

Smell: The Sense Perception of Recognition

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In a traditional form of Hindu worship, the temple deity is venerated through sacrificial offerings of food (*bhoga*) served three times a day. *Bhoga*, meaning “enjoyment,” “eating,” and “feeding,” and derived from the verbal root *bhuj*, denotes anything that can be enjoyed by the senses. However, in this specific gastronomic dimension, it is the sense of smell, and not the sense of taste, that occupies the central place. The deity is said to consume *bhoga* through its fragrance. The food ingested by the act of smelling is “metonymously transformed into *prāsada* or consecrated food”¹ and distributed to the devotees. Given the importance of this insight, it is odd that smell has received little or no scholarly attention in the scientific tradition of Indology.² In this essay, I make a humble attempt to look at the original contribution of non-dual Kashmiri Śaivism to the understanding of the sense perception of smell by drawing upon the work of Maheśvarānanda (12th-13th century), called the *Mahārthamañjarī* (The Flower-Bouquet of the Supreme Meaning). Maheśvarānanda (also known as Gorakṣa), son of Mādhava, was a denizen of Cidambaram during the rule of the Cōla

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1. Paul M. Tomney, “Krishna’s Consuming Passions: Food as Metaphor and Metonym for Emotion at Mount Govardhan,” in *Divine Passions: The Social Construction of Emotions in India*, ed. Owen M. Lynch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 164.
 2. A recent publication by James McHugh, *Sandalwood and Carrion: Smell in Indian Religion and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), certainly helps to fill this gap.

dynasty (9th-13th century). The fact that the *Mahārthamañjarī* was written in medieval Cidambaram is important because it provides evidence that the Kashmiri Śaiva traditions, which originated in the far north, were transmitted to the far south, where they were not only well known but also practiced. Of course, it is important to note that so-called Kashmir Śaivism was not confined to the socio-historical realm of Kashmir, but was rather a trans-regional tradition whose influence extended to South India and far beyond the Indian subcontinent.

The sense perception of smell plays a major role in Maheśvarānanda's system. He adopts it as a symbol of recognition or reflective awareness, which has a more direct experimental and aesthetic dimension situated in the reality of the senses. For Maheśvarānanda, smelling is synonymous with recognition (*pratyabhijñā*³). In this way, Maheśvarānanda tries to put Pratyabhijñā⁴ discourse on a new footing

3. The term '*pratyabhijñā*' is one of the three cluster-concepts constituting the theory of recognition. '*Pratyabhijñā*' means 'shining as facing oneself towards what was forgotten' ('*prati*'=towards, *abhi*=face to face, *jñā*=knowledge). Moreover, *pratyabhijñā* means cognition through the unification of past and present experiences expressed in judgments such as: 'This is the same Caitra' (*Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā-vimarśinī* 1.1, pp. 6-7). In the event of recognition, both memory (*smṛti*) and direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) are important. This standpoint was opposed to that of Vijñānavādins, who rejected memory, and to that of Advaita Vedāntins, who did not assign any value to perception. '*Pratyabhijñā*' is to bring about the notice of the powers of the Self—knowledge (*jñāna*) and action (*kriyā*)—which takes place simply by the removal of ignorance (*mohāpasāraṇamātra*) (*Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā-vimarśinī* 1.2, p. 13).
4. The *Śivadr̥ṣṭi* ("Vision of Śiva"), written by Somānanda (9th-10th century), is regarded as the first treatise to furnish a philosophical foundation of the Pratyabhijñā school ('Recognition [of the Lord]'). The Pratyabhijñā reached its apogee in the work of Somānanda's disciple Utpaladeva, whose *Īśvārpratyabhijñākārikā* ("Stanzas on the Recognition of the Lord"), along with his two commentaries (the *Vṛtti* and *Vṛtti-Vimarśinī*), built on the germinal ideas of the *Śivadr̥ṣṭi* and represent a full-fledged edifice of Pratyabhijñā philosophy. The Pratyabhijñā philosophy is important in large part because it provides a theoretical basis for the Śaiva tantric traditions of Kashmir. It flourished at the time when certain transgressive practices connected with the tantric culture of the cremation grounds became symbolically internalized, to subsist in thought alone. Cf. R. Torella, *The Philosophical Traditions of India. An Appraisal* (Varanasi: Indica, 2011). This inward reorientation developed a highly gnoseological attitude directed toward cognitive grasping of the Light of Śiva in all objective phenomena. The aim of a human being is precisely recognition

by providing an analogy of its philosophical ideas with corresponding concepts from the Krama⁵ metaphysical scheme. In doing so, he follows Abhinavagupta, who defines *gandha* or smell as a symbol of *pratyabhijñā* in his *Parātriśikā Vivaraṇa*.⁶ Analogies between Pratyabhijñā and Krama offer support to the logical structure of Maheśvarānanda's methodology, which, at least in some part, can be interpreted as a claim to revive the doctrinal concomitance of these two distinct traditions.⁷ But what specific qualities make smell special among the sense perceptions? In answering this question, we should concentrate on three closely related focal points. The first is the materiality of smell in its relation to earth. The second is smell's ability to expand in space, which endows it with the attribute of all-pervasiveness. The third is the stimulus that gives rise to smell, in this case a fragrant flower. Maheśvarānanda develops a notion of flower-fragrance covering different semantic fields to which the sense of smell, equated with reflective awareness or recognition, belongs. Let us analyze these specific features in turn.

(*pratyabhijñā*) of one's own nature (*ātman*) to be identical with Śiva. This implies recognition of Śiva's essential nature manifesting everywhere and at all times.

5. The Krama system is one of the earliest among Śaiva tantric traditions of Kashmir, elaborated in the first half of the ninth century in Uḍḍiyāna. The principal feature that distinguishes the Krama from other schools of Kashmir Śaivism is the notion of the sequence (*krama*) that brings into prominence the inherent dynamism of reality itself. The term *krama* is used in reference to the goddess Kālī, or more precisely Kālasaṃkarṣaṇī, "The Enchantress of Time," and her emanations, who are worshipped in sequence (*krama*).
6. *Gandha* (as is well known) is the attribute of earth. In the *para* or transcendental consciousness, *gandha* is symbolic of recognition or *pratyabhijñā* in the form 'I have always been like this' (*Parātriśika Vivaraṇa*, trans. Jaideva Singh, p. 135). In the scheme given in the *Parātriśikātantra* and adopted by Maheśvarānanda, taste (*rasa*) is the sense perception of relish (*āsvāda*, *rasanā*, *carvaṇā*), which is characterized as 'the joy of Śiva's realization as I, relish of one's own true nature'; while smell (*gandha*) stands for recognition.
7. According to Abhinavagupta, it was Utpaladeva himself who appears in the spiritual lineage that transmitted the Krama doctrine to him. Somānanda, the first preceptor of the Pratyabhijñā system, was, according to Abhinavagupta, a disciple of the Krama teacher Govindarāja, who, before dying, passed to him the Krama doctrine taught in the *Devīpañcaśatikā (Kālikulapañcaśatakā)*. This doctrine was transmitted by Somānanda, through his spiritual lineage of Utpaladeva and Lakṣmaṇagupta, down to Abhinavagupta. See Torella, IPV, xiv.