Foreword to Self-Realization in Kashmir Shaivism: The Oral Teachings of Swami Lakshmanjoo

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Foreword

Thanks to him the oral tradition, after an apparent eclipse, has been securely renewed, because the Swami, a very learned scholar but also a real yogin and jñānin, has mystically lived that which the old Śaiva masters of Kashmir, and in particular Abhinavagupta, brought to light.

—Lilian Silburn

I still vividly recall coming across, as an undergraduate during the late sixties, a small book by Paul Reps entitled *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*. This genuine spiritual classic continues to have wide appeal today. What most especially stuck in my mind then, in addition to Reps’s sensitive retelling of 101 delightful Zen stories, was the account of his visit to the Kashmir Valley, known because of its mountainous beauty as the “Switzerland of India.” There he discovered what he felt was an important pre-Zen text, the *Vijñāna Bhairava Tantra*, a central scripture of Kashmir

1. “Grâce à lui la tradition orale, après une apparente éclipse, s’est renouée solidement, car le swāmi, très savant pañcīt mais aussi véritable yogin et jñānin, a mystiquement vécu ce qu’exposèrent les anciens maîtres sivaïtes du Cashemire et, en particulier, Abhinavagupta” (Lilian Silburn, trans., *Hymnes de Abhinavagupta*, Publications de l’Institut de Civilisation Indienne, fasc. 31 [Paris: Éditions E. de Bocard, 1970], 1). (Translations from French and Sanskrit are my own.)
Śaivism. I remember being fascinated and, in a mysterious way, elevated by Reps's paraphrase of that short but profound work, which he called, from the practice it describes, "Centering." Somehow, however, I was even more captivated by Reps's description of his encounter with the saint who introduced him to the text and provided him with a translation, Swami Lakshmanjoo. As I reread Reps's words now, I experience again the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual pull that led me eventually to graduate studies in Indian philosophy. Reps begins:

Wandering in the ineffable beauty of Kashmir, above Srinagar I came upon the hermitage of Lakshmanjoo. It overlooks green rice fields, the gardens of Shalimar and Nishat Bagh, lakes fringed with lotus. Water streams down from a mountaintop.

Here Lakshmanjoo—tall, full-bodied, shining—welcomes me. He shares with me this ancient teaching. . . .

I see Lakshmanjoo gives his life to its practice.2

This was my first encounter with this extraordinary Śaiva saint.

A Spiritual Magnet in the Vale of Kashmir

During my years in graduate school, I made a point of keeping close tabs on developments in the modern Hindu tradition. Again the presence of Lakshmanjoo crossed the horizon of my concern as I became aware that a number of Hindu spiritual leaders, including Swami Muktananda Paramahamsa and Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, were making a point of visiting and paying their respects to this Śaiva master during visits to Kashmir. My curiosity was aroused.

Although my research focus was on Advaita Vedānta, of which I had made a thorough study, I was becoming increasingly aware of nondual Kashmir Śaivism as expressing a more profound mystical realization. Put briefly, classical Advaita achieves its nondualism...
uality by denying the reality of objective existence, which is excluded from its statically conceived Absolute. It aims ultimately for a state of isolation (kaivalya) in pure spirit, from which the world is obliterated. Śaivism, on the other hand, offers a more thoroughgoing nondualism in which the universe is accepted—and experienced—as divine Consciousness itself in dynamic motion. This allows the Śaiva yogin to enjoy the Infinite as a vivid, vibrant reality at the level of the senses. 3

As I continued my study of the literature on Kashmir Śaivism, I began to notice Lakshmanjoo's name appearing regularly in prefaces, dedications, and footnotes in the works of scholars writing in various languages. They were acknowledging, however briefly, their indebtedness to this Śaiva master. Among the who's who of Western scholars of Śaivism who spent time studying with Lakshmanjoo were the late Lilian Silburn and her colleague André Padoux, both of whom had distinguished careers as scholars of Tantrism at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris; Alexis Sanderson, currently Spaulding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford University; and Mark S. G. Dyczkowski, an important younger scholar of Śaivism associated with Sampurnananda Sanskrit University, Benares. Other South Asianists who made the pilgrimage to Lakshmanjoo's Ishvara Ashram on the shores of Dal Lake include Professors Harvey P. Alper, J. G. Arapura, Bettina Bäumer, Gerald J. Larson, and K. Sivaraman. In addition, I became aware that in India itself Lakshmanjoo was held in high esteem by a distinguished circle of Hindu scholars in the holy city of Benares, several of whom traveled to his ashram seeking a more profound understanding of Śaiva doctrine and practice. This group of Tantric savants included Pandit Rameshwar Jha and Thakur Jaideva

Singh, the latter well-known for his valuable translations of Kashmir Śaiva texts. For many years, both scholars were in the habit of going to Kashmir during the summer to study with Lakshmanjoo.4

Silburn, who dedicated her life to the study of Hindu Tantrism, produced several important translations and studies of Kashmir Śaiva texts, including Kūṇḍalinī: The Energy of the Depths.5 In preparing her translations, she studied with Lakshmanjoo during visits to Kashmir over a period of some twenty years. During that time she came to regard Lakshmanjoo as her “master in the science of Bhairava [Supreme Reality].”6 Her description of her first visit to Kashmir conveys something of her feeling for the place and her relationship with Swamiji:

In 1948 I journeyed to India for the first time and met Swami Lakshmanjoo in Kashmir. I received from him some help in understanding the Śivasūtra, its commentaries, and also the Spandakārikā and the Vījñānabhairava, which I had attempted to translate.

That year I lived near him in an abandoned hut of beaten earth on the uninhabited hills that dominate Dal Lake, toward which the terraces of the garden of Nishat descend [from the hills] by stages. I lived several months by myself at the heart of this exceptional site, in which the starkness of the rocky mountains, the subtle softness of the light, and the often hazy stillness of the lake joined together to create a harmony and a peace that was profound, yet pregnant—it seemed—with the

Plate 2. Swami Ram with Swami Lakshmanjoo’s mother and father.

presence of the great Śaiva masters who probably frequented that place.7

Acknowledging that she had benefited greatly from Lakshmanjoo’s vast knowledge of the Tantric tradition, Silburn expressed 7. “En 1948, je fis un premier voyage en Inde et rencontrai au Kaśmir le swāmi Lakshmanjoo. Je recueillis auprès de lui des éclaircissements sur les Siva sūtra, leurs gloses ainsi que sur la Spandakārikā et le Vījñānabhairava dont j’avais entrepris la traduction.

“Près de lui j’habitaïs cette année-là une hutte de terre battue abandonnée sur les hauteurs désertes qui dominent le lac Dal vers lequel s’abaissent par paliers les terrasses du jardin de Nishad. Je vécus plusieurs mois, solitaire, au cœur de ce site exceptionnel où la nudité de la montagne rocheuse, la douceur subtile de la lumière et l’immobilité souvent vaporeuse du lac s’allient et se fondent en une harmonie et une paix profondes encore imprégnées, semble-t-il, de la présence des grands maîtres sivaïtes qui fréquentèrent probablement cet endroit” (Lilian Silburn, trans., Śivasūtra et Vimarśinī de Kṣemarāja, Publications de l’Institut de Civilisation Indienne, fasc. 47 [Paris: Institut de Civilisation Indienne, 1980], foreword).
her profound gratitude to him for his untiring help with her work.8

As the result of his visits to Kashmir, Pandit Rameshwar Jha developed a profound devotion to Swamiji, to whose spiritual power he attributed certain spiritual realizations that he enjoyed. This is evidenced in his “Hymn to the Preceptor” (gurustuti), a Sanskrit poem filled with lavish praise of Lakshmanjoo and his lineage of masters. For example: “I bow to the feet of the divine Lakṣmaṇa, nectar to [my] eyes, whose glorious power as the great Lord Śiva is incomprehensible to the intellect. Blessed by his compassionate glances, I shine here with the form of the universe.”9 Elsewhere in this hymn, Jha expresses his belief that Lakshmanjoo was a reincarnation of Lakṣmanāgupta, a guru of Abhinavagupta.10 Although not all of Lakshmanjoo’s disciples share this opinion (some prefer to identify their master with Abhinavagupta himself), this hymn is still chanted daily by followers in Kashmir and elsewhere.

The extent of Jaideva Singh’s indebtedness to Lakshmanjoo can be gauged by looking at the dedication pages of his translations. Attesting to his esteem, Singh wrote that Lakshmanjoo “unsealed my eyes.” He spent hours with Swamiji—which he regarded as “the doyen of Śaivagama”—going over texts word by word before submitting them for publication. Singh’s translation of the Pratyabhijñāhrdayam is dedicated “with profound respect to Svāmi Lakṣmanā Joo, to whom I owe whatever little I know of Pratyabhijñā philosophy.”11 At the time he studied with Laksh-

8. Silburn, Hymnes de Abhinavagupta, 1; idem, Le Vijñāna Bhairava, 5.
9. tasyāpratarkya-vibhavasya mahēṣvarasya pādaunamāmi
nayanāmrta-lakṣmaṇasya / devasya yasya mahatah
karaṇākāṭkṣair
ālokito 'ham iha viśva-vapur vibhāmi (vs. 18; Rameshwar Jha (Śrī
Rāmeśvarācārya), Śrīgurustuti (Śrīnagar: Īśvara Āśrama, c. 1975), 6).
10. vs. 21; Jha, Śrīgurustuti, 7.
manjoo, Singh was in his seventies, a respected scholar with already more than half a dozen books to his credit. Still, we are told, he gave reverent attention to the teachings of one whom he evidently regarded as his spiritual preceptor. "It was a moving sight," Dyczkowski reports, "to see this fine old man sit before his revered teacher with the simplicity of a young child."  

Perhaps the most vivid description of a scholar's encounter with Lakshmanjoo comes from Dyczkowski, who spent a good deal of time with Swamiji, beginning in the mid-1970s. His account reveals something of the attraction that Lakshmanjoo exerted over serious students of Tantrism: "Swamiji would rise early [in the] morning and we, his few Western disciples, would come to try and share, as best we could, in Swamiji's immense profundity. His exposition of the great works of the ancient Kashmiri masters—Abhinavagupta, Utpaladeva, and Kṣemarāja—would fill us with wonder."  

Scholar and Practicing Mystic

In such testimony we may well find the answer to the question of why practically all scholars who had a serious interest in nondual Śaivism were making the pilgrimage to the valley of Kashmir to spend time studying with Lakshmanjoo. There are three factors that begin to explain Swamiji's importance for students of Tantra.

First, he is to be distinguished from the typical yogī or swāmī in respect of his scholarly training and achievement. Nowadays it is common for Hindu monks to have only a minimal knowledge of

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Sanskrit. This does not, of course, diminish their spiritual attainments, but it does mean that their acquaintance with the classical texts in the original language is limited. Necessarily, then, they have even less familiarity with the scholastic commentarial literature. While information about Lakshmanjoo’s life and training is difficult to come by, it is clear that he was a genuine scholar of no mean attainment. Silburn must have had the opportunity to learn something of her preceptor’s background during her long
apprenticeship. She remarks: "Very young he decided to dedicate his life to the Trika; he studied texts and manuscripts under the tutelage of two of the best scholars of the time, Hara Bhaṭṭa Śastrin and Rājānaka Maheśvara, acquiring in this way a deep and extensive knowledge of all the branches of Kashmir Śaiva philosophy and mysticism." Regarding Lakshmanjoo's language ability, she testifies: "Profound and sure is his knowledge of Sanskrit, and wide his learning concerning the various Śaiva systems of Kashmir. Many times in the past his translations and interpretations of particularly difficult passages were certified for me by that eminent Sanskritist, the late Louis Renou." What makes such testimony remarkable is that Silburn was herself a distinguished Sanskritist and scholar. Although certainly not a devotee, she had found in Lakshmanjoo a masterful guide to the scriptural tradition she wished to penetrate.

During his career, Lakshmanjoo demonstrated his scholarly interest and capacity by editing several important Sanskrit texts of the Kashmir Śaiva tradition, published in Srinagar and Benares. These include the Bhagavadgītārthaśāṅgraha of Abhinavagupta (1933), the Śrī Kramanayāḍīpikā (1958), and the Śiva-
Swamiji could speak Sanskrit fluently, and delighted in the opportunity when he found someone with whom he could converse in the sacred language. Like other traditionally trained pandits, he had a prodigious memory and could quote verse after verse by heart from a wide range of sources in support of points he was making in conversations or lectures. He also had a scholar’s mind for detail, if we can judge from certain of Singh’s remarks. For example, when Singh was working on his translation of the Spandakārikā, Swamiji not only provided him with a “luminous exposition” of the text, but helped him on a more practical level by correcting misprints in the printed edition. Lakshmanjoo, while helping Singh with his translation of the Pratyabhijñāḥṛdayam, saved him immense labors by tracing the sources of the numerous quotations in the text. Any reader of Singh’s translation of the Vijnāna-bhairava will come across notes in which the translator records alternate meanings, and alternate readings of the text, supplied by his mentor. Lakshmanjoo contributed to Singh’s translation of the Parātrīṣikāvivaraṇa by providing numerous textual emendations, based on manuscripts available in the valley and oral tradition. He also dictated notes and charts elucidating technical matters discussed in the work and composed a Sanskrit dedication. In her collection of translations of Abhinavagupta’s hymns, Silburn indicates that she decided not to include a certain text, even though it was in the standard edition. This was because Lakshmanjoo—exercising a critical awareness uncommon in traditional scholars—judged it to be not from the great master’s own hand.

17. Bhagavadgūthasarāhgraha: Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā with Commentary by Mahāmaheśvara Rājānaka Abhinavagupta, edited with notes by Pt. Lakshman Raina Brahmacāri (Srinagar, 1933); Śrī Kramanayaprādīpikā [portions of the Kramastotra, of uncertain authorship], edited with Hindi translation by Rājānaka Lakṣmaṇa (Srinagar, 1958); The Śivastotrāvalī of Utpaladevāchārya with the Sanskrit Commentary of Kṣemarāja, edited with Hindi commentary by Rājānaka Lakṣmaṇa, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, No. 15 (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1964).
18. Singh, Yoga of Vibration, xxiii; idem, Doctrine of Recognition, 1; idem, Yoga of Delight, xxiii, 50, 62, 63, 111, 128.
All this being so, it remains that the "immense profundity" that attracted Dyczkowski and other scholars is not to be explained by Swamiji’s scholarship alone. There was a second factor: students of Tantra came to the ashram at Nishat Bagh because they saw in Lakshmanjoo much more than a mere paṇḍit. By all accounts, he was a practicing yōgin of considerable attainment. Scholars from academic settings removed geographically from the home of the living tradition found in Lakshmanjoo, it seems, what they could not find in printed texts or the paṇḍits of Benares. Silburn’s estimate of Lakshmanjoo as a yōgin and jñānin (realized sage) as well as a scholar, given above, is echoed by Baümer. She describes him as “the only living representative of the full Kashmir Śaiva tradition both in its theory and practice, śāstra and yoga.”20 The implication, of course, is that Swamiji had himself undergone the transformative discipline recommended by the texts. Dyczkowski writes of Lakshmanjoo: “He was an immense inspiration to me as a living example of Kashmiri Śaivism in practice.” That he was a yogic adept was apparent, to sensitive onlookers, even in his exposition of the texts. “Somehow he sees much more in them,” Dyczkowski reports, “than could ever be grasped through mere bookish knowledge and we could all feel that behind his words lay another dimension beyond them in which he lived and from which he beckoned us to join him.”21

Last Master of the Oral Tradition

The final reason for Lakshmanjoo’s importance to scholars was one that may have sometimes, in its historical urgency, overshadowed the others. Lakshmanjoo was, by most accounts, the last and only living representative of the lineage of Kashmir Śaiva preceptors. He was thus the only remaining authentic cus-

Plate 4. Swami Lakshmanjoo in his twenties.
odian of its oral teachings. This understandably gave a certain edge to the scholars’ quest. For example, Silburn writes: “It is my inestimable good fortune to have been able to draw from the knowledge of this great master, the last to possess the key to a doctrine among others most profound and mysterious.” It is perhaps in this light also that we should understand Swamiji’s willingness to commit at least a portion of his knowledge to academicians: that it might be preserved for posterity.

Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that the scholars who came to Lakshmanjoo felt the need for a guide with access to the oral tradition. The Tantric traditions of India, like other esoteric traditions, are anchored in lineages involving direct communication of wisdom and experience from master to disciple. The transmission of knowledge, in the form of teachings and practical instructions, was originally and most authentically oral in nature. Although the practice of writing down some of this material had become accepted by the eighth century or earlier, the process was and continues to be regarded with some suspicion. The teachings and practices deal with yogic experiences that are extremely difficult to describe and differentiate for those who have experienced them, let alone those who have not. Even the more philosophical material written for a general scholarly audience—like the Pratyabhijñā literature—is filled with technical

22. Padoux describes Lakshmanjoo as “certainly the last depository of the teaching of the Trika, as it was transmitted from master to disciple for centuries” (sans doute le dernier dépositaire de l’enseignement du Trika tel qu’il a été transmis de maître à disciple depuis des siècles; André Padoux, trans., La Parātrīṣikālaghuṛtti de Abhinavaguṇa, Publications de l’Institut de Civilisation Indienne, fasc. 38 [Paris: Institut Civilisation Indienne, 1975]: 18). See also Archana Dongre, “Last Bhairava Master Will Teach until Year 2006,” Hinduism Today (July 1991): 1; Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega, foreword to Jaideva Singh, trans., A Trident of Wisdom: Translation of Parātrīṣikā Vivaraṇa (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), x; idem, foreword to Singh, Doctrine of Recognition, ix; Singh, Doctrine of Recognition, 1.

23. “C’est la chance inestimable que nous avons eue de puiser ainsi dans la science de ce grand maître, le dernier à posséder la clef d’une doctrine profonde et mystérieuse entre toutes” (Silburn, Le Vijñāna Bhairava, 5).
terms that no one but trained specialists can understand. The Tantric texts are even less accessible. In addition to evoking the subtle nuances of yogic states, they prescribe for initiates religious attitudes and rituals that, in their radical world affirmation, sometimes run counter to conventional Hindu piety and mores. Moreover, the practices—particularly those associated with the rise of kūṇḍalinī—involve psychological and spiritual dangers that make expert guidance essential.24 Thus on several levels Tantric literature carries the potential to be easily misunderstood, misappropriated, or both, by those inadequately prepared to receive it. The Tantric writers, therefore, feared potential abuse should this material fall into the hands of the uninitiated.

The result was that most of what these masters did write was obscure, whether because of the nature of the subject matter or through deliberate omission and obfuscation. Abhinavagupta, for example, sometimes intentionally cuts discussions short, declaring that the topic is secret and that he has already revealed more than he should. Scholars complain that his symbolic language can be interpreted on several levels simultaneously. Frequently, it is impossible to tell which meaning or meanings are appropriate.25 The texts are, moreover, famous for their use of a highly technical jargon intelligible only to insiders, those who have been initiated into the practices and have acquired some experiential awareness of the spiritual realities described. Often, the meaning of key terms was kept secret; sometimes elaborate systems of coded language or “intentional” (sandhā) speech were employed. These texts were, in fact, written by and for a small, elite circle of preceptors and their dedicated disciples. Access to manuscripts, hand-copied and privately circulated, was limited. In addition to preparatory disciplines, initiation, and knowledge of the technical jargon, the texts presume above all the active, personal guidance of an authentic preceptor. The latter should be an individual formed by, and capable of transmitting, the esoteric wisdom of the tradition, handed down orally through his or her lineage.

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Given all this, we are not surprised to learn that Jaideva Singh was convinced that no one, not even the best Sanskritist, could properly translate Kashmir Śaiva texts without the assistance of a teacher versed in the tradition.\textsuperscript{26} Noting the perplexing lacunae and obscurities that make these works so difficult to approach, Padoux concluded, “it is necessary in such matters to be guided.”\textsuperscript{27} The Indian tradition has attained an extraordinary level of literary achievement, to be sure. Still, it has never intended that the texts that elaborate its various branches of knowledge (śāstras) should function independently of an oral teaching tradition. The ideal of the scholar “self-educated” from books is foreign to the traditional Indian scene, as it is to other wisdom traditions. (“It is a grievous mistake,” the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, “to take the written page as your shaykh.”\textsuperscript{28}) The notion of mastering a field of knowledge without relying on a preceptorial tradition is unthinkable in a culture still oral in its most genuine expression. As a result, almost all religious texts in India were written with the idea that they should be read in the context of the spoken commentary of an authoritative teacher. In such a setting, the written manuscript functions more as an outline or point of departure than final authority. The latter rested with the guru.

Such attitudes are, of course, even more pronounced in the Tantric tradition, which seeks to protect a wisdom that is profound but vulnerable to misuse. As Brooks points out: “Axiomatic to the study of esoteric Tantric texts is the necessity of oral interpretation by living initiates; too much in texts is obscured by difficult language or is designed to exclude the uninitiated ... in every case, the presence of the living guru is assumed to be the final arbiter of tradition.”\textsuperscript{29} Because of their deliberately obscure

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\textsuperscript{26} Dyczkowski, “Appreciation of Jaideva Singh,” xiii.
\textsuperscript{27} Padoux, La Parātriśikālaghūvṛtti, 16.
nature, Tantric texts more than any others become intelligible only within the horizon of an oral culture that renders them accessible. Scholars who approach these texts, no matter how good their preparation linguistically and otherwise, inevitably become aware very early on of their need to avail themselves of what Brooks calls “the ‘missing’ oral component that accompanies texts” in the Tantric milieu.30

All this supports John Hughes, the editor of the present volume, in his decision to describe the contents of chapters one and three (“Fifteen Verses of Wisdom” and “Entrance into the Supreme Reality”) as “renderings.” Although they represent Swami Lakshmanjoo’s expositions of two traditional Kashmir Śaiva texts, they are more than mere translations. They capture at least the verbal portion of a multi-level encounter among text, master, oral tradition, student, and environment. The reader must imagine the text itself being spoken, often chanted, vibrating the minds and hearts of the students as the sacramentally potent voice of the guru. The students, thus empowered, are profoundly engaged. It is important, of course, that they themselves are practicing the teachings and are open to some experience of the realities being uncovered. As Anne Klein reminds us in her recent study of oral teaching in the Tibetan tradition, the aesthetic and emotional tone of the setting itself also makes a significant contribution to the discourse.31 In our case, the environment is Kashmir, ancient home of Vedic seers and Śaiva masters. Outside is the lotus-filled jewel of Dal Lake; the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas form the horizon; the air is vibrant and crystal clear. In the hermitage of Lakshmanjoo the students sit in the worship hall around their preceptor, with images of their master’s master, and his master’s master—the links of the lineage—silently showering blessings from the walls behind.

In this complex network, the central and most important node is, of course, Lakshmanjoo, the guru. An extraordinary human being, he himself is multidimensional, embodying the obvious value of years of scholarship, as we have seen, but also the more

intangible attributes associated with yogic realization. Above all he makes present and accessible in living form the precious secrets of the oral Śaiva tradition he has inherited. The master’s “renderings”—two of which are made available in this volume—have thus a range that significantly exceeds the compass of the text itself, for they are products of the living interaction of text, master, oral tradition, student, and environment. The mere text comes expansively alive as it is catalyzed by its participation in this many-faceted process.

In Swamiji’s lectures—as presented here in chapters 2, 4, and 5—the focus on a particular text is, of course, absent. The rest of this potent teaching network, however, remains in place as the master guides the students through the whole range of the Kashmir Śaiva tradition. He weaves his scholarship and his spiritual experience together with the oral tradition of his predecessors. We become, if we so chose, the privileged auditors.

Lakshmanjoo’s Śaiva Lineage

Swami Lakshmanjoo traces his lineage back to the great Kashmir Śaiva polymath Abhinavagupta (tenth–eleventh centuries C.E.) and beyond.32 Śaivism had flourished in the Kashmir Valley for several centuries before the time of Abhinavagupta, and it continued to thrive for several hundred years after. The nondual Śaiva teaching was passed down through illustrious preceptors such as Somānanda (tenth century C.E.), his pupil Utpaladeva, and Utpaladeva’s pupil Lakṣmana-gupta, who—as mentioned above—was one of Abhinavagupta’s preceptors. Also worthy of mention are Kṣemarāja (eleventh century), a disciple of Abhinavagupta, and Jayaratha (twelfth century), who commented on the great master’s masterpiece, the Tantraloka.

There is little reliable information on the recent history of Śaivism in Kashmir. However, it seems that the advent of Islam in the valley in the fourteenth century, combined with weaknesses within Hindu society itself, caused the tradition to go into

decline. Periods of tolerance under enlightened Muslim rulers alternated with periods of persecution. All but the Brahmans eventually converted to Islam, temples were destroyed, and a good number of Sanskrit texts were lost forever. By 1907, when Lakshmanjoo was born, the Kashmir Valley had for centuries been predominantly Muslim. Although the Hindus that were left remained strongly Śaiva in orientation, there were increasingly fewer authentic teachers, and probably still fewer worthy aspirants, left to carry on the tradition.

Still, in the late nineteenth century there were two important Śaiva masters in the valley. Swami Manakak, regarded by Kashmiris as an exalted saint, was—like many preceptors of the Śaiva lineage—a householder. His disciple, Swami Ramjoo (d. ca. 1914) is said to have been born a siddha (realized Tantric adept). Like his master, Swami Ram was held in utmost esteem
by his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{33} It is reported that he was in the habit of remaining in yogic trance (\textit{samādhi}) for four hours at a time.\textsuperscript{34} Among his devotees was Narain Dass, a devout Śaiva householder and successful businessman. Narain Dass established Swami Ram in a large house at Fatehkadal, Srinagar, which became the latter's ashram. As John Hughes explains in his introduction to the present volume, Swami Lakshmanjoo was Narain Dass's son. Before Swami Ram's death, the master entrusted the seven-year-old Lakshman to the tutelage of his senior disciple, Swami Mehtabkak. Such were the beginnings of this extraordinary spiritual career.

After a long and immeasurably valuable life, Swami Lakshmanjoo left his body on September 22, 1991, at the age of eighty-four, leaving numerous disciples and admirers to mourn his passing. Thanks to the dedicated labors of John Hughes and his wife Denise, hours upon hours of Swamiji's teaching have been preserved on audio and video tape for posterity. This collection promises to be of tremendous value to students of Tantra—scholars and practitioners alike. The tapes are slowly being transcribed by devotees and edited for publication. This book is an early outcome of this process, following \textit{Kashmir Śaivism: The Secret Supreme} (SUNY Press, 1988), and it is hoped that many more volumes of Swamiji's teachings will follow.

The question of who will carry the tradition after Lakshmanjoo must, of course, be asked. Its urgency is heightened by the conflict in contemporary Kashmir between India and various Muslim separatist groups, among the tragic effects of which has been the dislocation of the Hindu community. In May 1991 Swamiji gave Viresh Hughes, the then thirteen-year old son of John and Denise, the traditional \textit{upanayana} ceremony, his rite of initiation as a Hindu. Shortly thereafter, a few months before his passing, Lakshmanjoo named Viresh his successor. Young Viresh was born in Kashmir, but has lived in the United States since


\textsuperscript{34} Jha, Śrīgurustuti, 2.
1986. Now that Swamiji has left his body, it is not immediately clear how this young American will receive the proper training. In response to the natural concern of devotees, Swamji did say cryptically, "It will happen automatically."35 What exactly he meant is not clear to his followers. There are a good number, however, who believe that their master remains active, from a spiritual plane, even after his physical departure.

Conclusion

Practitioners will certainly be awaiting further indications of how Lakshmanjoo's influence will continue to express itself. Meanwhile, there can be no doubt of the importance of the Kashmir Saiva vision to the ongoing stream of human spirituality. We can only be thankful to John Hughes and the State University of New York Press for making available the full, authentic voice of this tradition's most genuine modern exponent. Lakshmanjoo is a

35. Dongre, 25.
presence too valuable to remain hidden in notes and acknowledgments appended to scholarly translations.

I should say that, while I cannot claim myself to have studied with Swami Lakshmanjoo, I did have the opportunity to meet him on several occasions, both in Kashmir during the late 1970s and in the United States just before his passing. I remember well a particular discussion I had with him. My question concerned the differences between Śaiva nondualism and Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta. In response, Lakshmanjoo described the Śaiva yogin's power to elevate his or her perception of objective reality so the universe "shines" as the dynamic movement of the Supreme Consciousness itself. What struck me most profoundly was his metaphor for this extraordinary power of transmutation. He called it "digesting the world." I somehow felt that here was a teacher who knew in the most profound sense what he was talking about.

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