

# The Identity of Sakti and Saktiman.

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Theism, if its appeal is to be effective, has to make its God both immanent and transcendent. He must be a great and supreme Being infinitely remote from us because of His perfections; He must yet be infinitely near to us, His creatures; else there may at best be fear and reverence, not love, sympathy, adoration. He must be above the world, since other than Him there is no intelligent artificer of the Universe; and yet He must be of the world, as else the world would be alien, material, constituting, to however small an extent, a limitation of the Lord's perfection. He must be both efficient cause and material cause. The reconciliation of these conflicting claims is often left to Scripture in many forms of Indian Thought. Of the supersensible we can have no direct knowledge by perception, inference or the like. It is the sphere solely of Scripture; and when Scripture affirms alike the material and efficient causality of God, it is not for us to question. Whether this appeal to revelation is just or not, it is not the last word of Indian Philosophy. Attempts have been repeatedly made to reconcile conflicts by reason, as supplementing though not as superseding Scripture. One such attempt is the notion of the identity of *Śakti* and *Śaktimān*, energy and energiser, or more broadly, attribute and substance.

When it is asserted that God is the material cause of the world, it cannot be meant that He undergoes transformation in whole or in part; for He cannot be subject to change and He is partless. Yet He is transformed as the world, intelligent (*Chit*) and unintelligent (*Achit*), without Himself suffering imperfection.\*

This peculiar transformation is possible because of the *Chitśakti* or *Prajñā*, with which the Lord is endowed. In the primal stage, when creation with its distinctions of night and day, name and form, real and unreal, was not, Śiva alone existed, self-luminous, imperishable. From Him proceeded *Jñānaśakti*. Then the Lord, of whom the world in its subtle condition is the body, resolved that His body should come to have manifest name and form; He distinguished the subtle world from Himself, entered it as the self thereof and became transformed into the multifarious world. The distinction between the causal and the effected condition of the Lord is like that between a man's infancy and youth. The energies latent in the former are now patent. The change, such as it is, is in the manifested or unmanifested condition of the energy, not in him who possesses the energy. The primary material cause, then, is this energy, *Śakti*, *Māyā*; the Lord is

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\* See Srikantha's *Brahmamīmāṃsā* on I. iv. 27,

only the possessor, the wielder of that *Māyā*:

मायां तु प्रकृतिं विद्यान्मायिनं तु महेश्वरम् ।

Because of the change in *Māyā*, the *Māyā* is not affected. But with this the *Māyā* does not cease to be the material cause; for, between *Māyā* and *Māyā*, *Śakti* and *Śaktimān*, there is non-difference.\*

शक्तयोऽस्य जगत् कृत्स्नं शक्तिमांस्तु महेश्वरः ।

शक्तिस्तु शक्तिमद्रूपाद् व्यतिरेकं न गच्छति ॥

तादात्म्यमनयोर्नित्यं वह्निदाहिकयोरिव ।

Reason boggled at the bare identification of the material cause with the efficient and sought to introduce a *modus vivendi* by recognising *Śakti* and distinguishing it from the Lord. But when we are told in the same breath that energy and energiser are one, the attempt of reason would appear to be fruitless; it is the old story of exploring by-ways all night to avoid paying toll and after all reaching the toll-house at dawn (*Ghaṭṭakūṭi-prabhāta-vṛttānta*). This is not really so; for, in the end it will be seen that attribute and substance are non-different.

Popular prejudice and the usage of the Tārikas tend no doubt to look on substance as other than the attributes and as the possessor of the latter. Attributes are many and fleeting; the same attributes are not cognised by all nor even by one all the time, even where without dispute

the substance itself is cognised. A colour-blind person does perceive a red cloth though he perceives it as green; the trained artist does see the canvas though he sees it as a daub, not as a picture. What is common to the red and green experiences, the daub and the picture, must be permanent; it is the substrate of these attributes; it is the *Guṇī* in contrast with the *Guṇas*. Is the distinction ultimate? No, say the *Śaiva* and the *Śākta*; for, it is not intelligible. Granted the independent existence of such a substrate, how could you know it? Perception uses the senses as channels and whatever is sensed, be it colour, sound, touch, taste, or odour, is classed as a quality; we never perceive a substrate of qualities; if perceived, it would itself be a quality. Nor can inference be of help; for, that proceeds on the basis of concomitances between the perceived. And what perceived concomitance can justify the inference of an imperceptible substance? We have then to hold that there is no substance (distinct from qualities) or that, while substance exists, there can be no knowledge of substance, not even that it exists. The latter being absurd, the former position is adhered to by the *Śaktivādi*. What, then, is the explanation of the notion of substance? How is it that we recognise an identity of substance in a diversity of qualities? The identity, we say, is not a real entity over and above the diversity: it is a mode of looking at the diversity. Just as soldiers, when viewed together, constitute an army or trees, viewed together, a forest, the qualities in the aggregate constitute the substance.

\* See Srikantha's *Brahmaṇḍa* on I. II. 1.

न गुणी कश्चिदर्थोऽस्ति जडो गुणसमाश्रयः ।  
गुणा एवानुभूयन्ते गुणिसंज्ञाश्च संगताः ॥\*

Hence it is that in the *Śaiva* and *Śākta* systems, as in the *Sāṅkhya*, the gross elements in the scheme of evolution are derived from the Tanmātras; else how could the former, which are substances, evolve from the latter, which are mere qualities?

It will easily be seen how such a doctrine favours the idealism of the *Śākta* and *Pratyabhijñā* systems. If substance is not something hard and eternal, if it depends on the point of view, the so-called substantial world of external reality gives up its imagined independence and becomes dependent on the intelligence of the seer. This paves the way to the conclusion that the

one substance is also the one seer and that all distinctions which are minor and intermediate are but due to *Māyā* or non-realisation of oneness with the one substance (*Akhyāti* as used in the *Pratyabhijñā* school). This metaphysical implication, however, has not stood in the way of the doctrine being espoused even by the realistic school of Śaivism, which believes in the independent and eternal reality of God, souls and matter. It is difficult to decide whether this peculiar position is due to an inability to follow reason throughout or to the desire for compromises and half-way houses so characteristic of the *Śaiva Siddhānta*.<sup>§</sup> However that may be, there can be no doubt of the tremendous philosophical and religious significance of the notion of the identity of *Śakti* and *Śaktimān*.

## On Homeward Journey.

That path beyond may be sought, treading which there is no return. I go indeed to that Primal Man (*Puruṣa*), whence the ancient energy forth-streamed.

Without pride and delusion, victorious over the vice of attachment, dwelling constantly in the SELF, desire pacified, liberated from the pairs of opposites known as pleasure and pain, they tread, undeluded, that indestructible path.

( *Gītā. XV. 4, 5* )

\* *Faushkara Agama*, pp. 456 (Chidambaram edition); see also pp. 455-40 of the *Agama* as also the *Bhāṣya* thereon.

§ For a further consideration of this position, see "Substance and Attribute in the *Śaiva Siddhānta*," *Journal of Oriental Research*, Madras, April 1934.