

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, India
Kalakosa Division
Kalasamalocana Programme

International Seminar & Exhibition on
Abhinavagupta : the Genius of Kashmir

15-17 December 2016

CONCEPT NOTE

Abhinavagupta has been praised and studied like Kalidasa throughout the length and breadth of India. He is a shining example among those Indian figures who though belonging to a regional tradition, profoundly impacted the whole subcontinent. While Abhinavagupta came from the particular tradition of Shaivism that flourished in Kashmir ever since his ancestors were brought from Central India and given *agraharas* to establish a line of scholarship and spiritual practice, he was honoured and respected even in his life time as virtually the greatest acharya of Saiva darsana by the whole country and even described as *kantheshaavataarah* and *saakshaat dakshinaamuurtih* incarnated in Kashmir. The rigour with which his ideas on theatre, music, dance and tantra were studied all over the subcontinent in the subsequent centuries, carries to this day the momentum of interest in his works and personality.

Abhinavagupta captured attention more than any single author in Indian history as the range of disciplines that he mastered and the commentaries that he authored is simply spectacular and unequalled. He is also unique in the sense that while professing Saivism which often implies a renunciatory ideal, became the doyen of aesthetics and arts. He is like Shiva himself who combines in his person both desire and renunciation (*kantaasammishradehopi avishayamanasaam yah parastat yatinaam*), Abhinavagupta, while celibate radiates like a *rasika*. His knowledge manifests not like the dust of funeral pyre or *chitaalepa*, but like moonlight effulgent like his own white clothing.

While being an ascetic attaining knowledge through *svaanubhuti*, like a *grihastha* he raised many disciples or *maanasputras*. Thus he was a complete man who achieved the classical ideas of four *purusharthas*.

The seminar shall explore the idea of the completeness as seen in Abhinavagupta, an individual belonging to Kashmir but influencing the subcontinent, seeking self knowledge but enjoying the world as beauty.

As the theme of the proposed seminar fits quite well in the mandate of IGNCA of interpreting the unity of all Indian arts coming from its different traditions and regions, the seminar is expected to highlight the contemporary relevance of the works

of Abhinavagupta by paying attention to each aspect of his rich contribution and its influence on his successors. Eminent Indian scholars from various parts of India are expected to read papers and participate in the discussions along with specialists from different countries viz., Germany, France, UK, Italy, Rome, Austria, Switzerland, Australia, and USA. Young scholars who are presently engaged in their studies on different works of Abhinavagupta in our universities will be invited to attend.

Kashmir Saivism along with the philosophy of Abhinavagupta has recently become popular among academics in India and West. The proposed seminar is expected to provide a significant opportunity for discussing various perspectives related to the subject at one platform.

Contributions of Abhinavagupta will be seen on the following themes, but it is desired that the contributors will focus more on his philosophic and tantric writings:

1. Philosophy & Religion
2. Metaphysics & Epistemology
3. Poetics & Literary Criticism
4. Aesthetics
5. Dramaturgy
6. Historiography
7. Tantra Studies
8. Devotional Literature
9. Performing Arts

An exhibition is also proposed to highlight the personality and contributions of Abhinavagupta to Art and Culture also showing the continuity of his ideas. It will be based on visuals and write ups. The exhibition will first be mounted in New Delhi in December and afterwards will travel to various places in India.

Three more seminars will be held at Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University in Katra (3&4 Sep.), Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal (4th-6th Nov.) and in Chennai (24th-25th Jan.2017).

A book volume of the contributions shall be published by IGNCA.