

## Abhinavagupta's Vision of Reality<sup>i</sup> Christopher D. Wallis

All that exists and has ever existed is one infinite divine Consciousness, free and blissful, which projects within the field of its awareness a vast multiplicity of apparently differentiated subjects and objects, each object an actualization of a potential inherent in the divine Light of Consciousness (*prakasha*) and each subject a contracted locus of self-awareness (*vimarsha*). This projection, a divine play (*krida*), is the result of the impulse (*iccha*) within the Divine to express the totality of its self-knowledge (*jnana*) in action (*kriya*). When that divine Consciousness contracts into finite loci of awareness, out of its own free will, and those finite subjects then identify with the limited and circumscribed cognitions and circumstances that make up this phase of their existence, instead of with the trans-individual overarching pulsation (*spanda*) of pure Awareness that is their true nature, they experience what they call suffering. To rectify this, some feel an inner urge to take up the path of spiritual gnosis (*jnana*) and ritual practice (*kriya*), the purpose of which is to undermine their mis-identification and directly reveal within the immediacy of awareness the fact that the Divine Powers of Consciousness, Bliss, Will, Knowledge and Action comprise the totality of individual experience as well – thereby triggering a recognition (*pratyabhijna*) of one's own identity as the Supreme Lord, the All-in-all. This experiential gnosis is repeated and reinforced through various means (*upayas*) until it becomes the non-conceptual ground of every moment of experience, and one's sense of contracted individuality is annihilated into the incandescence of the complete expansion into perfect wholeness (*purnata*). Then one's perception permanently encompasses the reality of a universe dancing ecstatically in the excitement of its completely perfect divinity.

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<sup>i</sup> "The Descent of Power", *Evam 4:1c32 - Abhinavagupta: Reconsiderations* (New Delhi: Samvad India Foundation, 2006) p. 235.