A SPIRITUALITY OF PLEASURE: Deciphering Vijñānabhairava Verse 68

INTRODUCTION

The “non-dual” (abhedha) school of Indian thought later known as Kashmir Shaivism reached its apogee about the year 1000 CE and then largely disappeared. It was rediscovered by Georg Bühler, who in 1877 published his "Detailed report of a tour in search of Sanskrit MSS: made in Kashmir, Rajputana & Central India". This led to the publication of the Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies starting in 1911, with the last volume relating to that school being published in 1947. The first studies of Kashmir Shaivism in the Western style began in the 1950s. It came to prominence through Laxman Joo (1907-1991 CE), who taught in his native Srinagar and initiated Westerners as well as Indians.

The Vijñānabhairava-tantra is a short text of only 163 verses (śloka), which comprise 112 techniques related to the wider philosophical discussions of that school. The techniques are roughly grouped into themes, of which one concerns the “bliss” (ānanda) that derives from music and food and family reunion but also from sexuality. The fact that only three ślokas relate to sexual activity means that not only is sexual activity given its due place but it is also relativised as just one of a whole range of different techniques. There are, for example, a series on the breath (śl. 24-31) and a series on sound (śl. 38-42); there are techniques such the contemplation of an empty pot (śl. 59) or even the act of sneezing (śl. 118): all give the same result.

THE TEXT

The three ślokas of the Vijñānabhairava relating to sexuality are ns. 68, 69, 70. The śloka 68 is the subject of this article. It reads

\[ \text{vahner viśāyā madhye tu cittaṃ sukhamayaṃ kṣīpet } \\
\text{kevalam vāyuṣṭamāṃ vā smarāṇandena yujyate //} \]

Bettina Bäumer, one of Laxman Joo’s initiates and a noted scholar in this field, translates his version as follows:

One should place one’s mind full of bliss between “fire” (vahni) and “poison” (viṣa), or filled with breath, then one will be united with the blissful union (of Śiva and Śakti).

But what is vahni, what is viṣa, what is ‘between’, what is ‘breath’?

The opinions are many. For example Rajneesh (aka Osho) translates it purely in sexual terms:
At the start of sexual union keep attentive on the fire in the beginning, and, so continuing, avoid the embers in the end.⁴

Despite the serious inadequacy of his translation, Rajneesh seems to give a more significant teaching when he says

If you are not in a hurry to finish the act, the act by and by becomes less and less sexual and more and more spiritual. Sex organs also melt into each other. A deep, silent communion happens between two body energies, and then you can remain for hours together. This togetherness moves deeper and deeper as time passes. But don’t think. Remain with the moment, deeply merged. It becomes an ecstasy, a samadhi. And if you can know this, if you can feel and realize this, your sexual mind will become non-sexual. A very deep brahmacharya can be attained, celibacy can be attained through it.⁵

Daniel Odier is very far-fetched:

When you practice a sex ritual, let thought reside in the quivering of your senses like wind in the leaves, and reach the celestial bliss of ecstatic love.⁶

In reaction to such interpretations, Georg Feuerstein comments, “This “California tantra,” [is] based on a profound misunderstanding of the Tantric path. Their main error is to confuse Tantric bliss… with ordinary orgasmic pleasure.” To which Hugh Urban adds “… instead of the ideal of unity, order, or harmony, the late-capitalist aesthetic is one of physical intensity, shock value, immediate gratification, and ecstatic experience.”⁷

Satyasangananda interprets it in a radically sanitised way:

One should throw the blissful mind into the fire (manipura chakra) in the middle of that fibre-like lotus stalk (sushmanma) or into that which is only fully of air (anahata chakra). Then one is united with the remembrance of bliss.⁸

Other translations in English, French and German are more objective.
Jaideva Singh translates:

One should throw (i.e. concentrate) the delightful citta in the middle of vahni and viṣa both ways whether by itself or permeated by vāyu (prāṇic breath), one would then be joined to the bliss of sexual union.⁹

Lilian Silburn writes:

Mais que l’on fixe la pensée qui n’est plus que plaisir dans l’intervalle de feu et de poison. Elle s’isole (alors) ou se remplit de souffle et l’on s’intègre à la félicité de l’amour.¹¹

Pierre Fuega has:
Dans l’intervalle du feu et du poison, que l’on fixe la conscience qui n’est plus que plaisir. Alors elle s’isole, elle se remplit de souffle, et l’on s’unit à la béatitude de l’amour.\textsuperscript{12}

Bettina Bäumer writes:

Man soll das Denken, das ganz von Freuden erfüllt ist, in die Mitte zwischen “Feuer“ und “Gift“ lenken. Allein oder gefüllt mit Atem wird man (dann) eins mit der Seligkeit der Liebe.\textsuperscript{13}

How can one verse lead to such diverse interpretations? This is partly explained by the fact that a word such as \textit{viśa} has a wide range of meanings, as we shall see. The correct meaning is reserved to the circle of initiates and their guru.\textsuperscript{14} If the word is not understood properly the whole verse is misunderstood. This is the case in particular in the case of Rajneesh, Odier and Satyasanganananda, whose versions serve only to support their own outlook and bear little connection with the original meaning of the text. On the other hand, the ambiguity of the \textit{śloka} has the advantage of letting the text be understood in different ways.\textsuperscript{15} Much can be said in a few lines, as we shall see.

Some clues are given in the \textit{Tantrāloka}, the encyclopaedic work of Abhinavagupta (c. 975-1025 CE), the principle author of Kashmir Shaivism, and in the \textit{Pratyabhijñāḥrdayam}, a text composed by his disciple Kṣemarāja. These are noted in Lilian Silburn’s edition of the \textit{Vijñānahairava}.

THE GENERAL MEANING OF VERSE 68 IN THE \textit{Pratyabhijñāḥrdayam}

Of the ancient writers only Kṣemarāja refers directly to \textit{śloka} 68. He does so in the \textit{Pratyabhijñāḥrdayam}, which is his own commentary made on his own summary of the Doctrine of Recognition (\textit{pratyabhijñā}), one of the most important branches of Kashmir Shaivism.\textsuperscript{16} The summary consists of 20 \textit{sūtras}.

\textit{Sūtra} 18 contains two terms basic to Kashmir Shaivism: “contraction” (\textit{saṅkoca}) and “expansion” (\textit{vikāsa}). In his commentary on \textit{sutra} 18 Kṣemarāja describes the first stage, contraction, as the process of withdrawing the senses from their outward orientation, in the manner of a tortoise withdrawing its limbs into its shell.\textsuperscript{17} As a result there is the expansion, defined as a “simultaneous “opening” (\textit{visphārana}) of all the sense organs”.\textsuperscript{18} Note that this same general idea is also treated in \textit{Vijñānahairava}, verse 67.

As a result, the practitioner attains the state of \textit{bhairavamudrā} (state of Bhairava), which Kṣemarāja defines as “external expansiveness in conjunction with inner absorption”.\textsuperscript{19} He substantiates his definition by quoting the \textit{Kaksyāstotra}:

Mentally projecting all the faculties such as seeing simultaneously, on all sides, into their respective objects and remaining at the centre (\textit{madhye}) like a golden pillar, you [O Śiva] appear as the one foundation of the universe.\textsuperscript{20}

Yogarāja, in his \textit{vivṛti} on Abhinavagupta’s \textit{Paramārthasāra}, attributes the \textit{Kaksyāstotra} to Bhaṭṭa Divākaravatsa.\textsuperscript{21} Yogarāja was a disciple of Kṣemarāja and lived in Kashmir in the second half of the 11\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{22}
In other words, the point of the practice is “to expand the centre point” (madhyavikāse) between the emission and reabsorption of the universe.23 If the practitioner looks outwards he sees himself, since all is a projection of his own being. If he looks inward he sees all things, since he is their foundation and essence. He is both limited and unlimited; the limitation leading to universality and the universality giving value to what is limited. His “eyes” are both “open” (ummāla) and “closed” (nirmūla), outward and inward. He acquires that universal “consciousness” (samvit) which is like the central vein of a leaf “because all the functions arise from that and come to rest there.”24

Kṣemarāja then repeats his description of the process, giving a more specifically sexual meaning to it. There is a contraction of kundalini in a “downwards” (adhah) direction …, that is in the direction of the “sixth mouth” (saśthavaktra) which is the sexual organ. Then there is an expansion of kundalini in an “upwards” (ūrdhva) direction … toward the “eye-brow” (bhrū) centre”. Then “he attains … the source, the summit, and the centre of “reality” (tat) (tanmūla-tadagra-tanmadhya-bhūmisparśavesāh).25 The phrasing tanmūla-tadagra-tanmadhya echoes the words fire, poison, and centre in śloka 68. In other words, whether it is in general terms or in a more specifically sexual way, the practitioner attains bhairavamudrā.

It is at this point that Kṣemarāja quotes the Vijñānabhairava verse 68 which he sees as a technique for achieving bhairavamudrā. He then explicitly identifies fire (vahni) with saṅkoca and poison (viṣa) with vikāsa. The purpose is to dwell at the centre point, namely bhairavamudrā, which unites these two.

Kṣemarāja then goes on to comment on other phrases in his sāstra 18 and to refer to other techniques whose purpose is to produce the supreme “awakening” (unmeṣa).26

From the development of the madhya (madhyavikāśc) results the attainment of the bliss of the spirit (citānandalabhah). This [attainment of the bliss of the spirit] indeed is the samādhi … of the highest yogin, known also as samāveśa, samāpatti and other such synonymous terms.27

For Kṣemarāja the main focus of Vijñānabhairava verse 68 is neither fire nor poison but the “centre” (madhya) and the resultant ānanda. This is a basic standpoint for all that follows.

**GENERAL MEANING OF VERSE 68 IN THE Vijñānabhairava**

Verse 68 consists of four half lines. The first three give the method; the fourth gives the result. This is typically the case with all 112 verses of the Vijñānabhairava dealing with techniques.

Kṣemarāja speaks of attaining cidānandalabhah, samādhi, samāveśa, samāpatti “and other such synonymous terms”. The synonymous term used in Vijñānabhairava 68 is, “the bliss of smarā” (smarānanda). The word smara can refer to “memory” or “loving recollection” or according to Fuega it refers to “sexual love” or to Kāma-deva, the god of carnal love, or quite simply to kāma.28

If the end result of the process described in verse 68 is smarānanda, its starting point is sukha. Indeed, the first description citta in verse 68 is “in a state of pleasure”
(sukhamaya) which refers to all sorts of enjoyment, in contrast with “suffering” (duḥkha) in its various connotations. Verse 66 had noted that “bliss” (ānanda) can suddenly arise for no seeming reason. Verses 69-74 speak of specific instances when sukhā arises: the “pleasure” (sukha) of sexual intercourse (verse 69); the pleasure of remembering a woman (strīsukha) and the sexual encounter with her (verse 70); the “bliss” (ānanda) of meeting a family member after a long separation (verse 71); the “pleasure” (ānanda) of food and drink (verse 72); the “pleasure” (ānanda) of songs, etc. (verse 73); in short, any “satisfaction” (tuṣṭi) (verse 74).

Thus, at the beginning of the sexual act there is desire which is pregnant with possibility, since it is itself a spark of the omnipresent and eternal “category of desire” (kāmatattva) found in Śiva himself. This “pleasure” (sukha), this incipient delight, leads to the fullness of smarānanda which is not just mental or emotional and so lacking in intensity. It is in fact more powerful, more real, more exciting, for it is the fullest bliss of which all other joys are the reflection. Indeed, the “vibration” (spanda) of the emanation and reabsorption of the universe is the expression of the “love-play” (krūḍā) of Śiva and Śakti.

This smarānanda will be attained by three processes which are implied in the multiple meanings of verse 68: the mantra, the subtle breath and sexual intercourse, all of which relate to each other.

**PARTICULAR INTERPRETATIONS OF VERSE 68**

The first particular interpretation of verse 68 is in terms of the mantra SAUH.

The philosophical tradition which modern scholars now call ‘Kashmir Shaivism’ is called ‘Trika’ by its principal exponent, Abhinavagupta. He calls it Trika or “Three” (trīka) because of the predominance of sets of three: the three goddesses, Parā, Parāparā, Aparā; the trio of Śiva, śakti and the “human” (nara); the “subject” (pramātṛ), “means” (pramāṇa) and “object” (prameya) of knowledge; “absence of mental constructs” (nirvikalpa), “mental constructs” (vikalpa) and “action” (kalpa); and so on. The principal mantra of the system is likewise three-fold, namely the phonemes, S, AU and H.

Let us remember that the mantra is not an idea but an effective word. In fact, the mantra SAUH is the goddess Parā in her phonetic form. It is all that she is and does. Therefore by receiving the mantra through initiation and identifying with it through recitation, the practitioner is all and can do all.

Abhinavagupta does not directly comment on Vijñānabhairava verse 68 but provides all the information necessary for interpreting it in terms of the mantra SAUH. The central phoneme of the mantra is AU. It is called the “immaculate” (nirāṇjanatattva), pure reality underpinning all other realities and containing them.²⁹ It is called “the trident” (triśūla) because it holds the three energies of “will” (icchā), “knowledge” (jñāna) and “action” (kṛtyā) as one.

These three faculties are similarly coded. For example:

The will is “desire” (kāma); knowledge is “poison” (viṣa); and action, namely the goddess, is “immaculate” (nirāṇjanam).³⁰

“Absorption” (samāveśa) into this triad is called Śiva / Bhairava.³¹
Having penetrated the viṣatattva, there is no “demon” (bhūta), no ordinary “poison” (viṣa) [as far as he is concerned]. Through “contemplation” (bhāvanā), [the awareness of] “I am” (aham) is alone manifest.\(^\text{32}\)

Since the term viṣa can refer to ordinary poison, to knowledge as distinct from other faculties, or to universal pervasion, the term needs to precisely understood according to its context. The varieties of meanings are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary they are meant to both differentiate and correlate.

When the three energies cease to compete and so fuse one with the other in perfect equilibrium, completely penetrated by the pure reality which underpins them, they attain their greatest clarity and intensity.\(^\text{33}\) The yogin, by being absorbed into this phoneme through “recitation” (japa), acquires the same characteristic. He is nirañjana; he does not have a particular colour such as blue or yellow; he is without “pigment” (aṅjana), that is he is universal and unconditioned.\(^\text{34}\)

Quoting the Kulaghavara, Abhinavagupta identifies the phoneme S with (viṣa).\(^\text{35}\) However, in its alternative sense the word viṣa, since it is understood to derive from the root viṣ “to penetrate”, refers to what is limitless and universally “pervading” (vyāpaka). For example: Kṣemarāja explicitly links viṣa to the root viṣ “to pervade” when he says “Poison is etymologically related to pervasion” (viṣṭṛ vyāptau).\(^\text{36}\) It is synonymous with union of Śiva and Śakti who are the source of all reality.

In a contrasting sense, the phoneme S is truly a poison because it destroys the “stain” (mala) of individuality, and the subsequent division into subject and object. It removes the “veil” (chā) that masquerades as the “individual person” (āru).\(^\text{38}\) It is a liberating poison and therefore really a nectar. For example, Śivastotrāvali 20.12 states that “even poison becomes nectar”.\(^\text{39}\)

The phoneme H is coded as fire. Even the devanāgarī script of the phoneme H is put to good use. Its two dots symbolise the union of the couple, Śiva and Śakti.\(^\text{40}\) Moreover, the phoneme H is commonly called visarga because of the slight emission of breath. Thus the phoneme also symbolises the “emission” (visarga) of the universe which springs from the loving union of Śiva and Śakti.

In short, the phonemes S, AU and H are referred to as poison, middle and fire.

The mantra SAUH can be understood as operating in two directions: in the direction of reabsorption or in the direction of emanation. This twofold direction complicates things for it means that S and H become interchangeable. There are multiple meanings even within the two directions.

When Parā is recited in the direction of reabsorption, S represents the objective world; AU the three energies of will, knowledge and action; H is the supreme brahman who emits the universe.\(^\text{41}\) From another point of view, S represents the first three cosmic “spheres” (aṇḍa): prthivī, prākṛti and māyā. The phoneme AU represents the fourth sphere of śakti; namely the three powers of action, will and knowledge while H consisting of two dots, , represents Śiva and śakti.

When Parā is recited in the direction of emission, S symbolises Śiva as the highest brahman, AU retains its meaning as the three energies of will, knowledge and action, while H represents the emission.\(^\text{42}\) However, all this takes place within consciousness.\(^\text{43}\)
In short, the mantra SAUH is everything in every aspect, non-dually.\textsuperscript{44} By reciting the mantra with full understanding of its significance, the practitioner reaches the high point of consciousness, the bhairavamudrā.

The second particular interpretation of verse 68 is in terms of the subtle breath

The first description of the “mind” (cittam) in Vijñānabhairava 68 is sukhamayam. The second description is kevalam vāyupūrṇam vā which is a difficult phrase.

Bäumer in her translation of Laxman Joo truncates the phrase, saying “simply filled with breath”. Her own German translation reads “Allein oder gefüllt mit Atem” and she explains that the mind “either works alone by its own energy or when it is filled with the energy of subtle breath.\textsuperscript{45} Silburn’s French translation is slightly better: “Elle s’isole (alors) ou se remplit de souffle” The commentaries largely avoid the problem.

The word vāyu can refer to the well-known five “subtle breaths” prāṇa, apāna, samāna, udāna, vyāna. It can also refer to that sixth “breath” (prāṇana) which comprises and founds the other five subtle breaths. In this sense it is the essence of life and indeed of the cosmos, detached from all limited passions.\textsuperscript{46} Prāṇana fills the whole universe. It is also called, the “category of subtle breath” (prāṇatattva).\textsuperscript{47}

Fire means “rising breath” or “exhalation” (prāṇa). Poison means “descending breath” or “inhalation” (apāṇa).\textsuperscript{48} When the practitioner allows the subtle breath to enter the susumṇa, the central “channel” (nāḍī), and dwells at the point of balance, the middle point between the two contrasting breaths, he experiences the sixth breath, prāṇana. Whereas the ignorant are caught up in the oscillation of prāṇa and apāna, those who reach the state of Śiva and Śakti abide in prāṇana.\textsuperscript{49} Thus the mind is “replete with subtle breath” (vāyupūrṇam) in all its forms and in all its fullness.

The word kevalam means “alone”, “excluding others”. In this sense it can be contrasted with vāyupūrṇam, whence the word vā in its usual meaning of “or” in the sense of an alternative. In that case, the practitioner is simply aware of the pleasure, nothing else. He or she is unaware of the multiple movements associated with subtle breath.

Another meaning can be given to the word vā. It can also have the sense of an explanation: “in other words”. The word kevalam can also mean “simple”, “uncompounded”, “whole”. In this way, kevalam and vāyupūrṇam are identified; the one is the explanation of the other.

A third meaning is possible. The word vā can have the meaning of alternative in the sense of alternating. This fits in with the idea of bhairavamudrā where the mind can focus within or focus without. In doing so it sees the same, since inner and outer coincide. The limited and the unlimited are one. If it focuses without it is vāyupūrṇam. If it focuses within, it is kevalam. This sense is found in the use of kevala in Tantrāloka 3.174b where kevalaḥ refers to the simple sense of “I am” (aham). Both sorts of focus ultimately coincide in bhairavamudrā.

Thus the mind is kevalam, namely it consists of prāṇana in non-dualistic fashion; it is “replete” (pūrṇam) with all five vāyu as one. The mind is no longer tossed around by the contrary movements of subtle breath, since it has fused them all in prāṇana.\textsuperscript{50} This is the sort of mind which is focussed on the “junction” (madhya). It does not reject the fire
and the poison, the prāṇa and the apāṇa, but dwells at their meeting point. It is both outer and inner.

The third particular interpretation of verse 68 is in terms of sexual intercourse

The placement of verse 68 is significant. It introduces a series of verses (69-74) concerned with pleasure. It is placed before two verses (69 and 70) that specifically deal with sexual activity. Furthermore, it is placed before verse 69 which deals with the last stage of intercourse. Verse 68, therefore, refers not only to all forms of pleasure but also to the beginning of sexual pleasure.

Although Laxman Joo says

The literal meaning of smarāṇanda is kāmānanda. It is joy, bliss of the sexual act. But in fact in the present context you must not take it that way. You must see that smarāṇanda is the ānanda which arises in the union of Śiva and Śakti or Rudra-yāmala. It is the state of cidānanda.51

and, accordingly, Jaideva Singh describes smarāṇanda as internal union in contrast with sexual union which is external, that interpretation limits the possibilities of our text.52 The verse is better understood as operating at many levels at once, as follows.

Verse 68 recommends “focusing the mind” (cittam...ksipet) on the “middle” or “centre” (madhyam). We have seen how the term ‘middle’ is of paramount importance. The madhyam is that undifferentiated fullness, that intervening emptiness which underlies all the variety of this world and constitutes its heart.53 The centre is where dualism ceases.54 The centre does not separate fire and poison but is their source and goal, holds them together and establishes them.

The word ‘fire’ refers to the beginning of the sexual act.55 The process of encoding is as follows. Since there are three sacrificial fires in the Vedic ritual the word ‘fire’ can refer to the number three which in turn can mean ‘triangle’ which itself can refer to the “mouth of the yogini” (yoginīvakra) located at the centre of the sexual organ.56 Fire then refers to the “category of desire” (kāmatattva) which is sensed at the onset of sexual feeling.57 It is also associated with the “will” (iccha).58 The word ‘fire’, therefore, has many meanings.

In the case of the person who is enlightened, the poison is the moment of expansiveness. However, if the intercourse is undertaken without awareness, as in the case of the person who lives in illusion, namely the “bonded animal” (paśū), the word viṣa does indeed have a negative sense.59 For them, the sexual acts ends in dismay; they are like animals tied to the mill, going round in circles, going nowhere. For them, poison refers simply to the unsatisfying end of the sexual act.60 In their case spermatic emission is rightly called poison because it is simply a wasting of energy, preventing them from awakening to that consciousness which is true life.61

When the fire i.e. the experience of pleasure occurs, the enlightened practitioner also experiences the true poison, i.e. “expansiveness” (vikāsa) and “pervasion” (vyāpti). He focuses his attention at the “joining point” (madhyam), which grounds and enhances both fire and poison. The mind, being free of the tumult of “thoughts” (vikalpa) and reaching a stage “beyond thought” (nirvikalpa), being focused on the centre, the point of
union of all things, finds that the *sukha* is not lost in the poison of the *paśu*. The fire is neither quenched nor dissipated. The *sukha* becomes *smarānanda*.

The technique is not concerned with imitating in an outward fashion the 1000 year “intercourse” (*maithuna*) of Śiva and Parvati. The technique is concerned rather with attaining the sense of *bhairavamudrā*, the mind of Śiva, the transcendent union of the divine couple, the highest consciousness, “I am”.

The interpretation of verse 68 as referring to sexual intercourse is not to be divorced from the other interpretations of the verse. Sexual intercourse also connects with the mantra and with the subtle-breathe.

### Intercourse and mantra

The mantra *SAUH* is audibly experienced in sexual intercourse. Although it is sounded in part and not entirely, the part contains the whole. Abhinavagupta teaches that when the woman unites with a man, she spontaneously emits the sound *śīt* at the moment of pleasure. If the man dwells on that sound he will reach the state of *visarga* (*H*), the state of pure energy, and will subdue the universe.62 The same is said with regard to the phoneme *H*. Abhinavagupta, quoting from the *Kulaghavara*, notes that the “sound” (*dhvani*) *H* spontaneously arises in the throat of the beloved. If the practitioner is able to focus his thought on that sound, he will likewise subdue the universe.63 By listening to the audible sound, *S* or *H*, the *yogin* reaches the unlimited pure state which is symbolised by the phoneme *AU*.

Thus the mantra *SAUH* occurs spontaneously in the act of intercourse, with all the significance and power that belong to the phonic form of the goddess. There is no need to engage in the formal practice of recitation.

### Intercourse and subtle breath

Fire refers to the moment in intercourse when the rising breath *prāṇa* enters into the “central channel” (*susumna*) which is simply called the middle.64 The practitioner then experiences *apāna*, the poison, the “expansiveness” (*vikāsa*, *vyāpti*), as the *kundalinī* rises to the “crown of the head” (*bhramarandhra*).65 The practitioner is free of the conflicting movements of *prāṇa* and *apāṇa* and reaches the universality of all-embracing *prāṇaṇātattva*.

In this way, the various elements come together in sexual intercourse in an act of cosmic significance, leading to a state of universality.66 Pleasure serves a mystical purpose.67

### CONCLUSION

Verse 68 of the *Vijñānabhairava* proposes a spirituality of pleasure. It is quite contrary to the spirituality of “austerity” (*tapas*), but neither does it refer to the poisonous pleasure of the *paśu*. Rather, it is the spirituality of everyday life where the enlightened person, on feeling *sukha*, comes to *smarānanda*, a sense of expansiveness and universality, and acquires the divine mind and its bliss.

This *smarānanda* is achieved in variety of ways: by contraction and expansion, by the recitation of the mantra, by the fusion of the subtle breaths in *prāṇa*, at the
beginning of sexual desire and by the act of intercourse itself. All these ways cross refer
to each other, all lead to each other. They all coincide. They function on different levels
but each is a form of the other, each can be substituted for the other. All give the same
result, namely the state of bhairavamudrā.

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Abstract

This heavily coded śloka from the tantric literature of Kashmir Shaivism has been misinterpreted and misused, to the detriment of the reputation of tantra in the West.

This paper studies the original text and ancient commentaries, and elucidates the several levels of meaning of this arcane verse. It also looks at the various translations and commentaries in English, French, German, which do not bring out the full meaning of the text or contradict each other or gloss over problems or bend the verse to suit their agendas.

As a result, this paper concludes that, far from being disreputable or trivial, the śloka describes a spirituality of pleasure in every-day life which is profound and important for our age.


2 This article is the elaboration of ‘A vexatious translation! What is the meaning of Viṣṇu-bhairava-tantra verse 68?’ given at the Third International Sanskrit Conference, Sydney, 21-23 July 2012.


5 Rajneesh. *Tantra Spirituality and Sex*, pp. 52-53.


15 *Viṣṇu Bhairava*, Bäumer, p. 123.


17 *Kṣemarāja, Pratyabhijñāḥdaṃ*, pp. 94-103.

18 *Kṣemarāja, Pratyabhijñāḥdaṃ*, p. 98.

19 *anupraveśayuktā bahūḥ prasarāṇam/ Kṣemarāja, Pratyabhijñāḥdaṃ*, p. 98.

20 *Kṣemarāja, Pratyabhijñāḥdaṃ*, p. 98.


23 *Kṣemarāja, Pratyabhijñāḥdaṃ*, p. 94.

24 *Kṣemarāja, Pratyabhijñāḥdaṃ*, p. 93.


27 *Kṣemarāja, Pratyabhijñāḥdaṃ*, pp. 102-103