

The contribution of nondual Saivism of Kashmir to the debate on *jīvanmukti*: a thematic perspective on the question of periodization

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The notion of liberation is at the very heart of Indian philosophical discourse. The examination of its formation, from upaniṣads to the later Vedānta texts (the *Jīvanmuktiviveka*, 14th c.), could provide a good starting point in order to establish some milestones of Indian philosophical thought.

This paper focuses on Saiva reasonings about liberation, and, more precisely, on ‘liberation in this life’. It will give us an opportunity to show how the transformations of the notion, within the tradition of nondual Saivism of Kashmir — from Tantras and Āgamas to the texts of Spanda and Pratyabhijñā, up to Abhinavagupta and his successors — reflect the way in which the tradition itself evolves.

We shall also examine how Saiva conceptions of liberation are related or opposed to those of other schools, earlier or contemporary, such as the Sāṃkhya, the Vedānta, or the Saivasiddhānta.

Indeed, one has the sense that the nondual Saivism of Kashmir is one of the first systems to seek to *justify* doctrinally the notion of *jīvanmukti*. As such, the treatment of the notion and its representation as a philosophical issue constitute in their own way major contributions to the development of Indian thought.

From a strictly philosophical point of view, the debates that are echoed in the Saiva texts on the “degrees” of liberation relate to a rather technical issue: can liberation — accepted by nearly everyone at the time — be reconciled *with* karmic life, or must one wait for the end of life in order to accede thereto? That is, is the notion of *jīvanmukti* defensible?

Most modern interpreters consider the terms *jīvanmukti*/^o*mukta* as relatively recent and that they have appeared in circles chiefly Advaitin or quasi-Advaitin. The same interpreters also agree that the *idea* itself is relatively ancient, to be found, *inter alia*, in the *Gītā* and even in some older upaniṣads, and that it has been recognized, though not by that name, by Śaṅkara. This point of view is certainly legitimate, but would gain even greater credibility were the vast śaivite literature taken into account.

In the same way most modern contemporary accounts take little note of the contribution of Saivism to the issue of liberation — liberation in this life or not —, likewise later Indian tradition, notably inspired by Vedānta, is careful to avoid Saiva reasonings. Perhaps, for the orthodox, reticence aroused by suspicion of tantric

leanings.

Whatever the case may be, the analysis of these debates and interactions might help to approach the fundamental problem, that of the periodization of Indian thought, from a new angle.