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Cosmic Elements as Represented in the Sri Chakra

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Abstract

This article attempts to study the expostulation of the Sri Chakra as described by Adi Shankaracharya in his work Saundarya Lahari. The diagrammatic representation of the Sri Chakra consists of a series of nine triangles superimposed around a small central circle known as Bindu, forming forty-three corners or triangular projections, with the Bindu at its centre. The Sakta philosophy as expostulated by Adi Shankaracharya, depicts the Supreme Reality as non-dual but having within it as a distinction

between Shiva and Shakti or the Power Holder and Power, described as Being and Will. Sakti worship through the Sri Chakra is a means of elevation of the consciousness, by the practice of which one can awaken the Kundalini Shakti lying coiled at the base of the spinal column, which is the consummation of the Shakti worship. This kind of meditation helps to improve cognition, enhance memory power, and achieve one's professional goals.

Keywords: Shiva, Shakti, Sri Chakra, Maya

Introduction

Sri Shankaracharya was born to a brahmin couple who lived in a place called Kaladi situated in Kerala (Varma, 2018) [6]. His date of birth is supposed to be between 788 AD and 820 AD. It is believed that Shankara was born to the couple with the blessings of Lord Shiva himself. His childhood was full of miraculous incidents which proved that he was an incarnation of Lord Shiva himself. Shankara was well versed in Tarakashastra's Sankhya Philosophy, had developed wonderful mastery over "Patanjali Yoga", and had completed intricate study of Bhatta Mimamsa in the 7th and 8th year of his childhood. Lord Shiva had conveyed to the couple that the child would live only for 32 years. It is said that the age of eight, he had mastered the four Vedas, at twelve he was well versed in all the shastras, and by the time he was sixteen he had completed the composition of "Brahma Sutra Bhasha". Shankara's mother worried about his life span being short Shankara took permission from his mother to become an ascetic disciple of Govindapada. Through his teacher's blessings he won several debates with several learned scholars in Varanasi, started a mission of establishing Advaita philosophy and removed the destructive influence of black magic and superstitious beliefs from Indian society. He protected Vaidika Dharma from the negative influence of Baudhika Dharma and established four *Maths* in the north, south, east and west of India to protect and preach Advaita Philosophy. His teachings on Vedanta have become the fundamental principles of Hindu Dharma (Tapasyananda, Swami, 1987) [5].

Introduction to Saundarya Lahari

Adi Shankaracharya was both the commentator on the three foundational texts of Vedanta philosophy and also the founder of the six devotional modes concentrating on the six conceptions of the Supreme Being. Adi Shankaracharya wrote commentaries on the Upanishads, the Vishnu Sahasranama, Brahmasutras, Lalita Tri Sati, several books on Advaita Philosophy like Tattva Bodha, Prapancha Saram, Bhaja Govindam, Advaita Anubhuti, and meditational verses like Vishnu Bhujangam, Meenakshi Stotram, Uma Maheshwara Stotram, Gauri Dasakam, Sivananda Lahari, Saundarya Lahari, etc (Varma, 2018) [6]. Saundarya Lahari is his most important hymn devoted to Shakti, and it forms a fundamental text of the Shakti Deity, which propagates the worship of the Supreme Being as the mother of the Universe, with a philosophic background of its own. Adi Shankaracharya composed a total of 100 verses dealing with the Mantra, Yantra and the other partly philosophical and partly ritualistic ideologies of the Shakti deity and also the mysteries of the Kundalini Yoga and the beauty of the Divine Mother (Tapasyananda, Swami, 1987) [5].

The Doctrine of Maya according to Adi Shankaracharya

The main principle of Adi Shankaracharya's Advaita system is the doctrine of Maya and the division of Reality into the Paramartha (metaphysical) and the Vyavahara (empirical). The Maya doctrine maintains that the non-dual Being is the only real existence (*Paramarthika*).

While the 'many' are only the appearance (*Vyavaharika*) of it conjured up by ignorance. Appearance means that the objects experienced are not actually there while they are experienced. All the time the multiplicity is experienced, the non dual reality alone has been in existence. A snake experienced as a rope in darkness is given as an example of this philosophical doctrine. The implication of this doctrine is, therefore that creation and created objects have never been existence, and one believes they are there only because of ignorance which corresponds to the darkness which in turn leads to the perception of a snake in the rope.

The Concepts of Shiva and Shakti as Expounded by Adi Shankaracharya

Adi Shankaracharya wrote several vedantic hymns, one of the most popular of them being the Saundarya Lahari, in Sanskrit. There are totally one hundred verses praising the Goddess Shakti, who is the consort of Lord Shiva (Clooney, 2011)^[1]. Verses from 1-41 is known as Ananda Lahari or Waves of Happiness and the second part from 42-100 is known as Saundarya Lahari or waves of beauty. Ananda Lahari describes pleasure through spiritual bliss while Saundarya Lahari describes the beauty of Devi Parvati and her physical characteristics (Bhandari, 2022). The meaning of the dictum 'Truth is Beauty' and 'Beauty Truth' and the ultimate perfection of beauty and its adoration is expounded in all the hundred verses. Shakti is adored as Uma in Himalaya, Amba in Kashmir, Vishalakshi in Varanasi, Gauri in Kanya Kubja, Bhavani in Maharashtra, Kali in Kolkata, Bala in Kanyakumari, Meenakshi in Madurai, Akhilandeshwari at Jambukeshwaram and as Kamakshi in Kanchipuram. The first forty-one verses of Saundarya Lahari deal with supremacy of Sakti personified as the Devine Mother, the way of adoring Her by internal worship consisting in awakening the sleeping Kundalini and raising her through the six plexuses to the centre in the mid brain called Sahasrara and also of her adoration in her external diagrammatic symbol called the Sri Chakra and the repetition of the Mantra revealed in it. The remaining fifty-nine verses are devoted to the exposition of the supremely beautiful form of Tripurasundari, the Devine Mother, in highly poetical language for the contemplation of pious votaries. The Sakta philosophy as expounded by Adi Shankaracharya, depicts the Supreme Reality as non – dual but having within it a distinction between Shiva and Shakti or the Power Holder and Power, described as Being and Will. In the personalized conception, what is called Power here becomes the Devine Mother, Tripurasundari, and the Power Holder Shiva, her Consort. Thus, though they are one in principle, in practice they are treated as distinct. There are two prominent Tantric systems in Indian religious thought Shaktism and Shaivism, which make it essential to study the concept of Shakti, since it explains the general problems of causality (Tigunait, 1997).

According to the doctrine of Shaivism, the Shiva aspect is the Principal, and the Shakti is represented as His Consort, which is a subsidiary and an accessory. In the Sakta

Doctrine however, Shakti becomes the dominant factor and Shiva becomes personally a substratum, an entity taken for granted as a background for his own manifestation as Power or Shakti, represented as the Divine Mother. The Saundaryalahari supports the Sakta School of thought. Shakti's absolute dominance is stated in several verses. These verses imply the supremacy of Shakti in contrast to the schools of Shaivism, where Shiva is dominant in creation and dissolution and Shakti is only an accessory. In Indian iconography this is indicated by the smaller size given to Shakti, by the side of Shiva. The dominance of Shakti in the Sakta sect is shown most conspicuously in the Uttara-Kaula image of Kali, where Shakti, shown as the very picture of power and energy, stands on the chest of the inert form of Shiva. In contrast with the Kaula conception of Kali, which represents the aspects of Mahakali or Shakti as the destroyer and consumer of the cosmos, the Saundaryalahari is exalting the same Shakti in her creative role as Maha-Tripurasundari, the supremely divine beauty of the three Puras or Bindus. Several commentators of the Saundaryalahari have maintained that the couch on which the Devi is resting has Brahma, Hari, Rudra and Ishvara as its four feet. These four together with Sadashiva, who forms her seat are called *Pancha-preta*, the Five Dead (Tapasyananda, Swami, 1987)^[5]. Like many sages of yore, Adi Shankaracharya had conceived a comprehensive picture of the Supreme Reality which is present in all forms of creation. He knew that these creations are nothing but manifestations of the Supreme Consciousness which as such is the formless, nameless, and timeless Brahman. The worship of Sri Chakra leads one to the path of yoga and knowledge since it is the manifestation of this Supreme Consciousness (Dokras, 2021)^[2].

The Sri-Chakra forms the symbol of the Shiva Shakti and is discussed elaborately in the Saundaryalahari. It implies the co-presence and therefore the equality of Shiva and Shakti in all conditions. This equality of Shiva and Shakti in both creation and dissolution is on a five fold basis: Identity of basis, identity of condition, identity of occupation or purpose, identity of form and identity of names. The worship of Shiva and Shakti accepts the position of equality and importance between Shiva and Shakti in both creation and dissolution.

The Diagrammatic Representation of the Sri Chakra in the Saundaryalahari

In the Hindu devotional practice, there are three kinds of external symbols used for worship of the Supreme Being who is himself formless and nameless. The most external symbol is the image cast in various human forms but with paraphernalia signifying supra – human divinity. The second symbol is that of the Yantras, also called Chakras which are representative of the deity in geometrical diagrams. The last symbol, is the Mantras which are the divine names preceded by Bijaksharas or letters indicating certain sounds. A Mantra is a divine power clothed in sound. This mantra is for continued repetition during meditation while the Yantra is for external worship. Among the followers of the Shakti worship, the second symbol of worship, that is, the Sri – Yantra or the Sri-Chakra as it is usually called, is considered the holiest and the most significant of all the three symbols, and the worship of the deity is done in that (Tapasyananda, Swami, 1987)^[5].



Fig 1: Sri Yantra Sri Chakra Form Mystical Stock Vector (Royalty Free) 1317300557

The Sri Chakra is conceived as Shiva Shakti in the macrocosmic as also in the microcosmic aspects, that is as the Cosmos and as the individual. The diagrammatic representation of the Sri Chakra consists of a series of nine triangles superimposed around a small central circle known as Bindu, forming forty-three corners or triangular projections. In the centre is the Bindu, representing Shiva-Shakti-in union in the causal state from which all the other parts of the diagram representing the cosmos are evolved. In this Bindu, Shakti is represented as the Mahatripurandari, the great Mother or the Divine Beauty of the three Puras or Bindus. The Bindu represents the initial pulsing forth of massive or *ghanibhuta-shakti* with the potentiality of the universe within itself. It is spoken of as three to indicate the three stresses when the unified Shiva Shakti become separated into the two aspects-the *Prakasha* (Aham-or I consciousness) and *Vimarsha* (the *Idam* or this-consciousness). These three stresses are technically called Nada, Kala and Bindu. Nada is the inchoate sound movement (interpreted by the human ear as Omkara), and Kala is the Kama-Kala or the desire to create which the Vedas represent as “May I be many”. Bindu is the potential universe ready to separate into various categories. All these three stresses (Mudras or poses) of Shiva-Shakti together is represented by the central red circle with an imaginary line across it to represent the polarity in that supreme category as Shiva-Shakti. This Bindu, the three-fold stress of the externalising or creative Shakti is the Mahatripurandari. In the verses of the Saundaryalahari, she is described as the “Pride of Shiva”, meaning Shiva as *Prakasha* (Luminosity of Consciousness) realises himself “I am”, through her, the *Vimarsha Shakti* (the Object of the Reflector). The rest of the Sri Chakra represents the whole of the cosmos (Brahmanda) as evolved from the Bindu, standing for Tripurasundari or cosmic power. Surrounding the Bindu are a series of overlapping triangles. Four of them called *Srikanthas*, or the Shiva triangles have their apex upwards and the other five are superimposed upon the former with their apex downwards. They are the five *Shiva – yuvatis* or Shakti triangles. These nine constitute the nine basic categories of the universe, evolving from the Supreme Mother Tripurasundari represented by the central Bindu or small circle. Hence they are called the nine *Mula – prakrutis* or Root substances of the universe. The Shiva triangles

(*Srikanthas*) are the Shakti triangles (*Shiva yuvatis*) are superimposed in order to indicate that Shiva and Shakti are involved in the whole process of Becoming in its microcosmic or cosmic aspects. In the individual they are present as the nine Dhatus or substances constituting the body of the individual. These are *Tvak* (skin), *Asrk* (blood), *Mamsa* (flesh), *Medhas* (fat), and *Asthi* (Bone). These five categories are born of Shakti element, while the evolutes of the Shiva elements consist of *Sukla* (semen), *Majja* (Marrow), *Prana* (the vital energy) and *Jiva* (the Individual Soul). On the Cosmic side, the five evolutes of Shakti are the five *Bhutas* (Elements), the five *Tammatras* (Subtle Elements), the five *Karmendriyas* (Organs of Action), the five *Jnanendriyas* (Organs of Knowledge) and *Manas* (Mind) have their origin in Sakti element, while *Maya*, *Shuddha Vidya*, *Maheshwara* and *Sadashiva* are the Shiva element. Thus, the nine basic triangles symbolise the twenty five elements (Tattvas) that constitute the cosmos and individual bodies according to the Sakta cosmology.

By the intersection of the lines of these nine triangles are formed forty-three triangles, as in Fig 1, in which is included the central triangle having the Bindu in the middle. In all these triangles are placed the different letters of the alphabet, which stand for the Devatas who are emanations of Tripurasundari as the conscious forces governing the various powers of Nature in the Cosmos and the individuals. These *Devatas* (gods and goddesses) are not to be equated with the animistic spirits of the primitive man. For in the Sakta world view, Spirit is supreme, and all Nature consists of evolutes of that Spirit, of which what we call inert matter is only the latest evolute having consciousness only withdrawn by the inherent power of concealment. The Spirit, the Being, or the Power is one only and what are called Gods and Goddesses placed in the various parts of the Sri Chakra are Its manifestations for governing the various forces of Nature. The portions of the Sri-Chakra lying outside the forty-four centres comprising the Bindu are all supposed to be included in the latter-the eight petalled lotus (*Ashtadala Padma*) in the central triangle (trikona), sixteen petalled lotus (*Sodasa dala-padma*), in the eight angled Chakra (*Ashta-kona*), the three circles (mekhala-traya), in the two ten angled Chakras (*Dasara-Dvaya*), and the surrounding space with the rectangular lines and four entrances (Bhupura) in the fourteen angled Chakra (*Chaturdasara*).

Conclusion

The Sri Chakra is worshipped to accomplish all the auspicious things in life, finally culminating in the attainment of liberation. The technique for the worship of Sri Chakra has been described in various tantric texts (Dokras, 2021) [2]. The Sri Chakra is used in the worship of Goddess Shakti, the primordial energy. Worship of the Sri Chakra helps the aspirant participate in the world of names and forms of Shiva and Shakti through enjoyment of material aspects as well as liberation from the endless cycle of births and deaths (Krishnakumar, 1993) [3]. The Sri Chakra is known to contain the blessings of all gods and goddesses, worship of which is known to yield positive energy, cleanses the soul of the worshipper, gives him higher knowledge and helps him in discovering the ultimate purpose in life. The worshipper is blessed with health, fame, fortune, rids him of his ego, and helps him to realize his higher purpose of life on earth.

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