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Review of Teachings of the Odd-Eyed One by David P. Lawrence

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*The Teachings of the Odd-Eyed One: A Study and Translation of the Vir-
ūpākṣapañcāśikhā with the Commentary of Vidyācakravartin.* By
DAVID PETER LAWRENCE. Albany: State University of New York Press,
2008. xii, 195 pp.

In his previous book, *Rediscovering God with Transcendental Argument* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), David Peter Lawrence provided a broad overview of Pratyabhijñā epistemology and ontology in dialogue with Christian theologies of the divine logos. In *The Teachings of the Odd-Eyed One*, he presents the philosophical psychology of the Pratyabhijñā School of Śaivism with a study and a translation of the *Virūpākṣapañcāśikhā* (VAP), composed in the eleventh or twelfth century CE, along with a commentary by the South Indian exegete Vidyācakravartin (ca. fourteenth century CE), the *Virūpākṣa-pañcāśikhāvivṛti* (VAPV).

Lawrence's first published translation of the Tantric "contemplative manual" and its commentary is divided into two parts: Part I consists of four main chapters detailing the context of the VAP within nondual Śaiva theology. Additionally, a short fifth chapter addresses issues of translation. Part II contains the translation of both the text (VAP) and the commentary (VAPV). Lawrence's translation of the VAP and the VAPV is based for the most part on the version that is found in the Tantric anthology *Tantrasaṃgraha* (ed. M. M. Gopinatha Kaviraja [Varanasi: Sansar Press, 1970]). However, Kaviraja's version is not a critical edition (p. 57).

The first part of *The Teachings of the Odd-Eyed One* provides a succinct account of the intellectual and social history of the nondual Śaiva traditions.

A description of the Pratyabhijñā quest for perfecting the ego in order to achieve Śiva identity or “perfect I-hood” (*pūrṇāhaṁtā*) is quite informative for scholars not specializing in nondual Śaivism (chapter 1). The narrative framework of the VAP, as a discussion between Śiva/Virūpākṣa and the god Indra, is the context of the following chapter (chapter 2). Three narratives from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* provide similar instances, generally, of the humbling of Indra’s ego, though the ontological frameworks in which these narratives are situated are quite different. However, as the Śaiva authors were not concerned with these upaniṣadic and purāṇic texts, their relevance to Lawrence’s larger project of presenting Pratyabhijñā psychology is a bit tenuous (p. 20).

Chapter 3 is the strongest and the most helpful for the reader. The VAP itself does not present the necessary mechanics of nondual Śaiva ontology. According to Lawrence, in contrast to the dualist Yoga system, in which egoity—the notion of I-am-ness or I-hood (*ahaṁkāra*)—is an affliction because of the misidentification of the self (*puruṣa*) with matter/nature (*prakṛti*) that needs to be eliminated, the VAP posits a “transformation” of the definition of I-am-ness rather than its complete elimination (p. 28). Pratyabhijñā conceives of reality as Śiva. He is the true self of all beings, with the principle of power, *śakti*, encompassed within his nature. Liberation is reached when one realizes that one possesses this *śakti*. The right understanding of I-am-ness, in particular the recognition that one’s real self is Śiva and that the universe is one’s body, transforms one into Śiva, ultimately subsuming all multiplicity within it. Presenting the philosophical context of the VAP, Lawrence navigates the difficult terrain of Tantra cosmology with clarity.

The cultural legacy of human and divine narcissism is discussed in chapter 4, utilizing Christian theologians such as Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart, and psychoanalytic theorists such as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Lawrence finds commonality between the Śaiva quest of perfect I-hood and Heinz Kohut’s conception of cosmic narcissism (pp. 48–52). According to Kohut, cosmic narcissism is a psychological state of “nongrandiose identification with the universe and all its beings integrally and genetically linked to empathy” (p. 49). Lawrence’s reading of Kohut’s cosmic narcissism leads him to characterize the Śaiva quest for perfect I-hood and the possession of Śiva’s *śakti* not as a grandiose expression, but rather as the motivation of a “de-individualized” ego that identifies with a higher cosmic reality. This chapter will be of interest to scholars of comparative philosophical psychology and mysticism.

Part II of Lawrence’s book comprises the translation of the five chapters of the VAP and the VAPV. Book I of the VAP describes the encounter between Śiva/Virūpākṣa and Indra and a dialogue that demonstrates that one’s real self or true nature is consciousness and that the universe is one’s body. In book II, Śiva teaches Indra that not only is the universe one’s body, but also that it is of the nature of awareness. Book III rejects doubts that the self is of the essential nature of the universe. The last teaching, in book IV, delineates the five types of experiences of people in ascending order, from the unenlightened person to one who is completely enlightened.

The notes and the comprehensive glossary are very helpful, but it must be noted that the Sanskrit text itself is not included. Specialists will want more on the univocality of the VAP and the VAPV. It would have been helpful to know whether Vidyācakravartin adds new dimensions to the concepts in the VAP, as the commentary is thought to have been composed at least 200 years later, in a different region of the Subcontinent. Perhaps this is an issue for future research. If Lawrence's overall goal was "an introduction to and a translation of" the VAP and VAPV, then his endeavor has been successful.