa vyāptam sarvaṃ carācaram ||
pasyanti munayāḥ siddhāḥ vrasamūḫīṃ devatāḥ ||
vikalpojjhitacittas tu pasyanti bhuvī māṇavāḥ ||
vikalpayuktacittas tu pīṇḍapātāc chivam vrajet ||
vikalpakṣṇacittas tu atmānāṃ śivam avyayam ||
pasyate bhāvasuddhiyā yo jīvanmukto na saṃśayāḥ ||}

By comparing the quotes, we can see that the reference to the external initiation ritual (bāhyadikśā) and post-initiatory observances (caryāsamaya) is added by Abhinavagupta, perhaps in order to allude to the fact that the jīvanmukta is often the result of a gnostic kind of initiation, or of spontaneous initiation (“initiation by the goddesses”).

\textsuperscript{675} See TĀ XIII.240cd-242ab.

\textsuperscript{676} I am inclined to think, however, that they can still become bhūkti-bestowing gurus (i.e. yogins) because such gurus do not necessarily need to be liberated (in which case they would be jñānins). Later in chapter XIII, Abhinavagupta declares the superiority of jñānins over yogins (XIII.327-341). In any case, he is not very interested in this lower category of teachers, who can only grant worldly enjoyments. I discussed earlier (pp. 228-29) how Abhinavagupta argues, against his opponents, that the intuitive guru, who is not even ritually initiated, can bestow enjoyments in addition to liberation (see also TĀ 151cd-153 in fn. 616 and TĀ XIII.147-148 in fn. 619)

\textsuperscript{677} XIII.240cd-241ab quoted at the beginning of this section. I specified “alone” here, because they do not desire worldly enjoyments, like those who receive Medium-Moderate saktipāta.

\textsuperscript{678} See Jayaratha ad 245ab.
Those who receive Medium-Moderate śaktipāta, while aiming at liberation as their final goal, are also interested in otherworldly pleasures and supernatural powers (bhoga). While still in the body, they will first experience these pleasures at the reality-level (tattva) of their choice, to which the guru has supposedly linked them at the time of their initiation. At death then, they too attain Śivahood. The recipient of Lower-Moderate śaktipāta is also an enjoyment-seeker (bubhuṣuḥ), whom the guru links during initiation to the level of reality or supernatural world the initiate desires to reach. However, unlike the former (Medium-Moderate), the Lower-Moderate śaktipāta recipient experiences these pleasures only after death, attaining the desired level or paradisiacal world (bhuvana) in a different body. Afterwards, he also attains Śivahood.\(^{679}\)

Like Intense śaktipāta, these three degrees of Moderate śaktipāta too have further gradations. Here, however, the criterion for the further subdivision is not the respective proportions of intuitive and acquired knowledge, because all practitioners in these lower categories receive their knowledge from a human guru. Rather, in this case

\(^{679}\) XIII.242cd-244ab and Jayaratha ad loc:

\[\begin{align*}
  & \text{madhyamadhye śaktipāte śivalabhotsko } \text{‘pi } san \| 242 \| \\
  & \text{bubhuṣur yatra yuktas tad bhuktvā dehaśaye śivaḥ } \\
  & \text{mandamadhye tu tatraiva tattve kvāpi nyojitaḥ } \| 243 \| \\
  & \text{dehānte tattvagāṃ bhogāṃ bhuktvā paścac chivam vrajet } \\
\end{align*}\]

“\[\text{In the case of Medium-Moderate śaktipāta, even though he desires to attain Śiva, since he [also] desires enjoyment, he first experiences this at whatever [level] he has been united [by the guru] and becomes Śiva at death. In the case of Lower-Moderate [śaktipāta], however, he enjoys the experience (bhoga) of the same reality-level (tattva), to which he was linked [by the guru] [only] at death [i.e. not while in the body, as in the previous case], and he goes to Śiva afterwards.}”

The syntax of 243cd-244a is not smooth; it translates literally as “having experienced, after death, the enjoyment of that reality-level in the same reality-level to whichever one he was linked.” Jayaratha has tried to interpret it, but does not have a satisfactory solution: he glosses tatraiva as “in the [degree of] śaktipāta under discussion” (prakṛnte śaktipāte), which does not make a lot of sense. The language of the Tantrāloka in the case of these two lower forms of Moderate śaktipāta is more elliptical than the corresponding passage in the Tantrasāra, which, for example, says explicitly that the recipient of Medium-Moderate śaktipāta enjoys pleasures in his current body, while the recipient of Lower-Moderate śaktipāta needs to die first and take another body (more likely in a paradisiacal world, rather than on earth). Jayaratha also provides these additional details based on the Tantrasāra passage, which he quotes in the commentary.
Abhinavagupta correlates the degree of intensity of grace with how quickly one attains Śiva, which is inversely proportional to the amount of worldly enjoyment the disciple desires to experience before liberation, and, in the case of Lower-Moderate šaktipāta, to the number of bodies he takes for that purpose. Although from the point of view of a

Following the grammatical structure in the Sanskrit text, I took the expression “taking many or few bodies” (dehabhāmālaṁpataḥkramaḥ) as a bahuvrhiḥ compound referring to the previous expression, “experiencing many or few enjoyments.” An alternative interpretation of this stanza could result by understanding its expression “taking many or few bodies” as if there were an implicit, connective particle “end” (ca), before the third element, producing a translation like this:

“Since there is a [further] gradation of intensity also with regard to these [respective levels of Medium šaktipāta], [one can attain Śiva] slowly or quickly, and may experience many or few enjoyments, taking many or few bodies.”

This would suggest three different scenarios, possibly corresponding to the three levels of Medium šaktipāta. The disciple who receives the Higher-Middle degree and desires liberation alone, without enjoyments, can attain Śiva slowly or quickly. The one who receives Medium-Middle and experiences enjoyments with this body can experience few or many of them. Finally, the disciple who obtains the Lower-Medium level and experiences enjoyments after death, in other bodies, may take few or many of these bodies. Aside from being more faithful to the text, however, I think the first interpretation also makes perfect sense. There need not be a one-to-one correspondence between the three scenarios and the three degrees of Middle šaktipāta. The expression “experiencing many or few enjoyments” can apply both to the recipient of Medium-Intense šaktipāta, who will experience these enjoyments in this body, and to the recipient of Lower-Intense, who will experience them in other bodies after death. In this case, it also makes sense that the compounded expression “taking many or few bodies” qualifies the previous compound “experiencing many or few enjoyments”: the more enjoyments the recipient of Lower-Medium šaktipāta desires, the more bodies he is likely to take, and the later he will attain Śiva. For this reason, I also think that the idea of attaining Śiva “slowly or quickly” is even more appropriate for the śādhakas (Medium-Middle and Lower-Middle) than for the putraka (Higher-Middle). The latter, not desiring any enjoyments, typically attains Śiva right after death (“quickly”). This provides an additional reason to dismiss the other interpretation of a one-to-one correspondence, where the expression “attains Śiva slowly or quickly” would apply to the putraka only. My preferred interpretation is also supported by a parallel passage (TĀ XIII.297cd–298ab) later in this chapter, where Abhinavagupta does not include the possibility of attaining Śiva “slowly” for putrakas. The only two alternatives are “quickly” and “instantly.” See TĀ XIII.297cd–298ab and Jayaratha’s commentary ad loc:

\[
\text{kaścic chuddhādhvābandhāḥ san putrakaḥ śṛghram akramār} \parallel 297 \parallel \\
\text{bhogavyadhinā ko ’pi sādhakaś ciraśṛghrātaḥ} \parallel
\]
\[
\ldots śṛghram iti dehapātasamantantarayaṇaḥ akramād iti saty api dehe—ityarthāḥ \parallel \text{bhogavyadhīś ca ciraṃ śṛghram vā bhaved ityuktam—ciraśṛghrāta} \parallel
\]
\[
\text{iti} \parallel
\]
sādhaka who wants to maximize his experience of pleasures, it would seem logical that higher degrees of śaktipāta would generate more enjoyments in this or other worlds, Abhinavagupta’s overall classification shows that the case is the opposite: the more intense the śaktipāta, the quicker one attains Śiva, while an increasing propensity for enjoyments is a sign of a weaker śaktipāta.681 This is in complete alignment with Abhinavagupta’s philosophical and soteriological view, whereby liberation is the primary goal. The fulfillment of one’s aspiration for otherworldly pleasures and supernatural powers is accounted for and accepted in all the subdivisions of the Tantric Śaiva tradition, and as such Abhinavagupta includes it in his system. However, he overtly displays his preferences by assigning those enjoyment-seekers to the lower levels of the Śiva śaktipāta hierarchy.

According to Jayaratha, recipients of both Medium-Moderate and Lower-Moderate degrees of śaktipāta are cases of śivadharmaśādhakas, enjoyment/power-seekers (sādhakas) who follow the Śaiva religion (śivadharma). They practice the teachings taught in the Śaiva scriptures and worship the Śaiva mantras they have received

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“Others, the putrakas, for whom the bonds to the paths have been purified (śuddhaṇṇavandah) [attain the state of Śiva] quickly or instantly; yet others, the sādhakas, with a period of enjoyment in between, slowly or quickly.

Jayaratha’s commentary:
[Putrakas reach Śivahood] ‘quickly,’ i.e. immediately after dropping the body; ‘instantly’ while being still in the body—this is the meaning. [With the words] ‘slowly or quickly’ he says that [for the sādhaka] the period of enjoyment in between could last for a long or a short time.”

681 Abhinavagupta in fact classifies those who attain Śiva instantly and become gurus or jīvannmuktas as recipients of an Intense degree of śaktipāta. Within the Moderate range, he associates those who do not desire any enjoyments and attain Śiva immediately upon death with the Higher-Moderate range; those who experience enjoyments, but just in the current life, with the Medium-Moderate range; and those who wish to enjoy pleasures in future worlds with the Lower-Moderate range. Finally, as I will show below, Abhinavagupta places in the lowest category, Mild śaktipāta, those for whom the desire for enjoyment is stronger than the longing for liberation.
from the guru during the initiation ritual.\footnote{See Svacchandatantra IV.83-84 and Kṣemarāja’s commentary ad loc.} Kṣemarāja, Abhinavagupta’s disciple, explains that the mantras given during the initiation “according to the religion taught by Śiva” (śivadharmiṣṭaṣṭiṣṭa) bring about supernatural powers (śiddhi) in the present body, in addition to the state of higher souls, such as Mantras and Lords of Mantras, who dwell in higher worlds.\footnote{See Kṣemarāja ad SvT IV.144ab: mantrādhamanena piṇḍasiṣṭhiḥhetunā manravādiprāptiḥhetunā ca… (Vol. IV, 89\textsuperscript{17-18}) and vartamānasidhiḥhetor mantrādhamanasya śivadharmiṣṭaḥ eva…(90\textsuperscript{2-3}) In addition to the Svacchandatantra, a Śaiva Siddhānta source that devotes a significant part of its ritual section (kriyāpada) to the various kinds of Śaiva initiations. He quotes MrṬ, KP VIII.6ab: śivadharmiṣṭaḥ anūṃ mūlaṃ śivadharmaphalaśrīyaḥ।

For the individual soul, the [initiation] “according to the law of Śiva” is the root cause of that prosperity which is the fruit of the religion taught by Śiva. Kṣemarāja clarifies that this fruit consists in the attainment of the state of Mantra, Lord of Mantra etc. (mantrāṃmanrēṣvādiprāptiḥatmakā), and that initiation is the only cause for it (hetur ekā). The second half of the stanza (MrṬ, KP VIII.6cd), which Kṣemarāja also quotes, refers to a special kind of śivadharmiṣṭa initiation that bestows immortality until the time of cosmic dissolution:

hitetarā vinā bhaṅgaṃ tanaṃ āvālayaṃ bhavatām

Another [initiation, which can be] granted [brings about enjoyment] without the destruction of the body, up until the dissolution of the worlds.

According to Kṣemarāja this second type of śivadharmiṣṭaḥaka enjoys medium-level supernatural powers, such as the ability to be invincible in battle thanks to a magical sword (khaḍgasiddhiḥ); the power to enter netherworlds (pāṭalasiddhiḥ); a magical collyrium that allows a person to see invisible things (aṁjanasiddhiḥ); or magical sandals (pāḍukasiddhiḥ). According to Nāriyānakaṇṭha, the commentator on the Mrgendratantra, this kind of sādhaka also attains the state of being like Śiva, which is to say, liberation. He writes: piṇḍasthairīre jāte śivatvavyaktaṃ utpannāyāṃ svecchāvihāṛt yathesṭabhogakṛt bhavati. “Once he has obtained the permanence of the body and the manifestation of Śivahood, he becomes one who takes pleasures at will, who experiences whatever enjoyment he desires.” See also Brunner-Lachaux 1985: 204, fn. 4. For an explanation of the various supernatural powers see relevant entries in Tāntrikābhīdhanakośa I, II and III (Brunner, Oberhammer and Padoux 2000 & 2004; Goodall and Rastelli 2013).
after death, I am inclined to think that Abhinavagupta intended it as the degree of grace connected with the lokadharmisādhaka—at least the higher kind, who also desires liberation.684 Lokadharmi-sādhakas are enjoyment-seekers who follow the Veda-based religion, which in Tantric Śaiva sources is referred to as the “mundane path” (lokamarga). They are intent on accumulating good karma by performing meritorious deeds, such as undertaking pilgrimages to holy places, taking ritual baths, and giving to charity.685 This lower kind of enjoyment-bestowing initiation, “according to the mundane religion” (lokadharmin-dīkṣā), does not entitle its recipients to worship mantras, unlike the śivadharmin-dīkṣā.686 What the ritual does, instead, is purify the initiates’ past and future bad karma so that they can reap the fruits of their good karma.687 After death, they enjoy

684 As I will explain below, the “higher” type of lokadharmin, who also desires liberation, at initiation is linked to Śiva and not to the lower deities. For now, note that the Śaiva scriptural sources characterize the lokadharmin dīkṣā as an initiation that grants the experience of enjoyment only after death. See for example Mrgendratantra, KP, VIII.7:

bhogabhūmiṣu sarvāṣu dūṣṭrāṇaṁ hāte sati
dehottarāṇimādyarthāṁ śiṣteṣṭa lokadharmīn || 7 ||

“The remaining [initiation], the one ‘according to the mundane religion,’ whereby the bad portion [of karma] has been removed in all the pleasure-worlds, is regarded as good for obtaining, in another body, [the set of supernatural powers] beginning with atomicity [viz. the ability to make oneself the size of an atom].”

A similar passage in Svacchandatānta IV.144cd, referring to the same initiation, reads:

prārabdhadehahbhe tu bhuṅkte ‘sa hyanimādikān || 144 ||

“But when the current body dies, he will enjoy [supernatural powers] such as the one to turn oneself into the size of an atom.”

Abhinavagupta himself in the Tantraloka, while describing the lokadharmin initiation, uses almost exactly the same words as the Svacchandatānta (TĀ XV.30ab: prārabdhadehahbhe te bhuṅkte ‘sāv animādīkām). I quote the full stanza of the TĀ in a footnote below, while discussing Mild śaktipāta. In his essay on initiation in the Tantraloka, Takashima (1992: 73-74) refers to this same stanza (XV.30) and suggests that Lower-Middle (manda-madhyā) śaktipāta is the case of lokadharma-sādhaka, and not another case of śivadharmi, as Jayaratha states.

685 See Svacchandatānta IV.85 with Kṣemarāja’s commentary ad loc.

686 This is one of the defining characteristics of this dīkṣā, which is described as “devoid of mantra worship” (mantrārdhanavajīta). See for example SvT IV.144b; TĀ XV.29d.

687 See Svacchandatānta IV.143cd-144ab, and TĀ XV.29. Abhinavagupta’s exposition in Tantraloka XV.27-30 of the initiations of the liberation-seeker (munukṣula) and these two types of enjoyment-seekers (śivadharmi- and lokadharmi-sādhakas) is a paraphrase of Svacchandatānta IV.141-145. Jayaratha (ad TĀ XV.29) observes that the purification of bad karmas referred to ad 29ab (adharmaṁśaṁ sodhanam) can be performed only with regard to past (prāktana) and future (āgami) karmas, but not present (dehārambhī
pleasures and supernatural powers in the various paradisiacal worlds of their choosing—
higher realms governed by various rudras, who are a kind of lower manifestation of Śiva. At the time of initiation the guru “links” the disciple to the deity of the chosen realm, which will cause the initiant to acquire the same qualities of that deity, such as omniscience and similar powers. In the case where the lokadharmin desires liberation, he will be connected to Śiva. In this way, the tradition seems to allow for a higher level of lokadharmisādhaka, normally a pleasure-seeker par excellence, who may also desire, and ask for, liberation at the time of initiation. Abhinavagupta too explicitly mentions these two possibilities for the lokadharmin, to be linked either to Śiva in his highest, undivided

or prārabdha) karma, the karma that has given rise to the current body, whose effects have already started, and that, according to the tradition, is impossible to eliminate other than by experiencing it. This principle applies to both the śivadharmi and the lokadharmi-sādhaka. On this point, Jayaratha openly criticizes the commentator (udyotakṛ) on the Svacchandatantra, Kṣemarāja, for suggesting that, in the case of the sādhaka, the bad portion of the present karma is purified during the initiation ritual. According to Jayaratha, Kṣemarāja bases his interpretation on an incorrect reading of SvT 142ab, reading ekam for ittham: sādhakasya tu bhūtyarthāṃ prākkarmaikam tu śodhayet instead of sādhakasya tu bhūtyarthāṃ prākkarmetthāṃ tu śodhayet.

This kind of deity is also referred to as sakala Śiva, or Śiva “with parts,” to suggest that it is a manifest form of Śiva, and to distinguish it from his non-manifest form, “without parts,” or akala Śiva; and bhuvaneśvara, which literally means “Lord of the world” (see TĀ XV.30 quoted in fn. 691 below).

See Mrgendratantra KP, VIII.149:

lokadharminam āropya mate bhuvanabh Hartari ।
taddharmāpādanan kurye chive vā muktikānśīnam ॥

“Having placed the lokadharmin in the intended world-regent, [the guru] should cause him to take on his properties. Or, if the lokadharmin also wants liberation [he should place him] in Śiva.”

As for the special qualities (dharma) of the deity that the disciples acquire, Nārāyaṇaśaṅkha, the commentator on the Mrgendratantra, explains that they are the perfections, such as omniscience (svajñatā), contentment (trspīt), eternal intelligence (anādibodha), and freedom (svatanratā) (ad MrgT VIII.149ad and VIII.136ab). The other two qualities of the traditional list of six are indestructible power (aviluptaśakti) and infinite power (anantaśakti). Only Śiva possesses all of the qualities, so disciples who are linked to Śiva will acquire the whole list. Lower deities, instead, possess only some of the qualities. See Brunner-Lachaux 1977: 405-406.

Brunner-Lachaux (1985) rightly observes that the tradition, without being explicit, provides the possibility for a sort of lokadharminī nirvāṇadṛkṣa, a “liberation-bestowing initiation according to the mundane religion.” She also notes that Nārāyaṇaśaṅkha (ad VIII.149) avoids glossing the term muktikānśin, “he who desires liberation,” with mumukṣuḥ, probably because he is aware that, technically, this initiation is categorized as bhautik (enjoyment-bestowing), and so is meant for the bubhukṣuḥ, whose immediate goal is the attainment of enjoyments and supernatural powers (1985: 288, fn. 5). However, both Kṣemarāja ad Sv.T 144cd-145 and Jayaratha ad TĀ XV.30 do use the term mumukṣuḥ to refer to the type of lokadharmin who also desires liberation (see fn. 691 below).
form, or to his manifestation as a lower divinity. The first kind of *lokadharmin*, who is linked to Śiva and therefore does not require additional initiation, seems to fit well Abhinavagupta’s description of the case of Lower-Medium *śaktipāta*. The second kind, conversely, who will need a further initiation in order to achieve liberation, fits the case of Mild *śaktipāta* (in its three degrees), which I will discuss next.

4.3.2 Mild *Śaktipāta*: The Predominance of “Experience” (bhoga) as a Goal

In both the *Tantrāloka* and the *Tantrasāra*, Abhinavagupta states that aspirants in whom the desire for otherworldly pleasures and supernatural powers (bhoga) predominates over the longing for liberation are those who received a Mild *śaktipāta*. In the latter work—perhaps because the topic he discusses right after Mild *śaktipāta* is the *śaktipāta* of the Vaiṣṇavas and other non-Śaiva sects, which in his view is not liberating—he clarifies that even this prevalent desire for mundane pleasures is the expression of (Śiva’s) *śaktipāta*, and as such leads its recipients to liberation. This is because, Abhinavagupta states, the means to obtain the experience of enjoyments are mantras, yoga and other observances taught by Śiva, which ultimately also lead to liberation. On the other hand, in the single

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691 See *Tantrāloka* XV.30 (a close parallel of *Svacchandatantra* IV.144cd-145):

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prārabdhahehabhede tu bhūnikte ‘asāv aṁśamādikam |
bhūkyordhvaṁ yāti yatraiṣa yukto ‘tha sakale ‘kale ||
```

But when the current body dies, he will enjoy [the supernatural powers] becoming the size of an atom and so forth; [and] having enjoyed them, he goes upwards to where he was linked [by the guru], either to a manifest form [of Śiva] (sakala) or to [his] non-manifest form (akala).

Commenting on this passage, Jayaratha explains that the term *sakala* refers to the Lord of the intended world, the *bhuvaneśvara*, while *akala* refers to Śiva. He also clarifies that the case in which the initiate is united with Śiva is when he desires liberation (*mumukṣur akale śive yojitas*). Thus, the initiate first enjoys the good karma, and then reaches the level of Śiva. Jayaratha bases his comments on *Mrgendratantra*, KP VIII.149 (which I quoted fn. 689 above). In his commentary ad TĀ XIII.245cd-246ab, the stanza on Mild *śaktipāta*, Jayaratha quotes both TĀ XV.30 and again this same stanza of the MrT VIII.149, in order to show these different possibilities for the *lokadharmini-sādhaka*. As I will explain below, he understands this special *lokadharmin* who also desires liberation to be the recipient of Higher-Mild *śaktipāta*.

692 See *Tantrasāra* XI, 223\(^1\)-224\(^4\).
stanza of the *Tantraloka* devoted to Mild śaktipāta, he adds an important piece of information that seems to make liberation for these initiates less “automatic”:693

In the case of Higher-Mild, Medium-Mild and Lower-Mild, the desire for enjoyments becomes successively (kramāt) more (atimātreṇa) predominant. At the end he becomes Śiva through the [initiation] ritual (vidhinā).

Thus these disciples attain the state of Śiva (liberation), only after going through initiation, that is, an additional initiation to the one they already received.

Abhinavagupta does not specify what class of initiates belongs to this category of Mild śaktipāta, or what specific initiation they must receive in order to become Śiva. According to Jayaratha, Mild śaktipāta, in all its degrees, applies to the case of lokadharmisādhakas.694 Abhinavagupta does not even provide specific information about each degree of Mild śaktipāta, other than to note that the more predominant the desire for pleasurable experience, the lower the degree within this category.695 The scantiness of

693 TĀ XII.245cd-246ab:

\[bhogotsukatā Yadā pradhānabhūtā tadā mandatvaṃ pārameśvaramantrayogopāyatā yatas tatrautsukyam | pāremeśvaramantrayogādeś ca yato moksaparyantatvam atah śaktipātarāpata | tatrāpi tāratamyāt traividhyam | \]

“When the desire for enjoyments is prevalent, then [śaktipāta] is Mild. [Even] such desire is an expression of śaktipāta, because it has as its means [of fulfillment] the mantras and yoga of the supreme Lord, and because the mantras, yoga, and other [means] of the supreme Lord end up in liberation. With regard to this [Mild śaktipāta] too there are three kinds, according to its degree of intensity.”

694 See Jayaratha ad XIII.245cd-246ab:

\[atraivamprakāre mandākhye śaktipāte bhubhusutā arthā lokaḥ dharmiṇaḥ sādhakasya kramādatimārēṇa mukhyā yathāyathām pradhānabhūtā ityarthāḥ \]

In this system, in the śaktipāta of such a kind, called Mild, the desire for enjoyments, by implication, the enjoyments of the lokadharmi-sādhaka, becomes successively more predominant, i.e. the becoming predominant [occurs] in regular order. This is the meaning [of the passage].

695 See XIII.245cd-246ab, quoted above. As I explain below, some lokadharmi-sādhakas enjoy experience up to the dissolution of the universe.
information—as well as the fact that he devotes a single stanza to the three Mild degrees of śaktipāta—further indicates of the subordinate place that bhoga as a goal occupies in his view with respect to liberation. Jayaratha, however, attempts a more specific classification. He understands Higher-Mild śaktipāta to be the degree of grace received by the special kind of lokadharmin who is granted salvific initiation and, after enjoying pleasures and supernatural powers in the paradisiacal realm of his choice, attains Śivahood. Jayaratha’s interpretation, however, seems at odds with Abhinavagupta’s description of the recipients of Mild śaktipāta as needing (a further) initiation to attain Śivahood. Therefore, this specification provides another argument in favor of considering this kind of “liberation-seeking” lokadharmin as a recipient of the degree above Higher-Mild, that is, Lower-Moderate śaktipāta; also, as I pointed out earlier, the śivadharmin, who does not have to wait until after death in order to experience pleasures, does not fit well in the category of Lower-Mild.

696 However, since the other characteristic of recipients of Mild śaktipāta is that their desire for enjoyments is predominant with respect to liberation, we have to presume that the liberation-seeking lokadharmis would fall in the category of (Lower)-Medium śaktipāta only if their experience of enjoyments did not last for an excessively long time. At the end of chapter XVI of the Tantraloka Abhinavagupta explains that the merging in either forms of Śiva, the non-manifest Śiva or the lower divinities, takes place only after all the pleasurable experiences, fruits of the good karmas which the teacher has intentionally not purified, have been exhausted. Regardless of the type of connection the initiate has received, it is possible that the enjoyments will last a very long time, even up until the time of cosmic dissolution, though he will not take on any body that will cause him suffering. See TĀ XVI.316bc-310ab. The last stanza of this passage (310cd-311ab), which echoes TĀ XV.30, previously quoted, reads:

\[
tato māyālaye bhuktasamastasukhabhogakah || 310 ||
\]

\[
niskale sakale vaiśī layaṃ yojanīkālāt ||
\]

“When the dissolution of Māyā occurs, having experienced all the pleasant experiences, he dissolves into the unmanifest or manifest Śiva, according to the connection [he received at initiation].”

Based on Abhinavagupta’s description of Mild śaktipāta, whereby bhoga is predominant, I suggest it would include these lokadharmi-sādhikas who, although linked to the non-manifest Śiva, experience enjoyments up until the time of cosmic dissolution.

697 See TABLE 4.4 at the end of this section.
The more ordinary kind of lokadharmin, conversely, who at the time of initiation is linked by the guru to lower forms of Śiva, seems to better fit the general category of Mild śaktipāta (in all its three degrees), since he will need another initiation in order to attain Śivahood. Jayaratha, instead, categorizes this disciple as a recipient of either Medium-Mild or Lower-Mild śaktipāta (but not Higher-Mild), depending on how long and gradual is the process leading to the disciple’s unity with the Lord of the chosen paradisiacal world. Jayaratha writes:

And some other lokadharmin, due to Medium-Mild śaktipāta, having experienced for a certain time pleasures in some paradisiacal world or other [levels of reality] (bhuvanādau), then gets initiated by the lord of that [realm] and finally attains Śivahood. But the one who received Lower-Mild śaktipāta, having experienced pleasure for a longer time, going through the stages of being in the same world (sāloka), then in proximity to (sāmīpya), then in union with (sāyujya) [the presiding deity] in that very world (tatraiva), [also] gets initiation from the same [lord] and attains Śivahood.

In addition to this regular kind of lokadharmin who needs to receive an additional, liberating initiation in order to attain Śivahood, it is very likely that Abhinavagupta intended Mild śaktipāta as the category for the “pledge-holders” (samayins). These are disciples who have received only the preliminary kind of initiation (samayadīkṣā), which requires them to observe the post-initiatory rules, or pledges (samaya), and at the same time qualifies them to study the Śaiva scriptures. In order to attain liberation, however,

698 See Jayaratha ad TĀ XIII.246ab (Vol. VIII, 152-153):

kaście ca madhyamandaśaktipātavān kvacana bhuvanādau kañcicikālaṃ bhogān bhuktvā, tad-tās̐åvaradīkṣitah paryante śivatām gacchet ā mandambhaśaktipātavān punas tatraiva sālokyasāmīpyasāyujyāśadanakrameṇa ciratarama kālaṃ bhogān bhuktvā, tata eva dīkṣām asādyā śivatām iyāt ||

699 I used the word “regular” here to distinguish it from the “special” kind I described above, who is able to obtain a liberating kind of lokadharmiṇi dīkṣā. As for the additional initiation the ordinary lokadharmin needs to receive to attain liberation, I have not seen other references, besides Jayaratha, to the fact that they actually receive it from the lord of the chosen paradisiacal world. However, neither have I seen explicit references to the fact that, instead, they receive a liberating initiation from a human guru in a future life on earth.
they need to receive the “liberation-bestowing initiation” (*nirvāṇadīkṣā*), also called “initiation of the sons” (*putrakadīkṣā*). When Abhinavagupta lists, from lowest to highest, the four main types of initiated practitioners determined by the degree of intensity of śaktipāta, he lists the *samayins* as the first:700

Thus, since this śaktipāta is of various types, there are various types [of initiated practitioners], i.e. the “pledge-holders” etc., because of differences such as the [various] degrees of intensity. Some, called “pledge-holders,” through attaining only the state of being part of a Rudra, attain Śivahood gradually, because of his grace (*tatprasādataḥ*).

Jayaratha explains that the term “gradually” (*kramaśah*) refers to the fact that they attain Śivahood, or liberation, only after the “initiation of the sons,” and that, for this very reason, their śaktipāta is Mild.701 Like the ordinary kind of “enjoyment-seekers”—the *lokadharmins* who do not ask for liberation at the time of initiation—the *samayins* become part of a Rudra, a lower manifestation of Śiva, and need a further initiation to reach their ultimate goal. Unless they choose to be consecrated as *śivadharmisādhakas*, however, the “pledge-holders” may never be interested in mundane pleasures and supernatural powers. Abhinavagupta’s characterization of Mild śaktipāta as the category of grace that generates initiates predominantly interested in enjoyments is meant for the *lokadharmisādhakas* only. The common denominator between these two types of initiates who receive Mild śaktipāta—*lokadharmins* and *samayins*—is rather that their initiation, whether *lokadharminī* or *samaya-dīkṣā*, is not liberating.

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700 *Tantrāloka* XIII. 295cd-297ab:

\[\text{evam vicitre 'py etasmiñ chaktiptē sthite sati || 295 ||}
\text{tāratamyādibhir bhedaiḥ samayyādīvicitratā ||}
\text{kaścid rudrāṁsatāmātrāpānanāt tatprasādataḥ || 296 ||}
\text{śivatvāṁ kramaśo gacchet samayī yo nirāpyate ||}\]

701 See Jayaratha *ad loc.*
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<td>- Liberating lokadharminī dṛkṣā</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MILD</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher-Mild</td>
<td>LOKADHARMAŚADHAKA</td>
<td>“HIGHER” LOKADHARMAŚADHAKA</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- Lokadharminī dṛkṣā</td>
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<td>SAMAYIN</td>
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<td>-Samayadṛkṣā</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium-Mild</td>
<td>LOKADHARMAŚADHAKA with a higher desire for bhoga</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SAMAYIN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower-Mild</td>
<td>As above, with even stronger desire for bhoga</td>
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</table>

However—and this is what, in Abhinavagupta’s view, distinguishes them from practitioners of other sects such as the Vaiṣṇavas—since they are still categorized as
recipients of a Śaiva śaktipāta, they are regarded as traveling a path that will inevitably culminate in liberation, even if at a later stage.\textsuperscript{702}

4.4 Hierarchy and Degree of Authority of Śaiva Gurus

In addition to his classification of teachers (kalpita, akalpita and their variations) based on their level of intuitive knowledge,\textsuperscript{703} Abhinavagupta establishes from his doctrine of multiple degrees of śaktipāta a theoretical hierarchy among Śaiva gurus based on other criteria as well, which he also relates to the intensity of Śiva’s grace. The criteria include

\textsuperscript{702} Samayadīkṣā is a preliminary initiation for both putrakas and sāḍhakas, who will respectively receive the nirvāṇa and śivadharmint initiations. I explained earlier that the first is categorized as a recipient of Higher-Middle śaktipāta, and the latter as Medium-Middle śaktipāta. The cases in which samayadīkṣā is followed immediately, or a short time later, by the second type of initiation, must not be understood as cases of Mild śaktipāta. Rather, Abhinavagupta, and more explicitly Jayaratha, are referring to cases in which the samayin takes many years to become a putraka or sāḍhaka; or, possibly, even to cases of samayins who die before they receive their second initiation.

See TĀ XIII.299cd-300ab and Jayaratha’s commentary ad loc:

samayadīcatusṭḥāya samāśavyāsavyogataḥ || 299 ||
kramākramadībhīr bhedaśā śaktipātasya citratā
tsamāśavyāsavyogata iti kramākramadībhir iti ca, tatra kramād ādau samayī, tataḥ putrakaḥ, tata ācārya iti sāmastyam, akramāt kaścit putraka eva, na tv ādau samayy api, kaścid ācārya eva, na tv ādau samayī putrako vetti vyastatvam ||

“These four categories [of initiates], Pledge-Holders (samayin), [Power-Seekers (sāḍhaka), Liberation-Seekers (putraka) and Teachers (ācārya)], [in turn], have different levels of śaktipāta, depending on whether they occur gradually or at once, all together or individually.”

Jayaratha’s Commentary:

“Depending on whether they occur in sequence or not in sequence” and “all of them or individually.” Among these, “gradually” (kramād) [means that] at the beginning he is a samayin, then a putraka, then an ācārya—this is “all of them” (sāmastyam); “at once” (akramād) [is when] someone is only a putraka, but not also a samayin in the beginning, someone else is just an ācārya, but not also a samayin or a putraka in the beginning; this is “individually” (vyastatvam).

When Jayaratha says that one is a putraka, but not also a samayin, he means that he has received the liberation-bestowing (nirvāṇa) initiation, and thus become a putraka, immediately after the samayadīkṣā. Therefore, he has never been in the stage of being simply a samayin. The same must be understood for the teacher first is very unlikely that someone who is not even a Śaiva—a person who has not even received samayadīkṣā and putrakadīkṣā—would approach a guru and request to be himself consecrated as a guru without first receiving the other two initiations. The only exception would be the spontaneously perfected (sāmsiddhi) guru, who, as I explained earlier, does not go through any initiation, not even the consecration as a teacher. See TĀ XIII.140-141, where Abhinavagupta states that a guru whose path is “intuitive” is not required to go through the progressive initiatory stages, such as samayin and putraka.

\textsuperscript{703} See section 4.2.4 above (‘Degree of Intuitive Knowledge: The Typology of Gurus’).
whether the teacher is a “gnostic” (*jñānin*), imparting liberating knowledge, or a yogin, granting otherworldly pleasures and supernatural powers at lower levels of reality; whether the teacher belongs to the Śaiva tradition or not; and, if the teacher is a Śaiva, which system within the tradition he belongs to. To a certain extent, Abhinavagupta establishes a hierarchy among non-Śaiva traditions as well. In line with sectarian statements found in early Śaiva scriptural sources, such as the *Svacchandatantra*, however, he does not regard these other religious sects as suitable for those aspiring to liberating knowledge. Since the author considers followers of these traditions to be yet untouched by Śiva’s liberating grace, I will discuss them in a separate section, devoted to the so-called Lord’s power of “obscuration.”

4.4.1 The Supreme Authority of the “Spontaneously Perfected” Guru

While discussing Abhinavagupta’s typology of teachers based on their degree of intuitive knowledge, I briefly mentioned that he declares the “Spontaneously Perfected” (*sāṃsiddhi* or *akalpita*) gurus to be superior to those who have been initiated (i.e., *samskṛta* or *kalpita*) and who have acquired their knowledge in the traditional way, from another guru—even though the latter have been formally empowered to the office by the consecration ceremony. He writes,704

704 See TĀ IV.74cd-76ab:

```
yathā bhede ‘nādisiddhāc chīvān muktāśivāḥ hy adhāḥ || 74 ||
iathā sāṃsiddhikajñānād aḥṛtajñānino ‘dhamāḥ 

tatśamnidhau nādhikāras teṣām muktāśivāṃvat || 75 ||
kiṃ tu tāṣṭṝṃsthītur yad vā kṛśyaṃ tadanuvartanam 
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74c. bhede ‘nādisiddhāc | my em; bhedenādisiddhāc (i.e. bhedena ādisiddhā) ed. KSTS.

Jayaratha’s commentary (Vol. VIII, 6977) also refers to Śiva as *anādisiddha*, a well-attested compound referring to Śiva in the Śaiva Siddhānta tradition, and not as ādisiddha. The instrumental case *bedhena* also would not make sense in the sentence.
Just like in the dualist tradition [of the Śaiva Siddhānta] the liberated [souls who have become like] Śiva are inferior to the eternally established [Lord] Śiva, in the same way those [gurus] who have received their knowledge [from a teacher] are inferior to those whose knowledge has arisen spontaneously. In their presence they do not have any authority, like those liberated souls who are equal to Śiva; instead they remain in silence [i.e. inactive] or, if they have to do something, they follow these [spontaneously perfected gurus].

Abhinavagupta is asserting that these traditional teachers, in the presence of those who have attained self-realization through their own liberating insight, must defer to them in matters of religious authority (adhikāra), for example, in performing functions such as initiating new disciples and teaching the scriptures.

It is possible that Abhinavagupta intended such a precept for both the gurus of the non-dualist, Bhairava traditions he represents, as well as for officiants belonging to the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta. He may not have expected the latter, however, to accept such hierarchy, because their doctrine would not recognize as gurus, or even as members of

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705 According to the dualist doctrine of the Śaiva Siddhānta, whereby individual souls and Śiva are ontologically distinct, “liberated Śivas” are souls who become like the omniscient Śiva, but still remain inactive. Similarly, gurus who have been initiated and have attained knowledge through their teachers are fully liberated, like self-accomplished gurus, but are still somewhat inferior to the latter. Therefore, they should remain inactive in his presence. Abhinavagupta, however, concedes that the spontaneously perfected guru who, in addition to possessing intuitive knowledge, has been formally initiated, is like Lord Śiva himself, Bhairava, the “boon-giver” in person.

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yas tv prātiḥbhabhyaṁsamśkaradvasantaraḥ || ||
ukto ‘nayopakāryatvāt sa sākṣād varado guruḥ || 158 ||
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“But that guru who is adorned by both processes of qualification (samśkāra), i.e. the intuitive one and the external one [i.e. initiation] is just like [Bhairava], the boon-giver, in human form, because he does not need any [further] assistance from anything else.”

As Abhinavagupta explains earlier in the text (TĀ IV.76cd-78ab), the reason a guru who has already attained knowledge of his Śiva nature through his intuitive insight would request initiation is to make it firmer. By practicing the scriptures, as well as studying the teachings of a master who knows these scriptures, he makes his knowledge absolutely perfect, complete in itself. Therefore, the author says, this knowledge itself “becomes Bhairava” (bhairavāyate). See TĀ IV.76cd-78ab:

```
yas tv akalpitāraḥ ‘pi samvādadrhatakṛte || 76 ||
anyato labdhamsamśkarāḥ sa sākṣād bhairavo guruḥ ||
yatah sāstrakramāt tajjñaguruprajñāntaṁ || 77 ||
atmapratyayītaṁ jītaṁ pūrganvād bhairavāyate ||
```

Such a view is completely consistent with a non-dualist ontology, which postulates the identity of the knower, the object of knowledge and the process of knowing.
the tradition, those who had not been ritually initiated. It is also likely, however, that he intended this idea to reach the wider audience of Śaiva disciples, especially those belonging to the Śaiva Siddhānta, or potential—still uninitiated—disciples, who might otherwise be leaning towards mainstream Śaivism. This may explain his poetic use of Śaiva Siddhānta ontology in the comparison he makes to illustrate his point, as quoted in the passage above. As I will point out later, Abhinavagupta’s agenda to expand his tradition led him to encourage practitioners to seek more than one guru, ideally by approaching what he regarded as increasingly “higher” teachers, even if this meant shifting sectarian affiliation.

4.4.2 The Hierarchy in the Streams of Śaiva Revelation: Bhairava and Non-Bhairava Gurus

Abhinavagupta also applies his doctrine of śaktipāta to allocate various levels of authority among gurus belonging to different streams of Śaivism. First, he ascribes ascending degrees of śaktipāta to followers of different Śaiva ritual systems, starting from the Śaiva Siddhānta up to the various non-dualist Śaiva cults, setting at the top the Trika, the system expounded in the Tantrāloka: 706

706 TĀ XIII.300cd-301:

$kramikah \text{ śaktipātaś ca siddhānte vāmake tatah }$ || 300 ||
$dakṣe mate kule kaule śādārde bernāye tatah ||$
$\text{ullaṅghanavaśād vāpi jhaṭitv akramam eva vā }$ || 301 ||

The commentator Jayaratha quotes a source that lists the same traditions (“Śaiva” stands for “Śaiva Siddhānta”) in the same order, preceded by the Vedas as the lowest, with the exception that there is no distinction between Kula and Kaula. I have not been able to locate the source for this quote, which is likely from a Trika tantra, since the Trika is listed as the highest system:

$\text{vedāc chaivaṁ tato vāmaṁ tato daksam tatah kulam }$
$tato mataṁ tataścāpi trikaṁ sarvottamaṁ param ||$

It was not uncommon for the various Śaiva systems to establish a hierarchical order among the different sects, placing the cult taught in the text at the top. The list could also start with the Vedas at the bottom, include the Vaiṣṇavas, and then proceed with the Śaiva systems in various order. See, for example, a later...
Śaktipāta can also be sequential [by occurring progressively] in the Siddhānta, then in the Vāma, in the Dakṣiṇa, in the Mata, in the Kula, in the Kaula [and] then in the Trika, which is the heart. Or it can also occur by skipping over [some stages], or instantaneously, without sequence.

Based on this passage we understand, for instance, that a disciple who is initiated in the Śaiva Siddhānta or Vāma traditions has received a lower level of śaktipāta than one initiated in the Trika; or that a student who chooses a Trika guru as his first teacher has received a more intense level of grace than a student who approaches the same teacher only after being first initiated in lower traditions. However, as I showed earlier in this chapter, Abhinavagupta’s main concern in expounding his theory of grace in degrees is to establish a hierarchy among gurus, not among disciples, even if the latter are ostensibly included in his classification. A few stanzas below this passage, in fact, the author uses the same list of traditions to declare the progressive superiority, and corresponding authority, of teachers belonging to the higher systems over those belonging to the lower ones:

Therefore the Saiddhāntika [teacher does not have authority] for the Vāma system, this one [i.e. teacher of the Vāma system] for the Dakṣiṇa system, this for

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Kaula source, Kulārṇavatantra II.7-8, which, however, places the Siddhānta above both the Dakṣiṇa and Vāma; and, this being a Kaula text, the Kaula tradition is predictably at the top.

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TĀ XIII.320cd-326ab:

tan na saiddhāntiko vāme nāsau dakṣe sa no mate || 320 ||
kulakaule trike nāsau pūrvaḥ pūrvaḥ paratra tu || 321 ||
avacchinno navacchedam no vetty āṇantyaśaṃsthitaḥ || 321 ||
sarvaṃsahas tato ṛhaḥstha ārdhvastho ‘dhikṛto guruḥ ||

. . .

adḥaḥṣṭhadṛksṭho ‘py etādṛggurusevī bhavet sa yah || 323 ||
tādṛksaktinipāteddho yo drāg ārdhvaṃ imaṃ nayer ||

. . .

uttarottaram ācāryaṃ vidann apy adharaḥ ‘dharah || 325 ||
kurvann adhikriyāṃ śāstraloṅghī nigrabhājanam ||
the Mata, this for the Kula, this for the Kaula, this for the Trika; however, the higher ones [have authority] for [all] the lower systems. A limited person, abiding in an infinity [of limitations] cannot know something unlimited. Therefore the guru belonging to the superior [system], capable of anything, is qualified in the inferior systems. … Even one who belongs to lower systems, kindled by such a kind of śaktipāta, can serve such type of guru [i.e. belonging to a superior system], who would quickly lead him up. … [The teacher] who belongs to inferior systems, though knowing a superior teacher [who is nearly available], by performing [his] function, transgresses the scriptures, [and is therefore] deserving of punishment.

Just as in the case of the spontaneously perfected (sāmsiddhi or akalpita) and initiated (samāskṛta or kalpita) types of gurus, Abhinavagupta establishes who is a superior and who an inferior teacher based on a variable that he makes dependent on a presumed degree of Śiva’s grace. The variables include the level of intuitive knowledge in the first case, and the specific Śaiva system in the latter case. He then ascribes a higher spiritual power, as well as higher religious authority to perform the functions of a guru—such as initiating and teaching disciples—to the superior ones. Here he even recommends punishment for violating a prescription that has no scriptural base.

The doctrine of śaktipāta provides a convenient way to sanction this hierarchy of religious systems in Śiva’s undisputable will, which manifests as grace, just as it does for the different levels of initiations, and the varying degrees of intuitive knowledge.

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708 According to Jayaratha the kind of śaktipāta Abhinavagupta is referring to is the Medium-Intense. I do not think he is correct, however, because recipients of Medium-Intense are sāmsiddhi gurus who do not need the help of any other guru, not even initiation. Rather, I think Abhinavagupta is referring to the kind of śaktipāta adequate for whichever higher system the guru is about to be initiated in, by approaching and serving a “superior” teacher.

709 I am referring here, for example, to the case of the sāmsiddhi guru who can bestow immediate liberation through a gnostic kind of initiation, an ability that the samāskṛta guru does not have (see TĀ XIII.223cd-227ab in fn. 642); or, here, to the fact that a guru of a higher Śaiva system would have the power to “lead up” a guru of a lower system who devotedly serves him.

710 See TĀ XIII.299cd-300ab, the stanza that immediately precedes the passage quoted. I quoted the same passage earlier, with Jayaratha’s commentary, in fn. Error! Bookmark not defined. [update field] (subsection 4.3.2 “Mild Śaktipāta: the Predominance of ‘Experience’ (bhoga) as a Goal”:

\[ \text{samayyādicatuṣṭasāya samāsavyāsayogataḥ} \]
The seven traditions that Abhinavagupta lists in both passages belong to the branch of Śaivism known as the Path of Mantra (Mantramārga).\textsuperscript{711} The first four traditions in descending order—Trika, Kaula, Kula and Mata—are part of the more esoteric goddess-centered cults first taught in tantras of the so-called Vidyāpīṭha (Seat of Vidyās).\textsuperscript{712} The Dakṣiṇa ritual system, also known as Mantrapīṭha (Seat of Mantras) privileges the masculine aspect of divinity in the form of Lord Svacchanda-Bhairava, even if he is worshipped with his consort Agoreśvari.\textsuperscript{713} The Vidyāpīṭha and the Mantrapīṭha, in turn, are the two main divisions of the larger scriptural corpus known as Tantras of Bhairava, which includes essentially all the non-Saiddhāntika scriptures of the Mantramārga.\textsuperscript{714} The Vāma, the ritual system centered around the worship of Tumburu-bhairava and his four sisters, occupies a somewhat intermediate place between the tantras of Bhairava and the Śaiva Siddhānta: although technically it may be included in the Vidyāpīṭha,\textsuperscript{715} Abhinavagupta himself, in the passage above, lists it as inferior to the Dakṣiṇa/Mantrapīṭha. Based on a passage he quotes from the Sarvācārahṛdaya, a lost Kaula source, it appears that the tantras of Bhairava regarded a Vāma guru as an

\begin{verbatim}
śamayādictaśkasya samāsavysayogataḥ || 299 ||
kramākramādibhir bhedaḥ śaktipātyasa citrataḥ

“These four categories [of initiates]—Pledge-Holders (samayin) and the others [i.e. Power-Seekers (śādhaka), Liberation-Seekers (putraka) and Teachers (ācārya)]—[in turn], have different levels of śaktipāta, depending on whether they occur gradually or at once, all together or individually.”
\end{verbatim}


\textsuperscript{712} On the Vidyāpīṭha see Sanderson 1988: 670-690, and Sanderson 2012: 35-44 and 57-68.

\textsuperscript{713} The principal and only surviving scriptural source of this tradition is the Svacchandatantra, quoted on several occasions in the Tantraloka.

\textsuperscript{714} Sanderson 1988: 667-672.

\textsuperscript{715} Sanderson 1988: 669. The main scriptural source for the Vāma tradition is the Vīnāśikhā tantra, still surviving. This cult may have lost ground owing to the emergence of the cult of Svacchandabhairava.
“outsider” in need of further initiation. Abhinavagupta writes,

In the revered Sarvācārahṛdaya and other [texts] the Lord showed the superiority and inferiority of the scriptures, based on differences in the spheres of knowledge, practice etc. “A teacher consecrated in the Vāma path knows the supreme reality. However, he needs another initiation in the Bhairava system. The Śaivas [Saidhāntikas], the Vaimalas and the [Pramāṇa] Siddhānta-followers [i.e. the Lākulas], the Ārhatas [Mausulas] and the Kārukas—all of them are unliberated in relation to the cult of the circle of the goddesses taught in the Tantras of Bhairava.

Although he needs further initiation, however, a Vāma guru is still regarded in this scripture—and by Abhinavagupta—as liberated, because he “knows the supreme reality,” which means that he perceives reality as undifferentiated. A Śaiva Saidhāntika guru, conversely, relying on a tradition that holds Śiva, souls, and matter as ontologically distinct categories, cannot have that kind of knowledge, nor grant it to his disciples. From Abhinavagupta’s non-dualistic perspective, what the Śiva Siddhānta doctrine regards as liberation—being like Śiva—is not the highest state, the awareness of being Śiva, the complete identification with him. This is why the source he quotes says that these souls are still “unliberated,” or “bound souls” (paśu) in relation to the teachings of the Tantras.

716 TĀ XIII.303-305:

[jñānācārādibhṛdēna hy uttarādhara tā vibhuḥ]
[sāstreyv addṛśac chrīmatavācāraḥṛdādīṣu || 303 ||]
vāmamārgābhīṣiktas tu daiśīkah paratattvavīt ||
tathāpi bhairave tantrve punah saṃśāram arhati || 304 ||
śaivavāimalasiddhāntā ārhatāh kārūkāś ca ye ||
sarve te paśavo jñeyā bhairave mārtṛmanḍale || 305 ||

717 The Lākulas, Vaimalas, Mausulas and Kārukas are all sects of the Śaiva stream called the Outer Path (Atimārga), which also included the Pāṣūpatas, and the Kāpālikas. See Sanderson 1988: 664-668; and Sanderson 2006a.

718 In this stanza I followed the translation proposed by Sanderson (2006a: 182-183). His explanation regarding the identity of the various sects listed in the passage is the following: “Since the Śaivas here can only be the followers of the texts usually called Siddhāntas in the Āgamic literature, the Siddhānta of this verse must be something else. The list will be satisfactorily complete only if that is the Pramāṇa school.” The followers of the Pramāṇa genre of texts are the Lākulas (a sect of the Atimārga), who are also known as Kālamukhas or Mahāvratas. On this latter point see Sanderson 2004: 1.
of Bhairava. However, as they approach teachers from higher systems, even their weak form of *śaktipāta* will gradually lead them to the knowledge of the Trika.719

### 4.5 Grace Obscured: *Śaktipāta* in Non-Śaiva Traditions and False Gurus

Just as Śiva liberates souls through his grace (*anugraha*), which he bestows in the form of *śaktipāta*, so too he binds them through his power known as “obscuration” or “concealment” (*tirobhāva*).720 These two opposite powers, together with creation, maintenance and resorption, are part of his five cosmic activities (*paṅcakṛtya*)—all of which he performs out of his absolute freedom. On a conceptual level, in non-dualistic Śaiva doctrine, liberation and bondage are merely the two ends of the spectrum that is Śiva’s endless activity as expanding and contracting all-encompassing Consciousness: the movement towards expansion is his grace, which leads to identification with Śiva as part of a non-dual perception of reality; and the movement towards contraction is his concealment, which leads to a view of reality as differentiated.721 The first activity, which leads to liberation, is connected to the power of Śiva known as “Superior” (*Jyeṣṭhā*), while the second, which creates the world of transmigration, by his “Left” (*Vāmā*)

719 See TĀ XIII.347cd-348, which I quote in section 4.6.

720 See TĀ XIII.264cd-267ab. The last stanza and a half of the passage is based on the *Spandakārikās*, an early text of the non-dualistic Śpanda school of Śaivism. TĀ XIII.266-267ab reads:

```
uktam seyam kriyāśaktīḥ śivasya paśuvartint ā
bhandhayitrī tait karma kathate rāpalopārtī ā śivasya paśuvartinī ā
jñātā sā ca kriyāśaktīḥ sadyalidhīyupapādikā ā
```

“It is said: ‘This power of action of Śiva, residing in the bound souls, is binding. Therefore (iṭṭ) it (tait) is called karma, which conceals the true nature. When, however, it is known as the power of action, it immediately brings about perfection.’”

Abhinavagupta’s quote is from *Spandakārikās* III.16:

```
seyam kriyātmikā śaktih śivasya paśuvartint ā
bhandhayitrī svamārgasthā jñātā siddhyupapādikā ā śivasya paśuvartinī ā
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721 In other words, the Lord generates a plurality of contents by generating also, through self-contraction, a plurality of limited perceivers; and he returns to oneness by means of self-expansion, by allowing the limited perceivers, touched by his grace, to identify again with Consciousness.
power. Because grace and obscuration are, so to speak, the two sides of the same coin, Abhinavagupta discusses them in the same chapter, both in the Tantrāloka and in the Tantrasāra.

4.5.1 Śaiva and Non-Śaiva Śaktipāta

In Abhinavagupta’s doctrinal view, whether this movement from complete concealment to full manifestation occurs instantly or gradually depends not only on the degree of śaktipāta, but also on its source, whether it is from Śiva or other deities. After concluding his exposition on the nine types of śaktipāta, Abhinavagupta clarifies that what he has

722 The third power that characterizes Śiva in this triad is Raudrī, which concerns “those who desire bhoga… and dissolves pain and blocks all karmas.” See TĀ VI.56d-57: bubhukṣūnam [em.; bubhutsūnam Ed.] ca raudrikā… drāvayitṛ rujām raudrī roddhrēt cākhilakarmanām. Gnoli (1999: 140) also reads the passage as referring to those who desire bhoga (bubhukṣu) and not to those who desire “awakening” (bubhutsu). On Vāma and Jyeṣṭhā see also Jayaratha ad TĀ XIII.207, where he quotes one and a half stanzas from an early source unknown to me:

\[\text{vāmā sāṃsāravamanā śvarūpāvarānāṃtika} \]

“[That power called] Left (Vāma), is that which emits forth (vamana) the world of transmigrating existence, having as her nature self-concealment.”

and

\[\text{kramaṇa sarvabhogāptasāṃskārārthaśaikapaddhitih} \]

“Gradually, desiring to transcend the endless succession of entities, which derive from the latent traces acquired through all past experience, she becomes completely expanded as the Superior (Jyeṣṭhā), the only path to liberation.”

723 Abhinavagupta actually chooses to conclude the eleventh chapter of Tantrasāra, devoted to śaktipāta, with two stanzas summarizing these opposite movements of concealment and grace: See Tantrasāra XI (ed. KSTS), 128:

\[\text{yathā nirargalasvātmavātantryāt paramesvarah} \]
\[\text{ācchādayen nijam dhāma tathā vivṛtyayād api} \]
\[\text{aprābuḍdhē 'pi vā dhāmni svasmin buddhavad ācāret} \]
\[\text{bhāyo budheta vā so 'yam śaktipāto 'napaśyakaḥ} \]

“Just as the supreme Lord can conceal his light through his own unobstructed freedom, in the same way he can also reveal it. And, even when his light is not shining (lit. awakened) he can behave as if he were enlightened, or he can [actually] become enlightened again. And this śaktipāta is autonomous.”
been discussing up to that point is the grace of Śiva alone—the only type that leads to liberation—and not that of other divinities, worshipped in different traditions.⁷²⁴

But this śaktipāta from the highest Lord [i.e. Śiva] is the one which separates from the impurity (mala) called ignorance, [and] therefore it reveals the Śiva-state. For the Śiva-state does not shine forth because of any other kind [of śaktipāta, i.e. that is not from Śiva]. For this reason it is said in the Svacchandatantra that there are three hundred and sixty-three (363) advocates of other doctrines, such as Višṇu etc., wandering inside the differentiated level of reality (māyā) [and therefore not truly liberated]. Only Śaiva knowledge, however, bestows the attainment of Śivahood. And [only] the śaktipāta ending with the attainment of Śiva is discussed [here].⁷²⁵

According to Abhinavagupta, Śiva’s concealment technically comes to an end with his śaktipāta,⁷²⁶ even if liberation may occur only later, or after death. On the other hand, anyone who has not received such grace is considered to be under Śiva’s power of concealment. This includes all those who have not been initiated into Śaivism, mostly because they follow other traditions, and those who were initiated but later rejected the mantras or the rituals they were taught and in some cases joined non-Śaiva traditions.

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⁷²⁴ See TĀ XIII.276cd-279:

patyuḥ parasmād eṣa śaktipātaḥ sa vai malā || 276 ||
ajñānākhyātāḥ viyokte śīvaḥ śīvakāśākaḥ ||
nānyena śīvaḥ āvā ṣamprakṣāte || 277 ||
svacchandaśāstraḥ tenokaṁ vādinaṁ tu śatatravām ||
triṣāṣṭyabhyadhikāṁ bhantaṁ vaisṇavādyam niśāntare || 278 ||
śīvaśānām kevalaṁ ca śivatāpattidāyakam ||
śivatāppattiparyāntaḥ śaktipātaḥ ca carecarne || 279 ||

⁷²⁵ The passage from the Svacchandatantra Abhinavagupta is referring to (SvT X.680-681, 287 in KSTS ed., vol. 5b) occurs towards the end of a parenthetical section (282-288) in the middle of the exposition on the higher planes of the universe. According to Arraj (1988), this section of the Svacchanda constitutes a later addition to the text. “This parenthetical section”—he writes—“praises the exclusive Śaiva knowledge of these higher planes, and thus, by implication, of the way to authentic liberation. This section largely consists of a simple, negative listing of rival sects, whose identity, characteristic tenets and shortcomings are then clarified by Kṣemarāja. As evidence that redactors interpolated this section, the dialogue closing this section and resuming the description of the water plane, echoes the precise wording of the verse preceding this section” (242). This may suggest that this kind of religious competition became more acute at a time later than the initial composition of this tantra.

⁷²⁶ See Tantrasāra, 127²-³: na tu uppanāṣaktipātasya tirobhāvo 'sti... “but this power of concealment is not [active] for someone who has [received] śaktipāta.
Jayaratha clarifies that the latter kind of people are just hypocrites who have not really received śaktipāta, but pretended to have devotion and faith in order to receive initiation. Even such deceptive behavior, however, is the result of Śiva’s will alone, enacted through his power of concealment. People of this kind were presumably a minority and they are not at the center of Abhinavagupta’s concern in his discussion on obscuration.

The non-dual Śaiva doctrine posits that the Supreme Lord conceals himself in his creation by manifesting as a descending series of forms corresponding to the descending sequence of levels of reality (tattvas). This teaching provides Abhinavagupta with a rational explanation to claim that only the Śaiva religion can lead to the ultimate goal: since nothing exists in reality other than Śiva, all other divinities, such as Viṣṇu, because they are just lower manifestations of Śiva are inherently limited. He writes,

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727 Abhinavagupta devotes only a couple of stanzas to the person leaving the Śaiva religion in chapter XIII. See, for example TĀ XIII.120cd-121ab:

\[
\text{anābhāsitarūpa 'pi tadābhāsitéaye yat} \ || 120 ||
\text{sthitvā mantrādi samgrhyā tyajet so `syā tirobhavah} ||
\]

\[
\text{kaścid dhi vastuto `nugrahaśaktipātābhāvāt anābhāsitarūpo `pi parameśvarecchayaiva para-}
\text{vipralambhāya dāmbhikatāyā bhaktiśraddhādidasanena ābhāsitarūpatayeṣvā sthitvā śaiva-}
\text{sāstroktam mantrādi samyag–dīkṣādiśavam–grhītā vāścād adarābhāvāt yat tyajet so `syā}
\text{tirobhavah} \]

“The fact that a person, although his [Śiva] nature is not illuminated, by conducting himself as if shining with that [Śiva nature], may receive the mantras etc. [and later] reject them—that is concealment for him.”

Jyaratha’s commentary ad loc:

The fact that someone, although his [Śiva] nature is not illuminated, because he does not really have the descent of Śiva’s favoring power, by conducting himself as if enlightened—i.e. through Śiva’s will alone, by showing devotion and faith in order to deceive as a hypocrite (paravipralambhāya dāmbhikataye)—correctly, i.e. with initiation etc., takes the mantras etc. which are taught in Śiva’s teachings; [and that] later, because he has no true respect for them, he abandons them—that is concealment for him.”

The term samyak is a gloss of sam in saṅgrhītvā, and is further glossed “with initiation.” See also TĀ 354cd-355 and Jyaratha ad loc for another reference to a person who turns again the Śaiva religion after initiation: in this case he rejects a Śaiva ritual and resorts to a ritual of a lower, that is, non-Śaiva, system, which also results in his ruin.

728 TĀ XIII. 268cd-270ab:

\[
\text{viṣṇvādirāpata deya yā kācit sā nijātmanā} \ || 268 ||
\text{bhedayogavāsan māyāpadadhyavavyavasthitā} \]
Whatever form, such as Viṣṇu etc., the god [Śiva] takes on, because it is the result of his own self-differentiation, is located inside the level of differentiated reality (māyā). Therefore, [this] śaktipāta, though existing because of [its] connection with those forms [of Śiva], [only] grants a certain amount of experience, but not Śivahood at the end.

In other words, although these divinities are manifestations of Śiva, they are already part of his process of concealment by appearing within differentiated reality, the impure universe. Their grace cannot lead a soul to experience its identity with Śiva, the “Śiva-state.” Based on their respective level of qualification (adhipāra), these divinities can link a bound soul only up to a certain level of reality (tattva), but not to the highest, that of Śiva (śiva-tattva).

4.5.2 Unqualified Gurus: Obscuration of Teachers and Disciples

Abhinavagupta also declares that teachers of traditions other than Śaivism are not qualified to be gurus. They have neither received Śaiva śaktipāta nor gone through the various initiatory stages leading to their consecration as ācāryas—those who act as spiritual teachers and officiants for the rituals.

For somebody who has attained consecration through the progressive stages of samayi etc. is held to be a guru. And he is thus because of śaktipāta [from

\[
\text{tena tadrāpatāyogāc chaktipāṭah sthito 'pi san II 269 ll}
\]
\[
tāvantaṃ bhogam ādhatte paryante śivatāṃ na tu l
\]

729 Literally, “whatever state of having the form of Viṣṇu etc. exists in the god [Śiva].”
730 Literally, “because of the connection with [Śiva’s] state of having those forms.”
731 Jayaratha glosses the expression tāvantaṃ bhogam “a certain amount of experience,” with tadadhikāroccitam eva bhogam, “an experience appropriate to the [respective] qualification of these [divinities].”
732 TĀ XIII.308:

\[
\text{samayyādikramāl labdhaḥbhīṣekho hi guruṇa mataḥ l}
\]
\[
\text{sa ca śaktivaśād itthaṃ vaisnavādīṣu ko 'nvayaḥ II 308 ll}
\]

733 One must not think that Abhinavagupta here is contradicting his view on the spontaneously perfected guru, who does not need to formally undertake the various initiatory stages. The fact that this special teacher attains Śaiva knowledge through intuition is itself a demonstration that he received a high degree of Śaiva śaktipāta.
In this way what connection can there be [to the state of a guru] in the case of Vaiṣṇavas etc.?

Abhinavagupta here presumably intends to say that teachers who are Vaiṣṇava or belong to other non-Śaiva systems are not qualified to act as Śaiva gurus and teach Śaiva knowledge, not that they cannot act as gurus in their own tradition. Later, in fact, in a different context he explains that a guru who has authority in a certain system is a guru within that system, otherwise he is a “non-guru.”

While in the majority of stanzas Abhinavagupta uses the expression “Vaiṣṇavas and others” (Vaiṣṇavādi), at times he alludes more explicitly to these “other” systems: they are Buddhists and Jains; followers of the orthodox Vedic tradition, as well as of classical philosophical schools (such as Nyāya, Sāṅkhya and Vedānta); and members of non-Tantric Śaiva traditions, the Atimārga and lay Śivas. It is worth noticing, however, that the stanza just quoted introduces a passage that appears to be particularly targeted at the Vaiṣṇavas, specifically to its Tantric school known as Pāñcarātra. As Sanderson explains in a recent study devoted to the rise and predominance of Śaivism in the early medieval period, between the seventh and twelfth centuries the Vaiṣṇava religion went

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734 The text reads śaktivaśāt, which Jayaratha glosses as pārameśvarāt chaktipatāt, thereby emphasizing the point Abhinavagupta makes: that the Descent of Power that grants the state of a guru is only the one from Śiva.
735 I followed Jayaratha’s interpretation of glossing ittham twice.
736 TĀ XIII.350cd-351ab. The expression “non-guru” is a translation of gurvantaram, literally “other than guru,” which Abhinavagupta uses playing on the other meaning of the compound gurvantaram as “other gurus.”
737 See TĀ XIII.271cd-272ab for a reference to the Sāṅkhya; and XIII.345cd-347ab for references to the other systems. As for the Śaiva Siddhānta, although Abhinavagupta regards it as a rival school and criticizes several aspects of its doctrine, he does not include its followers among the victims of concealment. The gurus of this tradition are fully qualified to teach Śaiva knowledge, even if they teach a dualistic ontology. In his view, their śaktipāta is liberating, even if it does not unite them with the highest form of Śiva.
738 About ten stanzas: TĀ XIII.309-319ab.
739 See, example, TĀ IV.22ab, where Abhinavagupta, speaking about followers of non-Śaiva traditions, refers to the Vaiṣṇavas as Pāñcarātra (pācarātrika-vairiṇca-saugatāder…); and in TĀ IV.29, the reference to paraprakṛti (Śupreme Matter) in relation to the Vaiṣṇavas is an allusion to the doctrine of Pāñcarātra.
through a period of decline, in parallel with its loss of royal patronage. Before flourishing again, and while still “in the shadow of Śaivism,” Vaiśṇavism developed a scriptural tradition known as Pāñcarātra. Based on strong evidence, Sanderson suggests that this literature, which likely originated in Kashmir, borrowed heavily—in particular its Tantric ritual system—from the Tantric form of Śaivism (Mantramārga), which was the predominant tradition in that region.\textsuperscript{740} He writes,

It is highly probable in my view that those texts are … the product of a thorough reformation in which Vaiśṇavas followed the example of the already flourishing Mantramārga in order to provide themselves with a substantially new ritual system that would enable them to compete more effectively with their rivals. I am led to this conclusion by the convergence of various considerations. Firstly, the ritual system prescribed by the Pāñcarātra scriptures is remarkably close to that of the Śaiva Mantramārga in its repertoire. … Secondly, I see no evidence that any of the surviving Pāñcarātra texts goes back as far as the Śaiva texts that they so closely resemble. … Thirdly, these early Pāñcarātra texts show clear signs of having drawn from Śaiva sources.\textsuperscript{741}

In light of Sanderson’s considerations, it is possible that Abhinavagupta’s sarcastic reference to the practice of overhearing and stealing Śaiva knowledge, and of mixing Śaiva scriptures with their own doctrine, is directed specifically at the Pāñcarātra tradition of Kashmir, even if he uses the expression “the Vaiśṇavas etc.”:\textsuperscript{742}

\textsuperscript{740} Sanderson 2009: 61. Sanderson also points out that although a Vaiśṇava tradition called Pāñcaratra existed earlier than the Śaiva Mantramārga—as attested by references to it in the Mahābhāratha—“there is no evidence that this early Pāñcarātra has a Tantric ritual system of the kind that characterizes the Samhītās of the surviving corpus of the Pāñcaratrikā scripture,” which, he suggests, was instead borrowed from Tantric Śaivism.

\textsuperscript{741} Sanderson 2009: 61-62. Among the evidence that Sanderson finds compelling is the fact that “while the ritual systems taught in the scriptures of the Pāñcarātra are generally coherent, no less so than those of the Śaivas, the texts retain elements that make sense in the Śaiva world but not in the Vaiśṇava; and in some cases we find a degree of awkwardness that is consistent only with a clumsy attempt to adapt Śaiva materials to their new context.” (2009: 66-67).

\textsuperscript{742} TĀ XIII.317cd-319ab:

\begin{quote}
\textit{vaiśṇavādiḥ śaivaśāstram melayan nijāśāsane} \| 317 \|
\textit{dhrvam saṃśāyam āpanna ubhayabhraṣṭātāṃ vrajaṃ} \| 317 \|
\textit{svadṛṣṭau paraḍṛṣṭau ca samayollanghanād asau} \| 318 \|
\textit{pratyavāyam yato ‘bhīyeti caret tan neddṛsam kramam} \|
\end{quote}
The Vaiśṇavas etc., mixing the Śaiva scriptures with their own teachings, surely becoming doubtful, go to a state of having fallen from both [systems]. And by transgressing the religious conventions of their own doctrine and the doctrine of others, they commit a sin;\(^{743}\) therefore one should not behave in this manner.\(^ {744}\)

Abhinavagupta adopts harsh language for both gurus and disciples of this tradition, both deemed sinful and in need of punishment: the guru because he has stolen the knowledge, like a thief, and the disciple because he is devoted to such a guru, who lacks qualification and in fact requires rites of expiation. He writes,\(^ {745}\)

> And the one who has taken that [Śaiva] knowledge by a trick, or by overhearing etc. should go through an expiation rite. Therefore how could such a person have qualification for the [Śaiva] system? A disciple who desires fruits [and] who makes his attainment dependent on this [kind of teacher] alone would certainly burn in hell, because of having served one who needs reparatory rites. The fact that [a disciple] is joined to such a guru by Śiva is a type of obscuration. His devotion to him is not said to be [a sign of] śaktipāta.

It is not only the disciple who is under Śiva’s power of obscuration, but the guru too. The author actually describes the latter as the most bound of all souls, for he remains involved in the world of plurality in spite of having acquired Śaiva knowledge.\(^ {746}\) Abhinavagupta

\(^{743}\) Literally, “he goes to the opposite course.”

\(^{744}\) Literally, “one should not practice such a sequence.”

\(^{745}\) TĀ XIII.309-311:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{chadmāpasravanādyais tu tajjānam grhnato bhavet} & \| 309 \|
\text{prāyaścittam atas tādṛg adhikāry atra kim bhavet} & \| 309 \|
\text{phalākānvāyatah śīyas tadekāyattasiddhikah} & \| 310 \|
\text{dhruvaṁ pacyeta narake prāyaścītyupasevanār} & \| 310 \|
\text{tirobhavapraṇārao 'yam yat tādṛśi niyojitah} & \| 310 \|
\text{gurau śīvena tadbhaktiḥ śaktipāto 'syā nocyate} & \| 311 \|
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{746}\) TĀ XIII.314cd-316ab:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sa hi bhedaikavr̥ttivam śivaśāna śruta 'py alam} & \| 314 \|
\text{nojñhatī dr̥jham vāmādhiśhitas tat paśāttumah} & \| 314 \|
\text{śīvenaiva tirobhaḥvyena sthāpito niyater balat} & \| 315 \|
\text{kathāikāram patipadaṁ prayaṭtu paratantritah} & \| 315 \|
\end{align*}
\]

“For he [the guru who follows Vaiśnavism etc.], though having thoroughly heard the Śaiva knowledge, does not abandon his engagement in duality alone. Therefore he is firmly possessed by the Vāmā [power of Śiva], [and] hence (tat) the most bound [of all souls]. Having been
recommends that, once a student realizes that he has been following such an unqualified and deceitful teacher, he should abandon him and devote himself to the true knowledge—which, in his view, is equivalent to saying that he should approach a qualified Śaiva guru. In his theoretical framework, however, because everything takes place through Śiva’s will alone, this path out of obscuration and towards true Śaiva knowledge can only occur through saktipāta.

4.5.3 From Obscuration to Grace: “Conversion” and Ascension towards the Highest Degree of Śaiva Knowledge

Because they lack Śaiva initiation, devotees of other sects—gurus or disciples in their own tradition—are not qualified to teach, nor even to learn Śaiva knowledge. If, however, as a result of receiving Śaiva saktipāta they feel the desire to “convert” and to be initiated into Śaivism, they must first go through a preliminary purification ritual

747 TĀ XIII.312-314ab:

\[
\begin{align*}
yādā tu vaicitryaśaśāj jāntyāt tasya taśrām & | \\
vipartaprayatvatvam jñāṇam tasmād upāhareṇ || 312 || \\
tat ca tyajet pāpavrīţīṁ bhavet tu jñānatatparaḥ & | \\
yathā ca vairād gṛhyārthāṁ tāṁ nighriṇāti bhāpātiḥ || 313 || \\
vaiśṇavādes tathā śaivaṁ jñānam āhṛtya sanmatih & |
\end{align*}
\]

“But when [the disciple] might become aware, by various means, of the fact of his being engaged in wrong conduct of this kind, he should take away the knowledge from him and abandon him, who has sinful behavior, and should become devoted to knowledge. Like a king, who takes away [stolen] wealth from a thief and punishes him, in the same way a wise-minded person, having taken away the Śaiva knowledge from a [guru] follower of Viṣṇu or other [deities], [punishes him by leaving].”

For the ritual of “taking away knowledge” (jñāṇāhṛti) see TĀ XXIII 50b-61. In that context, however, the guru–disciple relation is reversed: it is the teacher who takes away knowledge from a disciple who has no faith in him, and, by doing so, obscures him.

748 Abhinavagupta in this section of chapter XIII makes other references to Śvacchanda and other nondualist tantras, in order to provide scriptural evidence for the idea that only Śaiva knowledge can liberate, while other sects cannot lead to perfection or qualify for this higher knowledge. See TĀ XIII.306 (Kulakālividhī, a lost text); TĀ XIII.307 (Śvacchanda I.18b); TĀ XIII.316cd-317ab (Śvacchanda X.1141); and TĀ XIII.319cd-320ab (Gahvaratantra, a lost text).
called “extraction of sectarian marks” (liṅgoddhṛti or liṅgoddhāra). The metaphor Abhinavagupta uses to rationalize this ritual procedure is steeped in sarcasm: just as a bad-smelling pot must be cleaned before being perfumed with flowers, so too Vaiśnāvas and members of other sects must be purified before being initiated into Śaivism. In chapter XXII of the Tantrāloka, which he devotes to this purification ritual, Abhinavagupta clarifies what these individuals need to be extracted from: their link to levels of reality below the level of Śiva—all of which are wrongly taught as ultimate by all other scriptures. Only the Śaiva doctrine, which, he says, is superior to all these other systems, can prevent a person from being reborn as a bound soul.

749 The liṅgoddhāra ritual was also performed in the dualist Śaiva Siddhānta tradition. See, for example, Kiraṇatāntra, Yogapāda VI and Somāsambhupaddhati IX.6b-17. Since the main part of the ritual was to bring the disciple back down from the reality-level (tattva) to which he was supposedly linked, the Somāsambhū (ad 7-8) lists the various tattvas considered the highest for each religious sect, thus establishing a hierarchy among traditions other than Tantric Śaiva. Among the schools listed, Buddhists rank lowest (buddhī- tattva), followed by the Jains (gūna-tattva), the Vedāntins (prakṛti-tattva), and the Vaiśnāvas/Bhāgavatas (puruṣa-tattva), and followed at the top by two pre-Tantric Śaiva sects, the Pāśupata (māyā-tattva) and the Mahāvrata (śuddhavidyā-tattva). See Brunner-Lachaux 1977: xlviii, 550-558 (see in particular fn. 14 and 15, on 550-552).

750 TĀ XIII. 280cd-283ab:

teneha vaiśnāvādṛtaḥ nādhikāraḥ kathañcana || 280 ||
tev hi bhedaikavṛttivād abhede dāravarjītāḥ ||
vātantrīrtyā tu māheśasya te 'pi cec chivatōnmukhāḥ || 281 ||
dvignām samśkritīvāṣyā evām liṅgoddhṛṣṭāh dīkṣayā ||
duṣṭādhiḥvāsaṅgāme puspāḥ kumbhō 'dhīvāsyate || 282 ||
dvīgūpo 'syā sa samśkāro netthām śuddhe ghate vidiḥ ||

Therefore the Vaiśnāvas etc. do not have any qualification (adhikāra) with respect to this [Śaiva doctrine]. For, since they are engaged in duality alone, they are far removed from non-duality. However, if, as a result of Śiva’s freedom, they too aspire to [attain] the state of Śiva, they have [to undergo] a twofold purification ritual, through extraction of sectarian marks (liṅgoddhṛti) and initiation. A pot is scented with flowers [only] after the bad odor has disappeared. Its purification [process] is twofold, unlike the procedure for a pot that is clean.

The passage above hints that Śaiva śaktipāta is the prerequisite for this ritual with the expression “as a result of Śiva’s freedom.” In chapter XXII Abhinavagupta states it more explicitly: see stanzas 11d-12ab:

darśanāntarasamsthiteḥ prakṛtaḥ uddharāṇaḥthatvatvā śivaśaktīrṇataḥ hi ||

751 TĀ XXII.7cd-9:

ato hi dhvānaye 'rtho 'yaṁ śivatattvādhareṣv api || 7 ||
tattveṣu yojīnayaṣṭi punar uddharāṇyaḥ ||
samāstāśāstrakāthitavatvāsvaṅkṛtyadāvīnāḥ || 8 ||
śivāgamasya sarvebhyo 'py āgamebhyo viśiṣṭatā ||
śivajñānena ca vinā bhūyo 'pi paśuṭodbhavaḥ || 9 ||
According to Abhinavagupta, a person who desires the kind of attainment that only Śaiva knowledge can grant, but who still resorts to inferior scriptures and teachers, is ruined. On the other hand, he considers the act of leaving behind inferior scriptures and inferior teachers for superior ones to be a sign of śaktipāta. Abhinavagupta thus implicitly encourages the practice of learning from different teachers as a way of attaining progressively higher degrees of knowledge. He supports his view by quoting two beautiful verses he attributes to the Mataśāstra, an early scriptural source now lost:

Like a black bee, desirous of nectar goes from one flower to another flower, in the same way the disciple who desires knowledge goes from one guru to another guru. Having approached a teacher who is devoid of power, how could he attain liberation and knowledge? When a tree has its roots destroyed, O goddess, whence would its flowers, fruits etc. [be produced]?

“From this [passage of the MVT] the following meaning is implicitly understood: even one who has been connected to a level of reality inferior to the reality-level of Śiva can be extracted back (punar). The Śaiva scriptures, which deliver from the [lower] realities taught by all [other] systems, are superior to all scriptures. Without Śaiva knowledge one is born again in the bound state.”

Abhinavagupta quotes the first of these two stanzas also in TĀ XXII.45-46ab, referring to Somānanda, who had many teachers. There he attributes the passage to the Śrīmataśāstra.

Tā XIII 356-357:

*yas tārdhvordhavapathaprepsur adharaṃ gurum āgamam l
jihāsec chaktipātena sa dhanyah prnomukhīkṛtah || 356 ll
tat evaśaśtrestu śaiveśy eva nirūapyate l
śastrāntararthānāśvastān pratī samśkāro vidhiḥ || 357 ll

“But the one who, desiring to reach a higher and higher path, abandons the inferior guru and scripture, is fortunate, his longing having been kindled by śaktipāta. Precisely for this reason, here in the Śaiva scriptures themselves the purificatory ritual [of initiation] is taught [only] for those who do not believe in the teachings of other scriptures.”

Abhinavagupta quotes the first of these two stanzas also in TĀ XXII.45-46ab, referring to Somānanda, who had many teachers. There he attributes the passage to the Śrīmataśāstra.

TĀ XIII.335-336:

*āmodārthī yathā bhṛṅgaḥ puspā puspāntaram vrajet l
vijñāntarthī tathā śiṣyo guror gurvantaram vrajet || 335 ll
śaktīḥtīnam gurum prāpya moksajñāne kathāṃ śrayer l
naṣṭamūle drume devī kutah puspaphalādikam || 336 ll

Literally “fragrance.”
Abhinavagupta’s need to provide scriptural evidence in support of the practice of approaching various gurus—or even abandoning one’s own guru after being initiated by him—may stem from the fact that the dominant view in Śaivism and other traditions was generally contrary to this practice. He even uses his exegetical skills to neutralize scriptural evidence in support of the contrary position, which regarded as a sin even keeping the company of devotees belonging to other lineages.\footnote{757}

I mentioned earlier that Abhinavagupta establishes a hierarchy among Śaiva systems, and their respective gurus;\footnote{758} and how, among those who have received śaktipāta, the modality of ascent—gradual or direct—to the highest level of Śaiva knowledge, represented by the Trika tradition, is determined by the degree of śaktipāta. In a similar way, he claims that non-Śaiva (including non-Tantric Śaiva) traditions too teach different levels of knowledge, as if they represented progressive steps on a ladder to be taken under the guidance of increasingly more elevated teachers, eventually leading to Śaiva knowledge, and, within it, to the wisdom of the Trika. Abhinavagupta writes:\footnote{759}

\footnote{757} TĀ XIII.349-351ab:

\begin{verbatim}
gurvantararate mūḍhe āgamāntarasevake || 349 || 
pratyavāyo ya āmnātah sa iatham iti grhyatām ||
yo yatra śāstre 'dhikrtaḥ sa tatra gurur ucyate || 350 ||
tatrānadhikṛto yas tu tad gurvantarame ucyate ||
\end{verbatim}

Therefore one should never doubt the fact that [people have] a large number of teachers. The sin stated in the scriptures: “[one should not have contact] with the ignorant person who is devoted to other teachers (gurvantara) [and] who resorts to other scriptures,” should be understood in the following way: the one who has authority in a particular system is said to be a guru in that system, [and] the one who does not have authority in that system is said to be a non-guru (gurvantara).

\footnote{758} From lowest to highest: Śaiva Saiddhānta, Vāma, Dakṣina, Mata, Kula, Kaula and Trika. See TĀ XIII.300cd-301 and 320cd-326ab (pp. 265-66 and fn. 706 and 707) quoted in subsection 4.4.2 (“The Hierarchy in the Streams of Śaiva Revelation: Bhairava and Non-Bhairava Gurus”).

\footnote{759} TĀ XIII.344-348:

\begin{verbatim}
ā tapanān moṭakāntam yasya me 'sti gurukramaḥ ||
tasya me sarvaśisyasya nopadeśadaridratā || 344 ||
śrīmatā kallaṭenethaṁ guruṁ tu nyārāpyata ||
aham apy ata evadhaḥśastradrṣṭikutāhalāt || 345 ||
\end{verbatim}
The venerable teacher Kallatā explained: “I, who had a series of teachers, from Tapanā to Moṭaka, disciple of all, have no poverty of teachings.” I too, precisely for this reason, out of curiosity concerning the viewpoint of the lower systems, served various teachers, Nyāyikas, Vedic, Buddhists, Jainists, Vaiṣṇavas, etc. One should become aware of the fact that there are various degrees of excellence [even among teachers of other traditions], according to the degree of excellence of [their] knowledge, [which is determined] by the prescription of rituals and yoga [of the respective systems]: ordinary religion [i.e. Śruti and Smṛti], the religion concerning the Self [i.e. Vedānta], the Atimārga etc. In the Mālinīvijayottaratantra those who pose the questions, the sages Nārada and others, were previously Vaiṣṇavas, Buddhists, followers of the Siddhānta etc. Then, gradually, their eyes longed for the moon, which is the knowledge of the meaning of the Trika.

The last sentence of this passage makes evident that for Abhinavagupta the ascension towards higher degrees of knowledge does not stop with saktipāta and initiation in what he regards as the lowest among the Mantramārga traditions—the dualist Šaiva Siddhānta.

Eventually, and inevitably, it culminates in the Trika.

Abhinavagupta concludes the chapter on saktipāta by reiterating the superiority of the Šaiva revelation. The fact that the procedure of extraction of sectarian marks is unique to Šaivism—he argues—proves that Šaivism is indeed superior to all other systems: other gods, such as Brahmā or Viṣṇu, who in their omniscience are aware of the

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760 This the is final stanza of Kallatā’s commentary on Spandakārikā. See Dyczkowski 1992a: 236.
761 See TĀ XXXVII.60-61 for Abhinavagupta’s mathikā gurus: Vāmanātha, Bhūtrāja’s son, Laṅṣmanagupta (Trikā), Śambhunātha (Kaula); and TĀ XXXVI.11-13 for their respective Šaiva schools: dualist of Āmardaka, dualist-nondualist of Śrīnātha, non-dualist of Tryambaka, and the Fourth School, (Ardhatryambaka). See also Pandey 1963: 11-12; and Rastogi 1987: 34-35.
762 Śruti are the “revealed” scripture (the Vedas), and Smṛti are the Veda-based religious literature.
763 Atimārga refers to the non-Tantric or proto-Tantric Šaiva ascetic orders, distinguished from the Mantramārga. Jayaratha’s interpretation of the term as referring to the classical philosophical schools such as Sāṅkhya and Patañjali yoga here is dubious.
superiority of Śaivism, did not include such procedure in their teachings in order to favor only those who want to rise upward, to ever higher systems of knowledge. While Abhinavagupta usually presents other gods within a non-dualistic world-view as lower, and limited, forms of Śiva, in this final passage of the chapter he adds a quasi-humorous twist to justify the existence of other doctrines:

Thus Viṣṇu and other [gods], knowing only the Śaiva truth, instructed some people in that way [i.e. according to Śaiva teachings]. Those [recipients, however], out of delusion, clung to a different view. Having seen that their mind was in such [deluded state], incapable of grasping the truth, Brahmā, Viṣṇu etc., though awakened, taught them this way [i.e. the lower teachings].

764 See TĀ XIII.358-359:

\[
\begin{align*}
ataś căpy uttamam śaivam yo 'nyatra patitah sa hi \mid
\text{And for the [following] reason too the Śaiva [system] is the highest: one who has dropped out from some other [lower system] (anyatra) is, in this system, to be favored [and led] higher and higher, while [this is] not [the case for] one who has dropped out from this [system] into some other [lower system] (kvacit). This is precisely the reason why Brahmā, Viṣṇu etc., who are omniscient, did not prescribe in their own scriptures any ritual of extraction of sectarian marks etc."
\end{align*}
\]

I followed Harunaga Isaacson’s suggestion (personal communication, January 2008) to understand anyatra here in the meaning of anyataḥ. Gnoli (1999: 324, fn. 5) actually regards the anyatra as a textual mistake for anyataḥ. As for the kvacit, I followed Jayaratha’s interpretation. Alternatively one can read na kvacit as “never,” in which case the sentence would read: “but never somebody who backslides from this [Śaiva system].”

765 See TĀ XIII. 268cd-269ab, quoted in a previous section. Here, however, Abhinavagupta has presented Viṣṇu, Brahmā and other gods as “omniscient” and not as “limited,” in order to claim that they purposefully avoided including the extraction of sectarian marks in their systems because they knew that Śaivism taught a higher truth. Therefore, the author needs to avoid the possible question from an objector: “If they were omniscient and knew the highest teachings, why did they teach the lower ones?” By shifting the limitation from the gods to the disciples who learned from them, he avoids the risk of contradicting himself. See Jayaratha’s introduction ad XIII.360.

766 TĀ XIII.360-361:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Itthaṃ viṣṇvādayah śaivaparamārthaikavedinah} \mid
\text{If the text of the commentary is correct, it is not clear to me why Jayaratha glosses “in this way” (tathā) with “inferior knowledge” (apakṛṣṭajñāna), as opposed to “superior knowledge,” which is what Abhinavagupta seems to say. It is the tathā in stanza 361 that should be glossed as “inferior knowledge.”}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{katāsiṣṭi prati tathādikṣus te mohād vimatīṃ śrītāḥ} \mid
\text{tathāvīdhām eva matīṃ satyasamasparsanākṣamāṃ} \mid
\text{dryśvīśāṃ brahmaviṣṇvādāya buddhāya api tathoditam} \mid
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{360} \mid
\text{361} \mid
\end{align*}
\]
In other words, these omniscient gods indeed knew and taught the only existing truth, that is, that Śaiva teachings are the highest; however, because the minds of the disciples were limited, the gods were forced to adapt their teaching to a lower level of truth. “Thus”—Abhinavagupta adds in the half-stanza that closes the chapter—“I have examined saktipāta through reasoning and scriptural authority (āgama).”

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter was devoted to Abhinavagupta’s doctrine of “grace in degrees,” his theory that Śiva’s grace-giving power manifests in nine main levels of strength—Intense, Moderate, and Mild, each further divided in three sublevels—based on which he constructs a hierarchical typology of gurus and initiated disciples. It has been shown that, even though Śaiva textual sources occasionally allude to the idea that saktipāta may be intense or mild, such a nine-fold division is not based on any scriptural source, nor is it mentioned in the works of previous exegetes of the tradition. Abhinavagupta’s own declaration, that this doctrine was revealed to him by his guru Śambhunātha, serves as an implicit acknowledgment of the lack of explicit scriptural foundation for this theory, even though he claims it is based on the veiled teachings of the authoritative Mālinīvijayottaratantra. This part of my investigation aimed at understanding Abhinavagupta’s complex exposition of this doctrine in the Tantrāloka, his exegesis of the Mālinī, his underlying motives in constructing such a hierarchical system, and its ideological and pragmatic ramifications.

768 TĀ XIII.362ab.
The most obvious implication of such a theory is that by merely looking at the correspondences Abhinavagupta creates between the various degrees of śaktipāta and the types of initiates, we gain a sense of the relative status he assigns to the various practitioners within the Śaiva community. This standing is based on the presumed level of knowledge a practitioner attained through Śiva’s grace-bestowing power, sanctioned by a particular type of initiation or consecration. The highest status is reserved for those who become gurus, or at least achieve liberation (mokṣa) while still living, whom he categorizes as recipients of an Intense kind of śaktipāta. Next in the hierarchy are those who, receiving a Moderate śaktipāta, attain liberation after death. Among these practitioners are also those who, based on their inclination, aspire to the second goal promised by the Śaiva Tantric tradition—the experience of otherworldly pleasures and supernatural powers (bhoga). In the author’s view, the increasingly higher inclination for such goals other than liberation is the consequence of a progressively lower level of śaktipāta, which is considered in the Mild range if the desire for such experience prevails over the desire for liberation. I have suggested, however, that Abhinavagupta’s exposition of such a doctrine is not intended only to assert his view that the state supposedly achieved by a guru and by liberation in this life is superior to liberation at death, and that liberation is a higher goal than the attainment of magical powers and other desirable fruits. Rather, he appears to have a secondary agenda for this theory.

By pointing to the almost exclusive attention the author devotes to the exposition of the Intense level of śaktipāta—more than one hundred stanzas, as opposed to five stanzas expounding on the Moderate level and a single stanza explaining the Mild degree—I showed that Abhinavagupta’s exposition concerns more the Śaiva guru or
“officiant” (ācārya) than the doctrine of grace in itself. I have argued that Abhinavagupta’s primary agenda in expounding the theory of śaktipāta-tāratamya, the “gradation” of Śiva’s grace-bestowing power, is to claim scriptural validation and divine sanction for his hierarchical classification of Śaiva gurus. The degrees of śaktipāta that Abhinava reads into the passage of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra (I.42-45), whose hidden teachings he claims to unpack in his distorting exegesis, are in fact only the three levels of Intense śaktipāta—higher, medium, and lower—and not the other six degrees below these, which concern the vast majority of Śaiva initiates. This passage of the Mālinī, however, makes no mention of particular degrees of śaktipāta, nor does it appear to focus on the guru. Furthermore, the cases it describes of individuals touched by Śiva’s power do not even have a clear correspondence to Abhinavagupta’s classification of recipients of Intense śaktipāta. Through the analysis of the Sanskrit passage, I have shown, however, how Abhinavagupta achieves his interpretation only by forcing the syntax in an unnatural way.

Abhinavagupta’s main concern is to demonstrate the superiority of the “intuitive” (prātibha) guru—one whose knowledge is “intuitive” (prātibhajñāna or pratibhā) or “spontaneously” arisen, not imparted by another teacher—over the guru who has been instructed and ritually initiated (saṃskṛta) by another guru. Abhinavagupta achieves his purpose by making the former, the spontaneously perfected guru (sāmsiddhika-guru) or “not created guru” (akalpita) a recipient of a higher degree of Intense śaktipāta than the ritually initiated and consecrated guru (saṃskṛta-guru), whom he also calls a “created guru” (kalpita-guru), thus endorsing this higher status through divine will.
The hierarchy of gurus Abhinavagupta establishes is not merely a theoretical statement. Rather, it is part of a strategy to legitimize the power of the gnostics (jñānins)—gurus who had not necessarily been initiated and consecrated as officiants (ācāryas) through the traditional rituals—within the larger community of Tantric Śaivas. Abhinavagupta’s theory thus overtly challenges the religious authority of the Śaiva Siddhānta, the predominant Śaiva tradition in the Kashmir of his time, at the doctrinal, institutional, and individual levels. First, as I mentioned throughout this study, the idea that one could attain liberation without being ritually initiated contradicted one of the main tenets of the Śaiddhāntika view: that a soul’s innate impurity (mala) could be destroyed only through ritual. More significant in term of religious authority, however, is the fact that the Śaiva Siddhānta regarded as legitimate teachers and officiants (ācārya) of the tradition only those who had been ritually anointed through a special consecration ceremony (abhiṣeka) by another officiant, who in turn had previously attained that status and public recognition by undergoing the same procedure. It was through this structure of formal empowerment that the Śaiva Siddhānta “clergy” maintained control over who entered the community of initiates and, most importantly, who became qualified as ācārya. In addition to becoming spiritual preceptors, these Tantric officiants had the religious authority to perform desiderative (kāmya) rites for their patrons, including royal ones, which was perhaps their primary source of income and prestige. I have shown that not only does Abhinavagupta claim for these gnostics the same authority in this desiderative domain of Śaiva practice, challenging the criticism of his Śaiddhāntika rivals, to which he explicitly alludes; he also attributes to the spontaneously perfected guru the power to perform the “gnostic” (non-ritual) kind of initiation, which bestows immediate
liberation. His most radical claim, however, is that “in the presence” of this kind of teacher (that is, if such a teacher is available in a nearby area), the ritually initiated teacher loses any qualification to perform his functions.

Such statements disputed the religious authority not only of Saiddhāntika ācāryas but also of non-Saiddhāntika gurus belonging to the non-dualist Śaiva cults, such as the Trika, which Abhinavagupta claims to represent—but who nonetheless had been ritually initiated in their specific tradition. This apparent inconsistency is resolved in the second part of Abhinavagupta’s exposition of his doctrine of grace in degrees, where he establishes various degrees of authority among Śaiva gurus based on their particular sect within the larger tradition. He ascribes ascending degrees of ṣaktipāta to the different Tantric Śaiva traditions, from the Śaiva Saiddhāntikas to the various non-dualist Śaiva cults, and he places the Trika, the system expounded in the Tantrāloka, at the top. He also reiterates this view in the final chapters of the text: while affirming the original unity and validity of the entire Śaiva scriptural revelation, he structures it hierarchically, from the Pāśupata tradition up to the teachings of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra. In so doing, he places his doctrine (i.e., his interpretation of the teachings of the Trika) at the apex of the Śaiva tradition. The Vaiṣṇavas and all other non-Śaiva religions, in this scheme, occupy the lower end of the spectrum: the descent of grace connected to them does not lead one to “Śiva-ness,” the ultimate goal, Viṣṇu being none other than a limited form of Śiva. Hence, Abhinavagupta uses this strategy of “grace in degrees” to establish authority in the transmission of Śaiva knowledge, serving well his agenda of affirming the superiority of his tradition and its gurus.
Conclusion

This study has analyzed the conceptualization of grace and devotion in Abhinavagupta’s doctrinal view within the broader context of his tradition, Tantric Śaivism. With this goal in mind, I adopted a twofold analytical framework. The first framework is philosophical, aimed at understanding the texts of the tradition from a purely doctrinal perspective, examining issues such as the relation between grace and devotion, the causes and prerequisites for divine favor and, more generally, the scope of individual and divine agency in the process leading to the moment of saktipāta, the descent of Śiva’s grace-giving power. The second analytical framework I have employed is socio-historical, aimed at understanding doctrine within the sectarian context that characterized the religious landscape of tenth to early eleventh century Kashmir. I have suggested that certain aspects of Abhinavagupta’s view, as well as his critique of the doctrine of the rival branch of the religion, the Śaiva Siddhānta, reflect an agenda of expanding the religious authority of his own tradition.

My inquiry began with an attempt to understand the respective roles of devotion (bhakti) and grace in Tantric Śaiva soteriology. I have shown that Tantric Śaivism, unlike the bhakīi-oriented traditions, does not hold devotion to be a means to liberation, nor even a means to draw the Lord’s favor. Rather, in Tantric Śaivism devotion itself is considered the consequence of grace, the characteristic sign that Śiva’s grace-bestowing power has descended upon a soul. The occurrence of saktipāta, in turn, is regarded as a prerequisite to qualify for dīkṣā, initiation, which Tantric Śaiva doctrine widely considers
the fundamental means for liberation. Thus, I have argued, in Tantric Śaivism devotion has no soteriological function in itself, serving simply as a “visible mark” of grace, while the central element of the soteriology is initiation. I have also highlighted that in most cases, when the texts of the tradition refer to bhakti as the sign of śaktipāta, they do not describe it in intensely emotional terms, as for instance an overpowering feeling of love for the Lord, or a deep longing generated by the sense of separation from him, two traits that often characterize Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava medieval devotional poetry. On the contrary, the simple request to be initiated and instructed in the Śaiva teachings, faith in Śiva and his scripture, or even an attitude of indifference towards worldly pursuits are all regarded as manifestations of devotion. These are all viewed as necessary and sufficient signs by which the guru can infer that śaktipāta has taken place for a particular individual, who is then qualified to receive initiation.

Even while this sequence, by which śaktipāta causes devotion to arise and leads to initiation, is common to both branches of Tantric Śaivism—the dualist tradition based on the Siddhānta Tantras and the non-dualist tradition based on the Bhairava Tantras—the doctrinal views of these two divisions diverge in several other respects. They differ in their understanding of what precedes this sequence, that is, what determines the occurrence of śaktipāta for an individual; the respective salvific functions of śaktipāta and initiation; and the way they understand devotion and religious practice in the post-initiatory phase. Based on the works of Rāmakāṇṭha and Abhinavagupta—the main figures, respectively, of the dualist and non-dualist branches of Tantric Śaiva post-scriptural exegesis—I have shown that their divergences on these doctrinal issues are shaped to a certain extent by the ontological views of the traditions they represent.
Whether or not a doctrine posits God, souls, and matter as ultimately separate shapes its view of what constitutes bondage and liberation, its delineation of which means have soteriological efficacy, and its teachings on the dynamics of grace and devotion.

In Tantric Śaivism the central question concerning the doctrine of Śiva’s grace—what determines whether and how śaktipāta occurs for a soul—is not the relation between human and divine agency, the idea of individual free will against that of predestination. Rather, the main concerns revolve solely around the question of the Lord’s autonomy: whether Śiva bestows grace out of his will, or depends on certain factors. I have pointed out that these other “factors,” however, are not related to individual choice and ethical behavior. In Tantric Śaiva doctrine, karma, the retributive power of individual action, constitutes one of the three main bonds for the soul (karman); thus even meritorious deeds do not become a means for grace. I have argued that the view found in some Saiddhāntika scriptures that Śiva’s grace-giving power descends on a soul when two karmas are in balance (karmasāmya), for instance, suggests a mechanistic idea of grace that escapes both individual and divine agency. It is precisely because no karma, good or bad, can bear fruit that karmasāmya is regarded as an auspicious occasion for grace to occur. A related view found in the work of Nārāyaṇaṅkha is that śaktipāta occurs if the power of karma is “neutralized” (karmakṣaya): in other words, grace descends upon the soul whose karma is exhausted or blocked by karmasāmya.

The other view within the Śaiva Siddhānta is the one best represented by Rāmakaṇṭha: that śaktipāta depends on the degree of “ripening” (paripāka) of a soul’s innate impurity (mala). While this transformation is caused by Śiva, the timing of this process depends on the nature of impurity itself and is therefore different for each soul,
which would seem to account for the fact that grace occurs at different moments for different souls. Nothing in his exposition, however, suggests any relevance of intentional human agency in this process of “ripening” that leads to śaktipāta. If anything, he alludes to a connection between the ripening of a soul’s impurity and the ripening of its karman, the progressive exhaustion of the retributive power of action through the person’s experiences in life. Rāmakaṇṭha overtly denies the possibility of a Lord who does not depend on any external factor to perform his functions, such as creation, destruction, and liberation. He argues that this view would imply the Lord’s partiality, a quality contrary to his nature. More importantly, however, he is concerned that postulating a Lord who acts out of will alone would undermine the law of cause and effect on which his ritualistic-oriented doctrine is based—that liberation can be attained only through the initiation ritual and through post-initiatory observances, consisting mostly of ritual as well. Since for Rāmakaṇṭha it is ritual that carries ultimate soteriological efficacy, devotion in the post-initiatory stage is understood to express itself as ritual worship.

Abhinavagupta, on the other hand—in accordance with the Śaiva scriptures expounding a non-dualistic view of the universe—maintains that nothing exists outside of Śiva, whose nature is an all-encompassing, completely autonomous Consciousness; and that, consequently, Śiva bestows grace out of his own will alone, without depending on any other factor. Out of this freedom he binds himself through his power of concealment (tirobhāva), by manifesting himself in various levels of differentiated reality, including individual souls and matter, down to the five gross elements; and out of the same autonomous will he liberates himself, through his power of grace (anugraha), and takes on again his original, undifferentiated form. This is precisely the argument
Abhinavagupta uses to defend his doctrinal position against the accusation that it suggests the Lord’s partiality: even if Śiva’s grace-bestowing power appears to favor a particular soul at a given time, ultimately no souls are separate from him. Thus, in this non-dualistic framework, grace is none other than Śiva’s choice to liberate himself through an act of self-grace.

This idea of the absolute autonomy of the Lord and his grace is also reflected in Abhinavagupta’s conceptualization of devotion, which, in his view, also manifests through Śiva’s will alone, regardless of karma and other factors. Moreover, in the absence of a divine “other,” in the sense of an ontological distinction between the Lord and the devotee, devotion acquires a different meaning and function. Since nothing exists outside of Śiva, devotion can only originate in Śiva. It is the Lord’s power (śakti) that manifests at the individual level as devotion (bhakti), not only through his grace-bestowing power, but also as his grace-bestowing power. Abhinavagupta maintains that in the case of seekers who aspire to liberation as the only goal (mumukṣu), this “grace-devotion” does not depend on any cause other than Śiva himself. Furthermore, Abhinavagupta extends this idea that Śiva’s grace is the only cause and “instigating power” even in the post-initiatory phase, leading to the ultimate goal, liberation. In addition to providing an explanation at the ontological level, that nothing exists as separate from Śiva, Abhinavagupta bases his arguments on a principle drawn from logic, the law of cause and effect: liberation, which is the state of identity with Śiva as non-dual Consciousness, is undifferentiated and cannot be produced by various factors such as personal circumstances, including individual behavior and “actions” (karman). He admits, however, that in the case of the bubhukṣu—the person who, in addition to liberation,
longs for supernatural powers and otherworldly pleasures (*bhoga*)—Śiva depends on karma with regard to this second goal. Thus, Abhinavagupta prevents his philosophical view on the Lord’s autonomy, grace, and liberation from impacting this dimension of Śaiva doctrine and practice connected with those who aspire to supernatural experiences.

One of the questions I raised during my investigation concerned the relationship between Śiva’s grace and the individual’s actions in the phase that follows *śaktipāta* and initiation. I asked whether Abhinavagupta—who regards Śiva as the only cause not only for *śaktipāta* but also even for liberation—assigns any role to religious practice as “means” towards the ultimate goal. I have drawn attention to the fact that Abhinavagupta distinguishes between two kinds of actions: “ordinary actions” (*karman*), which further bind the soul by increasing the bond of *karman*, and which include what orthodox Veda-based tradition would regard as meritorious deeds, such as pilgrimage to sacred places or charitable activities; and Śiva’s “Power of Action” (*kriyāśakti*), which originates in his divine Will (*īcchā*) and includes all the practices that Abhinavagupta’s tradition deems to reveal an individual’s ultimate Śiva-nature, such as mantra repetition, worship, and meditation. Thus, the performance of these “practices” does not implicate an independent human agency, because they are themselves an expression of divine grace originating in the Lord’s will alone.

I have shown that, in Abhinavagupta’s view, if Śiva’s grace is the source of Śaiva practice, it is also the source of Śaiva knowledge. For the Kashmiri exegete action is none other than a gross level of knowledge. I have explored how in Abhinavagupta’s philosophy even these “means,” these “practices” that are an expression of Śiva’s own Power of Action, cannot lead to the final goal, the non-conceptual awareness of reality as
unlimited, undifferentiated consciousness, because this level transcends the relation of cause and effect, between means and end. Abhinavagupta teaches that ultimate reality can be attained only by intuitive knowledge (prātibhajñāna or pratibhā), which, in turn, arises through saktipāta alone. The higher the degree of saktipāta, the higher is the degree of intuitive knowledge attained immediately; consequently, the need diminishes for “practices” or other “external means,” such as initiation by a guru or studying scripture (though these means are themselves instruments of grace), and the time to attain liberation also diminishes. Furthermore, since for Abhinavagupta this ultimate state consists in knowledge of one’s identity with Śiva as undifferentiated Consciousness, the best “means” to achieve this goal is the cultivation of this knowledge itself, the contemplation of reality in non-dual terms through the progressive purification of conceptual awareness (vikalpasamskāra). Thus, we can say that in the author’s doctrinal view knowledge functions both as means and as goal.

Throughout my discussion I have shown that in Abhinavagupta’s non-dualistic view Śiva’s grace (anugraha) is the source of post-initiatory practice, and in its manifestation at the individual level, as saktipāta, it is also the source of devotion and knowledge. I have also observed, however, that in the Kashmiri author’s view, the meanings of these two terms, bhakti (devotion) and jñāna (knowledge), often overlap on many levels—both when they are conceived of as “means,” in the sense of “gnostic practice;” and when they describe the experience of the “goal,” the highest state of consciousness.

In my close analysis of relevant passages of Abhinavagupta’s Gītārthasaṅgṛaha, I have highlighted that when the Gītā uses the term bhakti in the sense of devotional
worship of the Lord, Abhinavagupta glosses the term with *vimarśa*, “reflective awareness,” or *ahaṃvimarśa*, “I-awareness.” This mental exercise consists in directing one’s awareness towards one’s Self, while identifying this “I,” or the heart, with the Lord in his all-pervasive, undifferentiated nature (*tadrūpavikalpābhyaśa*). By maintaining this awareness a practitioner can turn even devotional worship involving an icon of the deity into an internal practice, a progressive “immersion” in Śiva. Not surprisingly, Abhinavagupta also uses terms referring to this “immersion” (*āvesa* and *samāveśa*) as glosses for *bhakti*. Only in this sense can we speak of devotion as a “means” in Abhinavagupta: *bhakti* is a gnostic practice, the cultivation of non-dual awareness, and not the *feeling* of emotional attachment and surrender to the Lord. When the adept has attained the highest knowledge, the awareness of identity with Śiva, the experience of intense devotion arises spontaneously.

For this reason I have argued that references to *bhakti* as an intense, wholehearted devotion, the experience of intoxicating bliss, such as those found in certain passages in Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, do not imply that devotion is a means to liberation. Rather, they inevitably describe the ultimate goal, the highest state achieved through immersion in Śiva (*samāveśa*), the consequence and sign of this state itself. I also draw attention to the fact that Abhinavagupta, consistently with his view, does not consider *bhakti* in its more traditional sense as “devotion” (i.e., not “self-awareness”) to be a post-initiatory observance (*samaya*), to be actively cultivated by the Śaiva initiate, because it continues to be present naturally in a disciple who has undergone initiation, manifesting as the expression of grace that began with *śaktipāta*. Therefore, in disagreement with some previous scholarship, I have argued that Abhinavagupta teaches not a path of
devotion originating in the disciple, but a path of grace originating in the Lord alone and culminating in the experience of intoxicating devotion. Even if the author does not state this explicitly, I have suggested that his doctrine of “grace in degrees” is also a doctrine of “knowledge in degrees” and “devotion in degrees.” This view is consistent with a statement of Jayaratha, who remarks that “liberation is just devotion taken to the highest degree.” The path begins with śaktipāta, whereby devotion normally manifests as faith in Śiva and the desire to be initiated and instructed in Śaiva knowledge. The path continues with faith, becoming a progressively firmer conviction of one’s identity with Śiva and resulting in increasing devotion; and it culminates in the arising of the highest knowledge, pratibhā or intuitive knowledge. This final liberating insight brings about the experience of one’s identity with or immersion in the Lord (samāveṣa), and a blissful, wholehearted devotion. Within Abhinavagupta’s non-dualistic framework, the means—knowledge—is also the goal, and the subject—the devotee—merges with the object of his or her longing by becoming aware that they are identical. In this view devotion can only be the power of grace of the Lord, with no cause and no recipient other than Lord Śiva, who chooses to bestow grace on, and liberate, himself.
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